

# *Col. S. Orie Johnson*

1881-1952

Col. S. Orie Johnson was born Samuel Oramel Johnson in the lumber town of Howard City, Michigan, on March 9, 1881. He was the first child of local sawmill owner S.S. Johnson and Emma Gibbs Johnson.

Orie Johnson's father was a successful logger and sawmill manager as well as part owner of various small lumber mills in Minnesota. Young Johnson was quickly exposed to the lumber industry. When not in school he was usually found working at odd jobs in the mill or traveling in the woods with his father.

Johnson graduated from Shattuck Military Academy at Faribault, Minnesota, in 1898. Then he returned to his father's mill in Cloquet, Minnesota, where he was trained in several jobs. Through the years at Cloquet and later at Mc Cloud, California, Orie became his father's special assistant.

When his father became ill early in 1905, Johnson took on more responsibilities at the McCloud mill as well as in San Francisco. Soon after his father's death that same year, Johnson was appointed vice president and general manager of the McCloud River Lumber Company and its carrier, the McCloud River Railroad Company. He was 24 years old. For the next three years, Johnson directed the McCloud operations. Then, with his mother and brother, Paul, he founded the S.S. Johnson Company as a corporation to manage his father's estate.

In December, 1906, Johnson married Katherine Horrihan of Duluth, Minnesota. She had worked for his father's company in

Minnesota and San Francisco. Together they had five children: Emma (Peggy), Katherine (Kathleen), Samuel S., Beatrice Patricia, and Sheila (Sheyla) Marie.

In 1909, Johnson joined the Weed Lumber Company at Weed, California, as an advisor and consultant for timberlands and ranches in northern California and southern Oregon. He was very successful in buying and selling lands for the Weed Lumber Company and for his own company's investments.

During these years, the development of railroads was playing a major role in the settlement of the Northwest and in the growth of the lumber industry. Johnson saw the possibility of linking the Northwest to the Southwest and the East Coast through railroads. The railroads would pass through forestland and the lumber industry could grow tremendously. He formed a company with other far-sighted businessmen to make this expansion a reality. They pushed the railroad north into Oregon to the Klamath Falls area, and even farther, to Central Oregon, developing lumber operations in those places at the same time.

By 1917, World War I was underway in Europe. The American Expeditionary Forces were in urgent need of lumber for the allies. The best way to get the lumber was from the French forests immediately behind the front lines. The importance of having experienced lumbermen to tap the forests became clear, and one of three selected was Johnson. He quickly accepted the challenge. In August that year he was commissioned as a major in

the 20<sup>th</sup> Engineers Regiment. He set aside his investments in California and Oregon and selected men to work under him in Europe. He successfully dealt with the problems of working in foreign territory. In fact, he found Europe so much to his liking that he returned there many times with his family during the years after the war. After his World War I discharge, he remained active in the military service. In 1928 he was promoted to colonel and from that time on he used the name Colonel S. Orie Johnson in his business as well as his military affairs.

In the 1920's Johnson became even more involved in Central Oregon investments than he had been before the war. He invested for his own S.S. Johnson Company and served as broker for others. Two of his principal clients were the Shevlin family of Minnesota whom he had known nearly all his life, and W.A. Gilchrist of Chicago.

In the early 1930's, the advent of a program of timber production quotas under the Federal National Recovery Act spurred all non-operating timberland owners into liquidation. S.O. Johnson was among those in Central Oregon who encouraged owners of small mills to locate in the Sisters area.

By 1939 Johnson had withdrawn his share of timber from the Johnson-Gilchrist holdings and had liquidated it along with the other timber holdings. In the meantime, he had acquired a half interest in The Kite Knot Pine Mill in Sisters which he later moved to Redmond. His ownership in The Tite Knot Pine Mill was through the S.S. Johnson Company, a partnership with his son, Sam, his resident agent in Central Oregon.

Johnson had maintained his office in San Francisco from the time of the death of his

father until he was called to war. During this period, he acted as broker for private owners and arranged several large sales in the redwood region of northern California.

After returning from World War I, he reviewed the possibilities for sales and trades in the redwood region. He continued his interest in this area through the next two decades. In 1933, he arranged a merger of the Holmes-Eureka Lumber Company and several other timber companies. The mill had no timber and the timber companies were not selling timber.

Johnson became general manager and a substantial stockholder of the Holmes-Eureka Lumber Company at Eureka, a post he held for two years. This experience brought him into contact with the Union Lumber Company at Fort Bragg and the Pacific Lumber Company at Scotia. He became a substantial stockholder in both of these operations and continued his interest in them for the rest of his life.

Johnson enjoyed a longtime friendship with William Randolph Hearst, the newspaper publisher of San Francisco. He first became acquainted with Hearst while working at McCloud when Hearst built a summer home on the McCloud River. Later, Johnson helped Hearst acquire adjoining timberlands in the McCloud River area. Johnson was a frequent visitor at Hearst's San Simeon home and often a hunting guest at the Hearst ranch.

Johnson was an avid sportsman. He and others founded a well-known duck club on Winter Island offshore from Pittsburg, California. He would often invite his friends to Central Oregon for hunting deer, quail, chuckers and pheasant. His love of Europe took him there for upland game shooting and

he traveled to Chile to fish extensively in the rivers and oceans of that country. In all of these sporting activities he continued to visit old friends and make new ones while conducting some business at the same time. These ventures included importing wine and guns from Europe and looking at timberlands in Chile.

In his later years, Johnson was active in the California Forest Protective Association. He was also a strong supporter of the University of California School of Forestry.

He died on August 5, 1952, in Berkeley, California, at the age of seventy-one, after a long life, full of adventure and innovative business moves.