



Stanley Matthews left with older brother Martin.

Jenelle Wiggins

Nehalem Valley People *Those Who Where Here*

Stanley Matthews

by Jenelle Wiggins

"I was born in Portland Oregon in 1909," Stanley begins. "July 10, 1910 we moved to the Nehalem and settled in the Burn. At one time over 50 families had lived on the Burn but when we got there not many were left. Let's see, there was the Fishers, Hyatts, McMullens, Fred Phillip, Parkenens, Derocks and Lamonis," he rattles off as if the names and faces of 70 years ago were still his neighbors today. "The Kauppi family didn't move to the Burn until 1913 and the Ennebergs came in 1916." Older brother Martin stands by for consultation and carefully spells each name for me.

"In November of 1915 we left the Burn and headed for Clatsop County. We stopped over at the Neverstill for 2-3 weeks and then lived at Tom Johnston's old house for a couple of months. Come March we moved into Lousignont's old board house which Paw rented and farmed for the next 4 years. You know where the Lousignont's lived? No? Well I guess you don't know much about this country then. It snowed every month but August in 1916. And 1919 was the worst winter they've ever had. It was 16 below with 18 inches of sleet on the ground and it stayed cold like that for 10 days. We walked across the river the 2nd day."

"The fruit jars were stacked behind

the stove and they froze and burst, pop, pop, pop, just like that," Martin adds.

"Paw was a carpenter by trade," Stanley continues. "He built the church at Vesper and built lots of houses in the valley. Any house with wide cornices was most likely his. Paw thought nothing of walking from the Burn to Vernonia. It was only a 3 hour walk by road. He walked to Jewell alot too. But Paw had to follow the road on account he was no good in the woods. He'd be lost within 15 minutes. He was from Michigan. Me, I started working in the woods at 13 and had a steady job at 14."

"In 1918 we started to build a sawmill 1 1/4 miles S.E. of Mist and in 1920 we moved back to the Burn because that's where the timber was. We ran that sawmill from 1920 through 1948, 28 years. We called it the Mathew Brother's Lumber Company and all five of us brothers worked there. We'd go out and fall and yard timber for a week and then come back and run the mill for a week. Martin was a buckner and whistle punk in the woods and a ratchett setter in the mill; George was a sawyer and planer man; Robert ran the logging end when the rest of us couldn't get away from the mill; Walter ran the edger and cutoff and Paw worked the off bearer."

"The sawmill averaged 12-14 men and we put in a million feet a month when we were gypping for Clark and Wilson. We got paid \$5.00 a thousand for falling, bucking, yarding, loading, building our own plank road and hauling 11 miles. During the Depression years a man earned 35 cents an hour, 40 cents if he was a good man."

"A lot of our lumber went to rail road companies. We sold lumber ties at \$7.50 a thousand. Structural stringers sold for \$11.50 a thousand board ft. They measured 9X18, 32 feet long, no heart, no sap, straight grain with not less than 6 rings to the inch. The rail road companies sent out their own inspectors. We could saw up to 66 feet in our mill. We had 2 5/4 inch saws powered by a 200 horse steam engine."

"During World War II we sold wood to the government to make airplane parts for mosquito bombers. The planes were made of plywood and the props were fir. Have you ever noticed the timbers in the Sentry Grocery store? We sawed those in '29 or '30. They're 12X24 and 50 feet long. That building used to be Crawford's Ford Garage. We sold cedar to the Oregon Casket Company and sold lots of cedar flume stock to the Wapatu Indian reservation. Cedar went to Clatsop and Columbia counties for bridge pilings. We used to know everybody from here to Elsie. Elsie was the end of the line."

"You cold?" Stanley pauses to put some sticks in the stove and tops it off with some diesel. "You won't be cold for long," he chuckles.

"Me, I guess I went to every school there was. I started school at Burn when I was 5 and then went to Sunnyside school back of Boone

Johnston's. I went to both schools in Vesper, the Johnny Cahill school and the Berg school and then back to the Burn school and I finished up at the Mist school. You know where the Burn school house stood. No? Well then you don't know this country very well," he scoffs.

After a brief tour of the shop and out buildings I head for Vernonia feeling about as dull as a butterknife. An hour and an half listening to Stanley and Martin Mathews and I've become a foreigner in a foreign land. My mind is fogged with ghost images of old growth, steam donkeys, plank roads and misery whips. I clutch the steering wheel and strain my eyes through the windshield for a familiar landmark. Maybe someday I'll learn to speak the language and cause some youngster to sit up straight in her chair at the tales I tell. Afterall, Stanley did promise to take me up through the Burn and show me where that old school house had stood back in 1914!



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