



Ben B. Cheney

1905-1971

Ben Cheney was born in Lima, Montana on March 24, 1905. His father was John Cheney and his mother was Martha Kidd Cheney. When Ben with eight years old, he moved to South Bend, Washington, to live with his grandparents. Ben lived in South Bend until 1924 when he moved to Tacoma to attend business college. In 1925 he began work for the Dempsey Lumber Company in Tacoma, but in 1929 he found greater opportunities with the Fairhurst Lumber Company and began working for them. In 1936 he formed the Cheney Lumber Company.

The Cheney Lumber Company was originally established to manufacture railroad ties. Timber was purchased and resold to small portable tie mills manufacturing ties for both domestic and foreign markets. However, Ben Cheney had a broader, long-range plan in mind from the beginning. During his early days in the lumber business he had noticed that while cutting square ties from round trees, there was tremendous waste of timber which for all practical purposes was ignored. Later, in his own lumber company, he developed the process of converting the side-cuts from ties into eight-foot two-by-four studs. These studs potentially provided savings in builders' expenses. Always before, studs had been shortened by carpenters to the eight-foot length required in modern housing from twelve or sixteen-foot two-by-fours, with the excess going to waste. The obvious savings in labor and lumber would seemingly be a welcome boost to the market, but the first shipments of eight-foot studs took work from the carpenters on job sites and was therefore unacceptable to carpenters. The Cheney Lumber Company laid this obstacle to rest in a short time, and the recutting of twelve and sixteen-foot lumber into eight-foot studs was largely eliminated.

Over the years Cheney developed his railroad tie and stud production in more than 100 mills at various times in Washington, Oregon and California. Eventually the production of studs increased while the availability of suitable tie lumber for the portable mills and the market for railroad ties decreased. As a result of these changes, the Cheney Lumber Company built its own mills for the production of studs in many towns in Washington, Oregon and California. At the time of the sale of the Cheney Mill interests in 1974, efficient, modern mills were operating in Tacoma, Washington; Central Point, Oregon; and Pondsosa and Greenville, California.

The Cheney Stud brand of a stud horse imprinted on the ends and faces of Cheney Studs was recognized throughout the industry as a sign of top quality. The application of a check resistant, red-colored wax base paint to the end of the studs was originated by the Cheney Lumber Company, and for many years their product was the only one so identified.

Ben Cheney was active in sports, particularly baseball, as a boy. His interest in sports continued throughout his life and he became an enthusiastic sponsor of youth athletic teams. More than 5,000 boys played for the "Cheney Studs" over the 20 years he actively supported teams. In later life he became active in Major League Baseball as a member of the Board of Directors of the San Francisco Giants. He was recognized on many occasions in Tacoma with awards and honors in the sports world.

Mr. Cheney died on March 18, 1971 in Tacoma and was survived by his wife, Marian and children Sandra, Bradbury and Piper.