

Remembering When Don Yarnell

By: Janis Santer

In 1884, after their parents were killed, three boys by the name of Lemuel, Bud and Leman Yarnell set out from Oklahoma, heading west. The journey took them two years to reach the town of Lyle, accompanied part way by a horse and dog, both of which died along the way. Winter set in, which altered their original plan of reaching Vancouver Washington, where their uncle lived. They stopped at the Pyatt Ranch, located at the head of Major Creek, where they worked for their room and board through the winter.

Not wanting to lose these hard working young men, George Pyatt kept them on at the ranch year round. When Lemuel reached the age of 21, he homesteaded 160 acres of land located about 1½ miles up Major Creek. Shortly afterward, Lemuel married Lula Mae who also worked for the Pyatt Ranch and they settled down to raise 10 children, including one son by the name of Don Yarnell of Underwood, Washington. Don, who will be 89 years old in April, grew up in Major Creek just west of Lyle where he attended Balch School. When he was small, his parents would put 4 or 5 of the children on a horse named Bill, and off they would go to school. Bill was quite large to these small children. So, in order to get on the horse without help, they would lay an apple, celery, or something he liked to eat on the ground. While Bill was eating, they'd climb up on his neck, sliding down to their riding position when he lifted his



head. Later, they would attend White Salmon School, arriving via the "chicken coop,, a home-made bus made from a flat bed truck by their neighbor, Forest Hewett. Bordering their place to the south was a Klickitat Indian Settlement, which was located primarily on the east side of the creek, bordering the Hewett place on the south. Don shared fond memories of his relationship with these tribal people. Three of the Indian women would come to the Yarnell place and sew moccasins for Don, his sisters and his brothers. In exchange, Lula Mae would sew brightly colored gingham dresses for the Indian women using an old treadle sewing machine. The moccasins were sewn by hand and if the skin was too tough, the women would chew on the skin to soften it up enough to get a needle through it. He remembered the Indians showing them a cache built into the rocks near Arnold's Point where they would store their belongings while they went to the huckleberry patch. In 1921, 43 feet of snow drifted into the canyon at Major Creek. In order to get to town,

a large tunnel was dug in the snow leaving a two-foot header at the top of the tunnel.

Don remembered the loading dock located at Hammond Cove in the early 1920s. The Thompson, Hogard, Nelson, Hewett and Sauter families who lived in the area would place their orders for a year's worth of supplies, which would be shipped up from Portland and unloaded at the old boat landing located just to the east of Major Creek.

He can still remember watching the logs come down the flume to the planer mill located at Major Creek. One of the



flumes came straight down Major Creek, while the other came across the Lauterbaugh property at Catherine Creek. Don especially enjoyed the picnics and ball games held in Lyle at the school yard each 4th of July. But one of his favorite spots in Lyle was at the Chamberlain place on the east side of the Klickitat River. "The Curl boys, when we was kids, we'd sneak off from church and go down to the river and

play," said Don. One time, the boys lost track of time and old man Curl came looking for them, grabbing Cliff and Jimmy by an ear.

"I know their ears were a foot long by the time they got back up from the river,"

Don said laughingly of the incident.

From a very young age, Don played the fiddle. Joined by his brother Lon on guitar, his sister Mary Jane (Arnold) on the piano and a friend from Lyle, Elmer Beeks, they would entertain the community at the local Turkey Tromps (better known as barn dances). They would play at the Lyle Hotel, and at the Grange Halls in Lyle, Appleton, Bingen and Cook, or just about anywhere a dance was being held.

In the early 1920s, during prohibition, Don's father and uncle hauled their home grown moonshine to Portland. Things would tend to get a little heated at times. They used a Studebaker V-12 and a LaSalle V-12 to keep their distance from the law. Sitting on the wings, and used at times as a decoy, was a Chrysler 66 roadster. When the law would get too close, the decoy would cut them off, or block the road, allowing the moonshine to reach its destination. Their running days came to an end when the Model A came out in 1928. The Model A could run circles around their Studebaker and LaSalle, which gave the federal agents the upper hand.

The stills were located along Major Creek and Catherine Creek and when the federal agents got too close, his father and uncle would pack them up and move them to a different location. Don remembers a still that was located inside their barn, but hidden from view. To get to the still, they had to go through

a tunnel accessed from the outside of the barn, something the federal agents never stumbled on to.

Don referred to the federal agents as Prohis (short for prohibition). Stumbling upon a jug of moonshine, one of these Prohis was about to make an arrest. But this Prohi was no match for a small kid with a bean shooter. The Prohi squatted down with the jug of moonshine between his legs. "Oh, that was a good target" said Don. Using his bean shooter, he took aim and cut loose of a rock, which hit lower than Don planned, hitting the jug and breaking it. Thinking his father would take a switch to him for breaking a jug of shine. Don hightailed it out of there and didn't come back until after dark. The next day, instead of a whipping, his father thanked him for breaking the jug. No jug, no evidence, no arrest. Lemuel's luck, however, eventually ran out, when he and his brother were caught by the federal agents. Since Lemuel had 10 children to feed, the federal agents, not wanting the responsibility of feeding this bunch, let him off on probation. Don's uncle was not so lucky, he went to jail for a year.

Cured of bootlegging, his father packed the family up, left the homestead and headed up to the top of Major Creek where he ran a steam saw mill until 1939 when they sold out. Don logged and drove truck for his family



operation for several years.

Don would later meet and marry his wife, Ester Larsen, who was born and raised in Underwood where they live to this day. Don picked Ester up the night of her graduation from high school and headed for the cafe in White Salmon. They were married in the kitchen of this cafe officiated by Ira Groshong, who was both the blacksmith and the judge. Fro Gillespie, who cooked hamburgers, and his wife Lois, who waited tables, were the young couple's witnesses. Don and Esther will be married for 66 years next June.