



# William E. McPherson

1910 - 1994

The story of Bill McPherson's life and career illustrates that, in the forest products industry, a person can achieve great things through hard work, determination, courage, and above all, concern for others. Bill was 48 years old when, with Paul N. McCracken, he became the co-founder of Tumac Lumber Company. For the next thirty-five years, Bill provided continuity of leadership while Tumac grew to become a nationwide and international distributor of lumber and wood products.

## Early Life and Career

William E. McPherson was born in Portland on August 29, 1910, a third generation Oregonian on both sides of his family. Bill's paternal grandfather, William Angus McPherson, had traveled on horseback in 1850 from Iowa to Oregon seeking a new home for his family. Finding beautiful land in abundance, Angus returned to Iowa and traveled the Oregon Trail once again, this time by covered wagon with his widowed mother and his sister's family. Angus then became a newspaper journalist known for his ardent opposition to slavery and eloquent support for the Union during the Civil War. He was also elected to the office of Oregon State Printer.

Bill's father, Otho Leon McPherson, managed a cannery on the east bank of the Willamette River, from which, by ship and by rail, the abundant produce of the valley was shipped throughout the United States. Bill's mother, Lavilla Ottilia McPherson, was the daughter of John Bilger, a pioneer merchant and craftsman who supplied tools for the thousands of gold miners who successfully explored the mountains of southern Oregon. The Bilger House still stands as a historical landmark in Jacksonville, Oregon.

Bill and his older sister, Ann, grew up on Southeast Ash Street near 18th Avenue, graduating from Buckman Grammar School and Washington High School. Bill went on to study food sciences at Oregon State Agricultural College in Corvallis, now Oregon State University, but he was disappointed to find that, upon completion of his fourth year of college, he lacked a single credit necessary for graduation.

The year was 1932, and the Great Depression had begun. The circumstances compelled Bill to become financially productive without delay, so rather than return to college for another term, he took a job loading trucks for Best Foods Company. Because the qualities of a good salesman came naturally to Bill, by 1936 he had advanced with Best Foods to become the company's Denver-based wholesale representative.

Bill's heart remained in Oregon, however, and there he returned in 1938 to marry Helen Vivian Osland. After two more years with Best Foods in Spokane, Washington, the couple came back to Portland to stay, though it meant a change of career for Bill.

## A New Career

Bill got his start in the lumber business in 1940 with J.V. G. Posey & Company. Under the mentorship of John Posey, Bill worked with a consortium of three companies known as Western Aircraft Veneers. At one of those companies, Spruce Lumber & Veneer, Bill gained hands-on lumber mill experience of the products he was soon to sell. Those products included most notably aircraft lumber, flitches, and veneers manufactured to the precise requirements of Army-Navy Aeronautical Specification AN-NN-P-511b, using Douglas Fir, Upland Hemlock, Sitka Spruce, and Noble Fir, the latter two woods on special directive from Wright Field, now Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio. Following World War II and Mr. Posey's retirement, Bill started the Portland office of Hallinan Mackin Lumber Company. It was there that he met Paul McCracken, who was eighteen years younger than Bill. The two men found that they made an excellent team. So, when a management shake-up at the company left both Bill and Paul feeling their employment was untenable, they seriously considered embarking on the challenge of owning their own business. At age 48, with two children and a mortgage to pay on their newly-built home, Bill might have decided that the venture was too risky. But with his soul-mate Helen's indispensable encouragement, Bill was determined to "seize the day," and he did not allow this opportunity to pass him by.

## His Own Company

In February 1959, Bill and Paul put their pens to paper as the co-founders of Tumac Lumber Company. They settled on the name "Tumac" because neither McPherson nor McCracken, the two Macs, felt comfortable having his name appear first in the title of the newly formed corporation — a fact which, in itself, testifies to the spirit of profound cooperation and loyalty upon which Tumac was founded. A key reason for Tumac's early success was Bill's nearly two decades of experience in the wholesale lumber business, in addition to his always optimistic and generous nature.

Tumac started with three employees in a small office above a bus depot at 1008 S.W. Sixth Avenue, but the new venture seemed blessed from its inception, reporting first-year sales of \$1.3 million and black ink on the bottom line. Both Bill and Paul brought to their work keen foresight and steady judgment combined with a genuine desire to serve their customers and benefit their suppliers — the essential function of the wholesale lumber business. Under Bill and Paul's leadership, by 1971 the company had grown to 22 employees and offices in Oregon, Washington and Indiana.

During Tumac's early years, Bill's contribution to the success of the company was especially significant. Foremost, his patience and good judgment were primary resources for making the partnership work. Of more lasting importance, he was principally responsible for the establishment, from the beginning, of an inflexible dedication to ethical business standards; happily, his legacy endures as those standards have continued to be rigorously adhered to by the company.

Bill's marketing success covered an exceptionally wide range of products from box shooek to laminated beams to high-grade hardwoods; he was an unusually versatile salesman. He was a leader in popularizing the use of Western Red Cedar and Alaska Yellow Cedar in residential and commercial construction, particularly in the southeastern United States where the durability of cedar found a receptive market. In pioneering the market for cedar products in Florida, he forged a successful marketing partnership with Universal Building Specialties of Lakeland, Florida, along with a lifelong friendship with its owner Mr. Thomas Moore of that city. Today, Tumac continues to grow with 180 employees, sales in excess of \$330 million, distribution yards in Oregon, California, Colorado and South Carolina, offices in the U.S. and China, and agents in numerous foreign countries.

Throughout his career, Bill was a member of the North American Wholesale Lumber Association, always advocating for wise forest resource management at many national conventions. He was also an active member of Rotary International, of which he was a Paul Harris Fellow, and of Hoo-Hoo International, the forest products industry's oldest service organization. In addition, Bill contributed to his community in many ways, including serving for several years on the school board in the Beaverton School District. In his church, as well, Bill served selflessly as both a deacon and an elder.

Bill continued to work productively at Tumac, with his characteristic conviviality and flawless sense of fairness, until the late 1980s. He held the office of Chairman of the Board, and later Chairman Emeritus, for the remainder of his life. Helen and Bill are survived by their two children, Laurie A. Halsey and Thomas W. McPherson, two grandchildren, David S. Halsey and Kimberly H. Halsey, and five great-grandchildren.