

Troubles Encountered in Effort to Build Flume

One of the important chapters in early Walla Walla history — and certainly one of the most dramatic — concerns early big-scale efforts to supply the then young town of Walla Walla with an adequate supply of wood for fuel and lumber for building purposes.

Huge outlay of capital, frequent frustrations, heartaches and headaches, topped off with realistic rebellions that approached mob violence and created general excitement, were incidents involved.

The pressing need for wood and lumber in quantity had been recognized in the late 1860's by such men as Dr. D. S. Baker. He wisely visioned the Mill creek watershed as a logical source for such commodities.

Railroad Needs First

However, construction of the Baker railroad out of Wallula became more pressing as time went on than the wood project, and Dr. Baker did not undertake the Mill creek project until after the sale of the Baker railroad in 1878-79 to the O. R. & N. company and Henry Villard.

A summary of this exciting chapter of Walla Walla history is herewith appended, in condensed form from a paper prepared and read by D. Frank Baker some years ago, and the following text is essentially Baker's:

Small Mill Acquired

When Dr. Baker resumed active development of the Mill creek project, there was a small saw mill on Mill creek just above the mouth of Tiger canyon, owned by Shellworth and Cooper. This was purchased, together with what land they owned, and, with the assistance of an engineer and a promoter named Simmons, about 4,000 acres of timber land were acquired. This was the main body of timber in the watersheds of Henry,

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Webb, China and Tiger canyons. The merchantable timber consisted of yellow and bull pine, tamarack, red and white fir.

The Shellworth mill was rebuilt. New saws and other machinery installed; a dam was constructed, giving a drop of 12 feet; a LaFelle water wheel furnished power.

The plan was to deliver lumber and cordwood to Walla Walla by means of a large flume. Fifty thousand feet of flume lumber was gotten out first. The main flume had 32-inch sides, making the V-flume about 3½ feet across the top. The sides were 1½-inch lumber. To keep the flume on even grade, there was needed many trestles and some cuts. The flume required 66,000 board feet to the mile and there were 12 miles of the main flume constructed.

In addition, there was one mile of two-foot flume up Henry canyon; 2½ miles of similar flume up Tiger canyon; a little more than a mile of 16-inch flume up China

canyon; 1¼ miles of 16-inch flume up the left-hand fork of Tiger canyon. The flume cost \$2,000 per mile.

A portable steam mill was installed at the forks of the right-hand Tiger canyon.

Rights of Way Troubles

There was no trouble securing rights of way for the main flume to a point near Blue creek. From that point on the land owners all said they did not want the flume to go through their land, and refused to enter into any agreements, or submit the matter to arbitration. One owner twice ran the surveyor off his place.

When it was found that they could not come to an understanding, the mill company, which was incorporated as the Mill Creek Flume and Manufacturing company, began condemnation proceedings in the territorial district court. Work on the flume stopped until the court overruled the demurrer to the complaint, and held the company had a right to secure rights of way by condemnation. Work was then resumed, the juries to award damages in due time. This was not done without open resistance.

It is now admitted that the landowners had some reason to object to the flume, which was often an unsightly affair. It divided some farms with high trestles. One claim which now seems odd in face of the fact that city of Walla Walla largely relies on Mill creek for its domestic water, contended that the flume would reduce the water in Mill creek to such an extent that trees along the creek bottom would die for lack of moisture.

Dudley Was Boss

The boss of the construction crew was an honest, dependable and efficient Scotchman named Dudley. He was heavyset and powerful; peaceable but courageous.

On one place the work was interfered with by the owner and a large number of sympathizers armed with guns, who surrounded the workmen and ordered them off the place. An injunction was secured from Judge Wingard and the owner arrested for contempt. That ended that episode, but the next landowner was still more belligerent.

Cunning Helps Boss

This man warned the workmen to keep off his place. At the appointed hour Dudley and his men approached the fence and the owner came out to meet them. Dudley had instructed his men that when he placed his hands on the fence, that was a signal for them to tip over the fence and proceed with their work.

When the signal was given the owner struck at the hand with a thorn club and smashed Dudley's thumb. His assailant then stepped back, caught his heel on a root, fell over backwards. That calmed

him for that day and the work proceeded.

Armed Men Appear

The next noon, when half the crew was at lunch, the owner appeared again with 50 armed men and a lawyer. The lawyer read a lecture, warning the men to keep off.

As the company wanted no blood shed, work was discontinued until the jury awarded damages. Accordingly, operations were confined to sawing lumber until the first damages were awarded. The owner in that case had asked for \$2,000 got \$450.

Build Flume Destroyed

In the meantime, the next owner and his friends had cut down a half mile of flume that had been built on his place. He threatened force but finally accepted the jury award, for damages, and showed his good intentions by giving a pair of fine plymough rock chickens to Dr. Baker's oldest son, E. F. Baker, who was in charge of the whole project.

From that point on down the creek, owners accepted jury awards, and rights of way were obtained to a point about seven miles from town. What had at one time threatened bloodshed, now became an amicable arrangement.

Railroad Built

Originally it had been intended to build the flume into Walla Walla, but plans were changed. Instead, the company built a railroad, of narrow-gauge type, from the terminal of the flume, to town and also built a line to Dixie to tap the rich wheat district. The O.R. & N. company was at that time changing to standard-gauge on the Wallula-Walla Walla road, and the mill company made use of the opportunity to buy the original narrow-gauge tracks there, with locomotives and cars, for the Mill creek-Dixie road. Physical connection for transfer of freight was made with the O.R. & N.

The place where the flume and rails met was called Dudley, in honor of the staunch Scotchman. The name has now been changed to Tracy. The name by which the point was best known, however, was "the Dump". A grove nearby became Walla Walla's favorite picnic ground. Excursions to the grove by the little railroad were regular affairs. Improved seats were fixed to flat cars.

Both lumber and wood were floated down the flume, running about eight miles an hour. Materials were emptied into a reservoir, the wood cut and then loaded directly onto cars.

Floods Do Damage

The year after the railroad was completed the flume up China canyon was built, but the very next day after completion a cloudburst

washed out much of the main flume and all the flumes in the side canyons. The China canyon flume was ground to kindling wood, and at least 1,000 cords of wood were swept out of the canyon and scattered along the creek. The portable mill up Tiger canyon was buried under 30 feet of debris. It took a month to dig it out. The flumes were all rebuilt.

The second year a second freshet took out the flumes of the side canyons, and a little later the boiler of the Webb canyon mill blew up. This brought an untimely end to the operations of the company, officers considering that there was insufficient accessible timber to justify rebuilding the flumes.

The railroad was later sold to the O. R. & N., and later still by that line to the N.P.

Telephone Line Built

In 1888 a new corporation was formed, called the Blue Mountain Flume company, which took over the assets of the old company. The new concern never carried on an active business, other than selling what wood was on hand.

Although this date was very early in the history of the telephone invented in 1876, it is interesting to note that by 1880 the mill built a telephone line from the Walla Walla office to the mouth of Tiger canyon.

Collapse of a telegraph line over the Blue mountains made possible materials by purchase for the Mill creek line. This line was among the first, but not the original telephone system in the valley. That distinction goes to a system built in 1877 between the depot and the uptown office in Walla Walla.

Free Rides Splintery

As long as the flume lasted, fishermen had great sport riding the flume down creek after a hard day's sport. This they did by straddling a plank. The stream was swift, there were no handholds. Woe be the man who lost his balance. Also there were slivers—long slivers—and not a few men about town today can recall these rides, and the splinters.

Once a band of Indians tried to corral a colt, but it jumped into the flume where the water carried it down stream to Dudley, the animal sitting on its haunches, head in air. The animal collected so many splinters the owner had to kill it.

When the flume was no longer used, it rapidly went to pieces, and its lumber was used by farmers along the line. Pieces of the old flume may yet be seen.