

# The Simpson Lumber Co., Pioneers In The Development of the Great Timber Resources of Coos Bay

**C**APT. A. M. SIMPSON, Nestor of the Lumber Men on the Pacific coast, was the founder of the Simpson Lumber Co., the pioneer corporation in the development of the great timber resources of the Coos Bay country. The Simpson name will always occupy a prominent place among the pioneers who did the early development work of this section. It was in 1856 that Capt. A. M. Simpson purchased a small second hand mill near Sutters

lumber Company is largely the personal history of its founder, Captain A. M. Simpson, and its development. In later years is interwoven with the career of his son, L. J. Simpson, who has devoted life and talent to the business established by his father.

### Career of A. M. Simpson.

The life and work of Captain A. M. Simpson, founder of the Simpson Lumber Company, who is now residing in retirement in San Francisco, is an indelible impress

The venture proved successful and the entering wedge of his career as a lumber man was securely driven. In 1851 a vessel partly owned by him called the Potomac was partially wrecked on the Columbia river bar and was towed to Portland by the historic steamer Lot Whitecomb commanded by Captain Joseph Kellogg. A brother of Mr. Simpson, L. P. Simpson supervised the work of heaving her out at the city front of Portland where she was repaired and loaded with lumber and pling. What is now the waterfront of Portland was at that time a bank covered with alder and various other shrubs. Front street was full of stumps and the thoroughfare was lined with small wooden buildings and numerous tents. The lower part of the street near the Couch claim was for the most part unimproved but back of Third street the country was all primitive forest and of a very heavy growth. After seeing the Potomac loaded Mr. Simpson again secured the services of Captain Kellogg and the steamer Lot Whitecomb and had her towed to Astoria whence he sailed her to San Francisco, his first voyage as captain on the ocean.

In 1852, Captain Simpson became interested in the construction of a lumber mill at Astoria. Not having had any experience in this line of work the mill was a failure because of defective construction but chiefly because of the great and sudden fall in the price of lumber. In addition to this, ill luck beset the owner in other ways and he determined to try a new field. Early in April 1852, he made the pioneer trading voyage to the Umpqua river entering that water with a schooner called the Parriet. At that time there was a

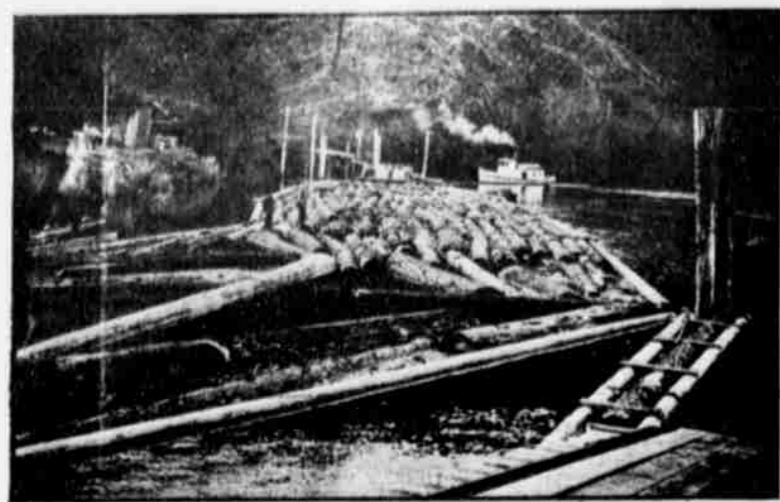
informed General Hooker that "The water in the Ten Mile Creek was too high for them to cross."

In 1855, Mr. Simpson made a trip to Coos Bay by way of Port Orford walking along the beach and through the forest to Empire City a distance of forty miles. A party from the valley had come in the year before and located there. Captain Harris had taken the Empire City claim and among others who had settled there were Perry B. Marple, who headed the party of exploration and who gave Coos Bay its name; Mr. Foley who had an adjoining claim; Gabriel Cooper, James Flanagan, James Alken, Glen Alken and Northrup and Simonds who had come from Portland with a stock of merchandise to start a store. Messrs. Flanagan and Rogers had begun the development of a coal mine and Messrs. Northrup and Simonds had started a coal mining enterprise and Mr. Simpson furnished vessels to carry the coal to San Francisco where it was in great demand.

Freight rates were attractive but as steam tugs were then almost unknown on the coast, transportation of this character was attended by great risks. Captain Simpson losing three vessels before obtaining a tug. The first accident of this kind not only resulted in heavy pecuniary loss to Mr. Simpson but was attended by a sad feature, the death of his brother, L. P. Simpson, who was lost at sea from the vessel bringing the machinery for the first saw mill to be built on Coos Bay. Enough of the machinery was saved to erect the mill. It was a very primitive affair consisting of an old fashioned down east sash saw with a capacity of six to ten thousand feet per day. The

of the great developers of the most important interests of Coos Bay, lumbering and shipping, while it barely hints at the gigantic enterprises which he has promoted and fostered during the past half century will give the present generation enough of an idea of the almost

brother Captain L. P. M. are now joint managers of the great industries which he established. His daughter, Edith, recently married a prominent eastern business man Roy M. Pike, and resides in Cincinnati, Ohio. Dr. Wiley W. Simpson is a resident of Sacramento



ONE OF THE SIMPSON LOG BOOMS.

mill in California, shipping it on a two-masted schooner to North Bend. His brother, Lewis Simpson, was captain of this vessel. The vessel was wrecked and Captain Lewis Simpson lost. They succeeded, however, in saving most of the machinery and removed it by lighters to North Bend where the following year the first saw mill was constructed.

This mill was operated by a sash saw and had a capacity of 5,000 feet per day of 12 hours, under favorable circumstances. It was located at what is now known as the Old Town, at which place a general merchandise store was also started, and a few dwellings for employes and a mess house for the men, were constructed.

From this modest beginning the business has grown to its present splendid proportion with a fleet of vessels that carry Coos Bay lumber to South America, Australia and the Orient. Captain Simpson retired from the active management of the great business his genius had created many years ago and the enterprise is now under the skillful and successful supervision of his two sons, L. J. Simpson and Capt. Edgar Simpson.

In 1858 a ship yard was started. The first vessel to be built was called the "Argo." She was built out of white cedar frames and is still in commission, although not owned by the Simpson Lumber Co. She was a small two-masted schooner with a capacity of about 125,000 feet full cargo.

The old mill was operated until 1889, at which time the present mill located at the Old Town was constructed with a capacity of about 20,000 per day. The capacity of this mill has been gradually raised to about 65,000 per day.

The ship yard was operated entirely at the Old Town until 1903, it was then moved to its present location alongside the Porter mill.

In 1902, in the month of December, the first grading was done on the streets of the new townsite of North Bend, laid out by L. J. Simpson.

The following year, 1903, the Porter mill was purchased from the successors of the old California Lumber Co. by the Simpson Lumber Co. and remodeled since which time it has been constantly in operation. The original capacity of the mill was about 85,000 feet per day, but with late improvements it has a capacity of 135,000 per day.

In 1904, the Simpson Lumber Co. started the construction of the sash and door factory, which has been run as a separate corporation ever since, under the name of the North Bend Manufacturing Company.

Over fifty vessels have been built in the ship yards of the Simpson Lumber Company and they have contributed largely to the development and prosperity of this section. It was in these ship yards that the first three, four and five masted schooners ever built on the Pacific coast were constructed. Also the first half masted steamer was built here.

The early history of the Simpson

upon the record of the development of the lumber industry of the Pacific coast and the history of Coos Bay. Probably none of the pioneer inhabitants of this section are more widely known than he, and none contributed in a greater degree toward the development of the timber interests of Coos County during the half century of his operations. Through the vista of long years of arduous toil, rendered still more difficult and discouraging at various times by reason of the many difficulties of the pioneer period and the well nigh insurmountable obstacles of early days in a new and undeveloped country, this dauntless factor in the building of a new empire is able to review with feelings of highly justifiable pride the record of a successful career whose climax has been the enrollment of his name among those of the comparatively few men who will always live in history as the chief builders of the great Coos country.

A. M. Simpson was born in Brunswick, Maine, February 21, 1826, a son of Thomas and Mary Simpson. After attending the common schools and academy he learned the trade of ship builder, and for some time was engaged in that calling in his native state. When the news of the discovery of gold in California reached the east he could not resist the impulse to join the army of fortune hunters which almost immediately inaugurated the rush for the new Eldorado. Having become the owner of a one thirty second share in the ship Birmingham and cargo he arranged to set sail in her in the capacity of supercargo in her journey around Cape Horn. After touching at Valparaiso the Birmingham continued her journey to the northward passing through the Golden Gate April 7, 1850. Soon after his arrival in San Francisco Mr. Simpson took a party of three to Stockton by boat of his own construction, thence to the mines on the Tuolumne river and mined there with success for about three weeks. Returning to San Francisco he began the disposal of the ship's cargo and with the \$1,500.00 which he had accumulated in the gold mines purchased an interest in a steamer called the H. T. Cay, then in course of construction which retained the proud distinction of being the first steamer built in the Golden Gate harbor. The dream of the owners of this craft was soon dissipated however for instead of the ounce of gold dust which they expected to receive for each passenger traveling to or from Stockton or Sacramento they were compelled to reduce the fare to five dollars with freight rates in proportion on account of the arrival of other steamers from New York by way of the Straits of Magellan. This meant the total failure of the venture and the loss of the money Mr. Simpson had so hopefully invested.

### Starts In Lumber Business.

Though Mr. Simpson was unfamiliar with the lumber business at this time the failure of the transportation enterprise induced him to ship a cargo of lumber on the Birmingham to Stockton and Sacramento.

thriving settlement at Scottsburg with a few stores engaged principally in forwarding supplies by pack animals to the mines of Southern Oregon. There was also a government station below Gardiner with a block house about completed for the protection of the inhabitants from Indians who were quite numerous. General Joseph Hooker who was in charge of the post afterwards built a wagon road from Scottsburg to Roseburg.

A. C. Gibbs afterwards governor of Oregon was at Gardiner at the time having taken up a claim under the Oregon donation of congress where the city of Gardiner now stands.

### Discovers Coos Bay.

While waiting on the Umpqua for a load of piling to be cut for a return cargo to San Francisco Mr. Simpson and two friends started down the beach for the purpose of discovering what is now known as Coos Bay. Having learned of its existence through the Indians who reported that it was "One Sun" down the beach they proceeded as far as Ten Mile Creek. Here, discovering on the opposite banks of the stream a party of Indians with painted and tattooed faces and further adorned with plumes and feathers and believing them on the war path the three explorers parleyed for half an hour. At the end of that time concluding that the soles of their shoes were too thin to enable them to cross the stream they decided to give up the remainder of the trip. Upon their return to Umpqua they

was in 1856.

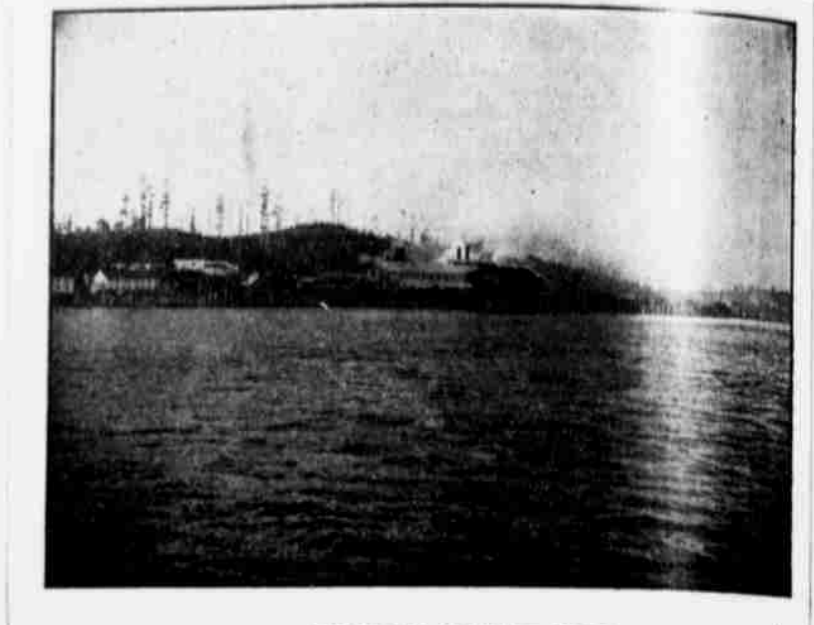
About this time 1857, Mr. Simpson established a packet line of five vessels from San Francisco to Portland. Among the vessels engaged in this trade were the Portland, The Tam O'Shanter, the Melancthon and the Whistler, all of which with the exception of the Whistler were built on Coos Bay.

Mr. Simpson purchased of Tichenor and Byxbee a mill located near Port Orford built in 1854 but this was completely destroyed by a forest fire with all logs, lumber, houses, stables, office and tools. So utterly was every improvement wiped out of existence that he never visited the place again, but gave the land to Joseph Nay. It is a noteworthy fact that at various times, Mr. Simpson has suffered loss of more than twenty vessels which have been wrecked on the Pacific coast and elsewhere and of six mills which have been destroyed by fire at different places on the coast and in none of these losses has he been reimbursed by any insurance. He has often been impelled to say to inquisitive strangers who have been his traveling companions in transcontinental and European journeys that his life work has been "getting knocked down and getting on his feet again."

He was also a very heavy loser in the great San Francisco fire where the stock, buildings and factory in an eleven million foot lumber yard were destroyed. This has not been re-established and now five individual yards occupy the site. This outline of the career of one

he has followed still exist throughout this section, but those who are familiar with his successful operation must if they are to succeed in their undertakings profit by the inspiring example he has set for them and let integrity, determination, perseverance and eternal vigilance be their motto and act accordingly.

Mr. Simpson was united in marriage in 1875 in Racine, Wisconsin, to Sophie B. Smith, a native of that city. Four children all of whom are living blessed this union. Mrs. Simpson passed away about two years ago. The eldest son, L. J. and his



VIEW OF PORTER MILL.

boundless possibilities of this country of marvellous resources to encourage those among them who are ambitious to continue the work so auspiciously begun by this king of pioneers. It is a fact strongly emphasized by Mr. Simpson that abundant opportunities along the lines

### Louis Jerome Simpson.

Whoever labors for the welfare of his community and not solely for his own personal profit is entitled to rank among the progressive and public spirited men of his region. Such a distinction worthy belongs to Louis Jerome Simpson, the active manager of the Simpson Lumber Company, mayor of North Bend and principal promoter of its progress and prosperity. Since his arrival on Coos Bay in 1899, to assume the active management of his father's manufacturing and shipping interests he has gained a reputation for public spirit and enterprise that has been worthily won.

He was born in Oakland, California, September 1, 1875. His education was received first at the public schools of Oakland and later the military academy at San Rafael. Subsequently, in 1895, he entered the University of California but his University career was cut short owing to illness and the following year he took a sea voyage to South Africa, returning the next year much improved in health. His first practical business experience was with the Simpson Lumber company as manager of the shipping department at Hoquiam, Washington, which he maintained for a year and a half. In 1899, he came to North Bend to take charge of the Coos Bay interests of the firm.

From his vantage ground of identification with the large lumber and shipping enterprises of his company he entered with zest into various other industrial activities. He does not permit business to absorb his entire time and attention but gives freely of both time and money to public service and improvement. He is president of the Port Commission of the Port of Coos Bay, mayor of North Bend and takes a keen interest in republican politics, being mentioned as candidate for Congress from this congressional district. Mr. Simpson's popularity and influence are in no wise limited because he was born into a competence but are enhanced because having been thus born he makes the most of his talents and business ability. In San Francisco, California, he was united in marriage with Cassie Hendricks, who was born in Corning, New York.

### HISTORY OF NORTH BEND

In the year 1903 a petition was filed with the County Court of the County of Coos, State of Oregon, praying that the City of North Bend might be incorporated under the general laws of the State of Oregon. This petition set forth the boundaries of the proposed city and pursuant to an order of the County Court of Coos County, Oregon, a special election was held on the second day of June, 1903, which resulted in a majority vote in favor of incorporation.

(Continued from page 7.)



SCENE AT SIMPSON LOGGING CAMP.



COOS BAY DAIRY