

## W.B. Marshall and Other Early Lumbermen

Prineville: 1890-????

The distinction for having the first sawmill in Crook county seems to go to W.B. Marshall who established a mill on what became known as Mill creek in 1868. Yes, I know, that distinction supposedly belongs to Ike Swartz; read on. An old newspaper (not identified) article located in Scrapbook No. 40, page 20 at the A.R. Bowman Memorial Museum in Prineville says:

**...It was a sash mill which was quite common in that day, consisting of a saw, a sash to carry the saw and an eccentric on a flutter wheel to give it motion. It was a variation of the old whip saw mills," said Edward Harbon, who was one of the early sawmill men of this country.<sup>1</sup>**

Mr. Harbin's information is supported by the Abstract of Title for the Hereford property located on Mill Creek. Blanche McClun-Hereford has carefully reviewed this document and wrote a story of the development of sawmill and ranching activities that took place in the valley through which Mill Creek runs. Blanche's story is told elsewhere in this book.

This evidence provided by Harbin and Hereford is somewhat confusing. Locals of the Prineville area, when asked who started the first sawmill—if they know—usually say Ike Swartz, in 1867. I have found no evidence that supports this apparent myth. There is no doubt that Ike existed but I've found no firm confirmation that he even had a sawmill. Some talk of Ike's more famous brother, Al, who may have operated a sawmill too, but evidence of this is also lacking. Al Swartz is noted for the fact that he was shot in

the back inside the Burmeister saloon in Prineville on the night of December 24, 1882. This during the reign of terror of Crook County's infamous vigilantes.

So maybe Ike Swartz had a sawmill up Mill Creek; maybe he didn't. There is no doubt, however that W.B. Marshall (William) did have a sawmill on what became known as Mill Creek. There is also no doubt who built the second sawmill in the County.<sup>2</sup> The same unidentified article mentioned above goes on to identify the second and succeeding sawmill operations.

**The second mill in central Oregon was established on Willow Creek in 1873 by C.C. Maling. The next was put up by a man named Nelson, the father of Ed Nelson, on Combs flat. Nelson sold this mill to William McMeeken, my brother-in-law, who moved it to the headwaters of McKay creek and later to town where it was the first mill in Prineville. It was located where the Prineville machine shop now stands. It was later turned into a brewery.**

No evidence can be found that anyone named Nelson operated a sawmill around Prineville. It is quite possible that the person telling the story contained in the old newspaper article knew more about what he was talking about than history has recorded but no corroborating evidence exists. William McMeeken, however, is a different story. Mr. McMeeken, who will be called "Willie" hereafter, seems to have had sawmills located all over the place. It is known that he had sawmills on Maury Mountain, Pilot Butte (southeast of Prineville), and Grizzly as well as in Prineville.

1. Ed Harbin, "People and Places of pioneer Central Oregon," October 04, 1934; newspaper not identified. The correct spelling is HARBIN. Edward Harbin, born 1845 in Ohio, was father-in-law to William McMeekin who married his daughter Mary. More McMeekin genealogy later.

2. In these early days, Crook County is what is now known as "Old Crook County," which included all of the present real estate of Deschutes, Jefferson and Crook counties and a small part of western Wheeler County.

Yet no other information—save some genealogical information ferreted by the ever-digging Don Houk who has found a lot about this industrious man—seems to exist. William McMeeken (sometimes spelled McMeekin and once even Mac-Meeken) remains a mystery. Here is what little I've been able to learn.<sup>3</sup>

William McMeekin's father and grandfather were both named William. The eldest William, born in 1804, married Nancy Jane Hale on May 23, 1865—obviously not his first marriage. William the first's son, William II, born 1825, married Nancy Jane Baker on June 17, 1866, adding more confusion to the family tree.

At the time of the 1900 census Willie was living next door to Sam Compton in the McKay precinct. By 1910, Willie now age 65, was living in the Joseph Smith household in the Willow Creek

precinct. Willie's wife, Mary, had died in 1909 and left her entire estate to Al Cubitt who must have been a family friend. By the 1910 census, both Cubitt and McMeekin were living with Joseph Smith in the Willow Creek district.

Mary's motives in leaving her estate to Al may have been this: William, at age 64, wouldn't be around much longer and probably needed care. That care may have been provided by Mr. Cubitt.

The newspaper article continues:

**The first planing mill in Prineville was build in 1875 by John Hamilton on the corner which the Prineville creamery now occupies [southeast corner, North Beaver & West 4th streets]. Here was made the finishing lumber for the first courthouse and, the first schoolhouse as well as many other buildings. Hamilton sold this planing mill to Maling who later sold it to me. I took in John B. Shipp<sup>4</sup> as a partner and later sold my interest to him and started another. This second mill burned in 1878 and that closed my ventures in wood working shops. I had always worked in metal before coming here.**

The narrator of this story, now assumed to be Gardiner Perry, lived an interesting life and since these details are not preserved elsewhere and because the narrator was, although he didn't make such a claim, working in the timber industry they will be set forth here without further interruption.

**During the next few years I worked for others and for the county and built all the bridges put up in Crook county which included what is now Crook, Des-**



3. All of this is compliments of Don Houk and his extensive research into incomplete and inaccurate records. Don's persistence paid off and I can now write what follows about Wm. McMeekin.

4. This seems to suggest that the person telling the story is Gardiner Perry. Shipp & Perry were partners in business together as early as 1900. Known as Shipp & Perry, they were known to operate a saw mill and planing mill and were "manufacturers of lumber and shingles." Additional information about the Shipp & Perry business will be provided elsewhere in this book.

chutes, Jefferson and a part of Wheeler counties. Among these bridges were those at Trail crossing, the Crooked river bridge near Prineville and the Mayfield bridge.

Harold Baldwin and I took a contract to re-build the Tetherow bridge across the Deschutes and rode our bicycles back and forth to work. That was in 1896.

The year of the famous smallpox epidemic in Prineville was a year of high water. W.A. Booth was county judge. He sent me down to look at the Crooked river bridge at the foot of the grade. The water was high and the bank was washing badly. A man with a team from Silver Lake came along and I would not let him pass over the bridge. He was anxious to get on his way and came back to town to see Judge Booth. The judge came with him to the bridge. He talked to me and I told him that I would not let the man pass but that he could do so if he wished. The judge finally gave his consent and the man passed safely over. He had not gone a hundred yards from the bridge when it went into the flood.

Judge Booth gave me an order to replace the bridge as quickly as possible. I got a crew of men and went to Mill creek and hewed out two timbers for stringers. We loaded them on wagons and brought them to town. In just a week we had the bridge so people could cross. Then the smallpox epidemic broke out and I was practically the only man in town who was immune. I had a slight variloid [it is not known what this word should be]. Judge Booth put me [...words unreadable on microfilm...] the washout had taken the bridge and 100 yards of the road. I could see no way to make the bridge connect the two ends of the road. Hirman Gobson owned the land at the bridge. He was mad at the court and refused to sell to them. But he sold me a right-of-way 45 feet wide for \$25 and by giving him my personal check for the land I got the two ends of the road joined with a 30-foot bridge.

There was a washout on the big flat between Cold Springs and Camp creek 35 feet wide and ten feet deep. I drove piling in this place and made a bridge. Then I went

on to the Hackleman place and put a bridge over Camp creek. For all these bridges I got my timber from the woods. The piling, capping and stringers were of tamarack. The county furnished the decking but all other timbers had to be sawed or hewed. The capping was sawed with a whipsaw.

In addition to these bridges I repaired the bridge at the Percy Davis place at the forks of Crooked river. All this was done in one summer and the cost to the county was about \$1500. I got out my own timbers, paid the wages of the men whom I hired nearest the job, and boarded the men. The best wages paid was \$1.50 per day. I got all supplies from the ranchers. Eggs were 10 cents a dozen. Beef and flour were cheap.

It was the first time that bridge work had been handled in this way and the men who worked for me were pleased to get my checks. I had arranged with Tom Baldwin [president of the bank] to take them up. They did not like to be paid in county warrants.

When court met and I told Judge Bell of the action I had taken in buying the right-of-way at Cold Springs, he laughed and said it was an unusual way of doing things, but that it was good enough. The court approved my action.

During the entire summer I had not come to town and had not seen a member of the court. There were no telephones.

I first came to Prineville in 1873. I made several trips here. In 1878 I brought my mother here. Dr. Belknap had just returned from medical school. We are the pioneers of Prineville business. No one else who was in business here then is now in business.

I started a machine shop in 1904<sup>5</sup> and have been at this same location ever since. During all the years that I have lived in Prineville I have had some sort of a shop. I began with a cabinet shop.

Other early sawmills include Prineville Lumber Company (1890), Providence Sawmill (1892), C.D. Calbreath Woodsawing Plant (1908) and others. These operation are not described

because I have found no information about them. They appear only in the list of sawmills. But this chapter is supposed to be about W. B. Marshall, so back to him.

Very little is known about the man. He appears to have been unmarried, at least when he mortgaged his land in 1889 and again in 1891 when he received a plot of public land from President Benjamin Harrison.<sup>6</sup> The best information on Marshall comes from Blanche McClun-Hereford's account of timber and ranching activities in the Mill Creek Valley. Although Blanche's article appears elsewhere in this book, the portion about Marshall is presented again here:

**William B. Marshall, a single man, was the first one to live on this place at the foot of Steen Pillar. He filed on a 160 acre homestead in 1888. He planted a large orchard and some of the trees are still bearing fruit. The orchard is a lot smaller now as a lot of the trees have died and have been removed. The old Mill Creek road used to go right in front of our house and the orchard was just above the road. The new Mill Creek road, which was built in 1950, goes above the orchard. Mr. Marshall had a lot of goats and they were often seen around and on top of the middle rock. The old timers named the middle rock Goat Rock. Goat Springs, I think, was also named for Mr. Marshall's goats.**

**Marshall borrowed money to build a sawmill which stood just below my house. This was a pen stock water-powered mill and could only run when there was ample water in the creek. The saw had only eight teeth. Mr. Compton soon bought in with Marshall, but they lost both land and mill. It was sold at public auction to satisfy Marshall's note. John Combs bought it and sold land and mill<sup>7</sup> to John Demaris in 1895. John Demaris, who was my husband's**

**LUMBER! LUMBER!**

At W.B. MARSHALL'S Mill,  
ON MILL CREEK.

Only 18 miles from Prineville.  
Good road to and from the mill.

**Rough lumber \$10 per M.**  
**Clear       "       15   "   "**

*Persons wanting lumber will find  
me on hand at the lumber yard at  
all times.*

**W.B. MARSHALL.**

Lumber yard at C. Rogers  
North side of Ochoco, Prineville, Or.

**great uncle, took a 160-acre homestead of 1895. Soon Henry Birdsong bought in and they became partners in the mill....**

This financial difficulty was a problem not only for Marshall but also for his young partner, Sam Compton (Sam's story is told elsewhere in this book). This may have been the end of Marshall as a sawmill operator but not so Compton. Nothing beyond the 1887 advertisement included here has been found about Mr. Marshall.

Marshall called his operation "Mill Creek Sawmill." That name was used by others which makes tracking the ownership of Marshall's operation difficult.

5. This is probably the same location that was eventually owned by the Hudspeth family. The business was then called Prineville Machine Shop.

6. Patent dated October 2, 1891, filed June 2, 1908, recorded in Vol. 3, Patents at page 514, Crook County Clerk's Office.

7. Mortgage, dated and filed December 19, 1889; recorded Vol. 1 Mortgages at page 737. The amount of the mortgage was \$626.50. A marginal note on the mortgage reads, "Foreclosed May 8, 1893; Journal 2, Page 566."

An advertisement for Marshall's mill on Mill creek appears on the previous page. I failed to note the date on which it appeared.

The next chapter is about a Wheeler County sawmill operator, N.S. Nelson and unlike the sketchy information for Marshall, Nelson's operation is well documented.

**LUMBER!! LUMBER!!**  
AT THE  
**MILL CREEK**  
SAW MILL

Common lumber, at the Mill, only \$10 per thousand feet.

Delivered in Prineville, \$15 per thousand feet.

Clear stuff, such as rustic, ceiling, finishing lumber, etc., at reduced prices—These terms are for cash or its equivalent.

A good road to the mill.

Lumber always on hand and for sale by C. Rogers, north of Ochoco bridge, Prineville.

**W.B. MARSHALL,**  
PROPRIETOR.



Cleanup at Hudspeth got a little too hot this day and melted some of the Wigwam burner. I've talked with the man responsible but I don't remember the date.



Consolidated Pine, Inc.; date unknown. Photo by Western Ways, Inc. of Corvallis, Oregon. Western Ways is no longer in business. Some years ago, a contact of mine—another history buff—Steve Stone, acquired a large inventory of the company's film negatives. Curt Deatherage scanned many of these negatives for Steve and provided me copies of those of timber industry operations in Green Gold Country.