

**A BRIEF HISTORY
OF
THE FORMER TOWN OF WENDLING OREGON**

By Loyal R. Swofford - July 20, 2001

(2) "Back in the last decade of the 19th century, two men with a vision and ambition saw the natural possibilities in the vast forests of virgin timber in the upper Mohawk Valley.

These men, Jordan and Holcomb, formed a partnership and the first sawmill in this section was constructed at the confluence of Mill and Wolf creeks - the future site of the town of Wendling.

The ring of axes and the song of saws blended with the howling of coyotes and the yelping of timber wolves, for it was a desolate, wild country in those days.

Trees were felled and yarded to the new mill by horses. In later years these two mill owners sold their rights and interests to Whitbeck and Stearns, who operated for a time and then sold out to Johnson and Wendling.

As there was no railroad here at that time, much of the lumber had to be sold locally and hauled over rough muddy roads."

Note:

(1) "Some of the lumber was hauled to Harrisburg by 4 horse teams and the lumber put aboard boats for markets down the Willamette River and other destinations."

(2) "The substantial ranch home of John H. Downing, cattleman, was constructed from lumber cut by the Whitbeck and Stearns Mill.

Johnson and Wendling operated their mill to the year 1896, when the mill and considerable timberland was purchased by the Booth-Kelly Lumber Co. who continued the operation for half a century, or to February 1946, when all their available timber was exhausted in the Wendling area."

(7) Booth-Kelly had other timber stands in the McKenzie, Fall Creek, Saginaw, Row River and Mosby Creek areas).

(1) "George X. Wendling of the former firm became a member and stockholder of the new corporation at its inception.

At this time the settlement had no name, and when the question arose as to a suitable name for the town site and post office, Robert A. Booth suggested the name Wendling honoring George X. Wendling, while Mr. Wendling suggested the name Booth. As no agreement could be reached, someone advised the flipping of a coin to settle the contest. The coin was flipped and Wendling won.

The original owners of the Booth-Kelly Lumber Co. consisted of Robert A. Booth, J. H. Booth, John F. Kelly and George H. Kelly."

(7) George H. Kelly was appointed Wendling's first postmaster on December 20, 1899.

(2) "Construction of the first Booth-Kelly sawmill at Wendling was commenced in 1899, and was completed in the latter part of 1900.

The Southern Pacific Railway Co. completed their branch line to Wendling in 1900 - Wendling was placed on the map, and had connections with the outside world.

Prior to the arrival of the railroad all the machinery and supplies had to be hauled in on wagons from Eugene and Springfield over rough and rugged roads."

(7) Before the building of logging railroads into the hills by Booth-Kelly in 1908 logs were floated down Mill Creek to the sawmill. Starting in about 1901 Booth-Kelly constructed three "splash" dams on Mill Creek to build up large volumes of water to store and then float logs down Mill Creek to the big pond at the Wendling sawmill. The gates on the dams were designed to open quickly and with the fast outflow of water carried the logs downstream. The first splash dam was located about 1 1/2 miles up Mill Creek from the mill near the site of the future Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp. For those of you who are familiar with the area, the first dam was approximately 300' above the bridge on the 2000 Line. The second dam was about 2 1/2 miles from the mill and approximately 1/4 mile below Oshkosh Creek and the 4000 Line. The third and last dam was about 4 miles from the mill and just above what was known as "Suicide Point" and approximately 1/2 mile above the 5000 Junction.

As the logging and railroad construction were moving farther and farther from Wendling there were over 40 camps built in the hills along the railroad lines. Some of the larger camps had elementary (grade) schools in them and were a part of the Wendling School District #163. The town of Wendling had at least 5 schoolhouses as it grew from a settlement of just a few people to a community of 800 - 1000 people.

The town at its maximum size had approximately 270 houses, a large bunkhouse, cookhouse, bakery, store, Booth-Kelly office, Post Office, Doctor's office, barber shop, beauty shop, large community hall known as the 4L Hall. The 4 Ls stood for Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumberman. Within the 4L Hall were three bowling lanes, a large billiard and card room, basketball court, stage with side rooms, movie projection booth, a confectionary, meeting rooms, kitchen, and showers for bathing; most of these buildings were provided by the Booth-Kelly Lumber Company. At an earlier time I've read that there was a roller skating rink.

There were two softball fields at the school grounds, one for girls and one for boys. A tennis court in two locations, a baseball field east of town near the Old Wendling Swimming Hole, a beautiful "Woodland Park" along Wolf Creek with bleachers on the slope of the hill among the big fir and hemlock trees, a stage below the bleachers on the knoll, a large barbecue oven made of fire bricks, picnic tables, foot bridges across the creek and piped in water. A Boy Scout house was built within the park for meetings of Boy Scout Troup #77.

The Wendling Swimming Hole east (up the creek) from Wendling was a "super fun" place. It had two dressing rooms, one for girls on the south side of the creek and one for boys on the north side, which were built by Booth-Kelly. At one time there were seven diving boards in place at the same time - a 10' board on the north bank, a 3' board at the falls, two side by side boards approximately 8' - 9' high on the south bank and a tower with three boards ranging from about 12' to 25' high up on the south bank. Swimming instructors from Eugene were brought in to give official swimming lessons.

There were two church buildings in town for those who chose to worship God there. The Methodist Church was built in the early 1900s, was destroyed by the 1910 fire and rebuilt soon after. This building stood in the north central part of Wendling. In 1927 the Open Bible Standard Church building was built just south and west of the

Wendling Covered Bridge on the inside of the big curve at the junction of the County and Weyerhaeuser-BLM roads.

Many former Wendling residents still claim Wendling as their "hometown" after it's closure 55 years ago.

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Note: Some of those contributing information for this Brief History

- (1) Louis E. Polley -
"A History of the Mohawk Valley and Early Lumbering" (1984)
"Wendling, Oregon Logging Camps 1898 -1945" (1989)
- (2) James E. Sprague -
"Wendling Soon a Ghost Town" (1946)
- (3) Herschel E. "Curley" Bailey -
who started working for Booth-Kelly in 1906 and continued (after the town closed) to look after the 42,00 acre Wendling forest land for Booth-Kelly until 1958.
- (4) Roger W. "Bud" Hall -
a former Wendling resident and historian.
- (5) Curtis Irish -
Mohawk Valley historian and son of a Booth-Kelly employee.
- (6) My parents, Elmer and Mary Swofford -
who came to Wendling in 1925.
- (7) Loyal Swofford -
from living in Wendling for 70+ years and working for the forest land owners Booth-Kelly, Georgia Pacific and Weyerhaeuser for 43 years.