

My Time at Holden - August-September 2018

By Joel Matter

My third visit this year to Holden Village - to work on the village archives once again - occurred in late August. I went up-lake with Nancy Winder. She passed the time on the boat trip working Sunday New York Times crossword puzzle with a pen! She let me do the Sudoku puzzle, which I completed in pencil. We both worked on the other large Sunday puzzle after the boat departed from Prince Creek - a hiker stop - and completed it with time to spare before arriving at Lucerne.

Also coming up-lake were two special people. One was Keith Dibble, one of the new members to Queen Anne Lutheran and father to Mark Dibble. He had been at Holden in the mid-1950's as a summer intern to Howe Sound Co. at the Holden mine. He had not returned to Holden until this trip and wanted to see how the place had changed. The other person was Audrey (I never caught her last name). She was one of the Forerunners, a group of primarily young people who, from mid-June to mid-July in 1961, began the process of cleaning Holden toward getting it ready for use as a retreat center. At that time her name was Audrey Sanders. She helped clean the Dining Hall and assisted the cook as they prepared meals outdoors near Chalet 1 (unlike the years when the mine was in operation, there was no power available in those early village days). She had been back to visit Holden several times during the intervening years, but this time - now that she is in her 80's - might be her last. Once in the village, both Keith and Audrey were celebrated for their knowledge of Holden's past, and several villagers talked with them at length. The village archivist interviewed Audrey while at the village (she is from Minnesota); an interview with Keith was set at a time when both were back in Seattle.

Speaking of the village archivist, Larry Howard, it turned out that he had arrived at Holden the prior Friday. He had not told me about this development. Had he done so, I would have changed my plans to fit his schedule. I then told him I was staying in the village a second week, which I had not previously told him. So I guess we were even. Larry's son Patrick and Patrick's two sons Lucca and Nico were again visiting Holden, though they spent most of their time in pursuits other than the archives.

During my two weeks at Holden I completed inventories for two banker boxes and began a third but did not finish it. The first one contain several items from the 1960's including LP records - vinyl - of Brynolf (Beany) Lundholm and Helen Landsverk, among others. Though a registered nurse and college instructor in Spokane, Helen was a self-taught guitarist, composer, and folk singer, as well as a member of ASCAP. She died in 2011 at age 88. (Her obituary can be found online at legacy.com). Also in this box was published sheet music of Helen Landsverk. Some of these titles were her own words and music. But she also wrote settings to words by Florence Ekstrand, such as "Noah's Raven", "Behold, I Stand At the Door and Knock", and "Run, Sheep, Run". (You can hear Helen sing "Run, Sheep, Run" via YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHNitRmRG4A>)

The second box I inventoried was a dense collection of board meeting materials and correspondence collected by Werner Janssen. Werner was the business manager of Holden Village

from 1963 to 1983/4. The collection included official documents from 1961 to 1983, but in reverse chronological order. There was so much material that it took me eight days to complete the inventory.

The first weekend in September was taken up with the Science and Technology Committee meeting. This was an abbreviated meeting, in part because the president of the committee was sick, could not attend, and did not provide an agenda. While many members were in attendance, there were several regulars who did not make the meeting. Marc Rerucha Borges, Operations manager for Holden, ran the meeting, telling the membership what has been accomplished and what remains to be done – a long list. One reason for such a long list is the lack of volunteer staff to do the work. Attracting volunteer staff is a high priority. (Village management does understand that it will be hard to do this when college students, who have amassed huge school debt loads, look for paying jobs and internships instead of volunteer opportunities.)

It was obvious to me that Holden was short staffed. Several long-term staff people were doing two or three jobs so that certain activities, like the pool hall and the snack bar, would be available to guests and staff. At each meal there would be calls for volunteers from the guests to help with clean and sanitizing tables after meals in the Dining Hall, or helping scoop ice cream, or assist with Sunday Eucharist, or offer First Word at breakfast. I volunteered for cleaning tables, assisting with Sunday Eucharist, and dish team when time permitted. I also took the time, when talking with staff, to thank them for all their effort and to let them know my appreciation. I also mentioned this to the directors, Chuck Hoffman and Peg Carlson-Hoffman.

Not all of my time was spent on inventory work. Larry Howard let me take time to attend the daily Bible study, renamed “Living Word”. For the two weeks I was at Holden, Wes Howard-Brook and Sue Ferguson Johnson offered studies in Old and New Testament. I had met Wes and Sue back in 2012 at Holden, the last time they gave the Bible study there. Wes is a senior instructor in Theology and Religious Studies at Seattle University and is a colleague of Pastor Dan. He is Jewish by ancestry, for three decades a Roman Catholic, and is now a Mennonite, a lawyer by training, who later went into Biblical studies. Sue shares responsibility with Wes in a ministry called “Abide in Me” out of their home in Issaquah. The crux of their two weeks of sessions is that what is expressed throughout the Old and New Testaments is a rejection of the religion of empire and control in its many forms and an embracing of a religion of creation and abundant life. Over the years, Wes has written several books explaining how scripture shows this to be true as over against what “Christianity” and “The Church” have espoused over the millennia: “Empire Revealed” (a study of the book of Revelations), “The Church Before Christianity”, “Come Out, My People”, and “Empire Baptized”.

It is Wes’ contention that much of the technological advances over the course of human history were at the command and instigation of human empire, such as language and mathematics, even down to our age with super highways and the Internet. In one of the early sessions, Wes asked questions of the people attending such as, “What is the meaning of the term ‘geometry?’” “Why was the Interstate Highway system created?” “Why was the Internet first developed?” I was the only person who answered all three questions, and answered them correctly. Wes immediately asked me, “How do you know all this?” “I pay attention,” I responded. (Ask me sometime if you want to know the answers.)

Most teaching staff sessions were held during the day while I was busy inventorying boxes. But there were some interesting presentations in the evening. Kai Carlson-Wee showed his short film about he and his brother hopping cargo trains across the country, called "Riding the Highline". Kai also answered questions about the life of train hopping, its joys and dangers. Another time a documentary was shown about salmon fisheries in the northern hemisphere, how pollution, damming the habitat streams, and overfishing has decimated practically all the natural salmon fish runs.

What made this visit to Holden quite special was a consequence of the fires this year. The Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) was closed due to the Bannock Lakes Fire in the Agnes Creek Valley. The Forest Service made the Railroad Creek Valley, in which Holden is located, the detour route. Hikers could go to Holden, then take the scramble route behind Martin Ridge to either the Devore Creek trail or the Company Creek Trail to Stehekin. Or, after reaching Holden, take the ride to the boat at Lake Chelan to reach Stehekin. From Stehekin, the hikers could travel on foot back to the PCT to continue on toward Canada. Every day more people were coming to the village. Some stayed overnight, getting a needed shower, washing their clothes, and a sheltered rest. Some of them even volunteered their time to help with a Holden task, like cleaning tables after a meal, or scooping ice cream. Many were impressed by the friendliness of the villagers. Good word of mouth about Holden went out to the hiking community, which rarely occurred previously, because, for PCT hikers, Holden is normally quite a diversion away from the direct route.

Although some hikers were heading south along the PCT, the majority were northbound. Several had started their journey at the border with Mexico, with hopes of reaching the Canada border by October. PCT hikers gained names from other hikers, which they accepted. People I met introduced themselves as "Brighty", "Tinker", or "Slaughterhouse"; few ever gave their real names. Some hiked solo (mostly males); there were some who hiked in pairs (quite a few women); several travelled in mixed groups of four or more; most adult age groups were represented.

Other people came to Holden for the first time. One person in particular, a woman named Laura Reed, a professor at U Mass, who had been visiting her sister in Stehekin, came to the village based on her sister's recommendation. She intended to visit for a couple of days, but was so enamored with what she encountered – the people, the scenery, the teaching staff, the village itself – that she stayed for eight days. She was enthusiastic in her accolades. She even joined me in a hike to Hart Lake, where I learned how very out of shape I was.

I also visited with one of the village cats (there are three currently). I met Mr. Kitty, a chocolate Siamese, who was very friendly and endearing.

I saw several friends this visit. Over my several visits this year, I have come to know many of the staff. I even got to see Terry Sanderson, the village mechanic, on the day I left. It was good to catch up with several of the Sci-Tech membership, many of whom I had not seen in a year. It was great to see Cristi Chapman and her daughter Maddie again. I first met them and her husband Chris at Holden back in 2011. BTW, Cristi is now Rev. Cristi Drane Chapman, Curate at St. Mark's Cathedral in Seattle.

I also got to see Josh Post again. I greeted him off the bus in true Wes Prieb fashion: looking behind him and saying, "It's nice to see you're (your) back." He responded with his Wes impression. I had suspected that he was visiting to check up on me. When asked, he said that perhaps he came "for rest and relaxation." But he spent much of his time in meetings. He did take some time to come up to the archives to look at a box that I had inventoried, the collection from Werner Janssen. He agreed with me that it contained items for which he had been searching a long time, and found documents of which he had been previously unaware.

There were a few swift changes occurring about the time I was leaving Holden. The directors had left the village with their 15 year-old dog Rudy. (Rudy later died on Sept. 14.) Interim pastors were about to arrive, and the husband and wife pastor team who had been there for only one year of a two-year commitment were to leave Holden a couple days after I did. There may be other announcements coming soon. Holden is now in fall transition. School is in full swing with five young students, two of them being the teacher's offspring. Most of the summer staff has left. What I said in my previous article still applies: I encourage you to financially support Holden with your gifts, and also encourage you to keep Holden, its co-directors Chuck +Peg, and its small-in-numbers staff – long term and short term – in your prayers as the village continues its ministry into the darker, colder seasons.

—Joel Matter