

Story of Early Day Grist Mill Wins Historical Essay Contest

Editor's Note: This is the prize winning essay in the Sherman County Historical Contest, high school division.

By Earl Williams

H. M. Cooper first owned a saw-mill in Washington twelve miles from Goldendale. He sold his interest to Presby with an understanding that he would take part of the purchase price in lumber. Cooper immediately began looking around for a site on which to build a flour mill, and seemed to find what he wanted on the Sherman county side of the John Day river, four and one-half miles from its convergence with the Columbia.

Cooper, when returning to Goldendale, (before he had filed homestead rights on the piece of land which he wished for his mill location) stopped at the town of Grand, located on the Columbia river two miles west of Rufus. He stayed overnight at a lodging house which was owned by Mr. Morey. Here Cooper let the information drop of his intentions to homestead the mill site and described the location of the property. While he was gone Morey filed on this land with the expectation of making Cooper buy him out. When Cooper in no uncertain terms refused, Morey finally withdrew his claims leaving the way clear for Cooper who then filed homestead and water rights.

Soon the task of building the mill was under way. The lumber was hauled from Presby's mill in Washington and the route over which it was transported was long, slow, tortuous and rough. It necessitated the long grade to the Columbia which had to be crossed by a ferry driven by sails. The teamsters could not be certain of arriving at their destination on any kind of schedule for sometimes the wind would fail and the ferry would be becalmed and could not cross for days. Then came the hard pull out of Rufus, extra horses were added at this point. Sometimes four, six and eight horses were used on the large wagons, depending on the size of the load and the dimensions of the lumber hauled. At last the descent into the John Day valley had to be made. At this juncture the roads were so steep that the wheels of the wagons had to be roughlocked as brakes alone would not hold the heavy loads. It has been estimated that fifty thousand board feet of lumber used in the construction of the mill was hauled in this manner. H. E. Everett and the Pedicord boys hauled most of the lumber.

There was no concrete used in the foundation of the mill as the 12x14 girders were laid on bed rock. There was a graduate scale of flooring supports used, the first 4x12 and the last 2x6. Over one thousand bundles of shingles were used on the roof, as the pitch was rather steep. The dimensions were, thirty-eight feet wide by fifty-four feet long and four stories or sixty feet in height. J. H. Johnson and his son William assisted by the Coopers did most of the carpenter work.

While the mill was being erected, the race, spillway and dam was under construction. The race is over one-third of a mile in length, and much of this was blasted through solid rock. Because lumber was

used in the construction of the dam it had to be repaired each year as portions of it would wash out during the spring freshet. Many of the local workers would take lumber at Presby's mill in lieu of cash pay. The average cost of lumber was ten dollars per one thousand feet and wages for working men was one dollar and a half per ten hour day.

The project was started in 1887 and completed in 1889. The lumber was hauled, mill erected, dam and race built and the machinery installed, all in this two year period. Huge mill stones were the grinding device used by Cooper and a seventy-five h. p. turbine ran by water furnished the power to operate the machinery.

Although it was identified often as Cooper's mill, "The Middle of the Wheatfield Mill" was the name bestowed on it. The name, in great black letters, was painted across the front or south end.

A brisk and thriving business was carried on as soon as it was completed. It was located in a strategic position, draining the westlands of Sherman and the western portion of Gilliam County. Thousands upon thousands of bushels of wheat were turned into flour every year.

The Biglow canyon road was a help to the success of this venture as it furnished an easier entrance to the mill, and a more gradual grade for hauling out flour. The road was built by donation and tax assessment workers. Some of the local farmers would donate their teams and their services for a certain period of time. A law in effect at that time stated that a land owner must work two days or pay three dollars yearly for road maintenance.

It was in the year of 1895 that Cooper and Son sold the mill, machinery and land to Charles Bright and M. Merchev. Merchev soon became dissatisfied and sold his interests to Bright, Bright in turn sold to H. K. Porter, who had been operating a mill in Gennissee, Idaho.

Because of the increasing number of families with children a school was soon deemed to be necessary. To fill this pressing need, School district No. 44 was organized and the EARLY school established in 1897. Julia Woods was the first teacher and she had an enrollment of over thirty pupils. Many of these same pupils have now passed the fortieth and fiftieth milestones in life.

A Post office was established in 1898, while Mr. Porter was still in possession of the mill. H. E. Everett was the instigator of the petition that finally secured the postoffice. Mr. Porter was the postmaster, and his son Charles, the mail carrier, delivered the mail. He received it at Klondike and

headed it out to many on the route from Klondike to Early. Charles Harper, John Lynch, Wesley Fuller, J. H. Johnson, H. E. Everett and Adolph Harpold were some of the people receiving mail on this route. Several families from the 'nook' in Gilliam County also came to this office for their mail. This settlement was named EARLY, for it was said that the season seemed earlier there than it was in any other section of Sherman county.

It was in the year 1899 that H. K. Porter sold the mill and a small portion of the land to George Wall, who was a miller from Stacyville, Iowa. Mr. Wall shipped in two car loads of modern machinery bringing the mill up to a high standard of efficiency, he also replaced the two huge mill stones with rollers.

During the years 1916-1918 his son Homer engineered the building of a cement dam two hundred and ten feet long and five and one-half feet high, in order to do away with the expense of continually repairing the wooden one and to increase the flow of water.

In 1921 the mill was shut down, after having seen thirty two years of continuous service. Queer as it may seem, prosperous times was responsible for its closing, as people bought flour and bread instead of hauling wheat to the mill to be ground.

The mill still stands deserted, 'all and weather beaten against the cliffs. The empty windows stare like sightless eyes on the weed choked race, and the cement dam which still remains, is only a barrier to be leaped by the salmon on their way to the spawning grounds.

Mother—Jimmie, I wonder if you can find a boy of about your size who would like to mow the lawn and have it looking nice for Sunday?

Jimmie—I don't know, mother—but I'll go around to the other boys' houses and see if I can find one.

Toni—Does your father object to kissing?

Yaabel—I, don't know. Shall I tell him you'd like to kiss him?

CCC Foreman—What are you all doin' there, Big Boy?

Big Boy—I'm oillin' this here wheel barrow.

Foreman—Don't you know you can't do that without instructions from Washington? You're just a common laborer. What do you all know about machinery?

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Wasco Social Events Recorded

Mr. and Mrs. Fred Abascher of Sherwood came Thursday. Mr. Abascher returned the same day leaving his wife to visit for some time with her sister, Mrs. Earl Richelderfer.

Miss McCord of Maupin and Arthur Bogard, brother of Mrs. Richelderfer were callers Sunday. Little Billy Eaton fractured his leg when he accompanied his parents to the cemetery last Sunday.

Charles Sisco, Cliff Fridley and Henry Richelderfer attended the Odd Fellows lodge Wednesday evening.

Frank Knox and children, Donna Dorothy and Jessie accompanied by his mother Mrs. Mary Knox visited in The Dalles.

Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth McCafferty and daughter Darlene and Miss Betty drove to the McCafferty home near Battleground over the week end.

Mrs. Gene Joyal left for Portland Tuesday to go on to San Francisco and leave by boat from there on the 7th for Honolulu to join her husband.

Mr. and Mrs. William Clothier, Jimmy Maddox and Leona Clothier spent decoration day at Lost Lake, Eagle Creek and Bonneville.

Wayne Kerby and wife of Spokane were callers Tuesday afternoon at the home of Mrs. Helen Dingle and children.

Members of the contract club entertained their husbands with dessert dinner Wednesday night at the home of Mrs. A. S. Johnson. Mrs. W. H. Burres and F. L. Morrow won the high scores. Attending were Messrs and Mesdames J. T. Johnson, Chas. Everett, F. L. Lamborn, F. L. Morrow, W. H. Burres, Mrs. Anna Lee and Mrs. Augusta Huckin.

The Webfoot Club met with Mrs. S. J. Brock last Friday evening. Mrs. J. T. Johnson was assistant hostess. Four tables of cards were in play with high scores being won by Mrs. Dick Yocum and Mrs. Ernest Medler.

Miss Margaret Johnson entertained the junior high school class at a lawn party Thursday evening.

Mrs. Maud Akers was called to Bend this week on account of the serious illness of her son Carroll. Mr. and Mrs. J. O. Russel were week end visitors at the home of Mrs. Augusta Huelkin.

Miss Winifred Fortner returned home the first part of the week.

from Willamette University. Mrs. Grant Armsworthy and daughter Norma are guests at the home of relatives at Dayton.

Miss Elma Profit of Prosser, Washington, a former teacher, is a guest of Miss Mary Fortner.

Mr. and Mrs. Harry Proudfoot spent decoration day in Walla Walla returning home in the evening. Mrs. Ernest Weld returned home Sunday coming with Mr. and Mrs. Linden Lucas of Condon.

Louis Hastings and wife spent Decoration day at Vancouver, Wn., with Mr. Hasting's mother.

A rodeo was staged at the Hugh Herin ranch Sunday with quite a number out to see the buckaroos try their luck.

Wayne Akers of Eugene spent Sunday here with his mother, Mrs. Maud Akers and his sister Mrs. Lloyd Hennagin.

Mr. and Mrs. Herb Root were in Condon Sunday going over with Perry Johnston and wife to see the Johnston ranch.

Florence Armsworthy has returned from Ontario and will leave soon for California with friends to attend summer school at a teacher's college.

Members of the contract club held a no host luncheon at the hotel Tuesday afternoon, followed by cards at four tables. Mrs. Dick Yocum received guest prize and Mrs. A. B. Riddel the complimentary prize. There will be no more meetings until after harvest.

Orient Has Lighter Wheat Crop Coming

Oriental countries which formerly provided an important outlet for Pacific Coast wheats but which in recent years have turned more to Australian wheats may increase purchases during the coming season to supplement short domestic supplies, according to the Grain Market News Service of the United States Bureau of Agricultural Economics. The Chinese outturn will be definitely below the good harvest of 1934 despite a slightly larger acreage and will also be of lower quality, the United States Agricultural Commissioner at Shanghai reports following a personal investigation of the Oriental wheat situation. The crop of the

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Yangtze Valley is making favorable progress but prospects indicate that the outturn will be smaller than last season and of lower quality. Dry weather was unfavorable to crop development in North China and retarded field work and spring seeding operations in Manchuria. The Japanese crop may be near that of last season when 46,000,000 bushels were harvested. The carry-over is about the same as last year when a substantial quantity of wheat was carried forward from the good 1933 crop.

The increasing importance of the Orient as an outlet for surplus wheat is apparent this season with nearly 50,000,000 bushels of wheat shipped to China and Japan as compared with only 40,000,000 bushels during the corresponding period a year ago. The share of the North American countries in this trade, however, was considerably reduced. Shipments from the United States Pacific Coast to China and Japan during the period August, 1934, through April, 1935, totaled only 4,040,000 bushels compared with 17,736,000 bushels for the corresponding period a year earlier. Shipments from the Canadian Pacific Coast ports to the Orient decreased to 4,464,000 bushels compared with 6,872,000 bushels a year earlier. Shipments from other countries comprising mainly Australian wheat and flour although including some from other countries notably the Argentine totaled 41,200,000 bushels against 15,300,000 bushels the previous year.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR U. S. Land Office, The Dalles, Oregon, May 28, 1935.

NOTICE is hereby given that Irma Laffoon, formerly Irma Snyder, of Kent, Oregon, who on May

21, 1928, made Homestead Entry under the Act Dec. 29, 1916, No. 026661, for E1SW1, SW1SE1 Sec. 31, T. 3 S., R. 18 E., Lots 2, 7, SW1NE1, SE1NW1, E1SW1, W1SE1, SE1SE1, Sec. 6, W1NE1, E1NW1, Sec. 7, Township 4, South, Range 18, East, Willamette Meridian, has filed notice of intention to make final proof, to establish claim to the land above described, before Register, United States Land Office, at The Dalles, Oregon, on the 9th day of July, 1935.

Claimant names as witnesses: Lawrence Amick, Mrs. Lawrence Amick, H. A. Sommer, C. I. Laffoon All of Kent, Oregon.

W. F. Jackson, Register.

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