



Albert Henry Powers

1861-1930

The journey of Albert Henry Powers, a man destined to become one of Oregon's most respected and innovative lumberman began, appropriately, in a log cabin. Though his family wanted him to stay on the family farm in Durham County, Ontario, Canada, Powers had other ideas. At 16, after his mother's death, the hardworking teenager set off...and before he was through, two towns would bear his name, an industry would feel his mark.

Powers learned the lumber business hands-on, working in lumber camps in Michigan. Before long, in 1882, a move to Northern Minnesota proved his business ability. He became a partner in the Powers-Dwyer Logging Company and the Powers Simpson Lumber Company, then the largest operation in Minnesota. A company town grew and logging families prospered in Powers, Minnesota. At age 26, Al Powers began his own family, marrying the beautiful auburn haired Johanna Hogan in Minneapolis in 1887. The couple reared seven children:

Frederick, Ethyl, Hazel, Lucy, Florence, Albert, Jr., and Margaret.

Well known for his wit, Powers once responded to a lawyer's question about the rail lines his company had built in the woods near Hibbing. Asked in court to compare his railroad to one of the nation's largest, Powers replied, "Well, my railroad is not as long as the Great Northern Lines from coast to coast, but it is just as wide."

It was 1907 that Al Powers decided that Oregon was the future for the lumber business. Despite a tough journey that would have stopped most people – walking 46 miles from Drain to Scottsburg through knee-deep mud after all the bridges washed out – Powers brought his growing family and business acumen to the Pacific Northwest. By September, Powers had moved his family and his beloved Standardbred trotting horses west. By any standards, the move was a massive undertaking. The young family needed two boxcars to transport the household goods,

including a fringed-top surrey and a White Steamer car, the first ever seen in Oregon.

The Smith-Powers Company concentrated their logging operations in the Coquille Valley, logging between 200 and 250 board feet of lumber a year. In 1912, the company began building a railroad up the south fork of the Coquille River. New camps were added as fast as the railheads could be pushed into the forest. Most of the lumber from those forests ended up in Southern California, shipped to company yards by boat after processing at the C.A. Smith Lumber Co. in Coos Bay. Powers and Smith were partners in the logging operation.

To expedite logging, Powers introduced steam logging in Coos and Curry counties and at one time had 42 steam donkeys working. Powers also inaugurated high-lead logging in the area. To keep an eye over his far-flung empire of logging camps in the remote areas of the Coquille Valley, Powers often used a speedboat to make the 120-mile circuit.

Aware that his men needed a life outside logging, Powers, known fondly as Uncle Al, started a baseball team that earned a reputation as being “as good as any in the state.” The mascots of the team – two bear cubs. The baseball field Powers built often drew several hundred spectators and fans who came to socialize as much as watch regional rivalries in Powers’ second namesake town, Powers, Oregon. Founded in 1915, the town became headquarters for the Smith-Powers Logging Co.

Powers also established the Bank of Powers that same year and served as its president until his death. Powers, Oregon, in Coos

County was incorporated in 1945 and still exists.

In addition to the lumber business, Powers took a keen interest in civic affairs, serving on the Marshfield City Council, the school board and the boxing commission. As a member of the Coos Bay Port Commission, he made several trips to Washington, D.C., where he testified for harbor improvements before a congressional committee. He was given major credit for getting the Coos Bay channel dredged by the Army Corps of Engineers.

Along with other lumbermen, in 1910, Powers founded the Pacific Logging Congress. During World War I, he was a member of the Loyal Legion of Loggers and Lumbermen and belonged to a fraternal lumbermen’s organization, the colorfully named Order of the Hoo Hoo. From 1921 to 1923, Powers was a member of the Oregon State Fish Commission.

During the early 1920s, when Powers was in his early sixties, he retired from the Smith-Powers Logging Co. and turned over management duties to his son, Frederick. At the same time, the company was rechristened the Coos Bay Lumber Co. It operated under the name until purchased by Georgia-Pacific Corp. in 1956. Until the early ‘70s, Georgia-Pacific continued to log the area Al Powers had seen the promise in decades before.

In 1928, Powers turned his attention to yet another new logging company, becoming president of the Powers-Davis Logging Company, an association with his son and Carl Davis that lasted until Powers’ death.

In a tribute in the Coos Bay Times on January 21, 1930, M.C. Maloney wrote, “Al Powers

was a member of that rapidly decimating band of pioneers who have fairly and honestly earned the title of Empire Builders. In any emergency, public or private, he could be depended upon. He never failed a friend or fumbled a principle.”

Albert Henry Powers died in Indio, California during a trip with his wife and beloved youngest daughter Margaret on January 2, 1930. His rich logging legacy lives on.