History was never of particular interest to me. Actually, I found it boring, extremely so. My family’s roots never seemed important either. I didn’t care where I was from or what my heritage was.

Then one day, in the summer of 1993, I noticed an announcement in the *Central Oregonian* that the Crook County Historical Society was sponsoring a tour of Summit Prairie. From my earliest memories of being on the Prairie I had wanted to know more about the place, especially about those houses that sat there like deserted islands on the sea. Why would anyone have built such grand houses in a place like Summit Prairie?

Come the day of the tour, I joined over 100 other vehicles in a caravan that stretched for miles. This turned out to be the most popular tour the Historical Society had ever conducted. I knew none of the “tourists” other than the people I had with me and I don’t think I spoke to anyone outside my group the entire day. But I did notice that a couple of people seemed to be doing a lot of explaining. I tried to stand close to these people and hear what they were saying. These knowledgeable people turned out to be Francis Juris, Denison Thomas, and Craig Woodward. No wonder they knew a lot; Francis is something of an expert on local history, as is Dr. Thomas, and Craig owned half the prairie—to say nothing of his own interest in local history.

Dr. Thomas was the Society’s president. I remember writing him a letter of thanks and somehow he recruited me to join the Society’s Board of Directors. My interest in local history—all history, actually—has grown from that day and continues even now.

About a year or two later I was talking with a friend and we wondered why no one had recorded the history of the region’s timber industry. We went to the A.R. Bowman Memorial Museum and asked the museum’s director, Gordon Gillespie, about the matter. As luck would have it, Gordon had just convinced the Historical Society’s directors to set aside one thousand dollars for just such a project. Because I was once again retired from regular employment, I could find no quick excuse when I was asked to coordinate the collection of Crook County’s timber history “from 1867 to the present.”

This effort was to be accomplished by an unknown group of people—none of whom had previous experience in collecting history. Since I had agreed to coordinate the project it was my task, first of all, to enlist some help. Before the data collectors could be assembled someone had to define a little more clearly the scope of what was to be accomplished.

Gordon Gillespie and a friend of mine (who shall remain nameless) agreed to help. The plan we devised seemed so simple at the time: interview about ten people familiar with the county’s timber industry and review all of the related documents held by the A.R. Bowman Memorial Museum. Put this collection of interviews and documents into a box and we would be done. Not a very complete—or satisfactory—plan. But that’s how we got started.

None of the three of us knew how to start. Somehow—through blind luck probably—I discovered Donna Collins who volunteered to pour through all of the documentation at the Museum that could possibly pertain to the timber industry. Donna was a fantastic find and she is a great detective; give her the name of a sawmill and she would track down everything the museum possessed on that operation.¹ Gordon and I made up

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¹ Using the Museum’s “master index”, a notebook listing sources; manually maintained then, computerized now.
a list of all of the sawmill names we knew (a rather puny list in retrospect) and the names of timber industry “big wigs.” Donna used these lists as her guide in collecting material.

While Donna was collecting written information I fumbled around trying to figure out how to conduct an interview; something I’d never done. And even if I had known how, who was I going to interview? A brief announcement on the local radio station and in the newspaper quickly took care of the who problem. We asked the public to call the museum and “nominate” people to be interviewed. We would have considered ourselves lucky to have received ten names; we received over thirty! And that was just the beginning. “Say, have you talked to….”

While the names were coming in, I met a woman in Bend that had been doing an interview project with former employees of the Brooks-Scanlon Lumber Company. Her name was Loretta Slepikas. She agreed to conduct the interviews (for a fee) if we would provide a list of questions. At this early point I couldn’t think of any meaningful questions to ask so I said, “Loretta, you’re better at this than I am, you make up the questions.” She started interviewing. Her first interview was with Carl Peterson, founder of Clear Pine Mouldings, Inc. of Prineville and, later, Bright Wood Corporation of Madras. Carl never thought small.

Loretta went on to interview a number of people. By the time Loretta had conducted her interviews, we were out of project funds (all four thousand dollars of it; the Oregon Community Foundation had donated an additional $3,000) so I recruited (again through great good fortune) Dr. Denison Thomas and Wayne Kee to do more interviews. This beginning two-man team grew to include Peggy Kasberger and myself. At last count, over 120 interviews have been conducted.

Somewhere along the way I got smart enough to create a list of thirteen basic questions the answers to which would give us the technical details about the many sawmills we were discovering. Each interview was tailored to the individual being interviewed and the personal story they had to tell. The team of interviewers have been responsible for collecting the oral history of Crook County’s timber industry—and that has been no small task.

Another “no small task” was transcribing those interviews from audio tape to computer disk. For the most part, the transcriptions were done by Naoma Nelson. Unfortunately Naoma did not live to see *Green Gold* in print. Wherever you are, Naoma, thank you for all the help you gave me and the work you contributed to this project. The transcribed interviews are available at the museum.

By the time Loretta had completed the first interviews and Donna had assembled the information that was available at the Museum, I realized we had a problem. First, the number of sawmills that had at one time or another been in operation was significantly higher than we expected. To date almost 500 timber industry operations have been identified—mostly sawmills.

A great source of information turned out to be the old Crook County newspaper files (now maintained on microfilm by the University of Oregon who provides a subscription service to which the Bowman Museum subscribes). Donna volunteered to start a review of the newspapers from the very first issue published in 1885 and work forward. The wealth of information Donna uncovered virtually poured out of her microfilm viewing machine. This information produced more and more leads resulting in a growing list of questions needing answers. This list of questions

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2. Those who take the time to review “The Sawmills of Green Gold Country” may disagree with my count. Included with sawmills are logging companies and log and lumber companies, moulding plants and other industry associated operations. The names of some company owners, William McMeekin is a good example, appear several times. I did this in an attempt to keep track of the various locations where operations were conducted. Others may have done this differently but at least I did it.
drew us to more and more people, resulting in the
large number of interviews that have been con-
ducted and a voluminous correspondence
between many people and myself. That corre-
spondence continues to bring in new information
even as I write this.

This gathering of information has been a huge
task for inexperienced people who all managed to
fall in love with the project. Rooting out historical
information seems to get under your skin and
once you’ve started it’s hard to stop. Peggy Kas-
berger told me recently that the two years she
worked on the project had been the happiest two
years of her life. The 12 years I’ve been at it have
been the most challenging, rewarding—and often
frustrating—of my life.

Most of the old newspapers have been
reviewed (and we didn’t limit ourselves to
Prineville either; I personally read the microfilm
for Blue Mountain Eagle, Burns’ Times-Herald,
and other Burns newspapers). Catherine May
joined Donna Collins in reading the Prineville
newspapers so we had information pouring from
two sources. Later, Yvonne Smith replaced
Catherine and Donna. Reading the newspapers
wasn’t all that we did.

When Donna or Catherine would come across
anything in the newspaper that was of interest to
the project they would make note of it. Later,
using a different machine, that information would
be printed out on paper, a process similar to pho-
tocopying. Typists would then take the “photo-
copy,” (usually of poor quality due to the age of
the newspapers when they were microfilmed) and
type the information into computer files. Almost
5,000 newspaper articles were identified and
most of those have been printed from microfilm
and most of those were typed into the computer.
This was not easy work.

While it wasn’t easy work it did provide an
invaluable database of information that was
searchable. If I wanted to find information about
Hawkins Brothers Sawmill, for example, I sim-
ply ask the computer, “Show me all you have on
Hawkins Brothers Sawmill.” This provides a ter-
rific research tool. That tool has been used in the
preparation of what you will read here.

A significant amount of time has been spent
reviewing public records. There just hasn’t been
time to exhaust this important but very time con-
suming work. Perhaps someone will come after
me and spend several years in various county
clerk’s vaults and dig out the facts which support
the information suggested here.

At a point about two year into the project there
was a major disagreement between the Historical
Society and me. The disagreement involved what
constituted enough research. Also, the historical
society felt I was spending too much money. By
this time $14,000 had been raised. When the His-
torical Society’s Board of Directors asked me to
prepare a budget for the completion of the
remaining newspaper articles I estimated 28,000
additional dollars. This amount worried some
directors and I was told to stop the newspaper
review effort. Like a spoiled child, I took my toys
and went home. I’ve been on my own since
although the historical society and museum con-
tinues to cooperate as long as it doesn’t involve
the expenditure of funds. 3

With no funds but my own I have continued.
My effort is not as grand—or organized—as it
was under the historical society. The newspaper
review effort would have ended with my depar-

3. I have sunk something over $20,000 into research and computer equipment and programs. I did this knowing it would
not be possible to recover the amount through book sales. Until early in 2003 the lowest bid I had received from a printer for
printing 400 copies of a book of approximately 400 pages was $14,000. No way was I going to sink an addition amount like
that into the project. Books would have had to sell for $35+ just to cover cost of printing. Now that same book can be printed
for about $5,000 and the books sell for about $15 (the book ended up being 416 pages). Long ago, out of thin air, a goal of
the sale of 400 copies of Green Gold equaled “success”. When 400 copies are sold I will happily retire as a “writer.” I’ve
never been comfortable with the terms “writer” or “author” yet when I consult the Oxford English Dictionary (which I
wouldn’t want to live without), I technically qualify as both. In my mind I remain simply a note-taker.
ture were it not for the wonderful and dedicated help of Yvonne Smith. We were determined to review all of those newspapers; a determination that we later modified a bit.

One last thing needs to be explained: the term “Crook County” has been applied rather loosely. The timber history of “OLD Crook County” would have included Deschutes and Jefferson counties plus part of Wheeler County since those counties were part of Crook County until sometime after the turn of the century. My rationale for adjusting the boundary line for “Green Gold Country” outward was: if an operation outside the political-geographic limits of Crook County significantly impacted Crook County’s economic development, that operation was included. That is why the operations at Mitchell, Grizzly, Snow Mountain, Izee, John Day, Burns and so on are included here.

The term “timber industry” can be misleading. Some people construe this to mean only large commercial operations such as Ochoco Lumber Company, Crown Pacific, Ltd., Pine Products Corporation, and so on. But the timber industry in Crook County included not only these historic operations but also many much smaller operations. I’ve been asked, “Why are you wasting your time on those small guys; they never amounted to anything?” Wrong! They did amount to something and I’m not wasting my time on them; they are a part of the timber industry’s history and I intend to record the efforts of those pioneer lumbermen just as completely—where I can—as the “biggies.”
Were it not for the small operators the biggies might never have gotten off the ground because without the small operators there would have been no settlements in Green Gold Country and without those settlements it is doubtful that the big operators could have been successful, at least not without a larger investment in start-up costs. The big sawmills didn’t get here until well after civilization had arrived and the basic transportation network was in place, put there by the early lumbermen.

And lastly, for me, “timber industry,” also includes lumber yards, trucking firms, and remanufacturing plants. Sadly, I have not taken the time to delve very deeply into these sorts of operations.

Edge of the Forest (above), this is a grayscale version of the book’s front cover. This site is where the defunct Oregon & Northwestern Railroad crosses the Silvies River some six or seven miles south of Seneca. On a beautiful spring day a few years ago, I made the drive from Burn to Seneca along U.S. Highway 395. The drive is beautiful and for much of the way it parallels the former railroad bed. On that first drive I missed this railroad bridge (must have been watching the road) and didn’t know of its existence until on a field trip with the students of Seneca School. We were on our way to view the railroad’s only tunnel and this was our first stop.

Seneca School has a very ambitious and vigorous history collection program. It involves all grades, K-8, and has been running for a number of years. The inspiration for this program, I’m told, was the Green Gold web site.

On a number of occasions I’ve been invited to join field trips and make presentations. This is the most outstanding group of students I’ve ever encountered (total enrollment hangs around 60 with a teaching staff of five). Visiting them is pure joy, as is visiting Seneca. While sleeping in a log cabin I can’t help but feel the area’s history swirling about.
Another forest edge: Camp 1

On the south edge of the meadow at Bear Valley, about five road miles from Seneca, is what must have been the entrance to Camp 1. The photographer (me) was facing almost east when the above was snapped.

Where you see rubble is where the sawmill sat. This site was introduced to me, once again, by the students of Seneca School. After the short bus ride we left the bus and headed for the shade that would be behind the photographer where we had a picnic lunch. Keeping 60 students orderly requires skill but the staff performed well and everyone enjoyed their lunch. We had a guide for this tour, Dennis Smith of Canyon City; and Sonny Rider of Seneca. Dennis’ extensive research of Camp 1 prepared him so he could answer almost every question the students asked. Sonny grew up in Seneca and knew the area very well.

Camp 1 was a small town, a town before Seneca was built. It fed and sheltered the unknown numbers of men that lived in the woods cutting the trees and turning them into beams, lumber, but most importantly, railroad ties.

There was a large number of bunk houses (photos of them can be seen elsewhere in this book) for the men without families, and a large kitchen, dining room, and bathing facilities. The men with families had “cottages” in the woods. Something that was of great interest to the students was the “left overs” from this early family living. There appears that there was no form of trash collection; much of it still sits on the forest floor.

It is regretful that there are insufficient pages here to fully recount the details surrounding Camp 1 (never Camp One, just Camp 1. There was never a Camp 2).