



Edward Keating Bishop

1872-1968

E.K. Bishop worked his way from a cabin boy on a four-masted schooner to directorships of leading financial institutions in the Pacific Northwest. He became a leading philanthropist as well. Remembering his own youth, its trials, and working as a mill hand at fifteen cents an hour, he was especially generous to organizations aiding youth.

Edward Keating Bishop was born February 1, 1872 in Alton, Illinois, the son of a civil engineer. He lived and was educated in Illinois until entering Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania to study engineering. His university career, however, was cut short because of family financial reverses. Bishop, Ned as he was called by his family and friends, was 19 years old. The year was 1891; the American West was still sufficiently untamed to lure those with a taste for adventure – especially a 19 year-old. Leaving school he headed west, stopping to work, here and there, as he went. In El

Paso, Texas, he had the good fortune to be hired as a camp cook for a party of vacationing New Yorkers bound for the mountains of New Mexico. They traveled by horseback, covering several hundred miles during summer and fall – living, as Bishop wrote later “...like kings on deer, wild turkey and trout from mountain streams...occasionally we would go to the plain below where quail would almost roost on your gun barrels.” Winter ended the outing. Bishop headed for Los Angeles, taking odd jobs as he went. Jobs in Los Angeles proved scarce. In response to stories of ready employment in Oregon, Bishop shipped out as cabin boy on a lumber schooner bound for Portland.

Ned Bishop landed in Portland with five dollars in his pocket. Immediate employment was imperative. The jobs offered were in the woods or in mills; Bishop had experience in neither. On the strength of knowledge of higher mathematics, however, he managed to talk

his way into a tallyman job in a lumber mill in Portland. He admitted later that at the time he hadn't known the difference between a two-by-four and a railroad tie. He described his first days on the job as "horrible," but he struggled through and stayed for two years. As he acquired knowledge, he began writing articles on logging and lumbering for newspapers and magazines. In 1895 a series of articles that he wrote for the Oregonian newspaper in Portland resulted in his being hired as a full-time staff writer, a job which he held for three years. Then the H.R. Duniway Company of Portland offered Bishop a job as their Puget Sound lumber buyer. He accepted and moved to Seattle. Four years later he resigned to go into business for himself.

Hoquiam and Aberdeen on Grays Harbor, opening directly into the Pacific, were then developing into major lumber ports. Edward K. Bishop, looking for a small business to match his limited capital, found what he wanted in a small shingle mill at Montesano, near Aberdeen. That was 1903; Bishop was 30 years old. Wood shingles, at that time, were big business. Shingles were common residential roofing, and were popular for side walls as well. The shingle mill Bishop bought had gone bankrupt. The machinery was priced at junk value. With a small down payment, and help from the bank, the E.K. Bishop Shingle Mill came to being. Bishop quickly turned it into a profitable operation. Then, a year later, still heavily mortgaged, the mill burned to the ground. In the interval, Bishop apparently made a favorable impression on the Grays Harbor business community because he was able to borrow from the bank and rebuild immediately. He had scarcely rebuilt when a new blow fell. In the summer of 1904, as the construction

season was nearing its height, rail shipments of shingles from Puget Sound to the East were suddenly restricted or blocked; object: to corner the shingle market. With his direct route to market closed, Bishop turned south to Portland. He knew that sacked wheat from east of the Cascade Mountains went by rail to Portland for trans-shipment by water. He correctly reasoned that empty wheat cars could return to the East with shingles. The key was warehousing. If he could obtain short-term warehousing in Portland, he might break the monopoly and turn it to his advantage. Moving swiftly, he tied up available Portland warehousing. Soon he was moving shingles in such quantities that he was buying from mills throughout Southwestern Washington in order to supply the demand.

Almost overnight Bishop found himself not only free of debt, but with capital to invest. He invested in standing timber, improved his mill and planned future expansion. In 1913 he married Lillian Fleet, a member of a prominent Grays Harbor family. At about the same time he bought a mill to cut spruce, then a neglected species because of cutting characteristics different from Douglas fir and Western red cedar. Spruce demand soon altered sharply upward: Combat aircraft for World War I were built of tough, lightweight spruce. Bishop moved his mill to tidewater in Aberdeen in 1920, and although he continued to operate it until 1958, banking occupied more of his time. In 1923 Reuben Fleet, Bishop's aviator brother-in-law, sought family financing for a company he called Consolidated Aircraft which he was forming in New York state. The Bishop investment represented two-fifths of the starting capital. Consolidated grew to become one of the giants of the industry,

and was the largest aircraft manufacturer in the world during World War II. Today it is known as General Dynamics Corporation.

The 1920s saw E.K. Bishop as president of Aberdeen State Bank, and of its successor, Grays Harbor National Bank. GHNB in 1928 became a part of Marine Bancorporation with Bishop serving on its board. Marine is the parent of the big National Bank of Commerce of Seattle. Bishop also in 1928 invested in a predecessor company of the now giant Safeco Insurance Company. He served on their board from 1941 to 1964. From 1938 until his death he was a vice-president and director of the National Bank of Commerce. He also invested in property in Southern California where the Bishops, with son Edward Fleet Bishop and daughter Barbara, often vacationed. As Bishop's financial influence grew so did philanthropic participation.

Edward Keating Bishop and his wife, Lillian Fleet Bishop, were especially interested in the young. Lillian Bishop and her brother had endowed a foundation to provide funds for construction and maintenance of a public park in Montesano. Subsequent substantial gifts from the Bishops expanded the foundation to include student scholarships. They next founded the Bishop Eye Research Center in Seattle to investigate diseases of the eye; and the E.K. and Lillian F. Bishop Foundation to provide financial aid to institutions and programs assisting young people. Among recipients of substantial grants are children's hospitals and homes, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and the Y.M.C.A. The third and last major Bishop philanthropy was provision of funds for construction of the E.K. and Lillian Fleet Bishop for the Performing Arts at Grays Harbor College in Aberdeen.

Edward Keating Bishop died January 25, 1968 at the age of 95.