

The Good Ol' Days

By Tobie Finzel

Clark and Wilson Lumber Company

Our columns have often focused on the Oregon-American Lumber Company because of its importance to the town of Vernonia, but of course there were many other logging and mill operations throughout Columbia County. One that was nearby and employed many Vernonians in the 1920s, and to some extent during the Depression years of the 1930s, was the Clark and Wilson Lumber Company.

The Clark and Wilson Lumber Company was organized in 1905 by Orange M. Clark; his son, Wilson; and C.G. and J.A. Wilson who were Orange's brothers-in-law. The Clarks were lumbermen in Michigan before moving to Linnton, Oregon, where they acquired a lumber mill and the accompanying Columbia River docks in that same year.

According to a March 1, 1907 press release, Clark and Wilson acquired 10,000 acres of prime timberland near Goble for \$800,000 from William Reid and his father-in-law, D.C. Pelton, who was president of the Banker's and Lumbermen's Bank of Portland. The tract contained about 400,000,000 board feet of standing timber. The purchase included the Goble, Nehalem and Pacific Railway, a logging railroad ten miles in length, and all the logging and camp equipment on the land. The company later built or acquired mills in Scappoose and Prescott.

The logging company that formerly worked the Goble tract had been putting about 100,000 feet of logs into the river daily. Clark and Wilson announced that the capacity would be increased to 150,000 and rafted and towed to their mill at Linnton for processing into lumber. From this point forward, Clark and Wilson intended to carry on their own logging operations which in Columbia County came as far inland as the Upper Nehalem River near Big Eddy Park and the east side of the Nehalem near Stoney Point Road's intersection with what is now Highway 47.

Clark and Wilson established multiple camps in the county of which Wilark was the largest and housed the firm's local operations after its 1927 merger with Nehalem Timber and Logging Company. Nehalem Timber owned a large block of forest land from Scappoose to the Nehalem River near Pittsburg as well as the Portland and Southwestern Railroad, now part of the Crown Zellerbach (CZ) Trail. Clark and Wilson sold its timberland and trackage to Crown Zellerbach in 1947.

Formerly known as Camp 8, Wilark (a partial anagram of the company name) was located on Pittsburg Road at the crest of the hills that separated the East Fork of the Nehalem from the Clatskanie River drainages. It is estimated that up to 800 workers and their families lived there during the peak logging years in the 1920s. Camp 10 was locat-

ed further north, but both camps' workers came to Vernonia stores and bars on their days off and were considered part of the extended Upper Nehalem community. The *Vernonia Eagle* newspaper noted births, illnesses, and other events in the lives of the Wilark residents and also carried news of Clark and Wilson Company.

Although they continued operations throughout the Great Depression years 1930 through 1936, the workforce was reduced due to diminished demand for lumber. Operations were frequently shut down by floods, landslides, heavy winter snows and the extreme fire danger in the 1930s. There were also disruptions due to labor disputes. One shut-down in 1934 was due to a protracted longshoremen's strike that kept the logs from being unloaded at the Columbia River lumber mills. A shorter 1934 strike by union loggers closed Wilark operations for two weeks until a compromise on wages was reached. Despite the hard times imposed by the Depression, Clark and Wilson was the highest property taxpayer in Columbia County in 1932.

Wilson Clark brought his children to Wilark/Camp 8 to learn respect for the timberlands and the people who worked there. The owners of Clark and Wilson went on to acquire other companies and holdings throughout western Oregon, eventually becoming Willamette Industries. With the death of Wilson Clark, his son, Maurie, took over the family's interests and devoted time and funds to community development and charity through the Clark Foundation, a major Oregon funder. His sister, Maybelle Clark Macdonald, founded Loaves & Fishes Meals on Wheels program, the Albertina Kerr Nursery Guild and the Maybelle Clark Macdonald Fund, one of Oregon's largest foundations.

In the 1970s, Maurie, who as a young man had worked as a whistle punk, choker setter and loader in family logging operations, befriended Gordon Smith, a logger and collector of old logging equipment. They collaborated to build Camp 18, the popular log-cabin restaurant and display of logging memorabilia at milepost 18 on the Sunset Highway. Several pieces of equipment there still bear the Clark and Wilson name.

From Virgil Powell's Diary

Virgil Powell (1887-1963) was a longtime resident whose family had a farm in the Upper Nehalem Valley between Natal and Pittsburg. Each year from 1906 until 1955, he kept a regular diary of his activities. July 1907 entries show that he worked with the county timber cruisers a few days in addition to his regular activities. The sections he cruised later became part of Clark and Wilson holdings.

Friday, July 19, 1907: Went black berrying till about noon. Did not do much of anything but go fishing in the afternoon. Terrible hot all day.

Saturday, July 20: Carried the mail to Mist. Got back at 12:30 P.M. Awful hot all day. Grange day at Natal. Sent a postal to Alice. Guess I will begin work with the cruisers tomorrow.

Sunday, July 21: Commenced working with the County Cruisers. Cruised on Section 11 5-4 (Note: Near Big Eddy Park). Got in about noon. Moved camp down to G. Peterson's. Went down to N.D. Peterson's in the evening. Pretty hot all day.

Monday, July 22: Cruised on Sec. 34-6X4 (Note: South of current Stoney Pt. Rd /Hwy 47 intersection) and done all of the Sec. Went down to Petersons after supper and had a dandy time. Got back to camp about 10 P.M.

Tuesday, July 23: Cruised on Sec. 35-6X4 (Note: Just east of Sec. 34) and got back about 1:30. Went down to Petersons after I got in and stayed all afternoon. Went back down after supper with one of the other boys and had a dandy time. Got back about 10 and stayed in a barn overnight.

Wednesday, July 24: Started from cruisers camp about 7:15 A. M. Alice came up about 2:30 and stayed till after supper and then I went down with her and had a dandy ride. Got back home about 10.

Friday, July 26: Went up around by Rock Creek and Mist road to Mist. Started at 9 and got to Mist at 1:15. Stayed till the mail came then came up. Saw Alice and had a dandy talk. Cool most all day. Received word that my buggy is in Clatskanie.

Saturday, July 27: Started for Clatskanie at 2:30 A.M. and got to Clatskanie at 7:40 A.M. Got my buggy set up about 10 and started for home at 1 P.M. Got over to Petersons at 5 and stopped for supper. After supper Alice went down with me to the singing in my new buggy. Got back home at 12:30. Awful hot all day.

Sunday, July 28: Started down the river at 12 to take Alice for a buggy ride. Started from the Petersons at 1:30 and went up as far as Vernonia and then came back. Saw the Vernonia team playing surveyors a game of ball. Alice says the buggy is O.K. so I guess it is. Got back to Petersons at 6:15. Had a dandy time all afternoon.

The Vernonia Pioneer Museum is located at 511 E. Bridge Street and is open from 1 to 4 pm on Saturdays and Sundays (excluding holidays) all year. From June through mid-September, the museum is also open on Fridays from 1 - 4 pm. There is no charge for admission but donations are always welcome. Become a member of the museum for an annual \$5 fee to receive the periodic newsletter. We now have a page on the Vernonia Hands on Art website, www.vernoniahansonart.org. If you are a Facebook user, check out the Vernonia Pioneer Museum page. The museum volunteers are always pleased to enlist additional volunteers to help hold the museum open and assist in other ways. Please stop by and let one of the volunteers know of your interest in helping out.



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