

Coleman H. Wheeler

1897-1973

Coleman H. Wheeler was an aggressive, determined lumberman, who began his notable career operating a small logging company in the Oregon Coast Range and ended his career as chairman of the board of Willamette Industries, Inc.

A rugged individual in the tradition of the Northwest logger, Coleman Wheeler liked people and hard work, and loved the lumber business.

But above all, he was proud to be an Oregonian. The grandson of Oregon pioneers, he was born November 14, 1897. At the time, his parents were living in the tiny town of Wheeler, Oregon on the Nehalem Bay. The town (named after the family) was then so remote, however, that it was easier for his mother to sail by lumber schooner to a hospital in San Francisco, than to go overland to Portland. So he was born in San Francisco, a fact he always was embarrassed to acknowledge.

He was introduced to the lumber industry early in his life through his father, who operated a logging company and mill in Wheeler and at Cochran, Oregon. His father died in 1920, and Wheeler, who was at the time attending Cornell University, returned to Oregon to run the family business.

In the course of the next 26 years, Wheeler was involved in a number of independent operations throughout Oregon: The Mill City Manufacturing Co., Swamp Mountain Logging Co., McDowell Creek Logging Co., Baker Creek Lumber Co., Wheeler-Hallock Co., Western Cooperage Co., and two California lumber firms.

In 1946, he became a partner of Fred Powers and Carl Davis in the Santiam Lumber Co. They spent the next 21 years building and expanding their operation, until in 1967 they merged with Willamette Industries. Wheeler was then president of the Santiam Lumber Co. Soon after the merger he became chairman of the board of Willamette Industries, a position he held until 1971. He remained a director until his retirement in 1972.

As a logging and lumber industry leader, Wheeler was active in the Pacific Logging Congress and Western Wood Products Association. He was a former regional director of the National Association of Manufacturers and a founding director of the Western Forestry Center.

Always proud of his pioneer heritage, he was a former director of the Oregon Historical Society. In 1962, he was made a trustee of the Oregon State University Foundation.

Coleman Wheeler died in 1973.