

Remember when Copeland Lumber was located on Southwest 31st near Capitol Highway?



Copeland Lumber, Multnomah, 1985. (Photo courtesy Multnomah Historical Association)

OLD MULTNOMAH

By Tim Lyman

Editor’s Note: A display advertisement for Copeland Lumber Yards appeared in the Sunday Oregonian, May 31, 1925. Mentioned at the bottom were five locations including Southeast 72nd Street, Portland; Vancouver, Washington; Forest Grove, Oregon; Olympia, Washington; and Multnomah Station, Portland. —Don Snedecor

Joseph W. Copeland was born at Sumner, Iowa, on Aug. 31, 1886. His father, Joseph, taught him the lumber business in yards acquired or opened in Cresco, Perry, Toledo and Gardiner, Iowa.

Copeland graduated from high school at Cresco, Iowa, and then matriculated to the University of Minnesota, fully intending to become a lawyer, but that never happened – his father got the urge to go west.

The Copeland family moved to Hood River, Ore., to enter the fruit growing business in 1908. It was at Hood River that young Joe, then 22, worked in the Hood River Bank and Trust Company.

He also became an officer. Lee A. Copeland, Joe’s older brother, got the family back in the lumber business with purchase of retail yards at Meridian, Kuna, Star and McKermitt, Idaho. (McKermitt no longer exists)

After a few years in the fruit business, father Joe exercised a

\$10,000 mortgage he had on a lumberyard in the Lents district of Portland.

Stock was purchased until 1912, and the elder Copeland was in the retail lumber business on the West Coast for the first time.

In 1920 Copeland Lumber Yards had only five outlets and 20 employees. Only two additional yards had been added by 1927. In the meantime, however, father Joseph, 72, died on March 7, 1924.

And death struck the hierarchy of the Copeland organization again in 1926 when brother Lee Albert Copeland died at the age of 43.

Joseph William Copeland, then 40, became president and chief executive officer in 1926. He guided the growth and destiny of the company for 47 years, until stepping aside to become board chairman a few days before his 87th birthday in 1973.

In those 47 years, Joe Copeland increased his number of yards until they totaled 84 on Feb. 15, 1974.

Perhaps the most distinguishing mark of Copeland Lumber Yards, Inc., was the use of bright, Halloween orange on the buildings and a big black cat insignia.

This all came about when the company, in its early expansion days, purchased the Fenton Lumber Company of Fenton, Idaho. The orange color and black cat were trademarks of the Fenton firm.

In 1973, when Joe Copeland was

elevated to board chairman, he was succeeded by his only child, Helen Joe, who was married to William Alexander Whitsell.

In 2000, Helen Joe decided to sell the company and retire. At that time Copeland Lumber had 68 retail outlets in Oregon, Washington, California, Nevada and Arizona; 1000 employees, and annual sales of \$200 million.

There was no single buyer for all Copeland’s stores, so the company was broken apart and groups of

stores sold to different companies.

The Copeland Lumber name lives on in Newport, Florence, and Waldport, Ore.

In 1999 a group of its employees got together and purchased the Newport and Waldport yards from Copeland Lumber Yards Inc., and have since opened another store in Florence.

Tim Lyman is president of the Multnomah Historical Association. Research material for this story was provided by the World Forestry Center.

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