

THE CAMAS CREEK TIMBER SALE AND THE MILTON BOX COMPANY

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In anticipation of an informal application by the Mt. Emily Lumber Company, whose office and mill were located at La Grande, Oregon, for the purchase of Government timber located in the Camas Creek area of the Umatilla National Forest, a timber survey project was authorized and field work completed during the fall of 1930 and the summer of 1931.

The survey area included lands now administered by the Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman national forests. The eastern portion of the survey area contained parts of the Starkey Experimental Forest and an area north of Frog Heaven Meadow in the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. Most of the survey area (western two-thirds) encompassed lands now administered by the Umatilla National Forest, including a small tract southeast of Ukiah near Hello Boy Spring.

It is interesting that just prior to the 1931 field season, the Forest Service entered into an agreement with the Mt. Emily Lumber Company to map their patented (private) lands within the survey area, for which the Forest Service was paid 4 cents per acre.

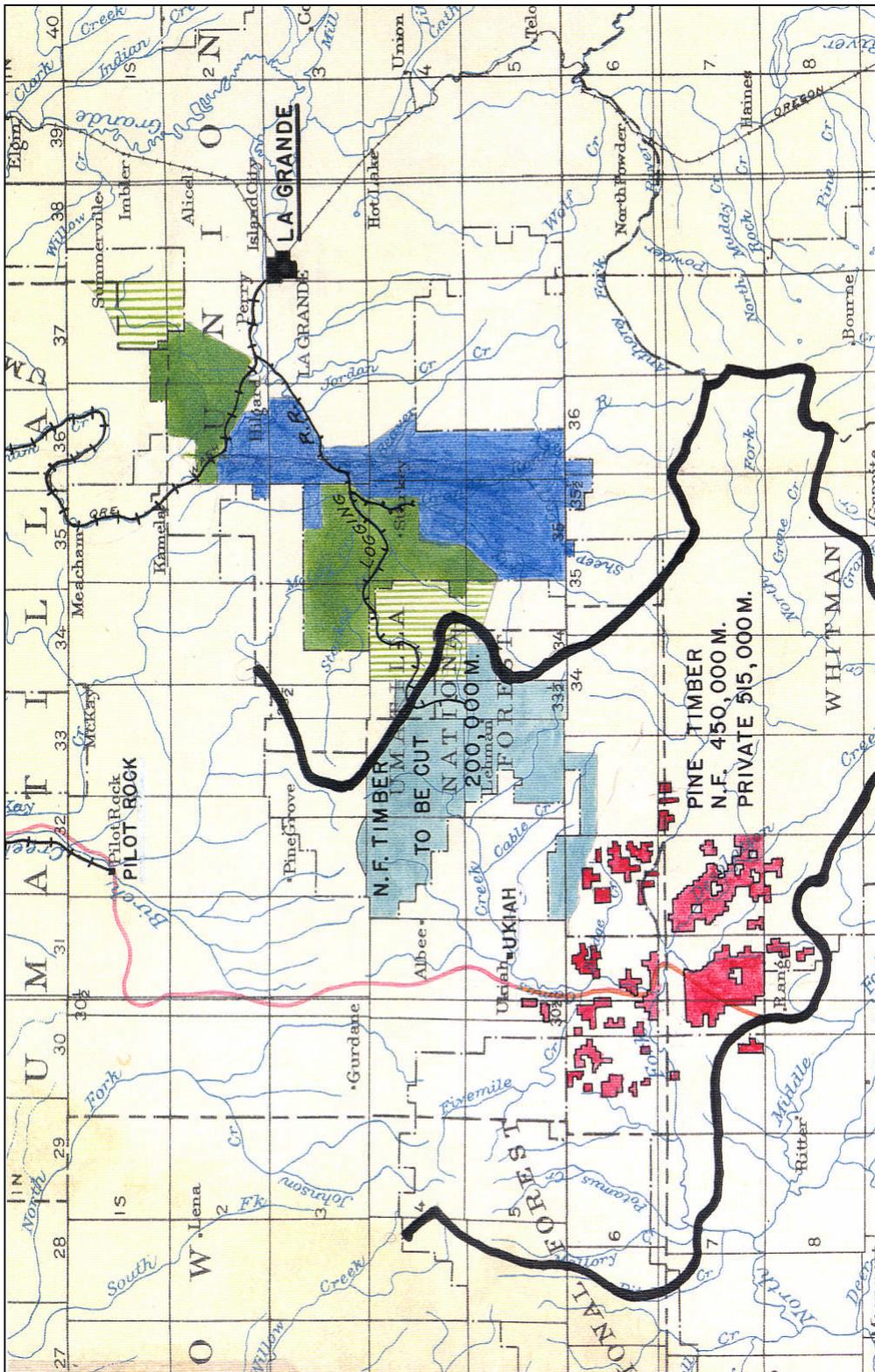
Survey work was completed by a large crew of estimators, most of whom were forestry students or recent forestry graduates from Iowa State College, Oregon Agricultural College, New York State College, University of Minnesota, University of Washington, Washington State College, Royal School of Forestry in Sweden, and several others.

The Camas Creek timber sale contained 221,308,000 board feet of national forest timber located on the Umatilla National Forest (see map on next page). The sale covered an area of about 69,645 acres in the watersheds of Camas and Meadow Creeks, with the western boundary of the unit being about 10 miles east of Ukiah, Oregon.

Timber on the Camas Creek unit consisted of a mixed stand of ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, western larch, lodgepole pine, and other species. All of the advertised volume was ponderosa pine; cutting of other species was optional and at the discretion of the purchaser.

The Camas Creek timber sale prospectus was dated August 7, 1937; the sale contract would require that all volume be removed by November 30, 1955. The appraisal report indicates that the timber sale and prospectus resulted from an informal application by the Mt. Emily Lumber Company of La Grande (dated March 4, 1937) requesting "the remaining National Forest saw timber within the Camas Creek Block of the Umatilla National Forest."

As a result of this request, a meeting was held on June 3, 1937 in Burns, Oregon, and it was attended by a representative from the Washington Office of the Forest Service (E.E. Carter), the Regional Forester of Region 6 (C.J. Buck), two other representatives from the Regional Office, and several representatives of the Mt. Emily Lumber Company. This meeting ultimately resulted in the preparation and distribution of the prospectus for a new timber sale.



Vicinity map for the Camas Creek timber sale (prepared in 1937), showing the sale area (light blue), present and past sales (green hatching), Mt. Emily Lumber Company logged lands (solid green), Mt. Emily timberlands (dark blue), and private pine timberlands (red). The Mt. Emily logging railroad is also shown.

Calculations in the timber appraisal report show that the sustained yield for the Camas Creek block was 13,780,000 board feet per year, which means that the Camas Creek timber sale represented an “over-cut” of 71,100,000 board feet for a five-year period.

The Mt. Emily Lumber Company was formed principally by the Stange and Kinzel families, successful lumber operators from Wisconsin. They made heavy investments in the Grande Ronde Working Circle in 1912 and 1913. In 1925, they constructed a modern, 3-band sawmill and drying facility, along with a complete remanufacturing and finishing plant, at La Grande. The rated capacity of their sawmill and associated operations was 50 million board feet per year.

At the time of the appraisal report, the Mt. Emily Lumber Company had been operating in the Grande Ronde Working Circle for 8½ years, with about half of the volume coming off their own lands and the remainder from national forest lands located east of the proposed Camas Creek timber sale.

The Mt. Emily Lumber Company used horse teams to skid and bunch logs to truck roads except for uphill skids, which were completed using tractors. Tractor technology became widely available around 1930 but it was expensive, so horses and high-wheeled arches continued to be used on flat areas because they were a cheaper alternative there. Truck roads were used to transport logs to the company’s mainline logging railroad, which was then used to transfer logs to Union Pacific’s line at Hilgard for eventual delivery to the sawmill in La Grande.



When the Camas Creek timber sale was finally advertised in the fall of 1937, the high bidder was not the Mt. Emily Lumber Company but the Milton Box Company of Milton, Oregon, who outbid their competitor by \$0.16 per thousand board feet. This unexpected outcome quickly resulted in a storm of protest and a controversial situation.

After the timber sale was awarded to the Milton Box Company, there was an immediate reaction in the form of memos, letters, and petitions prepared by local businessmen and civic leaders describing the importance of the Mt. Emily Lumber Company to the tax base and economy of La Grande and the Grande Ronde Valley specifically, and to northeastern Oregon generally.

In 1935, after 28 years of operation, the prosperous Milton Box Factory began seeking a new location closer to its timber source in southern Umatilla County. A committee of Pendleton businessmen invited the Harris brothers (Clyde and Burdette), who owned the factory, to consider Pendleton as their new location. After three years of negotiation, the city of Pendleton offered the brothers a free building site and a \$10,000 cash incentive to make the move.

After acquiring the Camas Creek timber sale, the Harris brothers decided to accept Pendleton's offer, and they began construction of Harris Pine Mills in 1938. The Harris Pine Mills officially opened on May 8, 1940 on a site occupied today (in part) by the Pendleton Wal-Mart store.

The Harris Pine Mills was one of the most modern ones of its kind in the western United States, producing 75,000 board feet of lumber in the sawmill, and 60,000 board feet in the box factory, per 8-hour work shift.

Harris Pine Mills quickly became known for its furniture, which could not be produced fast enough to meet demand. They eventually developed 16 fabrication plants across the country to make hardwood, pine, and redwood furniture. Harris Pine Mills was also known for its sash and door stock, along with many different types of boxes produced for fruit growers in the Yakima, Walla Walla, and Hood River valleys.

Clyde Harris and his wife Mary made national news in 1951 when they donated the Harris Pine Mills to the Seventh Day Adventist Church, who continued to operate it until its closure in June, 1991.

Sources

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