



Henry Charles Turrish

1864 - 1934

Born into a pioneer farm family in Buena Vista, Wisconsin, Henry Charles Turrish would during his 69-year lifetime become one of the nation's preeminent lumbermen. At the peak of his career in the late 1920s, he owned or had a financial interest in vast acreages of timber in the Pacific Northwest and upper Midwest. To service those holdings, he owned numerous lumber mills and logging railroads, providing employment to thousands. Yet, this Duluth-based "timber baron" eschewed publicity and never attained the recognition of, say, his contemporary Frederick Weyerhaeuser, with whom he partnered on several huge timber enterprises. At the time of his death in an automobile accident in 1934, there was little fanfare for Henry Turrish, one of America's more successful businessmen in the timber industry.

Henry was the fourth child born to James and Catherine Turrish, Irish immigrants who homesteaded in heavily wooded central Wisconsin. Henry worked on his father's farm and attended local schools. When he came of age, he began working in the logging business. He cruised and cut trees, served as a "river driver" who rafted timber down rivers, and became familiar with sawmill operations. He worked in mill offices and took some classwork in Madison to better understand the business. At an early age he recognized the value of standing timber and how handsome profits could be made by those who held timber rights and knew how to harvest, process and market trees efficiently.

By 1890, when he was in his mid-twenties, Henry had gone into business for himself as the Turrish Lumber Company, buying stumpage rights, logging and selling timber. His early logging activities were close to home along the Wisconsin River. Working with various associates, he gradually began buying timber rights along the Eau Claire River and farther afield. Among the timber tracts that caught his attention was an expansive stand of mature pine trees growing on the Lac Courte Oreilles Indian Reservation, southeast of Superior. He applied to the federal government for permission to negotiate with the Indians to harvest the trees. In October, 1894, President Grover Cleveland granted that request.

Henry met and married Margaret Vincent Keating, daughter of a fellow Wisconsin timber merchant, in 1891. The couple would have four daughters over the final decade of the century: Marie, Vivian, Nannie and Frances.

As the supply of virgin timber was harvested or tied-up in the central part of the state, Henry's activity moved farther north. The family settled for a time in Superior, Wisconsin, where he opened a lumber mill. Before long, he moved across the river to Duluth, Minnesota, the city he would call home for the remainder of his life. Upon settling in Duluth, he became secretary and general manager of the Minnesota Log and Timber Company, the first of a growing number of enterprises. His gift for buying and selling timber resulted in his becoming a wealthy man by the age of 40.

In the early 1900s, Henry and his associates – as well as his competitors – began casting their eyes on the vast virgin forests of pine, fir, hemlock and cedar in the Pacific Northwest. As railroads expanded in that direction and work was underway on the Panama Canal, great opportunities were at hand. Henry and his surrogates began making reconnaissance and timber buying trips to the Northwest with increased frequency in the first years of the new century. In some cases, syndicates were formed to purchase huge tracts of virgin timber in Idaho, Washington and Oregon.

In one notable collaboration, in March 1903 Henry Turrish and Frederick Weyerhaeuser merged their extensive, but as yet undeveloped, timber holdings in the Clearwater, Potlatch and Palouse River drainages of western Idaho to form the Potlatch Lumber Company. With an initial capitalization of \$3 million, the new company's officers included Charles A. Weyerhaeuser as president, Henry Turrish as vice president, and William Dreary as general manager. A huge mill was built and railroad tracks laid to access the timber. The Potlatch Corporation would over the following century grow into a diverse wood products company with annual sales in excess of \$500 million.

Henry made frequent train trips between Duluth and Portland, Oregon, where he established the Western Timber Company. He was especially active in acquiring timber rights and/or existing lumber companies in southwest Washington and northwest Oregon. The region's volcanic soils, mild temperatures and heavy rainfall produced Douglas fir, Western red cedar, Western hemlock, and Sitka spruce trees of enormous size. His business interests during the period of 1910 to 1930 included the Chapman Timber Company, Nehalem Timber & Logging Company, Drew Timber Company, Beaver Lumber Company, Fir Tree Lumber Company, Clark & Wilson Lumber Company, Appledale Land Company and the Portland & Southwestern Railroad, among others. In Cowlitz County, Washington, he was president of the O'Connell Lumber Company and a director of the Curran Timber Company. One source indicated he controlled over one billion board feet of prime timber in Cowlitz County alone. In Idaho, he continued as an officer of the Potlatch Lumber Company, president of the Western

Land Company, and a director of the Boise Payette Lumber Company, predecessor to the Boise-Cascade Corporation. He continued to have timber interests in Minnesota and elsewhere in the Midwest and South. He served as a director of several banks, including institutions in Florida, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Idaho.

Turrish's Western Timber Company, headquartered in Portland, managed eight sawmills, a log scaling bureau, and countless acres of timberland. Millions of dollars of timber sales were handled out of that office.

Henry's first wife Margaret died in her mid-forties, after which the timber man often traveled with his youngest daughter, Frances. During one of their early visits to Portland, Oregon, Henry made the acquaintance of Charles "CF" Swigert, the noted bridge-builder and founder of Electric Steel Foundry. Turrish may have had an interest in the logging equipment that Swigert had begun producing in his Portland foundry. In any event, it was through the business contact between Henry Turrish and CF Swigert that their children, Frances and Ernest, met and would eventually marry.

On the evening of April 4, 1934 Henry Turrish, aged 69, was instantly killed when the car in which he was being chauffeured overturned near Superior, Wisconsin. He had been on business in Eau Claire and was quickly returning to Duluth because of a message that his daughter, Vivian, was gravely ill. Witnesses reported that Henry was "hurled out of the car and pinned under it after it had turned over twice."

It is believed that Henry died without knowing that Vivian had indeed died earlier in the day. Rites for both father and daughter were held simultaneously at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Duluth. Thus, a great and successful lumberman, who began life on a hardscrabble pioneer farm in Wisconsin was laid to rest. His lifetime spanned from the Civil War to the Great Depression, during which he personally played a major role in developing the timber industry in both the Midwest and Northwest.

The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography wrote of Henry Turrish: "In religion he was a Roman Catholic and in politics a Republican. Golf reading and travel were his favorite recreations. A man of strong personality, he was an excellent business executive whose advice was sought by many. He was kindly and generous and gave liberally to numerous charities."