

## Hudspeth Sawmill Company: The Early Years in Oregon

Of all of the stories in *Green Gold*, the Hudspeth story is the most difficult to tell. Difficult because it is such a tragic story; so much potential, so much waste.

The Hudspeth story is also difficult to tell for another reason. Not one member of the Hudspeth family (of which there are still quite a few) would provide any information. Those family members that initially agreed to be interviewed became very hard to find when it was time for their interview. It is as if someone was holding a big stick over the family and threatened to beat to within an inch of their life anyone that talked. As reluctant as family members were to render assistance, former employees were *almost* as reluctant. The Hudspeth empire, if it did nothing else, created a massive amount of employee loyalty.

There are a several reasons for this loyalty. First, and probably the most important of the reasons, is that Hudspeth's companies took care of their employees. You will read several instances of this elsewhere in this book. Second, John Hudspeth, the larger-than-life force of the clan, was a very likable man. Third, John's wife, Floreine, is one of the nicest women you could ever meet (I'm told). And a beautiful woman to the end. Lastly, there is a great deal of sympathy for the Hudspeths. The clan's downfall touched many people directly and almost everyone indirectly. Many people feel great sorrow over what happened but there is still not a little anger sitting in the hearts of those that were injured in the fall of this once great empire.

The story told here cannot begin to cover every detail of the rise and fall of the family's timber businesses. And timber was not the only business in which the family became involved. A partial list of the family's businesses reads:

Blue Mountain Land Company  
 Blue Mountain Mills, Inc.  
 Central Oregon Pine, Inc.  
 Dayville Lumber Company, Inc.  
 Golden Pine Ranches, Inc.  
 Hudspeth Corporation  
 Hudspeth Land and Livestock  
 Hudspeth Sales and Service, Inc.  
 Hudspeth Sawmill Company  
 San Juan Lumber Company, Inc.  
 Spray Lumber Company, Inc.  
 Prineville Machine & Supply  
 Hudspeth Recreation Unlimited

These companies were owned by "the Hudspeth Men," a name I've given to the original patriarch, J. D. Hudspeth, and his sons, of which there were five. In order of birth they were:<sup>1</sup>

John	February 8, 1909
Claude	April 8, 1910
Clarence	November 8, 1912
Fred	December 10, 1916
Lloyd	November 12, 1918. <sup>2</sup>

Ownership of the Hudspeth companies frequently changed but there doesn't appear to have been a scheme behind the ever-changing ownerships. Some of the men had interests other than timber. One of the brothers, Clarence, had an interest in service stations and operated one in

1. Additional "family tree" information can be found within the **Hudspeth Sawmill Company Photo Album** which follows.

2. J.D. and Minerva had three daughters: Mabel, 1904; Golda May, February 8, 1909; and Jule Elizabeth, December 24, 1914, who is the only living member of that generation. "Jule" is the spelling bestowed by Minerva. Golda May was always known as Goldie. Goldie married Lee Evans who became a major force in the timber industry. Much more about Lee elsewhere.

both Kiowa, Oklahoma, and Prineville, Oregon. These stations did, in a rather large way, support the main enterprise of the family, sawmilling. Lloyd, who seemed apart from the other brothers, went off on his own early—and stayed away. Lloyd had sawmills, meat packing plants, ranches, and other interests. Very few details have been collected on this son and you will read very little about him in *Green Gold*. When the details of each company are presented the ownerships will be given—when possible.

The Hudspeth story, for practical purposes, starts in 1904 near a little town in Arkansas called Marble. It was in that year that J.D., Joseph Dere-miah, (always called JD) moved his family from the farm on the banks of the Kings River, in the far northeastern section of Madison County, Arkansas, into town. Kate Waldon spoke with me when she was age 92 (1997) and she remembered when the Hudspeths moved to town. Kate went to school with the Hudspeth children, but because of her young age at the time, she was not able to provide any details of the family's business in Marble but she thought that there may have been a lumber yard involved.<sup>3</sup>

Nor is there anything specific about when the Hudspeths left Arkansas for Oklahoma. The 1920 Federal census shows the Hudspeths living in Marble. By 1930 the Oklahoma school records show the children enrolled in Kiowa. So some-time during that ten-year period of 1920-30 the Hudspeth family made a big change in their lives. The change, there is little doubt, was brought about by economics: conditions in rural Arkansas were bad and the timbered areas of Madison had been completely cut out.

We in Oregon are lucky—in a lot of ways—as our region's history is well documented. Not so for many (if not most) other places. No formal history of Madison County, Arkansas, has been written. The local historical society is now gath-

ering information but no narrative has been written and while the Madison County Historical Society has collected a lot of information none of it pertains to the Crook County Hudspeth family. Very little can be found about the conditions in which the Hudspeths lived in those early years. The best information available is descriptions that appear in Roy Reed's book, *Faubus: The Life and Times of an American Prodigal*.<sup>4</sup> You may wonder what connection a book about a famous (or perhaps infamous) governor of Arkansas has to do with the timber industry's history in Oregon. Legitimate wonder. Reed's book gives detailed, and very readable, descriptions of Orval Faubus' early environment. He was growing up at about the same time as the Hudspeths in an area very close to Marble, known as Greasy Bend (doesn't that conjure up delightful images). Thus the conditions which Mr. Faubus experienced are very close to those of the Hudspeths. Reed's book provides good insight into conditions between 1904 and the late-1920s in rural Madison County. It is easy to give a summary of those conditions: deplorable. The land had been so devastated by over cutting, over grazing, over farming, and over just about anything else that could be done to the land, that the land was essentially useless for anything. The Hudspeths saw greener pastures to the west.

So by 1930 the family had settled in Kiowa, Pittsburg County, Oklahoma. The children were in school and the weddings were soon to follow. A Hudspeth marriage summary from the official marriage records reads like this:

1932 - Jun. 14;

**Johnnie Hudspeth** age 23 and Miss Floreine Powell age 18, both residing at Kiowa, Oklahoma, married 14 June 1932, witness by W.M. Powell and Mrs. H.D. Hooker; Minister of Church of Christ, Rev. Harbert D. Hooker. Book 22, Page 283

3. The court house for Madison County burned and all records were destroyed.

4. Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 1997.

1933 - Aug. 30;

**Clarence Hudspeth** age 21 and Miss Ruth Reynolds age 19, both of Kiowa, Oklahoma; witness: Jo Nita Risner and Chas. H. Reynolds; minister Samuel Braden. Book 23, Page 229

1934 - Mar 31;

**Walter Lee Evans** age 25 and Miss Goldie Mae Hudspeth age 25, both residing at Seminole, Oklahoma; witness: Claude Hudspeth of Kiowa and Geo. H. Nagel of Rt. 7, McAlester, Oklahoma; minister Samuel Braden. Book 23, Page 553

1936 - Aug. 29;

**Claude Hudspeth** age 26 and Miss Ruth Elliott age 22; witness Johnnie Hudspeth and Mrs. Johnnie Hudspeth; minister Rev. E.T. Winkler, MacAlester Christian Church. Book 25, Page 406

1938 - Jan. 24,

**Fred Hudspeth** age 22 and Miss Margaret A. Harlan age 17; minister Rev. G.H. Newland. (Information taken from photocopy of Marriage Certificate.)<sup>5</sup>

1941 - Jun. 5,

**Lloyd J. Hudspeth** age 23 and Miss Telia Anne Houk age 21; minister Rev. Penhollow. (Information taken from photocopy of Marriage Certificate.)<sup>6</sup>

There is no doubt that the Hudspeths were involved in the timber industry in Oklahoma. There is concrete evidence of a Hudspeth mill operating in Jacks Forks Valley south of Kiowa (almost as far south at Atoka). The author has

spoken with men who worked at that sawmill. By later standards it wasn't much, but at the time it was a sound operation. The Hudspeths also had a lumber yard in Kiowa, but much of their milled lumber went to the oil fields. Clarence had a service station that provided general services to the public, the Hudspeth trucks and the gypo trucks that hauled for Hudspeth.

The area around Kiowa, like that of Marble, does not have an official written history. In 1996 the Pittsburg County Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc. published a book<sup>7</sup> of family histories similar to those of Crook, Jefferson, and Wheeler counties. Because, one may assume, there are no longer any members of the J.D. Hudspeth family living around Kiowa there is only one mention of the name *Hudspeth*. It appears on page 344 in the story of William "Toolie" Ryan. Toolie came to Camp Watson to work for Hudspeth in about 1939 and continued there until 1942, when he was drafted into the U.S. Army. Although Toolie remembers working for the Hudspeths, he couldn't contribute any stories.

It was the author's good fortune to come in contact with Bennie Coffee-Loftin of Kiowa. Bennie responded to the posting of a request for information on the Internet. She contacted me and was able to provide names of people who knew the Hudspeths and a copy of the photograph of the Jacks Forks Valley<sup>8</sup> sawmill (photo on next page).

Several Kiowaians related stories that cannot be mentioned here. These stories do not put the Hudspeth operations in a positive light, but the stories are important for a full understanding of what happened in later years. Sources are not revealed for these stories. Many individuals

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5. Because Margaret was only 17 when wed her mother noted on the "Oath of Affiant" that she granted permission for her daughter to marry. [affiant = One who makes an affidavit; a deponent. (Only used in U.S.). From electronic version, *Oxford English Dictionary*.]

6. Wally Smith was one of the witnesses at Lloyd's wedding and he related the events of the day to his wife Yvonne. None of the events seemed historical in nature so nothing of them is written of them here.

7. Pittsburg County Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc. *Pittsburg County Oklahoma*. Wolfe City, Texas: Henington Industries Inc., 1997. Pittsburg County contains the town of Kiowa where the Hudspeths lived for a number of years after leaving Marble, Arkansas, and before coming to Oregon.

8. Local spelling; no apostrophe.



**The Hudspeths' sawmill south of Kiowa, Oklahoma, in a place called Jack Forks Valley, circa 1930s.**

offered to be interviewed but only on the condition that their names would not be linked to specific information.<sup>9</sup>

During the Kiowa days, the Hudspeths operated on a tight budget. IOUs were rather common and at one time some trucks of Hudspeth's were repossessed. Given overall conditions at the time, the repossession of even a single truck must have pinched the operations. One of Hudspeth's truck drivers (there may have been more than one) had to frequently work extra hard to collect his pay; even the man's wife was engaged in the task of collecting her husband's pay—tracking down company "officials" around town. Money seemed very short for the company. These financial matters are mentioned here because similar instances will become crucial to the understanding of the Hudspeth operation later. But on to less serious matters—although not much less serious.

By the mid-1930s the timber situation around Kiowa was very similar to what Hudspeth found in Madison County, Arkansas, in the late 1920's. Timber was scarce. "Go West, young man," must have had special significance for the Hudspeths. It was time to move again.

It has been impossible to firmly establish who or exactly when the Hudspeths heard of the "timber opportunities" in Oregon. As in any industry, rumors must have flown and word that "Oregon has big trees" must have traveled like wildfire (no pun intended). Although it cannot be firmly established who and when a Hudspeth came to Oregon, it appears to have been John. Then the question becomes, "Why Wheeler County?" With a state filled with "big trees," what drew John Hudspeth to Mitchell? Because of what John had

9. Yet, almost without exception, everyone that was interviewed agreed to having their name listed in Appendix A.

heard about Oregon's timber he decided that he and his newly acquired wife would venture to Oregon for their honeymoon.<sup>10</sup>

In the quest for details surrounding the Hudspeth migration to Oregon, both rumor and fact emerge. The one important rumor that has not been proved or disproved is whether or not Hudspeth obtained timber (and/or land) through Wheeler County sheriff's sales. Everyone in the Fossil country, the county seat of Wheeler County, that can be quizzed has been quizzed and they seem of one mind: there were never any sheriff's sales to anyone. Yet popular belief in Crook County is that Hudspeth (and others) obtained huge amounts of timber very cheaply. Someone remarked during the recent financial crises in Wheeler County that the crisis was partly John Hudspeth's fault; "he stole all that timber in the 1930's."

Fact or rumor, it doesn't really matter. Hudspeth's early timber purchases were legal and, more importantly, a sound business decision (whatever else may be said, John Hudspeth was a whiz of a business man). The first recorded outright purchase of timber—not land—was made in 1936, and that is well documented. But before you read about that, a look at the trip from Kiowa to Oregon may be interesting. This information comes directly from folks that made the trip and have very good memories for details.

The exact date of departure is not remembered but it must have been August 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup>. The year is clearly remembered: 1936. The caravan arrived at Camp Watson east of Mitchell on August 8, 1936. That date is a little misleading because the caravan by-passed Camp Watson on the westward journey and continued on to Bend where J.D. Hudspeth had a "ranch". This must have been leased or rented property as there are no records of a Hudspeth land purchase.<sup>11</sup> This suggests that J.D., and maybe other members of

the family, had come to Oregon ahead of the main caravan. The reason for continuing on to Bend was that one of the trucks contained the furniture and other household items of John and Floreine who intended to live in Bend. It appears somewhat strange that the "head guy" (John; J.D. was nominally in charge) was going to live in Bend when his operation was many miles away, with very bad roads between Prineville and Mitchell, and even worse roads between Mitchell and the mill site at Camp Watson. When asked about this my source said, "You wouldn't expect Floreine to live at Camp Watson, would you?" The statement was meant as a compliment.

This may appear as a disdainful remark; it was not intended so. And it isn't meant as a slur against John's wife. Floreine Powell-Hudspeth was a cut above primitive mill camp life. She was born a rung or more above the common person: she was a lady and remained so until her death March 17, 2004.

The caravan itself must have been something to see. It wasn't especially large. There were at most three or four log trucks converted to haul "cargo", and a small number of cars (John and Fred drove their own cars; maybe the other boys did too). One truck held the mules that were to be used in logging; there were probably three or four of these large animals. One truck carried the household items for John and Floreine. Other trucks must have carried the household goods of the other Hudspeth men. One truck carried the equipment to start the new mill operation.

The trucks also transported people—employees of the not-yet-built sawmill. Many of these employees—men, women, and children—rode on top of the loads exposed to the air. But it was summer so it was probably just hot and sunny. These trucks were simply converted log trucks so the cargo (human and otherwise) carrying ability wasn't what it could have been. The families

10. So says someone that should know but whom I cannot reveal.

11. But this can be misleading. It was not a requirement that all land transactions be officially recorded so it is possible that J.D. purchased land which isn't part of the record. It is also possible that the purchase was simply a "gentlemen's agreement" with no formal papers being prepared. Yet one would think that where a property deed is involved, some paper trail would exist. None can be found.

migrating west with the Hudspeths were not allowed to bring furniture or any other possessions beyond simple personal articles.

The Hudspeth men and their families rode in their separate automobiles and didn't follow along with the trucks. The automobiles usually went ahead and would stop at a designated place to spend the night. Unlike Tom Joad's family in Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*,<sup>12</sup> no one died and the families spent the night in motels rather than beside the road. Nevertheless, the women—most of whom didn't know each other before the trip began—had to prepare the meals and feed the families; restaurants were too expensive for working class folks.

## The Way West

The route of the caravan, for those who like detail, went something like this: Kiowa is on U.S. Highway 69 (which leads north-east to Muskagee and southwest to Durant), but that isn't on a highway with a direct route west. The initial leg of the trip must have been a meandering one, as the first major city the caravan reached was Oklahoma City. The caravan probably left Kiowa and headed northeast on US 69 to about Savanna (12 miles); north on Indian Nation Parkway for six miles; west on US 270, through Holden and Seminole to Oklahoma Route 9; west to Norman; north, on what would have been US 77, to Oklahoma City and Stillwater and on to Augusta; picking up US 54 and turning west through Wichita, Kansas, to Greensburg; and Bucklin; north-west on Kansas 154 to Dodge City.

Following US 50 northwest out of Dodge City to Lamar, Colorado, and on into Pueblo. Picking up US 85/87 (now Interstate 25) north to Denver. North on (probably) US 287 through Fort Collins and on to Laramie, Wyoming.

From Laramie, the caravan would have followed, roughly, what is now Interstate 80 through Rawlins, Rock Springs, Green River, and Evan-

ston on into Echo, Utah. From Echo the route followed what is now Interstate 84 to Ogden and on to near Burley, Idaho. West across Idaho approximately along current Interstate 84 to Boise. At Boise the group probably struck out on US 20 to Caldwell and crossed the Snake River into Oregon at Nyssa. From Nyssa to Vale on US 26, which wasn't then what it is today, and on in to John Day.

Through John Day to Mitchell, Prineville, Redmond, and Bend. One long trip for a group of people stuffed into cars and trucks. In retrospect, no one seemed to note that they were passing their ultimate destination, Camp Watson, as they came through Mitchell. Maybe they realized that after such a long trip, a night in Bend would do them all good.

But the night in Bend was no grand affair. It was a night under the stars; no motels that night. But up early and back on the road—after unloading John and Floreine's belongings—and back to Mitchell and Camp Watson.<sup>13</sup>

## The Caravan People

The group that headed west in the trucks of the Hudspeth caravan were not many in number. All were young; quite young—including the Hudspeth men. Driving John Hudspeth's truck was Ira Shirley with his wife Edna. Ira had only recently gone to work for Hudspeth and the sudden departure for Oregon was difficult for the Shirleys. Edna's mother was very ill but she insisted that her daughter go west where there was work and opportunity.

Fred and Nina Russell and their two very young children drove the truck with the mules. One of only two mechanical problems on the entire trip involved the mule truck. Somewhere along the way, in the early part of the trip, the structure holding the mules began to give way. The caravan stopped and repairs were made. The only other mechanical problem involved the Shirley's truck. Just east of John Day, as night

12. Penguin Books USA Inc., © Kevin Hearle, 1997.

13. A map of the route is included in the **Hudspeth Sawmill Company Photo Album** which follows.

approached, something went wrong and the caravan parked beside the road. Word was sent ahead to John, who came out the next morning and got things moving again. This was the only night the caravan was stranded “on the road.”

Other occupants of the Hudspeth caravan were: Clin and Lovie Walker and their baby; Bean and Billy Lambert with their baby; Clin’s brother, Tom Walker; Jasper Lambert; Doug Wind, driving the truck with the mill equipment; Neil Johnson; and a Mr. Roberts who was to be the sawyer. There may have been others but their names are no longer remembered.

### **Arrival at Camp Watson**

When the group reached the Camp Watson site on August 8, 1936, there were two big surprises. First, the trees were larger than anyone had seen before (other than John on his exploratory trip). Second, there was no place to live, other than the open ground. Well, there was one building—more shack than house. One lucky family would have a roof over their heads. This distinction went to Ira and Edna Shirley. The Shirleys got the only building because John talked Edna into being the camp cook. Edna’s pay: fifty cents a day.

One shack, no mill. It must have been a hectic time, those first days after the arrival. Whether Hudspeth knew about the severe winters is not known but some of the folks had already made plans to return to Oklahoma for the winter. In this group was Ira and Edna Shirley. John offered them a ride—for a price (the amount no longer remembered). By the first snow, some construction on the mill structure itself must have occurred. From somewhere Hudspeth would have to have acquired some lumber, especially the

large beams that would support the mill building and the equipment but these details are lost. Neither is it known if any additional living quarters were constructed this first season. It is quite possible that there was some construction because there were other mills operating along Mountain Creek which could have supplied lumber. Most of the people left Camp Watson that first winter.

### **The Mill Site**

If only the Hudspeth family had cooperated in this history! Without their help many of the details that would add interest to the story will remain unknown. How, for example, did John Hudspeth locate a plot of timber between Mitchell and Antone? While that isn’t known the details of that arrangement are a matter of record. Hudspeth’s decision to start his operation in Section 32, Township 12 South, Range 24 East will forever link the mill’s operation to the historic site of the U.S. Army’s post called Camp Watson. It was this section of land which Hudspeth chose for his entry into the Oregon timber business.

Hudspeth did not buy the land, only timber cutting rights. The deal was complex. The property was owned by Peter and Grace Truchot (pronounced True-show). But the Truchots were buying the land from the Eastern Oregon Land Company.<sup>14</sup> The agreement was signed by all parties on September 28, 1936. The Eastern Oregon Land Company was represented by Walter S. Martin. The Truchots represented themselves. At this time the Hudspeths were calling themselves Hudspeth & Company (soon changed to Hudspeth Sawmill Company) and were represented by J.D. Hudspeth, Johnnie Hudspeth (on the filed document the name is spelled Johnnie), and Claude Hudspeth. Did J.D., John, and Claude all come to

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14. The Eastern Oregon Land Company, a California corporation, was one of the several thorns in Oregon’s side. The thorniness involved land fraud (a summary of which will be presented elsewhere in this book). The Eastern Oregon Land Company was the successor to the original beneficiary of land grants made to The Dalles-Canyon City Military Wagon Road Company. Much like the deceptions of the Willamette Valley & Cascade Mountains Wagon Road Company, the Eastern Oregon Land Company “stole” land from the public domain and sold that land to settlers. Eastern Oregon Land Company continued to do business in Oregon into the 1960’s. No one associated with the company would respond to letters of inquiry. Although the company was convicted of land fraud on a number of occasions, the agreement between Hudspeth and the company were completely legal.

Wheeler County and sign the agreement? Wheeler County Court House records would indicate that they did. The agreement was filed several months after it was executed; filed on June 9, 1937—nearly a year after the family arrived at Camp Watson.

This three-way agreement was for timber cutting rights, not land. The provisions of the agreement are very detailed. Central Oregon Land Company established detailed accounting and inventory procedures which Hudspeth was required to follow. For an initial payment of \$500.00 Hudspeth could cut 500,000 board feet. Thereafter Hudspeth had to pay the agreed-to stumpage in advance (not an unusual requirement). This initial cutting authorization did not include lumber needed in construction of the camp or mill buildings. The lumber for these needs seem to have been essentially free.

**“...the purchaser of the timber to pay therefore as hereinafter provided at the stumpage price of not less than One Dollar (\$1.00) per thousand feet for all merchantable timber cut from said land, except, as to logs for lumber necessary for houses and mill for use in connection with the milling operations; and the Eastern Oregon Land Company is willing to consent to such an arrangement on the terms hereinafter stated:....”<sup>15</sup>**

While the timber for the camp and mill may have been free, there were substantial costs associated with getting the operation up and running. Other writers have reported that “The Hudspeths, father and five sons, arrived in the early 1930’s with no money and no food.”<sup>16</sup> This was not the case. Some of the employees that came with Hudspeth were strapped for money and supplies, but not the Hudspeths themselves. The Truchots did help these people through the first winter at Camp Watson. But the Hudspeths had both money and food.

Money sufficient to get started building the sawmill and to make a return trip to Kiowa the winter following their arrival at Camp Watson. When the mill began cutting in earnest, Hudspeth may have been strapped for funds. His agreement with the Truchots and Eastern Oregon Land Company required that he pay in advance for 500,000 board feet blocks of timber. It is standard procedure to pay for timber before cutting but in Hudspeth’s case, it must have been a complicated financial matter. At this time he had no lumber sales to support his operating expenses—and his workers must have had little income.

The tightness of money can be seen in the difficulty employees had in cashing their checks.

It has been suggested by a number of people, but it has not been substantiated by official records, that Floreine’s father, Mr. Powell, invested heavily in Hudspeth’s operations, not only in Oregon, but also in Oklahoma. Some say that Mr. Powell continued to pump money into Hudspeth operations for many years.

What prompted John Hudspeth to start his operation at the old Camp Watson site will remain a mystery. It was a good choice; plenty of timber, friendly terrain, and sufficient water. At the time Hudspeth made his agreement to cut the Camp Watson timber, the road east from Mitchell to John Day still followed the old Dalles-Canyon City Military Wagon Road. This road ran east from Mitchell through Camp Watson and Antone to John Day. It was a dirt road that was very difficult to travel, especially in winter. The road dissected the military camp. The mill site is several hundred yards south of the military camp site. And although the records say that Hudspeth’s agreement was for timber located in Section 31, it appears that the site of the mill was just to the west of the north-south western boundary of Section 31. In the lower right corner of Section 36 you can see where two creeks join. The creek run-

15. Wheeler County Deed Record Book 21, Page 386, June 9, 1937.

16. Crook County Historical Society Field Trip Notes, Antone Ranch/Camp Watson; “Antone,” by Flora Harris, June 25, 1995, p. 17, especially p. 21. Mrs. Harris was merely repeating a rumor that has prevailed ever since the Hudspeths’ arrival in 1938.



When the caravan reached the site that was to become their home and business there was nothing; one old cabin existed. Above you see the town partially completed.

The lumber was cut on site using equipment brought from Oklahoma but before the sawmill was fully constructed. A diagram of the town is on the next page.

A small creek, Fort Creek, ran through the site and provided water for the sawmill and the town. As the creek entered the town from the south it was joined by a smaller but unnamed creek flowing from the southeast.

ning north-south is Fort Creek. This creek flows north out of the Ochoco Mountains as far as the military camp site where it turns in a north-westerly direction and eventually flows into Mountain Creek. The creek flowing north eastward out of Section 31 does not seem to be named.

Regardless of section numbers, the location of Hudspeth's camp is one of the most beautiful sites in the region (if you overlook the U.S. Forest

The town-mill site is several hundred yards south of the military camp, Camp Watson—about which much has been written and research till continues which involves something of a controversy: was Lieutenant Stephen Watson really ever buried there? Most evidence indicates that he was not.

South of the town, up a hill, is the old fort's cemetery where not only soldiers' graves can be found but also those of early pioneers. Land owners are no longer granting permission for the public to enter this area.

Service's clear cuts on the north slopes of the nearby Ochoco Mountains). When the Hudspeths arrived here the area was covered with large ponderosa pine trees. To the folks from Oklahoma (and Arkansas) the trees were huge; they had never seen trees this size. But back in those days the forest was relatively clear of underbrush; the spot looked, to the new arrivals, like a park. The size of the trees quickly became a problem for the

loggers: the trees were too large to be moved by the mules. Hudspeth had to quickly locate and buy a cat. He did.

Water from Fort Creek was diverted into a pond to hold the logs. That pond still exists today, but as a stock pond. Little other evidence of a logging operation remains. If one looks closely—and knows where to look—rubble from the boiler room (which Ira Shirley supervised) and charred sawdust and lumber from the burn pile can be located. At the south end of the site, among the encroaching sage brush, are the tongues of two log-hauling wagons. Because the wagons were essentially useless, given the large size of the trees, the loggers cut the spokes from the wheels and used them for wedges in falling the huge trees.

Scattered among the trees on the eastern side of the site one can find rubble of the simple houses which the folks built. Hudspeth provided the lumber, but the men had to build their own houses. The houses were simple; bat-and-board, single-wall construction. This didn't invite winter living—and few residents remained once the snow began to fall.

The camp had no electricity, save one house. No telephone service, no indoor plumbing. The one house with electricity belonged to the Duke Dotson family. Duke's house sat beside Fort Creek and he built a waterwheel to which he attached a generator. That was high living for those days in that place.

South of the mill site, was the old military fort, Camp Watson. This was in the mid- to late 1860s. The cemetery sits on a low hill at the foot of the Ochocos. There has been a lot of contro-

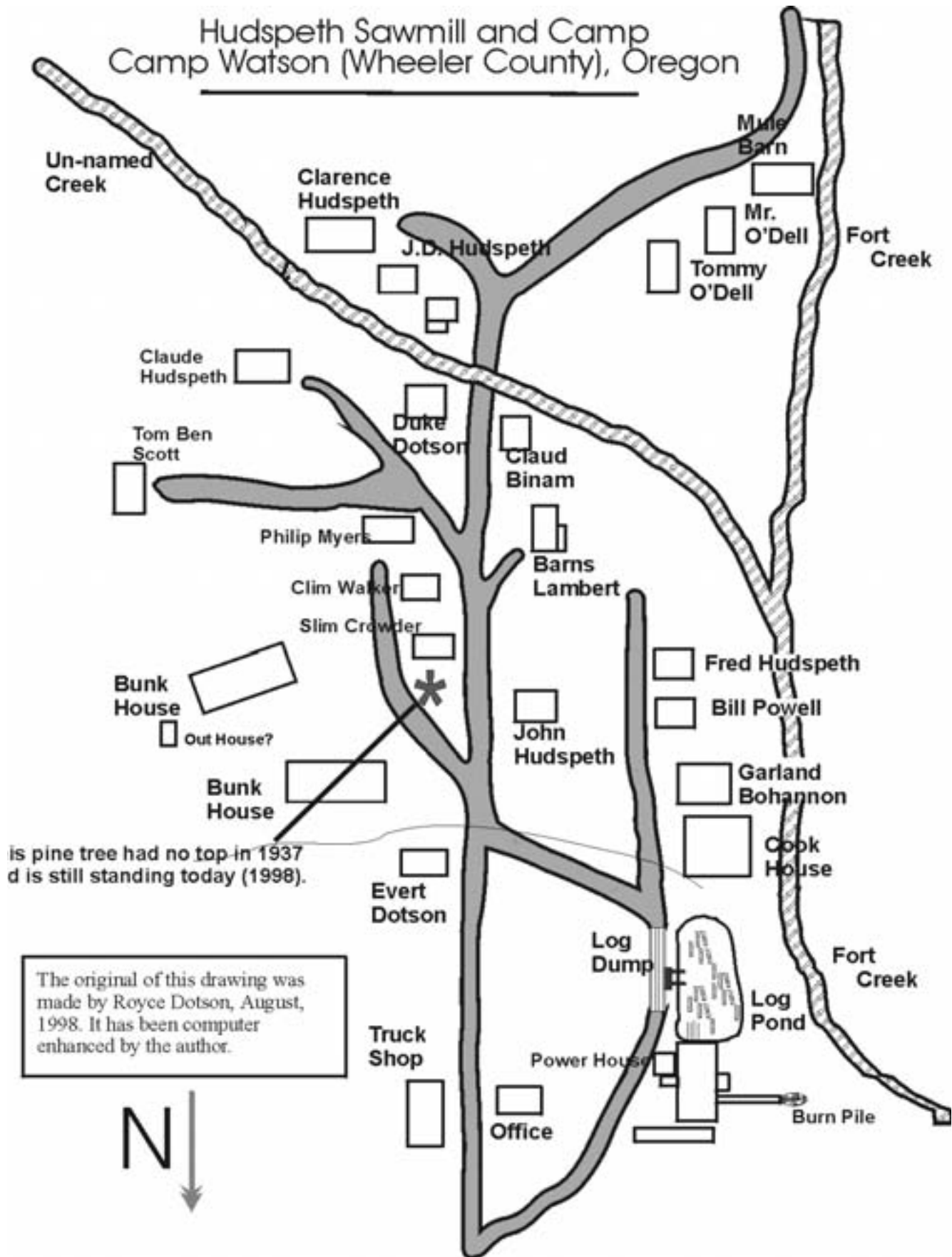
versy over the years about who is really buried here. That debate is left to others. Suffice it to say that in addition to some military grave markers there are some civilian pioneers buried here. It seems curious that the military would place their cemetery so far from the camp, located some half mile north.

The site today once again looks rather like a park. There is a lot of grass growing among the young trees. On a recent trip to the site, this writer accompanied several former residents of the camp. Two men were overheard to say, "This doesn't look like the place I remember. There are no large trees, only these skinny things." Times change.

Hudspeth continued to operate the Camp Watson mill, which was known as Hudspeth Sawmill Company, until about 1947. By 1947 the Hudspeth operations were well on their way to "empire" status with large sawmills at Bridge Creek, west of Mitchell, and the jewel of Hudspeth's sawmill operations at Prineville, Hudspeth Pine, Inc. operating.

One of the early arrivals at Camp Watson was the Duke Dotson family. The Dotsons had heard about Hudspeth's mill way back in Arkansas and they heard opportunity knock. They made the trip west and Hudspeth put them to work. Duke's wife, Chloe, was an amateur photographer and, thanks to her some wonderful photographs of Camp Watson survive. These photographs are more of camp life than mill operations. A selection of Chloe's photographs follow. Chloe also served as camp cook for awhile. The photos are from the collection of Royce Dotson, Chloe's son.

### Hudspeth Sawmill and Camp Camp Watson (Wheeler County), Oregon



This pine tree had no top in 1937 and is still standing today (1998).

The original of this drawing was made by Royce Dotson, August, 1998. It has been computer enhanced by the author.





Camp Watson sawmill's west side, looking east.



Oliver & Claude Binam, Chloie Dotson. Camp Watson wasn't all work. One time when JD was away the dancing took place in his house where the linoleum was slicker and better for dancing!