



Charles Colin Patrick

1879-1960

Though he probably didn't realize it at the time, C.C. Patrick (his friends called him "Pat") was a true Oregon pioneer. The company he founded in 1915, Patrick Lumber Co., was among the earliest firms to take on a lumber trading role in the Pacific Northwest. C.C. and others like him established not only a new sort of livelihood, but also the traditions, mores and honor code that continue to define that livelihood today.

The younger of two children, C.C. was born in McGregor, Iowa, to James Perkins Patrick and Louisa Meacham St. John Patrick. His father was a cattleman and a soldier, having fought for the Union in the Civil War in several engagements, including the battle of Shiloh. Later, C.C.'s father started a successful retail and wholesale hardware business.

C.C. attended Amherst College in Massachusetts. He and the faculty at Amherst did not always agree on how things should be run so he left school around the turn of 20th century and went back home where he started a foundry. When that proved unsatisfactory he managed a bank branch in Sioux City and tried his hand at sales for a chemical plant in Des Moines.

By 1904 he had made his way west, taking up temporary residence in Salem, Oregon, with his older cousin and her husband, Winona and Ernst Hofer. Like scads of other cross-country immigrants to Oregon at the time, C.C. found work in the sawmills and logging camps of the Willamette Valley, making ends meet while also learning the ins and outs of the state's chief industry. In late 1904, he landed a job in sales with the Tongue Point Lumber Company in Astoria, Oregon. Tongue Point specialized in products milled from Sitka spruce and Douglas fir. The mill's price list included a wide range of items including washing machine tub parts, well tubing, wagon box sets, windmill stock, scores of moulding and millwork items, and timbers up to 24x24 and 90 feet long, each requiring multiple rail cars to ship. It was young Charlie Patrick's job to get these items to market.

Despite C.C.'s success at Tongue Point, a few years later Ernst Hofer persuaded him to attempt a career in banking and for three years he gave it a try—working as a cashier at First State Bank of Independence, Oregon. That failed venture soured him on the banking business so he turned back to lumber, and by 1910 he was handling sales for the Bridal Veil Falls Lumbering Company. The company had a sawmill on Larch Mountain and used a flume to transport rough cut lumber and cants to the planer mill and dry kilns located in town. Intrepid sawmill workers frequently took the mile-and-a-half flume ride down the mountain at the end of 55-hour workweek to catch the train into Portland for a weekend of carousing. Charlie often accompanied his co-workers on these treks and soon decided the rapidly growing big city was the place for him. He moved to Portland in late 1910 while retaining his sales job with Bridal Veil Lumber.

Soon after C.C. moved to Portland, Bridal Veil Lumber entered into a co-op sales agreement with a dozen other Oregon producers, forming the Douglas Fir Sales Company, with C.C. Patrick as sales manager. The co-op gave C.C. his first taste of what lumber trading would be like, as he was responsible for matching customers with the lumber products offered by 13 different producers. He was quite successful developing industrial markets for Oregon-made lumber among customers such as moulding and millwork producers, produce packaging com-

panies, shipbuilders, and railroad companies. The railroad business was particularly fruitful, as rail transportation was in its hey-day and demand for both boxcars and passenger cars was high. The Pullman Car Company would regularly place orders for up to 40 million board feet at a time. Invariably the low bidder for these orders would alternate between C.C.'s Douglas Fir Sales Company and a similar co-operative based in Washington State called the Pacific Sales Agency.

That cozy relationship lasted until 1914 when the newly established Federal Trade Commission targeted the co-ops for anti-trust violations and they were disbanded. C.C. later said the co-ops were doomed anyway because the member mills were quickly becoming dissatisfied with how orders were doled out, each mill thinking favoritism was shown to the others.

While on the road selling for the Douglas Fir Sales Company, Charlie met Mary Bechtel riding in a Pullman car he had likely had a hand in furnishing. The two were married in 1911 and had three children, Marylou (b. 1912), John Charles (b. 1913), and Patricia Ann (b. 1924).

Left with no job when the co-op dissolved, the entrepreneurial spirit took hold. Charlie recognized that the mills in the Northwest were not well equipped individually to service the broad array of industrial users demanding their lumber products. And he knew those customers depended on a steady supply of wood to keep up with production. He sensed opportunity and in late 1914 he partnered with William Brushhoff, a former colleague from Douglas Fir Sales Company, to form The Patrick Company, one of the first wholesale lumber trading firms.

Long before the concept of ready-to-assemble furniture came into vogue, Charlie Patrick began selling lumber in kit form. He sold silo kits to Northwest farmers—\$194 for a 12x26 model or \$142 for the smaller, 10x24 model—and produce packing kits consisting of cut-to-size components for use in assembling all manner of fruit and vegetable crates. Often he would take the additional step of lining up a box manufacturer to assemble the crates so that the packing company received them ready to pack. He became adept at filling large orders for railroad cars and steamships by assembling a variety of products from various mills to meet the strict specifications of the purchasers. While he may not have invented such systems, Charlie Patrick certainly was among a handful of pioneers in the value-added brokering of Northwest lumber.

As World War I exploded in Europe, The Patrick Company expanded its sales into the shipbuilding industry as well as the new and rapidly growing "aeroplane" industry. Sitka spruce from the Pacific Northwest was a preferred species and Charlie Patrick knew just where to find it. When the U.S. entered the war in 1917, C.C. enlisted into the Spruce Production Division of the U.S. Signal Corps. He was stationed in Washington, D.C., and his job was to procure lumber, mostly Sitka spruce and Douglas fir, for the war effort.

Charlie recognized the value of diversification. In the mid 1920s, he purchased a retail lumberyard in Hood River, Oregon. In addition to lumber trading he and Brushhoff also brokered real estate deals and helped match up business owners who wanted to sell with individuals looking to buy a business. If it involved a buyer and a seller and there was a margin in it for him, Charlie Patrick would give it a try.

Over the years, C.C. came to appreciate the role well-financed lumber traders could play in helping to ensure producers were financially able to make the products he was selling. He was a firm believer in the merits of retained earnings and as a result, his company was well positioned to finance the sawmills. In the early days of Roseburg Forest Products, that company's founder, Kenneth Ford, would travel to Portland and pre-sell the following week's production to Patrick and other lumber traders, taking a check in advance to finance the mill's operations on a promise to deliver the goods the following week. Similarly, on several occasions Patrick Lumber purchased logging rights to timber on behalf of a valued supplier, receiving in return the right to sell 100% of the supplier's production. Once logged, the land was considered nearly worthless and Patrick Lumber would buy the cutover land, reforest it, and add it to the company's asset base. After C.C. passed away, these second growth forestlands became the primary assets of the Patrick Land Company, formed by his son Jack in the 1970s. When those lands were divested during the 1970s and '80s they returned a good profit to the family members who were C.C.'s heirs.

Politically, C.C. Patrick was a fiscal conservative, with leanings toward libertarianism. He believed smaller government is better government and that, for the most part, government should stay out of the way and allow the market forces of supply and demand to take care of economic issues. He was not afraid to involve himself in politics when he felt the situation called for it, often writing passionate letters to elected officials detailing his positions. As a prominent Portland businessman he carried some political sway, and in 1939 he wrote a personal letter to Wendell Willkie to pledge his influence and support of Willkie should he decide to run for President. Willkie replied with a personal letter in which he claimed to have no political ambitions whatsoever. He promptly ran for and received the 1940 Republican nomination before being soundly defeated as Franklin Roosevelt was elected for a third term.

C.C. Patrick was generous to his community. He believed in the idea of giving back and helping those in need and he instilled these values in his children. He was also an avid golfer, though some who knew him well cautioned that "avid" is not to be confused with "expert." C.C. was socially active; a member of the Waverly Country Club, The University Club, The Multnomah Athletic Club, The Arlington Club and the Portland Rotary.

C.C. Patrick remained president of the Patrick Lumber Company right up until his death in 1960. During his 60-year career in the lumber industry he became lifelong friends with some of the most colorful figures the industry ever knew. In pioneering the art of lumber trading, Charlie Patrick helped establish in the industry the principles of trustworthiness and forthrightness that still drive the trading business today. Over the decades many a lumber trader has come and gone and many others are still at it. But one would be very hard pressed to find a single individual who approached the business with the same high level of integrity and sense of honor that Charlie Patrick brought to every deal.