

Hubert Schafer

1872-1931

In 1893 Hubert Schafer, age 20, got his humble start in the logging business. He and his brothers, Peter and Albert, sons of Satsop Valley pioneers of 1870, harvested 500,000 feet of Schafer farm timber and converted it into cash at an Aberdeen sawmill for \$2.50 a thousand delivered, or \$1,250 for a season's work!

That was the beginning of Schafer Brothers Logging Co. that, in the next few decades, was to grow into one of the great forest industries of the West. Schafer Brothers had operations in four Washington counties—Grays Harbor, Mason, Thurston and Lewis and their products were shipped worldwide.

Hubert Schafer was closely identified with this growth. He was in the woods all his life, as faller-bucker, riverman, 'donkey' engineer and logging boss. He was secretary-treasurer of the company, in charge of all scaling and selling of logs. His four decades in the woods spanned many of the major steps in West Coast logging development.

His career was marked also by work on behalf of his industry. He was a leader in the Pacific Logging Congress from its very beginnings. He helped found the Red Cedar Shingle Bureau. In 1918, he was part of a four-man delegation to Washington, D.C., representing the loggers, successful in keeping logs out of price control. In addition, his influence was vital in development of guidelines and rules for grading and scaling logs of the Douglas fir region.

To find Hubert Schafer, you usually had to head for the woods. Hubert was known as a "complete logger," with a sure hand on all facets of the business, but his keenest interest was with his cutting crews. He felt that falling and bucking practices could make or break a company and insisted on low stumps and maximum care in falling, to minimize breakage. He trained his own specialists to mark felled trees for bucking, so the most in grade and value could be realized. Early in Hubert Schafer's career, he learned the value of scaling accuracy.

Maybe the Schafers were not in much of a negotiating position when they brought their first batch of logs to tidewater in March 1894, but as they stepped up output, they soon gained bargaining strength. By 1897, they had a drive of two million board feet. Next year Klondike fever gripped the land and Hubert went north to return in '99 with a stake of \$500 saved from his pay as a Yukon steamboat hand. During his absence, man-made engines had begun to replace bull teams in the woods. The Schafers set their cap for one.

Hubert headed for Seattle for a job at Washington Iron Works where they machines were being built. Hubert was there 18 months, and each month part of his pay was set aside to apply for his first machine.

Hubert also put in his Alaska stake. Peter and Albert added their gleanings from '98 and '99 and borrowed \$1,300.00. With that, they made their deal, and the wondrous

machine arrived at Satsop by railroad in 1900.

Andrew Smith, a Schafer neighbor, hauled the little 'donkey engine' up to the Schafer place on his big wagon. When it thundered into action, with Hubert at the controls, Satsop folks gazed in awe. The machine was a jewel. Hubert used it not only to bring in logs, but to load the river and pull out jams. It could go anywhere, needing only a stump or tree to reeve on. Hubert knew all its ways and nursed it with doting love.

Log production doubled and the Schafers were able to acquire larger machines. By 1910, they could move logs nearly a mile from stump to river, using a yarder, a 'swing donkey' and a roader.

As cargo mills on Grays Harbor grew in number, Schafer Brothers further expanded timber holdings and operations. In 1913, they started railroad logging and shifted from ground to high lead logging. In 1919 the firm went into the sawmill business. The first oil-burning donkey engine was introduced by Hubert in 1922. In the late '20's he brought in their first diesel donkey.

On July 10, 1925, one of Hubert's sides yarded, loaded and shipped 104 cars of logs, 875,000 feet, in an 8-hour shift, a record at the time.

At the peak of production, the company had about 3,000 employees and the logging operation included six camps, 70 donkey engines, two railroads totaling about 100 miles, 18 locomotives and 325 log cars.

In Hubert's day, timberland economics did not favor holding the land after the old-growth harvest, but later on tree farming became possible and the company bought back about

20,000 acres in the Satsop region. After World War II, the Schafer holdings were sold to Simpson Timber Company, Shelton. Shortly thereafter the former Schafer sawmill at Aberdeen became a Weyerhaeuser unit. Descendants of the Schafers continue active in the business and civic life of Grays Harbor.

The Hubert Schafers lived in Aberdeen. Mrs. Schafer was the former Bertha J. Thornton, schoolteacher. They married in 1908. Five children were born to them – Bertha, Elizabeth, Hubert, Gerald and Francis, the latter two being named after Hubert's friends at Washington Iron Works, the Frinks. Mrs. Schafer died December 19, 1929, and Hubert passed on less than two years later, September 6, 1931.