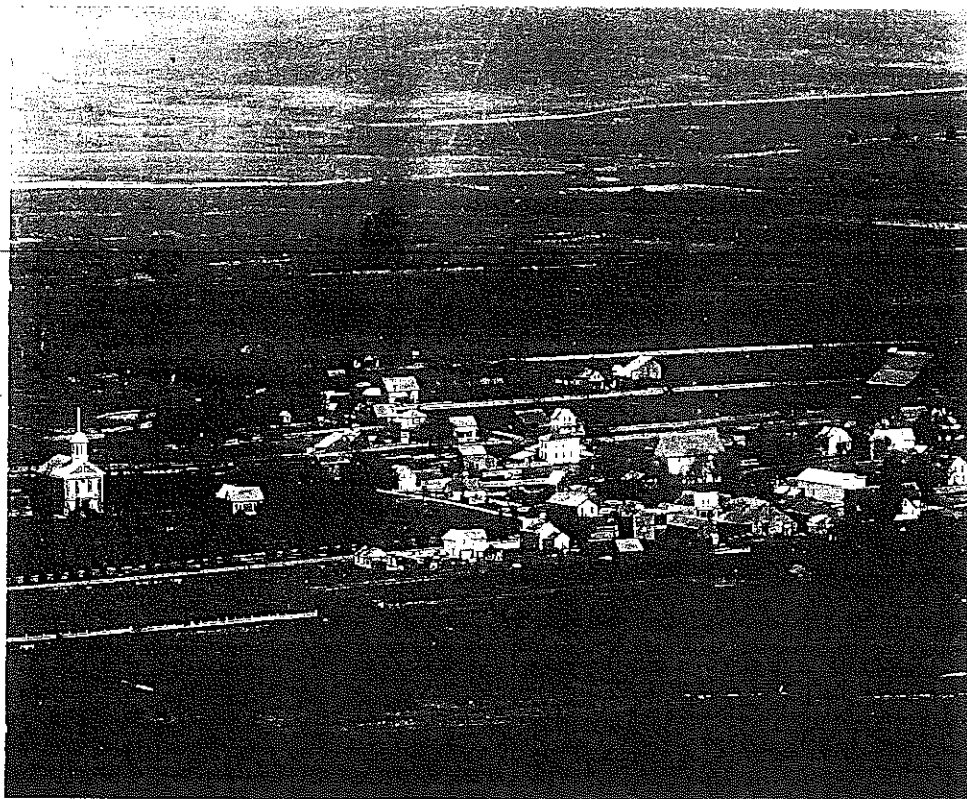


Philomath

And

The Marys River Settlement

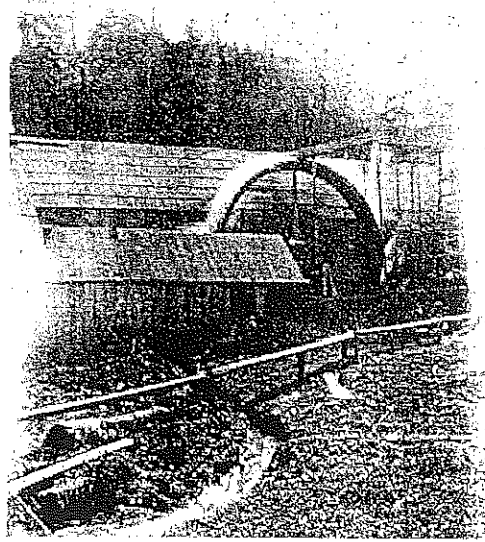


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By Marlene McDonald

quickly realized that the trees they first viewed as nothing but hindrances to plowing their fields, were actually a valuable cash crop. Settlers might live in log cabins at first, but seldom viewed them as anything but temporary. Their dream was to build houses of dressed lumber, just as they had in the East.

In each community located on a stream, water powered sawmills (later converted to steam) sprang up to provide lumber for building. Farmers and their grown (but in some cases quite young) boys started felling the timber on their land and selling the logs to the mills. Crosscut saws, usually operated by two men standing on springboards inserted in the tree trunk to get the saw operators above the swell of the trunk, felled trees one at a time after removing the limbs. Logging was usually done on ridges or high ground above streams, so the logs could be moved more easily.

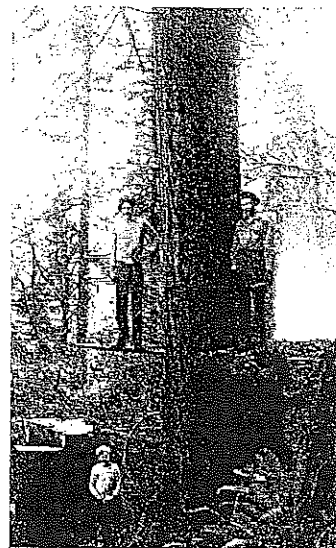


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Henkle's early water-powered sawmill, ca 1872



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Left: making the undercut. Right: ready to cut with the misery whip. Fallers are standing on springboards.

Using "misery whips" (crosscut saws), two men could fell perhaps two or three trees a day. It took a great deal of labor to limb a tree and the forest seemed to stretch forever. It was an infinite resource as far as they were concerned, so they only took the tree between the swell of the trunk and the first limbs, making clear lumber (no knotholes). As cutting methods improved, more of the tree was utilized. When power saws became more common after World War II, felling trees became easier and faster. Donkey engines pulled logs out of canyons and across ground easily to landings where

Henkle's sawmill, also located on the South Fork but farther south near Rock Creek, was built earlier, but burned and was rebuilt in 1872. Henkle's mill produced 10,000 feet a day. Jerry Hinkle said, "In the summer time there was too little water in the creek to run the mill but at other times the mill was busy. At first the lumber was cut with a slash saw (jig saw) which had an up and down motion, but later father got a circular saw. The mill was operated until Corvallis claimed Rock Creek for a municipal water supply and father was compelled to sell his rights to them. The lumber for the old Philomath College building was cut at our mill."⁵ Ed Frantz said "the old up-and-down saw was very slow. The most we could cut with that were two or three thousand feet in a day. I remember the sawyer would adjust the water power, start the saw through a log and go to dinner. He would have time to finish his meal and get back before the cut was finished."⁶

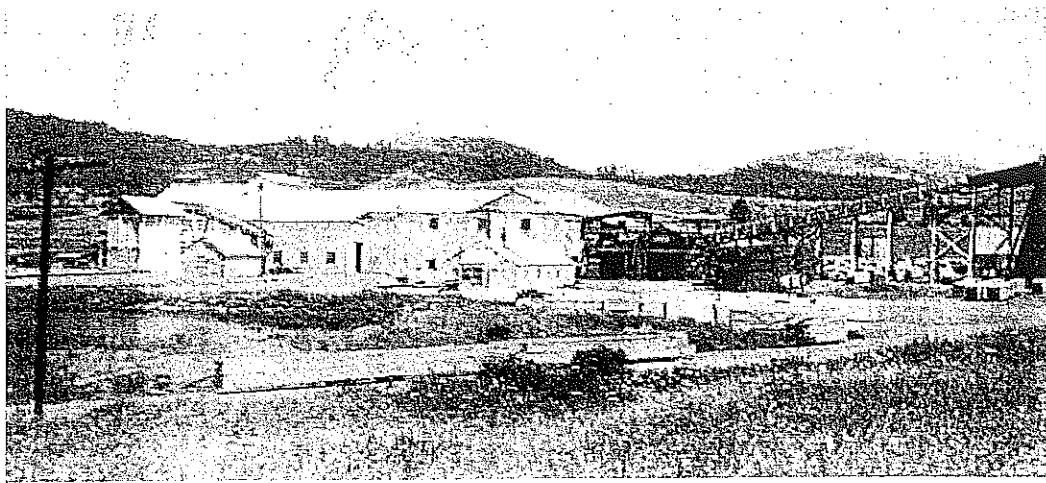
Moore's mill, built by Jesse Hoffman in 1865, stood at the head of Pleasant Valley but produced only about 600 feet a day.⁷ Hoffman sold it to Moore in 1884.

In April of 1939, the R.L. Griswold sawmill, located "on the west edge of Philomath" caught fire early one morning and burned to the ground. The fire department's water pump broke down, which hindered efforts to save the mill.⁸

In more recent times, Rex Clemens, after building two mills between Wren and Kings Valley (one burned), moved his operation just east of Philomath where it remained for many years. The millponds still remain as part of the Philomath Industrial Park.

Northside Lumber Company was established by Dorval and Anna Bevens in 1947 and operated until his death in 1985, when it was sold. The main mill burned in a spectacular fire 1982, which started in an electrical panel, but the Bevens rebuilt, modernizing and keeping competitive by installing computerized equipment which cut by metric measure also, allowing the mill to compete in foreign markets. The main mill handled logs twelve inches or more in diameter and a smaller mill handled the smaller logs.⁹

In the 1950s there were many small mills around the countryside run by independent owners. They were much like the small water and steam mills built by the settlers for their own needs. Many were milling timber from their own land and when the timber was cut, the mill closed down.



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Rex Clemens Sawmill east of Philomath

Eventually equipment was developed which meant oxen and horses were not needed. Probably the most important of these was the donkey engine, a steam engine mounted on skids so it could be moved from place to place. Using a network of cables and pulleys, logs could be moved up from and even across deep canyons, over the top of rocks and brush, to a landing where they could be easily loaded on flatcars or trucks.

Safety gear at first was unknown and men just wore their regular clothes and watched out for themselves. Men learned early on that "cork" (caulked) boots gave them better footing, and "staggered" pants (cut off halfway to the knee) kept them from getting caught by brush or limbs. Canvas pants and jackets well coated with paraffin gave some



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Faller using power saw, wearing hard hat and caulk boots

protection from the rain. Suspenders instead of belts meant the pants could come off more quickly in case of their getting caught on machinery or tree stubs. Loggers and millworkers alike wore shapeless red felt hats, rather as a mark of their profession. It was not until the 1950s that "hard hats" were required as protection against head injuries and were worn under protest. Somehow protecting one's head did not seem quite "manly." Flannel and "hickory" shirts, tough but comfortable, were staggered

between the wrist and the elbow, again to rip more easily if caught. After the use of power saws speeded cutting, accidents from saws kicking back increased, until finally someone invented cutters' "chaps" which cause the material to ball up in the chain and stop the saw. This greatly lessened the accidents but again, many loggers fought against their use. Tough leather or canvas gloves cut down on hand injuries, but they had to be loose enough to come off easily if they are caught in moving cables or equipment.

High climbers, the men who climbed to the top of a tree, trimming it to make a pole from which cables were rigged to bring in the logs, were considered daredevils. Climbing 60-70 feet up a tree, limbing it as he went, was not for the faint hearted. At first a climber used only spurs on his boots to help him climb, with his tools dangling on ropes from his belt. Most tied ropes around the tree trunk to help keep themselves from falling, but all too often, a misstroke with the axe cut through the rope and the climber fell to his death. Nevertheless, there was great protest when hard hats and ropes with steel cable inside were made requirements. The use of steel towers has made the high climber nearly obsolete. Logging is still one of the most dangerous jobs but the number of broken, crippled men from accidents has decreased steadily.



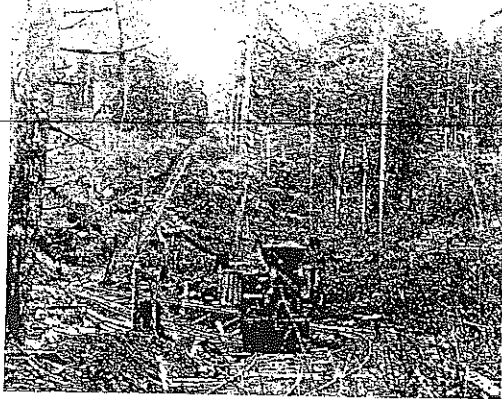
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Glenn Decker topping a tree

that one boy, if he was at all late, automatically got a whipping from his mother.¹¹ On Saturday night, some of the braver (or more foolhardy) of the loggers and mill workers might take a dangerous but speedy route to town for their night out by hopping on a board in the flume and riding it down. Naturally, the boys along the way saw them doing this and tried to do likewise. Since punishment would be swift and severe if they were caught, it was done in utmost secrecy and little is known about the practice, but no accounts have been found of deaths or injuries.

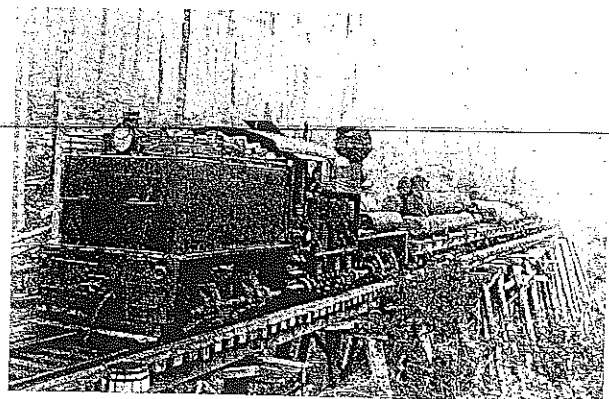
Logging Railroads.¹²

Starting in the early 1900s railroad tracks were run into the timber, sometimes for miles, so logs could be transported to the mills for processing. Logging railroads used short narrow-gauge tracks and specially developed Shay logging locomotives to haul logs to the mill for processing. They eliminated the need to build expensive roads and could haul more logs at lower cost. Since tracks could not easily be moved, they were usually built into larger timber tracts, being extended as the logging moved farther into the woods.



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Spaulding incline railroad on Marys Peak



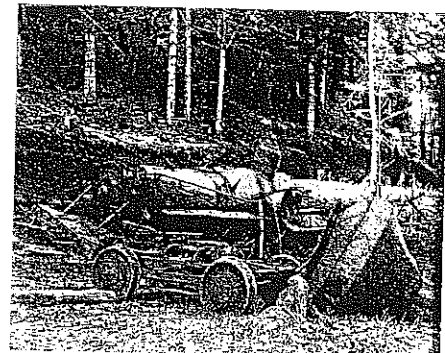
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Load of logs on the trestle up Woods Creek



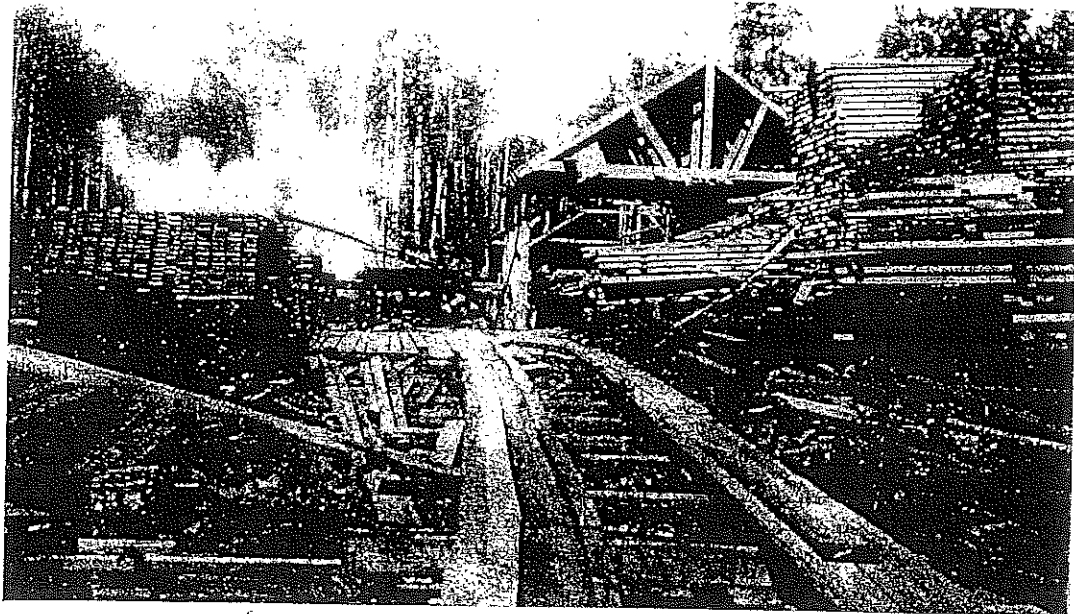
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Load coming into Noon Mill



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Wrecked engine, salvaged for metal during World War II



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Steam sawmill with tram road in foreground



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Two-man dragsaw, 1930s

building and finance the program; contributions to the swimming program; installation of tennis courts at the high school, some paving costs within the district; a one-time speed reading course for high school seniors and administrators; occasional summer student activity financing; and other projects that are probably unknown. They invested in the future of students and their legacy is in the success of the graduates.

Stan and Hazel Lowther¹⁴ - In 1938 or 1939, Stan Lowther made candy and ice cream in Eugene, then moved to Philomath, where he bought the Barkley ice cream store. He sold the store to Ted Ward in 1947, who used it to publish the *Benton Review*. Lowther started working with his brother-in-law, Rex Clemens, in 1941, at a variety of jobs including laying and taking up tram roads, unhooking the tongs from logs after they were loaded on trucks and rafting logs in the Willamette River for Clemens. In 1948 he worked all summer building the log pond at Clemens Philomath mill. In 1949, he started Lowther Lumber Co. and built a stud mill at Sturgis Creek in Alsea. In 1950 he moved the stud mill to Sharp's ranch between Grass Mountain and Marys Peak. He quit logging in the mid 1960s when log prices fell. In 1977, at the age of 60, he started working with his sons Dave, Steve and Fred in the newly formed Lowther Logging, Inc., and continued until the mid-eighties.

T.J. (1890 - 1983) and Margaret Starker¹⁵ - Thurman James Starker came from Kansas in 1907 and was one of the first four graduates from the School of Forestry at Oregon Agricultural College in 1910. After graduation he worked for the U. S. Forest Service and the Western Pine Association until 1922 when he took a position at his alma mater, now Oregon State University, teaching forestry classes. During his teaching



T.J. and Margaret Starker

career he began to purchase forestlands in the area, mainly around Blodgett, becoming a well known timberman. During the 1920s the common logging practice - called highgrading - was to take the biggest choicest, easiest-to-reach trees and let the land go for taxes, although it was known that trees could be regenerated on cutover land. This practice meant that thousands of acres of land were taken off the tax rolls.

Using a well-worn map, Starker slowly bought up small pieces surrounding his initial 140 acres on Marys Peak, choosing carefully. "I had

certain measuring sticks. I preferred to get north slopes because the moisture is there. I wanted trees that would come on the market in 20 to 24 inches in diameter in 25 years. I didn't want flat land because Doug fir doesn't do well in poorly drained soil. But I did like from 15 to 25 per cent slope. I wanted 40 inches of rain at least. And I always looked for good neighbors who weren't too handy with matches." By the late 1940s he had more than 10,000 acres of timberland and by the mid-1970s had increased the acreage to 52,000 acres. A family partnership business was started in 1971 and Starker Forests manages and maintains the large tracts of forest.

TJ was well known for his letters to the editor in the local paper, commenting on environmental issues. He felt that most "instant ecologists should join his 99-50 club - 99 per cent of them had never been more than 50 feet off the trail." He was always involved

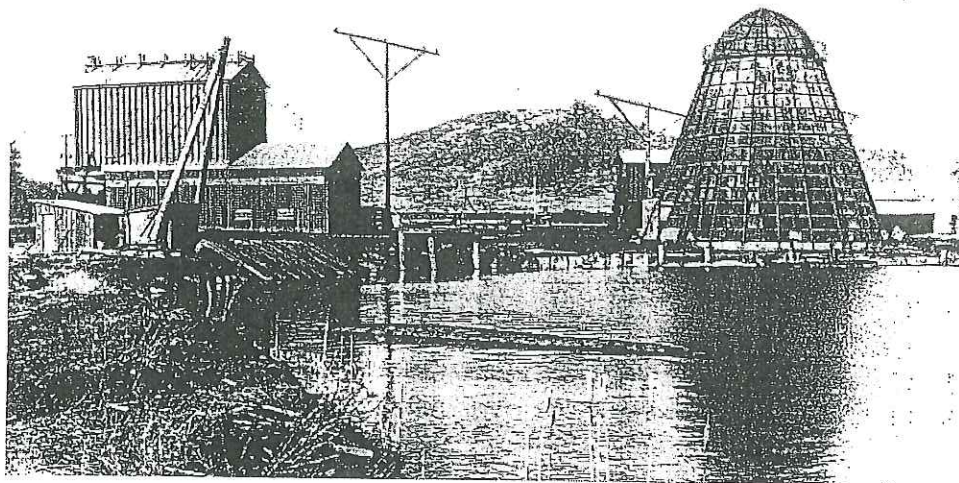
Gordon (1913-1968) and Thelma Larson¹⁸ - Larson started as a contract logger in 1938, then bought into a sawmill with W. McCalmet in Philomath. It operated until 1957 when he built a new mill, which he operated with Kermit Roth until he sold it in 1967. His business and community interests varied widely, as he also operated G.T. Automotive, G.T. Logging, Benton Tire Sales, and Philomath Variety, as well as housing developments in the Gladstone area near Portland. He and his brother Larry opened "The Frontier," Philomath's first bar and restaurant, just west of the town limits. He served as councilman and mayor of Philomath for several terms, was a charter member of the Philomath Lions Club, the Corvallis Moose Lodge, the Corvallis Elks Lodge, the Beaver Club, and the Oregon State University Round Table. He and his wife Thelma raised two daughters, Beverly and Géary.

John "Johnny" (1902-1974) and Bertha Thompson¹⁹ - Johnny Thompson started in 1931 with a planer mill at Blodgett and added a sawmill in 1936. He bought and leased tracts of timber on Marys Peak and brought the logs to the mill at Blodgett. In 1958 he discontinued the Blodgett mill and concentrated on the logging operation with his son Gene.

Others

Other mill owners, for whom information was difficult to obtain, included Les and Gary Hobin who operated a mill on Chapel Drive; Mica, who owned the Cedar Mill west of town; Marvin and Ben Ellis; Bud Bayliss, Roy Scott who operated a planer, Dan Taylor and Woody Taylor (partners); Charlie Hall; and the Rose Bros.

Many small mills operated "up every canyon" in the 1950s, as one source said, but they did not survive long.



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Larson Lumber Mill with wigwam burner. These burners, although safer and less wasteful than open burning of sawdust and other waste, became obsolete with the increased demand use of sawdust and chips for pulp and particle board, and now the bark is utilized for garden mulch.