

## Sustainable in Every Sense

Simpson Door Company celebrates 102 years as an AWB member and more than 130 years as a leader in innovation and sustainability in the Pacific Northwest.

DEBBIE RITENOUR

With roots dating back to 1890, Simpson Door Company has a rich history of protecting its people and preserving the planet.



Long before innovation was the buzzword of the day and decades before sustainability became a corporate expectation, Simpson Logging Company was taking the long view and building its business to last. From advocating workers' rights to replanting harvested timberlands, Simpson's often-revolutionary ideas and methods have helped cement the company's position as one of the oldest and most successful privately owned companies in the Pacific Northwest.

Today, McCleary-based Simpson Door Company manufactures high-end wood doors for homes across the United States. But when Sol Simpson founded S.G. Simpson & Company in 1890, it was a logging business. After periods of extensive growth and diversification into everything from paper to plastics, Simpson has narrowed its focus and found its stride.

### AN EARLY INNOVATOR

Sol Simpson was born in Canada and made his way to Washington via Carson City, Nevada, where he had hoped to make his fortune in the area's gold and silver mines. After his luck didn't pan out and he moved to rapidly growing Seattle in 1878, Simpson began grading streets and railroad beds. He was soon hired to grade the Mason County right-of-way for the Port Blakely

### At A Glance

Sol Simpson established S.G. Simpson & Company in 1890, later incorporating it as Simpson Logging Company.

The company diversified into a number of industries over the years, including paper and plastics.

Today, Simpson Door Company creates handcrafted interior, exterior and custom wood doors for customers across the nation.

This story is part of a new series highlighting AWB's legacy members.

**AWB AND SIMPSON: A PRODUCTIVE PARTNERSHIP**

The Simpson Logging Company was one of AWB's first members, joining in 1919. Simpson has been actively involved with the association throughout the years. Many Simpson executives have served on the AWB Board of Directors, including Simpson Investment Company Vice President of Public Affairs Joseph Leitzinger, who served as chair in 1991.

AWB has recognized Simpson and its affiliated entities with multiple awards, including the following:

- 1992 Cleanup Award: Simpson Tacoma Kraft Company
- 1996 Environmental Innovator Award: Simpson Tacoma Kraft Company
- 2001 Resource Conservation Award: Simpson Timber Company
- 2001 Award of the Decade: Simpson Investment Company

*“In an industry known for cutting and running, or chopping down trees and then abandoning the land to avoid paying taxes, Simpson has long been an outlier.”*

in-law, became general manager of the Simpson Logging Company in 1898 and the company's president in 1914. He also had a successful political career, serving as mayor of Shelton (where he moved the company's headquarters) before becoming a state representative and later speaker of the House. It was as a legislator that Reed was able to push through major labor reforms, including the state's first medical insurance act and increased workers' compensation benefits. He also worked to establish the eight-hour workday.

The volatility of the lumber industry in the 1920s caused Reed to rethink the company's long-term prospects. He soon recognized that Simpson needed to expand to survive. Specifically, Reed believed the company needed to move into manufacturing. This set off a decades-long diversification strategy led by Reed and two of his sons, Frank Reed and William G. (Bill) Reed, both of whom eventually became president of the company.

In 1925, Simpson opened a hemlock sawmill, Reed Mill, which was followed two years later by the Reed Shingle Mill. In 1941, Simpson acquired the Henry McCleary Timber Company. The McCleary door factory, built in 1912, was touted as the largest in the world. Later, the company entered the pulp and paper business and at one time owned a plastics business that became the largest producer of irrigation pipe in North America.

**EMBRACING SUSTAINABILITY**

In an industry known for cutting and running, or chopping down trees and then abandoning the land to avoid paying taxes, Simpson has long been an outlier. From the very beginning, Sol Simpson held onto cutover lands for future use. Bill Reed picked up his grandfather's mantle and began exploring sustainable forest management practices during his tenure as president.

The tree farm movement of the 1940s promoted the protection and regrowth of privately owned forest land. Reed recognized an opportunity to invest in the company's lands and future, and in 1943, Simpson joined forces with other timberland owners in the Shelton area to form the South Olympia Tree Farm Company. In

Mill Company's Puget Sound and Grays Harbor Railroad. Progress was slow going, and Simpson wanted to find a new, faster way to move logs. He turned to a method with which he had extensive experience: horses. While oxen were the traditional choice, Simpson discovered horses could pull logs much more quickly than steers after they had built up momentum. Inspired by his success, Simpson began looking for other ways to improve efficiency. He explored the use of machinery and introduced a log-hauling contraption called the “Walking Dudley” to the industry.

The company was also ahead of its time when it came to protecting and supporting workers. Logging camps at the time were notorious for their unsanitary conditions, but the Simpson Logging Company – as it became known in 1895 – built livable camps and established a company retail store that provided credit to the workers.

The company also was one of the first in the Puget Sound region to offer its workers a health plan, which was especially valuable considering the inherent dangers of the logging profession.

**EXPANSION AND DIVERSIFICATION**

Simpson's commitment to its workers rose to new heights under the leadership of Mark Reed. Reed, who was Sol Simpson's son-



Sol Simpson



*"Simpson's often-revolutionary ideas and methods have helped cement the company's position as one of the oldest and most successful privately owned companies in the Pacific Northwest."*

1946, Simpson further committed to managing its lands responsibly and supporting employment in local communities by signing the Shelton Cooperative Sustained Yield Unit contract with the U.S. government. This 100-year agreement unified 160,000 acres of mostly second-growth Simpson land and 112,000 acres of U.S. Forest Service old-growth land under a forest management plan designed to provide for continuous harvesting and replanting.

The Simpson companies continued to demonstrate their commitment to environmental stewardship over the years. In the 1970s, Simpson Paper Company was one of the first companies in the nation to make completely recycled white paper. In 1988, Simpson Tacoma Kraft Company completed the St. Paul Waterway Remedial Action and Habitat Restoration Project, the first Superfund cleanup in Puget Sound. Simpson Timber Company also signed a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) to protect the northern spotted owl in California in 1992. In 2000, Simpson stood with federal agencies

to sign a second HCP protecting 51 aquatic and terrestrial species on its Washington lands. It was the first agreement in the nation to include protection for temperature and sediment on a forest land base under the Clean Water Act.

#### TWO COMPANIES, ONE COMMITMENT

Over the years, Simpson acquired new forest lands outside of Washington, including redwood forests in Northern California and timberlands in Oregon. In 2002, the company divested its timberland management and formed a separate company later named Green Diamond Resource Company. Simpson Investment Company continued to own the lumber, paper and door manufacturing companies, while Green Diamond managed the timberlands. Simpson Investment Company later divested its lumber and paper operations but continues to own Simpson Door Company to this day.

While Simpson Door Company and Green Diamond Resource Company are separately managed, they share a chairman: Colin Moseley, the great-great-grandson of Sol Simpson. Sol Simpson's company may have changed course more than once throughout its long and storied history, but the commitment to innovation and sustainability remains. [≡](#)