

The Wallowa History Center works to save the memories, stories, and photographs that define the history and culture of the places we call home.

June 2004

Maxville: A Logging Camp

By Dale Victor

Maxville was a logging camp owned by Bowman-Hicks Lumber Company. At the time it was started J.D. McMillan was the superintendent and it was suggested that the first part of McMillan be used to name the Community, Maxville. In 1908 the railroad was extended from Elgin to Joseph. This opened up a vast area of Virgin Pine Timber. The Palmer Lumber Company who had operations in Union Co. began extending their operations to Wallowa County. They began by buying up homesteads for the timber on them. In 1913 Frank Victor didn't sell his homestead to Palmer but sold Palmer a 20 year lease on his timber on Smith Mountain. The timber was near to where Camp 5 was built. In 1910 the Palmer Lumber Co. hired Morrison-Knudsen to construct a rail line from a siding about two miles up the Wallowa River from its junction with the Grande Ronde River. This siding was named Vincent, named for Vincent Palmer. From here a track was built up Howard Creek for a distance of five miles to a logging camp called Camp Five. The last three miles was a 6% grade. From here branch lines were extended to other locations.



McGiffert Loader

Palmer Lumber Co. used steam powered donkey skidders, but horses were used to skid logs to where the donkey engines could reach them. The logs were loaded on a train and shipped to the mill. The company had six locomotives. One of these was a Shay which had which had a weight of 110 tons. The Shay was gear driven and was used on steep grades. The small locomotives, which were of 35 to 70 tons were used to bring the logs from spurs to the yards at Camp 5. This is where the shay took over. The shay would hook onto 20 loaded double-deck of cars and start down the 6% grade to Vincent. The logs and cars were put on a siding and the shay returned for another load. Camp 5 not only had a machine shop but a roundhouse also. They had 4 donkey engines skidding and loading logs.

In 1919 the company went to Spokane and purchased a McGiffert loader. It was said to be the largest loader built. Only two were built. It stood on stilts and this huge machine straddled the track and the train passed under it when being loaded. It could also reach out 1/4 mile and skid logs to be loaded. To move to a new place the loader was let down on the track and moved under its own power. It proved to be too difficult to move and repair and was not a success.

In 1922 Bowman Hicks a Lumber Co. from Louisiana purchased the Palmer Lumber Co. operation at Camp 5. This was the only temporary camp so Bowman-Hicks began looking for a permanent camp. They sent Don Riggle who was raised on Smith Mountain along with Joner Trump and John Carper to find a new location. This location must be large enough for a town of 4 to 5 hundred people, level enough for train tracks, and water for the town and locomotives. Don Riggle knew of such a place, the Bishop Meadows.



Herman Anderson

The Bishop Meadows were large and flat with a stream that could be dammed up creating a pond for water. In 1923 the Co. began construction of Maxville. The railroad workers lived in cars and tents until cabins were built. A large log building was the first to be constructed. In September the post office was moved from Camp 5 to Maxville. By the end of the year the town, a school, a bunk house and mess hall for the 80 single workers. Housing was built for the married men and families. It also had a baseball field, a swimming hole, a doctor office and running water.



Adalee Anderson

In 1924 Bowman-Hicks purchased the Nibley-Mimnaugh Mill in Wallowa and extended it's railroad line to Wallowa, a distance of 16 miles. Eight steam locomotives began hauling logs from the Maxville area to Wallowa. In 1922 Camp 5 was only a temporary camp so many men left their families behind until a permanent camp was established. One of these workers was Herman Anderson. He left his wife Adelee and his 3 girls, Vivian, Leona, and Ione in Louisiana. In 1923 when Maxville was established he sent for them. They went by train to Elgin where they were met by a company speeder. They and all the luggage was loaded on the speeder and they traveled 20 miles to Camp 5. It was an experience they never forgot. Vivian who is 89 years old still has memory of the ride. Adalee said that the most happy years of her life was spent at Maxville. Her three daughters attended school there. In 1925 her son Kenneth was born at Maxville.

Herman was a log cutter and this usually required a partner. They usually got along OK if one didn't ride the saw. One day Herman got a new partner who had a tendency to ride the saw. When he accused him of it he denied it. Herman got mad and said he was quitting. They then decided to divide the equipment. The only thing they didn't have 2 of was the saw. When his partner asked about it, Herman said he would take care of it. He laid the saw on a large pine stump, took his ax and cut it in two. 20 years later Herman's 1/2 of the saw was still on the stump which was near the Victor Meadows.

Herman and his family then moved to Wallowa. Here a daughter, Vera Jeane was born. After moving to Wallowa his work took him away from home. He was only home on weekends. He and his partner, Shorty Barnett worked in the woods as far as Kinzua, Oregon. In the 1940s they were cutting on U.S. Forest Service Land. The snow was deep and the ground steep. They cut timber all winter and it was after the snow melted that an inspector came by to measure the height of the stumps. Instead of measuring the high and low sides and take an average measurement he only took from the low side of the ground and said the stumps were too high and all stumps had to be cut off. They were told if they didn't cut the stumps they would never cut another log on Forest Land. They went back and cut 1 to 2 inches off every stump. Herman said he would never cut another log and quit. He then got a night watching job at the Little Duck Saw Mill in Wallowa. He retired in 1949 and lived out his life in Wallowa. In 1948 I married his daughter Vera Jeane and we have enjoyed more than 55 years of married life, which includes our daughter Linda who was born December 7th, 1949.

In 1922 when Bowman-Hicks took over the Camp 5 operation they let a contract to furnish meat, milk, and cream for the cookhouse, which furnished meals to the single workers. The contract was given to my dad, Alva Victor. He built a slaughter house and butchered own beef and hogs. He purchased a new Model T truck in Elgin and then hired his brother-in-law Harold Carroll to help him. At first he delivered to Camp 5 then to Maxville in 1923.

Alva met many interesting people. The cook that ran the cookhouse always had a fresh bake pie for him when he arrived. He also kept asking Alva to take him fishing. One day my dad told him to get a fishing outfit because he was taking him fishing over the weekend. They drove down the Imnaha River to the Cow Creek Bridge and then walked the 5 miles to Snake River. They had little luck until they saw a sturgeon laying on a ledge in about 3 feet of water. The sturgeon was about 7 feet in length. The cook could not get

the sturgeon to bite so my dad told him to put on a large hook and snag it. After tries he snagged it. He gave several hard jerks on the line but the sturgeon gave no response. After several minutes the sturgeon decided to head for deeper water. With him it took one half of his fish pole also his hook and line. The cook said that he had enough of fishing and never again asked my dad to take him fishing, but he still had a fresh baked pie when he arrived at Maxville. My dad said that the cook baked the best pie that he had ever eaten.

Jim Crowley was manager for Palmer Lumber, when they sold to Bowman-Hicks he was made wood boss. He was a big rough talking Irishman. He was liked by everyone. Two young men showed up one day wanting to cut logs. He asked if they had cut logs before and they said they had. He gave them a set of tools and an 8 foot measuring stick. That night he asked how many logs they cut. It was more than anyone else. He then found that they were 8 foot logs instead of 16 foot. Jim's remark was "Be jabbers me lads its best time you turn in your tools, get your pay, and have a good meal and then go down the road." When Jim left Maxville he opened a business in Elgin. Alva's father. Frank Victor died in 1936 and was buried in Elgin. The only man to close his business for his funeral was Jim Crowley.

Morrison-Knudson had the contract with both Palmer Lumber and Bowman-Hicks to build their train tracks. Morrison and his mother lived at Maxville. His mother was always bragging on her son. She said that he was only 42 and was already a millionaire. One day she asked if my dad would do her a favor, he said he would. She said that she was low on bathroom tissue and would he stop at Shells and get her a supply. On his next trip instead of going to Shells he stopped and picked a bunch of mullen leaves, put them in a box, and told her that Shells were out of tissue but would have a new supply in time for his next trip. Her response was "Thank you Mr. Victor, thank you Mr. Victor." On his next trip he had a supply of tissue for her. After leaving Maxville Morrison-Knudson became one of the largest construction companies in the United States.

In 1926 my younger brother was born, but my parents had not decided on a name. On one of Alva's trips the cook said that he missed a good fight last Saturday night. Most of the fights were between railroad workers and log cutters. After the fight began a little man jumped up and said "Deal me a hand boys I am a railroad man, my name is Joe-Joe Edwards and I can lick any man in the house. A big lumberjack then laid him out with one blow. When my father got home he told my mother that he had a name for their son and it was Joe-Joe. After some time the second Joe was dropped and he became just Joe. Also while my father was working at Maxville my sister Wenonah was born.

Alva didn't renew his contract for 1927. He was tired of fighting mud in Spring and Fall, dust in the summer and snow in the winter. About three or four months in the winter he had to use a sled to deliver his produce to Maxville.

Maxville began to decline after the 1929 Depression. The limber market slowed down and people began leaving Maxville and moving to Wallowa and other towns. In 1930 they began pulling the tracks and building roads on the grades. In 1933 Maxville closed, and some cabins are moved to Wallowa. The remains of some of the cabins can still be found today if you know where to look.

In the winter of 1936 & 1937 my father and crew began loading steel at the mill in Wallowa. This steel was from the railroad tracks from the Maxville operation. They loaded one car of spikes, one car of steel tie plates and a number of car loads steel rails and cut up locomotives. This was shipped to Japan and they returned the favor at Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941.



Plate from
Maxville dining hall

Soon after the Great Depression hit the U.S. in 1929, the lumber market began to decline, and people began leaving Maxville. One of the first businesses to close was the dining room of the Maxville Hotel.

Vivian and Ione Anderson were working at the dining room when it closed. The hotel had no money to pay them, so they were paid with dishes. Part of Vivian's pay was a large bowl, seen here.

This bowl has been in her family for seventy-five years and is still used by her granddaughter, Susan James of Portland, Oregon.

Wallowa

History

Preserving Our Past for the Future

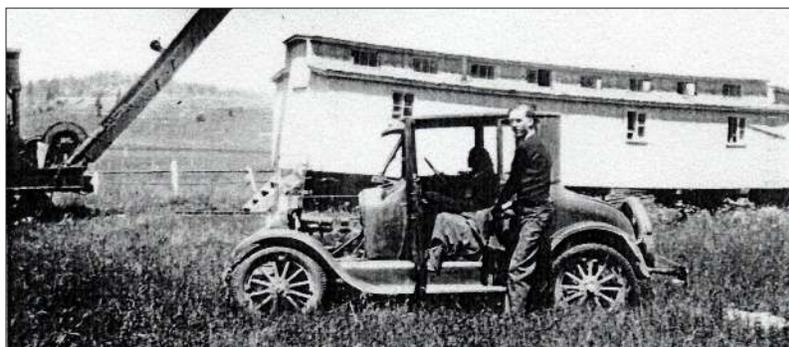
Center

Wallowa History Center
PO Box 486
Wallowa, Oregon 97885
E-mail: mburrows@eoni.com

*As a member you receive three free copies of
historical photographs from our archives, and
10% off your purchase of regional history
books.*

Today the only thing left at Maxville is a pond and the large log house. Instead of the sound of children swimming you hear the sound of loons in the water and yellow winged blackbirds singing in the cattails. The Bishop Meadows look the same as it did 80 years ago. You see deer, elk, coyote, and you may also spot a sandhill crane. Gone forever, sounds the toot of whistlepunks signal to the donkey operator. Stop, go ahead or back up. The sound of a locomotive pulling a string of loaded cars. The sound of a crosscut saw, the ring of an ax.

Gone forever is the town of Maxville and all that remains is a memory. Let's not let this memory die.



Victor hot rod at Bishop Meadows.
Maxville house in background.

*Thanks to Ron and Celine Gay
for providing the space
for the Wallowa History Center.*