



## *Frank R. Gilchrist*

1924-1991

Frank R. Gilchrist was a Central Oregon lumberman and president of Gilchrist Timber Company. He was born April 2, 1924 in Big Rapids, Michigan. He was the son of Frank W. Gilchrist and Mary Moorman Gilchrist.

He was a fifth generation lumberman, dating back to his great-great-grandfather, Albert J. Gilchrist, a New Hampshire lumberman who moved to Michigan in 1850 to operate mills in the Marine City area. His son, Frank W. had a long, prosperous career as a lumberman and investor in sawmills, timberlands, lumber ships, and other investments. Frank W. began acquiring timberlands in central Oregon in 1902.

The third-generation Gilchrist lumberman, Frank R., served as president of the Gilchrist-Fordney Lumber Company at Laurel, Mississippi. The next generation, Frank W., guided the company at Laurel, but made plans in the 1930s to move the company's operations to Central Oregon, building a new sawmill and constructing the community of Gilchrist.

Construction of the sawmill began in 1939. When the company town of Gilchrist was started in 1938, the Gilchrist family moved to

Oregon. Frank R., his brother Stewart, his sister, Mary, and his parents were among the many families working for the company who moved from Mississippi to their new home in Oregon.

One of Frank's responsibilities during the construction of the sawmill and town was to record the progress on film. His photographs show how the undeveloped area, some 46 miles south of Bend, was transformed into a new company town on both sides of U.S. Highway 97. The sawmill began operations in 1939 and the town was soon completed.

Frank graduated from Gilchrist High School in the spring of 1941. That fall, he entered Oregon State College at Corvallis. A year later, he left college to take flying lessons in California. With the United States now at war, Frank was interested in qualifying for flight duty in the military. After completing the lessons, he entered pre-flight school and was eventually commissioned as a Lieutenant, J.G. in the U.S. Navy Air Corps. He served on active duty as a navy pilot on an aircraft carrier in the South Pacific during World War II.

In the fall of 1945, Frank left the service and returned to Gilchrist to work for the Gilchrist Timber Company for a year. He returned to college for a short time, but then chose to return to the company as a lumber salesman with offices in Memphis, Tennessee. In this position, he sold lumber throughout the southeastern United States.

In September, 1949, Frank married Helen Gertrude Hill of Memphis. They were married for 30 years when she died in 1979. During their marriage they adopted four children – Frank R. Jr., James A., Benjamin H., and Susan A.

Following his marriage, Frank returned to Gilchrist to serve as a special assistant to his father, Frank W. who was president of Gilchrist Timber Company. In 1953, Frank was appointed sales manager of the company, a position he held until his father's death in 1956. At that time, he became president of Gilchrist Timber Company.

For more than 30 years, Frank was known throughout the forest industry as a successful businessman who guided his company through the cyclic ups and downs of the lumber business. He managed the Gilchrist Timber Company as a viable operation of a small, independent company. At the same time, he oversaw the management of the Gilchrist community as the last company town in the west still operating as it was originally established. This unique community has been the subject of many articles in regional newspapers, the *Wall Street Journal*, and other publications as the last of its kind.

Frank was also recognized as a leading spokesman for Central and Eastern Oregon, that part of the state east of the Cascade Mountains. He championed the causes of

this part of the state, knowing that a smaller population, greater distances, and a closer touch with the land made the needs of the people here unique.

Throughout his career, Frank also worked closely with others in his industry and the business community of the state to achieve common goals that are good for the entire state.

Among the positions in associations and activities that Frank held were: past president of Associated Oregon Industries, the state's largest business organization; a director of the National Forest Products Association; a director and past president of Western Wood Products Association; and a member of the advisory committee to the Oregon State University Forest Research Laboratory.

Frank served three terms on the Oregon State Board of Forestry, the state's policy-making forestry body. With each appointment, he was named by a different governor representing both major political parties. As a member of the Board of Forestry, he well represented the forest landowners and the forest industry of Eastern Oregon.

One of his most satisfying experiences was serving for many years as a member of the Oregon State Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, looking at current and long-range needs of Oregonians for parks and recreation.

Among the many awards that he received were the Governor's Energy Conservation Award for outstanding leadership in energy conservation at Gilchrist and the Klamath County Chamber of Commerce award for Oregon Business of the Year.

In recent years, Frank's attention was directed at the construction of a new sawmill using state-of-the-art technology. With this technology, the plant has significantly improved the product and made the operation more efficient.

The management of the Gilchrist timberlands, now totaling 100,000 acres, is just as impressive. Following individual tree management practices, the company has continued to improve the quality of the forests, while harvesting from these lands and from nearby national forest lands.

As the Gilchrist Timber Company approached its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Oregon, Frank R. Gilchrist continued to manage the company, its timberlands, and the community as a unique and independent business, contributing to the economy of Central Oregon and the entire state.