



Lowell Thomas Murrey

1885-1971

L.T. Murray rose to prominence in the timber industry at an early point in his long and distinguished career. An innovator and leader, he began from the start searching for better ways to harvest trees and to improve methods of managing his forestland for continuous production.

Born in Cincinnati, Ohio, on October 24, 1885, Mr. Murray left the University of Michigan in 1906 on his first venture to the West Coast. He worked in the mills and camps of several lumber companies in Washington and Oregon before striking out on his own in 1908. Many years later, L.T. said “I always had an uncontrollable urge to find out what was happening on the other side of the mountain,” a statement that aptly typified his career.

Responding to this urge, L.T. quickly ventured into the logging business in 1908 on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. In 1910, he returned to the State of Washington and early the following year organized the West Fork Logging Company and established a camp on the west fork of the Tilton River in eastern Lewis County.

Two years later he incorporated the West Fork Timber Company and expanded his operations on the Tilton River. He logged briefly on Hood’s Canal and several other locations in Western Washington and then began to concentrate in the Mineral Creek area between the Nisqually and Tilton Rivers in the shadow of Mount Rainier. From that point on Tom Murray and West Fork became synonymous in the minds of western lumbermen and West Fork soon became one of the major independent log producers for the sawmills on Puget Sound as well as one of the largest independent timber owners.

Murray knew logs and his skill as a logger was only exceeded by his reputation as a log merchandiser. Decades before the term “log merchandiser” hit the industry, he carefully analyzed the log requirements of each mill and, by sorting his logs to best meet sawmill needs, provided a valuable service to his customers and at the same time received top prices for his logs.

In 1916, Mr. Murray married Helen Bailey to Tacoma. They had three children; Amy Lou (Mrs. Robert Young), Anne (Mrs. Graham Barbey) and Lowell Thomas Murray, Jr.

In 1922, in recognition of his leadership in the forest industry, Mr. Murray was elected president of the Pacific Logging Congress, the youngest man to have received that distinction.

Among foresters and loggers, Mr. Murray will be remembered best as a staunch advocate of selective logging; a most unpopular and controversial concept of the day. The general industry practice of sacrificing the relatively worthless understory in the process of harvesting old growth Fir and Cedar did violence to Mr. Murray's ideas on forest management. Breaking with tradition, he developed what he aptly termed his "low-high lead" system along with tractor yarding for selectively logging the Douglas fir in his predominantly Hemlock forest. He was severely criticized and accused of using a high-sounding forestry term to disguise what others considered the high grading of his timber. In the long run, however, his unique logging methods were vindicated and lent additional truth to the old German adage, "The best forestry is the forestry that pays the best." In 1943, Mr. Murray licensed the cutting rights on his Mineral Creek timber to the St. Regis Paper Company and the residual Hemlock left over from years of selective logging became a significant part of the long-range log supply for the St. Regis pulp mill in Tacoma.

Mr. Murray served for many years as a director of the National Bank of Washington and the Western Bancorporation. At various times he served as an officer and director of many major industrial associations, including the National Association of Manufacturers. He was also a director of numerous civic organizations and educational institutions.

Mr. Murray combined his love of the forests with his interest in land and livestock. Over a period of years, he put together the largest ranch and cattle operation in the State of Washington and at one time operated a ranch of similar size in Arizona. The extensive rangelands of the High Valley Ranch, headquartered near Ellensburg, Washington, were finally sold to the State of Washington for what are now the L.T. Murray Wildlife and Recreation Area. Retained, however, were grazing rights, 30,000 acres of timber and extensive farmland.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Murray strongly supported the arts, in 1969 purchased, and donated the National Bank of Washington building to the Tacoma Art League to be used as an art museum.

Mr. Murray passed away in 1971 at the age of 85 at Madera, his home for many years at Gravelly Lake, Washington.