

Pining for a little Harris history ?



LEFT: The "Harris Line" featured functional furniture, including this design marketed as ideal for bedrooms or dining rooms.

BELOW: An aerial photo looking north of Harris Pine Mills shortly after the business was incorporated in 1940. The plant obtained its timber from a large tract purchased from the government in the Camas Creek district near Ukiah.

Contributed photos

■ Harris Pine Mills was once a modern, prosperous operation

By PHIL HODGEN
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PENDLETON — When the prospering Milton Box Factory began seeking a new location closer to its timber source in southern Umatilla County after 28 years of operation in 1935, a committee of Pendleton businessmen invited the Harris Brothers, Clyde and Burdette, who owned the factory, to consider their community.

A glimpse of yesterday



Clyde Harris

as well as enough second growth for another 30 years of manufacturing.

Construction of the plant began in 1938, eventually occupying 36 acres and employing approximately 200 workers in addition to those in the woods operation.

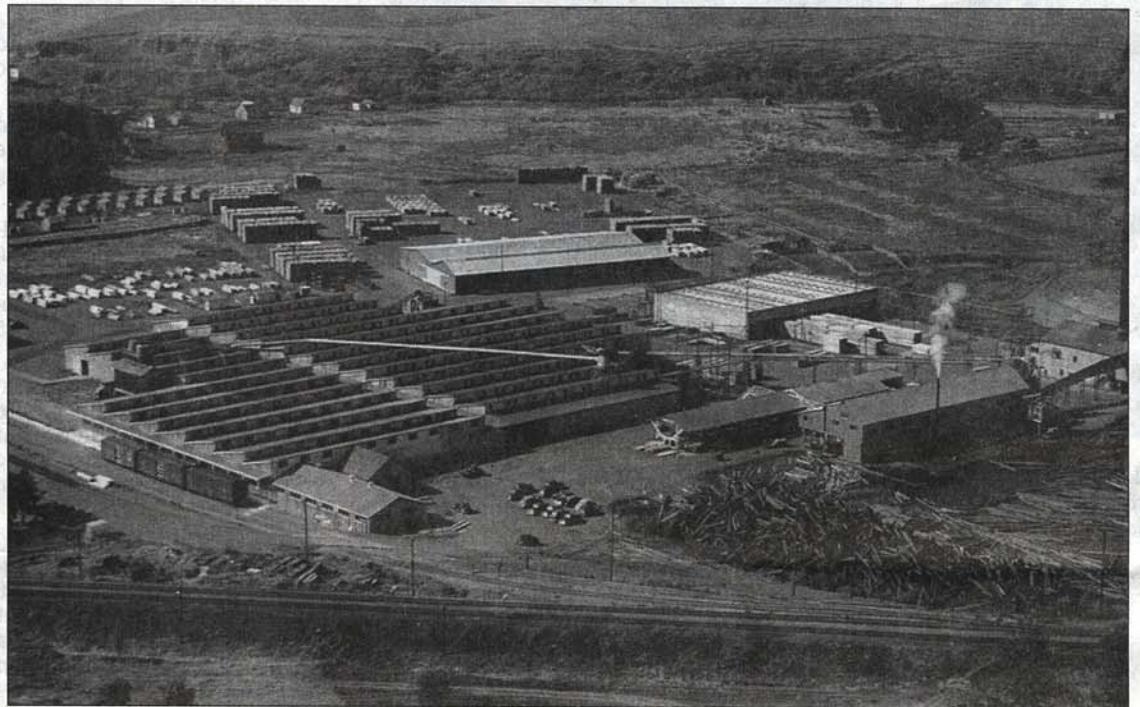
On May 8, 1940, Harris Pine Mills, Inc. celebrated the official opening of its new plant on property that is occupied today by the Pendleton Wal-Mart store.

The mill was one of the most modern of its kind in the West, producing 75,000 feet of lumber in the sawmill and 60,000 feet in the box factory in an eight-hour shift.

The power plant, operated on hog-fuel and mill by-products, was capable of producing 2,000 horsepower both in steam and electric generation.

The smokestack was seven feet in diameter and 204 feet high. The log pond, shaped roughly like a flatiron, had a capacity of 3,000,000 feet of

After three years of negotiations, the city offered the brothers a free site and \$10,000 to make the move. At the same time, authorities with the Umatilla National Forest endorsed the offer, saying there was sufficient timber to provide old-growth cutting for six decades



logs by decking.

Clyde Harris, who would buy out his brother in 1942, operated the saw that cut the first log on Christmas eve, 1939.

Company rules required workers to not engage in profanity or the use of tobacco or intoxicants. The facility would also be closed on Saturdays per requirements of Harris' Seventh Day Adventist faith.

For a few years, furniture manufacturing was only a sideline for the company, producing \$12,000 to \$15,000 a month. But, as the output gained popularity, inquiries and demand for considerable quantities of the quality furniture grew. Harris concluded that furniture production needed to expand rapidly — a program that he said, at times, took his breath away.

"Public demand for our furniture dictated growth of our business almost from the beginning," Harris explained at the time. "We didn't spend any money on advertising. Our product did that for us."

It began with an assembly plant in Alexandria, Virginia and grew to 16 across the United States fabricating quality hardwood, pine and redwood furniture. A monthly \$12,500 payroll grew to \$3,000,000 annually.

During the growth years Harris returned all company profits into plant expansion and timber — something largely unheard of in wood manufacturing in the Northwest.

When Harris and his wife Mary made national news in 1951 by donating Harris Pine Mills to the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the multi-million dollar gift brought Charles Nagele, sent by the church, to town.

Agreeing on mass production processes, Harris and Nagele expanded lumber products to include sash and door stock and multiple types of boxes, all printed with individual stamps. The boxes were shipped to the Yakima, Walla Walla and Hood River valleys and the lumber to areas east of Chicago.

Harris also became wealthy from feed mill, wheat and pea ranches and other activities, all of which he gave to the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

Encroaching challenges to the timber industry, however, exacted a toll on the company in later years. After a series of attempted turnarounds and bankruptcies, the last owner, Ron Waldquist, liquidated the business in June, 1991. Buildings were gradually dismantled and the equipment was auctioned to other interests.

The Pendleton City council rezoned the 68 acres owned by the Harris foundation and Louisiana Pacific from light industrial to central commercial.

Thanks to Harris Pine Historian Jim Wells and others the unique relationship between the church and the business has been kept alive through reunions of Harris workers, the Seventh Day Adventist Church and Harris Junior Academy.

Another weekend to reminisce will take place Aug. 11-13 when a homecoming for the present and former church family, those who attended Pendleton Junior Academy and Harris Junior Academy, and all friends of the mills welcome former pastor Duane McKey, pastor at the Pendleton church shortly after the mills were closed in 1986.

Music, food, and special programs, including a panoramic display of Harris history, are planned.

For more information contact Jim Wells at 276-0172 or the church office at 276-0882.

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