

George Corydon Wagner, Jr.

1895-1979

George Corydon Wagner, Jr. used the name Corydon Wagner. “George” was generally reserved for his well-known father, Dr. George Corydon Wagner, though both men lived with distinction, fulfilling their individual commitments to the same community.

Most people knew Corydon Wagner as a lumber executive, dedicated to the industry; many recognized him on the golf links, for he played like a champion; others met him at Yale, a school he steadfastly supported; a certain percentage of them served with him in the army – veterans who kept in touch at a Last Man’s Club; and a good number still solicit The Wagner Fund, a family charitable foundation initiated by him.

Corydon Wagner’s activities, just as his friends and business associates, were varied and almost endless; so it’s easy to see how his life was laced with accomplishments.

He was born in Tacoma, Washington, in 1895. His mother, Heartie Dimock Griggs, was the daughter of Colonel Chauncey Wright Griggs, one of the four founders of the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company. Cordy (as everyone soon called him) grew up in Tacoma, where he was to live most of his life. After attending The Taft School, Watertown Connecticut, he enrolled at Yale University and graduated in uniform (Class of 1916) having joined the army. He served nine months overseas as a Lieutenant with the 347th Field Artillery.

At the close of World War I, Corydon Wagner returned to Yale for a degree in

Forestry. Before long, he was back in Tacoma to begin a career in the lumber business with the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company, first applying his talents as plant timekeeper. Perhaps two important factors triggered his success. Cordy Wagner believed in himself and he believed in forestry. In 1925, he distinguished himself as head of the company’s Atlantic Coast Sales Office. By 1930, at the home base, he was in charge of Finance, Manufacturing, and Sales, and had advanced to Vice President and Treasurer, two posts that he resigned from in 1958 when St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company merged into the St. Regis Paper Company.

Of course, for Cordy Wagner, this departure from a prominent position did not signal inactivity or uninvolvedness – he was not one to be cabined and confined. He participated in the lumber industry where he was a familiar figure, respected for his vast knowledge and years of experience. Corydon Wagner had an exceptionally innovative and retentive mind. Not long after he left St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Company, he became principal founder of Merrill & Wagner, Ltd., a timber processing, lumber and veneer manufacturer in the Cariboo District of British Columbia. Merrill & Wagner, Ltd. came into being through the acquisition of several British Columbia timber and small sawmill operations, but it was through the combined efforts of Mr. Wagner and his son, Corydon Wagner III (generally known as Cordy, Jr.) over a period of three or four years, that production started at Merrill & Wagner, Ltd. With exemplary teamwork,

these two men provided the base for the company's inception as well as its expansion. Mr. Wagner, acting as Chairman, looked for future growth, while Cordy, Jr. as President, attended more often to the daily operations. Under this father-son leadership, the business grew from a rather small concern to an organization that employed well over 500 people, controlled substantial timber rights, and owned a very modern sawmill and veneer plant at Williams Lake, British Columbia. At that state of development, early in 1977, Merrill & Wagner, Ltd. was sold to Weldwood of Canada, Ltd.

About the time Merrill & Wagner, Ltd. was formed, another Wagner firm appeared – Cariboo Pacific Corporation, established as the United States sales outlet for Canadian products. Mr. Wagner was Chairman of the Board of Directors at Cariboo-Pacific until his death in 1979.

Some of the other business activities to which Mr. Wagner contributed his multiple skills and advice were: The R.D. Merrill Company, Merrill & Ring, Inc., and Merrill & Ring Canadian Properties, Incorporated.

Besides his distinguished lumber industry career, Mr. Wagner was associated as a Director with several publicly owned firms, among which were the Winthrop Hotel Corporation and the Consumers Central Heating Corporation. He was also Director of Booth Kelly Lumber Company until its merger with Georgia-Pacific. Cordy was particularly proud of his relationship with Tacoma's Puget Sound National Bank. He was on their Board of Directors for 35 years, and afterwards, he served for several years on the Bank's Advisory Board.

His long-standing membership on the Board of Directors of Tacoma General Hospital was also very rewarding to him, inasmuch as the hospital established itself during his tenure as one of the outstanding health facilities in the Northwest. In addition, he served a term as Hospital President.

He was a past President of the Tacoma Area Chamber of Commerce and for four years, as a Director of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States, he was the spokesman for our country's natural resources.

During his lifetime, Mr. Wagner held memberships in many industry organizations, such as: West Coast Lumbermen's Association, National Lumber Manufacturers Association, Western Forestry and Conservation Association, and the Industrial Forestry Association, serving all in executive capacities.

As early as 1935, Corydon Wagner was named Chairman of the Trade Promotion Committee for the West Coast Lumbermen's Association. In 1937, he was among three men in our nation to be selected by the Oberlaender Trust, a United States-Germany cultural exchange foundation, to travel through Central Europe to study forest products utilization. Mr. Wagner was a United States delegate to the Third World Forestry Conference in Helsinki, Finland, in 1949; and in 1954, he was the U.S. Delegate to the Fourth Forestry Congress in Dehra Dun, India. During 1958-59, he represented the United States as a delegate to the sixteenth and seventeenth sessions of the Timber Committee of the United Nations Economic

Commission in Geneva, Switzerland. He was also engaged as Chairman of the Host and Finance Committees and Vice Chairman of the United States Delegation to the Fifth World Forestry Congress held in Seattle, Washington, in 1960.

Cordy Wagner was always ready to support and to give. Being a staunch proponent of his alma mater, he gave both time and money towards creating the Hugh Brady Scholarship Fund, which aids young students interested in the Forestry program at Yale University.

He was an active member of the First Congregational Church. He belonged to the Tacoma Club, Seattle's University Club, the Yale Clubs of New York City and Western Washington, plus its St. Elmo Society and Aurelian Honor Society. He was a member of Sigma XI, the scientific research society.

Another lifetime interest was golf. Lumberman Wagner started as a ten-year-old caddy at the Tacoma Country and Golf Club in 1906, the year the club moved to the present location. Cordy carried the club's longest standing membership, dating from World War I days. At his best, he played to a four handicap. He won the Washington State Seniors' Golf Association Championship in 1955, the first time he played in its tournament. He was a U.S. Golf Association rules committeeman for several years. But it was with the seniors that he especially endeared himself. In 1952, he joined the Seniors Northwest Golf Association, a 300-man group from Washington, Oregon and British Columbia. He won the championship in 1956, and was president in 1966. Cordy Wagner also belonged to the Union Club of Victoria,

British Columbia; two California clubs – The Valley Club of Montecito, Santa Barbara, and the Thunderbird Country Club at Rancho Mirage.

Cordy was a member of the Chesapeake Club, for he owned two chesapeakes, friends as well as watchdogs, who were eager in all seasons to accompany him on walks about Lakewold, the Wagner's woodsy old country place on Gravelly Lake, nationally renowned for its beautiful grounds and diversified gardens. Cordy's great love for trees has lasting evidence in his own grove of favorite specimens, either rare or uncommon to the area, many of which he had collected during visits around the world. These he transplanted along the edge of a sward sloping to the lake. From 1967 to 1979, his name was on the roster of the International Dendrology Society of London. The Rhododendron Species Foundation was still another organization to which he was devoted and served for many years.

As an octogenarian, Corydon Wagner had more time to work on the Wagner and Griggs genealogical trees. (He wanted to make sure his three children and eleven grandchildren remembered their ancestry). Cordy's penchant for history never altered. It was his wish to preserve the whole story of the St. Paul and Tacoma Lumber Company, and this wish has come true, primarily due to his own endeavors, for he was the chief catalyst in raising the necessary funds to commission the noted historian, Murray Morgan, for the job. Cordy fondly dubbed the project "Four West," because the book would also chronicle the lives of the four pioneering founders, including Grandfather Chauncey Wright Griggs.

The date for the completion of the manuscript was December, 1979; it was to be the same month and year in which Corydon Wagner died. Cordy was cognizant of the facts unearthed by Murray Morgan about the "Boot," the author's term for the Puyallup River Tide Flats, locale of the St. Paul and Tacoma Lumber Company. Most likely, this history will be in book form by 1982-83, for public sale under the title The mill on the Boot.

On Sunday, December 16, 1979, Mr. and Mrs. Corydon Wagner attended church services at the First Congregational Church on South J Street, in Tacoma. Mr. Wagner died at home shortly thereafter. During the memorial services, the Reverend Edelen delivered an unforgettable and remarkably simple eulogy. Probably everyone who knew Cordy cherishes the same thoughts. George Corydon Wagner, Jr. was truly a Renaissance man. He was a credit to forestry, to the lumber industry, and, in general, to all mankind.

Mr. Wagner had been married over 55 years to the former Eulalie Merrill. They had one son, George Corydon, III, and two daughters, Wendy (Mrs. George H. Weyerhaeuser) and Merrill (Mrs. Robert Ryman).