

# *Sol G. Simpson*

1844-1906

Sol Simpson was born in Cote St. Charles, a town near Montreal in Quebec, Canada. His father, Joseph Simpson, was originally from Yorkshire, England, and his mother, Caroline Grout Simpson, was from Vermont. Until he was in his early twenties, Sol Simpson lived in Cote St. Charles which was on the Ottawa River, and while he was growing up he saw the port achieve a high volume of log trade. As a young man he worked with the great rafts of timber coming down the river, both in moving them and in breaking them up so that the logs could be shipped abroad.

Just after the Civil War in the United States, news of gold and silver in the West was reaching as far as Cote St. Charles. Simpson left home attracted by stories of fortunes to be made, and settled in Carson City, Nevada around 1870, where he became involved in various mining ventures. In 1876 he married Mary Garrard.

In 1877 his oldest daughter was born. Since all of his business ventures in Carson City, including his mining, had been unsuccessful, he and his new family moved to Seattle, Washington in that same year to make a new start. With a team of horses and a minimum of equipment he found work grading streets. He prospered in this endeavor and became a substantial contractor for the city operating as "S.G. Simpson & Co."

About 1888, Captain William Renton made a contract with him to go to Kamilche on one of the southern inlets of Puget Sound to do the grading for the Port Blakeley Mill Company. In 1894, when the grading was

completed and the railroad was under construction, Simpson turned S.G. Simpson & Co. into a contract logging company for the Port Blakeley Mill Company. This was Simpson's first venture into the logging business.

In 1895 he incorporated his logging business as "Simpson Logging Company." It's \$50,000 in capital stock was owned equally by four shareholders of the Port Blakeley Mill, Mr. A.H. Anderson and Mr. Simpson. Simpson continued logging for the Port Blakeley Mill and also bought and logged timber in other areas. Anderson was the representative of B.B. Healey, his father-in-law who lived in Wisconsin and had purchased a substantial acreage of timberland in eastern Grays Harbor County. Healey and Anderson also had substantial interest in the Peninsular Railway Co., the Mason County Logging Co., the Phoenix Logging Co., and several miscellaneous businesses in the area, including a hotel, a bank and a retail store.

Sol Simpson died in 1906, and after his death his son-in-law, Mark Reed, and Mr. A.H. Anderson bought out the other shareholders of Simpson Logging Company. About the same time the Port Blakeley Mill Company, where Simpson had gotten his start in logging, was sold by Renton's heirs. Over the years Simpson had become known as quite an innovative logger. He was one of the first to use horses for logging instead of oxen. He had been using horses for grading when he started his first logging contract, so he just kept working his team of horses, seeing no disadvantages in it (except perhaps for being

the target of the other loggers' jokes). In fact the horses proved to be faster and have more stamina than the oxen, and slowly but surely the use of horses for logging became quite popular.

Simpson also brought mechanical horsepower to the logging site. In northern California, John Dolbeer, a redwood logger tired of the slow-moving oxen, had devised an engine strong enough and portable enough to move logs in the woods. Simpson ordered one to use in the forests surrounding Puget Sound. The engine, a simple design, was not very impressive at first. Dolbeer had taken the design from the small steam engines used on sailing ships to bring up the anchor. Dolbeer could not understand why the same simple principle could not be applied to the hauling of logs from the timber stand. He set about designing an engine with a vertical boiler that powered a single cylinder engine to turn a spool with a cable attached. The cable was then connected to a log and the spool "wound" the log into the leading site. It required a horse to haul the cable back to the next log, but in spite of the unsophisticated design, Simpson liked the Dolbeer engine, felt it had potential, and ordered more. In time, the design was improved so that the need of the horse to return the cable was eliminated, and the strength of the engine was increased to the power of hundreds of horses. The small engine was affectionately called a "donkey" by the sailors of the ships due to the nature of its work. Dolbeer carried its name into the forests. Where once oxen and horses had ruled, the steam "donkey" now came to dominate. By the late 1890's these engines had well established their reputation. Their popularity caused them to be used widespread throughout the Puget Sound forests. And so, the first marriage of steam to

logging was formed. There would be many such marriages with the advent of steam locomotives to haul the timber giants from the Pacific Northwest forests.

There were many other business interests in Simpson's life. He was a major stockholder and a very active one in the Capital National Bank of Olympia. He owned tidelands in Seattle – coastal property within Seattle city limits which later became very valuable. He also formed the White Star Steamship Company which was on its way to becoming a very successful steamship company when one of its passenger ships was lost at sea for about two weeks. The subsequent suits against the company forced it out of business, and unfortunately Simpson had to dispose of his Seattle tidelands in order to settle the suits.

Simpson was a true pioneer with all of the innovative energy one needed to make a success of life in the rugged West. Simpson Timber Company stands today as solid proof of the strength of Sol Simpson's main business endeavor. "Simpson Logging Company" became "Simpson Timber Company" in 1950 so that the name would cover the extent of Simpson operations.