

Howard Wallis Irwin

1899-1953

Howard Wallis Irwin was born in Palo Alto, California, on October 9, 1899. He attended the University of California at Berkeley, where he studied business and law. He was married to Doris C. Hinton (a native of Vancouver, British Columbia) on June 30, 1924.

He started his successful career as a lumber wholesaler, with offices in the Oregon Journal Building, now known as Jackson Tower. In the early 1930s, he met James A. Lyons of the Coos Bay area. Mr. Lyons was familiar with logging and lumbering operations. The two men teamed up and from then on there followed a series of events unique at that time in the Southwestern Oregon lumber industry.

Their first joint venture was to take over the Empire Lumber Company in 1935. In 1937, they acquired a North Bend corporation named Mill B, Inc., from the former Stout Lumber Company. At the same time, they purchased extensive timberlands, as well as the mill, from the W.R. Culver Company. These were located on the South Fork of Coos River in Coos County.

Officially, the Irwin-Lyons Company came into being in 1938. They operated the sawmill until 1955, producing approximately 100 million board feet annually.

From time to time, they acquired or formed other companies. Some of these were the Coos River Boom Co., Daniels Creek Logging Co. and I-L Logging Co., Inc. The

name of the latter was changed to Irwin-Lyons Lumber Company.

Extensive logging operations were conducted up the Coos and Tioga rivers. Coos River Boom Co. floated the logs down to tidewater with the use of splash dams. They were then rafted and towed to the sawmill on Coos Bay.

Some of the lumber was shipped out of North Bend via the Southern Pacific Railroad, but the bulk of the lumber produced went by lumber schooners to San Francisco, Los Angeles and Long Beach. For the first time in the industry, lumber was packaged for sling loading and unloading from vessels. This system is used throughout the industry today.

From 1938 to 1948, Irwin-Lyons chartered the steam schooners QUINALT and NORTH BEND from the Hard Wood Lumber Co. In 1948 the firm purchased a Navy surplus LSM vessel that was renamed the ROLANDO. In 1949 another was purchased and named NORTH BEND, with a third acquired in 1951 and named COOS BAY.

To promote sales of their Oregon lumber, the firm in 1943 acquired the J.E. Peggs Company in California and the Rolando Lumber Co. in 1946 in San Francisco.

The success of Irwin-Lyons Lumber Company and allied operations is credited to the special talents of each man. Mr. Irwin, in general, looked after the financial affairs of the various companies. Mr. Lyons was in

charge of logging and manufacturing operations. This was a rare combination.

Mr. Irwin had a good “feel” of the wood products business at all times. He was decisive, making decisions quickly; he never looked back nor worried. Stories of his compassion are many.

When the schooner ELNA broke apart and sank off the Oregon-California coast with a full cargo of lumber, his only concern was for the crew. He was elated when he learned that all hands had been rescued.

Another time, when good business judgment called for a shut down of the mill because of depressed conditions in the lumber market, he elected to keep operating. Thus, the employees were assured a job and a paycheck.

Mr. Irwin’s hobbies included yachting, hunting and fishing.

Mr. Irwin died at the age of 54 on November 7, 1953 in Portland. At the time, he was survived by his wife, his daughters Joan Irwin Green and Jean Irwin Hoffman, his mother and seven grandchildren.