

A PROGRESS REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE NEW ENGLAND
KILN DRYING ASSOCIATION

by J. Harry Rich, Secretary

To be presented at the Sixth Annual Meeting of Western Dry Kiln Clubs, Eureka, Cal.

Fortunate indeed is the association secretary who finds himself surrounded with a group of officers and committee members enthusiastic about the objectives of the association and endowed with the capacities to make all efforts function successfully.

Credit for founding the New England Kiln Drying Association should be given to two men connected with the Forest Utilization Service of the Northeastern Forest Experiment Station, and the nuclear groups of trainees from two separate Two-Weeks kiln drying clinics staffed by personnel from the Forest Products Laboratory. Reference is made firstly to Roy M. Carter, now Professor of Wood Technology at North Carolina State College, whose enthusiasm instigated the formation of two small local associations, one in Maine in 1946, the other in New Hampshire in 1947. The second reference is to Charles R. Lockard, Chief, Forest Utilization Service, Northeastern Forest Experiment Station, who recognized the ever-present need for men trained in wood seasoning and envisioned the potentialities of an industry sponsored regional group of technical men aiming to seek proficiency in this important phase of the wood-using industry.

The two nuclear associations referred to above were the Northeastern Kiln Drying Association and the New England Kiln Drying Association formed respectively in Maine and New Hampshire. Both organizations met at regular intervals and held two very successful joint meetings. Total enrollment in the two groups did not exceed sixty members.

Late in 1950, through unforeseen circumstances in which officers in both organizations either transferred from the region or were promoted to higher responsibilities, there resulted a temporary lag in activities. However, like the Long Leaf pine seedling, growth in the root was still taking place awaiting an opportunity to burst forth into a more vigorous life.

It was at this time that Charles R. Lockard persuaded the present secretary to offer his services to fill a vacancy, as secretary of the New England Kiln Drying Association. As a result notices were sent to members of both groups inviting attendance at a meeting held in Gardner, Massachusetts, November 1950 in conjunction with the Northeastern Section of the Forest Products Research Society. About thirty men attended. Temporary officers were elected and it was decided to hold a reorganizational meeting the following Spring. The writer agreed to serve as temporary secretary with Irwin Elkins of Keene, New Hampshire and Leon M. Fiske of Greenfield, Massachusetts, both custom kiln dryers, agreeing to act as co-chairmen of the proposed meeting.

Consequently a careful study was made to determine prerequisites for a successful Kiln Drying Association. The temporary officers met at various times and also consulted with the management of leading wood-using establishments.

The result was a list of "musts" compiled as follows:

1. - MEMBERSHIP in the Association must be large enough to justify the procurement of outstanding speakers at meetings.
2. - MANAGEMENT must be sufficiently interested to encourage kiln operators to attend meetings.
3. - WELCOME by the Association must be extended to all those concerned with any wood-seasoning problem.
4. - ADULT EDUCATION must be a function of the Association to provide opportunities to learn the fundamentals of wood-moisture relations and their application to practical wood seasoning.
5. - CONTACT WITH MEMBERS must be maintained.
6. - REGULAR MEETINGS must be held to which members may look forward. Such meetings must provide technical information to satisfy both operator and management.
7. - An opportunity for EXCHANGE OF IDEAS and DISCUSSION OF PROBLEMS must be provided.
8. - CLEARING HOUSE facilities must be available to handle the numerous inquiries received.
9. - EXPERIMENTAL WORK POSSIBILITIES with member cooperation must be recognized.

Let us see how closely we have followed this synoptic approach.

1. - Our membership now exceeds 150. We have used no ballyhoo or circus tactics. We have secured top notch speakers and tried to make all meetings instructive and of interest to all segments of the wood-seasoning fraternity. Over 100 interested attendees at our March '51 meeting at Keene, N. H. resulted in our amalgamation with the Northeastern Kiln Drying Association and also proved there was need for such meetings.
2. - Management is interested. As secretary-treasurer I know that most annual dues (\$2.00 per year) are paid with company checks. Some companies enroll 4 to 6 members. Management of various companies have inferred they would like to do more. Of course many small concerns and individuals are members. We keep adding likely prospects to our mailing list. One recipient of our bulletins wrote, "I work alone in my basement shop. Already the information you have sent me has been of considerable value. Am I too small to become a member?"
3. - We welcome all who are concerned with wood seasoning problems. Fundamentals are the same whether wood is dried in a kiln or in an open field. We welcome the manufacturer or handler, large or small, who by a more thorough understanding of wood-moisture relations will be better able to manufacture, store, and distribute quality lumber with less seasoning degrade. Some of our most enthusiastic members are lumber dealers.
5. - The association must function as a medium of Adult Education. Only a few of our wood-using establishments feel they can hire a competent wood technologist.

Such a man would probably have only general supervision of seasoning but might also be concerned with problems of adhesives, machinery, finishing, and structural design in which case he would delegate kiln drying to a subordinate susceptible to technical training in that specialized field. It is often difficult for the small outfit to justify the salary of a well trained wood specialist and consequently the problems of seasoning are delegated to some bright dependable but untrained employee assuming that he will learn by experience. It is comparable to promoting to head surgeon, a hospital attendant who has carried bed pans for several years.

Self education is a wonderful thing, but it can be greatly expanded by providing incentive, developing imagination and giving encouragement - - three important aids to Adult Education. The theory that older men have lost their capacity for learning has long since been exploded.

Management and kiln operators alike can be sold on the value of knowing the fundamentals of wood structure and characteristics and their application to the various techniques of seasoning. The Association can provide this Adult Education through meetings of various kinds: clinics, demonstrations and other opportunities for detailed discussions and through the distribution of new information on seasoning practices.

One kiln operator has remarked, "Even before we had a kiln drying association, Joe, Al, and I used to meet at the drug store and hash over our common problems."

We believe that the wood-using industry, comprising both large and small units is willing to underwrite, as a sound investment, the cost of Adult Education available through Short Courses, Clinics, and Demonstrations. This statement is based on our own experience with two Six-Day Kiln Drying Clinics, staffed by personnel from the Forest Products Laboratory. Comments from the Industry prompts us to sponsor annually in September a similarly staffed Six-Day Kiln Drying Clinic.

5. - Keeping in contact with members. The association issues 8 to 10 bulletins annually, giving lists of members, attendees at meetings, association reports and announcement of forthcoming meetings. Enclosures include also reprints, and abstracts of specific and sometimes new information on seasoning.

6. - Regular meetings - we are confident our members look forward to our regular meetings. These are announced several months in advance. We hold two general meetings each year; a one-day meeting in March or April, a two-day meeting in September. New and prospective members write to say they hope to be informed of the next meeting. Members of long standing contribute ideas. Chambers of Commerce, Units of Industry, and Educational institutions vie with each other to sponsor our meetings.

7. - The kiln operator and other technicians concerned with seasoning enjoy most the Question and Answer form of meeting. Such an individual usually has a very definite problem and he wants help. Perhaps there is someone else present who had had the same problem and solved it. Often a man will come from such a meeting with what to him is a "brand new idea". The value of such a meeting may well be illustrated as follows. Two men each have a dollar. Each gives the other his dollar. They still have only one dollar each. Two men each have an idea. Each gives the other his idea. They both have two ideas.

8. - Yes, we operate a clearing house. We can't give all the answers but we do refer inquiries to those we consider competent to answer them. Of course, we must use discretion. If a man asks, what dry kiln is best, we send him a list of manufacturers and tell him to inspect various installations. If he asks how to avoid brown stain in soft pine, we may be more specific.

9. - Experimental work is something that intrigues all who become interested in it. There are many research projects where the man on the job can be of much cooperative value. Many of our members have provided written reports on tests of schedules and the field is wide open for much constructive work.

During this discussion frequent reference has been made to the part Management has played in our organization. Our concept of seasoning is that it is a very definite part of Quality Control and as such is a segment of Management. We are confident that Management is as much interested in our activities as are the kiln operators it sends to our meetings. We believe we are rendering a valuable service to the wood-using industry and we also believe our success depends on a two fold service; to management we help make available better trained and more efficient co-workers; to the individual, carefully selected by his employer, we provide opportunity and encouragement to learn the intricacies of wood seasoning and to find satisfaction in a highly technical and interesting work.