



Herbert J. Cox

1891-1958

Herbert Joseph Cox was born in Winona, Minnesota, on January 23, 1891, the descendent of an Englishman who crossed the Atlantic to fight in the War of 1812 and later settled in Ontario, Canada.

Cox's father, Herbert Aaron Cox, found his way to Minnesota where he prospered as a railroad conductor and married a "noble, God-fearing woman," Nancy Rebecca (Rude), who believed that "a woman's place was at home and the husband was the lord and master of the household." After young Herbert was born, the family moved to Nebraska.

Later, following a trip to the Pacific Coast, Cox's father became obsessed with the Westward urge and left railroading at age 40, financially well off, to move to Oregon. In 1901 the family settled in the Willamette Valley, near Eugene, where the father invested in timberland and took up farming.

Young Herbert milked cows morning and night and walked four miles round-trip to school until he left in the 8th grade to begin a lifelong career in the forest industry.

Starting as a "pond-monkey," he soon transferred to log handling. Then he decided to accept an offer by his father to go to the Eugene Business College where he took a stenographic course. Upon its completion in 1909, he went to work in the office of the Mohawk Lumber Company in Donna, Oregon, as an "inkslinger," a stenographer/bookkeeper, at a salary of \$50.00 per month with free accommodations in a two-bed bunkhouse, less \$18.00 per month for cookhouse board. "In the early days," he said, "lumber mill firms, with few exceptions, employed male stenographers; the average mill office was 'no place for a lady'."

At Mohawk, Cox worked from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily, six days a week, and used Sundays to catch up if he got behind. Part of his job was to keep an eye on the lumber flume from his office window. His only recreation was the Saturday night dances where the loggers danced in their stocking feet, because they owned nothing but calked boots.

Before long, Cox made his first of several career moves by transferring to the Booth-Kelly Lumber Company at their Saginaw operations near Cottage Grove. Booth-Kelly was the first Willamette Valley lumber company to engage in interstate business and it was recognized as the leader and training school in the lumber industry. Cox's salary jumped to \$70.00 a month.

Booth-Kelly operations in the Willamette Valley had been predicated on the granting of rail-freight transportation rates from the valley to San Francisco Bay, allowing them to compete with water shipping operations of Western Oregon and Washington. The inauguration of such rail competition was followed by rapid lumber industry development throughout the valley.

At Saginaw, Cox learned to delegate some of his duties to others, and he was rewarded with a transfer, in 1912, to Booth-Kelly's plant at Coburg, a "one-payroll" town.

It was there that Cox met and married, on October 23, 1914, "Coburg's uncrowned Queen," Alice M. Clover, daughter of Charles Pressley Clover, the Coburg mill company's night watchman. Their marriage was to be a long and happy one.

The Coburg plant was closed down in 1914 following completion of a new, ultra-modern plant in Springfield, replacing the one lost there by fire. Cox was transferred and his duties included conducting tours of the new plant. He saw World War I stimulate the industry and increase the need for lumber that was used in ship and airplane building.

After the war, the pent-up demand at home and abroad for forest products made the 1920's a period of prosperity for both labor and capital. Cox was able to invest money in two partnerships. With his father-in-law, he became a silent partner in a recreational hall, and with two other gentlemen, he acquired a fuel company that sold mill refuse for firewood.

In 1928, A.C. Dixon, Booth-Kelly's General Manager, asked Cox if he would accept responsibility for management and future development of the Willamette Valley Lumberman's Association, an organization which had long been dormant and was in the process of being revived. Jack Magladry, the newly elected president of the organization would work with Cox. Together they endeavored to organize lumbermen and improve general business conditions for the industry.

Cox traveled around the state in a Model T Ford from mill to mill contacting lumbermen, as prospective members of the organization. His work with the association gave him a wide acquaintanceship with the leading lumbermen of the period and he became a keen observer and commentator on the scene. And, as an industry spokesman, he was strongly opposed to Roosevelt's New Deal regulations.

Through the years, Cox became increasingly involved in community and industry organizations. A Eugene resident from 1931 to 1957, he served on the Eugene City Council and became a member of the board of directors of the Eugene Chamber of Commerce in 1938, and its president in 1945.

Forestry research caught Cox's interest and he became a leading advocate as president of the Forestry Research Foundation from 1940 to 1955. He was also secretary of the Willamette Valley Wood Chemical Company from 1945 to 1947, and served from 1940 until his death on the board of directors of the Keep Oregon Green Association.

Cox's sense of humor, always evident in even his most serious endeavors, caused him to help organize the "Order of the Buggy Ride," an annual event still conducted in Eugene. The "Order" pokes fun at Oregon principals and reminds them to not take themselves too seriously.

In addition, he found time for several lodge affiliations, including the Eugene Elks Lodge No. 357, the Liberty Lodge No. 171 AF & AM in Springfield, the Scottish Rite in Eugene, and Hillah Temple of the Shrine at Ashland.

Cox remained secretary-manager of the Willamette Valley Lumbermen's Association until 1949. At that time he retreated to his McKenzie River cabin and recorded his experiences in a full-length book which he published that year as Random Lengths, Forty Years with "Timber Beasts and "Sawdust Savages." The book is a rich source of information about 20th century lumbermen of the region, with historical references brightened by colorful tales of the woods.

Cox later published a weekly market report, called "Random Lengths" after his book, for eight years until poor health forced his retirement.

In 1957 Cox moved back to Springfield where he died at his home the following year at age 67. Upon his death, the Eugene Register-Guard newspaper wrote, "Cox in his life bridged the old and the new in lumbering. With his zest for the new he also had a nostalgic yearning for the sweaty bunkhouse, the bull cook, and the toot of the locomotive of the old logging trains. A good citizen has entered his last retirement."

He was survived by his widow, Alice, his daughter Clover Jean Dorries, and one-grandson.