

Railroads Aided Basin Lumber Industry



MANY KLAMATH COUNTY SAWMILLS brought in their logs in rafts similar to this one photographed on Upper Klamath Lake. In this shot, two million board feet of timber were on their way to the Algoma Lumber Company mill at Algoma. According to lumber historian A. D. "Cap" Collier, the skipper of this particular tow was probably O. K. Puckett. —Photo from William Dyche collection, courtesy A. D. Collier.

The development of the lumber industry as one of the major industries of the Klamath Basin was closely tied to the building of railroads into this area in the early 1900s.

This, and many other related historical facts about the growth of Klamath's lumber industry are related in a pamphlet published by the late W. E. Lamm several years ago.

Around 1900 the Klamath Lake Railroad Co. started building a railroad from Thrall on the Southern Pacific Railroad up the Klamath River, primarily to haul out logs but also with the intention of eventually building to Klamath Falls.

This road was completed to Pokégama in 1903 marking it as the first railroad to enter Klamath County. It was a common carrier road, handling passengers as well as freight, although as stated, its chief function was the hauling of logs and lumber.

In 1905 the Weyerhaeuser Timber Co. acquired a large amount of timber in this general area and planned to extend the railroad from Pokégama to Klamath Falls. When it was learned in 1906 that the Southern Pacific was going to build into Klamath Falls, plans for further construction by the Klamath Lake Railroad were abandoned.

The Lamm pamphlet states that Ray Potter built a small sawmill at Pokégama in 1903 and shipped the first lumber out of the county.

The mill ceased operation in 1906. In 1910 the Algoma Lumber Co. built quite a large mill at Pokégama, which ran three seasons and closed down in 1912. Operation of the railroad was then discontinued.

The promise and subsequent completion of the SP line into Klamath Falls was a great stimulant to lumbering in the county.

One of the early steam-driven mills in Klamath Falls was the mill purchased by Harry and John Ackley from Al Pitch in 1904. This mill had been operating at Hildebrand and the Ackley brothers moved the mill to its present site on Lake Ewauna. It was a steam driven circular mill of about 20,000 feet daily capacity. In 1920 a band mill was installed and the entire mill improved to a capacity of 50,000 feet. This mill, which has been expanded considerably in the last few years, is now operated by the Modoc Lumber Co.

The first mill of any size to be built on Upper Klamath Lake was erected by William Huson and Roscoe Cantrell about 1906 at Shipington. The mill had previously operated at Long Lake, being built there about 1905. The plant was sold and dismantled in 1915.

In 1907, after closing down their old sawmill on Link River, the Moore brothers, Charles S. and Rufus S., built a fast steam driven circular mill on the west shore of Lake Ewauna a short distance south of the mouth of Link River.

The mill had a capacity of 50,000 feet daily and had a planing mill in conjunction.

The Moore mill first obtained its logs from a Forest Service unit of timber lying west of Wampler Creek, the first unit of government timber sold in the county. Horses and stinger-tongue wheels were used in logging to Wampler Creek where the logs were rafted and then towed down Upper Klamath Lake with a steam boat and finally driven down Link River to the mill. Driving logs down Link River proved unsatisfactory and

the mill turned to the Keno district for its logs, towing them up Klamath River.

This mill was sold in 1910 to Walter Innes and W. I. Clarke who operated as the Innes-Clark Lumber Co. for two years and then sold in 1912 to the Big Basin Lumber Co., at that time a subsidiary company of the Klamath Development Co. The plant was operated for an additional two seasons and closed in 1914.

The first box factory in the county was built by the California Fruit Canner's Association in 1907 adjacent to the mill of the Long Lake Lumber Company at Shipington. The company shipped the first box shooks from the county by hauling it in wagons to Pokégama where it was shipped over the Klamath Lake Railroad to California markets. The factory was sold in 1912.

With the completion of the railroad into Klamath Falls in 1909

the late H. D. Mortenson came to Klamath Falls in 1910 and organized the Pelican Bay Lumber Company. This firm contracted for a large unit of government timber lying west of Pelican Bay in the Crater National Forest.

The organization of this company in 1911 was the beginning of lumbering in the county in a truly modern sense. This mill was a strictly modern one for those days with a band head saw, the first shotgun carriage feed and the first complete planing mill in the county all entirely planned for supplying the U.S. markets. The plant had a capacity of about 60,000 feet per shift and was the first plant in the county to run two shifts. Dry kilns were added in 1912. The sawmill burned in 1914 and was rebuilt with a larger mill consisting of two hand bear-rigs and a band resaw. In 1918 a fire destroyed this second mill and it in turn was replaced with one of similar size. This third mill was the first completely electrified mill in the county and until 1926 was the largest mill. In 1921 a large box factory was added.

Pelican Bay logged various units of timber around Upper Klamath Lake and on the Klamath Indian Reservation. The firm was one of the largest purchasers of timber under government contracts, both Forest Service and Indian Service, in the West. The plant was sold after World War II to the Car-Ad-Co Company which still operates parts of the plant.

Cover Picture

The cover picture on this week's Herald and News tabloid section was taken by staff photographer Don Kettler from the West Side Highway looking east across Upper Klamath Lake. Kettler used a 4x5 Speed Graphic press camera with a setting of F16 at 100th of a second using a yellow filter.

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