

IT'S NOT JUST A SHINGLE . . . IT'S HISTORY!

I was sure I had written this story before . . . but I can't find it anywhere. That's surprising primarily because it's one of my favorite "museum coincidence" stories! Six years ago, a gentleman from Everett called the museum and said he'd like to stop by and donate some pictures he had showing Canyon Creek Logging in the 1930s. Needless to say, we were thrilled to get the pictures . . . but they were merely the start to a spectacular visit.

John Osterman, 90, introduced himself when he got to the museum, then mentioned in rather casual terms that his dad had built the first shingle mill on Blackman's Lake. Specifically, he built a shingle mill on the exact site of what has been Miller Shingle Mill in Granite Falls since the mid-1940s. This was all news to me, since I had no idea there was a shingle mill on the site prior to Miller's, although I knew the Blackman Brothers once had a tie mill there to help build the Everett & Monte Cristo Railway (their mill burned in the 1890s).

John's Dad needed financial help to open the mill, and he got the help from a relative named Dahlberg (a local name, fairly well known). In return, he had to agree to employ Dahlberg's son (I believe John said he was a cousin) as a partner in the mill. Unfortunately, that didn't work out too well, and after about three weeks, John's Dad needed to cancel the agreement and buy out his partner's share in the mill. So the "O-D Shingle Mill" (stood for Osterman-Dahlberg) quickly became known simply as the "Osterman Shingle Mill". That all happened in 1939, shortly before John entered the service and left to fight in the war. John said that he'd never been back to the mill (his Dad sold out to Miller in the mid-1940s), but he wondered if there was any possibility he might get a look at the mill. It was late afternoon, but by good fortune, there was someone still at the mill . . . Bruce Miller III . . . and Bruce happily suggested we stop for a quick visit.

When John and I arrived, it took Bruce a couple minutes to appear, but in his hand he was carrying an old shingle. He said, "This has been kicking around the office for over 60 years, and we've never known what the letters on it stood for. Got any idea what they mean?"

The look on John's face was something to behold. On the shingle was written:

O-D SHINGLE CO.

Everett Wash

Box 139

At Blackman's Lake, Granite Falls, Wn

This is one of the first shingles cut off
the first bolt cut in the new mill, started in
June 1939, completed Oct 4, 1939



“Sure!” said John. “O is my dad – Osterman – and D is Dahlberg, for my cousin. I packed the shingles from that first bolt and I had no idea anyone had saved one!” He went on to share the story of the mill with Bruce Miller, who could see the tears of joy in John’s eyes. What a thrill it was to connect the threads of history in such an unexpected way!

When we left the mill, I told Bruce, “We’ll be back for the shingle”, and he smiled. It now sits proudly in the display cabinet in our museum lobby – a piece of history that survived all odds.



Last week, I got an email from John’s daughter who plans to visit with John this week. John’s 96 now, but she lives in New York and John really wanted her to visit the museum on Sunday after they attend an earlier luncheon. She asked if I remembered her Dad, and I had to tell her there was no way I could forget the visit we made together to the mill.