



Donald McCornack Stevenson

1885-1970

A hard-working Oregon native, Donald McCornack Stevenson made his mark on the history of the Northwest lumber industry through his participation in starting and jointly operating the Broughton Lumber Company of Willard and Underwood, Washington. His life was not without misfortune, but he had the satisfaction of seeing his children follow in his footsteps as leaders of the industry.

Donald—who went by “Don” and signed his name “D.M.”—was born in Eugene, Oregon, on July 10, 1885, the first son and second child of Helen Isabella McCornack Stevenson and Jacob George Stevenson. By the time he was six-years old, Don had two sisters and a brother. A graduate of Pacific University (Forest Grove, Oregon), Jacob Stevenson was an educator and at one time the Lane County, Oregon, school superintendent. Jacob and Helen were founding members of the Mt. Laki Presbyterian Church in Klamath Falls.

Don was raised in the rural setting of late 19th-century Eugene. The University of

Oregon was founded nine years before Don was born, and its first graduating class had five students. The son of an educated man, Don set himself on becoming a U of O graduate, but he had to work to afford his education. In the summers and into the fall, he worked on surveying crews that operated in many parts of Washington and Oregon. He was also employed as a night watchman in a bank while attending the university.

Don played on both the football and basketball teams at the U of O. One Thanksgiving, pranksters from the rival Oregon Agricultural College (now Oregon State University) plowed up the football field before the game, creating a muddy mess. This prank in part accounted for Don’s lifelong animosity to what he always called “OAC.” Don was also a charter member of the university’s Beta Theta Pi fraternity, which he helped found after he graduated. It was through the fraternity that he met his future business partner, Harold J. Broughton.

A skilled mechanic, Don performed so well in a blacksmithing course that the university hired him to teach the subject the following year. Don received his B.S. in Civil Engineering in 1906.

While a college student, Don met Angeline Williams, who was born on December 6, 1886, in Oregon City. She received her B.A. from the University of Oregon in 1907 and worked as an English teacher after graduation. On December 7, 1910, she and Don wed in Oregon City.

After college and during the first decade of his marriage, Don worked as a general contractor. Initially an employee for a large company, Don took on project management duties for contracts all around Oregon, including a new YMCA building in Portland. Though Don's employer wanted him to become a partner, he decided to start his own business. Don's company built two bridges across Sullivan's Gulch in east Portland and several miles of the Oregon Coast Highway. He also constructed dikes around islands on the Columbia River at Cathlamet, Washington, and built the Hyatt Prairie Dam near Ashland, Oregon—a large-scale project that took a few years.

In the early 1920s, after a decade of moving around for construction projects, Don and Angeline settled in the Overlook neighborhood of Portland, on the city's east side. By this time, they had five children: Donald, Elinor, Jean, Bruce, and Wallace, born between 1912 and 1918. Their sixth and last child, Rees, was born in 1924.

Don had invested money with fraternity brother Harold Broughton to start the Broughton Lumber Company.

Broughton's father owned a mill, where Harold had worked, and he knew about the business. Because of Don's experience as a contractor, he joined the venture full time in 1923, first taking charge of construction of the buildings for the new operation.

The Broughton Lumber Company had two distinct facilities. An upper mill in Willard sawed logs into rough cut lumber, which was loaded into a flume that ran nine miles to a lower resaw and planing mill at Hood (part of the town of Underwood) on the Columbia River. The Willard sawmill was built alongside Pine Creek, which fed a large pond where logs were held before they were cut. The Willard site also included bunkhouses for the workers, a cookhouse, and a general store.

In the early days of Broughton Lumber, the company logged in the vicinity of the Willard mill. Nearby trees were felled and skidded to the millpond with the aid of steam donkeys—steam-powered engines that turned winches to drag logs. Much of the area around the pond was hilly, so high-lead logging—a technique for dragging logs up inclines—was employed. In the late 1920s, Don began replanting logged areas—an early instance of entrepreneurial sustained forestry practices.

Once Broughton Lumber became fully operational, Don spent much of his time at the Willard mill and in the woods. He lived during the week in Willard, returning to his family in Portland on the weekends. However, during the summer and holidays, the family made Willard a second home. In the company's early years, the family stayed in an army tent pitched over a wood floor, sited near the

Little White Salmon River. In the mid-1920s, Don built a house in the same spot, with the aid of a mill carpenter and his children, especially his eldest son Donald. Neither Don's house nor any house in Willard had electric lights until Don installed turbines that were powered by the flume's water. At first, Don's small electricity operation provided one light per household.

Though Don's children enjoyed the woods and spending more time with their father, they also were assigned tasks around the mill. As a result, all of Don's sons learned a great deal about the lumber industry and eventually became lumbermen themselves.

Much of the company's early success came through the efforts of Frank Daubenspeck, who was the mill foreman for 23 years. Don's partner, Harold Broughton, ran the company's sales office in Portland, but traveled weekly to the Hood mill to review operations and determine what lumber was available for sale. The company also thrived because people liked working for Don. He treated employees fairly, though he also expected hard work.

To expand the area that Broughton logged, Don led the effort to lay railroad track along Pine Creek. Track was picked up and moved from one logging area to another—a formidable task. In the 1930s, Broughton began to log with tractors and use large trucks for hauling. The company negotiated a long-term contract with the U.S. Forest Service to cut timber in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, and this area was relatively flat and suitable for tractor logging.

Broughton's lengthy lumber flume was a critical part of the company's operation,

and its upkeep was an ongoing effort. In the company's first decade of operations, the flume provided the only means of transporting lumber from Willard to the railroad line at the Hood mill. In addition to running nine miles, the flume dropped more than 1,000 feet in elevation. In some sections, the flume ran as high as 80 feet off the ground.

In this rugged terrain, the flume was susceptible to rock slides, and there were frequent lumber jams as well. Broughton built an alarm system along the length of the flume that rang when there was trouble, and an automatic spill control mechanism diverted water when there was a jam or rockslide.

With only a thin walkway, the flume posed some danger to the men who cleared jams or made repairs. Some time in the 1930s, Don fell nearly 30 feet from the flume when he was breaking up a lumber jam. He ended up in the hospital with a broken hip.

In the 1950s, Don had an even more serious mill accident. The glove on his left hand got caught in the double chain drive of a roll case—a piece of equipment that conveys lumber in a mill. In a split second, Don lost all of the digits on his hand, though his palm remained intact. Don was initially treated at the hospital in nearby White Salmon, Washington, but then his son Wally drove him to Portland—a harrowing two-hour plus drive before the days of Interstate 84.

Don did not allow his accidents to set him back. In both instances, he returned to the mill and the woods as soon as possible. By the time of his hand injury, his eldest son Donald had joined him at Broughton. His younger sons, Bruce and Wally, had

partnered with Don's foreman, Frank Daubenspeck, to found SDS Lumber in 1946.

After World War II, Don purchased a surplus air-sea rescue boat, which was converted into a cabin cruiser called the *Black Prince*. Don's sons used the boat in summers to take their families on cruises along Alaska and British Columbia in the 1950s and early 1960s. Don himself was a capable deckhand in spite of his injuries. For leisure, Don also enjoyed hunting. For many years, he duck hunted on a friend's property on Sauvie Island, located near Portland where the Columbia and Willamette Rivers meet.

For Don, the work ethic was second nature. He advised his sons that a man who carried a pocket knife would be an industrious employee, but one who smoked a pipe would waste too much time fiddling with his pipe and tobacco. "Don't hire a man who smokes a pipe," Don said, "unless he has three arms."

Though Don's bad hip became more painful in his later years, he continued to

work without complaint. Don survived prostate cancer, but his heart gave out on May 8, 1970, at the age of 84. His longtime business partner, Harold Broughton, had died just three days earlier. Don is buried in a cemetery on the property near his home in Willard. His wife Angeline rests by his side; she died on November 23, 1972.

Don's legacy can still be seen in the woods around Willard, much of which was reforested under Don's leadership, and in the industry tradition carried on by his descendents. Unfortunately, the mill operations of Broughton Lumber ceased in 1986. Like many companies in the industry, Broughton declined when public forestlands became less available for commercial logging. The company's timberlands, however, remain actively managed today. A forester oversees Broughton's 14,000 acres, which produce a sustainable annual yield of 4 million feet of timber. Don would be proud to know that his labor from decades ago continues to produce results today.

June 2006