



Harold James Broughton

1888-1970

The son of a lumber mill owner, Harold James Broughton struck out on his own to found the Broughton Lumber Company of Willard and Underwood, Washington. Harold successfully navigated two worlds—moving between the business world of sales and urban living in Portland and rural life at his mill on the Columbia River.

Harold was born in Oregon City on January 12, 1888, the middle child and only son of George Broughton and Clara Louise Taylor Broughton. Harold had two older sisters—Vesta and Alda—and two younger sisters—Harriet and Mildred. Harriet died at age 6, but Harold's other sisters grew to adulthood, and all three married.

George Broughton was a founder and partner in the Broughton and Wiggins Lumber Company, which manufactured poles and piling. Originally the mill was located in Oregon City on the Willamette River, but a series of floods led the company to relocate to St. Helens, Oregon, on the Columbia River.

Harold attended high school in Portland and enjoyed playing baseball as a youth. He enrolled in the University of Oregon and became a founding member of the university's Beta Theta Pi fraternity and served as the organization's fourth president. Harold graduated in 1913.

Harold's future wife, Rita Fraley, was also a University of Oregon graduate (1916) and a charter member of the school's Pi Beta Phi sorority. The couple married in 1916 in Eugene, Oregon. Their first child, Emily Jean, was born May 20, 1919. Two other children followed: Mildred Eleanor (b. April 14, 1922) and Hal Fraley (b. April 4, 1934). The family eventually settled in Portland, and the children grew up in a beautiful house on Ravensview Drive in Portland Heights.

For a time, Harold worked for Broughton and Wiggins Lumber, but he wanted to go into business for himself. With a few partners, Harold launched the Broughton Lumber Company. The company was formed on April 20, 1923, but not formally incorporated until around 1970.

The groundwork for Broughton Lumber had been put in place years earlier. The Pacific Light and Power Company had built an earthen dam on the Little White Salmon River near Willard in 1913, and George Broughton and his associates had built a flume to carry rough-cut lumber (called "cants") from Willard down to the Columbia River. This business, however, depended on the construction of a resaw mill at Hood (part of the town of Underwood), planned by the Perry Lumber Company of Nebraska. Perry reversed course when the price of lumber fell and never built its new mill. As a result, George Broughton's Drano Flume and Lumber Company became inactive.

But in spite of a challenging lumber market, Harold decided to begin operations at Willard and Underwood, relying on the link provided by the nine-mile long flume. At first, Broughton Lumber paid a fee to the Drano Flume and Lumber Company to use the flume, but Broughton purchased the flume outright in 1927.

Harold's primary partner in Broughton Lumber was Donald M. Stevenson, a fraternity brother whom he knew from his college days. Stevenson was an experienced general contractor, and his knowledge came in handy when the company constructed several new buildings. Stevenson eventually supervised logging and operations at the Willard mill.

Once the mills were running, Harold devoted a good share of his energy and time to operating the company's sales office out of the Builders Exchange Building in downtown Portland. Now known as the Oregon Pioneer Building, this commercial building has housed Portland's oldest restaurant, Huber's, since 1911, and Harold ate there a few times each month. Harold also had a standing

lunch every Tuesday with his good friend Clarence Jewett at the elegant Multnomah Hotel, located very close to the Builders Exchange Building.

On Wednesday afternoons after lunch, Harold made weekly trips out to the mill at Hood, where he stayed until after lunch on Friday, when he returned to Portland. Until he built a house of his own on the sawmill property in 1959, Harold slept in a room behind his office at the mill.

The company maintained two cookhouses, one at each mill. Harold always took his meals with the crew at the Hood mill. The crew was seated by seniority in the company, and whenever Harold joined them, everyone shifted down one seat so that Harold was at the head of the table.

Cam Thomas, Harold's grandson, recalled that Harold was treated with similar respect when he dined with his grown daughter and her family, who lived on mill property beginning in 1948. "Grandfather Broughton sat at the head of the table when he came to visit." Harold, however, recognized that city traditions did not necessarily apply in the vicinity of the mill. "Once my mother asked him to change into a suit for dinner when she had friends visiting, and he responded, 'No, this is the way I dress when I'm at the mill.'"

In the early years of the company, Broughton Lumber logged in the vicinity of the Willard mill. The company later laid railroad track along Pine Creek and elsewhere to extend its logging operations. Eventually the company negotiated a long-term contract with the U.S. Forest Service to log in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

During the 63 years that the Broughton mills operated, the flume played an essential role. Lumber longer than 32 feet had to be carried by truck, but anything

smaller was transported from Willard to Hood by the flume. It took about 55 minutes for a cant to travel the nine miles and 1,000-plus foot descent from the upper sawmill to the lower resaw and planing mill. Running through rugged territory, the flume was sometimes damaged by rockslides, and lumber jams also temporarily stopped operations. The flume could also be dangerous. Donald M. Stevenson and Harold's son-in-law Don Thomas both injured themselves at various times clearing lumber jams from the flume.

Lumber was in great demand during World War II, and Broughton Lumber helped the effort. After the war, Don Thomas joined his father-in-law at the company and eventually became president of the business. Don's involvement with the company enabled Harold to ease back from his day-to-day duties, and in the late 1940s and 1950s, Harold and Rita traveled extensively. They visited China, South

Africa, Vietnam and Thailand, and took a cruise that traversed the Panama Canal.

While Harold attended to business in Portland and out at the Hood mill, Rita maintained the active life of a socialite. She participated in a wide range of volunteer charitable activities and was a member of the Town Club. Harold maintained his social and professional connections in Portland through his membership at the University Club and the Waverley Golf and Country Club. He was also a member of the West Coast Lumbermen's Association and active in the Republican Party.

After his son-in-law had learned the business, Harold had enormous confidence in the younger man's ability to oversee

mill operations. Nevertheless, Harold maintained his presence at the mill and took a great deal of interest in the welfare of the crew. One longtime employee, Vern Newell, recalled that once some of the Broughton Lumber crew worked on loan for another company—long shifts six days each week for a month. Harold thought the men deserved a bonus, but the company refused, so he paid them each a substantial bonus out of his own pocket. "And he paid the taxes on it," remembered Newell.

Harold died on May 1, 1970, just one week before the death of his partner, Donald M. Stevenson. Rita had died seven years earlier, on June 25, 1963. When Harold died, the company that he built was still going strong, but change was coming to the Northwest lumber industry. In the late 1970s and 1980s, public forestlands became less available for logging, and there was a dwindling supply of the large timbers that the Broughton mills were designed to cut. Broughton Lumber cut its last lumber in December 1986, and the working days of the last operating flume in the United States came to an end.

Broughton Lumber, however, continues to this day. The company owns 14,000 actively managed acres of forestland, which produce a sustainable annual yield of 4 million feet of timber. Harold's spirit remains alive among family, friends, and employees, and his company's timber continues to contribute to the Northwest's forest-based economy.

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