

Plywood and Paper

The period 1950-1970 for Menasha was characterized by extensive expansion in both its timberland holdings in Oregon and the construction of major wood processing operations in the Coos Bay area. Aside from the Northwest Wooden Ware Company mill in Tacoma, Washington, Menasha had no wood manufacturing operation out West before 1950.

By 1950, Menasha owned in excess of 40,000 acres of timberland in southwestern Oregon that contained massive amounts of old-growth conifer timber. Some of this timber was of very high quality and some was quite defective. Many of the logs, however, would make excellent veneer for the rapidly developing plywood industry. The US housing market was booming, thanks to the return of World War II veterans. Plywood quickly replaced lumber as the base siding and roofing material for wood-framed houses.

In 1948 the Menasha Wooden Ware Corporation and Coos Head Timber Company entered into a fifty-fifty partnership called the Menasha-Coos Head Plywood Corporation. Their purpose was to construct a fully integrated new plant built on the Coos Bay waterfront in the town of North Bend that would produce Douglas-fir plywood for US markets from the logs harvested from Menasha timberlands in the region. Mowry Smith Jr. recalls that Willis Smith of Coos Head and Earl Weed, who managed the local timber assets of Menasha, were the impetus for this venture.

On July 1, 1948, the front page of the *Coos Bay Harbor* newspaper carried the following headline:

Coos Bay Harbor
Big Plywood Operation Coming Here

NORTH BEND IS LOCATION FOR \$2,000,000 FACTORY EMPLOYING 200 WORKERS

Construction will be started immediately on a \$2,000,000 plywood plant to be located on the North Bend waterfront, it was announced today by the owner-operators, the Menasha-Coos Head Plywood Corporation. The plant will be located on the site occupied by the former Commando Packing Company building and property covering a distance of about a quarter of a mile south.



Menasha logs in a "flat raft" (single logs vs. bundles) just outside the in-feed conveyor to the plywood mill.