



*E. B. Dean mill along the east side of Isthmus Slough (ca. 1900). This mill was purchased by Charles A. Smith in 1906 for the purpose of supplying lumber for the mill he built at Bunker Hill in 1908. It was rebuilt by C. R. Smith in 1910 after a fire destroyed it (Coos Art Museum, Victor C. West Collection)*



*Frederick Weyerhaeuser*



*William J. Conrad mill in Marshfield (Coos County Historical Museum)*



*The Oregon Export Lumber Company mill on Isthmus Slough (ca. 1919) originally the Millington sawmill, rebuilt by the Export Company (Courtesy of Gordon Ross)*



*Gifford Finchat*



*James J. Hill*

#### TIMBER BARONS

In researching the history of Menasha Wooden Ware Company in the Pacific Northwest, one is struck by how Menasha and C. R. Smith connected with many of the other "timber barons" that moved west about the same time. Names such as Henry Luse, Asa Meade Simpson (not to be confused with Sol Simpson of the Simpson Timber Company of Seattle, Washington), Louis Simpson, Elijah Smith, Prosper W. Smith, James Hill, William Crapo, Charles Axel Smith, Al Powers, and Harvey MacMillan can be found in association with deals made with Menasha and its land agents in Oregon, Idaho, and Washington. Others who came west looking for timber along with C. R. included such notables as: Andrew Pope, William Talbot, Cyrus Walker, Simon Benson, Thomas D. Stimson, and Frederick Weyerhaeuser. While the record is silent as to their direct involvement with Menasha, one can surmise that indeed they did "know" each other.

Many documents detail business transactions between Menasha and other timber companies in the region at the time Menasha settled in Coos Bay, including the Simpson Lumber Company, Weyerhaeuser Timber Company, C. A. Smith Lumber Company, Smith-Powers Logging Company, Coos Bay Lumber Company, Northern Pacific Railroad, North Bend Lumber Company, and the Southern Oregon Company. Each transaction would undoubtedly

reflect the colorful stories of the era. However, such anecdotes are lost to the dust of time.

Many of these people and companies got their start in America's Midwest. As lumbermen liquidated the pine forests from Wisconsin to Minnesota, they began to turn their attention and financial resources to the extensive forests of the Pacific Northwest. By the 1870s, logging and lumbering in Coos County were showing signs of expanding rapidly. Towns like Empire City (now Empire), Yarrow (now North Bend), and Marshfield (now Coos Bay) grew rapidly around the large mills built by Asa Simpson, Henry Luse, and E. B. Dean.

Several other sawmill operators tried their hand at making lumber in competition with these big mills, but many of them failed to gain the economies of scale that these three competitors possessed. Small mills—like the one located on the flats at Millington currently occupied by the Knutson Company Log yard—had little chance to compete with Dean, Simpson, and Luse.

Other "gyppo" mills cropped up closer to the forest to provide a ready outlet for the small loggers and farmers who did not have the means of transporting their logs great distances. These mills were simply too small to create a workforce that might lead to a permanent community, although there are exceptions: the small town of Broadbent, Oregon, was created in this way.



*The Cedar Products mill in Broadbent, Oregon, located more than thirty miles from Coos Bay (ca. 1921) (Coos County Historical Museum)*

And that was just the value of the timber. The SOC also owned the Big Mill in Empire City and adjacent structures, including a large adjacent wharf supported by 4,000 white cedar pilings with about 700 feet of frontage on the main steamer channel, a two-story office building with a fireproof vault, and a company store 30 feet x 100 feet in dimension. The Big Mill was idled for some time around the turn of the century due to depressed lumber markets in California, but the company store continued to operate as a stand-alone profit center and reportedly had on hand some \$14,000 of goods for sale. The initial deliveries to the Empire store were made by the company's ship *AL-KI* as company records indicate that the local merchants apparently "charged excessive profits for their material."

The company also owned a large, two-story hotel (the Arago) in Empire City, as well as a stable, cannery buildings, a warehouse, and three residences (the author believes that Norm Laird, a Menasha timber cruiser in the 1940s and 1950s, occupied one of these dwellings as late as the early 1970s. It was eventually burned down by the local fire department as a hazard. The Empire City store was destroyed by fire in early part of the 1890s). In addition to the large freighter *AL-KI*, the SOC also owned the 79-foot sternwheel steamer *Montesano*, purchased in 1888 and used primarily for transportation of passengers and freight up to Catching Slough.

The Southern Oregon Company also owned considerable developable land in and around Empire City. In addition to the mill site of about fifteen acres, the company store located on lot 8 in the Empire City subdivision, and the Arago Hotel on lots adjoining the store, the company owned 128 "valuable lots" within the original townsite of Empire City as well as 980 residential lots in townsite additions.

And there was more. In connection with its logging business, the SOC owned a "well graded and substantially built" railroad at Sumner, Oregon. The timber in the vicinity had all been cut by 1902, but there was still more than six miles of 40-pound track in inventory along with two locomotives (ten and eight tons in size), thirty-two logging trucks, a pump car, two flatcars, and associated stock. From SOC correspondence, it appears that Louis Simpson had used the rail line to haul out some of his timber in the area and did not pay the freight charge.

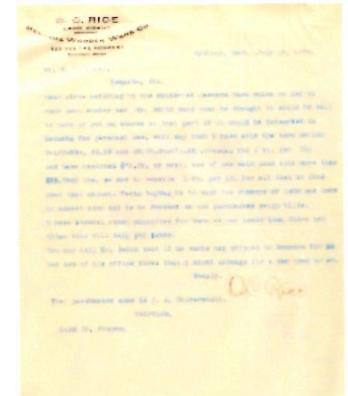
The forests around Coos Bay also contained many Cascara trees, whose bark could be used to make a laxative. This "Chittum bark" as it was known locally, was another potential source of income. A 1902 report in the Menasha files refers to:

*Chittum Bark: This bark, or drug known as . . . "Cascara sagrada" or Chittum Bark is peculiar to [these] localities. The company's land near Sumner and Fairview and East Fork produce an immense quantity of the article. Market varies. At one time the price was 20 cents per pound. Present quotation is 3 cents per pound, delivered to San Francisco. At one time the company carried over 150 tons of this bark in stock, which amount was obtained during one summer, chiefly from company lands.*

Following the disappointments with their big mill in Empire City (which was closed in 1892) and the uncertainty surrounding the political battles over the Wagon Road lands, the SOC began trying to sell their timberland assets in the region. In 1905, the local newspaper reported that the SOC was negotiating to sell 100,678 acres to Frank B. White. No deal was struck, and in December 1906, the SOC's Elijah Smith was negotiating with C. A. Smith, the Swedish emigrant



*Moving two veneer blocks in the early twentieth century (Pacific County Historical Society)*



*O. C. Rice, land agent for Menasha, writes to Willis H. Miner about "chittum bark" as apparently C. R. Smith had wanted some sent to him in Wisconsin.*