

Sam Compton

<u>TOWN</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>SAWMILL CALLED</u>	<u>DATES</u>
Prineville	Mill Creek	Compton & Marshall	1876-1886
Grizzly	Willow Creek	Compton & Maling	1910-1918
Grizzly	Coon Creek	Compton & Frohnhoffer	1917-1918
Ashwood	Trout Creek	Compton & Nichol	1925-1935

Samuel William Compton was born in Nashville, Tennessee, March 20, 1855. Sam was the second oldest son of nine children born to George William and Mary (Snodgrass) Compton. Sam's generation was the fifth to reside in America. The first Compton crossing the pond to America being John. The exact date of John's arrival in the new country is not known, but he probably came from England sometime between 1700 and 1720. John and his wife lived out their lives in Virginia. John's son, Archibald, served in the 2nd Virginia Regiment during the Revolutionary War. Several of Archibald's children left Virginia for Tennessee following the War of 1812.

Following in the footsteps of those earlier generations, when Sam was two years old, his parents continued the family's westward trek, first moving from Tennessee to Osage County, Missouri, (where Sam's grandfather, Patrick Compton, died), and later to Taney Co., Missouri, after the Civil war. It was here that Sam grew up. Many know the area of Sam's youth as modern-day Branson, Missouri, the "Nashville of the Ozarks."

Sam was but six years old when his father left to serve in the Union Army but took delight in retelling the story to his grandchildren even 70 years later as if it were yesterday.¹

[Sam was] six years old when Abraham Lincoln was elected President and ten at the close of the Civil War. When the Civil War broke out, the Compton family was living 40 miles from Jefferson City, Missouri. [Sam's] birth occurred at a time when excitement and resentment was keen over repeal of the Missouri Compromise. The political effect of repeal led to the formation of the [n]ew Republican Party. Sam's father, born in Tennessee in 1831, became a lifetime Republican and Sam followed in his footsteps. When Lincoln carried the election in 1860, it was with full support of this growing party that had met in convention in Pittsburgh in 1852 and had organized a national Republican Party. Missouri at that time was a dangerous place for the Compton family, dominated in thought by a strict abolitionist father. Sam was brought up in an atmosphere of suspense and deep discussions of slavery in Missouri, freedom in Kansas, the Dred Scott decision and even 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.'

A peculiar situation prevailed in the Compton household. Although the anti-slavery feeling was paramount, the children were cared for by a Negro 'mammy,' a slave belonging to Sam's mother [Mary Snodgrass, born December 25, 1833, at Sparta, White County, Tennessee; Decem-

1. The following long quote is from an article written by Evada Power (not Powers) for the *Madras Pioneer*, published on May 7, 1942. The original material has been edited so it reads correctly for today's times. Portions of the above newspaper quotation were extracted from a longer profile of Sam Compton which appeared in the *Redmond Spokesman* of June 16, 1938. Some of Mrs. Power's information conflicts with other sources of information. Those differences will be noted in footnotes. As Mrs. Power had access to Sam Compton (one can only assume that she interviewed him) I place more weight on her information than on what I have been able to find elsewhere. My good friend, Don Houk, the Compton family genealogist, who lives and works in Tokyo, Japan, has made valuable contributions to the information presented here. Some of Don's details have been inserted into Mrs. Power's article.

ber 25th would become a “birthing date” in the Compton family]. Her Virginia-raised father (David Snodgrass) had been the owner of over 100 slaves. When she married, he gave her this slave as a present. The faithful woman had been taken to Missouri where she remained in their home until long after the war ended. Sam’s memories of this woman who raised him were very tender. In fact she nursed his youngest brother, John, as was often done in those days. It became a childhood joke, a weapon in the hands of thoughtless children, for they would tell the brother who had been nursed at her breast that he was part Negro because of this.

Sam’s childhood was a succession of exciting days, particularly the day his father left home to serve 4 years in the Union Army. Days of hardship followed when their food consisted mostly of cornbread and cornmeal mush. Their bottom lands produced tobacco, their high land corn and if possible a little sugar cane was raised for sorghum molasses, their only sweet. As their guns were confiscated, no wild meat, which was plentiful, was obtained. Flour jumped to \$14 a sack and everything else went up in proportion. Hardly a day passed that Sam didn’t see from 50 to 300 soldiers passing. When General Price moved 80,000 soldiers it took five days for them and their equipment, including cannons, to pass the Compton house. Present always was the fear that they would be burned out, as many of their neighbors were, for both sides plundered and destroyed.

Sam remembered the re-election of Lincoln and his assassination, but the happiest day for the family was the day in 1865 when his father came home. His hat and coat were full of bullet holes, yet he escaped injury. For years, evenings were spent listening to experiences of his father and [Sam] regretted that he kept no record of these true stories of the Civil War. As his



The only known photograph of Sam Compton. Date of photograph unknown.

forefathers had done many times in previous generations, shortly after Sam turned 17 in 1872 he headed west driving 4-yoke of cattle² in a wagon train of 60 wagons and more than 300 people all westward bound. He changed cattle often as there were 100 head of loose cattle in the outfit. He left on the 30th of May, driving for a man named May. This man had been in California mining in 1849 and had returned to move his family out in 1871. Sam’s job was driving the grub wagon. T.C. Baker, who was in the wagon train, became great friends with Sam. He had served as a 1st Lieutenant in the Union Army. Later the two became brothers-in-law when they married two sisters.³

The longest stop on the way west, or at least one Sam recalled best, was at Fort Scott, Kansas. The memory of the darky town celebrating the 4th of July in the midst of the most abject poverty was one he often remembered.

2. This probably means “oxen.”

3. Sam married on Christmas Day in 1877 in Prineville to Jane White, daughter of Ed and Anna (Woodside) White of Linn County.

That first winter in Central Oregon was spent in Prineville which was then in Wasco County. [The wagon train] came in by the way of Summit Prairie where snow was eight feet deep. Wood was hauled to pay for his board at Dr. Vanderpool's. In the spring he went to Mill Creek where he piled lumber at the first sawmill on Mill Creek [which was] run by water power. Only two or three families lived in Prineville, and Bend did not come into existence until 30 years later....

In 1874 [Sam] worked for Dan Powell who owned that first sawmill on Mill Creek.⁴ He saved his money and bought this mill from Dan who was a son of Joab Powell, one of the best-known, early-day, circuit-riding preachers in the Willamette Valley. When Sam bought the sawmill, he paid \$1,000 down and the balance was paid in a year. The second year he sold an interest for \$1,000 and rented the place for 7 years. After the seven years were up he sold the mill to John Demaris.⁵ When he moved to Willow Creek [in 1895] and took up a homestead, almost 25 years had passed since he began his residence in Central Oregon. At that, his sawmill was the second to be set up on Willow Creek, the Maling mill being the first. The homestead was in the heart of good timber and Compton's mill cut several million feet in thirty-five years of activity. The original mill was finally moved to Coon Creek where it still stands [in 1942]. The Dee and Compton mills were combined and ran for several years. Trout Creek Mill,⁶ which Compton still own[ed in 1942], is running strong after more than three decades of service. Thus began a lumber sawing career that lasted for 65 years.

In 1899 Mrs. Nellie (Kinder) Crain became Sam's second wife. Their five children were raised at Grizzly and attended the Grizzly school when it was one of the largest in the county.

For reasons that are understandable, Mrs. Power did not reveal the real reason for Sam's departure from the family home, but I will. Sam's mother, Mary, died in March of 1872 following the birth of her ninth child, son John Thomas. Sam's father knew he could not raise his family without a woman's help. The exact course of events that ended with Sam's departure for Oregon are not known. What is known is that Sam's girlfriend, a distant cousin of Sam's mother, was to become his father's second wife. That was more than Sam could handle so he headed west. This betrayal drove a wedge between father and son that was never resolved. Sam returned to Missouri but once, in 1912, arriving just a few days after the death of his only surviving brother, Henry (1857-1912). Their father George Compton died nearly 20 years earlier. When Sam returned to his family in Oregon he remarked that he should not have made the visit to Missouri.

Sam's first trip west was with one of those lucky wagon trains that escaped problems with Indians. Before the wagon train left Missouri the wagon master told the assembled members that if they met up with Indians they were not to shoot unless given permission. Among the members of the wagon train was a young man whose name is not recorded. The young man had remarked that he was going to shoot the first Indian he saw. Sam often told this story, as it explained the only encounter the train had with the Indians on their trip west.

4. This is not correct. The first sawmill on Mill Creek was owned by W.B. Marshall. Compton and Marshall became partners. It is not disputed, however, that Sam worked for Dan Powell. This further confuses the "first sawmill" ownership issue.

5. This conflicts with information obtained from property abstract records. Blanche Hereford has written a summary of early sawmill activities on Mill Creek based on the abstract of records for her property. From those records it appears that Sam took W.B. Marshall as a partner. Either Marshall, on his own or in partnership with Sam, took out a loan which he could not repay. The sawmill was lost because of Marshall's inability to repay the loan. John Demaris bought the property at a sheriff's sale.

6. This was the mill that was located about 15 miles southeast of Ashwood. The mill wasn't right on Trout Creek but at the confluence of Big Log Creek and Dutchman Creek. Throughout Sam's story this will be referred to as the Trout Creek Mill.

The wagon train always tried to camp along rivers to have water for the cattle and to replenish the water barrels. At one such spot the young man took his gun and went looking for camp food. He was walking along the river and saw an Indian woman doing her wash. He did just what he said he would; he shot her. It wasn't long until the chief of the tribe arrived in camp. The chief told the wagon master that some braves had found the Indian woman. The ultimatum was most reasonable: turn over the person that did the shooting and that is the end of the matter. Otherwise, the chief promised, the Indians would burn the entire wagon train and everyone with it.

There was nothing to do but turn the young man over to the Indians. That was the last they heard of the sixteen year old and that was the only "Indian problem."

The wagon train in which Sam came to Oregon was one of the few that came through what is now Crook County. The train probably left Fort Boise and came across Summit Prairie to the spot where Ochoco and Crooked rivers joined (in pioneer times, Ochoco was known as a river rich with salmon). Unfortunately, there are no official records of the train's arrival, but it must have arrived in the fall of 1872. There were only two or three families living at the spot that was to become Prineville. The area's main settlement was at the mouth of Mill Creek and the wagon train must have passed that encampment.⁷

Sam was given a team of oxen and a plow as his pay for driving the grub wagon and that is all that he had to start his new life.

When Sam lost the Mill Creek sawmill because of Marshall's loan, he tried his hand at raising sheep. (This fact about Sam, to my knowledge, is not recorded elsewhere.) He acquired property just east of the Lookout Mountain

Grange hall—the old Hi-Tor Place. But sheep would not long interest Sam; sawdust was in his blood.

On Christmas Day 1877, Sam married Jane "Jennie" White in Prineville. Eleven months later, their first child, son Carrol, was born. Sam and Jennie would have two more children, a daughter, Edith Pearl, in late 1880, and a son, Leo in 1883. Leo died shortly after birth and within a few years Sam's marriage ended in divorce. Jennie would later marry James McCulloch in 1896, and Sam taking Mrs. Nellie (Kinder) Crain as his second wife in 1899 who bore him five children.

Sam took a homestead at Grizzly in 1895. The Compton family oral history says that Sam's first mill at Grizzly was on his homestead. The mill was serviced by a private road. William McMeekin had a mill across the road from Sam and a bit further up into the timber. Another lumberman, Jack Dee, influenced Sam to relocate his mill down to the main Grizzly road. It appears that Sam and Jack became partners in what was called the Dee & Compton Mill.

Details are sparse but Sam and Jack Dee, son of C.C. Maling's nephew John Dee, seemingly continued their joint or individual involvements in a number of sawmill operations in the area. Compton family descendants remember many family stories relating to both personal and business relationships between the Compton and Dee families well into the early quarter of the twentieth century. But, as indicated elsewhere in these pages, Sam's business activities were seldom formal or recorded, and tracking them has proven challenging. There is no question, however, that Sam's and Jack's interests and activities in the timber business illustrate the fever which filled the hearts of many new arrivals in the last quarter of the 19th century. These pioneers saw the opportunities the future held; even those with little in

7. A detailed account of the early settlements on Mill Creek and Crooked River-Ochoco River can be found in *History of Central Oregon: Embracing Wasco, Sherman, Gilliam, Wheeler, Crook, Lake and Klamath Counties*. This is a very rare, hard to find, book was given to me by Yvonne Smith. This book is sometimes quoted to include the word "illustrated." This is not correct. The only illustrations are a few photographs of individuals. If you want to know how Old Crook County's settlers viewed the place in which they lived—and how they came to be here—this book is a must read. Spokane, Washington: Western Historical Publishing Company, 1905.

the way of financing or other assets, but who were willing to cast their lot in promoting Central Oregon's fledgling timber industry.

Sometime during 1925, Sam and Martin Nichol⁸ passed through Madras on their way to Ashwood where they negotiated with George Martin Telfer for the purchase of the Telfer sawmill located about 15 miles southeast of Ashwood.⁹ This sawmill became the Big Log Lumber Company and was a substantial operation. You can read more about Martin Nichol in a separate chapter of this book. Sam and Martin must have bought the mill from Telfer. It was known as the Trout Creek mill by Sam's family because of its geography. At some point Martin must have bought Sam's share but there is no record of this. It was under Martin's supervision that the operation became known as the Big Log Lumber Company.

Sam's second marriage was to Nellie B. (Kinder) Crain. They were married in Prineville on March 5, 1899. This marriage may appear a little strange—but only if I tell you the details. Following Sam's divorce, he lived with Mrs. Crain (I have no idea where her husband was but he didn't appear to be living in the household). It was somewhat common at the time for "single" men to board with families, especially in rural areas like Grizzly.

Sam's first marriage may have fallen apart because Sam and Jane White were vastly different personalities. Sam was carefree to the point of neglecting his business affairs but Jane ran a tight ship—in every respect. Either Sam couldn't follow the rules or Jane threw him out. Did Sam struggle under the burden of child support? Who

provided for Sam's two living children? Perhaps their new step-father? No one recalls these details.

Both Sam and Nellie had children from previous marriages. Sam had a son, Carrol (1878-1965), and a daughter, Edith Pearl Compton-Smith (1880-1979). Nellie had a son, Earl Levi Crain (1892-1979), and a daughter, Blanche V. Crain (1894-1904).

Together, Sam and Nellie parented five children of their own:

Bessie Elnora Houk	(1900-1985);
Mary Elizabeth	(1902-1915);
Minnie Ray Gray	(1904-1996);
William Alfred "Bill"	(1908-1945),
	(the only son of this union);
Maude Cordelia Monical	(1910-).

Sam's first mill at Grizzly was on Willow Creek and was known as Compton & Maling (Charles C. Maling) Sawmill. Maling was an emigrant from England and brought the first steam-operated sawmill into the area in 1877. Charles was able to arrange for the emigration of his sister and brother-in-law, John and Hannah Dee, and their three children, George, who married Ina Mae Wheeler; Elizabeth who married into the Kibbee family of Hollywood fame; and young Jack Dee who married Nellie Crooks.¹⁰ The Dee family came directly from England to Oregon in the late 1870's. More about Maling and Dee elsewhere in this book.

Young Jack Dee and Sam Compton formed a partnership and acquired C.C. Maling's sawmill on Willow Creek in 1906. Later, Sam had his own sawmill on his homestead on Coon Creek near a

8. How these two became acquainted is not known.

9. George Martin Telfer was the author's maternal great grandfather for whom he was named. The author's father was also George Martin. In 1968 George Martin Morisette, Jr., had his name legally changed to Martin Gabrio Morisette.

10. "The cherubic, pop-eyed [Guy] Kibbee first performed on Mississippi riverboats as a teenager, then matriculated to the legitimate stage. The 1930 Broadway play 'Torch Song' was the production that brought Kibbee the Hollywood offers. From 1931 onward, Kibbee was one of the mainstays of the Warner Bros. stock companies, specializing in dumb politicians (The Dark Horse [1932]), sugar daddies (42nd Street [1933]) and the occasional straight, near-heroic role (Captain Blood [1935]). In 1934, Kibbee enjoyed one of his rare leading roles, essaying the title character in 'Babbitt' (1934), a role he seemed born to play. During the 1940s, Kibbee headlined the 'Scattergood Baines' B-picture series at RKO. He retired in 1949, after completing his scenes in John Ford's 'Three Godfathers'. Kibbee was the brother of small-part play[er] Milton Kibbee, and the father of Charles Kibbee, City University of New York chancellor." Quoted from a piece by Hal Erickson, All Movie Guide found at: <http://movies.yahoo.com/shop?d=hc&id=1800011244&cf=biog&intl=us>, March 23, 2005.

spring which created a small creek which ran into Willow Creek. Sam built a home on the homestead where he and his second wife Nellie and their family lived although Sam kept the original home on Willow Creek too. The family moved back to the Willow Creek house in about 1910. At this time Sam started a sawmill on Willow Creek. After a time he took in a partner, William McMeekin. McMeekin (sometimes spelled McMeeken) was very active in the early timber industry of Old Crook County but little is known about him or his sawmills.

In about 1917, Sam moved his mill to Coon Creek where he took on a partner, Hank (Henry) Frohnhoffer. German-born Hank and his wife, Anne, and Hank's brother Fritz, lived at the mill site.

Before continuing with Sam's story, a short story about Hank Frohnhoffer will illuminate things, although there isn't much known about the Frohnhoffer family.

The Compton-Frohnhoffer mill was of some significance and employed enough men to merit a bunkhouse and cookhouse. Like most of the mills of the time, it didn't operate continuously—timber was not always available—for reasons other than environmentalist obstructionism. This was in the days before government timber was sold but individuals were able to obtain up to 10,000 board feet from the government without cost. Hank's background is not known—it has been said that he came from Germany—but when he arrived on Coon Creek he was unmarried. It is also not remembered if Fritz came to Coon Creek with Hank or later.

Grizzly was a lonesome place for bachelors so Hank occasionally traveled to far-off Seattle for female companionship. Why he chose Seattle over closer sources of feminine charm is not known. On one of his returns, Hank had a wife in tow. Anne had been a woman of the night for whom Hank developed a deep love. Anne's appearance on Coon Creek must have made Hank's life more pleasurable—and her own too.

Whether Anne or the large house on Coon Creek came first is not known but Hank and Anne did live in a large house right on Coon Creek. That house has a story of its own.

Originally it was the main house at the Hamilton homestead "just over the hill" (west of the Coon Creek mill site). The house was moved by man and animal power over the hill from the homestead to the flat land of Coon Creek. The author has visited the house which still stands—although one entire wall is missing and the latest residents (cattle) have sadly damaged what remains. This was a substantial two-story house with a commanding view of the beautiful Coon Creek valley.

Some distance north of the house were the bunkhouse, cookhouse and other outbuildings (in 1998, there was nothing more than piles of rubble). The mill was located some yards down the creek from the house. The only evidence of the mill is part of the original power plant smoke stack and a few pilings. It appears as though the creek passed under the main mill building, a practice that was not uncommon at the time.¹¹

Like many timbermen of the day, Hank also had a "cash crop" to supplement his sawmill income: moonshine. Built into the side of the hill just south of the house was a cellar and there Hank kept his supply of spirits. Somehow the authorities learned of Hank's illegal enterprise and hauled him off to jail. Hank was gone for a considerable time. In his absence, brother Fritz moved from the bunkhouse into the main house where he remained until Hank returned. Draw any conclusions you wish.

Frohnhoffer's neighbors, still living today, tell these stories. It was Anne herself that told the story of her trip from the streets of Seattle to the house on Coon Creek. Anne told her story to Edna Sawyer-Ellsworth who told it to this writer.

Edna Sawyer-Ellsworth was just a young girl when Anne told her story but Edna's experience had well prepared her for such stories. Edna was part of a timber family living on Cook Creek, just over the hill from the Frohnhoffer place. Edna's

11. It was a common practice to allow the waste created by the mill's saws to drop into the creek to be carried downstream.

father, Joseph Arthur Sawyer, worked in the sawmills of Grizzly but his employment came to a sudden halt.

Joe had a habit of coming home for lunch so he probably worked at the Gardiner mill—which must have been located not far from the Compton-Frohnoffer mill. On this particular day, a day in 1916, when Joseph came home for lunch he found his wife, Minerva Jane (Hamilton), in bed with another man (identity unknown). Exactly what happened with this discovery is not remembered but the following day Joe took his gun and left to hunt deer—or so he said. He was never seen again and no body was ever found although a search was conducted. Over the years Edna has heard things that cause her to believe that her father simply deserted his family and took up a new life elsewhere.

With the departure of Joseph Sawyer, the family fell apart—torn apart is more accurate. Minerva decided that she was tired of being a mother and dumped her three children on her family, the Hamiltons. She would never return to Grizzly or her children. She became a woman of the night, working in Madras and Bend. So Edna had empathy for Anne's story. But back to Sam.

Sam and his family still lived at the Willow Creek place although Sam would bunk in the Coon Creek mill's bunk house during the week and then walk home on the weekend. This mill burned in 1918. The fire was thought to have been set by a disgruntled young man who had approached Sam for a job. The young man's request for employment presented Sam with a problem.

The young man's family also owned and operated a sawmill at Grizzly. Sam knew from neighborhood gossip that the boy's father would not hire him to work in the family mill—the exact reasons for this are lost to us. But Sam thought it unwise to hire someone that couldn't work for his own family.

The fire destroyed the Willow Creek mill. The equipment that was salvageable was moved to the Trout Creek sawmill. This was only the first fire to devastate Sam and his family.

In 1925 the Compton house at Grizzly burned to the ground. This fire started in the upstairs flu when sparks fell from a small hole onto the very dry wood of the walls and floor. The fire destroyed everything, including the family's photographs, of which there were only a few. The family would not live at Grizzly again; Sam moved his family into Redmond. Sam and Nellie wanted their younger children to attend school in a more formal setting than that provided by the rural school at Grizzly.

Sam continued to run the Trout Creek operation (perhaps in partnership with Martin Nichol). Sam, and this may be hard to believe—but it is true—would walk from Redmond, to the Trout Creek mill almost every week. As the crow flies, it is fifteen or so miles from Grizzly to Ashwood. From Grizzly to Redmond is another 15-20 miles. That is a lot of miles. When this story first came to the surface it was hard to believe but a number of people remembered Sam's hiking ability and say the story is true. Sam was a remarkable man in many respects.

Sam would stay at the mill during the week and then walk the back to Redmond. Sam's route was not by road (primitive as they were) but "over hill and dale". This routine continued until Sam could no longer walk the distance from Redmond to Ashwood when he was in his seventies.

It is assumed that Hank continued to run the sawmill on Cook Creek without Sam. If, at some time, Hank bought Sam's interest in the mill that fact has not been recorded. Because Sam was such a generous man, almost everyone benefitted from his work but Sam. There is no evidence, for example, that Sam received any buyout money when he stopped making the Redmond-Ashwood trip.

This information has been provided by Sam's daughter, Maude Monicle (who was living in Bend when I visited with her), and grandson Donald Houk (who lives in Tokyo, Japan), a descendant of Sam and his second wife through the Compton-Kinder lines.



The Compton homestead house on Willow Creek that burned in 1925, from the *Madras Pioneer*. Someone sent me the clipping of which this photograph was a part but the clipping did not show the date.



Wisconsin timbermen that started the Alexander-Yawkey Lumber Company in Prineville:

Walter Alexander on left, Cyrus Yawkey on right.

