



Samuel Alexander Agnew

1879-1965

Samuel Alexander Agnew, also known as S.A. Agnew and Sam Agnew, was born at Port Townsend, Washington on May 11, 1879. He was the son of Irish immigrants, James and Jane Agnew, who together with their children moved to the Centralia, Lewis County, Washington area in the early 1880s.

On April 18, 1914, Mr. Agnew married Kathryn Walker of Tacoma, and they established their home in Centralia, Washington where they spent their entire lives.

Mr. Agnew began working in the lumber industry while quite young. An early employer was the Eastern Railway and Lumber Company, a Washington corporation located in Centralia and one of the largest inland sawmill operations on the West Coast. During the 1920s and 1930s he became mill superintendent of the Eastern Railway and Lumber Company, advanced to general manager, and by the mid 1940s, he and Mrs. Agnew had acquired a majority ownership. The Eastern's principal asset at that time was approximately 12,000 acres of logged-off lands in Lewis County, Washington. These logged-off lands, harvested during the 1920's 30s and 40s, were retained in spite of considerable financial hardship, because of Mr. Agnew's firm belief in the potential value of the underlying coal deposits.

The Eastern Railway and Lumber Company plant, which employed over 350 local people, was totally destroyed in 1939 by fire. Because the Eastern was deeply in debt from the economic depression of the 1930s, the plant was not rebuilt.

But with a faith in the future of the industry he loved so well and the responsibility of debts unpaid, Mr. Agnew leased the sawmill and operating facilities of the Western Crossarm and Manufacturing Company, a subsidiary of the Eastern, and resumed operations as Agnew Lumber Company in January, 1941. Agnew Lumber Company continued its operations until 1960 when the timber purchased from the Eastern and other sources became depleted.

During the 1940s Mr. Agnew recognized that the timber reserves in the Washington area in which he operated would not provide a sustained timber yield unless outside timber reserves

could be located. With this in mind he investigated the possibility of acquiring timber in Oregon, California and Canada to supply his future needs.

The Oregon acquisitions of Mr. Agnew, which at his death exceeded 38,000 acres of timberland, were confined to Curry County, with the exceptions of small tracts in Douglas and Lane counties, and were for the most part acquired by purchase during the years 1943, 1944 and 1945, from both Curry County and private owners. At the age of 65 years, he had walked over and became familiar with the timbers on most of these lands that were underdeveloped and unmanaged.

The California acquisitions of Mr. Agnew, which at his death exceeded 8,000 acres of timberland, were confined to Del Norte, Trinity and Humboldt counties, and were acquired by purchase from private owners and the various counties during the years 1944, 1945 and 1946. In July 1944, he purchased the Klamath Cedar Company and its box chuck and battery separator plant in Klamath, California. He immediately converted the plant into a sawmill to aid in the harvesting and manufacturing of his Del Norte County timber holdings. The mill was operated until 1951 when it was severely damaged by the Klamath River flood. He rebuilt the sawmill in its entirety but it was again destroyed by the flood of 1953, and it was not rebuilt again.

At this time, Mr. Agnew also entered into a joint venture with a Midwest timber brokerage firm and purchased the extensive holdings of Interior Lumber and Shingle, Ltd., a Canadian corporation near Blue River, British Columbia, Canada. Included were timber licenses to 200 million board feet of timber on over 13,800 acres of land. The venture collapsed in 1946 and S.A. Agnew, Incorporated became the sole owner of these holdings that were still held by Mr. Agnew at the time of his death.

Following the destruction of the mill operated as Klamath Cedar in 1953, attention was turned to the management of his Curry County timber holdings, which were estimated in excess of 900 million board feet. This management program consisted mainly of developing road systems and a program of sanitation logging in an effort to remove the decadent and diseased timber from his healthy, merchantable stands.

The logging of road right of ways developed grade logs which found a ready market but the high volume of cull logs developed by the sanitation cut presented another problem. To justify the removal of beetle infested and diseased logs from his lands, Mr. Agnew purchased the veneer plant previously operated by Oregon Coast Veneer at Brookings, Oregon in 1956, and the veneer plant owned by Oregon-Washington Plywood at Harbor, Oregon in 1959, and through these plants salvaged the "unsalable" cull logs being produced, prior to the establishment of any commercial demand for the "peelable cull."

This program was interrupted by the 1962 Columbus Day windstorm. The southern coast of Oregon was hit especially hard by the hurricane force winds that blew down over 100 million board feet of Mr. Agnew's Curry County timber. After that date, his logging operations were increased greatly in an effort to open up more unroaded acreage in an effort to salvage the large volume of blow-down timber before its value was lost.

In 1962, Mr. Agnew believed that it was essential that he have a plywood operation to utilize the greater volume of veneer being produced by his Brookings and Harbor plants. He purchased the Veneer Products Plywood facility in Grants Pass, Oregon, and immediately rebuilt and modernized the plant. At that time it became one of the first hot-press plywood facilities featuring an automatic saw and sander line in the State of Oregon.

Sam Agnew was an individual with vision and determination. He believed in the responsibility of the individual and free enterprise system. During the 1950s when he was well past the age of 70, he was in complete control of daily activities of his logging operations and manufacturing facilities in southern Oregon. He drove from his home in Centralia to southern Oregon and northern California and returned on an almost weekly or bi-weekly basis. He was known in the industry as a man of his word, and his contemporaries consummated many a business transaction with him with no further assistance necessary than the shake of his hand.

He was also the owner and operator of a large and highly successful commercial cattle operation located in the State of Washington. He was a leading breeder of the thoroughbred horses he loved to watch run on Washington, Oregon and California race tracks.

Mr. Agnew suffered a stroke in 1963 and his health steadily declined until the date of his death in June, 1965. He left to his heirs land and timber holdings in Canada, Washington, Oregon and California, in excess of 70,000 acres and one billion board feet. He also left them with the challenge of fulfilling his dream of harvesting the trees and perpetuating the forest which had been his love and livelihood for over half a century.