



Edward Valentine Prentice

1886-1943

The processing of timber has challenged the ingenuity of individuals for centuries. Wherever trees grow, special problems have had to be answered to properly harvest, prepare, and deliver to customers useable materials for their particular needs. The western United States and Canada hold forests as unique as found anywhere in the world, and so the challenge to develop them has attracted men particularly drawn towards difficult questions that require novel and creative answers.

This potential is what E.V. Prentice saw in 1909 as a young man from Chicago out in the Northwest working on the new plant of Armour & Co. His experience in the animal glue division of their business qualified him to set up that part of the Portland plant. Seeing the stirring of the wood giant and appreciating the variety of uses of wood from his glue background, he saw the opportunity for supplying the production machinery to process these woods as a challenge to which he could give himself completely. This he did for over thirty years. He opened his first office in 1910 in Seattle, Washington but moved to Portland in January, 1912 convinced it would become the timber center of the region.

Edward Valentine Prentice, or “Val” as he was known to nearly everyone in the West, was born in Chicago, Illinois, December 22, 1886. His parents were Dr. Edward Prentice, who had come from England, and Kathryn B. Michon whose French parents lived in Louisiana. He was educated at Calumet High School in Chicago and studied three years at The Armour Institute where he learned the sciences, which he would apply throughout his work. He married Mary E. Horton in Portland in 1916. They had six sons and one daughter, all of whom are still living in the Northwest. He died October 11, 1943.

Recognizing the differences that each customer would have, he traveled the region extensively, visiting the mills and plants to learn first-hand the problems being encountered. Through these visits, he had the opportunity to become acquainted with the persons in the mill as well as the office, and he counted among his personal friends many maintenance and production workers as well as the owners of the mills. It was an era when individuals worked with each other on a basis of mutual cooperation and trust. In addition, the expression, “his word was his bond,” gained him the life-long friendship and confidence of his customers. In that time, the industry moved from manufacturing custom products into high volume marketing programs promoting the use of woods in all possible forms. The machinery he offered covered the sawmills, cooperage mills,

sash and door manufacturing plants, moulding mills, furniture, and veneer and plywood plants. However, perhaps because of his background in glues, he enjoyed best the furniture, and veneer and plywood business. It is in these areas that he provided most of his ideas on new and more productive machinery.

He was an inventive man with wide-ranging interests. Among the patents granted to him were those for a log-barking machine that could handle full-length logs of all lengths and diameter; a hydraulic apparatus to raise fluids, such as water, like a pump but without using mechanical power; and even small items such as carpenter clamps to facilitate assembly of glued parts in furniture manufacturing. In addition, he was interested in the use of electro-magnetic, pneumatic, and hydraulic controls to increase the efficiency of existing machines. His natural curiosity made everything about the processing of timber interesting, and a challenge to improve it.

He was deeply involved in the development of the manufacturing techniques that introduced refined drying procedures, the hot pressing of plywood, and other advances that brought plywood into common usage throughout the world.

Although the industries he helped are significantly different today from what he knew, he would not be surprised by the changes, only intensely interested in what might be done to make them better. He had a personal belief that improving the lives of everyone would come about through the efforts of the individual and he started with himself.