

A NEW BRAND FOR WESTERN LUMBER

By G. Cleveland Edgett

I am pleased to have this opportunity to talk to a group of men whose technical skill and know-how in dry kiln design and operation is taking on so much added importance to our industry in its continuing effort to find new and profitable ways of satisfying the changing market demands of increasingly sophisticated customers for our wood products.

I speak frankly to you, as lumbermen, when I say that products that have been good enough for our customers for 50 years are not good enough for today's and for tomorrow's customers. Thumb through the pages of the current issue of any builder magazine. Take a look at the advertisements and the articles. What are they discussing? The "new" and the "different" and the "improved." They talk about pre-cut lumber, components, pre-fab construction and a wide range of prefinished products. Surely these are just the advance guard of any army of new wood products to come. They are in fact the harbingers of change that is still to come.

Accelerated change is the operational climate in which Western lumber manufacturers labor in their search for the "new" and the "improved," and the better way of developing and of distributing hundreds of wood products in the fiercely competitive national and world-wide markets. Our Western wood products industry is in a state of flux and to a degree greater than many of our own producers may even fully realize.

Swift technical advances in construction design and in building methods are prime movers behind this rapid change. Just as our modern mills have largely abandoned the practices of a happily gone era that relied on the piece-by-piece handling of materials by relatively unskilled labor, so the construction and building industry has outgrown the age of the handsaw and the wasteful use of both materials and manpower.

Our industry is investing money and talent in the search for tested systems that will insure that wood products will meet the demanding requirements of architects and specifiers who design to the exacting terms of engineered materials, and so command a market.

Product availability, along with quality, is important in marketing programs and they must be offered at a price that will attract willing buyers, and more and more buyers are demanding technical evidence of end-use performance, and are, in addition, asking for manufacturers' warranty.

Just recently WWPA put into effect a financial guarantee of grade stamped lumber. The voluntary program extends only to the first purchaser, but it provides a basis for buyer confidence by removing

one more element of product risk. This trend will continue to grow.

As dry kiln specialists you add increased value to our products and also customer appeal. It is important that you help us send quality wood products to market, competitively priced so that they attract willing buyers. Customers can be fickle. If wood fails to meet their needs they look to other wood and non-wood substitutes that will seemingly do as good a job, at less cost. Under such conditions, it is important that all of us do our best to deliver wood products of highest quality to the market at competitive prices.

It is vital to the progress of the industry that key people like yourselves understand where it is going, and what it is doing. The speed with which change comes makes this understanding more and more difficult for a technician and manager in any segment of the industry to be always fully informed of even those major changes taking place outside his specialized field. An occasional look into the other fellow's sphere of activity can be helpful in establishing a proper appreciation of one's own role in relation to the overall industry, and how it affects progress.

With this thought in mind, I'd like to tell you about our Western Wood Products Association. Who it represents, what it is doing to ensure that western species maintain traditional markets and what it is doing to gain new ones as the old ones become obsolete, or are displaced by newer, non-wood substitutes.

WWPA has yet to celebrate its first birthday. I'm sure that all of you recall that WWPA came into existence only last August with the final consolidation of Western Pine and West Coast Lumbermen's Associations. Since the Association membership is voluntary, not all WPA and WCLA members elected to come into WWPA. The majority of the 12-state region's progressive producers did, however, and the Association is representative of an impressive share of the region's total production.

The overriding consideration of WWPA's existence is a dedication to advancement.

Fundamental to WWPA's efforts to capture and to hold markets for western wood species is quality control and product uniformity governed by the grading department and symbolized by the grading stamp. While the grading of lumber has never been considered an exact science, the degree of uniformity in results and the dedication of grading people in achieving personal skill and judgment has been outstanding. Of all the Association's activities, this area of grading is most sensitive to your dry kiln operations. I can assure you that it is an area to which our Association assigns top priority and attention.

This complex and technical area of lumber grading has spilled into politics in recent years until the industry's efforts to standardize its sizes, simplify its grades and modernize the system is in imminent danger of being "federalized."

It is sometimes difficult to realize that the first printed grading rules were published more than 200 years ago in Stockholm and described four grades -- Best, Good, Common and Culls. That was 1754. Our recently published WWP grading rules contains better than 200 pages covering 12 Western species. The book is 15th in a series and the 16th probably isn't far away.

Standards are fundamental to modern manufacturing, and they have made our present level of modern living possible. Standards produce economy in the manufacturing process and very important, they protect the consumer. WWPA recognizes these concepts, and has assigned capable men and talent to its engineering and research department. WWPA is placing major emphasis on the need to manufacture an engineered product that will meet rigidly defined standards and which will assure the buyer of ultimate product usefulness and flexibility. WWPA's technical staff is seeking ways to simplify

design problems that will make wood easier to specify and to use. They seek ways to make wood more reliable and they are working on systems to reduce the costs of homes and commercial structures to the ultimate purchaser. They are increasing their efficiency in translating research findings into meaningful design data and industry standards. These are vital tasks today, they become more so tomorrow.

I mentioned at the outset that our customers were becoming increasingly sophisticated. WWPA recognizes this consumer knowledge of products and is meeting it through the organization and training of a technical field staff that is strategically stationed in key market areas to provide consumers with manufacturer guidance and experience in specifications and in the proper use and application of Western species.

WWPA backs its field staff with informative, factual and readable product literature to provide consumer education. Millions of pieces of such literature are distributed each year to architects, regulatory officials, students and others with specific interest in our member wood products.

The Association's advertising campaign is geared to new construction and building developments. It requires a major share of the WWPA budget to tell the story of Western lumber uses to the nation's readers of shelter, trade, professional, and dealer magazines. If there is a man in this room that feels that advertising is not a necessary function, I remind him that Colorado has 29 mountain tops that are higher than Pike's Peak.

Our Western producing region ships more than a 1/2 million carloads of lumber to our domestic markets each year and this volume doesn't include the substantial amount that also moves by truck and cargo. WWPA takes a serious interest in the rates under which these products move to market. They must be kept competitive. The guardianship of these transportation rates is a prime responsibility of the Association on behalf of its members and also in the interests of the ultimate consumers of Western Wood species.

Traffic rates and the ready availability of transportation equipment designed to haul wood and forest products should interest all of us in the industry because profits are materially affected by them. I might add that it does dry kiln specialists little good to conscientiously dry products to a specified moisture content only to have them arrive at the customer's inventory sheds wet, sooty, stained and degraded because the boxcar leaked, or the products suffered rough handling in loading and unloading.

Another key function of our Association is its forestry program aimed at fostering and encouraging the productive management of commercial timberlands to provide the West with a reliable source of raw material.

The forestry department works to do something specific about the ever increasing cost of raw material and the development of an available even flow of reasonable priced logs, especially in those areas where the government is the dominant commercial timber land owner. The conservationists -- I prefer to call them preservationists and to rightly reserve the title conservationist for our lumbermen -- continually minimize our industry's advances in scientific reforestation and improved utilization of forest leftovers. These are very real and very dramatic industry gains.

A few weeks ago the U. S. Forest Service released a comprehensive look at the forest resources of the nation. In commenting on the survey, one official quietly noted that ". . . forests have made a comeback during the past quarter century . . . this increased timber growth is a real success story." We can say "Amen" to that.

Latest addition to the Association's long list of member services is the market research department, whose task includes forecasting accurate and up-to-date knowledge of the market for western

softwood products, the share it is apt to have of the market in, say 1975, and how such shares would relate to planned production. Market research will develop new and meaningful uses of the day-by-day industry statistics and will provide precise measurements of the effectiveness of advertising programs and customer preferences. Basically, market research defines the problem, gets related facts, analyzes the findings and presents conclusions and recommendations in clear, sharp focus. This is a management tool acquired by the industry in its serious effort to remain competitive and to keep abreast of the changing times.

That's the broad picture. Now I would like to briefly discuss with you an area of serious mutual concern.

Recently, at the request of our mills, our WWPA issued moisture meters to its grading supervisors. In issuing these meters, WWPA is not forcing restrictions upon mills. It is not imposing additional control and is not advocating prohibitive moisture content provisions. It is WWPA's avowed intention to be helpful and to supplement individual and company efforts to produce a uniformly dry product at the least money.

This is no green vs. dry program. It is a progressive effort to establish and to maintain a uniform seasoning when customer requirements specify moisture content. Our Association has charged its supervisors to help the mill help itself solve and control its particular drying problems and in so doing keep out of claims.

Our Western industry is manufacturing a more precise product than ever before. We are promoting and marketing products that perform to a known standard. From raw material through delivered product, all manufacturing processes add additional value to the product, and when marketed, must be of a quality to demand a profitable return to the manufacturer. We are interested in helping you develop schedules and techniques that produce a more uniformly dry product at less money and we are interested in isolating and correcting those deficiencies in drying that require costly loss of product and time and profits through degrade and through excessive drying.

WWPA is interested in making available to lumber and wood products buyers a product that performs as industry promotional advertising states it will. We must ensure that when the word "dry" appears on a WWP grade stamp, that the maximum moisture content is 19% or less, conforming to current ALS specifications in WWP grading rules. This level of drying requires more precise kiln control than is necessary where specifications require only an average of 19%, thus allowing some pieces to be as high as 25%.

Designers and builders look to modern grade marking for the evidence they require for eligibility of use under specifications of span tables reflecting the relationship of moisture content to strength. Designers and builders need assurance that stress ratings are reliable. It behooves WWPA to work with dry kiln people to make every attempt to ensure the integrity of the product and the WWP grade stamp through strict adherence to, and compliance with, moisture content rules.

Along with the growing demand for dry framing is rising a corresponding one for dry, heavy material intended for heavy floor or roof plank. Historically, such drying has been done by only individual order agreement. But with the increase in demand for such heavy items it would seem logical that buyers would like to select such material out of random stock without having to get it through special schedules. We don't have the answer to this one, but we will try to find it.

Well, gentlemen, I've skimmed hastily over a wide range of western wood products manufacturing and marketing activities. The point that I have been trying to make is that our industry

is changing and that the speed of the change is important to you as dry kiln specialists because it will make changes in your traditional methods and standards for performance.

Our industry must change to remain competitive and to find and to capture new markets. The overriding purpose for every one who works in this industry, regardless of his field of activity is: profitable sales to willing and satisfied customers for western wood products.

The new WWP brand is in the forefront of progressive industry-wide efforts to ensure that western wood products have built-in technical standards and quality performance that merits a major place and use as space age construction material.

One final point before I close. A group of lumbermen recently returned from a trade mission to Australia and Japan. We discovered there, as we did previously in the United Kingdom and Western Europe, that there is a growing interest in importing kiln dried lumber manufactured in sizes that are suitable for remanufacture.

If this trend continues, as I am sure it will, it will place new demands on your skills to ensure that our kiln dry lumber, which will be free from troublesom checks, splits and blue stain, successfully reaches its final destination 8000 miles away. I am sure that you are well equipped to accept this challenge.

As I said at the outset, I speak frankly to you as lumbermen. I commend you on your meeting and its professional approach to the problems and techniques concerned with manufacturing a wood product of measurable performance and uniform quality.

I thank you.