A man of science and principle, Garrett (née) Eddy pioneered research on reversion in tamarack, which helped revolutionize the timber industry practices and contributed to the success of his company, Port Blakely Tree Farms. Garrett was an astute businessman, but he left more comfort in the woods than behind a desk. Though he had a professional dedication to sound forestry, his greatest personal passion was ornithology. He made invaluable contributions to both areas of science.

Garrett was born in Seattle on June 8, 1916, the youngest of John Whittemore Eddy and Ethel Garrett Eddy’s three children. John W. Eddy was a highly successful businessman, originally from Bay City, Michigan, who had purchased the Port Blakely Mill Company in 1903 with partner Ned Skinner. John Eddy’s brothers, James and Robert, were also silent partners in the venture. Located on the southeast side of Bainbridge Island, west of Seattle at Puget Sound, Port Blakely had been founded in 1894 and for a time had been one of the world’s largest sawmills under one roof.

Just a few years after John Eddy and his partner acquired the business, they sold millions of board feet of lumber to San Francisco to rebuild the city after the devastating earthquake and fire of 1906. In 1923, John Eddy dissolved his partnership with Skinner, and he and his brothers acquired the whole of the mill as well as the partner- ship’s timberlands. The Eddy brothers leased the mill and later closed it to focus on timberland operations.

Garrett spent his boyhood days in Seattle and boarded at the prestigious Thacher School in Ojai, California, for high school. Garrett was studious and athletic. He captained the track team and in 1933 won the state high jump championship. By the time Garrett was studying for his MBA, World War II was looming on the horizon. Garrett had been a member of the U.S. Navy reserve, and he served on active duty from 1941 until March 1946. His first assignment was aboard the USS Anholt, an inshore patrol vessel. The Anholt patrolled the waters of Puget Sound and was assigned to Alaskan waters. Garrett served on other ships, including two destroyer escorts, the USS Key and the USS Elmer M. Mayo. After serving on the Key, Garrett took over command of the cruiser from Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Jr., the son of the President, near the end of the war. Garrett was honorably discharged after the war, having achieved the rank of lieutenant commander.

While Garrett had enormous responsibilities as a naval officer, he also worked on reversion in tamarack on the home front. On February 14, 1942, he married Mary Ford Eddy (née Eddy), a fifth cousin whom he had previously met while playing squash at the Portland Yacht Club. He named her “Mary Ford.” The couple had three children, Garrett Edward, John Whittemore II, and Barbara Hilda.

After the war, Garrett returned to Seattle, and he and Mary Ford settled in the eastern suburbs of Seattle. Garrett embarked on a 10-year research initiative to work for what was then called the Port Blakely Mill Company—though the mill was now owned by his brothers, James and Robert, through a new corporation, Pacific Forest Corporation—“on building on this scientific legacy.”

Port Blakely had a reputation for excellent management of its timberlands, and Garrett aimed to bring more precise science to the endeavor. In particular, he was interested in determining best practices for thinning tree stands so that the remaining trees could grow bigger and more valuable. Port Blakely had experimented with commercial thinning as early as 1941, making it one of the first, if not the very first, company to employ this practice. Garrett embarked on a program of carefully measuring plots of forestland that were thinned to variable densities. The results were documented over several decades, and Garrett introduced new practices as a result.

Notably, Port Blakely instituted long rotations between harvests. Douglas fir, for instance, is harvested after a 45-year rotation by standard industry practice. Port Blakely, on the other hand, allowed its Douglass for stands to grow as long as 40 years, which yielded higher quality lumber. Through the decades, the stands would be thinned several times, with suppressed and subordinate trees turned to lumber and profit.

In the late 1940s, Port Blakely also began to have its timberlands officially certified as Tree Farms. Owners of certified Tree Farms pledge to institute practices to keep their land productive and prevent forest fires. The legendary forester W.F. “Bill” Hagensteiner, one of the founders of what became the American Tree Farm System, recalled how Port Blakely adopted Tree Farm practices. “I was visiting lands in Snohomish County [northeast of Seattle], and there had been a big blowdown of old growth, and a lot of it was big woods; intrigued I got Port Blakely out to look at it and convinced him to clean up the area and replant.”

Bill said that he earned Garrett’s trust in part because Bill’s uncle was Walter Hagensteiner, an amateur ornithologist and had taught Garrett about birds decades earlier. Garrett extended his welcome for Walter to Bill. Garrett later served on the board of the Industrial Forestry Association, which Bill managed and ran for more than two decades. In the Northwest forest products industry, the Port Blakely name became associated with the quality of its timberlands. Industry magnate George Weyerhaeuser commented that Port Blakely knew how to choose land. In addition to identifying fertile land with healthy forests, Port Blakely also invested in timberlands at lower elevations. When higher elevation land was inaccessible during winter snow, Port Blakely could still cut timber and supply mills.

Cheesing and managing timberlands also carried enormous risk, primarily of forest fire. Everyone who worked for the company trained to fight fires, and Garrett spent a lot of effort working with fire departments and the Washington Forest Protection Association (WFPA) to prevent fires and organize fire-fighting crews. Eventually Garrett served as president of the WFPA for 12 years, longer than anyone else to hold the office. During fires, Garrett kept his car to the fire radio in his car, even if it meant parking the car alongside his house so he could hear the radio through the window during meals. Garrett was also a driving force in improving forest protection in Oregon.

Port Blakely owned timberlands in Oregon, Idaho, and primarily Western Washington, and by the mid-1980s, the timber holdings were eventually sold in Garrett’s career. Port Blakely purchased new timberlands on the other side of the Columbia River. His interest in developing Port Blakely’s operations also led him to pursue the company’s first real estate venture, the Port Arbor Village, a partnership with a real estate subsidiary of Puget Sound Power & Light Company. Port Blakely developed Renton Village. Over time, as Western Washington became more populous, Port Blakely bought and sold land for development and to extend its timber holdings.

“Garrett invested for the long term,” said Jim Varney, Garrett’s closest business and lifelong friend in Port Blakely. “He had the kind of patient, consistent, and sustainable development that the company continues to reflect.”

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