



William Chaloner Talbot

1816-1881

William Chaloner Talbot was a “State of Mainer” – born at East Machias in 1816 – one of three sons of Deacon Peter Talbot, a sawmill owner. He had gone into the shipping side of the lumber business and became a seasoned ship captain, making voyages to South and Central America and to Europe. By 1849, he owned his own brig, the “Oriental,” and, with the news of the California gold strike, decided to go “Around the Horn” to California with a cargo of lumber and with passengers headed for the gold mines. The lure of the gold fields did not draw him – rather it was the opportunity to grow with the country that intrigued him into coming West. His brother, Frederic, had preceded him to San Francisco, arriving there on December 3, 1849, and joining with Andrew Jackson Pope, Captain J.P. Keller, and Lucius Sandborn – all from East Machias – in establishment of the firm Pope & Talbot, dealing in ship lighterage and in lumber.

Captain William Talbot arrived in San Francisco harbor on March 3, 1850, and joined forces with his brother, Pope and

Keller, Sanborn having sold out to the others. He contributed his ship to the young company, and made numerous voyages with the “Oriental” to Hawaii. In mid-December, 1850, Frederic Talbot returned to East Machias and the other three partners carried on the business, with William Talbot and Keller being most active in lighterage and shipping, while Pope emphasized the lumber sales end. In 1851, after learning that cheap lumber was a necessity in San Francisco and that lumber from Eastern United States could no longer be profitably sold there, they decided to seek out a closer source of lumber supply. They learned of the vast timber stands on Puget Sound and decided to make San Francisco their home and build a mill on Puget Sound. On November 29, 1851, the three partners signed an agreement to build and operate “a steam sawmill for manufacturing lumber in Oregon in the vicinity of Puget Sound.” They disposed of the lighterage business and sold Captain Talbot’s ship, the “Oriental.”

All three of the partners returned to East Machias in 1852, where they acquired a fourth partner – Charles Foster, a previous ship-building associate of Keller.

On December 20, 1852, the Puget Mill Company was formed for the “purpose of manufacturing lumber in the Territory of Oregon at Puget Sound,” and Messrs. Talbot and Pope returned to California.

Talbot captained the vessel “Julius Pringle,” sailing with a cargo of lumber to build cabins and a cookhouse for his men while they built a sawmill. He also had trade goods for the Indians he expected to find on Puget Sound. Keller was to come later with the “L.P. Foster” and a cargo of sawmill machinery. It was well for the future of the tiny company that two of the partners were sea captains!

Talbot also recruited a number of mill crew members, mostly from Maine, and they sailed with him in the “Julius Pringle,” arriving on Puget Sound in the summer of 1852. Talbot had come in search of timber – and he found it! He sailed past thousands of acres of land so densely weeded they could supply scores of sawmills with raw materials for many generations. The new mill would need workmen as well as logs, so he did not want to select a mill site too far away from the settlements already established in the vicinity of Seattle and Olympia. He also wanted a good anchorage in a harbor close to the Straits of San Juan de Fuca. Sailing vessels, dependent upon the breezes, could waste hours and even days reaching a mill located on one of the inlets of the lower Sound.

First, Captain Talbot anchored in Port Discovery Bay. Upon going ashore, his down-eastern crew was surprised and awed by the immense tree trunks stretching to the sky for a hundred feet and more without a

limb. But Captain Talbot was a cautious man. With practically the entire Sound area to choose from, he saw no reason to select any site but the best. So he set off with a small sailboat and a canoe to do more exploring. After several days, he found his site – a small peninsula near the entrance to Hood Canal. On one side was a level, sandy spit for a mill, and magnificent timber grew so close to the water’s edge that trees were mirrored in the bay. Because the sun shone with particular brilliance on the sandy shores at noon, the Indians had named the place “Teekalet,” which means “brightness of the noonday sun.”

So here Captain Talbot started work. A bunkhouse, a store and a cookhouse were built and foundation timbers prepared for the mill. Captain Keller soon arrived with the “L.P. Foster” and its cargo of mill machinery. By September, 1853, the first log was cut and the first Pope & Talbot mill was in operation at Port Gamble (formerly “Teekalet”). To this day, Pope & Talbot continues to manufacture lumber in a mill at Port Gamble, Washington.

Through the first years of the company, Andrew J. Pope handled the sales of the Puget Mill Company, Captain Keller was the first manager of the Port Gamble Mill, and Captain Talbot handled the firm’s dealings with agents abroad. He frequently captained a Pope & Talbot ship sailing with a cargo of lumber and handled the sales of the cargo directly to an agent at whatever port he had landed. In 1863, the firm of Pope & Talbot formed, with Pope and Talbot as equal partners. A one-tenth interest in the Puget Mill Company was sold to Cyrus Walker, who had been superintendent of the Port Gamble mill under Captain Keller.

By 1878, Pope & Talbot had acquired additional sawmills at Utsalady and Port Ludlow, both in Washington. The partners had also acquired other properties in the West, chiefly California ranch lands. Although they had been hailed by the San Francisco Journal of Commerce in 1875 as the "lumber kings of the Pacific Coast," they did not live long to enjoy the title. Andrew J. Pope passed away in 1878, while Captain Talbot lived until August 6, 1881. He left five children including two sons. One of his daughters married Cyrus Walker, who was a part owner of the Puget Mill Company. His oldest son, W.H. Talbot, was only 21 years of age at the time of his father's death, but he dominated the company for the next 49 years.

Captain Talbot was only 65 years of age at this death, and had played a great role in the growth of the company. His sons and grandson continued to play an active part in the management of the company. Today, his great-grandson is president of the firm, which has grown to an organization of more than 1,200 employees, operating large wood products manufacturing plants in Oregon, Washington and British Columbia, as well as being engaged in community involvement and recreational housing on lands which originally grew the raw materials for the firm's first mills.