



Mark E. Reed

1866-1933

Mark Reed was the man who directed the Simpson Logging Company from its small but strong beginning into tremendous growth in the early twentieth century. Born in Olympia, Washington, the son of Thomas M. Reed, a prominent territorial politician, Mark Reed's early exposure to politics became an excellent tool when he entered the business world as a young man. His first logging endeavor was in 1891 near Shelton. He and Ike Ellis, in partnership, designed and built a short railroad. Because 1893 brought a period of sudden financial depression throughout the country, the railroad failed and the partners were financially unable to continue the business. The experience proved valuable to Reed and C.J. Lord, an Olympia banker, was impressed with Reed's abilities and hired him to take charge of a logging camp.

Soon thereafter Sol Simpson hired Reed as straw boss under Joseph Simpson, foreman of his No. 1 camp. Reed proved to be as promising as Simpson had hoped. It was not long before Reed was brought into the Simpson Logging Company offices at Shelton. Simpson asked Reed to manage the Lumberman's Mercantile Company, a general store in Shelton which Simpson owned with other lumbermen. Reed was so successful with the store that Simpson also had him manage

the State Bank of Shelton, in which he was a major shareholder. Around 1898, Reed was given the responsibility that he would value most: he was made manager of Simpson Logging Company. During the next few years Simpson involved Reed in virtually all important business concerns. These included his private concerns as well as those of the company. With the opportunities Simpson was making available, Reed was developing outstanding managerial abilities. He could see the advantages of political activity for business. With talent for bringing opposing views together and for making progress out of apparent dead ends, Reed developed an extremely effective political position.

Reed served eight terms in the state legislature as representative for Mason County, including one term as speaker of the house in 1923. He was generally considered to be the dominant force in the legislature during the 1920's, and although tempted by a promising career in politics (he was urged to run for governor three times), he kept his perspective on political involvement. His primary interest at all times was Simpson Logging Company and its employees.

Reed chose his focal points for action as wisely within the company as he did in the political arena. Early in his career when the Simpson Logging Company was still small and dependent on commerce with the Port Blakely Mill Company, Reed was instrumental in ending this dependence. This move freed the Simpson Logging Company to grow into the most successful logging company on Puget Sound. This was its first and certainly most significant step in growing out of the small business Sol Simpson had established into the strong and extensive company Simpson Timber is today.

In 1901, Reed married Irene Simpson, Sol Simpson's daughter, and in the early years of the marriage Simpson moved Reed into position as the operating head of the company. Simpson Timber Company is even now a family company, confirming Sol Simpson's belief that his can be good operating policy. Until 1914 Reed was general manager of the company, and president from that year until his death in 1933.

In the beginning of his career with Simpson, Reed had managed Simpson's satellite business interests as well as the company's mainstream business. As Reed's knowledge of forest products developed, he began establishing businesses for Simpson Logging Company when the need arose. The first one he set up was a mill.

In the 1920's Reed found that Simpson Logging Company was cutting more hemlock and cedar logs than the market could absorb. There was also other small material from cutting at high altitudes which had to be used near the logging sites to prevent waste. Reed solved these problems by building a hemlock sawmill in Shelton for which he established Reed Mill Company to own and operate the plant. The first mill was so successful that he soon built a shingle mill which used all of the cedar being brought from the forest. He persuaded two San Francisco men, E.M. Mills and J.D. Zellerbach, to build a pulp mill adjacent to the Reed mill. They organized Rainier Pulp and Paper Company and built a mill to produce high grade pulp exclusively using hemlock.

There are many illustrations that Reed's first concern was always Simpson Logging Company.

Equally important to him was employee protection and fairness in employee policies. He made tremendous improvements in conditions at logging camps. He was one of the first to secure group insurance for employees, and as early as 1911 he was working to promote a workmen's compensation law. He was always receptive toward new operating methods and was most resourceful in this respect.

He was a banker throughout his life with many banking interests: he was president of the State Bank of Shelton, he organized a bank in Olympia, and he was on the Board of Dexter Horton Bank (now the Seattle First National Bank) from 1910 until his death. He felt a life-long loyalty to the town of Shelton, living there and guiding its growth by donating many needed buildings over the years.

Reed and his wife had three sons, the eldest of whom, Sol Simpson Reed, died an early and tragic death when shot by an ex-logger who'd gone mad. At that time Sol Reed was well on his way to a fulfilling career in logging, and his two brothers, Frank C. and William G. both made successful careers with the Simpson Timber Company.