

Smith Brothers

Mill Creek	1915-1920
Grizzly (2) Locations	1920-1928
Ochoco	1929-1935

Beginnings of early sawmill operations are sometimes—many times—difficult to establish. Such is the beginning of the Smith Brothers’ operation on Mill Creek. Their beginning was someone else’s ending and the beginnings and endings on Mill Creek seem especially difficult to determine.

In about 1908, John Demaris and his four sons built a sawmill on McKay. William Birdsong and wife Emma also sold their holdings on Mill Creek to W.H. and Ed Barney. All of the Barneys were loggers but they lost the mill on a debt to Billy King. Art Champion ran the mill for King, then Tom and Lon Smith took over the running of the mill (But did they buy it? Don’t know.) and finally they moved the mill to their father’s timber claim at Grizzly around 1919-1920. The *Crook County Journal* of February 13, 1919 reported,

Smith Brothers, who have been operating the old Barney sawmill on Mill Creek, are transferring their machinery and equipment to a new location on Grizzly, where they believe road conditions, etc., will be more favorable to the successful operation of a small mill. They have been purchasing timber from the Forest Service.

The article noted that the Smith Brothers thought that the road conditions at the new location in Grizzly “will be more favorable to the successful operation of a small mill.” That may have been true in 1920 but to anyone that has traveled the old county road between Prineville and Grizzly would have a hard time believing that to be

true. This road passes between Grizzly and Foley Butte, and is crooked and steep. Crook County no longer maintains the road but sufficient interest in the road exists that the county has been unsuccessful in allowing the road to revert to property owners. During a dry season, take this drive; it will give you an impression of what the pioneers encountered. You can reach the “good” section of the road from the south near the clubhouse of Ochoco West. From the north, the county road heads south from the now-gone town of Grizzly.

The *Journal* article also noted that the Smith Brothers were buying timber from the Forest Service.¹ This time, 1919, was before the Forest Service kept records of timber sales. The sale referred to in the article may not have been one open to bidding but more of a direct purchase sale. The Smith Brothers, however, were the first outfit to purchase a bid sale. This occurred on July 17, 1929. That sale consisted of about 980,000 board feet of Douglas fir and larch, for which Smith paid fifty-cents a thousand board feet, a total of about \$2,812. This was the only time that the Smith Brothers purchased public timber at bid.

As usual, when you are relying on old newspapers for information, the situation surrounding the Smiths’ relocation to Grizzly is a little confusing. In the February 1919 *Journal* article, the newspaper reported that the brothers were “transferring their machinery and equipment” to Grizzly. But then on March 18, 1920, the *Central Oregonian* reported that,

1. The Smiths made for first-ever purchase of Ochoco National Forest Timber, July 17, 1929, called the Canyon Creek Sale. Ponderosa pine sold for \$3.25M; total stumpage cost of the sale: \$2,812. (Ochoco National Forest timber sale records, computerized by me.)



Smith Brothers Sawmill on Mill Creek, 1917.

G.M. Cornett has purchased the Smith Brothers saw mill on McKay mountain [sic] and the final arrangements for the operation of the mill under its new management have been completed.... Mr. Cornett also purchased some of the timber interests of Smith Bros. in that part of the country....

The exact details of the relocation are not very important to the history of the company anyway.²

The sawmilling exploits of the Smith Brothers is best told by a member of the family, Thelma Robinson. This writer spent several hours interviewing Thelma and from those interviews Martha Blair wrote the following. What follows is Thelma's story with some additional information supplied by this author.

I was born Thelma Smith, February 4, 1920, in a house at Grizzly, Oregon, at the site of my father's sawmill, Smith Brothers millsite. Grandma Smith, my father's mother, attended at my birth as she usually did for all of those that were born in our home there at Grizzly.

2. The Smith Brother's Grizzly sawmill was bought by G. M. Cornett. The sale included about 700,000 feet of "lumber", according to the *Central Oregon Enterprise* of March 18, 1920. I doubt if that much lumber—boards—was sitting at the mill site. The newspaper probably meant timber. The article goes on to say, "Mr. Cornett will move the mill two miles to timber which he has owned for several years. This will amount to about ten million feet...."



Smith Brothers Sawmill at Grizzly, 1925

My father was Alonzo Roy Smith of the Smith Brothers Sawmill. He was born February 9, 1894, over on Trout Creek in Jefferson County. He died September 26, 1940. My mother was Sylvia Matilda Moore. She was born on the McKenzie River at Walterville. Her parents lived in the town of Lamonta. That is where my father met her and courted her. They were married at the home of my grandparents, Lizzie and Joe Smith.

My grandparents on the Smith side were Joseph and Elizabeth (Linnton) Smith. My Grandfather, Joseph B. Smith, was born in Missouri. He was 14 years old when he left home and worked his way to California. He then came to work at the Friday ranch near Willowdale in Jefferson County. My great, great-grandparents

came from Scotland and settled in Kansas. Great Grandad was born there. He was a minister.

My Grandmother, Elizabeth "Lizzie" Linnton, was 12 years old when she crossed the plains by wagon. Later she came to visit her sister Becky who was working at the Cram ranch near Willowdale. While there she met my Grandfather and, at age 18, she married him at Grizzly, Oregon. Joseph and Elizabeth Smith had 11 children.

Thomas Smith was my father's other brother that comprised the partnership of the Smith Brothers Sawmill, Lon (Alonzo) and Tom Smith. There were other Smith brothers who were employed by Lon and Tom but they were not part of the mill management; they had no ownership interest in the mill. There was Lance, Lain, Raymond and Fergie Smith who all worked at various times at the mill helping to haul the

In March 1996, Hazel Smith-Denton, Thelma's sister, wrote me a letter. The radio station in Prineville, KRCO, was airing a series of "Timber History Stories" and Hazel had heard an announcement that her story would be read within a few days. Hazel had been interviewed by someone other than this writer and she just wanted to let me know that she was very interested in "the project." Knowing that Hazel's story was going to air, she "started thinking of my childhood on the Ochoco and what cherished memories I have from being privileged to live there. A few years back I was reminiscing about those memories and the friends and neighbors who lived on the Ochoco and also on Mill Creek. I sat down and [made a list of everyone, starting] from the Ranger Station down the Ochoco and Mill Creek with names of everyone and came up with this little poem." Here is Hazel's poem:

MEMORIES

Deep in my heart is a memory
Of days so long ago,
Remembering good times with friends we knew
When we all lived on the Ochoco.

"Lookout Mountain" and the "Ochoco"
Are sacred names to me –
If I had my choice, next to Heaven –
That's where I'd want to be!

Most of the people have gone –
And everything has changed so –
But still, it's home, and I love those names
"Lookout Mountain" and the "Ochoco."

The Blevins, the Kochs and the Tollidays,
The Smiths, Staleys, Youngs and Cornetts,
The Keetons, Johnsons, Laniuses and Ontkos,

Are friends and neighbors you just don't forget.
The Higgins, Morgans, Russells, and Hindermans,
The Taylors, Davises, and Louie Beirl,
Farquar McRae and Julius Cornez,
Each one lived by the Golden Rule.

The Fullers, Lakins, and Herefords,
The Millers, Martins and Dills,
Art Champion, the Wertha, and the Leaches,
Good times memories linger still.

Places change,
People come and go,
But, if you're like me, you treasure
Those days on the Ochoco!

Hazel Smith-Denton

lumber, doing the logging and various things like that. An uncle by marriage also worked at the mill. He was Herman Meder who was married to my Aunt Gertrude Smith. They also lived in one of the houses at the mill site. His year of birth was 1893; he died in 1973. They are buried at Juniper Haven as is Doris and Osa Houston my aunts. Doris and Osa married brothers. Osa married Sumner Houston and Doris married Frank Houston. They are all buried at Juniper Haven Cemetery.

The oldest child was Una. She was married at one time to a man by the name of George Earl. They had one little girl who died of ptomaine poisoning. Una did the cooking at the sawmill at Grizzly. She later

married Leo Jones. They are both buried in the Juniper Haven Cemetery. That's where my grandparents and all of the brothers and sisters are buried. William Smith left here. I don't know at what time or what age he was when he left, and went to California. He did mining and made his home in California down around Placer-ville and various places. William and his wife Lorena are buried in Juniper Haven Cemetery.

The Smith Brothers began their mill business on Mill Creek around 1918. That is the year that my sister Hazel was born there. Not too long ago there were still remnants of the old mill. One landmark was on the hillside coming down to the creek.

There were remnants of an old log chute but that's gone now. The logs were started at the chute and they slid down into the mill pond. About all that is left now are the trees but you can see where it was.

The Smith Brothers bought the mill from W.F. (Billy) King. In about 1920 the equipment was hauled over to Grizzly from Mill Creek. Some of the lumber that was milled from Mill Creek and from Grizzly went into the construction of the Ochoco Dam. I was quite small but I remember a small mill pond at the Grizzly mill. Apparently they moved because the first mill on Mill Creek burned.

Another time I remember when the mill at Grizzly caught fire one evening. Of course, you didn't call the fire department because there wasn't one. It was the old bucket brigade. They saved part of that mill and rebuilt it. The lumber was hauled by wagon over the mountain to Prineville to an operation along the railroad tracks that was called "the switch." Pine Products later was built on that site.

We attended the Grizzly school. There was a store and post office combination in a two-story house operated by Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton. They were Maxine Brummer's grandparents (Jerry Brummer's great grandparents.)

In 1928 the Smith Brothers moved the mill to Ochoco. I was between six and seven years old. It was kind of an excursion for me, quite an excursion, really, to move. The equipment was hauled from Grizzly to Ochoco and the cows and horses were driven to our new home. The new site at Ochoco was leased from Henry Koch. I'm not sure what month we moved there. It was late fall and I remember the winter was quite severe at the time we were getting settled. We weren't put in school that year because the weather was so severe and they were busy building the mill. We just didn't go to school that year. When we did go to school it was at Howard School. I finished 8th grade at Howard School.

The winters, as I remember them, were far more severe on the Ochocos than they are now. The snow was deep in the winter-

time. Many a time I shoveled my way out to the barn and to the woodshed, and to the privy, too. And of course we had to go out and shovel out a path for my Grandfather.

I can remember the road plow going along and banking the snow up high. We'd have to dig our way out to the mailbox and out to get the car out. I remember one time my Dad had sciatic rheumatism. He was really crippled up. There was a deep snow. I shoveled my way to the barn to milk cows. Dad heaped praise on me for working so hard, but I did get the path shoveled out to the barn. We knew what there was to do and we did what we had to do.

There were three houses and an office when we moved from Grizzly to Ochoco. Later there were some bunk houses for the men and a cook house too. My mother did the cooking and laundry for the men who didn't have families. I don't remember who cooked later on when the mill was in full operation. There were eight to ten men working at the Ochoco mill. The only ones that had their families living there were the relatives. My Grandmother Smith lived there and, of course, my Granddad Joe Smith. He was blind. The families rotated in taking care of him. Grandma and Granddad and Uncle Lain lived in the house next to ours. Herm and Gertie Meder lived in the other house.

My Grandfather was quite a man. Even though he was blind he cut wood for all of the families at the mill. He used a crosscut saw and a buck saw and did his own wood splitting. He had very few accidents but once in a while we'd see him bleeding a little from getting a little too close to the saw or the axe. We had "lines", as we called it, which were wires put up from one building to the other where he could go by himself. He used a cane to guide him.

We little kids used to think it was fun to lead Granddad astray. Once when we were little and living at Grizzly my cousin and I were helping him go from our house back to Grandma's house. We led him too close to a bank and he fell. He was mighty angry

with us and so was Grandma when she found out what we did. I have never forgotten that.

Granddad chewed tobacco. You had to be careful and not get in his way because he'd let 'er fly once in a while. He sometimes used strong language, too. He talked to himself a lot and we'd get a kick out of listening to some of his conversations. It was kind of entertaining to listen to Granddad and see what he had on his mind that day.

He had what we called a "piccalilli". It was a form of harp. He amused himself by strumming on that and singing songs. Granddad was 79 years and 21 days old when he died. He was born August 6, 1859, married March 17, 1888, and died September 8, 1941. We were all living in Prineville when he died.

There was no electricity at the mill houses but not long after we moved in we had a telephone—an old crank style telephone.

The mill went out of business in 1934 or '35. That's when we moved to Prineville. I think the Depression had a big impact on the timber industry right about that time. The Depression had hit and all during the 30's it was devastating. Also the planer burned and there was no insurance. That was a big loss to the family. Pop Forsythe bought some pieces of the mill machinery for Pine Products mill that was just getting started. My Dad was a good friend of Pop Forsythe. He went to work for him as a timber cruiser and timber buyer. That's where my Dad lost his life.

It was in a woods accident while he was working for Pop Forsythe. The accident that claimed my father's life was recorded in the local newspapers. People very close by could not say what happened. We had to rely on what we were told. I'll leave it at that.

When we first moved to Ochoco Creek there was a gas station already there owned by Bert and Zelma Tolliday. They had one gas pump and a small store with living quarters in the back of the store. The property was leased from Ella Koch. The store

was located on the same side of the road and near where the Koch (now Steve Ontko's) home is located. Tollidays moved from this location and bought property belonging to Ben Taylor about 1/2 mile below the Smith Brothers Sawmill and across the road where they built a store, gas pumps and a house. They lived there until they sold the operation to Shirley Quant. They then built a home on the Marks Creek Highway which opened up a new road to Mitchell and the eastern part of the county.

Ella Koch was Vera Ontko's mother and the grandmother of Gale Ontko. She built a log cabin store and gas pumps across the road from her home. Her husband was Art Champion. Mr. Champion did a lot of work in mining. He also worked for my Dad at the mill and lived in one of the cabins there. My brother, Arthur James, was named by Mr. Champion. He was born in Prineville at the home of Mother's brother, Clyde, and his wife Edith Moore. After five daughters in the family, everyone was just delighted that there was finally a boy in our family. Mr. Champion asked if he could name the baby and he did. Later another little boy, Robert Lee, came along. He was born at our home on the Ochoco. After the family moved to Prineville on an acreage on Lamonta Road, James Lloyd joined our family. The road off Lamonta now bears the name "Lon Smith Road."

At the time that I lived on the Ochoco there were a lot of young people living there. There were farm families, forest service families. The John Cornett family farmed. Valore (Johnson) Grubbe was just a young lady at that time and she lives there still. Valore had twin cousins who were musicians. We spent a lot of time with them. They were lively and fun. They had a car and we all piled into their car and went places.

There were the Keatons with three girls and two boys. Velma (Keaton) Monroe lives kitty-corner across from me now. Lee Blevins, the forest ranger, had four daughters one of whom was June Blevins. She

taught me how good onion and peanut butter sandwiches taste. They taste just as good today. We rode our horses a lot. Once Lee set us up with a forest service tent down on the creek about where the campground is now. In the summer time we rode our horses down there and camped out a week at a time. June Blevins is now June Collins. She lives in Yreka, California.

We were a very close community from where we were to clear over on Mill Creek. Our place was kind of a gathering place for young people. My Dad was the biggest young person there. All the kids loved him. And my Mother too. Dad usually did all of the shopping. He had to come in for parts and things for the mill. He took care of the business end of their living. I don't believe probably at the time my Dad was killed that my mother had ever paid a light bill. I think Mother was just too busy taking care of her family. The cooking and washing and all of that. I guess everyone has a set way in the way they take care of things, but that's the way our lives went. We girls helped Mother with the housework but we worked out as soon as we were old enough to work.

I remember one winter my mother was sick in bed with the flu. Dad came in and asked me if I thought I could fix the meal that night for the men if he cut the meat for me. He had some mutton hanging in the meat house or maybe it was in the woodshed but it was frozen. He brought it in and cut it up and I cooked the meal that night. I seasoned the mutton with a little sage. I don't know why I did that but the fellows sure bragged on my cooking. They said it was the best meal they ever had eaten. I felt 10 feet high. I thought I'd really done something.

As I said, we worked away from the family even when we were just little kids. My aunt and uncle, Sumner and Osa Houston, lived near the little town of Roberts. In the summer they wanted us to come to their place and drive the hay derrick for them. It was a one horse team that pulled up the fork. I'd go there but I could only stand it about a week. I would get so home-

sick for my family they would have to take me home. If I stayed three weeks it was more than enough for me because I'd get so homesick.

We raised chickens and pigs and milk cows. This provided us with eggs, meat and milk, things that you go to the grocery store for nowadays. It was the Depression. We were poor people, we just didn't have it. And you didn't miss what you never ever had. My mother had said many times, even up to the time she was named Pioneer Queen, she would say that if she could turn back the clock and live back in time when she still had Dad and her little kids she would rather go back to that time than have what she had at the time of her death. She did. She dwelled on the old way of life that she loved.

I can see my mother making us happy when the kids gathered for candy or popcorn. We played cards, we had an old phonograph that we kept going steady. We pitched horse shoes, rode horses, fished in Ochoco Creek and went hunting with my Dad. We had lots of fun. My Dad was a wonderful fun person. He was just a good family man. He sang, he called square dances and later on he took us to dances. We had dances at the cookhouse. And a family by the name of Young had a large living room where there were parties and dancing. Later on when Lookout Mountain Grange hall was built we spent many happy hours down there. It was like a home away from home.

Two fellows who worked for my Dad at Grizzly and again at the Ochoco mill were musicians. They were Frank and Dick Long. One played the banjo and the other played a violin. They played for many of our dances. Andy Ontko played the accordion and he played for many of our dances, too.

We have fond memories of Vera and Andy Ontko. I also have very fond memories of Ella Koch Champion, Vera's mother, and her elaborate Christmas tree decorations. Vera decorated for Christmas, too, and they would bring us girls up there to see their Christmas trees. Years later

when I was driving the school bus Vera was to tell me that she decorated just for me. You see, it was something my sister Hazel and I had never seen. We stood there just staring in open-mouthed awe.

In later years I drove the school bus from Prineville to the ranger station for a number of years. It was like going home every day. I drove one of the big buses to the ranger station. The forest service employees from Prineville rode with me in the morning and came back with me in the evening.

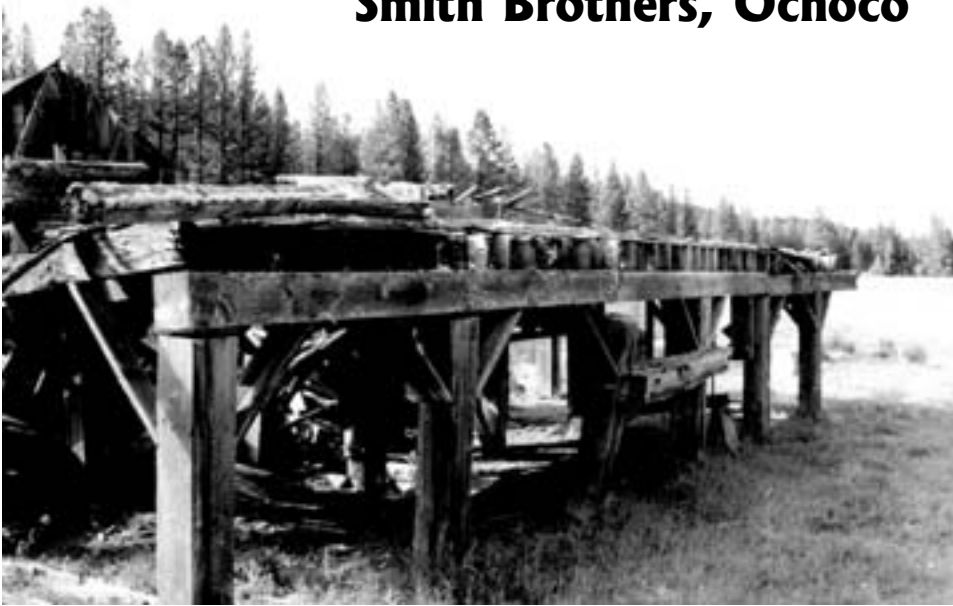
The Smith Family consisted of parents Joseph B. Smith (1859-1938) and Elizabeth Smith (1869-1941). The children were:

<u>NAME</u>	<u>BORN</u>	<u>DIED</u>
Katy Union Jones	Feb 14, 1889	Feb 12, 1978
Thomas Linton	Dec 21, 1890	Jul 12, 1959
William Joseph	Mar 7, 1893	1963
Alonzo Roy	Feb 9, 1894	1940
Guy Fergus	Sep 2, 189	May 23, 1944
Robert Lain	May 5, 1899	Nov 20, 1971
Raymond McKinnly	Sep 6, 1901	Feb 9, 1964
Clarence Lancelot	Jul 3, 1903	Feb 19, 1986
Gertrude Smith Meder	Feb 4, 1906	1988
Osa Smith Houston	Mar 29, 1909	1989
Doris Smith Houston	May 16, 1911	1984



It was not noted where or when this photograph of Smith Brothers' logging activities was taken. Nor do I know from whom I received the photo. I'm just a beginner at this, give me some slack!

Smith Brothers, Ochoco



This is the back side (north) of the main mill structure. Ochoco Creek is out of the photo to the right. There is no sign of a log pond having been used.

One of the many things that has fascinated me about the research for this book is that this “rubble” is still here. It is, generally speaking, beginning to disappear more all the time but this mill has been out of operation for 61 years.



No one, including my wonderful friend Gale Ontko, has been able to confirm whether or not this old building was part of the mill; its just an old building



Above, a piece of machinery no one has been able to identify. I've shown this to lots of folks all of whom just guess that it was from the mill. Left, these foundations were for a substantial plant.



Ochoco Ranger Station Road runs right to left just beyond the log deck, mid-picture, right. Just to the left of the barn is the main cement foundation for the main mill building. Further left is the wooden part of the foundation for the main structure. Many early mills, and this one was 1928-1934, were built over or very close to streams. No exception here. Ochoco Creek (formerly known as “Ochoco River”) today is but a trickle of what it once was. Years ago this “river” was connected directly to the Pacific Ocean and salmon returned even higher up for spawning. This was an amazing place for a sawmill, which had its own unofficial town known as Ochoco. This photograph measures ten inches wide; you’re seeing it much reduced. Turning books sideways always annoyed me so I’ll not subject you to that here.



At left you see a drawing of a young Abe Lincoln. He did his time as a land surveyor. One of the many stories which did not find its way into *Green Gold* was that of how and why the United States was surveyed as settlement moved west. That story—in exquisite detail—appears in two books written by C. Albert White: *A History of the Rectangular Survey System*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983); and *Initial Points of The Rectangular Survey System*, (Westminister, Colorado: The Publishing House, 1997). These are wonderful books, quite expensive, and probably difficult to find. I corresponded with Mr. White and he straightened me out on several survey matters.

I also came in contact with a retired BLM survey engineer, William W. Glenn. Glenn was very helpful and sent me a number of great photographs of equipment used in surveying. Some of those photographs appear on the next page.

GREEN GOLD



Equipment used in land surveying (officially, rectangular land survey): Upper left, Vernier compass; upper right, chain; lower left, Gurley solar compass; lower right, steel tape.

Before lasers, GPS, and other “modern methods,” men walked the land with very modest equipment and marked the townships, ranges, sections, and quarter sections of the nation. Most of this work was done for the government by contractors (sound familiar?). The land was to be surveyed *before* settlement. Some pioneers were so anxious, especially in Oregon, that they couldn’t wait for survey and became squatters. Many broken hearts and dreams resulted. Prineville’s founder, Barney Prine was one squatter that lost. He lost his land through a land grant to a road company. Since he did not have title to surveyed land, when the land was surveyed it fell into the land granted to the Willamette Valley & Cascades Mountain Wagon Road Company. Barney may have bellied up to his own bar with grief.

It probably won’t surprise you to learn that much of the survey efforts were, first, inaccurate (how could it be otherwise given the terrain and equipment), and crooked. If you look closely at the section lines (short for all the survey lines used to denote land positions) you will note that even in some flat areas the lines are not at all straight. This is not always the result of collusion; sometimes it is the result of the surveyor’s uncertain knowledge of how to correct his magnetic compass bearings to true bearings. As a ship’s navigator of many years experience, I understand this problem. The earth’s magnetic pull (magnetic north) is not located at the top of the earth as is “true north” and the amount of variation between the two depends on where you are standing.

Those variations are quite adequately documented world-wide today but not so in the pioneer’s days. In many ways, things do get better as civilization moves forward, but not all things.



Elsewhere in *Green Gold* you will read that for a time logs were floated down the Deschutes River. This was back in the late 1800s and the company was the Deschutes Lumber Company, of which there were three operating in Oregon.

The log drives on the Des Chutes didn't last long but they sure caused an uproar. The Deschutes Lumber Company wanted to *lease* the entire river from the city of Bend, thereby denying others access. The editorials and "letters to the editors" of the local newspapers were so hot the paper almost melted in your hands.

The two photos here are of the long chute and river crew near Snow, Klamath County, Oregon, and appeared in the newsletter of the Klamath County Historical Society some years ago.