

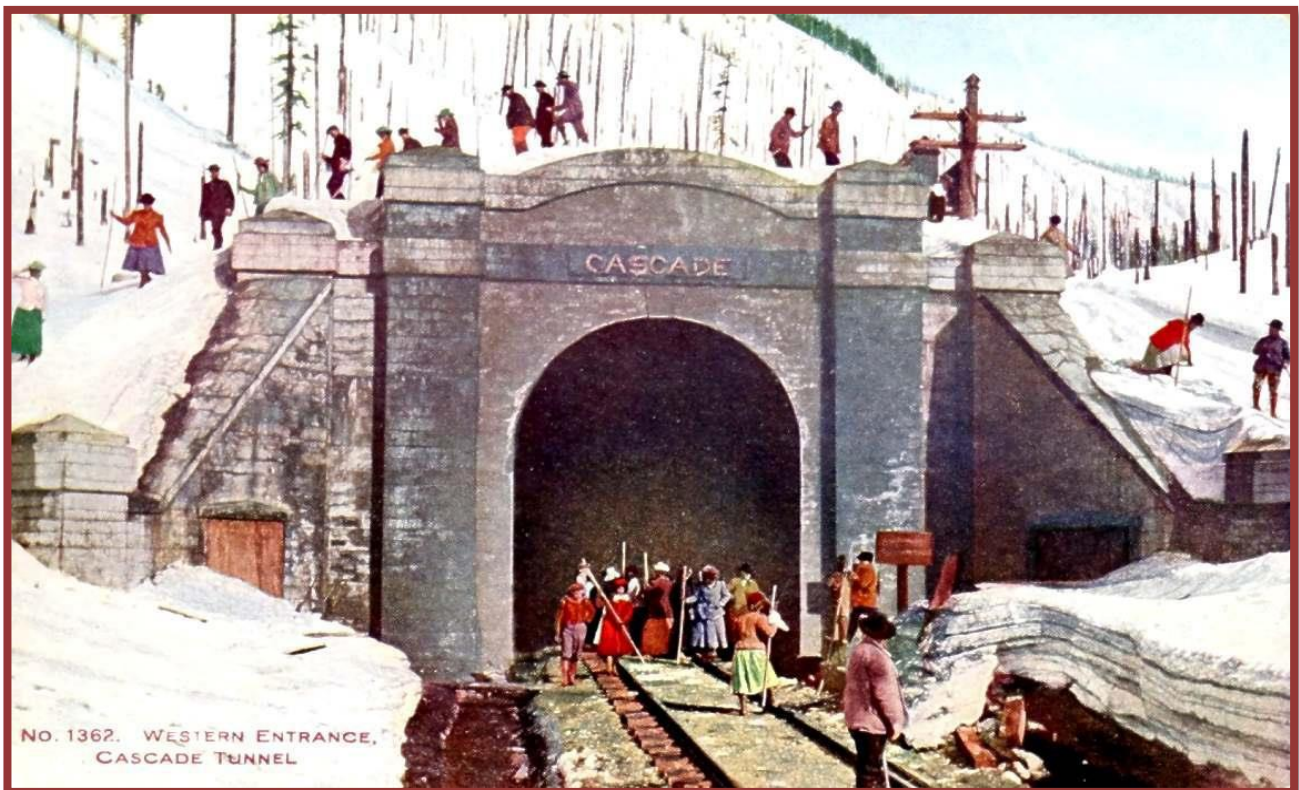


WEBFOOTER EXTRA

JUNE 2024

REMEMBERING THE ORIENTAL LIMITED IN THE CASCADE MOUNTAINS

BY DAN SIMMERING



Lithographed postcard of the of the west entrance to the Cascade Tunnel on the Great Northern Railway at Wellington, Washington showing an event to herald the upcoming electrification of the original Cascade Tunnel in July 1909. Postally unused, circa 1909. Dan Simmering collection.

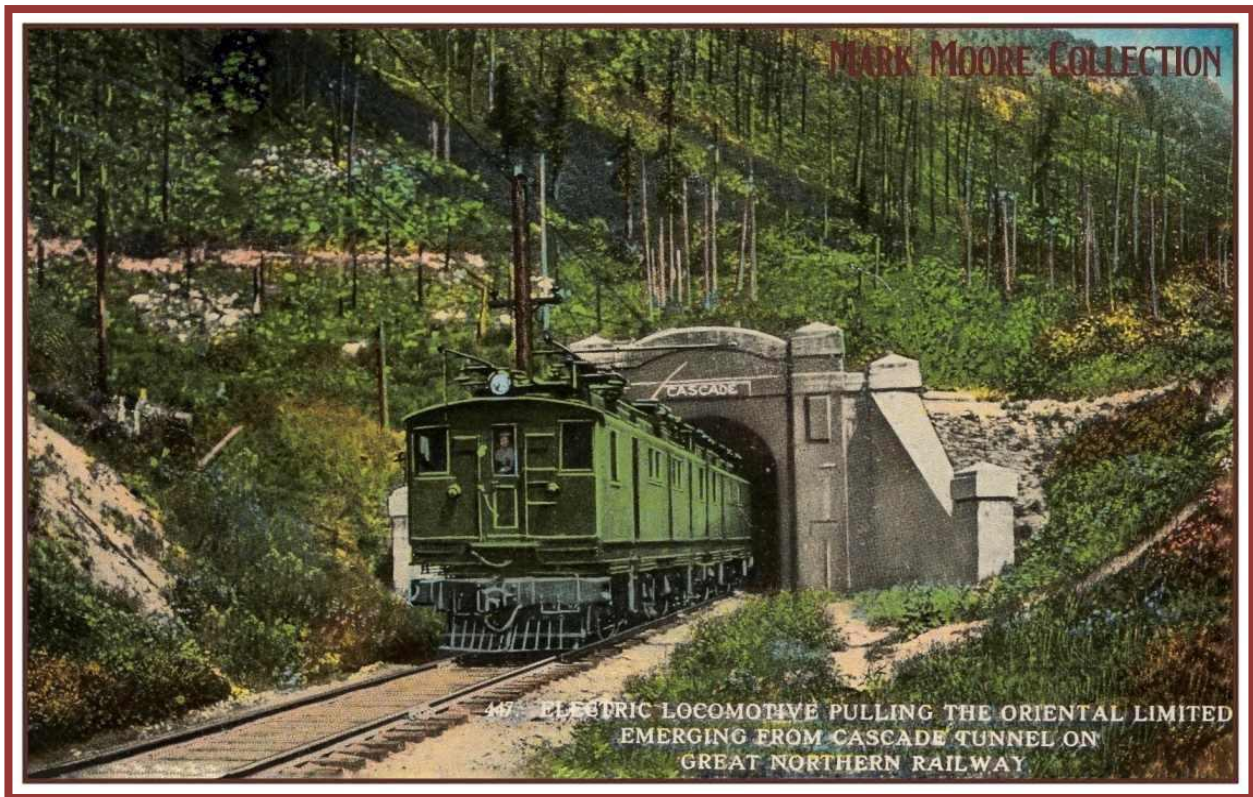
REMEMBERING THE ORIENTAL LIMITED IN THE CASCADE MOUNTAINS

BY DAN SIMMERING

The Great Northern Railway built a rail line in 1892 to connect the Great Lakes in the Midwest with Seattle, "the Gateway to the Orient" on the west coast. The track was used until 1929 when the new Cascade Tunnel was opened. In December 1905, the Great Northern put the Oriental Limited into service on a 58-hour schedule between St. Paul, Minnesota and Seattle. That train averaged 31 miles per hour over the entire route.

As slow as that was, the Oriental Limited was still faster than Northern Pacific's North Coast Limited by 4-1/2 hours between the same two cities. Even with "Limited" in its name, this train stopped at numerous small towns along the way. When considering the mountains that the train had to cross, the train was still quick enough to garner good ridership.

The Oriental Limited was the premiere train for the Great Northern Railroad until 1929 when the Empire Builder took over the top position on the roster. The Oriental Limited ceased to run in 1931, which was during the Great Depression. The Oriental Limited name returned in 1946 to another train, but that train was renamed the Western Star in 1951.

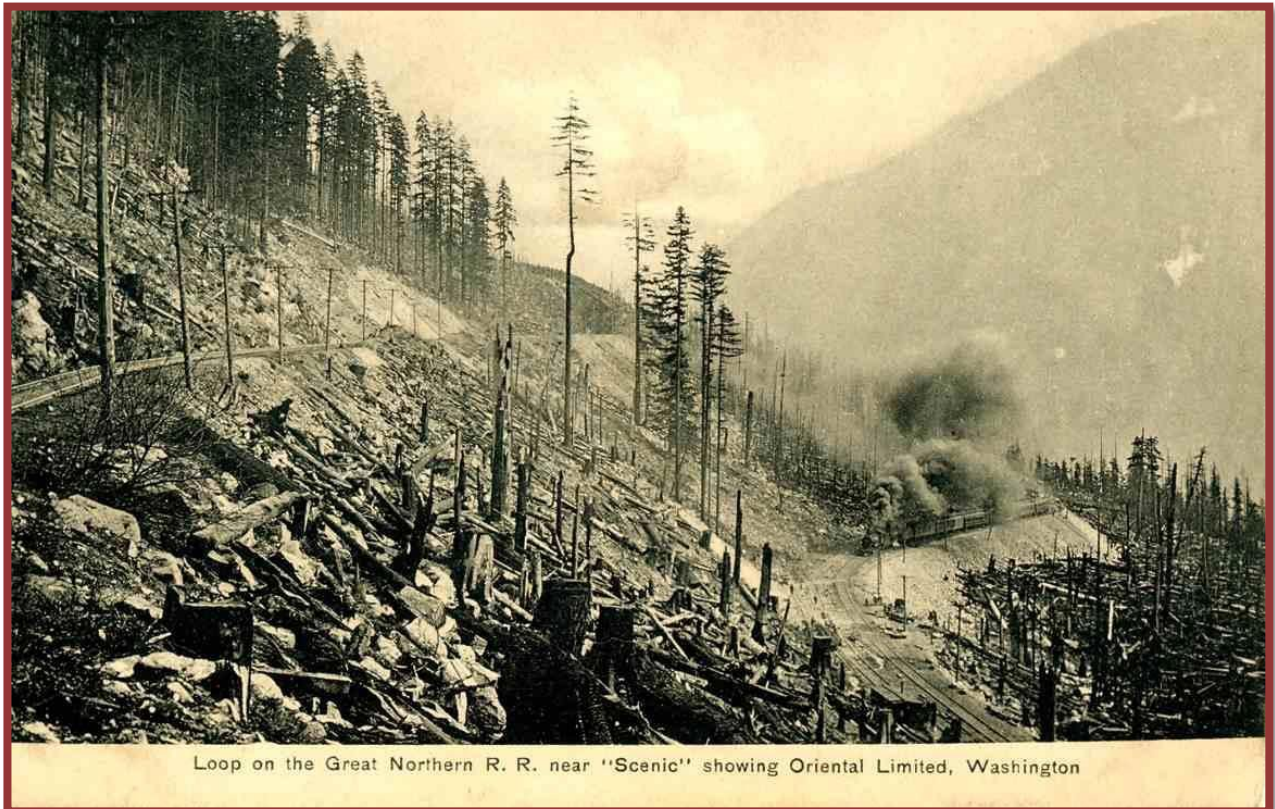


Lithographed postcard of an Oriental Limited electric locomotive emerging from the Cascade Tunnel on the Great Northern Railway through Stevens Pass, Washington. Postmarked 1924.



Lithographed postcard of the electric locomotives on the Oriental Limited at the Cascade Tunnel on the Great Northern Railway through Stevens Pass, Washington. Postmarked 1911.

A GREAT NORTHERN RAILROAD SCENE ON A POSTCARD



Lithographed postcard of the Loop on the Great Northern Railway near Scenic, Washington, circa 1908, Spokane & Seattle RPO cancellation, Sept. 25, 1909. Dan Simmering collection.

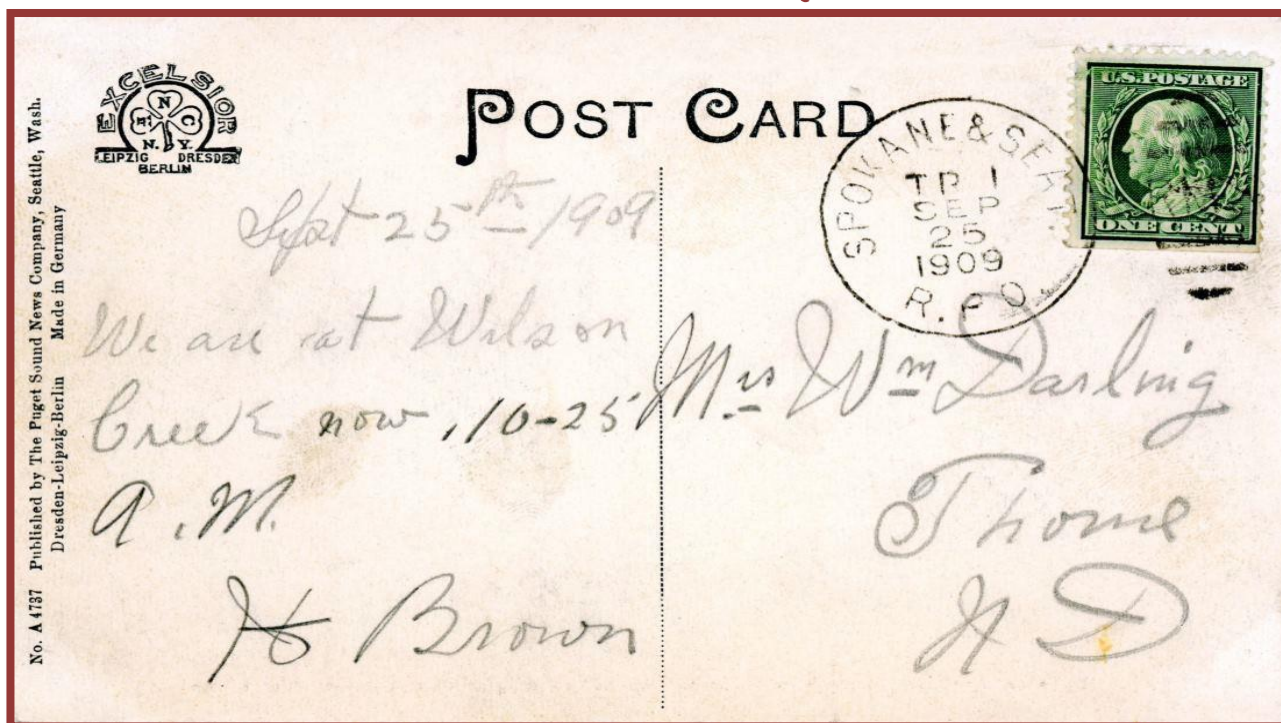
While out rummaging for old railway post office cards and letters, I found the postcard on the previous page. The photograph side of the card reportedly shows Great Northern's Oriental Limited near Scenic, Washington. The address side of the card indicates that this card was mailed on the Oriental Limited to a Mrs. William Darling in Thorne, ND. The card was mailed by H. Brown on September 25, 1909. Also notice that the card has a RPO postmark cancelling the stamp.

Let us first look at the photograph to determine the location of the train. If the scene was "near Scenic" as the caption indicates, this train was nearing the Horseshoe Tunnel loop on Windy Mountain. Great Northern identified this location as Corea. If this is true, the train in the black and white photograph was an eastbound which had left Seattle and was traveling to St. Paul. When this card was mailed in 1909, the Oriental Limited still plied over the section of track shown on the postcard.

The photo on the card shows the train climbing the grade up to the summit at the old Cascade Tunnel at Wellington. However, in 1909, the Oriental Limited left Seattle at 7:10 pm which would put the train at this location after dark. The postcard photo of the train was taken several months before it was printed in Germany.

The Official Guide that I referenced (as noted on the following page) was for the passenger train schedules of 1909. Even in 1895, the train left Seattle at 7:10 pm putting it at Scenic after dark. It is possible this train was not the Oriental Limited, but a train running just for the photograph.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE ADDRESS SIDE OF THE POSTCARD



By examining the postmark, we can determine that the RPO district was between Spokane and Seattle with this card mailed on Saturday, September 25, 1909. The train number as indicated by the postmark was Train #1, or the westbound Oriental Limited. During the year of 1909, this train left St. Paul at 11:15 a.m. On its trip west, the Oriental Limited was scheduled to leave Minot, North Dakota at 2:25 am and Spokane at 7 am. It arrived in Seattle at 8:15 pm.

The message from H. Brown indicates that the writer wrote the card as the train was stopped at the isolated and small village of Wilson Creek, Washington. That location is 29 miles east of Ephrata, Washington. Wilson Creek was a quick five-minute, scheduled stop on the Oriental Limited's schedule. H. Brown indicates that the time of the writing to be 10:25 am. That would put the train just 5 minutes late.

I do not know the relationship between Mrs. Darling and H. Brown, but if Brown had been visiting Mrs. Darling in Thorne, the nearest Great Northern railroad station to Thorne was Rugby, ND. The Oriental Limited did stop in Rugby at 12:43 am.

The town of Thorne, North Dakota was laid out in 1905. A number of the first settlers who were native to Thorne, England chose the name of the town. Checking some genealogical lists, the last name of Darling was listed in Throne burial records. The town had a post office starting in 1905, but it was discontinued in 1965. Even though a person cannot mail letters to Thorne today, H. Brown could in 1909. Thorne is about 15-miles south of the Canadian border and 22-miles north of Rugby. In 1909, the distance from Thorne to Rugby would have been considered as a trip that took all day.

The postage stamp on the card is a 1908-1909 era one-cent green Franklin that came from a booklet pane of 6 stamps. The Scott number of this perforation 12 stamp is #331a. This postcard was mailed about five months before disaster hit the railroad community at Wellington, which was located at the track's summit on Windy Mountain. The picture on the postcard predicted the event.

During the last nine days of February 1910, eleven feet of snow fell on the western slopes of the Cascade Mountains. There was so much snow that during the last week of February two passenger trains became stuck in the snow as they were coming westbound out of the old Cascade Tunnel, which was completed in 1900. Snow removal equipment was sent from Everett, WA to free those trains, but progress was painfully slow and very difficult. On March 1st, after six days of the trains being marooned by the snow, a thunder storm with heavy rain struck Wellington where the trains were parked.

During the night, the snow field above the tracks broke loose in a huge avalanche striking the occupied trains and pushing them over the mountain's side and down into a deep ravine 150-feet below. There were 96 people who died in the snow slide, the worst avalanche in U.S. history. Looking at the photo on the postcard, Wellington was just 2-1/2 miles east following the upper track.

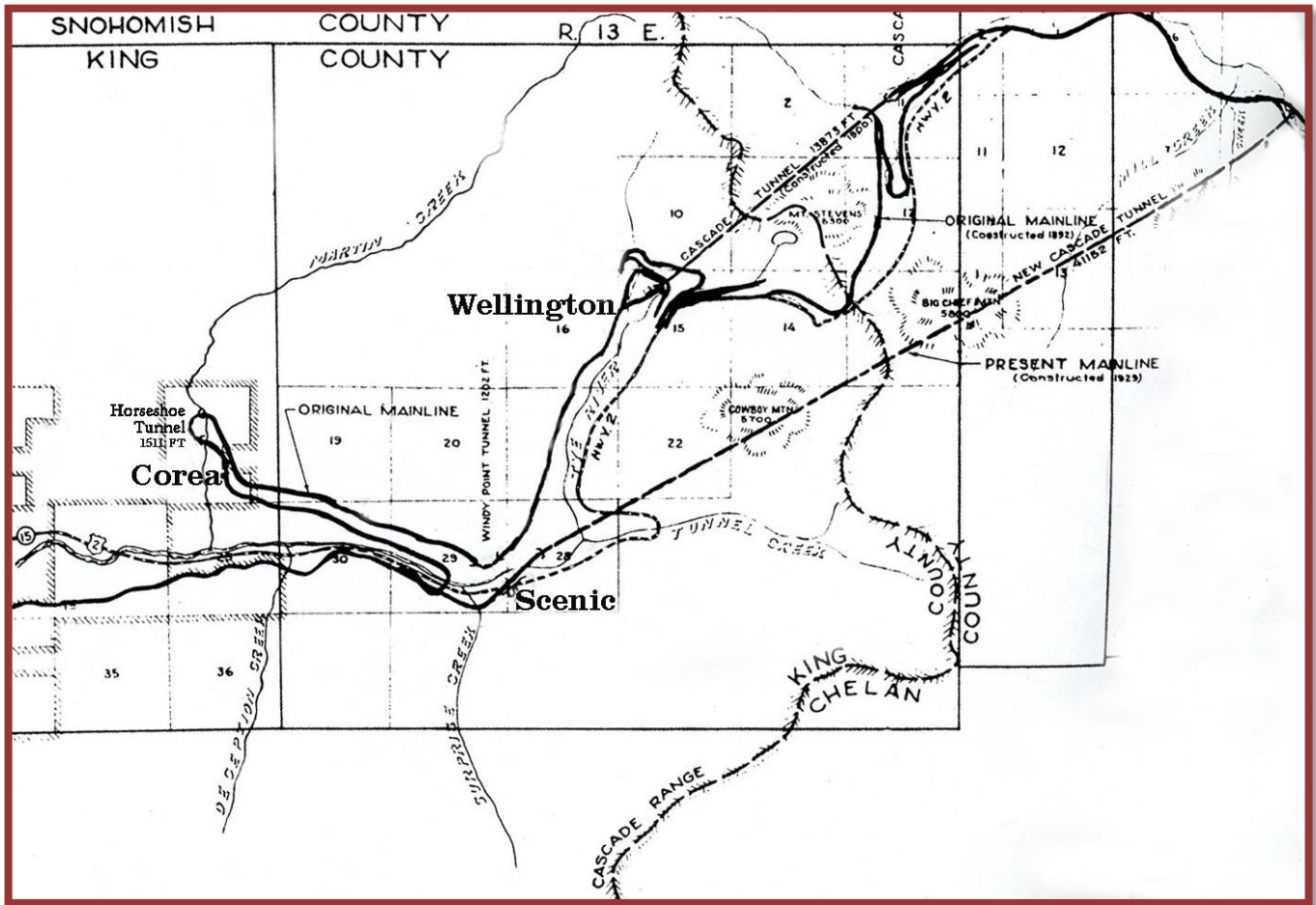


1910 photo showing the destruction of the avalanche that engulfed the Oriental Express Limited on the Great Northern Railway through Stevens Pass, Washington. Dan Simmering collection.

With these facts in mind, how does the photograph on the postcard on page 4 foretell of an avalanche danger? Notice the trees along the right-of-way which were burned with some of the trees subsequently cut down. As trains passed through the thickly-growing forests on the mountain slopes, the coal cinders and fly ash from the locomotive boiler's firebox would set the vegetation on fire. With almost no way to extinguish the blazes, the wild fires were left to burn themselves out.

Before the railroad constructed the line through the dense undergrowth and standing trees, the forest growth would help prevent or retard avalanches. In the summer of 1909, the slopes above Wellington were burned off by locomotive caused fires. On March 1st when the thunderstorm's rain caused the snow above Wellington to break loose, there were no trees to retard the slide. The postcard photograph of the mountain side forest at Corea is a testament of the devastation that those fires caused.

Would intact forestation above Wellington have saved the lives of 96 rail passengers on the two trains? No one at this time can tell for sure, but it would have been a factor in the final outcome of the avalanche.



Author's map of Stevens Pass railroads from 1892 to present.

Editor's Note:

This featured guest article was submitted for publication in The Webfooter by Northwest rail historian, enthusiast and postcard collector Dan Simmering.



Advertising blotter for the Great Northern Railway, circa 1946.

ANTIQUE PAPER LLOYD CENTER
ROUND-UP

OUR 41ST SHOW
 WWW.ANTIQUEPAPERROUNDUP.COM
SEPTEMBER 19-21, 2024

ANTIQUE PAPER AUCTION

THURSDAY, SEPT. 19: 4 PM TO 7 PM

ANTIQUE PAPER SHOW & SALE

FRIDAY, SEPT. 20: 10 AM TO 5 PM

SATURDAY, SEPT. 21: 10 AM TO 4 PM



THE TWO MIKES FROM SEATTLE

ARE INTERESTED IN PURCHASING POSTCARD COLLECTIONS, ANY SIZE, ANY LOCATION. ALSO BUYING EPHEMERA, MAPS, PHOTOGRAPHS AND POSTERS.

CALL MIKE FAIRLEY 206-499-7413

email: fairlookantiques@gmail.com

CALL MIKE MASLAN 206-587-0187

email: oldphotos4u@aol.com

For the latest news, visit our website: email: info@thewebfooters.com

 www.thewebfooters.com

Find us on Facebook 



WEBFOOTERS POST CARD CLUB

PO Box 17240
Portland OR 97217-0240