



Paul Neils

1886-1977

Paul Neils was born in Spencer, Wisconsin in 1886. It was the summer that his father's hardware store and most other buildings in Spencer were consumed by a catastrophic fire. This tragic event forced the Neils family to move to Sauk Rapids, Minnesota, where Paul's father Julius joined with others in his first sawmill venture.

Paul's youth and that of his seven brothers and five sisters was spent mostly in small sawmilling communities in Northern Minnesota. Like others in his family and in the community, he was profoundly influenced by his deeply religious mother Mary Geiger Neils. Her dominant goal: "All to the greater glory of God" required regular church attendance and support. Paul, as the eldest, attended the local parochial grade school and spent several years at his church's Concordia College in St. Paul, Minnesota, to consider theological studies.

His great interest in timber and lumbering prevailed throughout his school career in St. Paul and he kept involved with his father's

mill operations. All of his vacations were spent looking for timber to harvest. At that time, timber shortages had developed in a number of Minnesota mill locations and competition for trees was keen. Some mills obtained trees from long distances. Paul and his father were determined to keep their Cass Lake mill in operation as long as possible, so they made an all out effort to get timber even when transportation problems proved difficult. They built dams to drift logs down rivers during the spring months. At other times they built spur railroads to connect with common railroad carriers to get the logs to the mill. By this unrelenting effort Paul managed to keep the Cass Lake mill in operation until 1924, many more years than the most optimistic had predicted.

Julius Neils and his sons were advance planners. Long before Cass Lake timber was depleted in 1923 they had built a new mill site and purchased a timber supply at Klickitat, Washington. In addition, they set up a new company headquartered in Portland, Oregon, where Paul and his father

had their offices. Eventually the J. Neils Company in a division of assets with their former mill partners – the Shevlin group – obtained some 20,000 acres of timberland in Montana. (This Montana property had been developed in 1914 with a new sawmill at Libby, Montana, in a partnership venture with the Shevlin group). When financial problems developed at Libby, Paul Neils was sent to the operation as general manager. Conflicts between the partners were resolved by J Neils' offer to purchase the Libby mill from Shevlin, from unexpected earnings over a period of years.

Paul, as the new manager of the Libby operations, found many opportunities for economical operations and higher production. He surprised his father, as well as the former partners, by paying outstanding costs several years before they were due. During this period Paul built for himself such a reputation for reliability that when he needed capital to broaden a well-planned operation it was always available. Paul was a tireless worker and had a strong ambition to grow in business but also to let faithful employees prosper with him.

Paul had great ability to learn from others. He prompted mill foremen, engineers, foresters and others to provide him with answers to his questions. He frequently told his family and friends that “decisions were automatic when you had answers to the essential questions on facts in the case.”

Paul Neils blazed a trail of well-balanced success, yet during his long life he gave himself few luxuries. Until a hip problem prevented it, he walked several miles to work each morning. He kept regular business hours, faithfully attended meetings of the lumber trade associations and chamber of

commerce but under no circumstances would he accept the frequently offered high organizational offices. Very sincerely, he would plead that he just could not perform before large groups on general industry subjects. The few offices outside the presidency of J. Neils Lumber Co. that he did hold related to his church. There he served on the board of elders, sang in the choir, served as substitute organist, and became a long-time director of the Northwest District of the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod.

During his lifetime he made many contributions to worthy causes, often anonymously. His favorite beneficiaries included Zion Lutheran Church in Portland and Concordia College in both Portland and St. Paul. He was active as director of St. Regis Paper Co., director of the First National Bank of Oregon and held memberships at the Chamber of Commerce, Portland Symphony, Irvington Tennis Club, Arlington Club, Western Wood Products Association and the Western Forestry Center.