

LUMBERING

One of the first needs of settlers in a new country is lumber. A few of the early houses were built of logs, but as the settlement grew, lumber became a necessity. It is difficult to trace accurately the beginnings of the lumber industry. It is recalled that a number of small mills cut lumber in the foothill country, but transporting it to the valley or Walla Walla was a problem. To solve the problem, Dr. Blalock and his associate, Dr. Baker, set up a mill on Blalock Mountain and flumed the lumber and ties down the mountain side to the valley. The flume was extended at intervals to Milton, running down what is now Mill Street and across the flats to the "dump" near where the Pleasant View School now stands. From there it was picked up on a branch line of the "Baker Railroad" and taken to market. The operation was known as the Oregon Improvement Co. The flume, at one time, was 21 miles long. It was abandoned in 1890.

When Frank Olinger, oldest living member of the Olinger family (all lumbermen), came to Milton in 1876, the Fletcher Mill was the largest operation. Frank recalls one water-powered jigsaw in operation up the river. "Not a very fast way to cut lumber but while the saw was going the length of the log the operator could hoe potatoes for awhile".

The Olinger's built a way station, store and shop at the timberline on Linton Mountain. It was their headquarters for many years.

The first large manufacturing plant was the Milton Box Company, established by Det and Clyde Harris to supply the growing demand from the fruit industry for boxes. This was the first large manufacturing payroll in Milton and Freewater area.

Early History of the Milton-Freewater Area

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