

First Lumber Cut in Oregon Country in 1827

Tree Farms, Sustained Yield Insure
Permanence of State's Top Industry

By Arthur W. Prialux

When in 1827 at Fort Vancouver, Dr. John McLoughlin, famed Hudson's Bay factor, gave the sign that turned the water-powered muley sawmill to saw the first boards ever cut west of the Mississippi, it was the start of an empire in the Oregon Territory.

By 1837, a sawmill was operating at Newberg, another at Salem in 1840, and still another at Oregon City in 1842. Mills, crude affairs powered by water wheels, sprang up throughout the Willamette Valley wherever lumber was needed to build towns and farms. By the 1850's, mills were operating along the Columbia River and down the Oregon Coast, and they were running full tilt supplying lumber for the California gold rush.

Since 1938, Oregon has led the nation in total lumber production, and for the past five years, it has produced more than half the nation's softwood plywood, as well as a million tons of pulp a year. But this was not always so.

For eight decades, the lumber industry of Oregon was on a hand-to-mouth basis, suffering from overproduction. Only during times of great national stress, such as during World Wars I and II, did it prosper, or during times of great catastrophes, such as the San Francisco and Japanese earthquakes, when vast quantities of lumber were needed for reconstruction.

Power Makes Progress

Power and wheels tell the story of the lumber industry's progress. First, logging was handled with jack screws as logs were felled along river banks and rolled into the water for transport to the mills. Then came horses, oxen, crude steam donkey engines; then more powerful and refined steam equipment. Away from the waterways, logs were moved by logging railroads, but there were vast areas of forested land considered inaccessible by rail.

Then, after World War I, came the technological revolution which has changed the face of Oregon and brought every tree in the state within reach of the mills. The crawler type of tractor and the logging truck, whose development was sparked by the first war, have made logging big business.

250 Separate Grades

From crude early sawmills which backed irregular-sized boards and cants from Douglas fir logs, the industry today claims the finest precision machinery: electric-powered, even some electronically guided equipment. Lumber is so finely manufactured for ultimate use that mills produce as many as 250 separate grades for strength and for appearance, compared with the few simple items of the early days.

The coming of the railroads in the 1870's had its effect on opening up new markets for Oregon-made lumber in the midwest, and the opening of the Panama Canal spurred the expansion of cargo mills along Oregon's waterways as the Eastern Seaboard became our customer.

Today, Oregon's eight to ten-billion-foot annual production of lumber goes to every crossroads in America and to virtually every country on the globe. Lumber, plywood, pulp and paper — the forest products — give employment annually to 90,000 men and women, among the highest paid industrial workers in the world. The annual value of Oregon's forest products at wholesale prices to the mills is \$1,200,000,000, which is more than twice the value of all agricultural products grown annually.

Oregon will always be the leading lumber-producing state in the nation, because man is doing something about managing our forests. In 1940, following many disastrous years of forest fires, the Keep Oregon Green program was launched under the sponsorship of Governor Charles Sprague and many leading lumbermen, as well as dedicated public forestry officials, both state and federal.

Fire Losses Drop

Since the advent of Keep Oregon Green, forest fire losses have shrunk from an annual average burn of 125,000 acres to less than 10,000 acres a year, sometimes as little as 5,000 acres.

The greatest single advancement in conservation in our history started the same year in Oregon and Washington: The Tree Farm program. Private timber owners, seeing the example of the declining forests in the Lake States and New England, decided they must manage their forest holdings for perpetual growth if the mills and factories of the

state, which live on wood, were to operate permanently.

Thus was founded the Tree Farm program, which some have called the greatest single invention of man for the conservation of our forests. It establishes management plans for the maximum production of forest crops on every acre of private forest lands. State and federal forests have similar plans.

Future In Young Trees

After 125 years of harvesting, Oregon forests contain 440 billion board feet of saw timber, but the real hope of the future is wrapped up in its millions of acres of young trees from one to 100 years of age. Forest fires have been cut to a bare minimum, so seed sources are protected. Although we have developed new techniques for planting, such as aerial seeding of logged lands by helicopter and hand planting, Mother Nature still reseeds about 90 per cent of all logged lands naturally, the seed coming from blocks of seed trees left for that purpose.

It is the estimate of expert foresters that Oregon's 26 million acres of commercial forests will be able to produce perpetually a volume of timber adequate to maintain a forest economy at about its present level. In the rain-drenched Douglas fir forests of western Oregon, an acre will produce an average of 700 board feet in a year. In the drier eastern Oregon pine region, the growth rate is about 150 board feet per acre per year. With these definite figures available, it is possible to project with reasonable accuracy the growth rate of our vast forest resource for generations into the future.

What of the future? There are those who predict the 2x4 and the board will become as obsolete as the carrier pigeon in another 50 years. That's dream stuff, for there will always be a need for conventional lumber and plywood.

Research Helps Industry

However, the Oregon Forest Products Laboratory at Corvallis, financed by a four-cent-per-thousand tax on all logs cut in the state, is coming up with some wondrous by-products from wood, cellulose, and bark. Private firms in their laboratories are making equally amazing discoveries as research moves into the nation's oldest industry. It is possible that, in the near future, we may have a chemical industry here in Oregon manufacturing a wide variety of products from leftover woods from sawmills and plywood plants. The potential dollar value of this industry is tremendous.

What sort of chemicals and products can be made from wood, bark and cellulose? From bark, you can get cork, fibres, tannins, drugs, quercetin (widely used in food manufacturing), and many other products. From cellulose, you can get wood sugars, feeding molasses, land fertilizers and extenders, drugs, chemicals, ships stores. The list is endless.

Oregon's vast lumber and forest products industry of today, with its amazing mechanical contrivances and multitude of products, is indeed a far cry from the tiny mill at Fort Vancouver which Dr. John McLoughlin proudly and prophetically started.

Oregon has some of the most productive forest lands in the world and farsighted citizens to maintain these lands perpetually in forests, for which this land is best suited.

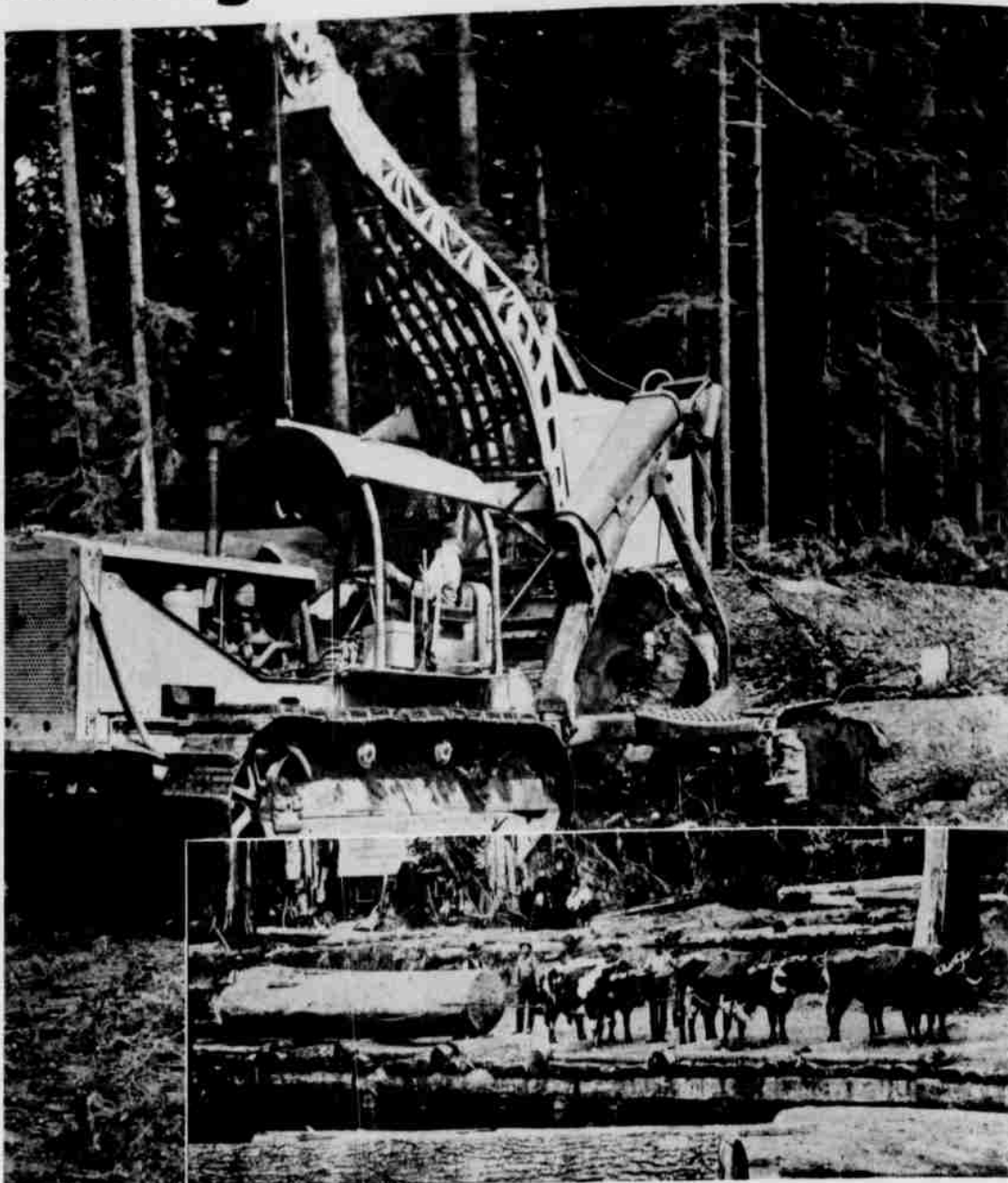
Feeders of Life

Ontario Argus-Observer: The smaller cities and towns of eastern Oregon are the life-feeders of this area...In Malheur County, where agriculture, which includes livestock, is the main source of income, the smaller cities are showing growth."

Food-Producers

Sherman County Journal, Moro: "We will continue to grow smaller in population percentage and more important in the economy, for the growth of cities increases the importance of the country because food is produced in the country and the higher the percentage of the people who live in the city the more important it is that they be fed. City people run railroads, make T.V. programs, package goods, sell shoes; rural folks raise food. What can you do without?"

The first chief justice of the Washington Territory was arrested by militia on the governor's orders after the justice had ordered the arrest of the governor for contempt of court.



THE TRACK-TYPE TRACTOR, shown in the upper part of the picture, has superseded the "deliberate oxen" used in the early days of Northwest logging. The lower right part of the picture, from a photograph taken in 1890, shows how the old-timers did the job.



EARLY DAY LOGGING operations centered around the steam-powered "Giffert" log loader. Empty cars were backed under the loader and moved forward as each load was completed. No railroad is needed for the modern loader, for its tracks transport the heavy equipment where it is needed and the logging truck backs up to the loader to receive its logs.

Small-City Service

Myrtle Creek Mail: "To the many people engaged in lumbering, mining, and ranching in Oregon, the smaller cities and towns provide the necessities and most of the pleasures of living. With hospitals,

libraries, fine schools, and civic and recreational facilities, they mean SERVICE in capital letters to a widespread population. There is but one metropolitan center of the state, with but one-fourth of the state's population. The remainder of more than a million persons live

in an interdependency of big-time industry, agriculture, and small business with attendant professional services—building friendly atmosphere in which each knows personally and is concerned with the welfare of those who are his neighbors."