

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE:	Washington
COUNTY:	Pierce
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY DATE	JUN 10 1974

1. NAME

COMMON:
Coke Ovens

AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
SE of Wilkeson railroad tracks

CITY OR TOWN:
Wilkeson wa

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:
#3 - Honorable Julia B. Hansen

STATE: Washington CODE: 53 COUNTY: Pierce CODE: 053

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) abandoned

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
Burlington-Northern Inc.

STREET AND NUMBER:
176 E. 5th Street

CITY OR TOWN:
St. Paul

STATE:
Minnesota

CODE:
27

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:
Pierce County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:
930 Tacoma Avenue South

CITY OR TOWN:
Tacoma

STATE:
Washington

CODE:
53

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
None

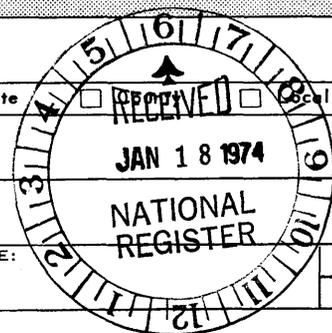
DATE OF SURVEY:
Federal State

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:

STATE:



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

(Check One)

Excellent Good Fair Deteriorated Ruins Unexposed

(Check One)

Altered Unaltered

(Check One)

Moved Original Site

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The bee hive shaped coke ovens are arranged in pairs for a distance of about three tenths of a mile parallel to a now abandoned rail line immediately adjacent to the town of Wilkeson. Although there were 160 ovens at this location at one time, all but about 30 have been recently destroyed.

The remaining ovens are about eight feet high and twelve feet in diameter. They are constructed of brick, marked "Heathfield" and reputedly imported from Scotland, beveled to form the distinctive bee hive shape. The construction was accomplished apparently without mortar but a six-inch layer of cement covered the exterior of each oven. Originally, a sandstone wall about ten feet high faced the entire line of ovens and a small arched embrasure in the wall opened into each oven. In the late 1940's, the stone was removed and was used for wall construction in Orting. Only the lowest two or three courses of stone remain. As a result, the earth covering the ovens has eroded away partially, although the major portion has been held intact by a dense growth of timber and brush. The side of each oven which was faced by the sandstone wall has fallen in somewhat, although the original configuration of the oven is clear.

The interior of the ovens show signs of intense heat, the effects varying from a slight color change to the melting and fusing of the brick face. Ash lines the floors in some ovens, although the majority are filled with earth and rubble. A small hole about one foot in diameter is centered on the top of each structure.



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

4. SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian	<input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century
<input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century	

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal	<input type="checkbox"/> Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Political	<input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning
<input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)
<input type="checkbox"/> Historic	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Industry		_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> Invention	<input type="checkbox"/> Science	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Art	<input type="checkbox"/> Literature	<input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian	_____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Theater	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Communications	<input type="checkbox"/> Music	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Conservation			_____

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

The Wilkeson Coke Ovens represent an early industrial activity in Washington which had an effect throughout the Pacific Coast. They are an example of the influence of the railroad in the development of the area. They are also emblematic of the state's coal industry, an enterprise which has always held much promise but has never grown into full substance. It has remained even until now an interesting but subdued element in the economy and history of the Puget Sound Region.

The Pierce County bee hive coke ovens, of which those at Wilkeson were the most numerous and active, were the sole supply of coke in the coastal area.

Coal was first discovered in the canyon of the Carbon River in Pierce County in 1862, and mining for local consumption began in 1873. During that same year, the Northern Pacific Railway had reached its western terminus at Tacoma and realized the potential value of the Wilkeson coal deposits. A branch line was built to the area in 1876. Several organizations mined the coal, but the emphasis altered when it was discovered that the coal could make very satisfactory coke.

The Tacoma Coal & Coke Company built the first bee hive coke ovens on the Pacific Coast at Wilkeson in 1885. The first 25 ovens were built as an experiment and supplied coke to foundries in the Seattle and Portland areas. The Wilkeson Coal & Coke Company added 50 more ovens in 1891, and by 1902, there were 100 ovens in constant use. In later years, a total of 160 ovens supplemented the original 25. Lead smelting added to the demand for coke after 1889, and demand increased sharply in 1902 with the advent of copper smelting.

The ovens were the only coke producers from 1885 to 1914. Subsequent to that date, the bee hive coke was supplemented with by-product and bench gas coke. Coke production reached a maximum of 125,872 tons in 1916, after which it declined steadily until termination in 1937. With the loss of markets for coke, local coal mining operations shut down. The most significant factor in the reduction of coke production was the change in the copper smelting industry from the blast furnace to the reverberatory furnace which used pulverized coal, oil, or natural gas.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Daniels, Joseph. Coal Fields of Pierce County. Division of Geology Bulletin #10, Olympia, 1914.

Washington Geological Survey. Annual Report 1902, Vol. 2.

Wilkeson Area Coal Study. U.S. Area Redevelopment Administration, 1963.

"Pierce County Town has Varied History", Tacoma News Tribune, August 2, 1964, Page 5.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

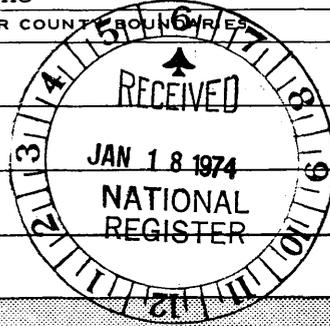
LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "		47 ° 6 ' 08 "	122 ° 2 ' 21 "	
NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

10/572920
5216770
GD

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: Less than one

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:
Office of Archaeology & Historic Preservation

ORGANIZATION: Washington State Parks & Recreation Commission DATE: 11/1/73

STREET AND NUMBER:
P.O. Box 1128

CITY OR TOWN: Olympia STATE: Washington CODE: 53

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National State Local

Name Charles H. Odegaard
Charles H. Odegaard

Title Director - Washington State Parks & Recreation Commission

Date JANUARY 14, 1974

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Ernest Allen Connolly
~~Assistant Director~~
Associate Director
Professional Services

Date JUN 10 1974

ATTEST:

Charles H. Odegaard
acting Keeper of The National Register

Date 6-10-74

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
Washington	
COUNTY	
Pierce	
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(Number all entries)

#8 - Significance
Wilkeson Coke Ovens

The production of coke is essentially a baking process whereby impurities are driven out of coal, leaving a substance which burns with a more intense heat. At Wilkeson, the procedure began when rail cars loaded with washed, dry coal traveled down a track laid on top of the ovens. Coal was shoveled into the ovens through the opening at the top and the embrasure in the sandstone wall was sealed with clay. Depending on the quality desired, the material was baked for 48, 72, or 96 hours, the oven opened and the coke raked into rail cars waiting on the adjacent siding. Although the initial fire to prepare the coke had to be made with wood, the ovens retained sufficient heat to continue the process with each individual charging.

After the ovens were abandoned, they proved useful to at least one individual. A Wilkeson miner worked diligently and carefully saved his money. After spending his small fortune on his love, he was jilted. Disappointed and embittered, he moved into an oven and made it his home earning him the name of Coke Oven Dan and a reputation as the town character.

