

## The Other Gold of Cottage Grove

By K. Myers

Cottage Grove was originally a gold town. In many ways it continued to be a gold town long after mining slowed down. Green gold, timber, to be exact as logging and mills replace metal gold with the green trees of Oregon.



One article can not cover the rich history of logging in the Cottage Grove area. One book, *Green Gold*, identifies over 110 mills that existed in or around Cottage Grove. We will follow the journey of one mill, started by J.I. Jones, grown by Booth-Kelly, and sold to Weyerhaeuser.



The first sawmill in the Cottage Grove area was built west of Silk Creek in 1857 by Mr. Harvey Hazelton. A few years earlier, in 1853, settlers in Dorena put together a rudimentary sawmill to provide lumber for their homes. It was not until approximately 1895 that J.I. Jones built his sawmill near Saginaw. J.I. Jones also owned a mill in Disston. Jones' Saginaw mill was one of the largest in the area and included a six-mile flume to move timber.

In 1898, Robert A. Booth and brothers George and Tom Kelly joined forces to create the Booth-Kelly Lumber Company purchasing J.I. Jones Mill in Saginaw. *Golden Was the Past* states the sale price at \$70,000 in 1898, though some sources state the price as high as \$500,000. Jones was only 32 years old.

Booth-Kelly continued to expand, by 1899 the sawmill was running on electricity, allowing year-long production. In 1899 Booth-Kelly bought a mill in Coburg, began



to buy **tracts** of timber at a scale larger than ever before, and built a third mill. By May 4th of 1899, the company's stock was 1,000,000 dollars.

by 1922 the operation was employing the most employees it ever had or would, 825 men were on the payroll.

Working conditions in the late 19th and early 20th century included 10-12 hour days, 6 days a week at around a dollar a day. Men lived in bunkhouses then dormitories, with 2 men to a room. Living conditions improved in the first years of the 20th century with logging camps. Cabins were constructed for men with families, allowing families to live together near the worksite. These camps would often have their own small store, school, and church services. A 1905 diary from a logger's wife, Flora Hills, read "Had a big venison feed. Fried venison, boiled potatoes and gravy. Loggers will eat anything if it has enough gravy on it."

Cookhouse at Booth-Kelly in Saginaw



The logging industry has had its ups and downs right along with the rest of the economy. Technology brought progress and the passage of time saw changes in ownership. In 1958, Georgia Pacific bought out Booth-Kelly's Cottage Grove operation. Then, around 1985, Weyerhaeuser bought out Georgia Pacific. Green gold remains a large part of many people's lives, and will very likely continue to be for a long time.

#### Discussion Points

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1. Consider and compare life in bunkhouses, dormitories, and cabins in the early 1900's.
  2. Why does the author call timber Cottage Grove's "other gold"?
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#### Vocabulary

Flume: a deep narrow channel or ravine with a stream running through it, an artificial channel conveying water, typically used for transporting logs or timber

Rudimentary: basic or simple; not very developed or advanced

Tract: an expanse or area of land, water, etc.; region; stretch

