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WHITE PINE: King of Many Waters

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PROBABLY J. J. KENNEDY
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The Blackwell Lumber Company, Coeur d'Alene. The first to build and operate a sawmill on the site that later became the grounds for the big Blackwell plant were the Kennedy Brothers. They bought the site on the west side of the Spokane River where it leaves Lake Coeur d'Alene and constructed a small sawmill there in 1903. They were in the process of constructing a large sawmill, sawing the lumber for the buildings in the small mill, when they sold out to B. R. Lewis, president of the newly formed B. R. Lewis Lumber Company.

Lewis immediately set about completion of a still bigger plant which was destined to become one of the largest lumber manufacturing and processing plants in the Coeur d'Alenes. Lewis installed two band mills, planers, lath mill and other facilities needed for the great production planned. He even added a shingle mill. The company operated its plant steadily from the time it first opened in October, 1904, until it experienced financial problems and was forced by creditors to close in 1907. The big plant stood idle for some time.

On January 30, 1909, a new firm was incorporated under the leadership of another Pennsylvania lumberman, Frank A. Blackwell, who had arrived in the Coeur d'Alenes a few years earlier. This new concern was the Blackwell Lumber Company, the incorporators of which were Frank A. Blackwell, B. R. Lewis, Fred Grinnell and R. M. Hart of the Coeur d'Alene and Spokane areas, and C. R. Smith of Wisconsin. Earl Rogers served as general superintendent during the early years; Hart served from 1914-1918; Sigurd Hofslund was manager from 1918-1931, and Carl Lundgren served in that capacity until the company closed permanently.

Blackwell weathered the worst years of the Depression. The heavy losses sustained during the Depression, added to flood losses in December, 1933, and January, 1934, hurt the company. These and other reverses were factors leading to a decision to close permanently on May 4, 1937. The big plant was operated later that year by the Atlas Tie Company while the latter was rebuilding its plant following its first big fire at Atlas.

The big and historic Blackwell plant soon fell into disrepair and it was later dismantled and the machinery sold or junked. The Rutledge unit of Potlatch Forests, Inc., took over the assets of the Blackwell Co. and absorbed those of the Blackwell employees who desired to make the transfer.

The combined output for the B. R. Lewis Lumber Company during its three years of operations and the Blackwell Lumber Company at Coeur d'Alene during a 27 year run is estimated at 1.2 billion board feet of lumber.