

It takes more than a good resume to get a government contract.

Amos Bowman (1839-1894)

By Jerry C. Olson

Amos Bowman was born on September 15, 1839 of Jamin and Mary Bowman at Blair, Waterloo County, Ontario. His family moved to Ohio when he was quite young, where he attended school through college. At 17 he went to New York to school to study medicine. He had learned shorthand and the New York Tribune hired him where he worked for Horace Greeley, who became his friend. He must have followed Greeley's advice for he did go west to write for the Sacramento Union. The mining activity in that area interested him, and Amos traveled to Europe to study at the Universities of Frieberg and Muncih for three years, graduating in Civil and Mining



Figure 1 Amos Bowman. Photo courtesy of Skagit River Journal, www.skagitriverjournal.com.



Figure 2 Anne Curtis Bowman. Photo courtesy of Skagit River Journal, www.skagitriverjournal.com.

Engineering. While in Europe he travelled all around, writing for Greely and the New York Tribune.

He returned to California in 1863 and participated in the survey of the California Nevada border. Soon he was hired as the editor of the Mining and Scientific Press which he did for several years. His expertise led to his appointment as assistant to J D Whitney, the head of the California Geological Survey. While in California, he met and married his wife, Anne Bondfield Curtis, the daughter of a mill owner in New Jersey in April 1871. Two of their children were born in California. After the funding for the California Geological Survey terminated in about 1873, he worked for private companies as a mining engineer for several years. In 1874 he prepared a report and maps for the California Water Co. of the Georgetown Divide, and for the Central Pacific RW on the mining possibilities of their land holdings. He then moved to Seattle where he worked for the NPRR as a mining engineer in the coal fields near Seattle and the Olympia Tenino RR.

While in Seattle, he became aware of the potential for Fidalgo Island as a future railroad terminus and harbor. Amos bought 168 acres from Miss Maud Stevens, daughter of Isaac Stevens, at the northern tip of Fidalgo Island. And in 1877 the family moved there, built a home, a wharf and a store. He named the post office Anacortes, for his wife Anne Curtis. The corruption may have been on purpose, by error, or by mandate of the Postal Service, but the name has continued to the large city of today. The Northwest Enterprise, his newspaper from Anacortes was created soon, later merging into the Daily Progress. He made a map of Anacortes and its railway potential to send all over the U. S. to promote the town. In 1880 he platted the present town at the northern tip of his claim.

Things were slower than he expected in the townsite business, so in 1882 he took employment with the Canadian Geological Survey, working in British Columbia. He mapped and reported on the 4000 square miles of the Cariboo Mining Region, publishing the report in 1888. In 1887 Amos published a report, "Mining Developments on the Northwest Pacific Coast." During this time Amos was gone a lot to both the U. S. and Canada, working on mining projects.



Figure 3 Amos Bowman's Store at Anacortes. . Photo courtesy of Skagit River Journal, www.skagitriverjournal.com.

The year 1888 brought brighter prospects, and he returned to Anacortes. The Washington Surveyor General, under Special Instructions, issued him an appointment as a U. S Deputy Surveyor and a contract to survey Saddlebag and Hat Islands in T35N R2E just northeast of Anacortes. His axeman was Oliver B. Iverson, a U. S. Deputy Surveyor and sometimes draftsman for the General Land Office in Olympia. His connection probably had something to do with the awarding of the contract. The field work of triangulating and traversing was



**Figure 4. Amos Bowman. Photo from
“An Illustrated History of Skagit and
Snohomish Counties”, Interste
Publishing Co., 1906**

accomplished in a week in November, 1888, and the notes were approved in June 1889. He was paid the total of \$45 for the contract and survived charges by surveyor Arthur. M. White.

Between 1888 and 1890 the town boomed. A railroad started East, a school and high school were built, and two mills, a door factory, a brewery, 6 large docks, an opera house, a street car line and an electric light system were all constructed. Near the end of 1890 there was the start of a panic, railroads were going out of business and Anacortes didn't look as promising. By 1893 the Oregon Improvement Company went broke, the railroad to the East stopped after 33 miles, there would be no western terminus for Anacortes, and everyone left.

The Bowmans stayed until Amos died in June 1894, feeling his efforts were a failure. Anne moved to Sumas and later died in California in 1906, but is buried next to Amos. There wasn't even enough money for a gravestone for Amos. By 1896 however, Anacortes was coming back with canneries and sawmills.

Amos Bowman was a member of the California Geological Survey, the Geological Survey of the Dominion of Canada, the American Institute of Mining Engineers, a Fellow of the Geological Society of America, and a United States Deputy Surveyor. Bowman Bay on Fidalgo Island is named after Amos Bowman.