



Harry L. Wollenberg

1886-1979

At age 40, when most men have settled comfortably into their careers, Harry L. Wollenberg began a new venture that would occupy his time and energy for the remainder of his life.

A successful mining engineer and businessman until then, in 1926 he helped to build the Longview Fibre Company, nursed its steady and profitable expansion, and served as Chief Executive Officer for 52 years.

He built the company from an initial worth of \$3.5 million to its present worth of more than \$170 million. He broadened the scope of the mill's production, pioneered the invention and use of specialized mill equipment, and demonstrated a concern for the environment.

Wollenberg was a man who liked to work hard and spent much of his life doing just that. It was characteristic of him that he was at work two days before his death in 1979 at the age of 93. His wife, Gertrude, died in 1919, and he never remarried. He spent his time rearing two sons, and, later, enjoying them and their families. But after his sons were grown, he seldom took any time off, preferring instead to spend his hours at his work.

Wollenberg was born into a poor family on June 10, 1886, in Prescott, Arizona. During his youth he worked to help supplement the family income. In 1902, nearing graduation from high school in San Francisco, he found a job to help finance his college education. He was forced to leave high school one month before graduation to take the job, but because his grades were good, he was granted his diploma.

After two years on a survey crew, he entered the University of California at Berkeley to study for a degree in mining engineering. He was awarded a scholarship but, feeling he could make it on his own, instead he was able to have it transferred to his sister, Bertine, a student at the school at the same time.

He worked in mines in California and Mexico after graduation, and then was hired as chief engineer for the Alaska-Gastineau Mining Company in Juneau, Alaska. He was charged with planning for a dam and powerhouses and finding a site for their construction. The dam and upper powerhouse are still in operation today and are owned by Alaska Electric Light and Power Company. Wollenberg was especially proud of this

first accomplishment in his professional field. Two days before his death he commented, “Wouldn’t it be something if that dam lasted a thousand years.” It is expected to be in commission for some time to come.

At this point, Wollenberg’s life took a turn in a different direction. Some backers of the Alaska Company owned Aetna Explosives Company, an eastern-based firm that was in difficulty as a result of rapid expansion following the start of World War I. Wollenberg was sent to Aetna as a troubleshooter and was soon made manager. The company operated effectively and made a significant contribution to the war effort. After the war, it was sold.

Some owners of Aetna then formed the Beacon Oil Company, which built the first and only oil refinery in New England in Everett, Massachusetts. The company pioneered refining technology and marketing. It started the first full-service auto filling stations called Colonial Oil and became the Colonial-Beacon Oil Company.

Harry Wollenberg was the president of Colonial-Beacon when it was merged in 1925 with Standard Oil in New Jersey, now Exxon. But he found he did not like working for a large company. He said he had chosen the field of mining engineering because he wanted to be his own boss. He retired at the age of 39.

That retirement did not last long. Partly as a favor to an old friend and mill owner, Monroe A. Wertheimer, Wollenberg took over the management of the Longview Fibre Company, which was formed to build a mill at Longview, Washington. With the help of Monroe’s son, R.S. Wertheimer, he built the mill. After the mill was completed Wertheimer became Resident Manager. Wollenberg maintained his office in San Francisco to put emphasis on building sales for the mill.

During his tenure with Longview Fibre, it grew from one machine making 100 tons per day of paperboard to eleven machines making 2,000 tons per day of paper and paperboard. While the mill began its operation using the chips from the waste of the adjacent Long-Bell mill, it expanded to using chips from about 140 sawmills and plywood plants in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana.

Not long after the mill was started, Wollenberg and other company officials decided that the company’s product base must be broadened to give it stability. It was decided a machine was needed to make paper. Because the young company was short on funds, Wollenberg and Monroe Wertheimer personally guaranteed bank loans to finance the second machine.

Wollenberg demonstrated a caring for the environment. Under his direction, the company installed one of the first lime kilns in the industry to reduce limestone loading in the mill wastewater discharge and pioneered the first electrostatic precipitator on a recovery boiler, which reduced particulate discharge from the boiler stack. He invented and patented an early version of a continuous digester for cooking wood chips into pulp. Though this new design was never used by the industry, it was the forerunner of the continuous digesters now prevalent in the pulping process.

Wollenberg was one of the founders of the Pacific Coast Association of Pulp and Paper Manufacturers formed in 1934 to deal collectively on behalf of a number of companies with two unions that were organizing in the mills. A bargaining system was successfully set up on both sides and resulted in twenty-eight years of peace between the mills and their workers. Wollenberg played a key role in the negotiations and manufacturing activities of the Association.

Wollenberg’s productive career came to an end on July 1, 1979, when he died in San Francisco.