

*A forest talks...if you listen. Millicoma: Biography of a Pacific Northwestern Forest by Arthur V. Smyth, was published recently by the Forest History Society. The author worked part of his early career on the Millicoma and so writes first hand of its early management history during the second half of the 20th century. The following is a short excerpt from the book telling about the forest and how it came into Weyerhaeuser ownership. Millicoma is a story of the life of a forest—how it began and how the forces of nature and the human hand changed it.*

## MILlicOMA: BIOGRAPHY OF A PACIFIC NORTHWESTERN FOREST

BY ARTHUR V. SMYTH

By the 1820s, when the first settlers arrived in Oregon, the Millicoma Forest still had not been seen a white man as far as we can determine. All of the early explorers and trappers traveled up and down the Willamette and Umpqua valleys or along the coast. None of these early explorers had penetrated the wilderness lying between the Umpqua and the Coquille. McLoughlin's trappers found the beaver trapping poor when they ventured south of the mouth of the Umpqua in 1826. In 1828 Jedediah Smith was the first white man to bring a sizeable company up the coast from California to Oregon. He met disaster when fourteen of his eighteen-man company were killed by Indians at the mouth of the Umpqua. Smith escaped to Fort Vancouver. The Wilkes expedition in 1841 produced a "Map of the Oregon Territory" which included Fort Nisqually on Puget Sound but Coos Bay was not mentioned. The Scottish botanists, Archibald Menzies and David Douglas, for whom the Douglas fir was named, never saw Coos Bay or most certainly the Millicoma Forest. The forest was now about eighty years old with some trees approaching 200 feet tall and three feet in diameter. Most of the lower limbs had fallen and the bark on the clear boles were beginning to furrow. The forest floor was carpeted with sword fern and mosses.



*The 180-year old Millicoma forest as it looked in the late 1940's. The forest was a result of a major fire event about 1765.*

WEYERHAEUSER COMPANY ARCHIVES



*Frederick Weyerhaeuser (right) was known for his business acumen, commonly bringing together a variety of investors in business ventures. This photo taken on the Snohomish River Boom near Everett, Washington.*

Except for an occasional windfall, the forest contained few obstacles for travel, and it was crisscrossed with elk and deer trails. Indians dug carefully covered pits to trap an unwary elk along these game trails.

Three thousand miles away in the halls of Congress, lawmakers were devising ways to encourage the settlement and development of the American West. From the very beginnings of our nation the land question was one of the most important facing the young Republic. Thomas Jefferson in 1776 said, "The people who will migrate to the Westward will be a people little able to pay taxes...by selling the lands to them you will disgust them and cause an avulsion of them from the common union. They will settle the lands in spite of everybody...I am at the same time clear that they should be appropriated in small quantities." In 1841 John C. Calhoun stated, "I regard the question of public lands next to that of the currency, the most dangerous and difficult of all which demand the attention of the country and the government at this important juncture of our affairs." In that year the preemption laws were passed and the event was hailed as "truly a frontier triumph." Congress determined that the national interest could best be served by transferring the public domain by gift and

sale to individuals and companies which would develop the land and its resources. Also, they felt the only way to bind this vast nation together was to encourage the building of railroads. So it was that during the years just preceding and then following the Civil War, a variety of proposals became law: the railroad land grants, the Donation Land Act, the Homestead Act, the Timber and Stone Act, the Timber Culture act, and the Forest Lieu Act. Under the provisions of these Acts, between 1850 to 1950, almost 30 million acres of Oregon's 62 million acres of public domain were transferred to individuals, companies or the state.

By 1850 all of the land in Oregon belonged to the federal government except for vague, frequently ignored Indian titles. But what about all of the earlier settlers who had come into the Oregon country beginning in the 1830s? Until the passage of the Donation Land Act in 1860, settlers could exercise squatter sovereignty or preemption rights to 160 acres. After the land was surveyed a more legalistic method of transfer of title was called for, hence the Donation Land Act. This act granted 320 acres to any white settler who was a citizen of the U.S. residing in Oregon before December 1, 1850. It required the settler to reside on

the land for four years during which he was suppose to cultivate it. If the settler was married he received an additional 320 acres. If the settler had arrived between 1850 and 1853 he was granted 160 acres and again it was doubled if the man were married. Women were assiduously courted by land hungry bachelors and one record shows a twelve-year-old girl being led to the altar, but she lived with her folks for several years after the wedding. The date for the land claims was later extended to 1855 and the requirements were further loosened when the residency requirement was shortened to two years, after which the land could be purchased for \$1.25 per acre. After April 1, 1855 all public land west of the Cascades in Oregon except for Donation Land claims, mineral lands, and public reserves were subject to public sale. Jerry A. O'Callaghan in his treatise, "The Disposition of the Public Domain in Oregon," which was published by the Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs in 1960, showed how Oregon's public lands were disposed:

Homestead:	11,097,982 acres
Land Sales:	6,455,551
Grant to State:	4,329,445
Donation Claims:	2,614,082
Wagon Road Grants:	2,490,890



*In order to encourage the building of the Northern Pacific Railroad, President Abraham Lincoln made grants of land on either side of the railroad line. James Hill acquired part of the Millicoma forest in exchange for land needed for Rainier National Park. This land was later sold in to Frederick Weyerhaeuser in 1902, starting with 31,000 acres. This section of the Northern Pacific Railroad is located near Lewiston, Idaho.*

Railroad Grants:	1,588,532
Miscellaneous:	<u>992,921</u>
Total:	29,569,921 acres

The forest of our story did not yet have a name, but it was soon to have an owner. The biggest real estate transaction in the nation's history up to that time had its beginnings at 266 Summit Avenue in St. Paul, Minnesota. Here, in his large plain house lived Frederick Weyerhaeuser, a German immigrant, who had made a fortune in the great white pine forests of Wisconsin and Minnesota. He was born in the Rhineland of Germany and immigrated to the United States as a young man. His first job in America was in a brewery in Erie, Pennsylvania. He disliked this job and moved to Rock Island, Illinois where he took a job as a night watchman at a sawmill. Through hard work he impressed the owners and moved up to other jobs in the mill. When the mill owners went bankrupt, he and his brother-in-law Frederick Denkman bought the mill. Soon he left the job of running the mill to Denkman and headed up the Mississippi to find timber.

Throughout the woods he was known as Dutch Fred, probably because of his accent. He was a shrewd judge of both timber and men and had established the respect of many of the leading lumbermen of the region who found that they seldom lost money if they listened to Fred.

He reportedly said, "I know this much: whenever I buy timber I make a profit; whenever I do not buy I miss an opportunity. I have followed this practice for many years and have not lost anything by it." He enjoyed making deals and for his time was remarkably far-sighted. In St. Paul, Weyerhaeuser was blessed with a neighbor he got to know well—James J. Hill, the railroad magnate. Hill through the immense land grants given to the Northern Pacific Railroad (NP), which was building a line from Minnesota to Puget Sound, owned immeasurably more pine trees than even Fred Weyerhaeuser and his associates had dreamed of. A good deal of Jim Hill's pine trees were Douglas fir far out in the Pacific Northwest. Most of Frederick Weyerhaeuser's peers were more interested in the southern pine than in the wilderness on the west coast. But that was about to change.

The first land grants to the Northern Pacific Railroad were made in 1864. Additional grants were made in 1870. The original grant specified a twenty-mile strip on each side of the completed sections of the line that passed through a state and a forty-mile strip on each side where it passed through a territory. The railroad was granted alternate sections of land within the strips. In addition, if the lands within the strips were already reserved, an additional ten-mile strip was added as

indemnity lands. This was later extended by another 10 miles. In essence, the railroad had a swath of alternate sections of land 120 miles wide from Minnesota to the shores of Puget Sound. By 1886, according to the General Land Office, the NP had constructed 2,021.38 miles of its road all of which had been approved by President Abraham Lincoln. Of the road constructed, 35.80 miles were within the states of Wisconsin, Minnesota and Oregon and 1,669.58 miles were within the territories of Dakota, Montana, Idaho and Washington. At this rate, in 1886 the railroad company was entitled to 47,244,288 acres and it was still building.

During long evening conversations with his neighbor, Weyerhaeuser learned that the railroad had to quickly raise some money for redemption of bonds that were due. To raise the money the railroad had to sell some of its enormous land holdings. Weyerhaeuser and some of his associates had been to the Northwest. Frederick Weyerhaeuser's eyes must have lit up when he saw the magnificent stands of Douglas fir that Jim Hill's people showed him. It was also apparent that the end was in sight for the white pine in the Lake States. So on January 3, 1900, Frederick Weyerhaeuser and William H. Phipps of the Northern Pacific Railroad signed the papers transferring 900,000 acres of timberland in Washington State to the Weyerhaeuser Timber Company for \$5,400,000. Three million of the purchase price was to be paid immediately and the remainder in eight semi-annual payments at 5% interest.

It took almost all of Weyerhaeuser's associates in the upper Mississippi region to raise the money. They were apprehensive about this gamble, but finally trusted the judgment of Weyerhaeuser and named the newly established company after him. The news of this bold transaction spread across the country, and some in the Pacific Northwest immediately feared that the small operator would be squeezed out by the "syndicate." At \$6 an acre it proved to be a bargain indeed, but in 1900, it was a huge bet on the future.

The Millicoma Forest was hundreds of miles away from Puget Sound, so how did Weyerhaeuser end up with these lands in southwest Oregon far from the Northern Pacific mainline? In 1899, Congress established Rainier National Park after some years of intensive lobbying by Tacoma and

Seattle boosters for Congress to protect this beautiful mountain. Officials within the Department of Interior had advised Congress not to establish the park until the railroad claims had been exchanged for other federal lands. The NP lands that were taken up in the park could, under the provisions of the Lieu Land Act, be exchanged for other federal lands. The railroad issue stalled the Washington National Park bill long enough to prevent its passage in 1897. Supporters tried again in 1898 and 1899. By that time the bill had been rewritten to grant the NP lieu land rights in exchange for its lands on Mount Ranier. The railroad had built relatively few miles in Oregon. Charges were made that the Northern Pacific had itself framed the bill that established the Park and openly lobbied for the passage of the Enabling Act of March 2, 1899, which created the nation's fifth national park. Critics claimed that under the provisions of the lieu land act the NP was exchanging glaciers for rich timberland. According to some figures, the Mount Rainier Forest Reserve deal netted the railroad 540,000 acres, of which 320,000 acres were yellow fir in Oregon, 100,000 acres of fir in Washington and 120,000 acres of pine in Idaho.

The Progressive era of Teddy Roosevelt saw an outcry against the wide spread land frauds in the West. Federal investigations resulted in the conviction of a United States Senator from Oregon, and many public officials went to jail. The so-called muckraking journalists began writing stories about the mysterious Weyerhaeuser who they claimed was richer than Rockefeller. One article described him as an "octopus." The always shy and now aging Weyerhaeuser was dismayed and stoutly maintained that every dollar he had made was earned honestly, and no evidence indicated otherwise. However, C.A. Smith of the Coos Bay Lumber Company and Booth of Booth-Kelley Lumber Company were both charged with using illegal dummy entrymen to secure valuable timberlands. George Long, Weyerhaeuser's manager in the West would not condone this practice. The close buyer-seller relationship with the NP continued, however, and in July of 1902, Weyerhaeuser purchased 31,000 acres of NP land in Oregon for about five dollars per acre. It was the first of many acquisitions on the Millicoma.

After four centuries of conflicting

claims, much of this remote forested area became the property of Weyerhaeuser's timber company. Neither the Spanish or British had ever seen this forest nor had the Weyerhaeusers. What had they purchased?

David Douglas, a young botanist who traveled through Oregon in 1826 sponsored by the Royal Horticultural Society of London, described the Douglas fir, which now bears his name, as, some of the most striking and graceful objects in nature. The trees in the Millicoma in 1902 were now clear of limbs for one hundred feet or more. The trees in the creek bottoms were so much taller than those on the ridges so that if the forest could have been viewed from the air, the terrain would have appeared much more gentle than it really was. The understory contained hemlock and cedar. The forest floor was carpeted with sword fern, mosses, oxalis, and trillium. Devil's club and salmonberry grew along the creeks and the openings left by windfalls were commonly choked with tangles of vine maple and salal.

Elk foraged throughout the forest. Red squirrels chattered in the tops. At dusk the wide-eyed flying squirrels would drift down through the trees. Martin preyed on the squirrels, cougar on the elk and bark beetles on the fir. With each year the trees added another wide ring of wood. To lumbermen this was still red fir, not to be valued as highly as the much older yellow fir with its dense, close grained clear wood. But it was indeed a treasure chest and growing more valuable every year. □

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*Millicoma: Biography of a Pacific Northwestern Forest* can be obtained from the Forest History Society, (919) 682-9319; [www.foresthistory.org](http://www.foresthistory.org). ISBN: 0-89030-058-5, paper \$12.95 plus shipping and handling.