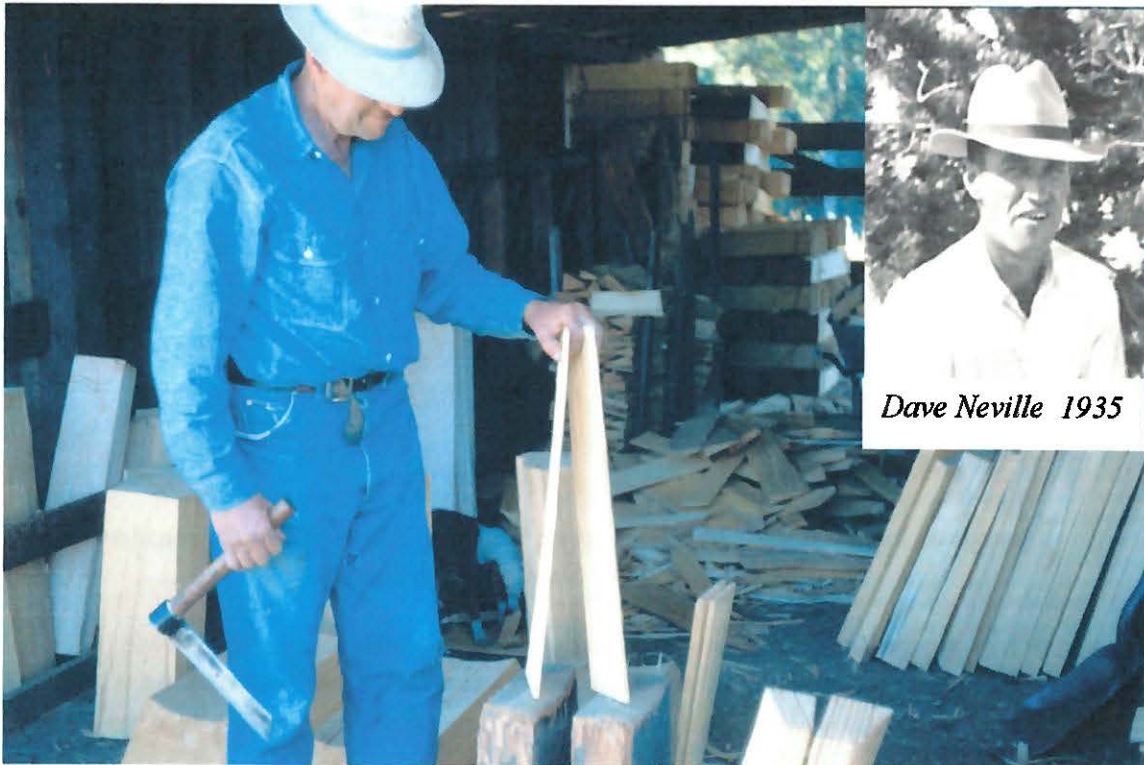


# THE MAKING AND USE OF SUGAR PINE SHAKES



*David (Dave) James Neville Making Sugar Pine Shakes in 1969*

**By Mary Lou Neville King,  
With contributions and help from  
my husband Jim King and my brothers  
Clarence, Dee and Kermit Neville**

**Photos by Jim King, Sara King McDaniel, Clarence Neville, Dee Neville,  
Xanterra Parks & Resorts/Crater Lake**

**Quotes from Interviews conducted and published by Forest Service, USDA,  
Pacific Northwest Region, Rogue River National Forest 1978**

**September 2003**

fact according to Kermit, Nelson was the first white baby born in Jackson County Oregon. He had gone to Alaska during the gold rush. He had a long mostly white beard and his chewing tobacco frequently streamed right down it after he spit. He loved to tell stories about the old days and Alaska.

This is the most vivid story about the Rogue River Indians that I remember Nelson telling while he was making shakes. The white settlers killed almost all of these Indians shortly before the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



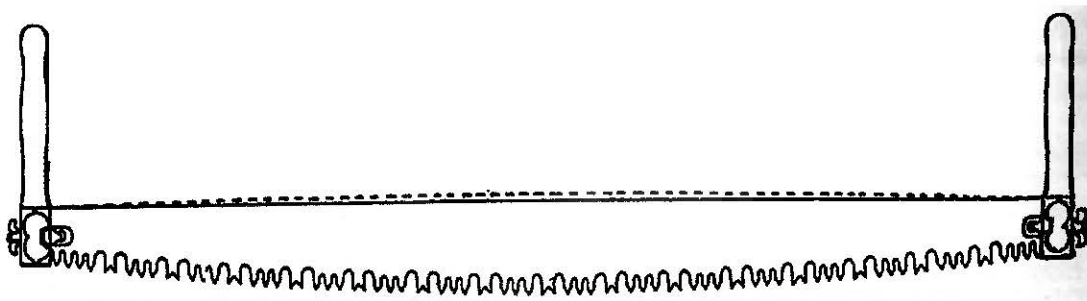
*“The Pole House” With Shakes on the Roof—Maybe Clarence on The Step*

house became known as “The Pole House”). There was no chain saw and Kermit and I were trying to learn how to saw with a cross-cut on the back side of the tree while Dad was chipping with an ax along on the other side making an undercut. I think it was mostly fighting with Kermit trying to pull the saw back and forth through the tree. You had to have a whisky or pop bottle full of oil that you poured on the saw about every fourth pull to keep the pitch from gumming the blade. I can’t remember the tree falling or anything.”

While they were fighting Indians on Flounce Rock, a friend of Nelson’s had his rifle in firing position when an Indian jumped up and shot his arrow before his friend could fire his rifle. The arrow went through the lower part of his arm with the arrowhead on one side of the arm and feathers on the other. Nelson had to cut the arrow shaft with his pocket knife and pull the arrow out.

Soon after I told this story to my parents and I remember my mother saying: “I don’t want my kids listening to those kinds of stories again.”

When we first came back from Missouri, I remember Dad, Kermit and I were working with Dad to fall a big tree for shakes for the roof of the house, with logs placed vertically that Dad was building on the 3 acres near the old dairy site. (This



*Cross-cut Saw*



*Dad's Shakes on the Prospect Library (Photo from Dee) 1960s*

Mary Lou's note: I think Dad built this library building, with a shake roof, for Mom when she became the Prospect Librarian. She had had a light stroke and had to quit teaching in the Prospect school when she was about 60 years old and continued as the librarian until she was 70 when she was forced to retire.

**Some things my brother Kermit remembers about shake making:**

Sometime around 1967-68 while living in Roseburg, I acquired a chain saw with a long bar. I would make trips to Prospect, where I fell and bucked Sugar Pine trees for my father, David Neville. We tested many trees to see if they were straight-grained in the heartwood before we fell them.

About the testing: The trees, as above-mentioned, were snags (dead) and if the bark had fallen off you could see the grain in the sapwood. (Note -only sugar pine, of all the softwood, has grain that twists to the left. All others twist to the right.) Don't ask a dumb question like one guy did in my forestry class, which was, "Are you looking up the tree, or down the tree?" Anyway, Dad would have you cut a wedge through the sapwood into the heartwood to determine if the heartwood was straight enough or not before falling the tree.

In a wood tech class in college one day I was thinking about the above process in determining the straightness of the heartwood grain, and the thought occurred to me, "How could this be?" Since each year as a tree adds a growth ring, it has one growth ring that becomes heartwood. Why or how would the direction of the grain change from heartwood to sapwood? So I asked the question to the instructor, just how could this happen? Needless to say, I became the laughing stock of the class for a day, as the instructor proceeded to tell me it was impossible, and simply did not happen. This instructor was Dr. Resch, who was fresh over here from Germany, and I had just gotten back from spending two years in the Air Force in Germany. I would regularly make fun

than dry. And the shakes you can get from it all depends on the tree, that's something you can't predict until you get to working on it. See, one tree can look very good and yet it won't amount to much and another tree can be just fairly good and make more shakes, you just can't tell. When a tree works good you get practically all of it"

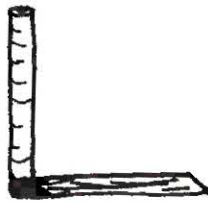
My Dad had a permit from the Forest Service to cut only dead or dying sugar pine trees for shakes. Therefore, as he drove around old logging roads or for that matter wherever he went in the woods, he always kept his eye out for trees that the needles were turning brown or trees with an unusually large crop of cones. He said that the large old trees made lots of seeds before they die. Besides being dead the tree had to be very straight with no limbs to make knots on the lower part of the trunk. And it had to be where he could clear space to get his truck to the tree so he could bring home the bolts to split later in his barn. Sometimes he had to bring his tractor with its scraper to build a road to the tree. We got the impression hunting for good shake trees was a bit of a sport, not unlike a deer hunt or such, as Dave and his friends searched the back roads with which they were so familiar, for eligible trees. Other old timers had been involved and it was a sport in which it was possible to cheat. Unscrupulous players could carefully place a dynamite charge under a large healthy sugar pine resulting in root damage and death within a few years. An act not unlike night lighting deer or blasting fish that was deplored by Dave and his team.

When Dad and Waldo Nye, Nelson's son, began making shakes to sell, they enlisted the help of Waldo's brother-in-law, tree faller Dee Hedgepath. At this writing, Dee is still alive, living in Prospect and is 103 years old. He could fall a tree to land exactly where they wanted it to be for working on the shakes. The trees were often larger in diameter than the length of Dee's long-blade chain saw, but that didn't stop him from making perfect cuts. After the tree was on the ground, Dee would cut the bottom straight part of the tree trunk where there were no knots, into 30 inch, shake length, rounds. Even though Dee was older and pretty shaky even then, maybe from his years of being a tree faller, he could start on one side of the log, go around to the other side and have the cuts line up almost perfectly.



*This Photo Was Taken By A Young Sara King With Her Little Camera And Might Be Dee Hedgepath, But Then It Could be Clarence or Someone Else*

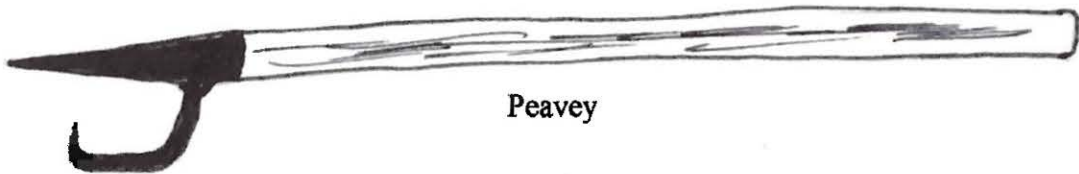




Froe



*Learning About Tools*

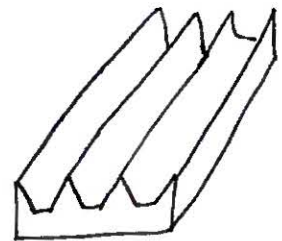


Peavey



*Grandma Seriously Splitting Large Bolts and James Trying*

The large bolts were then marked for each individual shake's thickness and width. When Dad started making shakes he used a ruler then later he used his own invention. His innovative idea consisted of 4 small metal blades welded together (the distance between the blades was the thickness of a shake and the four together was the thickness of the bolt to haul home) making it possible to pound on this to mark four shakes at a time. When the marking was completed, the large bolts were split into 4 shake thicknesses using a froe and wood mallet.



*Marking Tool*





After the shake bolts were hauled to the barn, Dad very carefully split the individual shakes from the bolts. The bolt was placed in the wood structure (brake) seen in the picture above. He always split from the middle of a piece of wood so that with the bolts for four shakes he first split it into two halves then split each half to make four shakes. To do this he drove the froe into the marked groove in the middle of the bolt so that there was an equal amount of wood on each side. He then worked the froe back and forth making a near perfect split with shakes as near the same thickness as was possible. If one side started to get thicker than the other, he would tip the top of the froe blade to the thick side with his right hand and applying additional pressure with his left hand by leaning forward or pulling back.

For shakes that did not split well, either the tree was not very good for shake making, or for some other reason, these rougher shakes were sold for barn roofs or siding. They sold for \$30 a square. Jim remembers Dad saying he could make more money making shakes than any other job he ever had.

Clarence estimates that the highest quality--#1 shakes, if they were sold for \$40 a square or bundle, that each 6"x 30" shake would have been sold for only 10 cents. If his estimate is correct, then purchasers were certainly getting a good deal because it took a long time to make the shakes.

At the time Dad was making shakes they were used extensively for the roof of houses, sheds and barns. They shed water and snow beautifully and had a long life because of the steep pitch of the roof combined with good ventilation. However, they were far from fire proof and now are not permitted for house roofs in Oregon. A few people used shakes for siding on their buildings. Dad and my brothers used the shakes in other ways too. Following are photos of some of the installed Neville shakes.



*Dave Neville Shakes on the roof of the Crater Lake National Park Headquarters Building, Crater Lake, Oregon 1971. Photo from: Clarence*

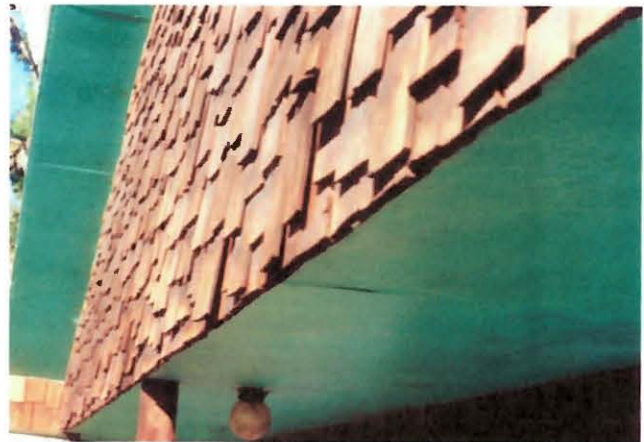
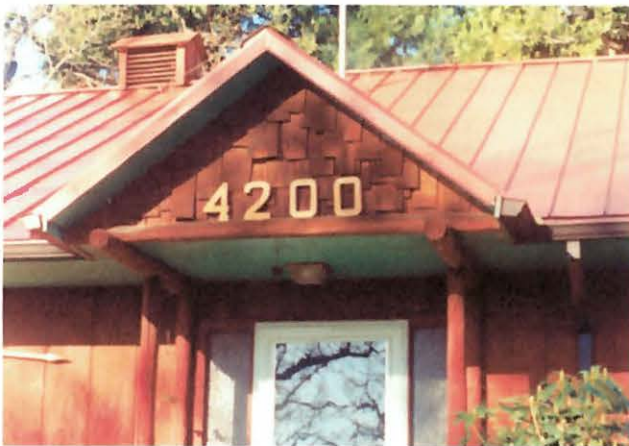


*Dave Neville shakes on the roof of the Gift Shop building at the rim of Crater Lake in Crater Lake National Park, Oregon. Photo from: Xanterra Parks & Resorts/Crater Lake*





Clarence's kitchen cabinets with Dad's shakes on the front. Number 1 shakes can be as fine a wood product as you can get. That is why the U.S. Park Service used Dave Neville's shakes on their Crater Lake Buildings.



Shakes on the Front of Clarence's House



# United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Crater Lake National Park

Post Office Box 7

Crater Lake, Oregon 97604

IN REPLY REFER TO:

H18(CRLA)

October 8, 2003

Mary Lou King  
1700 Branta Road  
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Mrs. King:

This letter is largely a thank you and an apology. I am very grateful to have received "The Making and Use of Sugar Pine Shakes," having read it at home last night. Your review of the process is very valuable, especially as to how it compares with re-roofing jobs utilizing western red cedar. Reading the booklet brought back memories of my two years in Prospect and later meeting both Dee Hedgpeth (when he was 98) and Jack Hollenbeak in 1995.

I must also apologize in not getting those photographs of the Administration Building to you. If prints are still of some value, I can send some taken in the past. Unfortunately the building was re-roofed with cedar in 1987 and again in 2001. There is still some sugar pine shakes nearby, on some of the employee residences that retain the original (and very pleasing) "hit and miss" pattern rather than straight courses used on symmetrical structures like the Administration Building.

Again, thank you for the booklet. I will alert my colleagues to its existence, especially when the subject of re-roofing comes up.

Sincerely,

Stephen R. Mark  
Park Historian



1700 Branta Rd  
Juneau, AK 99801

Steve,

This is the shake story I talked to you about on the phone. I was sorry you were unable to send photos, but have completed the story with what I have collected.

You expressed an interest in receiving a copy and it is enclosed.

Mary Lou King

# As It Was

Stories from the State of Jefferson



## The Wood House

Craig Stillwell

One of the most captivating houses in Jackson County, Oregon is the one that Marvin Sylvester Wood built in 1870, two miles north of the town of Eagle Point.

Wood built it to last by using lumber from trees found in the Upper Rogue area and cut at the mill in present-day Prospect. Inside the two-story, gabled structure, Marvin and his wife, Susan, raised three children: Ora, Mayme, and the youngest, Walter, born in 1881.

Walter married in 1904, but his wife divorced him twenty years later. Soon Walter adopted a hermit-like lifestyle, including a long, straggly beard that usually bore traces of his last meal. "Old Whiskers," as he was called, was also rumored to make moonshine.

In 1946, the state condemned his house in order to widen Highway 62. Walter furiously refused to allow its destruction. He demanded that it be moved to the other side of the highway and paid the \$1,442 required to do it. There he spent the rest of his life, sitting on the porch, watching the cars drive by, and occasionally shuffling down to Eagle Point.

Although Walter Wood died in 1974, his house endures, preserved and maintained by the Eagle Point Historical Society.

Sources: Hegne, Barbara, "Lonesome Legacy: The Wood House," *Southern Oregon Heritage Today*, vol. no. 9, 1999, p. 16; Hegne, Barbara, *The Wood Homestead* (privately published by the author), 1988; Strange, Jennifer, "Son Fought to Keep the Wood House from Being Razed in 1946," *Mail Tribune*, June 14, 2006; McKechnie, Ralph. *The Wood House: Eagle Point Oregon: A Virtual Tour*. 2006. DVD.

## Housing Shortage!

Margaret LaPlante

It's hard to imagine what would happen to a town that grew by 40,000 people in a few months.

That's exactly what occurred, though,

when Camp White was about to open. Built in 1942 as a training facility in Southern Oregon's Agate Desert for the U.S. Army's 91st Infantry during World War II, it brought 40,000 people to the vicinity of Medford in a short time.

The one thing that everyone wanted was housing! Many soldiers brought their wives and children who found themselves without shelter. Ads went into the local newspaper asking the townsfolk to make room in their houses and garages to accommodate the new arrivals. Some people went so far as to convert chicken coops, outbuildings, and sheds into living quarters. Beds were rented out in eight-hour shifts, which were advertised as "hot beds."

One lieutenant got fairly creative in attempting to call attention to his plight. He placed an ad in the local newspaper, stating: "Reward: Three-month-old Sally will reward someone with a pair of her mommy's precious nylons for a furnished apartment or house. She really needs a home."

The towns surrounding Camp White rallied and eventually everyone found a place to stay.

Source: Kramer, George. *Camp White: City In The Agate Desert*. White City, Oregon: Camp White 50th Anniversary Committee. 1992.

## Sugar Pines

Craig Stillwell

Sugar pines were a valuable resource for Southern Oregon's American Indians. The wood gave planks for shelter, the large cones gave seeds to eat, and the edible inner bark gave a sweet-tasting treat.

White settlers favored the sugar pine for its straight-grained, knot-free lumber. Many Rogue Valley pioneer houses and buildings used sugar pine boards and shakes cut from the forests around present-day Prospect.

Later, the logging and timber industry paid top dollar for sugar pines. To cut down a 200-foot tree, lumberjacks had to saw through a base that was eight to ten feet in diameter. After falling, the first cut of a tree

is called the "butt cut." This section of the tree is heavier than water, so it needed to be tied by a cable because it wouldn't float in the millpond.

One day, Dave Neville, the longtime Prospect shake-maker, made a butt cut from a fallen sugar pine. The cut log rolled down the hillside into a stream and sank to the bottom, dislodging some pumice rocks, which rose to the surface. With him was a newcomer to Prospect, who shook his head and said, "This is a heck of a country; the wood sinks and the rocks float!"

Sources: Weiss, Robert M. *Prospect...Portrait of an Upper Rogue Community*, Eagle Point, Oregon: Laurelhurst Publications, 1989, pp. 51-52; Todt, Donn L. and Nan Hannon. "Sugar Pines: Giant Princes of the Forest," *Southern Oregon Heritage Today*, Vol. 2, No. 10, (2000), p. 14.



*As It Was* is a co-production of Jefferson Public Radio and the Southern Oregon Historical Society. The series chief writer and script coordinator is Dr. Craig Stillwell a Ph. D. in History from the University of Notre Dame, now an instructor at Southern Oregon University. The team of writers includes published authors, university students and staff members from other historical societies in Southern Oregon and Northern California. *As It Was* airs Monday through Friday on JPR's *Classics & News* service at 9:30am and 1:00pm; on the *News & Information* service at 9:57am following the *Jefferson Exchange*; and during *The Jefferson Daily* on *Classics & News* and *Rhythm & News*.