

Elmer and Eta Hamming Interview

By: Roger Sherman

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This interview was done at the home of Etta and Elmer Hamming, Oak Harbor, WA. They are long time acquaintances of the interviewer. When Roger was growing up, (1940s) he used to ride with his father, Clark Sherman, when feed was hauled from the Co-op dock in Oak Harbor. Etta and Elmer worked there at that time and both retired from the company.

R is Roger Sherman
E is Elmer Hamming
Et is Etta Hamming

R-----We are going to talk about the old Co-op Dock. Like for instance, both of you worked there?

Note: The company was called the Washington Cooperative Egg and Poultry Association

E-----Yes

R-----And Etta, when did you start working there?

Et-----1947

R-----And Elmer?

E-----1942

R-----In 1942 and what did you do when you first started there?

E-----My first job was to make turkey boxes. I did that for----

R-----Was that for the dressed turkeys?

E-----Yes, after they were slaughtered and then they were put in the cooler. They were rolled into the cooler, even before they were put into the boxes sometimes, depending on how fast they could do it. I made the boxes first. Then when that season was over, then I went into the feed department.

R-----And that was nicer?

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E-----Well no, making the boxes wasn't that bad. It was a one man job and you had to keep up with the flow of the need.

R-----Did they process chickens as well as turkeys there?

E-----Not that I know of. I never saw any chickens go through there, that I remember. It could have been, but I never seen em.

R-----Do you remember when they quit, when they went to Mount Vernon?

E-----No, I don't know

Et-----Well it has to be between 42 and 47 because they weren't doing it when I was there.

R-----Ok, because when I was in high school in the early 50s, I got to drive trucks to Mount Vernon with turkeys.

E-----That was the live turkeys?

R-----Yeah, because they had that plant over there

E-----Yeah, yeah, they had a big one over there.

R-----So, then you went from making boxes to the feed department and then what and name dates if you can remember.

E-----Oh boy. Well, it would be in the fall of 42. I don't know exactly when I started. Would that have been in September, or something. When did they first start shipping the turkeys. It was in the fall, wasn't it? Because that's when I started working there, so after that season, then I went to the feed department and I was just a worker over there, I ground the feed and did a little mixing, although Don Eaton was really the mixer at that time, but I did grind the feed for him and took care of the customers and then, I think maybe it was a half a year later or so, then I got to be the feed foreman, so then I had to order the feed and take care of all the inventory and take care of the customers and I guess just general work around there and I did that until VanDyk came back from the war and then I went on the petroleum truck. Lets see, I delivered feed to for awhile before that and then when the war was over and Garret came back, I got on the petroleum truck from then on and that was until I quit.

R-----Which was when?

E-----Lets see, 38 years from 42

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Et-----1980

R-----So, did you quit because you wanted to, or because you were unhappy.

E-----No, I was 55 years of age and I thought that was long enough for one company.

Et-----You were delivering over in the Mount Vernon area.

E-----Yeah, I had to go to Mount Vernon to go to work and then drive the truck from Mount Vernon back to Whidbey Island and Anacortes and around Mount Vernon. So I did have an increase in territory but I was used to a drive that was only maybe a mile and a half and I was driving 30 miles to go to work, so that made a big difference. I was 55 and I could retire with enough years in from the union.

R-----Now where did you pick up the fuel?

E-----First, we picked it up in Langley and Clinton, when I was just doing the island. When I got the Anacortes run, then I picked it up in Anacortes and San de Fuca and Langley and then when I got to Mount Vernon, I was picking it up everywhere. Burlington and wherever it was handy, whether it was in Mount Vernon, Anacortes, well, some of those plants were dismantled. Anacortes finally went out and Langley went out.

R-----Did you pick up at Columbia Beach, or what used to be Clinton? Did you pick up where the ferry is now or did you pick up down the----

E-----No, right in Langley.

R-----In Langley, not Columbia Beach then.

E-----No

R-----Yeah, because some of the old steam boats used to pick up fuel at Clinton, but that is not where Columbia Beach is. It is an older settlement to the north.

E-----No, I always picked up in Langley. It was the Standard Oil plant, bulk plant.

R-----Ok now, what's that blob of concrete sitting out in the middle of the bay. My recollection is that it had a fuel tank sitting in it. Is that right?

E-----That was a gasoline tank in there. It could have had, they had about three products, gasoline, stove oil and diesel and it could have been all three products were in there.

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R-----That was pretty good containment for those days.

R-----Ok Etta, what about you?

Et-----Well, lets back up a little bit on this. When you (Elmer) were working, all the feed came in by boat, at that time and so you would have to unload those skips every time in between.

E-----Oh yeah, as we were selling the feed, we would had to unload them and that was 45 sacks per skip. Then we had to store those skips until the boat came back in the following week. It always come in on a Sunday

R-----So they came in once a week. And what era would that have been?

E-----Ahmm

R-----Because the last of the steamer freight boats was the "Atalanata" and the last year that it ran was 1936. So that was before your time, so that's when the big red boats, well Bill (VanDyk) called them the red boats. They actually weren't red. They were all orange, but ah. Anyway, when you started working there, were those the boats that were coming in.

E-----Yeah- muhum

R-----Did they have that big elevator on the bow? Because, the old steamers, they had to go up a ramp, but when Lovejoy, Ed Lovejoy was his name, when he developed that company he developed the freight elevators on the bows of those boats so that they could take it up to the level of the dock.

E-----I see

R-----Now, when they unloaded those pallets, were they----

E-----I thought they came up a ramp at first. But what they came up later on, I don't know. Cause I never had to go down there on a Sunday and work. It was either Claude, or _____ one of those guys that took care of that.

R-----Do you remember, they had something they called jitneys that carried those pallets, the predecessor of our fork lifts.

E-----Right, yeah. And then what we had, we didn't have a jitney, but we had one of those, I've forgotten what in the world we even called them but they were on four wheels and you slid it underneath the skip. Then you had a big old handle that come down and

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had.

R-----You didn't have anything with a motor in it?

E-----No -- but we really didn't move them that much because we tried to unload them to the customers as we were emptying them, you know, mostly.

R-----Well now, when you loaded, like dad's truck. When you loaded those, did you put the sacks on hand trucks and then wheel it onto the truck?

E-----Yeah, yeah

R-----Yeah, I did a little of that, a lot of that.

E-----I can imagine, yeah, six high.

R-----When we were unloading those railroad cars, over there, I got in on a lot of that.

E-----Usually, we put them six high. I don't know what you guys did but that was probably about right. 100 lb. Sacks.

R-----Bill (VanDyk) said that the two boats, he remembered, coming in, it was called the Puget Sound Freight Lines. I have a complete history. I got a complete history from the company. They don't run boats anymore, they run trucks, but one was the "Warrior" and the other was the "Indian."

E-----So, I don't have any information on that platform that raised up. I thought the first ones that I remembered had a ramp that they came up. I kind of think they came a little bit with the tide to when they came in.

R-----Ok Etta. Like when did you start working?

Et-----I started working on October the 20th, 1947.

R-----What a day to remember.

Et-----Well that was a big day in my life and I worked in the office all of those years up until January of 82.

R-----Then you retired from there.

Et-----I quit.

R-----As I recall, you weren't too fond of Rody.

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Note: Rody (pronounced Roady) Rodarmel was the Oak Harbor manager. The co-op had changed its name to Western Farmers Assn. It was still a farmers co-op and owned by the farmers.

R, E and Et---laughter

E-----Neither one of us was.

R-----Well, obviously Bill wasn't either.

E-----No

R-----Do remember, like Claude (Boyer)?

E-----Yeah

R-----So you worked under him for an awful lot of years.

Et-----Claude and then Burger and then Rody.

R-----Now, did Rody actually work out on the dock, or was he---

Et-----No, Burger was manager at that time.

E-----When we moved?

Et-----Yes

R-----You gave me that date of 1958 when you moved into the new building and then, I didn't read all of that. When I was working at home, I was listening to the tape of Bill and he was talking a little bit about the move but he could not remember if it was Western Farmers at that time. He did say that when you guys left the dock then some boat outfit took it over. Do you remember anything about that? A marine outfit or something.

E-----No, there was a

Et----- (Could not understand tape. Something about a construction company).

E-----And they stored lumber there. He was a builder, a house builder.

R-----They actually bought the dock.

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E-----I don't know how that went. I don't know whether he leased it with intentions of buying it or just what arrangement.

Et-----They never told us. But then, I am sure that Western Farmers didn't have anything to do with it anymore so they must have sold it. Because I would think you would hear of someone checking it out once in awhile or doing something down there. Like when the fire burned it, there was nothing said about it belonging to Western Farmers anymore.

R-----I have that article. I'll have to read that. Maybe they say something about who the actual owner was. When I was a kid, I remember floats down there and some small boats. Do you remember?

E-----Yeah

R-----Did they lease space or something?

E-----I don't know what they did as far as the arrangements, but there was a float, in fact an airplane used to come in there once in awhile, not the same one, a float plane would stop down there once in awhile. And boats would stop there. I don't know if that was a public---I have no idea of what arrangement was made.

Et-----Western Farmers didn't keep it up or anything that I recall.

R-----Do you remember them working on the dock, maintaining it, as far as pile drivers and that kind of stuff.

E-----There was some.

Et-----They had to replace the planks every so often.

E-----Yeah, going down to the dock. They did that, but I don't know about driving pilings. You know where they killed the turkeys in the back there, whether that was added afterwards or what. That was on a cement floor.

Et-----Yeah, that's right

E-----And the rest was all wooden floors.

R-----What did they do with all of the guts and things like that? Did they do what I think they did with them?

E-----Yes, they did until the Navy got awful irate. They wound up on their beach. But some of the farmers took them in barrels and hauled them to the farms. Evidently they

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plowed them under or something and they used them for fertilizer.

R-----Mmm, that's supposedly what the Indians did with fish. Do you remember any old stories like the one I got from, well it was actually Chuck Arnold's wife, Connie. She was a Lang and ah they back in the days with the horse and buggies, they managed to back a wagon load of potatoes off the dock. It drug the horses down with it and the horses drowned. Do you remember any stories like that, any happenings?

E-----That was before our time

R-----Well it was, obviously, with the horse and wagon, but they used to have a heck of a time turning those horse and wagons around on the dock. It took a pretty good team of horses and driver to be able to back a four wheel wagon.

E-----Did they have to back it down the dock all the way?

R-----No, but they had to turn them once they got on the dock and I don't know how they did that. They said that Elmer Calhoun, down at the Coupeville dock, he would get a hold on their reins and then back them around some way in the building. He ran the feed mill there. They stored a lot of grain and stuff in there. Langley had a U shaped dock, but it was the only one on the island, so you wouldn't have to turn the horses around. That made a lot of sense.

Et-----They never had any horses go down there-----

E-----No - had tractors. Tractors with trailers.

R-----Do you remember Etta, any of the old freight boats that used to come in.

Et-----Not particularly, no. They weren't doing that to long when I started working there. Because, then it came in by truck.

E-----Well, it came out of Bellingham, the truck and trailers. They used to haul them up to Wilbur's (Sherman) with a truck and trailer.

R-----I helped unload some of them.

Et-----I can remember the trucks going to Coupeville.

R-----Do you remember about when the boats quit bringing that freight in?

Et-----It has to be before 50 because when you were in the service, it was coming in trucks already.

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E-----Well, lets see. I think I hauled it from Whitmarsh and ah I think that's before I went in the service, cause when I got back, I was on the gas truck. So ah, ----

Note: Whitmarsh is on the old highway on March Point between Anacortes and Burlington, near where the Swinomish Casino is now. All that was there in the 50s was a dinghy tavern and railway siding. The interviewer hauled numerous truck loads of turkey feed from that siding in the early 1950s.

Et-----It has to be between 47 and 50 then.

R-----That's close enough. That type of thing doesn't need to be exact. Historians just put ca.. It gives you an approximate time period. Ok, now the name and it is in here, Washington Egg and Poultry Association.

Et-----Washington Cooperative Egg and Poultry Association.

R-----Then, Bill, in the interview, just remembered it as the dock, or the Co-op and that's what we always called it to. Do you remember when the name was changed to Western Farmers?

Et-----I can't say that I do.

R-----I sure don't either, but it had to have been before they moved off the dock.

Et-----Yeah, I would say so. I don't remember if it was Western Farmers when I started or if it was the Co-op then.

R-----What type of work did you do there Etta?

Et-----When I first started I waited on the customers and made up the statements and mailed them all out and that pretty well took care of the day. And I balanced the ledger every so often.

E-----You did all of the billing.

Et-----Then somewhere along the way, Seattle took over the invoicing. We had to send all of the invoices into Seattle. And they did all of the statements, but when that was, I couldn't tell you either.

E-----That's when they started getting those computers.

Et-----Yeah

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R-----And then is that pretty much what you did your whole time there?

Et-----Yeah, it was.

R-----You never got to be the boss, or were you one of those persons that ran the place but you didn't have the title.

Et-----Well, I was the assistant branch manager. I got to that capacity.

R-----Tell me about Claude. Did he work there the whole time you were there?

Et-----He was there when I started but he worked quite a few years before that. He worked there for years and years, didn't he?

E-----Yeah

Et-----Lyle Muzzal was manager before him.

E-----But then after Lyle, there was. What was that one that raised----

Et-----Bill Ballou (spelling OK)

E-----Bill Ballou was there and then it was. I think he was before Claude. And then Claude got in.

R-----Now, when Claude left there, did he retire?

E-----Yeah

R-----Do you guys remember anything about the machine shop that was at the head of the dock there.

Et-----Lambert Vanderstoep

E-----Well, no, before that it was, who was it, that older person. Lambert had and Hank Zylstra, I think, had it for awhile and then Lambert had it. But, what in the world did they call that? He had it for years.

R-----I was just fascinated with that place, with all of the belts and the overhead drive lines---

E-----Yeah, all of those wheels turning and stuff.

R-----God, OSHA would never approve that thing today.

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E-----That was amazing all the stuff that thing ran.

R-----Can you think of anything else that would be of interest, history wise, anything. Did the kids used to swim off that thing? Did they dive off of it?

E-----Yeah, they would dive--- In fact there was a ladder that went up to the roof, well if you were facing the dock, it would be on the right hand side (West side) and you could climb that ladder and get on the roof and they would dive from the roof down.

Et-----I guess I didn't see that.

E-----Well, we didn't see it either because we would have kicked them off there but they would do that after hours or weekends. I heard them talking about that. A lot of kids went down there fishing though and that's where you had that little dock down there. The kids would go down there and fish off that little thing. Sometimes they would fish from the top side, but a lot of times they would walk down to that little dock and fish.

R-----We used to fish from the Coupeville dock all the time. We caught a lot of perch.

E-----Well now, did you walk down there from your home, or did you---

R-----Bicycles. Mom cooked the perch, but she never liked them because they were so boney. They had the, well, so called toilets, bathrooms, you know, it was the type that went straight down into the water. We used to catch fish through there. Well, OK, I think I have what I need. One of more then twenty docks that I've counted so far.

Note: Oak Harbor had three wharves, the first being built by Barrington and his partner Phillips in the 1860s. The second was the L. P. Byrne (pronounced Burn) wharf, east of Midway Ave. The third wharf was the Maylor wharf (dock), 1890s, later owned by the Washington Cooperative and Egg Association.

E-----Is that right? I wouldn't believe that there would be that many. I used to deliver to a guy just out of Greenbank and he was the mail man at one time and he had a dock that went out there. That was just a little bit below Greenbank.

R-----Almost straight out from where the Greenbank Farm is now, just a little bit to the East.

E-----No, this was a little farther south (probably east) than that, where I delivered to him. He said the boat used to stop and he'd have the mail.

R-----Well, they had Cottage Grove, one of those resorts down there, by Dynes Point

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Cottage Grove had a little dock. It didn't go out very far, but he had some floats that went out during the season. I didn't count that one. There's probably several of those around.

Note: Tape ran out and we did not continue. Some parts of the tape were not transcribed because they were not of interest to the subject matter.

Note: One of the interviewers questions: Does the bay in Oak Harbor have an official name? The answer is yes. The U. S. Board of Geographic Names states that the bay is called "Oak Harbor," the same name as the city.