

~ Collier Warehouse ~

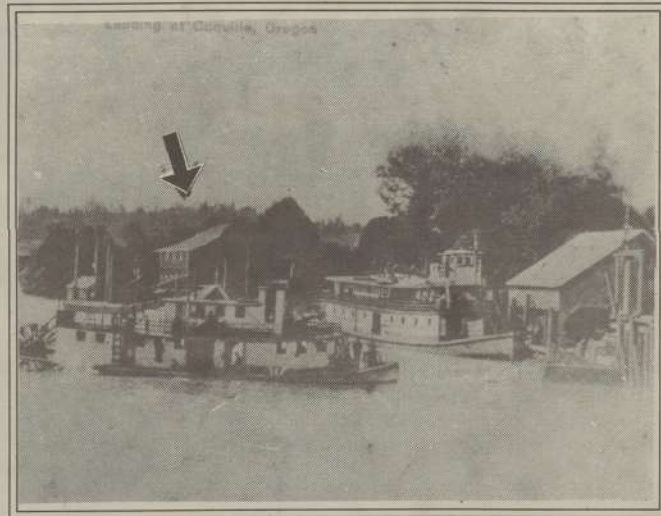
Why Lose Money Feeding Cockerels?

Separate Feeding on Kerr's Fattening Mash will make early broilers.
And Bingo goes the Ax.

PHONE 16

COLLIER WAREHOUSE

CHESTER C. FARR, Prop.



By Boyd Stone

The 69 foot steam sternwheeler "Little Annie," built by William Rackleff in 1876, was the first commercially successful riverboat to operate on the Coquille River. That same year Judah Parker built the "Katie Cook," the first tugboat on the river, which made it possible for small sailing ships to get upriver without waiting for favorable winds.

For the next 17 years the Coquille River was the only commercial highway in the Coquille Valley. Then in 1893 it got some competition when the railroad was completed from Coos Bay to Myrtle Point, but the river remained important because settlements and farms had sprung up along the river with no other access but by river. It opened up an opportunity for a new business in Coquille of transferring freight from the train to the riverboats to be delivered to addresses on the river and for products along the river to be picked up by the boats and put on the railroad-cars.

Allen Collier took advantage of the situation and built a warehouse on the river bank across the railroad tracks from the depot. A wheeled cart, running on a ramp, could be let down from the warehouse to the river and pulled back up by a hand-winch. Later, a small gas-engine replaced the hand-winch. This was the way freight was transferred from the boat to the warehouse, or from the warehouse to the boat.

It was a lucrative business, but not without competition. Charlie Mansell used a wagon and team to haul freight between the trains and the riverboats tied up at the Coquille Docks. When the automobile became popular around 1914, a Union Service-Station was opened in Coquille. Gas was shipped in by rail in 100 gallon barrels and stored in the Collier Warehouse. From there Charlie Mansell would haul the barrels to the station, one or two at a time as needed.

Charlie Mansell did all kinds of hauling. If anyone had something to haul, he was the one to call. He didn't have any established charge, so when asked, "How much do I owe you?", he might scratch his head and reply, "Oh, I guess that will be 50 cents for me and \$1 for the horses."

In 1914 Alton Kay and Harry Hunt bought the business of transferring freight and rented the warehouse from then owner Ben Curry who was the son-in-law of Allen Collier.

I interviewed Alton Kay who is a young 98 and lives in a retirement home south of Bandon. He told me Cecil Elwood went to work for them, but later rented a 20 foot square corner in the warehouse and put in a steam plant where he washed milk cans and took care of milk samples for a creamery.

When Alton and Harry took over the business there was a yellow cat that lived in the warehouse. He liked to go into railroad cars and look for mice. Sometimes the railroad crew, not knowing he was in there, would close the door, locking him in, and sometimes they wouldn't see him again for two or three weeks. But he would always show up again, happy to be home. At times when the cat had been missing for quite awhile, Alton would ask a train crew member, "Have you seen "Old Yellow" lately?" He might answer, "Yes, the other day I saw him in Eugene." Alton thought the old cat enjoyed traveling around the country. He was still at the warehouse in 1917 when Alton and Harry were both called on the first draft of World War I. Harry was inducted into the Service, but Alton wasn't taken because he had lost his trigger-finger in an accident. They sold the business back to Ben Curry and Alton went to work on the sternwheeler "Telegraph" as a purser, processing mail between stops where they picked up and delivered mail at Post Offices at Leneve, Riverton, Lampa Creek, Parkersburg, Randolph and Bullards.

Chester Farr went into partnership with Cecil Elwood and they bought the warehouse business. Ida Oerding graduated from high school in 1920 and went to work for them, typing Bills of Lading for goods being transferred from the boats to the railroad or from the railroad to the boats. She told me she didn't have much to do until a boat or train came in and then she had more work than she could handle. One item she remembers handling a lot of was Port Orford Cedar railroad-ties, brought to the warehouse by boat and stored until the railroad needed them. Sometimes the warehouse would be completely full of ties.

Don Farr recalled when he was about 10 years old Model T-Fords would come in by rail, packed standing on end in box-cars without bodies or wheels. It was their job to unload the cars, put on the wheels, then tow them to Walker's Ford Garage, located where Farr's Hardware now is. Sometimes they would let Don steer the towed Model T's.

By 1926 the main highways were paved, other roads were improved, and they put the Coquille River out of business for hauling freight and passengers, and the Collier Warehouse was used for other purposes. One time the Arrow Mill was located there where they made cedar arrow shafts. About 1940 Perrot and Son Construction installed an elaborate refrigeration system for Ocean Spray Cranberry Co-op who had their operations there. Another time it was a berry processing plant. For years Don Greene had a feed and cold-storage business there. More recently it was used for a truck-repair shop. No telling what else it was used for during its near 100 years of existence.

In 1992 it was decided by the owners that it was in too much disrepair to restore, so they had it torn down. The two men who tore it down said they could clearly see where it had been added on to or altered at least seven times during its lifetime.

If only the old Collier Warehouse could have talked —