



## *John Wood Blodgett*

1860-1951

John Wood Blodgett was born July 26, 1860 on a frontier farm on the site of the present village of Hersey, Osceola Co., Michigan, to Delos A. and Jane Wood Blodgett. His father, a native of Otsego Co., New York, of New England ancestry, came to Michigan in 1848, and was well-established in logging, sawmill operating and farming when John was born. John learned the rudiments in a school his father built for settlement, and then attended Todd Seminary in Woodstock, Illinois, and Highland Military Academy in Worcester, Massachusetts, from which he graduated in 1876. Although he had expected to enter Harvard, he became a lumberman at eighteen. A short course at a Grand Rapids business school, where, he said, he learned to write a check, completed his formal education. He was then sent to Muskegon to help look after his father's pine logging and milling interests in the area. Uninformed about the lumber industry, he learned to place his trust in those with specialized knowledge. Within a few years he had assumed chief responsibility for the family

enterprises in the Muskegon Valley; in 1885 he also became president of the Muskegon Booming Co., which boomed and sorted all the logs floating down the Muskegon River, and was said to be "the largest exclusive dealer in saw logs in the world." At the height of the Muskegon operation, Blodgett mills were producing sixty million board feet of lumber a year. About 1890 John moved to Grand Rapids, where his father lived, and made it his residence for the rest of his life.

Although Blodgett lands in the Muskegon Valley had been cut over by the early

1890s, John continued to be actively engaged in business, taking full charge of family business affairs several years before his father's death in 1908. In 1895 he married Minnie A. Cumnock, a native of Lowell, Massachusetts and a graduate of Vassar. During the 1880s, the Blodgetts acquired some quarter million acres of pinelands in the South, mainly in Mississippi. From World War I to about 1934, Blodgett maintained an office in

Mobile but did no logging or milling. The stumpage was sold under cutting contracts with Blodgett retaining only the mineral rights on the cut-over lands. A Western office was established in Portland, Oregon, in 1905, and in the preceding year, Blodgett bought into the Booth-Kelly Lumber Company at Springfield, Oregon. Forestlands were also acquired in California and Oregon, where logging and milling operations were carried on by a number of companies of which Blodgett was a leading member. Companies in which he was prominent included the Blodgett Co., Ltd., the Wright-Blodgett Co., Ltd., the Hill-Davis Co., Ltd., owner of redwood timberlands in Humboldt County, California, all of which he was chairman or manager, and the Michigan-California Co., of which he was organizer and president (Interestingly, the use of "Ltd." suggests that these companies were of Canadian origin. This was not the case, as at that time Michigan was one of four states with a limited partnership law). Although his lumber interests were extensive, they were modest compared with those of giants in the industry. He had large investments in Grand Rapids, where he was considered "the biggest financial figure," and was a director of a number of banks, including the Federal Reserve Bank in Chicago.

Blodgett was president of the National Lumber Manufacturers Association in 1922, 1923 and 1930, and was chairman of the committee established by the association to work with Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover, in standardizing the manufacture and distribution of lumber. He was an advocate of reforestation, and was concerned with the problem of forest fires; Blodgett Co., Ltd. incurred severe losses in the great Tillamook Burn in Oregon in 1933.

His civic and philanthropic activities were numerous. He was a founder of the Anti-

Tuberculosis Society of Michigan, and one of the antecedents of the Community Chest and the Chamber of Commerce in Grand Rapids. Long interested in improved health facilities in Grand Rapids, he and his wife gave more than half a million dollars for the erection of the Blodgett Memorial Hospital, which was completed in 1916. Two decades later they made a large gift to the hospital. In 1929 they gave about half a million dollars to Vassar for a euthenics building, the Minnie Cumnock Blodgett Hall – Mrs. Blodgett (1863-1931) became nationally known for her work in the field of public health. The Blodgetts aided the Delos A. Blodgett Home for Children in Grand Rapids, and made possible the establishment of Camp Blodgett for children on Lake Michigan. At Blodgett's death, a fellow townsman, Congressman Gerald A. Ford, described him as "a generous benefactor who always gave magnanimously for humanitarian causes."

Blodgett was an advocate of fresh air and exercise, advising sedentary workers to "get out of doors." He rode horses until he was 80, played golf frequently for another decade, and enjoyed sawing wood with a bucksaw. In the year of his death, he visited the new sawmill of the Michigan-California Lumber Company at Camino, California. A photograph taken during his last year is that of a man looking many years younger. He lived on his estate, Brookby House, where he had one of the finest gardens in Michigan.

The Blodgetts had two children. Katherine (Mrs. Morris Hadley) was long active on the board of trustees at Vassar. John Wood, Jr. entered the lumber business, and in the later years of his father's life had chief responsibility for the family's business affairs.

Mr. Blodgett died November 21, 1951.