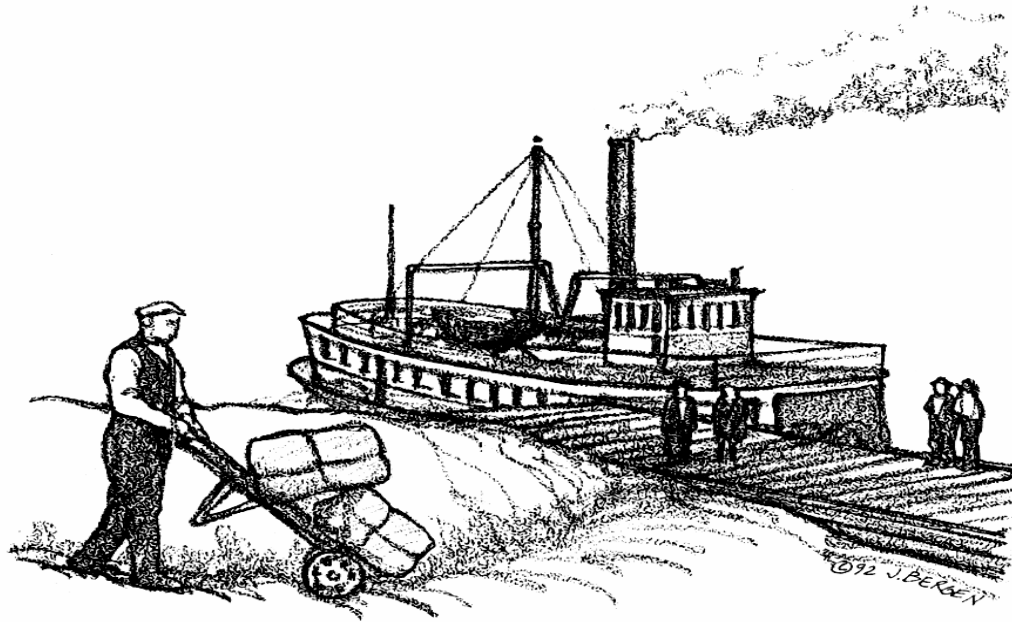


# Industrial Settlement on Coos Bay

by Kenn Oberrecht



*By 1903, the year North Bend was incorporated, the bay was a busy place, with sternwheelers, sidewheelers, and steam-powered propeller craft carrying goods, farm products, and passengers up and down the rivers and*

*sloughs, throughout the bay, and along the coast. Gasoline launches scooted across the water in great numbers and soon became known as Coos Bay's Mosquito Fleet. The Reverend G. Leroy Hall even conducted Baptist Church services aboard his launch, the Life Line.*

In 1916, the Southern Pacific Railroad completed the line connecting the Coos Bay area with the Willamette Valley. Not only did this present new opportunities for the transport of freight and passengers, but it also stimulated the local growth of commercial fishing, because fresh seafood could now be shipped in refrigerated cars.

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World War I brought boom times to Coos Bay in 1917 and 1918. Logging, wood-products manufacturing, and shipbuilding were better than ever. The end of the war, however, caused an abrupt downturn in these industries. Within a few weeks, as many as 800 families packed up and left the area.

From 1924 to 1928, the south jetty was built at the Coos Bay entrance, the north jetty was rebuilt, and the channel was dredged to accept a new

generation of deep-draft steam ships. As a result, the sluggish economy began to stir. Harbor improvements also helped the commercial-fishing industry, and Charleston started to grow and prosper.

By 1930, a network of good roads connected the communities of the bay area. The North Bend Airport opened that year and later received a federal grant for improvements. In 1936, the McCullough Bridge and the Oregon Coast Highway were completed--perhaps the most significant growth event of the 20th century.

Coal mining began declining in 1916 and ceased altogether in the 1940s. By 1915, wood products had become the bay area's main export, and by 1946, Coos Bay was shipping more lumber than Portland.

*The bay has been altered tremendously since the arrival of the first pioneers in the 1850s.*

The sprawling Weyerhaeuser complex at North Bend opened in 1951, and other wood-products companies followed. Some are still in business, while others have long since ceased operation. Wood products remain the area's economic mainstay, but the business has always alternated between riding the crest and trough of the industrial wave.

While industrial growth and urban development can lead to economic health, they can also threaten the well-being of the estuary, which could eventually wreak financial havoc on the bay area in a variety of ways.

The bay has been altered tremendously since the arrival of the first pioneers in the 1850s. About 50 percent of its valuable marshes and tidal flats have been filled or drained. Dredging, road construction, and shoreline alteration have changed the way water moves through the estuary, carrying nutrients to plants and animals, flushing and filtering urban and industrial waste.

To the early developers and many who succeeded them, wetlands were synonymous with wastelands. The estuary was something to be exploited without regard to consequences.

We know now that estuaries represent the richest, most productive habitat on earth. The bay area's second most important industry--commercial fishing--depends on them. So do tourism, many forms of recreation, and the quality of life of those who live along or near their shores.

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