

Peter Koch, A Man and His Legacy

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During 1973, Peter Koch joined Thomas Edison, Mme. Curie, the Wright Brothers and other "most deserving" men and women in receiving the John Scott Award. This award first given in 1822, recognizes those individuals "whose inventions have contributed in some outstanding way to the 'comfort, welfare and happiness' of mankind (The John Scott Award, 2017)."

Credited for the invention of the chipping headrig; Peter is best remembered as the renowned Chief Wood Scientist, Southern Forest Experiment Station, USDA Forest Service. He was a man on a mission linking basic wood research with innovative applications within the wood products industry. Best characterized as indefatigable; and a doer; he had a pace to match. He became a leading American authority on applied wood science.



The Early Years

Peter's life began in Missoula, Montana on October 15, 1920; and proceeded full circle over the next sixty-five years back to Corvallis, a small Western Montana community south of

his birthplace. The youngest of three sons born to Elers (a career U.S. Forest Service Forester) and Gerda Koch; Peter later graduated in 1942 from what is now the University of Montana with a Mechanical Engineering degree. He immediately enlisted in the U. S. Army Air Corps and served much of the next four and one-half years as a fighter pilot in China.

Subsequently he was hired as a mechanical engineer at Stetson-Ross Machine Company; a company then known for its innovative and well-constructed wood processing equipment. He later met and married Doris Ann Hagen on October 8, 1950. Their honeymoon wasn't typical, they flew a single engine airplane down the heart of the Mexican Sierras to Mexico City. The Honeymoon trip established a pattern of continuing adventures throughout their life together.

Doris could best be described as Peter's soul mate; this was evident when she defined Peter's secret to success, "We define our goals, consider our direction and, having done so, abundantly enjoy our passage." (Elaine, 1978)

Abundantly Enjoying the Passage

After a six-year stint at Stetson-Ross, the couple made a life change decision; Peter was to go back to school. He obtained his PhD in Wood Science from the University of Washington in 1954. His PhD dissertation, "An Analysis of lumber planer process" was a logical field of study after his tenure with Stetson-Ross; it was also an indicator of his career path.

He went on to teach at Michigan State University for a couple of years, and then served as vice president and director of

Champlin Company, a hardwood lumber producer in New Hampshire. He then went to his father's employer, the U. S. Forest Service; this time as a research scientist at the Southern Forest Experiment Station, at Pineville, La. He later connected professionally with his father; each became a Fellow in the Society of American Foresters.

Peter was predictable and fearless in establishing ambitious, yet attainable goals. Collaborating with his Pineville staff: two ambitious goals were established early on during his tenure at the Experiment Station. First, develop the technology to double the recovery of useable products from the Southern pine timber resource.

Second, figure out how to utilize the small, poorly formed hardwood species growing on Southern pine sites. He and his six wood scientists, six technicians and three secretaries decided they, and their industry cohorts, would accomplish these goals no later than 1980.

Not surprisingly, the chipping headrig was unveiled by Koch in 1963 as a major contribution on Goal number one. This device, now part of modern sawmilling technology, profiled the log without saw kerf to maximize lumber yield, and converted a round log into a square cant with the remaining fiber going into useable pulp chips.

The chipping headrig, later recognized with the presentation of the John Scott Award, was just the beginning. Other projects followed over the years. These projects including gluing research that facilitated the satisfactory gluing of Southern Pine plywood, and equally important, Peter Koch and his team of researchers provided an assist in the utilization of low value hardwoods into what we now know as Oriented Strand Board (OSB) during the 70s and early 80'.

Peter's leadership credentials were all encompassing. He had been raised in a household where the practice of forestry was common lore. His stint at Stetson-Ross extended his knowledge into cutting-edge

technology. Add, his tenure as a hardwood saw mill operator in New Hampshire, his affinity for wood science, and his high energy level; this all came together into one extraordinary individual.

Forest Products Society Leadership

Peter participated in a number of professional organizations. However, the Forest Products Society (then the Forest Products Research Society) best met his interests in integrating basic research into applied wood science.

Participation was, and is, a valued career enhancing activity. This is the place where wood scientists, researchers, and students, mingled with wood products practitioners and their suppliers; exchanged knowledge, and developed collaborative relationships.

The 60's, 70's and the 80's were the years when legendary research and wood industry practitioners were Society members. Names such as George Marra, Ben Bryant, Tom Maloney, Robert Wellwood, Jim Love, Milton and Jean Mater, Charles Kozlik, Stuart Rich, Richard Blomquist, and a host of others. Peter, a colleague, became the 26th President of the Society at the 25th Annual Meeting in 1972.

Indefatigable, and a doer, he set about defining his vision and short-term goals for the Society under his tenure. Citing the Constitution of the Society as revised in 1970, he read,

"The Society shall encourage and facilitate the application of technical knowledge that will enable mankind to derive maximum benefits from forest products,

The Society will serve as a link between producers and users of knowledge relating to wood products by providing a forum for discussing research findings and significant developments, for demonstrating the benefits resulting from the application of such information, and for stimulating needed new research (FPJ, July 72)."

He then set about explaining how specific short-term goals, during his tenure, would enhance Society objectives,



"It appears to me that the achievements of the last few years set the stage for an early and substantial increase in industrial membership. To this end we have launched a campaign to raise membership to at least 4,650 before the 1973 Annual Meeting in Los Angeles (FPJ, July, 72)."

Peter then explained how this goal was to be met,

"By the time this editorial appears, the memberships goals—and their method of achievement—will have been explained to every Section and to every member. I believe that you will see benefits in expanding our membership and that you will work effectively to attain the assigned number of new members (FPJ, July, 72)."

Peter's leadership and service to the Society continued through the years; he left a legacy that will endure through the years.

The Passing, and a Growing Legacy

Society member Peter Koch passed away on February 14, 1998. Doris died in Hamilton, Montana on October 26, 2017. He was a prolific author, shortly before his death he completed a three-volume set entitled the Lodgepole Pine in North America. His two volume *Utilization of Southern Pine* (1972) and three-volume *Utilization of Hardwoods Growing on Southern Pine Sites* (October 1985) are classics. His other published papers are

legion.

He bequeathed a vast collection of papers, photographs, and other data to the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library, University of Montana. The collection traverses 66.0 linear feet and spans his career over a half century from 1948-1998. And because of Peter and Doris' devotion to the Forest Products Society, they established the Peter and Doris H. Koch Endowment with an initial donation of \$285,000 in 1990.

In Peter's words, the objective of the Endowment was to establish the Forest Products Society (FPS) "as the world leader in technical information transfer to further the socially beneficial use of wood and fiber resources and to foster innovation and research in fundamentally sound processing and use of wood by disseminating information and providing forums for networking and the exchange of information (Koch, 1990)."

Over the years, growth and additional donations from the Koch's have brought the Endowment total to nearly one million dollars. The funds will provide an ongoing income stream to the Society in three phases;

2018-2028 - The Koch Basic Fund provides annual income to FPS

2029-2047 - The Koch Basic and Intermediate Funds provide annual income to FPS

2047 and thereafter - The Koch Basic, Intermediate and Centennial Funds all provide annual income to FPS and SWST (Society of Wood Science and Technology).

In his bequeath, Peter and Doris left specific investment instructions for the Endowment to assure capital preservation, income generation and minimization of investment costs. The Koch's goal was to assure the funds will be available to the Forest Products Society to fulfill its goals as long as it is in existence.

An oversight structure is in place to assure that their wishes are being met in managing and using these funds. The FPS Investment Management Committee continues to review

all decisions made regarding FPS investments, including the Koch Endowment.

In addition, an Oversight Committee consisting of current and past Board Members from both the Forest Products Society (FPS) and the Society of Wood Science and Technology (SWST) will meet annually to review the previous year's actions regarding the Endowment and to assure that the Koch's intent is being met.

Peter Koch, and his beloved wife Doris, left a legacy of action and deed. Their lives will continue to provide an example to those that seek to continue connecting basic wood science with application of technical knowledge.

About the Author:

Richard F. "Dick" Baldwin PhD, CF is a native of Lebanon Oregon, draws on six decades of executive, supervisory, and hourly experience across the forest products industry. Currently Dick is Managing Partner of Oak Creek Investments LLC. Dick also co-founded the Winston Plywood & Veneer LLC mill in Louisville MS that is currently starting up, and is a partner in the business. He currently serves as the FPS Board Rep from the South Central Region. He can be reached at 972-890-4162.

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- Added note:
Peter Koch cover photo, FPJ, Volume 22, No. 6, June 1972