



Frank W. Gilchrist

1903-1956

Frank W. Gilchrist, fourth generation lumberman of Mississippi and Oregon, was born January 31, 1903 in Cleveland, Ohio, the son of Frank R. and Flora Gilchrist.

His great-grandfather, Albert Gilchrist, had been active in the timber industry in New Hampshire before moving to Alpena, Michigan. His grandfather, Frank W. Gilchrist, was highly successful in sawmills, transport ships on the Great Lakes, and sugar factories in the United States and Canada. He was a major partner in the Rust-Owen Lumber Company in Wisconsin, the Three States Lumber Company and the W.E. Smith Lumber Company of Illinois and later Tennessee, and the Gilchrist Transportation Company.

In 1902, his grandfather began acquiring timberlands in the central Oregon region, an area of vast pine forests not yet served by any major railroad system. Five years later, in 1907, he helped form the Gilchrist-Fordney Company to develop large tracts of timber near Laurel, Mississippi.

After the grandfather's death in 1912, the father of Frank W. and Frank R. Gilchrist, began representing the family's interests in the Laurel, Mississippi operations. He also continued

acquiring timberlands in central Oregon until, by the late 1920s, there were more than 60,000 acres in company ownership. All but 5,000 acres were in Klamath and Lake counties.

Frank W. Gilchrist moved from Cleveland to Laurel, Mississippi with his family in 1907 when he was four years old. He spent most of his youth there except for years that he attended a boys' school at Andover, Massachusetts.

Following schooling, Frank W. began work for the Gilchrist-Fordney Company, learning the business from the ground up under the direction of his father.

His father died prematurely in 1917 at the age of 46. The company continued under the leadership of a new president, S.M. Jones. Frank W. completed his schooling and then began his life-long career with the company in a variety of jobs.

By the mid-1930s, near the end of the Great Depression, the company could see an end to its timber supply in Mississippi. State taxes were making it difficult to continue an economic operation in that state. President Henry E. Fletcher (Frank W.'s uncle), woods superintendent J.P. Applewhite, and Frank W. looked to the

company's holdings in central Oregon and made the decision to move to that state.

By this time, Frank W. had married Mary Moorman. They had three children – Frank R., Stewart J. and Mary G.

In March of 1937, Frank W., his wife and Mr. Applewhite traveled to Oregon. Besides examining the construction site for a new sawmill and company town, they visited a number of sawmills in the area, talked to railroad company representatives and other local businessmen. The site chosen for the sawmill was on the banks of the Little Deschutes River. On the opposite side of U.S. Highway 97, the townsite of Gilchrist was located, a company-owned town of sufficient size to house the 250 to 300 workers needed at the mill.

Frank W. was certain that the sawmill to be constructed should be a small one to maximize the return on his investment. A 60-acre millpond was constructed. The mill included a sawmill with a nine-foot band and resaw unit, a planing mill, dry kilns, a power house and a shipping plant. The sawmill was designed to cut about 10,000 board feet an hour.

The company hired Hollis Johnston, a Portland architect and town planner, to design the Gilchrist community. Using the latest knowledge of town planning, Johnston laid out a community of 128 two-bedroom and three-bedroom houses, plus the business community to serve the people. The businesses included a restaurant, grocery store, beauty parlor, bowling alley, barber shop, library, post office and tavern. The businesses were located primarily in one large building, similar to the shopping malls that would become popular three decades later.

The community also included a school, housing for school teachers and an office for the Oregon State Police. A gas station and movie theatre were constructed. Land was donated for a Catholic Church and the Methodist Church met in a company building.

All town properties remained in the ownership of Gilchrist Timber Company with a nominal rent charged to workers and supervisors who lived in the housing. All town services of street maintenance, garbage service, and maintenance of structures were provided by the company.

Frank W., serving as general manager of the company, helped guide the company as it established the Klamath Northern Railroad to ship their products, connecting with the Southern Pacific lines passing through the area.

When the sawmill began production in 1939, the new community of Gilchrist was the last of 16 company towns ever established in Oregon and, with the exception of two mining towns in other states, the last of its kind to be established in the United States. Many onlookers thought that it was past the era of "company towns," but the community began to prosper at once and continues to the present as an attractive and pleasant place to live and work.

With the sawmill established, the attention of the company turned to the management of its timberlands. Had the company harvested only on its own lands, without looking to the future, its timber supply would have lasted only 40 years. However, by practicing single tree management with selective harvesting on its own timberlands and by purchasing more of its timber from nearby national forests, the timberlands were placed on a plan for a perpetual supply of logs for the mill with healthier forests being the product of skilled management.

Frank W. continued to guide the operation of the company's mill operations and the community during the growth period following World War II.

He died on April 4, 1956 in Bend, Oregon. In noting his passing, *The Bend Bulletin* stated in an editorial, "Frank Gilchrist made friends easily. He kept them long. His was a most generous nature. His graciousness as a host could not be exceeded. Gilchrist is a model town. It, the company he founded, and the family he leaves will be perpetual monuments to the kindly soul of Frank W. Gilchrist."