BRIEF HISTORY OF THE KILN CLUBS IN WESTERN UNITED STATES AND BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Annual Meetings

Some kiln associations (clubs) were first organized on the west coast in the 1930s by kiln foremen, sawmill managers, members of trade associations and equipment manufacturers. The purpose of the clubs was to improve lumber seasoning through friendly cooperation and exchange of ideas. There were seven kiln clubs in the western U.S. and three in British Columbia from the 1930s to the 1960s. Presently, the West Coast Dry Kiln Association remains active. The Washington-Idaho-Montana Dry Kiln Association had one or two meetings per year but I am not sure if this group is active. Two Kiln Clubs in British Columbia are not active; however the Interior Kiln Drying Association may still be active. In the 1960s, all active kiln clubs had exchanged the word "clubs" for association. The reason for this change was that most kiln club members felt club referred to a social group.

The following are the kiln "clubs" that existed in 1955:

- Eastern Oregon-Southern Idaho Dry Kiln Club (EOSI)
- Central California Dry Kiln Club (CC)
- Redwood Seasoning Committee (RSC)
- Southern California Lumber Seasoning Association (SCLS)
- Southern Oregon-Northern California Seasoning Club (SONC)
- Southwest Lumber Seasoning Club (SLS)
- Washington-Idaho-Montana Lumber Seasoning Club (WIM)
- West Coat Dry Kiln Club (WC)
- Vancouver Island Dry Kiln Operators Society (VI)
- Vancouver Coast Dry Kiln Club—not sure of exact title (VC)
- B.C. Interior Dry Kiln Club—not sure of exact title (BCI)

In interest of brevity, I will use the word club instead of Association. Also, I designate each club by a letter code, as shown above. The first annual Kiln Club Meeting was held in 1948 with the Forest Products Society in Spokane, Washington. Since 1949, the annual meetings have been hosted by one of the Kiln Clubs. The meetings consisted of a mill tour, three technical sessions, and each Club would present a 15 minute paper on kiln drying. The wives would tour special areas, such as a Japanese garden, and old restored areas in a city. A banquet and entertainment closed the annual meeting. This agenda was followed until the 1980s. The length of the meetings varied from two to three days. Individual kiln club presentations were abandoned in the mid-1960s because of lack of interest and a decline in kiln club attendance. This decline can be attributed to mill closures; lack of interest by both kiln operators and management; and management unwilling to fund their personnel to attend local and/or annual meetings.
An attempt was made in 1980 to increase attendance at the annual meetings. A half-day was added for a show and tell by the equipment manufacturers and suppliers; registration; cocktail hour with snacks and fun entertainment. A similar program exists today but has been condensed to a two day program.

Proceedings of other annual meetings were published by the host kiln club until 1962. The West Coast Dry Kiln Association assumed the publication of the proceedings from 1963 to the present time.

Kiln Clubs Status and Local Meetings

The Eastern Oregon-Southern Idaho Dry Kiln Club was supported by the Western Pine Association. I do not know when this Kiln Club was formed but there was poor support by the kiln operators and mill management. They did host an annual meeting in Boise, Idaho in the early 1950s. The Kiln Club ceased to exist in the 1960s and the remaining money in their treasury was given to the West Coast Dry Kiln Association. Some of their members became active in the WC and WIM Kiln Clubs. Mr. Edwin Knight assisted the EOSI with their meetings from the 1950s into the 1960s. Also, Mr. Knight was active in the CC, SONC, and WC Kiln Clubs when he was with the Western Pine Association and Western Wood Products Association.

The Central California Dry Kiln Club was supported by Mr. Harvey Smith of the Southwest Forest and Range Experiment Station during the 1950s and 1960s. Further support came from the California Forest Products Laboratory through Bill Dost, Steve Quarles and Tom Breiner. I do not know when the CC Club was formed. The Club had 2 to 4 local meetings per year from the 1950s into the 1980s or early 1990s. The CC Club hosted several annual meetings in Berkeley and Redding, California. The Club ceased functioning due to closure of many mills. Some of the members continue to attend the annual meetings.

The Redwood Seasoning Committee was sponsored by the California Redwood Association. They had several meetings a year and hosted annual meetings in Eureka, California. The attendance was very large, maybe all you could eat of fresh Dungeness crab with salad and beer was the reason? The RSC presented excellent technical reports at the annual meetings in the 1950s. After the closure of many redwood mills, the RSC membership did not exist but a few of the redwood sawmill personnel attended the annual meetings.

The Southern California Lumber Seasoning Association located in the greater Los Angeles area was active from the 1950s to the mid-1960s. They hosted an annual meeting in 1958 and most of the attendance was from the Los Angeles area. The membership consisted of kiln operators to general managers. Mr. Robert Inglis was secretary of SCLS that was active in the 1950s and early 1960s. The Southern Oregon-Northern California Seasoning Club was founded about 1930 making it the first Kiln Club in the western United States. Mr. Heber Radcliff was the key person in organizing this Club and assisting other persons in other areas to organize a Kiln Club. Members in Klamath Falls, Oregon in 1930 evaluated the drying efficiency of a new Moore dry kiln. They collected data every hour on air velocity (entering and leaving); dry and wet bulb temperatures; steam consumption for heating coils and spray line; and moisture content of the lumber using kiln samples. The SONC was first to recognize that the importance of temperature drop across the load was to prevent brown stain and to optimize the kiln schedule. This Kiln Club continued research to ensure annual meetings in Medford and Klamath Falls, Oregon. The SONC membership diminished because of an increase in
mill closures, management not recognizing the value of kiln clubs, and environmental issues, etc. The remaining members were invited to join the CC and WC kiln clubs.

The Southwest Lumber Seasoning Club was formed during the 1950s. The membership was small with limited leadership, so the Kiln Club was not functioning in the 1960s. A few members and other personnel from this region did attend some annual meetings.

The Washington-Idaho-Montana Lumber Seasoning Club was organized in the early 1940s. Edwin Knight, Richard Schmautz and James Pickens were among the few who supported this club into the 1970s. Activity declined for a period of time until 1980-90s, when Mr. Orlin Galloway stimulated interest in this club. The club had two meetings per year and had to deal with a number of species including spruce-pine-fir; lodgepole and Ponderosa pine; western cedar; and larch. The different species and small logs created a real challenge in kiln drying. The club hosted the annual meetings in Missoula, Montana, and Coeur d’Alene, Idaho. I think this group is presently active because many persons from this area attend the annual meetings.

I am grouping the British Columbia kiln clubs together because I am not that familiar with their organizations, local meetings or key personnel. The clubs located in the Vancouver area and on Vancouver Island were supported by Forintek and the Council of Forest Industries of British Columbia. The clubs in the interior were supported by Forintek and the grading associations in their area. An excellent relationship existed between the BC clubs and the WC and WIM clubs. There were annual meetings between the BC clubs and the US clubs about every 8 years from the mid-1960s to 1990s.

The West Coast Kiln Association had its first meeting on October 19, 1940 to name the organization and outline the association’s purpose and policies. Briefly the purpose was proper seasoning to make lumber more suitable for its final use and increase the value of seasoned lumber. The members discussed mutual problems and coordinated information by exchange of ideas to improve drying quality. Fifteen kiln operators and Mr. Art Mottet and Mr. D.J. Hill from the West Coast Lumbermen’s Association (WCLA) were the organizers of the Kiln Association. The WCLA and the Western Pine Association merged to become the Western Wood Products Association.

The next meeting on November 16, 1940 was devoted to discussions on warped lumber, drying schedules, and kiln construction. The first Chair was Mr. A.W. Lahey from Snoqualmie Falls Lumber Company and the secretary was Mr. D.J. Hill from WCLA. A new chair was chosen each year and Mr. Mottet was secretary from June 1941 to January 1946. By October 1941 the membership had grown to 78 members and they held a meeting each month. In 1942, the U.S. Government was defining kiln drying specifications for aircraft lumber, timbers, and lumber for general use. Mr. L.A. Nelson of WCLA was the liaison to mill personnel for fulfilling the government specifications. During World War II, the Kiln Club had meetings nearly every month to discuss and address the U.S. Government drying specifications.

After the war, the Club met about 4 to 6 times per year. Mr. Archie Knauss of the Pacific Northwest Forest and Range Experiment Station, Mr. L.A. Nelson of WCLA and Mr. L. Espenas of the Oregon Forest Products Laboratory became members of the Club. They participated in the meetings and led the discussions on problems from kiln schedules to kiln maintenance and encouraged kiln operators to explore any ideas, such as decreasing kiln time to reducing drying degrade.
The number of meetings after World War II dropped to 5 to 6 meetings per year until the 1960s. The number of meetings dropped to 3-4 meetings per year during the 1970s to the present. The attendance at the meetings from 1940 to 1950 ranged from 60 to 80 persons. After 1950 to 1985, the attendance varied from 30 to 90 depending on the meeting site. The Club hosted annual meetings in Portland. The West Coast Dry Kiln was a co-host with the CC, SONC, WIM, VI, and VC Kiln Clubs from the mid-1960s to 1996. In 1997, the annual proceedings were named the Joint Meeting of the Kiln Associations in Western North America. The up and down cycles of the lumber markets did not effect the attendance at the annual meetings into the 1980s.

The first dues were $0.25 on June 13, 1953 and the treasury was $11.75. The dues were raised to $1.00 on May 14, 1955 and the treasury was at $151.01. The WCLA gave the Kiln Club $100.00 per year from 1940 to the early 1950s. A joint meeting in 1961 had a $14.00 registration fee for two luncheons and a dinner.