

Harold Woolley

1912-1970

More than a few men have carved and shaped backwoods Oregon logging towns into thriving communities, through the cut logs and sawmills that have marked their timber careers. But few have, beyond the scope of forestry, inspired and affected the lives of virtually every local citizen, as did Harold Woolley.

The town was Drain, heart of timber country where local logging and independent mills worked side by side. From childhood until his death, Woolley was part of the area – he knew the land, the trees it supported, and most of all, the tremendous pride of small town achievement.

While teams of horses still formed the backbone of logging, Woolley was forced to trade school for work. Although only 13, his large family needed what he could earn. He began as a fire warden but soon drifted into the aura of lumber mills and logging. The whirring of saws, the clean, fresh smell of newly-cut lumber excited him and would do so throughout his career.

Only 27 years old, he decided to start his own business. The Depression was closing and timber's future looked promising. Area lumber mills were open and needed logs. Woolley, agreeing to supply a local company, opened his own logging operation. Little did he realize that this same company he was supplying, in less than ten years, would be his own.

Not a man to pass up a good opportunity, or to be content with a single, small operation, Woolley purchased the lumber mill. He had watched the timber industry proliferate during World War II, and knew expansion would pay. In less than ten years, he would expand again, opening the Drain Plywood Company in 1956, then purchasing the Blue River Veneer Plant in 1959, and just prior to his death in 1970, adding the Mt. Baldy Mill.

Fire has always been the fear of loggers and lumbermen alike. Despite stiff safety standards, fires were often common, financially ruining many small entrepreneurs. In a five-year span, Woolley himself had both his first lumber mill and his plywood plant reduced to charred rubble. Financing, will power, and hardened optimism supported his courage to rebuild.

Woolley's keen perspective and unbending enthusiasm carried over into his community. Proud of his hometown and surrounding area, he eagerly undertook workloads of city and county activities far beyond those related to his business including a 19-year term on the Douglas County Budget Committee, years spent on the area's Bureau of Land Management Advisory Board and the Douglas County Board of Equalization, plus dozens of local activities. Woolley, also a recreation enthusiast, was convinced that outdoor sports would provide good, wholesome activity for area young people, and saw that fine public recreation facilities were built.

Beyond his timber career and his family (his wife, Donna, and five children), Woolley had one passion: Baseball. For years he had watched the local sand-lot games with dismay. How much better, he thought, a real playing field would be. Idea-struck, Woolley gathered his logging equipment and workmen, and turned them loose onto the task of building the town a genuine baseball field.

As townsfolk beamed on the new diamond and its first home game, Woolley was again dismayed. He thought of the great improvement a grandstand and full-lighting would make. Knowing exactly where to find the 100-foot poles he would need, he again set to work. As these were completed, for a third time he was dismayed. He lacked a true baseball team. Supported by other townspeople, he laid the groundwork for bringing to town the Drain Black Sox. He supplied jobs in his sawmill in order to lure the state's best college talent, and served as the team's financial mainstay, covering the cost of flying the 22 or more players and equipment to the national semi-pro championships in 1958 and for two additional years. As the last "out" of the 1958 tournament was being called, Woolley ran onto the Kansas playing field, one of the proudest men alive that day. His Drain team had won the national title. Had his loggers not built the home field, nor his sawmill helped players earn a living, he and local citizens would not have celebrated Drain's national fame that day, nor would they have had a legendary chapter to add to local history.

Whether in timber, baseball or civic affairs, Woolley's promotion-mindedness continually brought attention to Drain. During the 1959 Oregon Centennial, Drain's covered wagon distributed 50,000 letters inviting everyone to visit the town, enjoy its recreation, watch the Black Sox play, and while they were there, of course, tour the Drain Plywood plant. One of the few men to have a keen sense of entrepreneurship for both business and his town, Woolley never lost his special determination to align personal interests with those of others around him. Despite the prosperity of his timber career, pride in his town never wavered. He believed in it as he did in himself – and gave every moment to developing a financially solid yet well-rounded community.