

Joseph Henry Gonyea

1889-1963

Joseph Henry Gonyea was born in Milaca, Minnesota on March 9, 1889. In his late teens, his family moved to Tacoma, Washington where his first job was delivering groceries by horse team for a grocer named C.A. Brown. Shortly thereafter, he got a job loading doors in boxcars for the Wheeler Osgood Company, which at that time was the largest door plant in the world. While this job did not maintain his interest for long, he little dreamed that some 45 years later, he would be president of that same company.

While his formal education ended at the grade school level for economic reasons, his ambition led him to a complete accounting education through correspondence school. This in turn led him to a job as deputy city controller of the City of Tacoma and to a subsequent position with W.W. Seymour, who was then Mayor of Tacoma. It was during this period that he developed his unusual expertise in the financial world that was so successfully demonstrated throughout the rest of his business career.

Next, he entered the stationery business and ended up as owner of M.R. Martin Co., the leading office supply firm in Tacoma, and was elected president of the Washington State Stationers Association.

His first executive entrance to the lumber industry was as treasurer of Tacoma Sash & Door Co. From there he joined Herman Tenzler in acquiring what later became Northwest Door Co. This team built the firm from 200 doors a day to 2,000 doors a day and operated a plywood plant at the same location.

During this period, Mr. Gonyea was directly involved in the recruiting of W.E. Difford as managing director of the Douglas Fir Plywood Association and the expansion of this group in

leading the plywood industry during its explosive growth period.

Northwest Door also purchased Clear Fir Lumber Co., a major manufacturer of doors at Day Island, near Tacoma, and operated it successfully until its destruction by fire in the early 1940s.

About this time, Gonyea, Tenzler, together with Sherman and Bob Davidson, acquired Siuslaw Forest Products, a logging and sawmill operation at Mapleton, Oregon, and operated it until its sale to U.S. Plywood Co.

A mutually agreed upon separation occurred between Gonyea and Tenzler with Gonyea retaining the Oregon interest. Together, with his two sons, the Clear Fir Products Co., a re-manufacturing facility, was constructed at Springfield, Oregon. At the same time, Clear Fir Sales was established, a marketing concern selling lumber and plywood primarily.

After a fire destroyed the re-manufacturing plant, it was rebuilt as a door factory, manufacturing 2,000 doors per day. The Clear Fir Sales and Products companies were subsequently sold to a group of key employees who in turn sold out to Fibreboard Corporation a few years later.

The Gonyea family, together with the Pritzker Family of Chicago, bought the Umpqua Plywood Corp. at Roseburg, Oregon in June 1952.

During this period, Gonyea also participated in the purchase of Fir Manufacturing Co., a sawmill at Myrtle Creek, Oregon with considerable timber ownership. A plywood plant was built at Myrtle Creek and the Mt. Pleasant Plywood Co., a green and veneer plant was purchased in Washington and moved to Tiller, Oregon where it supplied veneer to Fir Manufacturing Co. and also produced studs.

Through an exchange of stock, whereby Wheeler Osgood purchased the Myrtle Creek and Tiller holdings, the Gonyea family became major shareholders of Wheeler Osgood and J.H. Gonyea became vice-president and later president of that organization. Subsequently, the Gonyea and Pritzker families purchased all the outstanding shares of Wheeler Osgood through a tender offer and operated it until its liquidation.

Mr. Gonyea died in May 1963 and is succeeded by a daughter, Mrs. Foster Anderson of Eugene, Oregon, and by two sons, Wilford H. of Eugene and Douglas A. of Tacoma and 11 grandchildren. His whole history in business involved participations with his family and with key employees, as well.