



## *Thomas J. Autzen*

1888-1958

Mr. Thomas J. Autzen was born in Hoquiam, Washington, June 30, 1888. He graduated from Hoquiam High School and from Oregon Agricultural College in 1909. He married Marvel Mae Shields on March 16, 1916. At the time of his death, he was survived by four children – two daughters, Elizabeth and Annabelle; two sons, Thomas E. and Duane; and 11 grandchildren. At this writing (1972), all of these people are still living, and in addition there are three great-grandchildren.

Mr. Autzen's first job was in Hoquiam with his father's company, the Mack Logging Company, and in the summer of 1905, he started working part-time for Portland Manufacturing Company where he remained until his death, at which time he was Chairman of the Board, having relinquished management to his two sons.

One of his first assignments with Portland Manufacturing Company was to handle the display of the original Douglas fir plywood panels manufactured by the Company and shown at the Lewis & Clark Fair in Portland, in 1905.

Portland Manufacturing had no regular press, no prepared glue spreader, no veneer clipper or sanding machines. An ordinary steam kiln dryer was a part of the plant's regular equipment. Gluing was a serious problem; the men mixed an animal glue and kept the very odoriferous material warm and pliable over a coal fire. The glue smelled so bad that the men frequently had to seek the comfort of the outdoors. Hand brushes were used to "paint" the glue on the veneers. A wooden press was improvised; the pressure was applied by putting ordinary house jacks between a backing timber and another timber fixed to the press. The work was slow and tedious as only one set of panels could be glued up at one time and this took most of the day. The panels were then put in the press overnight to set.

When the Lewis & Clark Fair opened in June 1905, young Tom Autzen was placed in charge of showing the panels, the first fir plywood "salesman" of record. He showed the panels to more than a half a million people. This exhibit set the stage for the development and growth of a new West Coast industry. Some early customers, all in the Pacific Northwest, included those from

the Portland area: Nicolai Door Company, Oregon Planing Mills and Central Door and Lumber Company. Customers from Washington included Chehalis Fir Door Company, Tacoma Fir Door Company, Pacific Manufacturing Company, Wheeler-Osgood Company and Robinson Manufacturing Company.

At that time, his father, Peter Autzen, was a part owner of Portland Manufacturing Company and later took over the management and became the sole stockholder. From the time of the death of Peter Autzen in June 1918, and until his death on September 10, 1958, Thomas J. Autzen was either President or Chairman of the Board of the Company. This era saw the growth of the plywood industry move from the experimental stage to the booming industry which it has now become.

Mr. Autzen was also active in numerous other woodworking and timber companies throughout the Northwest as well as some unrelated industries. It is recalled that he was active in the management and as a stockholder in Nicolai Door Manufacturing Company, Oregon-Washington Plywood Company, M&M Woodworking Company, Portland Lumber Mills and Blagen Mills in Hoquiam, Washington. He was also a Director in the United States National Bank of Oregon from April 29, 1930, until his death. Mr. Autzen was a member of the Arlington Club, the Elks Lodge, the Portland Yacht Club, Astoria Yacht Club, Multnomah Athletic Club, Kappa Sigma Fraternity and Trinity Episcopal Church.

In 1951 he established The Autzen Foundation, which has made substantial grants to active charitable organizations, schools and various public institutions.

Mr. Autzen was also highly recognized as a sportsman. He was an ardent yachtsman, fisherman and hunter, and was well-known throughout the entire West in these endeavors.

His activities as a plywood salesman commenced in the old Forestry Building and the panels which were then shown were on display in the Forestry Building at the time of its destruction by fire in 1964.