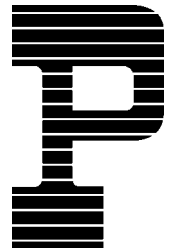


Plywood in Retrospect

# THE HENRY McCLEARY TIMBER COMPANY

No. 4 in a series of  
monographs on the  
history of west coast  
plywood plants



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Henry McCleary

**Plywood in Retrospect** During the period 1903 to 1920, plywood production on the west coast made steady growth. All of the early plants were constructed as adjuncts to the door manufacturing industry and the subject of this monograph was no exception.

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Simpson Timber Company, Ernest Teagle, Frank Chapman and Mrs. Lee Wills and the late Howard Jakubovsky for much of the data and material needed to

augment the history files of the Plywood Pioneers Association.

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Editor's Note: PLYWOOD & PANEL, by special arrangement, continues the series of monographs completed by Harrison Clark before his death. This is No. 4 and was originally published and copyrighted by the Plywood Pioneers Assn.

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As I took over the material available to me from which to write the McCleary story, I feel as though I had received the material from which Horatio Alger would write one of his typical novels.

# The McCleary Story

Young Henry McCleary, living with his parents in Cambridge, Ohio, in 1889, heard and heeded the call of Horace Greeley, to "Go West, Young Man, Go West." His first stop was in Montana, where he tried ranch life and, among other things, became an expert marksman with the "six shooter." But, being the son of a sawmill man with considerable experience, he could not resist the lure of the tall timber and continued on to Tacoma, Washington in 1890. There he got a job as mill foreman for J. N. Foy & Son who had a small sawmill at Midland, near Tacoma.

In the spring of 1897, Mr. McCleary joined in partnership with T. Edward Foy, the younger member of Foy and Son, to form a logging and mill operation under the name of Foy & McCleary near the present site of McCleary, Washington. The location was surrounded by an excellent stand of cedar trees. To obtain this tract they found they needed additional financing so Mr. McCleary talked with William C. Wheeler, president of Wheeler Osgood and Company of Tacoma, the principal customer for their cedar lumber. After investigation both Wheeler Osgood & Company and George J. Osgood, son of George R. Osgood, as an individual, invested in the company.

About a year later, in 1899, Mr. McCleary bought out his partner, Mr. Foy, and George J. Osgood purchased Wheeler Osgood & Company's interest and a new sawmill was built. Osgood did not participate in the daily operation of the company at this time. The output of this mill went almost entirely to Wheeler Osgood & Co., and was called Tacoma Cedar Lumber Company. During this period, Henry's brother William McCleary arrived from the Ohio home and joined the firm. Bill was a constant companion with Henry, and they worked closely in all the planning and management of the operations.

The first of three major fires for the McCleary Company occurred on June 6, 1906 when the original sawmill burned to the ground. Fortunately, a new and better mill was already in the process of construction at the time of the fire, and was put into operation within a few weeks. Meanwhile, the company had acquired several sections of timber near the mill site and with the new mill the company began the production of fir as well as cedar lumber.

At about this time another brother, Leonard McCleary, who had been operating flour mills in Ohio, also came west with his bride for a new career and joined his brothers in the company which was now known as the Henry McCleary Company. Their specialty was producing shop lumber.

There was a little millwork and door factory at Chehalis, Washington, which was being served by the Henry McCleary Company. It was in financial difficulty and was for sale, George Osgood suggested that the Henry McCleary Company purchase it. Henry McCleary said, "Who will run it?" George Osgood answered, "I will" and that's how McCleary got into the door business and George Osgood left Wheeler Osgood & Company.

The Chehalis operation was named Chehalis Fir Door Co., George J. Osgood was President, Henry McCleary, vice president and William C. Hobart, secretary. Mr. Hobart handled the production and Mr. Osgood the sales end of the business.

By 1910, this operation had outgrown its plant facilities at Chehalis and it was decided to build a new plant at McCleary near the source of the timber and adjacent to the sawmill. Plans were prepared, a forty-acre site cleared and construction started during the spring of 1911. The plant was to be the most modern door plant on the west coast. The plans included a veneer (plywood) department for the purpose of making veneer panels for their doors. In August, 1912, the Chehalis Fir Door Company was moved – machinery and personnel – from Chehalis to the new McCleary plant where it continued to operate under the name of Chehalis Fir Door Company.

The plywood department had the most modern equipment available. The main items of equipment included: a Capital lathe; a Capital clipper; a Proctor Swartz dryer made by the Philadelphia Textile Machinery Co.; a glue mixer and spreader by Perkins Glue Company; and a Francis hydraulic press. The department had a capacity of 20,000 feet of 3 ply panels per day (single shift).

Since there were no experienced plywood men available to operate the new plant, George Osgood had turned to

the eastern machinery producers for recommendations. The Perkins Glue Company recommended Joseph Jakubovsky, glue room foreman of the Gorham Bros. Co., Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, for the position. Negotiations followed and by early September Mr. Jakubovsky arrived and took over as the veneer (plywood) department foreman (superintendent), a job he retained until his death in 1935.

The plywood department being as it was, a department, was not housed in a separate building, but the different units were placed within the door factory, which turned out later to be a restriction on expansion possibilities. In the beginning the department made plywood only for door panels and no log under 66 inches diameter or with any defects showing in the ends, was peeled.

The Chehalis Fir Door Company, under George J. Osgood's direction, established a strict jobber sales policy and its only customers were the large door and millwork jobbers from New England to California. Most of the selling was conducted from the home office at McCleary. They had one salesman in the east, J. F. Miles, who maintained his headquarters at Columbus, Ohio. George Osgood made regular sales trips, calling mainly on their regular customers, thus cementing their friendly relationship. Henry McCleary would at times join Osgood in these calls, thus establishing himself with his customers.

In 1915 Frank Chapman, an experienced door man from Hoquiam, Washington, was employed to assist George Osgood in the sales end. When the orders were accepted by George or Henry, they were turned over to Frank, thus becoming his responsibility, for acknowledging, scheduling, routing, shipping and billing.

The business during the first three years at McCleary expanded rapidly, from 1000 doors per day to 3000, on a one-shift operation.

During this period, George J. Osgood's family remained in Tacoma and were reluctant to move to McCleary. Commuting was a real chore in those days, so in 1915 George Osgood severed his connections with the company and sold his interest back to Henry McCleary. The name "Chehalis Fir Door Company" was dropped and the entire operation was consolidated to form the Henry McCleary Timber Company.

The plywood, door and sawmill operations on the west coast were greatly influenced by the first World War (1917-1918) and McCleary was no exception. Many men were called to war duty. Mill and logging camps were organized into units of the Loyal Legion of Loggers and

Lumbermen. During this time, Frank McCleary, Henry's son, with the rank of Captain, served as a key man in the lumbering operations at Vancouver, Washington, where special attention was given to the manufacture of spruce lumber intended for use in airplane manufacture. George J. Osgood, having left McCleary, served his country in Washington, D.C. as head of the Millwork War Service Committee.

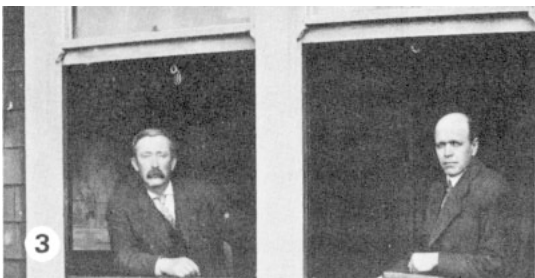
With the signing of the Armistice, these activities were disbanded and Frank McCleary returned home to become his father's right hand in the operation of the mills.

By 1920 the post-war boom was in full swing. The McCleary door department had gained the reputation of being one of the most modern and productive plants in the west. In 1923 the factory broke all records in door manufacturing when it produced and shipped over 300,000 doors in sixty days.

The plywood department was pushed to the limit to supply the necessary door panels for this large door production. In fact, in 1922, a new, complete and more efficient plywood plant was built and put in operation in Olympia in conjunction with a new sawmill that the Henry McCleary Timber Company had built on West Bay Drive. And the entire plywood operation, including personnel, was moved to Olympia. This operation was, however, destined to be short-lived for in May of 1923 this plywood plant was totally destroyed by fire.

As a result of the Olympia fire, it was decided to build a complete new plywood plant at McCleary using such pieces of equipment as were salvaged of which there were very few. Also many pieces of good equipment from the original plywood department of the door factory were transferred into the new plant which was housed in a new and separate building. New steam tunnels replaced the old log boiling vats. This new plant more than doubled the capacity of the old, for in the new there were two lathes, two Proctor dryers. A new glue room arrangement contained two spreaders feeding one hydraulic press and there was considerable added efficiency in the clippers and trim saws. The sanding operations continued as a part of the door department.

In 1919, William Hobart left McCleary to join George J. Osgood in building a new door plant for Wheeler Osgood at Tacoma. Some of the key personnel followed him but on the whole the staff remained. Henry McCleary was genuinely respected by his men who were always very loyal to him and he to them. He was The Boss. Officially, titles seemed not to exist, but in operation the line-up in the early 1920's was about as follows for the manufacturing operations at McCleary. Frank McCleary



Henry McCleary's first cedar mill (1) was built at McCleary, Washington in 1900. A huge pile of logs and stumps (2) was piled for burning in clearing the ground for the new door factory site at McCleary in 1911. Workers and their families posed for this Sunday picture. Henry McCleary (left) and George Osgood (right) watch the construction (3) from their office window.

was general manager, Frank Hawkins was his assistant or general superintendent. Leonard McCleary was in charge of the power plant and machine shop. Joe Jakubovsky was in charge of the plywood production. Frank Chapman handled the sales and A. W. Teagle was secretary and in charge of the office. His son, Ernest Teagle, took over in his father's stead in 1926.

Along about 1925, the plywood industry began to develop industrial markets for other than trunk stock and drawer bottoms and furniture backs. The radio cabinet manufacturers like Atwater Kent, Griggsby Gronow, Zenith and RCA became car lot buyers. Then the automobile industry began to use plywood in large quantities in their automobile bodies, which were at that time all wood.

The Henry McCleary Timber Company was a large producer of auto body parts, both solid wood and plywood. They established a complete department for cutting, shaping, machining and boring the different parts to pattern, and shipped in carload lots to Briggs Auto Body, Fisher Body and many independents such as Studebaker. Frank Hawkins became the key man in this work. He assumed all the design of jigs, templates and work involved from the blueprint through to the shipping of the finished part. A partial list of body parts made of plywood included floor boards, running boards, dashboards, seat bottoms, seat backs and trunk stock.

This was big business in the late twenties, but then two things happened that caused the business to practically dry up. One was the lack of a waterproof glue that would keep the plywood from separating under severe moisture conditions and two, the advent and popularity of the so-called safe all-steel body.

The biggest and most disastrous fire in the McCleary history was on December 31, 1928 when the door department factory burned. It was with much effort on the part of everyone in the town of McCleary that the cutting department was saved, due in part to a fire wall. The adjoining power plant was also saved and the plywood plant only scorched. When Henry and William McCleary came over the hill from their homes in Olympia, they said the whole plant seemed to be ablaze.

A large new warehouse to the north of the door factory was not harmed and immediately became the new home for the burned out door plant.

In 1930, W. S. "Bill" Nurenborg and George J. Osgood, who had severed connections with the Wheeler Osgood Company of Tacoma, formed a sales agency with offices in New York City. One of their prime accounts was the McCleary Timber Company in the territory from the Mississippi to and including the Atlantic Seaboard.

With the collapse of the auto body business, Henry McCleary prevailed upon George Osgood to return to McCleary. The New York partnership was dissolved and Osgood took over the sales for McCleary in an effort to rebuild their position in the door industry, which met with reasonable success considering the fact that the depression of the early 1930's followed almost immediately.

In June of 1933, the newly formed Douglas Fir Plywood Association held its first meeting at the Winthrop Hotel in Tacoma. Henry McCleary was elected president; E. Q. Walton, vice president; Phil Garland, treasurer; and Harrison Clark, recording secretary. Henry McCleary was named president because he "was one man everyone trusted."

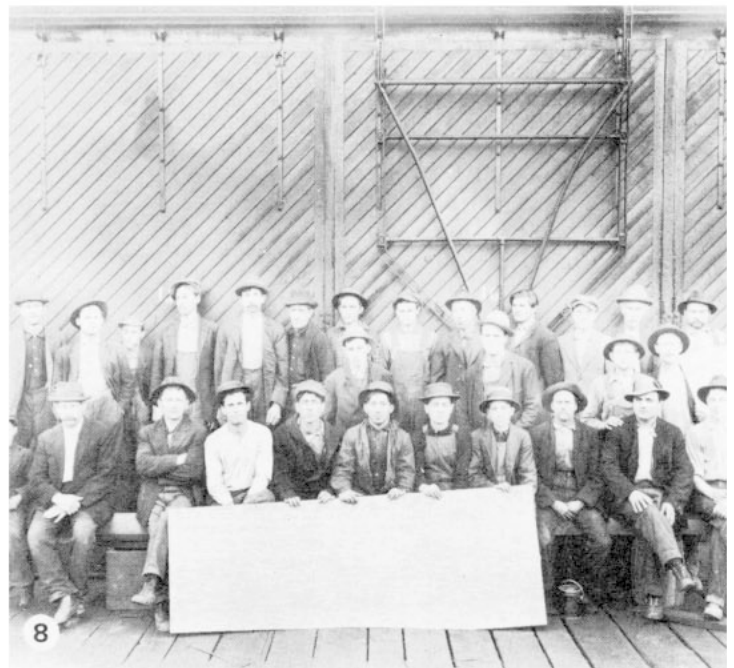
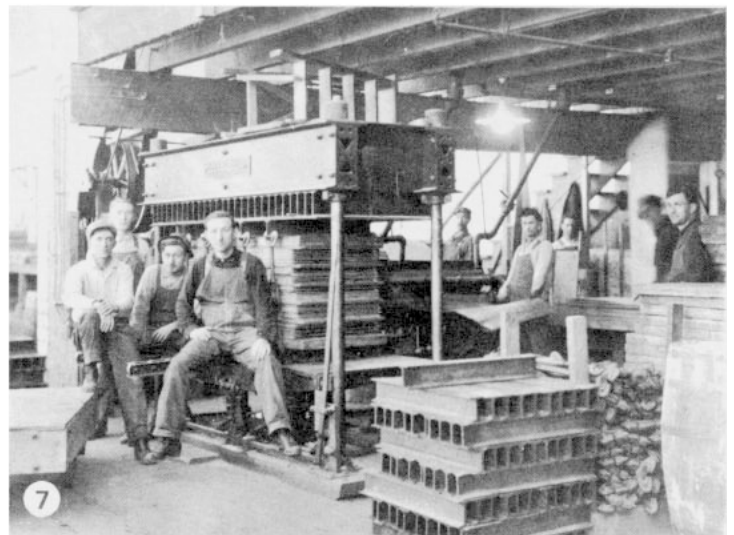
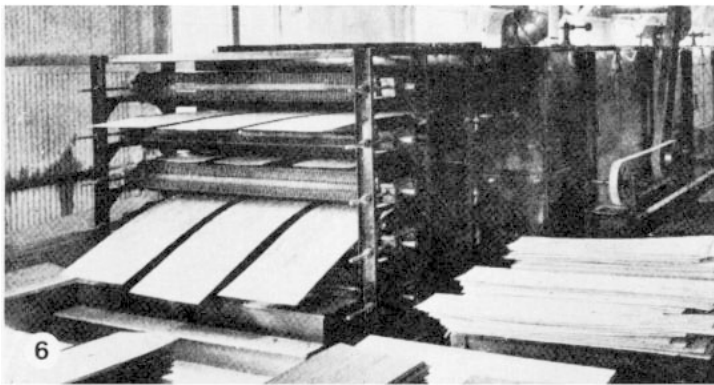
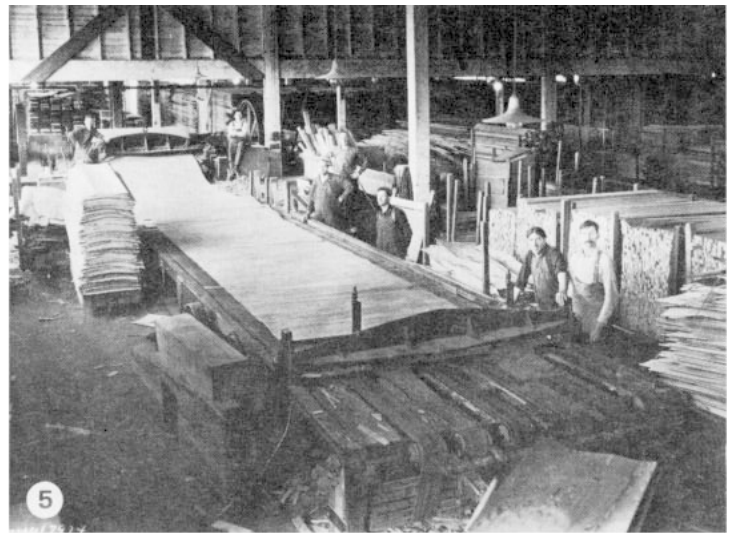
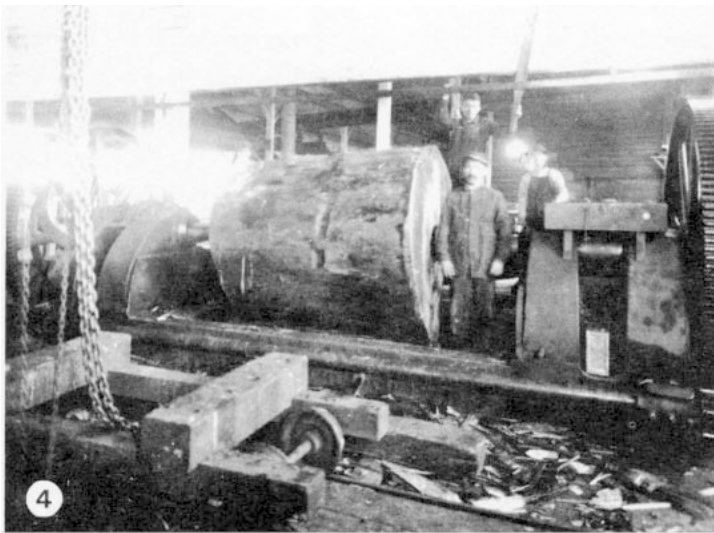
Joe Jakubovsky died in June of 1935 after nearly a quarter of a century as head man for McCleary's plywood operations. His son, Howard, who grew up in the plant, took over where his father left off and continued in charge until the operation was taken over in 1941 by Simpson Logging Company.

Between 1930 and 1940, the plywood plant was updated and the capacity was nearly doubled again by 1941. A new 10-foot lathe had been added; a new Modern dryer replaced the original Proctor dryers; the multiple tray system from lathes to clippers was installed; automatic clippers replaced the older semi-automatics. Modern taping and patching equipment had been installed and when the plants were sold to the Simpson Logging Company of Shelton, Washington, in 1941, and turned over on New Year's Day, 1942, Simpson received a modern operation in every respect.

Following the sale, Frank McCleary went to Nevada where he became the owner and manager of a large cattle ranch near Winnemucca.

The final sale brought a great change in the career of Henry McCleary. He sought new activities with his son in Nevada, but nothing could replace the tall timber, the sound of the sawmill and plywood plant and his old associates and friends. He returned to his Olympia home which he built in 1923 and which was one of the most magnificent homes ever built in the area. After a few weeks he became seriously ill. Following a round with the doctors in a Seattle hospital, he returned to his home where he died on May 8, 1943.

While this concludes The McCleary Story, it is not the end so far as the plywood plant is concerned for it continues today as one of the important units of the Simpson Timber Company. It will become a part of the Simpson story when it is written.



One of the 66" or larger perfect logs (4) which were the only kind used in peeling veneer for door panel plywood. These logs were turned on the Capitol lathe and fed by a single tray to a hand clipper (5). The green veneers were then fed into this (6) 2-way Proctor-Swartz dryer. The door panels were pressed in a Francis (water) hydraulic press (7). The panel crew of 1916 (8) pose with a perfect sheet of door panel veneer. Officials and office men (9) of the early 20's are: standing, left to right, Leonard McCleary, A. W. Teagle, William McCleary, Captain Ridley and Carl Macke. Seated are Frank McCleary, George Townsend and Frank Chapman.



The Henry McCleary Timber Company's operation (10) as it appeared from the air in the early 1930's. At the upper far left is the sawmill, next across is the resaw, the drykilns and door cut-up plant. At center is the power plant and below that, the plywood factory. The door factory and warehouse is at lower right. Some of the officers in the early 30's (11) are Frank McCleary, George J. Osgood and Henry McCleary.