



Darrell H. Schroeder

1923 - 2018

A respected, hard-working, and trusted lumberman, Darrell H. Schroeder rose from an entry-level job in the woods to become the head of the Stimson Lumber Company, one of the longest-operating forest product companies in the United States. Darrell succeeded in this tough industry not because he was a fierce manager or cutthroat competitor, but because he remained friendly, down-to-earth, and loyal throughout his career.

Darrell was born on May 17, 1923, in Albany, Oregon, the second son of Herbert A. Schroeder and Mabel Elizabeth Beeson Schroeder. Darrell's only sibling, Ed, was nine years older. He too carved out a successful career as a forester and lumberman, and eventually served as the Oregon State Forester in the 1960s and 1970s.

Darrell's grandfather John Schroeder—a German immigrant who became a U.S. citizen—had established a homestead in woodlands near Gates, Oregon, in the late 19th century. When Darrell was born, his father still farmed the family homestead, though a sawmill on the property had closed in the early 1900s.

Darrell's father Herbert was a skilled machinist and mechanic. Though he ran logging "sides" (the industry term for worksite), he more often worked maintaining and repairing logging equipment. Informally, his job title was "donkey doctor"—a mechanic who repaired steam engine "donkeys" used to winch felled timber.

Darrell's mother settled in Oregon as a child when her mother, sister, and brother moved to Albany, Oregon, from Iowa. She became an elementary school teacher, working as one of just two teachers in a small schoolhouse in Gates, Oregon.

When Darrell was still a young child, his family gave up their homestead land claim and relocated to Mill City, Oregon, not far from Gates. Herbert Schroeder worked for Hammond Lumber Company, which ceased operations during the Great Depression.

In the early 1930s, economic conditions worsened across the nation. To put men to work, teach skills, and develop America's natural resources, the federal government launched the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in 1933. Darrell's father, uncle, and brother all worked in the program, helping operate CCC camps and teaching logging skills. In early 1937, Darrell's father and uncle were offered an opportunity to purchase shares in a start-up sawmill and logging operation called the Mill City Manufacturing Company. Darrell worked his first industry job—minding a gate to keep cows clear of logging trucks—for this company.

As a freshman in high school, Darrell worked under his brother on crews building fire trails and fighting forest fires. The next two summer seasons, Darrell worked as a choker setter—placing cables on felled timber so it can be moved. As a senior in high school, Darrell began cutting timber with handsets. The wide use of power saws in logging was still many years off. Though Darrell was young and relatively inexperienced, he had one advantage: though he was right-handed by birth, he could cut wood left-handed. A head faller needed a left-handed chopper, and Darrell earned the job. His mother disapproved, but his father consented, so Darrell worked while attending his last year of high school and before entering college.

Darrell graduated from Mill City High School in 1941. Though he worked during his high school years, he also had the chance to play on his school's football and basketball teams.

In the fall of 1941, Darrell began his freshman year at Oregon State College (now University) in Corvallis, with the intention of studying Forestry and Logging Engineering. He had been enrolled for just a few months when Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbor and the U.S. entered World War II. Darrell enlisted in the U.S. Army and was called up after the first term of his sophomore year.

Darrell had been part of Oregon State College's Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program, but because he was an underclassman, he entered the army as an enlisted man. He received artillery training at Camp Roberts in California, participated in maneuvers in Oregon, and then traveled back to California for desert training.

Like millions of servicemen of his generation, Darrell then became a global traveler. He crossed the U.S. by train and then shipped to Casablanca in French Morocco. Another train took him overland to Oran, Algeria, which had been captured by the Allies in November 1942. From there, he proceeded to Italy, where he spent the remainder of the war, battling north.

Darrell served as a staff sergeant of a headquarters battery, the command element of an artillery company. Darrell's unit fought at the Battle of Anzio and participated in the final big breakthrough into the Po Valley, which took Darrell nearly to the Swiss border. Darrell also traveled through a liberated Rome and Milan, where he saw Mussolini's body hanging from its heels in a city square.

Less than a year and a half later, Darrell was back at Oregon State College for winter term 1946, his war experiences behind him. About the time

that he started classes, a cousin suggested that he meet a spirited friend of hers, a woman named Pat Meisinger.

Born in Eugene, Oregon, on February 14, 1925, Pat had also participated in the war effort. A talented musician, she played the accordion with the USO. Pat also worked in a hospital unit in the South Pacific. Eight months after they met, Darrell and Pat married—on September 8, 1946—and they remain happily married in 2009, 63 years later.

In the summer of 1946, Darrell needed work, and his brother suggested he talk with representatives of the Stimson Lumber Company. Ed was then stationed at Forest Grove, working for the Oregon Department of Forestry, and he admired Stimson's operations. And so, Darrell began his career at Stimson working on a road crew and living in a bunk house in the company's logging camp 12 miles southwest of Forest Grove.

By the middle of the summer, Darrell was ready to quit because he could make more money as a timber faller. But when he went to give his notice during the July 4 holiday shutdown, the superintendent's son notified him that he was getting a raise of two dollars more per day, so Darrell stayed on.

The following logging season—again on break from college—Darrell became involved in his first major project for Stimson. Charles Willard "C.W." Stimson and Harold Miller, the longtime operating head of the Stimson Lumber Company and Stimson's son-in-law, were visiting logging camps and considering how to convert the company's railroad operations to truck, which offered greater flexibility. On one of these visits, Mr. Miller—who was always respectfully called "Mr. Miller" even by close associates—introduced Darrell to C.W. Stimson. It was the only time that Darrell met Stimson, the grandson of the family company's founder, Thomas Douglas "T.D." Stimson.

Mr. Miller knew that Darrell was a student and promising lumberman, and he asked the young man to give some consideration to how Stimson Lumber should convert from moving timber out of the woods by rail to truck. In 1948, Darrell received his Bachelor's of Science degree in Logging Engineering, and that summer he effectively took on the position of the company's chief logging engineer. His first major task was implementing the company's conversion from rail to road over the next two years.

Because he had a year-round position at Stimson, Darrell had Pat move right up to the logging camp with him. A year and a half later, they had a house built in Forest Grove, shortly before their first child, Julie Anne was born in March 1950. A son, Scott, joined the family in May 1954.

By this time, Darrell's duties had expanded to include surveying, cruising timber, planning logging operations, and more. He increasingly became a trusted advisor—or at least a trusted sounding board—to Mr. Miller.

In 1951, Mr. Miller came out to the Forest Grove-area camp and asked Darrell to accompany him on a trip to Del Norte County, California, where the Miller family owned about 24,000 acres of primarily redwood timberlands. Del Norte County was in desperate financial straits, and the tax assessor planned to raise taxes on the holdings. This tax plan spurred Mr. Miller to consider harvesting timber from this land, though he had initially planned to wait. Darrell accompanied Mr. Miller on numerous trips to California, where they began to consult with local lumbermen about redwood logging.

Finally, in December 1954, Mr. Miller decided to begin substantial logging operations in California. He founded the Rellim ("Miller" spelled backwards) Redwood Company as a subsidiary of Stimson Lumber and appointed Darrell the Vice President and General Manager. After several meetings—Darrell thought of them as tests of a sort—Mr. Miller asked Darrell to head up the California operations.

Darrell leapt into the new challenge. He established an office, purchased equipment, and hired his own crew. He also relocated his family to Crescent City, California, in February 1955. Though dedicated Oregonians, the Schroeders spent the next 23 years as California residents and raised their children in the Golden State.

For nearly a decade, the California operation primarily provided timber to third-party sawmills, plywood plants, and veneer plants. In 1964, after extensive planning and two years of construction, the company's own sawmill opened just outside Crescent City. The new operation was called Miller Redwood Company, and Mr. Miller also appointed Darrell the Vice President and General Manager of this subsidiary company. That same year, historic tidal waves hit Crescent City, destroying nearly 30 blocks of the town and taking many lives. Fortunately, neither the company nor Darrell's family personally sustained any damage.

Darrell earned tremendous loyalty, respect, and effort from the people who worked for him. Charles Howe, the company's financial manager in Crescent City for 28 years, who worked closely with Darrell remembered his boss as "an efficient manager" and "a fantastic person." Howe elaborated,

"Darrell got the best out of people, and people were happy to give him their best."

Howe also remembered that Darrell was incredibly detail oriented and kept track of all parts of the business, just like his mentor, Mr. Miller. "Every month, I put out financial statements, and we went through them in great detail," Howe said.

Darrell also earned the respect and friendship of many in the larger industry. "He ran an excellent operation and was well liked in the industry," recalled Bob Sanders, the head of RSG Forest Products. "We were often competitors bidding on timber sales, but there were never conflicts, and we maintained a good friendship."

Darrell kept extraordinarily busy heading up Stimson's California operations, but he still made time for other civic and industry activities. He eventually served as President of several organizations, including the Crescent City Rotary Club, the California Forest Protection Association, the California Redwood Association, and the Redwood Inspection Service. He later served on the Board of the World Forestry Center as well. Darrell was also active in Republican Party politics, first supporting Ronald Reagan in his campaign for California Governor and later for President.

Darrell and his family were also loyal supporters of Oregon State's basketball team. Darrell became close friends with coach Ralph Miller and traveled to see many PAC 10 games.

Around the time that the Crescent City mill opened, the Sierra Club and other organizations began to advocate for the creation of Redwood National Park. Supporters of the park wanted the federal government to restrict logging and acquire private timberlands, including acreage owned by the Miller family. Mr. Miller considered himself a good steward of the land who wanted timber resources available for current and future generations.

After years of debate, Congress created Redwood National Park in 1968 and acquired by eminent domain 2,646 acres from the Miller family's holdings. Though the federal government exchanged cash and land for the timberlands, Mr. Miller was still aggrieved by the outcome. The battle took a professional and personal toll on him, and the company had to curtail its business plans in California.

Throughout this process and after, Darrell became an even closer confidante and protégé to Mr. Miller. Darrell traveled several times each month to Portland to consult with Mr. Miller and participate in decision making. Mr. Miller also enjoyed traveling to California, first to review operations at Crescent City, and then to go hunting with Darrell for pheasant and duck in the vicinity of Oroville, California.

In fact, their shared interest in hunting and fishing made Darrell and Mr. Miller closer colleagues and friends. Darrell and Pat accompanied the Miller family on several fly-fishing trips in Oregon and Idaho. In the early 1960s, Mr. Miller and his wife had to withdraw from a yachting trip in the Caribbean, and he asked Darrell and Pat to accompany his grown daughters and nephews on the expedition. For a week, Darrell, Pat, and members of the Miller family had a great time island-hopping along the route between Antigua and Grenada.

In 1978, Mr. Miller asked Darrell to return to Portland, become President of Stimson Lumber, and assume day-to-day leadership of the company's operations. The Board of Directors approved Mr. Miller's motion to promote Darrell, who officially became the President of Stimson Lumber on March 1, 1978. When Mr. Miller passed away in 1981, the Miller family was happy to have Darrell remain the company's leader, as Mr. Miller had wanted.

Though Darrell planned to maintain Mr. Miller's principles of stewardship and fiscal prudence, he had to make several changes during his years leading the company. For instance, mills had to be converted from cutting old-growth logs to smaller, second-growth timber. Under Darrell's leadership, Stimson Lumber also acquired additional timberlands and mill operations.

In 1988, shortly after returning home from a business trip, Darrell suffered a heart attack, and he soon had bypass surgery. He retired in 1991, though he remained on the company's Board until 1996.

Darrell remained highly active in his retirement. A hunter and fly-fisher most of his life, he took numerous fishing trips with his brother Ed to Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, and elsewhere. In addition, he and Pat golfed together and often played when they traveled. They have also enjoyed seeing their three grandchildren grow up—and now they have a great-grandson as well.

When asked what was his secret to running a successful logging and forest products operation, Darrell modestly said that he "picked good people" to work alongside him. But as his friends and colleagues attest, Darrell's generosity of spirit, dedication, and fair-mindedness brought out the very best in people that had the privilege to know and work with him throughout his rich career and life.