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Final Project - Term Paper

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*The Yoncalla Log Pond: The Influences of a  
20th Century Pacific Northwest Timber Industry on Yoncalla, Oregon*

Seven decades ago in Yoncalla, Oregon, a small residential town sat overlooking the buzz and commotion of two sawmills and their log filled ponds in the valley floor. Located on eighty acres in Douglas County, these mills harvested the great Douglas Fir trees nestled between the Pacific Coast to the west and the Cascade Mountain Range to the east. Today, this now empty tract of land is affectionately named 'Yoncalla mill pond'. The still pond encircled by blackberry bramble is owned by the non-profit organization North Douglas Betterment. The mission of North Douglas Betterment is to improve the quality of life in North Douglas County, and they are determined to find the best use of this property that will benefit the community as a whole.<sup>1</sup> North Douglas Betterment is sensitive to the fact that the majority of the site's remembered history of today's Yoncalla residents involves sawmill activity, not to mention the fact that the town's economy once relied heavily on the success of these mills. North Douglas Betterment is eager to compile as much information as possible regarding the Yoncalla mill pond history in the twentieth century before establishing a program or developing the site. Researching these smaller sawmills involved in the pre- and mid-century timber industry proved to be a difficult task. That is not to say the smaller companies were unimportant. As former logger O.J.

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<sup>1</sup> *Log Pond History*. Found on North Douglas Betterment website, <http://ndbetterment.org/miz.html> (accessed October 30, 2013).

Theil wrote, "To my belief I think the smaller outfits did more towards pioneering the lumber and logging business than the big outfits."<sup>2</sup> The difficulty is that there exists a limited inventory of primary photographs and plans compared to the abundance of written accounts available. The goal of this research paper was to find a balance between sources, using first person accounts as well as regional logging trends to better explain the physical transformations that occurred at the Yoncalla mill pond throughout the twentieth century.

Although the site of the Yoncalla Mill Pond is known today for its sawmill history, it was first settled and farmed by western pioneers. The original land claim of this valley landscape in the late 1840s was primarily by George A. Burts. A small southern portion of the property was claimed by A.T. Ambrose, and the site was bordered to the east by Lindsay Applegate (Figure 1). Lindsay Applegate and his brother Jesse are known for pioneering an alternate southern route from the Columbia River to the Willamette Valley, famously known as the Applegate Trail. Lindsay Applegate came to Yoncalla in 1849 from Polk County and established a gristmill to the east of his property.<sup>3</sup> A.T. Ambrose and his family came from Missouri and crossed the plains by Ox team.<sup>4</sup> The site's location at the base of the picturesque Yoncalla Valley, alongside forests and streams, was highly sought after since the beginning of Westernization in America.

In the late 19th century, the forest product industry became well-established in the Pacific Northwest.<sup>5</sup> Like the mode of transportation for the Ambrose family, Oxen teams were the primary method for hauling and the main means for logging. Ox-team logging has been documented as a rigorous, exhausting feat. The majority of the early logging outfits of the time were mobile teams in

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<sup>2</sup> O.J. Thiel, *Green Gold* (1982), 1.

<sup>3</sup> Janice Marschner, *Oregon 1859: A Snapshot in Time* (Portland: Timber Press, 2008), 219.

<sup>4</sup> "Mr. and Mrs. J.M. Ambrose," *The Sunday Oregonian*, (Portland, OR, November 20, 1923), S.3.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Louise Russell, *The Pacific Northwest Forest Dispute: Processes, Constructions, and Representations*, (December 2001), 61.

the hills high above the valleys. Their teams of oxen were guided over greased wooden rails for easy hauling, but it made for slippery, messy, and dangerous conditions.<sup>6</sup>

With advancements in technology, the timber industry began to boom in the Pacific Northwest by the early 20th century. One of the biggest improvements was the southward extension of the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1926 that lead from Eugene, OR down through the Cascade Mountain range and finally connecting to San Francisco.<sup>7</sup> The railroad was a lifeline for the logging and timber industry, as it was the primary way to haul timber long distances for profitable sales. This new thoroughfare meant opportunity for inland timber companies that otherwise had few options for transportation. The Southern Pacific rail line ran, and still runs, alongside the Drain-Yoncalla Highway in Yoncalla, separating the town of Yoncalla to the west from the mill pond site to the east. However, at the time of the railroad construction in 1926, the mill pond site was the location of the Yoncalla Emergency Airfield (Figures 2 & 3). Although not yet a bustling mill that took advantage of the proximity of the railroad, the site's airfield was a symbol of the technological advances of the 1920s. The rail line also allowed for access to another technological improvement, the steam donkey. A steam donkey, as implied by its name, is a steam powered machine that could be brought into a logging site in order to haul fallen timber out of the forest. As it had to be brought in by train and hauled up terrain, it did not replace oxen teams, but rather supplemented them.

Other timber companies in and near Yoncalla during the 1920s did benefit from the Southern Pacific Railroad extension as well as the introduction of the truck, but not without difficulty. One such company was Kruse Lumber Co. in Skelley, OR.<sup>8</sup> Owned by Elmer Kruse, the company sat in nearby Hayhurst Valley on a ranch owned by a man named Art Rykards. Elmer Kruse was responsible for

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<sup>6</sup> Ray E. Doerner, "Timber: The Log is Supreme in Douglas County", *The News-Review Umpqua Edition* (Roseburg, OR, February 1977), A-2.

<sup>7</sup> John S. Garner, *Company Towns in the Western United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 194.

<sup>8</sup> Larry Moulton, *History of Douglas County Sawmills* (Roseburg, OR, 2002).

bringing the first steam donkey to Yoncalla via rail. The timber his company harvested in Hayhurst Valley was hauled by truck to the railroad in Yoncalla, where it was loaded out to other cities. One former log hauler, O.J. Thiel, wrote in 1982 of his experience working for Elmer Kruse back in the 1920s. In his book titled *Green Gold*, Thiel describes the steep 14% grade he had to travel to reach Kruse Lumber Co. Winter conditions and frost made for terribly slippery wood plank roads. The roads were so bad that Thiel remembered sliding past Kruse Lumber Co. on his way down into the valley by upwards of a half mile while he attempted to gain control. He would then have to back up to the site to load up with timber.<sup>9</sup>

While the timber companies near Yoncalla benefited from the new lifeline of the railroad and trucks, these inland companies were still faced with one large setback--the timber itself. The decade of the 1920s was known as the "glory days of logging" for the Pacific Northwest.<sup>10</sup> The giant redwoods and firs of the coastal region, as well as the Ponderosa Pine of the high plateau, were highly sought after.<sup>11</sup> The timber inland, however, was found to be of lesser quality. The colder climates of the north and east produced stronger and healthier trees. The Willamette and Yoncalla Valleys tend to be warmer and produced a rather high rate of overripe and sometimes diseased mature timber. In a way, the timber product was shunned in Douglas County. Even in the 'glory days', mills in Douglas County were few in number, with only 37 operating locations in the 1920s.<sup>12</sup> With the likes of outfits such as Kruse Lumber Co., the timber industry in Yoncalla was off to a slow start.

Further technological improvements in the 1930s allowed for more progress. Earlier, getting timber out of the woods had been the biggest obstacle for logging companies and sawmills. According to an article on the timber history in Douglas County from 1977, early "millworkers would have to build

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<sup>9</sup> Thiel, *Green Gold*, 123.

<sup>10</sup> Merv Johnson, *In Search of Steam Donkeys: Logging Equipment in Oregon* (Hillsboro: TimberTimes, 1996), 8.

<sup>11</sup> Garner, *Company Towns*, 192.

<sup>12</sup> Doerner, "Timber: The Log is Supreme in Douglas County."

their own roads-on their own time-so they'd have work back at the mill."<sup>13</sup> With the invention of the bulldozer, power saw, and loading shovels, skid roads were replaced by plank roads, and companies were no longer limited by crude roads and equipment.

Despite the lesser timber quality of Douglas County, these technological improvements may have provided the right setting for the first sawmills on the site of interest in Yoncalla. The north end of the site was the first to be developed by a timber company in the mid-1930s. Francis Bigelow of the Bigelow Mill had originally started his business approximately 10 miles east of Yoncalla in Elkhead, OR. After depleting the timber supply there, he relocated his mill to the northern end of what was then the Yoncalla Emergency Airfield. A few years later in 1939, the Scheiman Brothers built a mill at the south end of the site (Figure 4)<sup>14</sup>. This began the divided northern/southern layout of the Yoncalla mill pond site.

Come the 1940s, the timber industry in Yoncalla and the greater Douglas County finally caught its break. The country's demand for lumber during World War II surpassed what the coastal and northern counties of the Pacific Northwest could provide, as well as other regions in the nation. In late 1943, the U.S. Military realized it was going to need more wood for the war and began commissioning logging and sawmill outfits in western Oregon, despite the timber's poor reputation.<sup>15</sup> The number of mills in Douglas County exploded from the 37 documented back in the 1920s to over 300.<sup>16</sup> It was at this time in the early 1940s that began a nearly two-decade streak of activity at the Yoncalla mill pond site.

The year of 1941 set the stage for the first round of changes on site. The site's proximity to the railroad proved to be beneficial to the mills. The Kruse Lumber Co. in Skelley, OR decided to take advantage of the town location and loading docks, and purchased the Scheiman Brothers mill at the

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<sup>13</sup> Doerner, "Timber: The Log is Supreme in Douglas County".

<sup>14</sup> Moulton, *History of Douglas County Sawmills*.

<sup>15</sup> Doerner, "Timber: The Log is Supreme in Douglas County."

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

south end of the site. In the same year, at the north end, Kissling Lumber Co. purchased the Bigelow Mill.<sup>17</sup> Although bought out in location, the Bigelow Mill did not go out of business and continued surfacing lumber off-site into the following years.<sup>18</sup>

The booming timber industry of western Oregon during the mid-1940s did not go unnoticed across the nation. Out in Kansas City, Missouri, a company called Kansas City's Exchange Sawmill Sales Co., or ESSCO, was looking to expand its operations out west. In 1946, ESSCO purchased the southern portion of the mill site in Yoncalla from Elmer Kruse and incorporated their new branch, named Yoncalla Lumber Company (Figure 5).<sup>19</sup> With the backing of two successful businesses on site, improvements began at the facilities within and in the surrounding town.

The economic recovery during World War II after the Great Depression of the 1930s could be seen at both the site of the Yoncalla mill pond as well as in the town of Yoncalla itself. Personal accounts by the locals of Yoncalla provide a social context of the town and the sawmills. One family in particular had an intimate relationship with the sawmills, for their home since 1946 is located at the northwest corner of the site. Sisters Barbara Templeton and Mary Rines moved into this house in 1946 while their father worked at the Whipple Mill in Drain, Or, just 5 miles north of Yoncalla. The house their family moved in to was constructed in 1884 and may possibly be a structure from the George A. Burts family that originally settled at that plot of land.<sup>20</sup>

Barbara and Mary spoke fondly of Yoncalla at the time, recalling many memories that included the prosperous town that lay just across the tracks and highway from their home. In the first decade of their time in Yoncalla, the town had approximately three grocery stores, three service stations, two

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<sup>17</sup> Moulton, *History of Douglas County Sawmills*.

<sup>18</sup> Theil, *Green Gold*, 133.

<sup>19</sup> Moulton, *History of Douglas County Sawmills*.

<sup>20</sup> Barbara Templeton, Dianna Coggsell, and Mary Rines, Personal Interview, November 16, 2013.

taverns, three churches, a theater, and a sweet shop. Compared with the one grocery store, one gas station, and four churches of today, it is clear that the town flourished during the timber boom of Douglas County and the economy relied heavily on the mills' success.<sup>21</sup>

Running nearly the full length of town at over seven city blocks long, the sawmills were a prominent feature of Yoncalla. As the train tracks separated the two, there was only one way in and out of the mill, and this was at the intersection of the Yoncalla-Drain Highway and Main Street. This intersection and mill entry also separated the northern half of the mill site from the southern, cornering the Kissling Lumber Company into a smaller northern plot. Barbara, Mary, and Mary's daughter Dianna Cogswell remember this junction being a very busy spot in town. In fact, the only way to get to their house was at this intersection, for the sawmills' entry was the only way to cross the tracks and therefore it doubled as their driveway in the 1940s (Figure 4).<sup>22</sup> This close proximity with the mills provided each of them a first-person experience of being on the sawmill on a daily basis.

Since their home lies at the north end of the sawmill site, Barbara, Mary, and Dianna's most vivid memories are of the Kissling Lumber Company. Their home is located directly along the train tracks, just north of where there was a log and pole storage pile. At some point after the establishment of the first mills, a third set of tracks were installed for the ease of loading and unloading without stalling rail traffic. South of the storage area and still along the tracks was a wooden loading dock.<sup>23</sup> A photo of the loading dock, with a descendant of the Applegate family working on deck, shows the wood structure with a rail car stationed on the adjacent tracks. In the background, one can see the other two sets of tracks as well as the feed storage warehouse to the south, which was on Yoncalla Lumber Company's property (Figures 6 and 7).

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<sup>21</sup> Templeton, et. al., Personal Interview.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Living in the midst of a sawmill offered for a noisy experience. A "green chain", as Barbara termed it, was south of their home along their driveway that veered north from the main entrance. The green chain was where men sorted the freshly cut, or green, lumber. As Barbara described,

It was very interesting to watch the lumber come down. Each man had a specific dimension of lumber, I suppose, and they pulled off ones from the big pile. [Lumber] would come down and the first man would grab his dimension, and the next man would stand there until one of his dimension came by. It was interesting to watch them.<sup>24</sup>

At night, the green chain would be cleaned while it was not in use, which Barbara remembered producing a grinding noise into the late hours. Another noisy feature of the mill was the saw. Mary recalled laying in bed and falling asleep to the "Zing! Zing!" of saw blades cutting through timber at the mill. The sawmill itself was located south and slightly east of their home, and all three members of the family remember it as a corrugated steel building with large 12x12 timber posts.

One of the most memorable, and missed, structures of the Kissling Lumber Company was the large wigwam burner located directly behind, or to the east, of their home. The daughter, Dianna, had the fondest memory of this burner,

There was nothing in the world that smelled better than that wigwam burner. They would burn all the scraps and the sawdust at night. This time of year the sparks would be shooting off like fireworks. It was so beautiful. And just a little hint of wood smoke. I don't know, I found it comforting. But any place that you grow up, I suppose, you would love.<sup>25</sup>

Other Douglas County locals shared the same appreciation for these wigwam burners. Curt Deatherage, a contemporary wigwam burner enthusiast, remembered when wigwam burners were

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<sup>24</sup> Templeton, et. al., Personal Interview.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



used prior to their ban for environmental reasons in the 1970s. Deatherage explains, "I must have, at a young age, read a story about fireflies. I don't think I've ever actually seen a firefly. But all the sparks under a wigwam screen, I thought that must be what fireflies looked like."<sup>26</sup> It is clear that the wigwam burners were an amazing sight, especially to young imaginative minds.

While Barbara, Mary, and Dianna were most familiar with the Kissling Lumber Company, there was also activity on the south end of the site. Yoncalla Lumber Company was active with establishing multiple structures on their property (Figure 8). Known structures and equipment in the late 1940s and leading into the early 1950s included a sawmill with resaw at the very southern end, a planer to the north of the mill, and the feed storage warehouse to the north of the planer, directly along the tracks.<sup>27</sup> Also of note were eight employee cabins and one more prominent cabin for R.B. White, the superintendent of Yoncalla Lumber Co. The cabin for Mr. White was located along the entry drive to the mill, at its southern edge atop a slight hill. This structure faced the feed storage warehouse to the southwest. Directly behind, or to the east, of Mr. White's cabin were the two rows of four cabins. These cabins, as remembered by Dianna Coggsell and her family, were small, single-story, brown shingle-sided structures (Figure 9). The interiors were based on a three-room plan, with two bedrooms located off one main living area with a kitchen tucked in the back corner.<sup>28</sup> These cabins were quaint, and as Mary Rines emphasized, were not to be compared with the more luxurious logging camps in the area such as Gillcrest. More structures existed at Yoncalla Lumber Co., as pictured in Figure 8, but have yet to be identified with certainty.

The success of these sawmills did not end with the boost of World War II like other timber companies in the Pacific Northwest. Many mills and their company towns closed after World War II.

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<sup>26</sup> Bob Keefer, "A Burner Obsession: On a quest to preserve the memory of those rusting vestiges of logging's hayday," *Oregon Life* (Sunday, May 4, 2003), G.

<sup>27</sup> "Fire Wipes Out Sawmill," *Drain Enterprise* (July 9, 1953).

<sup>28</sup> Templeton, et. al., Personal Interview.

Some of these towns were raised and turned into parks, where, in the distant future, the parks ironically turned to tree farms to help replenish the timber supply. One example of this situation happened in Wendling, OR. The towns that did survive the lull after World War II benefited from ideal locations along railroad tracks or highways, both of which were adjacent to the site of Kissling Lumber and Yoncalla Lumber Co. in Yoncalla.<sup>29</sup>

Yoncalla Lumber Co. and Kissling Lumber's success continued into the 1950s with the housing boom. A high increase in demand for forest products developed out of the large rate of homes being built as a result of the GI Bill.<sup>30</sup> As some mills didn't last long enough to make it to the housing boom, other surviving mills in the Pacific Northwest were also suffering from depleted resources. The mills of Yoncalla and the greater Douglas County region were at an advantage. The delayed start of logging in the area allowed for an abundant supply of timber while neighboring counties with higher quality timber were running out.

An increased demand in timber required facility improvements in log storage. It was at this time in the early 1950s that began the development of log storage ponds that would later combine to become the single large pond that exists today. An aerial photograph from 1943 shows no water features on site (Figure 4). Another aerial photo from 1952 depicts two smaller ponds at opposite ends of the site (Figure 10). One is at the southwest corner on the Yoncalla Lumber Company's property. The other is at the northeast corner, owned by Kissling Lumber. No aerial photos have yet to be found between 1943-1952, but it was at some point between these years that both the north and south ponds were installed. Formal records exist which document the beginnings of the Yoncalla Lumber Company's log pond. According to the State of Oregon Water Rights records, the Yoncalla Lumber Co. applied for the rights of nearby Yoncalla Creek to create a 16.3 acre log pond that varied from 6 to 9

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<sup>29</sup> Garner, *Company Towns in the Western United States, 192-193*.

<sup>30</sup> Russell, *The Pacific Northwest Forest Dispute*, 67.

feet deep. Water would be pumped from the creek over 100 feet to the pond location by an electric motor.<sup>31</sup> A photograph from the Yoncalla Historical Society ca. 1950s shows the well-established pond filled with logs and a log walker. (Figure 11).

Figure 8 of the Yoncalla Lumber Company's pond ca. 1952-53 portrays a bustling, thriving mill. Unfortunately, no matter how successful, sawmills involved dangerous conditions that often led to disasters. 1953 was a tough year for Yoncalla. Two miles north of town, 160 acres of forest land being logged by Elmer Kruse were destroyed by fire.<sup>32</sup> The same year, Yoncalla Lumber Company succumbed to the same devastation. That summer, with the success of the business, the Yoncalla Lumber Company was undergoing facility upgrades to change from steam power to electricity. They halted operations for a period of time in the month of July during this transformation. On Wednesday July 8, 1953, the week Yoncalla Lumber Company was scheduled to reopen, a fire erupted from an acetylene torch in the sawmill. The resaw and planer were saved, but everything else, including some lumber, were destroyed, at a total loss of approximately \$150,000. That is equivalent to \$1.3 million today. The mill at the time was the largest in town, creating 50,000 board feet per day of dimensional lumber.<sup>33</sup> As Barbara Templeton remembered, "It was tragic for the town."<sup>34</sup>

While the fire was an unimaginable tragedy, the demand for lumber persisted and the Yoncalla Lumber Company simply treated it as a temporary setback. Within two weeks of the fire, R.B. White, in charge of the business, purchased the Kissling Mill to the north.<sup>35</sup> In the following two months, White announced Yoncalla Lumber Company's intentions to rebuild the southern fire-damaged mill in the

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<sup>31</sup> *Application for a [illegible] to Combine a Reservoir and to [illegible] Use the Unappropriated Waters of the State of Oregon*, Reservoir Permit No. R-1361 ( May 14, 1952).

<sup>32</sup> "Fire Wipes Out Sawmill."

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Templeton, et. al., Personal Interview.

<sup>35</sup> "Yoncalla Mill Transfer Told," *Eugene Register-Guard* (August 27, 1953).

near future. The expansion of this business allowed an increase in production and the mill began a two-shift operation.<sup>36</sup>

By 1954, Yoncalla Lumber Company's monopoly over the sawmill was transposed into the physical landscape of the site. According to more Water Rights records, the southern log pond of 1954 had combined with the north and increased in size from 16.8 acres to a massive 108 acres.<sup>37</sup> Based on an aerial photo taken a bit later in 1959 (Figure 12), the pond now covered over half of the property, occupying the entire eastern edge of the site. The reason for this increase in size may be due to the subcontracting of "gyppo" loggers in the 1950s. Gyppo loggers, independent subcontracted outfits hired by Yoncalla Lumber Co., were likely bringing in more timber at a higher rate than could be milled.<sup>38</sup> This timber came from nearby federal forest land as well as private land. According to Barbara Templeton who still resided at the northeast corner of the sawmill site, some of the wood came from private property when people wanted to clear their pastures.<sup>39</sup> All of this timber was collected by Yoncalla Lumber Company and stored in the pond. It is this large pond form that still remains to this day.

The end of the housing boom decade of the 1950s has an abrupt history of downturns in the timber industry. The first recorded sign of struggle appeared in September of 1955, when sawmills in Douglas County were reporting a shortage of rail cars for transporting their lumber. The Southern Pacific Railroad company supplied each mill with an agreed upon number of freight cars per week. For reasons unknown, the car allotments were falling below the sawmills' demand. The Yoncalla Lumber Company, as well as Mount Baldy Lumber Company (also of Yoncalla) complained of receiving only

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<sup>36</sup> "Late Forest Industries News," *The Lumberman* (September 1953), 16.

<sup>37</sup> *State of Oregon, County of Douglas, Certificate of Water Right*, Application No. 29545, Permit No. 23213, "Yoncalla Lumber Company" Recorded in State Record of Water Right Certificates, V. 16, P. 22628, (September 13, 1954).

<sup>38</sup> Curt Beckham, *Gyppo Logging Days*, (Myrtle Point: The Hillside Book Co., 1978), Introduction.

<sup>39</sup> Templeton, et. al., Personal Interview.

three freight cars in one week when their typical allotment was three per day, or fifteen cars weekly. Yoncalla Lumber Co. managed to persevere through this shortage, but Mount Baldy Lumber Co. was not as fortunate, and announced their closure on September 18, 1955.<sup>40</sup> The Southern Pacific Railroad was now limiting the mills' success and driving businesses to close.

Yoncalla Lumber Co. lasted for another two years until 1957, when superintendent Dan Wright announced its closure.<sup>41</sup> It is unclear what became of the site immediately after its doors closed, but aerial photos from 1959 and 1960 show many of the structures still standing, smoke billowing, and logs floating (Figure 12). It wasn't until 1963 that the site reappears in discovered records with its purchase by Harold Woolley of Woolley Enterprises in Drain, OR.<sup>42</sup> Many of the mill's structures were dismantled and sold, while the pond was utilized by Mr. Woolley for continued log storage into the 1970s as depicted by the empty landscape and log-filled pond in an aerial photograph from 1967 (Figure 13). Barbara Templeton's husband worked for Woolley Enterprises at in the 1970s and assisted them in the final removal of all sunken logs for their milling up in Drain.<sup>43</sup>

The town of Yoncalla has been greatly affected by the closure of the Yoncalla Lumber Company. Its presence was not only physically a large part of Yoncalla, but also economically. As author John Garner wrote on the power of sawmills in the Pacific Northwest, "When sawmill dies, town dies."<sup>44</sup> The last of the mill cabin residents, including a childhood friend of Dianna Coggsweil's, had moved out by the mid-1960s and the cabins were demolished. The town of Yoncalla, which once had an abundance of establishments and entertainment for its residents as described earlier, now consists of fewer resources such as only one grocery store, one gas station, and four churches. The site of the

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<sup>40</sup> "Mill to Close at Yoncalla", *Eugene Register-Guard* (September 18, 1955).

<sup>41</sup> Yoncalla Historical Society, *Yoncalla Yesterday* (Portland: Richard Mort, 2001).

<sup>42</sup> Theil, *Green Gold*, 31.

<sup>43</sup> Templeton, et. al., Personal Interview.

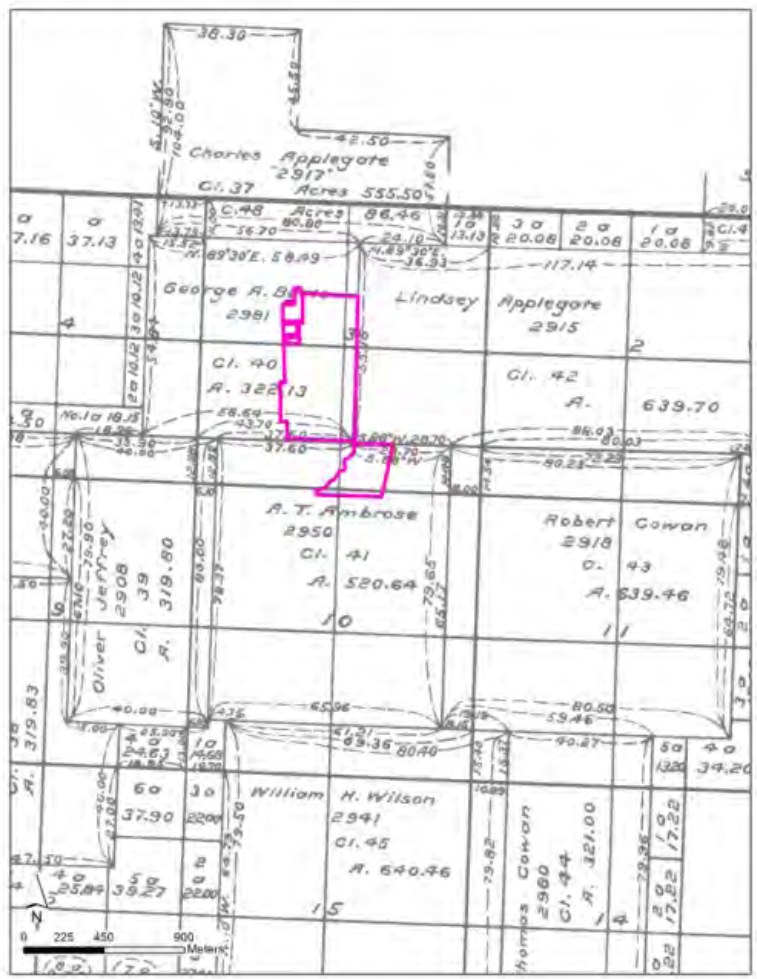
<sup>44</sup> Garner, *Company Towns*, 195.

Yoncalla mill pond itself now sits empty, overgrown in blackberry bushes, waiting for another occupant to revitalize the site and the town of Yoncalla as a whole (Figure 14).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Yoncalla was a small town with a landscape physically balanced by residences to the west and an emergency airfield to the east. As the 'glory days of logging' kicked off in the greater Pacific Northwest in the 1920s, the timber industry in Yoncalla was slower to take off, as they suffered from a poor timber quality reputation. Technological progress in the late 1920s and early 1930s introduced the Southern Pacific Railroad to Yoncalla as well as other equipment to the timber industry such as trucks, bulldozers, and steam donkeys. It was at this time that the first mills were introduced to the Yoncalla mill pond site, taking advantage of the proximity to the railroad and the other technological advancements that made logging and milling less dangerous and more efficient. As the demand for timber increased during World War II in the 1940s and continued into the 1950s with the housing boom, drastic changes and improvements happened on site including the creation of the log ponds. The earlier delay in logging of Douglas County timber transpired to be an advantage for the sawmills of Yoncalla at this time. Resources depleted in other regions and forced many mill closures and relocations. The formally shunned Douglas Fir in the Yoncalla area was still plentiful, keeping the mills alive through the first signs of suffering in the Pacific Northwest timber industry. However, towards the end of the housing boom, rail cars provided to the mills in the area were drastically reduced. This likely contributed to the inevitable closure of all mills on the Yoncalla mill pond site by 1957. The same asset that initially fueled the advancement of the sawmill industry in Yoncalla--the rail road--ultimately also led to its demise.

The site as it sits today represents one example of a rise and fall of the harvesting of a natural resource in the western United States and its effects on a local economy. There are still gaps to be filled and more to be learned on the history of the Yoncalla mill pond and its structures, but there is an

increasing understanding of the history of the site and its facilities. Barbara Templeton still resides at the northwest corner of this site after 67 years, uncertain of the Yoncalla mill pond's future and the survival of the town itself. It is with hopes that this research helps better inform North Douglas Betterment's plans for this site, as it helps explain the historical impact of the greater influential trends of the timber economy in the Pacific Northwest on the town of Yoncalla, Oregon.



**Figure 1:** Yoncalla Land Claims, 1857. Courtesy of the University of Oregon Department of Archeology. Location of the Yoncalla Mill Pond is outlined in pink. The majority of the site was settled by George A. Butts.

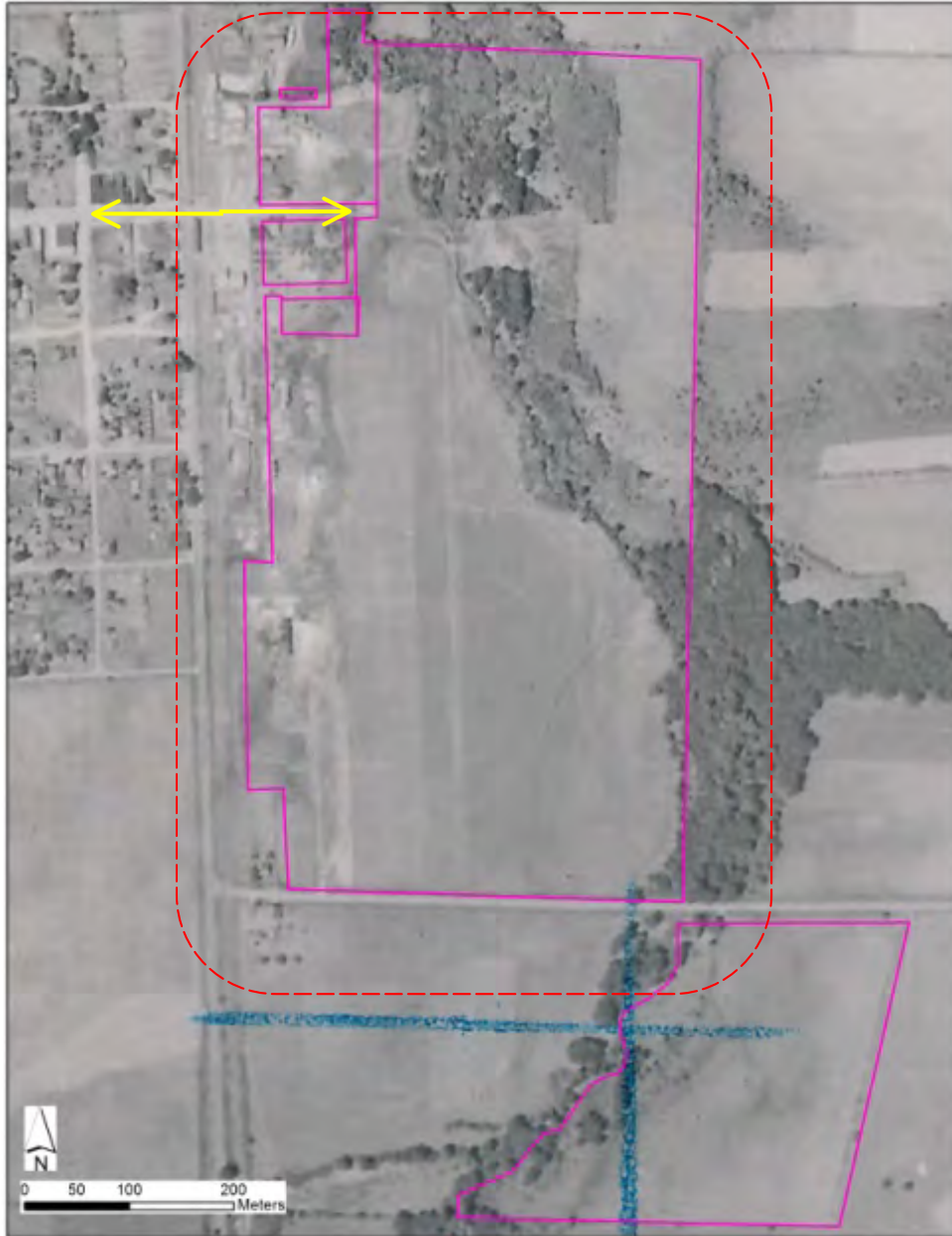


**Figure 2:** Aerial of Yoncalla, 1939. Courtesy of the Knight Library Maps and Aerial Photo Archives. Yoncalla mill pond is outlined in red. The large lighter rectangle is the manicured landing strip for the Yoncalla Emergency Airfield.



**Figure 3:** Yoncalla Beacon, 1926. Courtesy of the Yoncalla Historical Society.





**Figure 4:** Aerial of Yoncalla, 1943. Courtesy of the University of Oregon Department of Archeology. The western edge of the Yoncalla mill pond site is developed by two mills, Bigelow Mill at the north end and Scheiman Brothers at the south. Main Street and the entrance to the mill is marked by a yellow arrow, and also served as the driveway to Barbara Templeton's home at the northwest corner of the site.



**Figure 5:** Yoncalla Lumber Company's early sign, ca. 1946. Image courtesy of Kent Smith of North Douglas Betterment.



**Figure 6:** Howard Applegate at work at the Yoncalla, OR sawmill, located along side railroad tracks. June 7, 1946. Located at Douglas County History Museum. Mr. Applegate stands on the wooden loading deck owned by Kissling Lumber Company at the north end of the site. A freight car is parked at the third set of tracks, installed for the sawmills' use. The other two main set of tracks can be seen to the right of Mr. Applegate, and Yoncalla Lumber Company's feed and storage warehouse is off in the background.



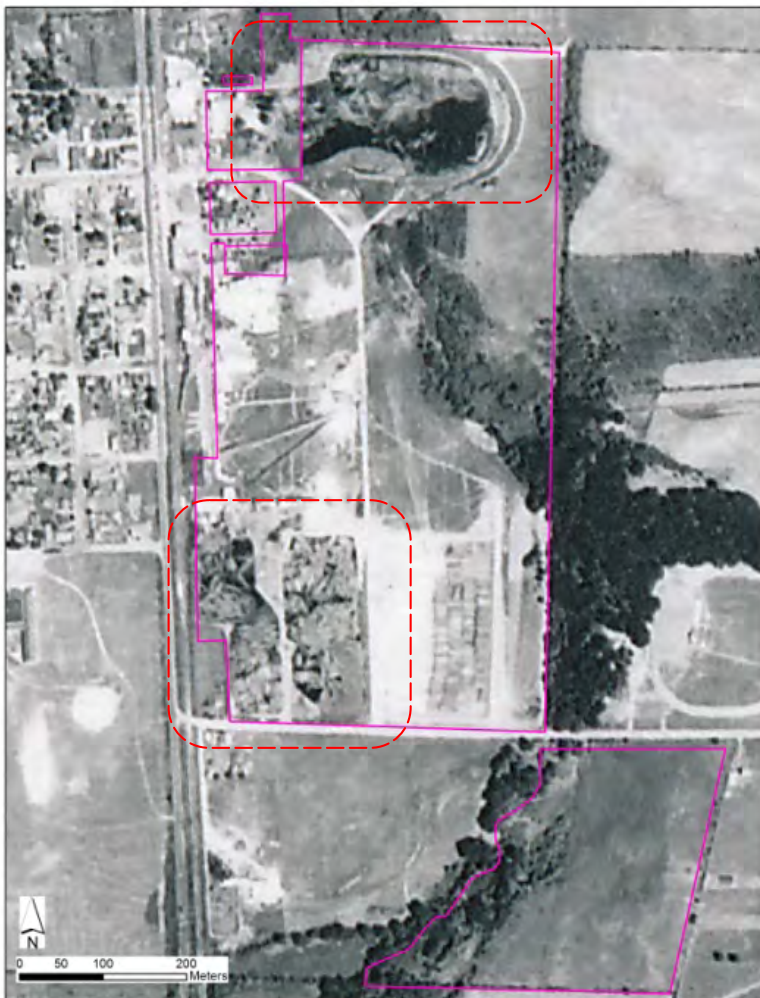
**Figure 7:** Photograph of the feed and storage warehouse on the Yoncalla Lumber Company's property, date unknown. Courtesy of Barbara Templeton, Yoncalla resident.



**Figure 8:** Yoncalla Lumber Company, ca. 1950s. Image courtesy of the Yoncalla Historical Society. Photo taken from the southwest end of the site, looking northeast.



**Figure 9:** Detail of Aerial of Yoncalla, 1959. Image Courtesy of the University of Oregon Archeology Department. The central pink rectangle highlights the two rows of employee cabins as well as the main superintendent cabin at the upper left of this rectangle.



**Figure 10:** Aerial of Yoncalla, 1952. Image Courtesy of the University of Oregon Archeology Department. This is the first dated evidence of the creation of the log ponds, one at the north and one at the south (outlined in red).



**Figure 11:** Yoncalla Mill Pond, ca. 1950s. Courtesy of the Yoncalla Historical Society. View is looking southeast.



**Figure 12:** Aerial of Yoncalla, 1959. Photo courtesy of University of Oregon Archaeology Department. The north and south ponds have now been connected to create one large pond at the eastern half of the site. The entire site was developed to this extent solely by Yoncalla Lumber Company.



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