



Robert A. Booth

1858-1944

Robert A. Booth, one of the founders of the Booth-Kelly Lumber Co. and the son of a Methodist Circuit Rider, was born May 15, 1858 in Yamhill County, Oregon. He graduated from Umpqua Academy in Wilbur, Oregon in 1875 and later attended Heald Business College in San Francisco. He received honorary degrees from the College of Puget Sound, Tacoma, Washington in 1922, Willamette University in 1923 and the University of Oregon in 1929.

Mr. Booth married Clinton A. LaRout in 1881 and their children were Echo V., Robert Roy, Floyd Wilson and Barbara Wenzari.

He was in the mercantile business from 1879 to 1885. His first venture in the lumber business was in 1879 when he also became involved in a sawmill that cut railroad ties for the Southern Pacific. In the years 1886 and 1887, Mr. Booth was principal of the Drain Normal School at Drain, Oregon. He organized the First National Bank of Grants Pass in 1889 and later became President of Douglas National Bank at Roseburg and the Grants Pass Banking and Trust Company at Grants Pass.

He organized with George and John Kelly the Booth-Kelly Lumber Co. in 1896 and was its President and Director throughout his life. It was the genius of Mr. Booth that brought into the new company the financing and leadership to acquire the involved timberlands from the O & C Railroad land grant at the turn of the century. Special Acts of Congress were required to accomplish the purchase of the Company's timberlands that eventually covered more than 140,000 acres with some 5 billion feet of quality Douglas fir timber.

From 1898 to 1942 – a 44-year period of difficult times in the lumber business – the Booth-Kelly firm showed total net earnings of \$223,455 or about \$5,000 a year on big sums invested. In those long intervening years thousands were spent in access roads, in developing fire control and protection programs such as water holes and snag removal and in doing the many things to improve the timber property.

It was not until the new phase in forestry developed with World War II that earnings gave adequate returns on the investment. The Company was sold in 1959 to Georgia-Pacific Corporation which continues on a program of producing repeated crops of trees and scientific timber management.

And so in his lifetime, Mr. Booth knew that his visions for the timber holdings had come true but even more would continue for all times as long as scientific forestry kept these lands productive for annual crops of trees that provided employment as well as many other benefits.

Robert A. Booth was more than a successful businessman. He was a state Senator for two terms in the Oregon Legislature. He was the leader in formulating the Oregon highway system and served as chairman of its Highway Commission. He served as trustee of Willamette University, was President of the Oregon Land and Livestock Company, served on the Oregon Tuberculosis Association and the State Park Commission and was active in Rotary, Boy Scouts, Portland and Eugene Chambers of Commerce and other public service organizations. It is an expression of Mr. Booth's devotion to the religious work of his father that the Circuit Rider Statue adorns the Capitol grounds at Salem, his gift to the State. Mr. Booth was lifetime Methodist. He was the Sunday School Superintendent for over 20 years and also served his church as trustee and in other capacities.

He died in Eugene, Oregon, April 28, 1944, at the age of 86.