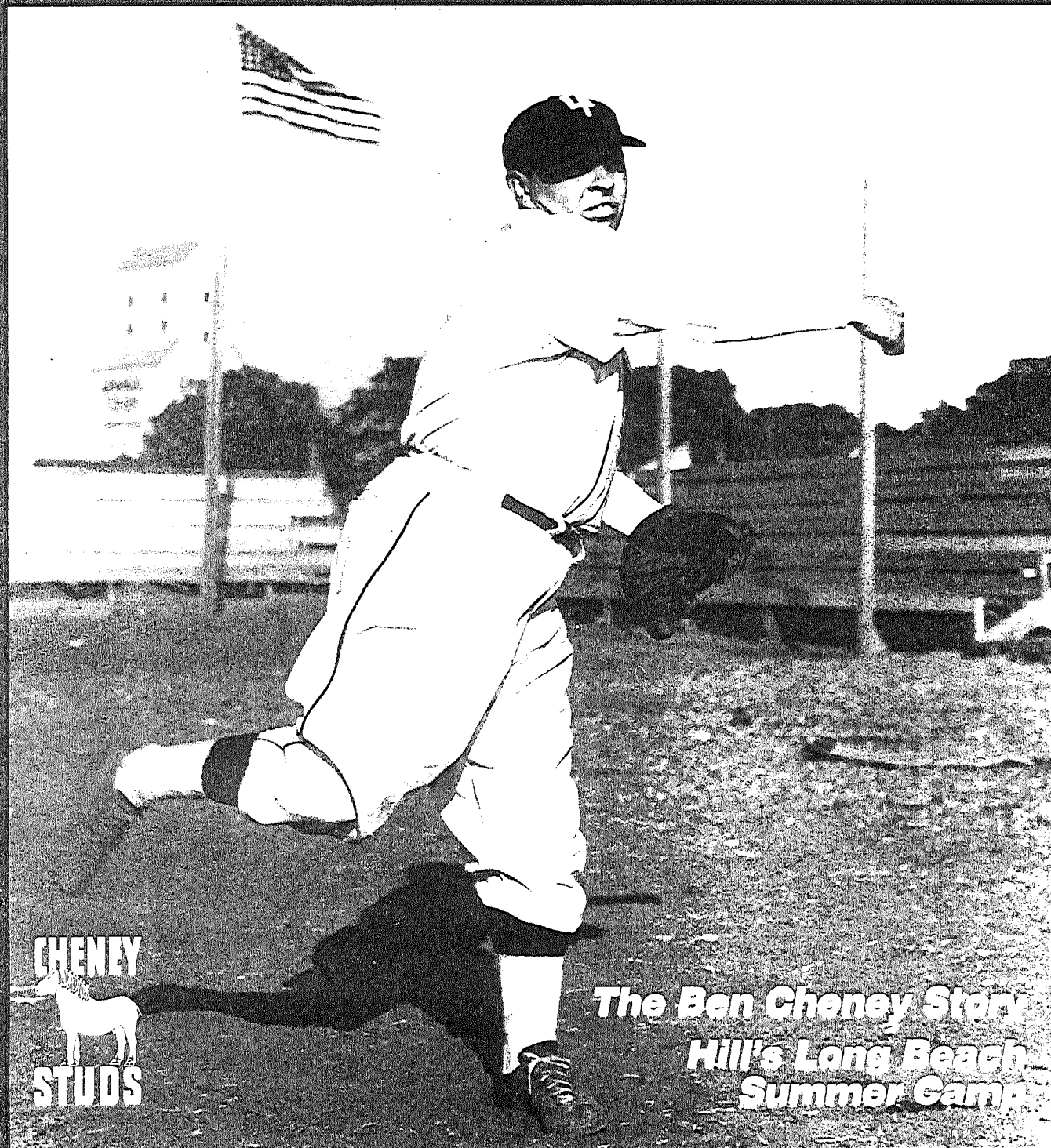


The **Sou'wester**

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The Ben Cheney Story

by Med Nicholson

"Men with his dedication to helping others don't come around too often"

***Earl Luebker, Sports Editor
Tacoma News-Tribune***

Ben Cheney spent ten formative years in South Bend, early in a life story that led from a tiny mountain town in Montana to ownership of a major west coast lumber company, and then to astonishing generosity with the fortune it brought him.

Too poor to buy a street car token when looking for a job in Tacoma at age 19, he became one of the city's leading businessmen and its most faithful supporter of youth sports activities.

Cheney's philanthropies have swelled in recent decades. Established before his death in 1971, the Ben B. Cheney Foundation since 1975 has provided \$231,300 in aid to 11 public and private organizations in Pacific County.

Ben Cheney never forgot his roots in South Bend, and

though he left school before his high school class of 1924 graduated, he returned for at least one reunion, kept up ties with friends there and faithfully attended the Indians' playoff games in Tacoma. He is also remembered for playfully leading SBHS cheers while the pilot of his company plane dutifully circled above the school campus.

Willapa Harbor also played a key role in the growth of Cheney's lumber business. It was from his mill at the Raymond port dock that in 1945 he shipped his first boat-load of two-by-four-by-eights, the innovative product that made Cheney Lumber Co. a major factor in the west coast housing market and an industry leader.

A lifetime interest in sports

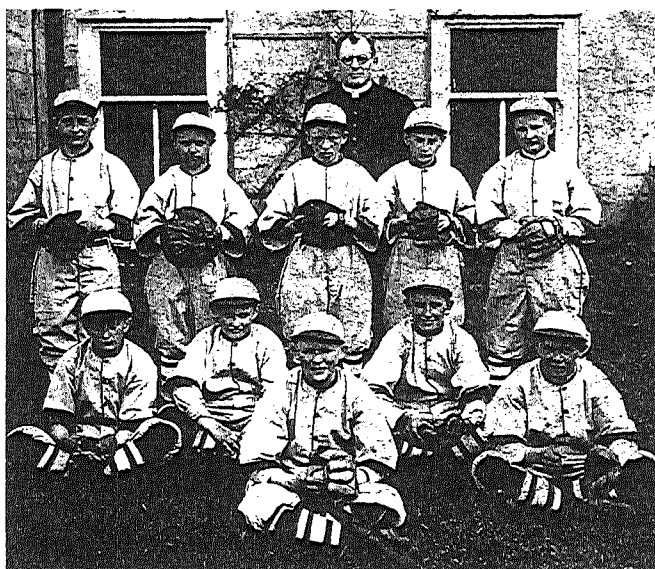
Ben had fun with his business success, and he loved all manner of sports. Curiously, he took up baseball, not at South Bend High School, which did not have a team in those years, but through the encouragement of Father Victor Couverette, pastor of the Catholic churches in South Bend, Raymond and Frances.

Still in his teens, he became a "good field, no hit" short-stop in amateur play for Father Couverette's team, and after moving to Tacoma played in leagues centered in that city, spending countless summer Sundays on the field in places like Tenino, Kalama and Morton.

"Until I was almost 30, I kept trying to make contact with a breaking pitch," Ben told a sportswriter many years later. "It wasn't any use."

Knowing it was time to quit he turned his energies to sponsoring youth leagues and assembling the Cheney Studs team that was good enough one year to win the American Amateur Baseball Congress (AABC) title in Battle Creek, Michigan.

It wasn't until 1959, the year after the New York Giants and Brooklyn Dodgers moved to the west coast that Ben's involvement in big league baseball began. He learned that a small interest in the newly relocated San Francisco Giants



Father Couverette and his Willapa Harbor boys' baseball team in 1922. Ben Cheney was not part of this particular team, but he and many other boys benefited from the father's guidance over the years. From the left, back row: Rene Burdetee, Ed Hudziak, Bob O'Brien, Ed Gacek, and Emil Huter. Front row: John Gacek, Tony Dell, Frank Dick, Al Hudziak, and Walt Sinko. Photo donated by "Babe" Dick, PCHS#8-1-72-6(2).

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was for sale and jumped at the chance to buy it. Soon Ben bought out the large block of stock owned by New York socialite Joan Whitney Payson, who had to dispose of her holdings so she could buy into the brand new New York Mets. Suddenly he was the team's second largest stockholder, his holdings exceeded only by those of quixotic Giants president Horace Stoneham.

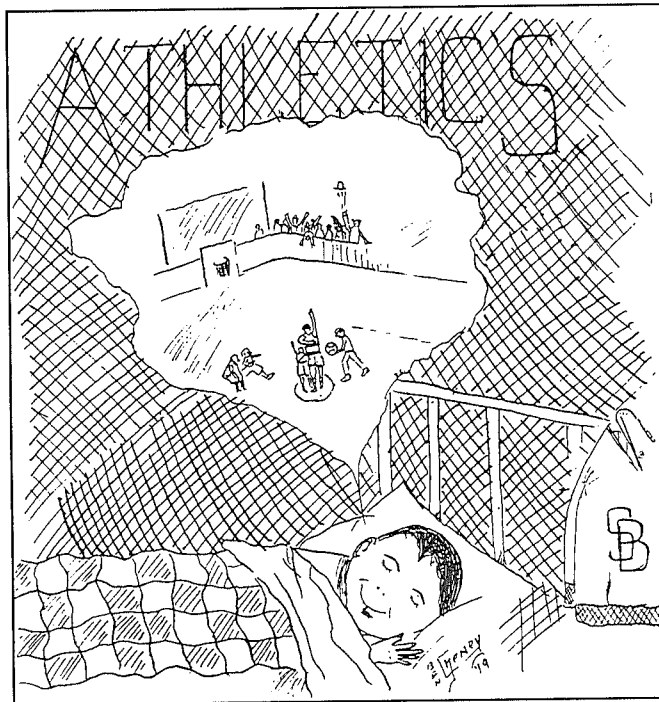
The purchase truly put Ben into the big leagues, and his timing was perfect. His Giants won the National League pennant in 1962, his first year as a major owner and board member.

It is unlikely that any aspect of Ben's elevated position in big time sports gave him as much pleasure as did the opportunity to rub elbows with the ballplayers. Publicity photos survive showing him in a Giants uniform at the team's Arizona spring training camp with such luminaries as the all-time great Willie Mays and Tom Haller, an all-star catcher. In his mid-50s, Ben took infield practice with the Giants during spring training, and he once got on the field as first base coach when the big league Giants came to Tacoma to play an exhibition game against their farm team there.

Quite typically, Ben always remembered to include others in the fun. His secretary during those years, Tina Bemis, remembers that she and her son, Lindsay, catcher for his high school team, were invited to fly down to the Giants' facility at Casa Grande, Arizona, where Lindsay went behind the plate to catch the famed spitballer, Gaylord Perry, as he faced his teammates in practice.



Ben Cheney with Willie Mays, star outfielder for the Giants both before and after their move from New York to San Francisco, in a spring training photo taken in Arizona in 1963. Giants photo provided by Bradbury Cheney.



Ben Cheney dreams of athletic glory in a cartoon he drew for the 1920 Carcowan, the South Bend High School yearbook. Pacific County Historical Society collection.

It was the unlikely realization of a dream of athletic glory that Ben had sketched out for the 1920 Carcowan, the South Bend High School yearbook. A yearbook drawing signed by Ben shows a sleeping youth neatly tucked under the covers of his bed, a wide smile on his face, a SBHS letter sweater hung on the bedpost. A standard cartoon balloon shows what is on Ben's unconscious mind—he has the basketball at centercourt, driving for the hoop, as the crowd cheers in the background.

Ironically, the panel also shows how dreams can garble reality. Standing only five feet, eight inches, Ben didn't play on the varsity basketball team. He did make the football team, however, and was starting quarterback in the fall of 1921 for two of the three games against Lebam, apparently the Indians' only gridiron opponent that year.

The football team photo in the 1922 yearbook shows Ben with the typical high school player's intimidating scowl on his face, but the image he offered the world in the sophomore class photo that year was more cultivated. In it Ben stands at far right in the front row, and the scowl is still there, but he wears a neat dark suit, well-shined oxfords, dark tie and buttoned down white shirt. His hair is brushed straight back in the style also favored by most of his male classmates.

The smiling girl in a jacket and checked skirt next to him is Elizabeth McBride, now Elizabeth Gillies. At 93, still residing in South Bend and a long time volunteer at the Pacific County Historical Society, Mrs. Gillies remembers the photo well. As originally posed, Ben was to be in the top row, but before the shutter was snapped, he dashed down to the front row. "I want to stand next to

you,” he explained to Elizabeth, and that’s how the picture was taken.

She and Ben were good friends, Mrs. Gillies says, and more than once he walked her home from school dances in the Odd Fellows Building all the way up the Fifth Street hill, though they didn’t really “go together.”

Ben is also well remembered by classmate Arnold Leber and his wife Isobel, now living in Longview. Arnold and Elizabeth Gillies are the only two survivors from that 1924 class of 20. The Lebers remember fixing the food for the only reunion Ben attended. This would have been in about 1928 or ‘29, with classmate Harvey Pierson the host at his home down on the North Nemah.

Isobel Leber says that as a boy, Ben didn’t show the ex-

pansive, outgoing personality described by those who got to know him in later life. He was well liked all right, but shy and quiet. He didn’t seem to like school, and he had problems with his teachers, Isobel remembers. She doesn’t know why.

Arnold, left guard on the 1921 football team Ben quarterbacked, can still tick off Ben’s friends in the class of 1924: George Newton, Vern Morgus, Norm Cressy, George Ogren, Fred Floetke, and Pierson.

Arnold agrees with newspaper stories that Father Couverette had a key role in encouraging Ben’s love of baseball. As a matter of fact, Father Couverette sponsored South Bend’s entire teenage team, buying the uniforms and equipment and even giving the boys streetcar fare to get to their games in Raymond.

From Lima, Montana, to South Bend

Ben and his younger sister Lula were living with their grandparents, B. F. (for Benjamin Franklin, and known as Frank) and Rebecca Cheney, who in 1911 came from the tiny town of Lima, Montana, to open a photo studio.

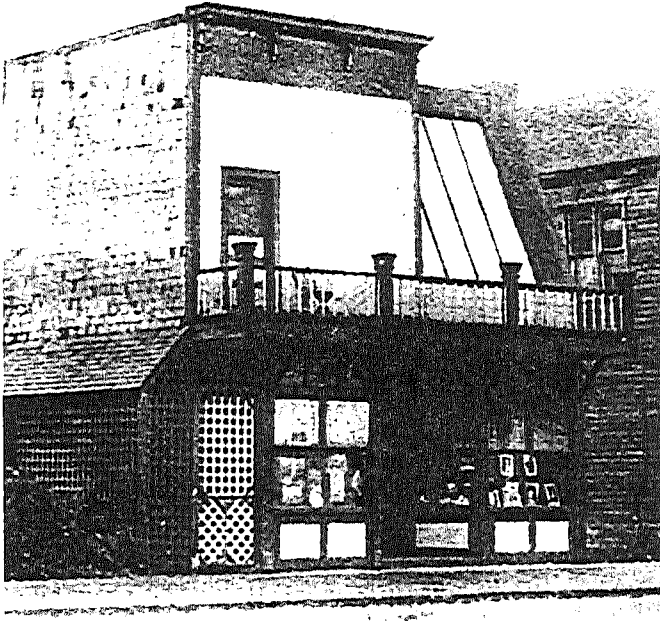
A story in the South Bend Journal Jan. 20, 1911, said B. F. spent a “number of days looking over South Bend and Raymond” before settling “on the Stevens block, where the old Gylfe studio used to be.” The Journal article said the

Cheneys’ decision was “good news to the public.” It noted that Mrs. Cheney, who was not along on the scouting trip, was “an experienced photographer,” a judgment consistent with recent observations of South Bend residents who remember the senior Cheneys. Mrs. Cheney seemed to run the studio, and run it well.

A year and a half later, on July 26, 1912, the competing Willapa Harbor Pilot broke the news that the Cheneys were



Ben Cheney's sophomore class picture for the 1922 Carcowan (yearbook) at South Bend High School. From left, first row, Clyde Millam, George Ogren, Arthur McAninch, Salome Gerwig, Gladys Geer, Marie Leber, Richard Adkins, Elizabeth McBride, Ben Cheney; second row, Vern Morgus, Malcolm Jack, Mildred Hansen, Sylvia Hansen, Sylvia Johnson, Bernice Throdahl, Edith Wilson, Mabel Christofferson, Carrie Gillam, Laura Goodpasture; third row, Harvey Pierson, George Newton, Floyd Hyde, Marie Monchon, Eva Hoeck, Mary Jane Dever. Photo scanned from the 1922 Carcowan.



The Cheney Photo Studio at 712 West Water Street (Highway 101) in South Bend. Ben's grandparents operated this studio from 1912 until about 1933. Both of the elder Cheneyes were photographers. The Pacific county Historical Society's collection contains hundreds of their images documenting the early 20th century life of South Bend. Photo courtesy of Glenwood Cheney.

going to put up a new building. "B. F. Cheney, the photographer, is clearing the lot formerly occupied by a blacksmith shop on Water Street (now Robert Bush Drive, ed.), just opposite Miss Nelson's millinery store. He will put up a building and occupy it as a studio." South Bend residents of a certain age who remember the studio on Water Street and had their picture taken there believe that B. F., Rebecca, Ben and Lula lived in an apartment right above the studio.

Ben, born March 24, 1905, in Lima, was nine-years-old when he and sister Lula came from Montana after the death of their mother. Martha Kidd Cheney died in a Pocatello, Idaho, hospital January 2, 1914, and was buried in the Rupert-Burley, Idaho, area. Soon thereafter B. F. and Rebecca returned to Lima to pick up their son John's two youngsters. The children began new lives in South Bend but their widower father remained in Montana, where he remarried and fathered a son who died in infancy. However, by the mid 1920s John and his second wife had also moved west to Tacoma, where he died January 13, 1959 at the age of 74, possibly after another residency in the Lima area.

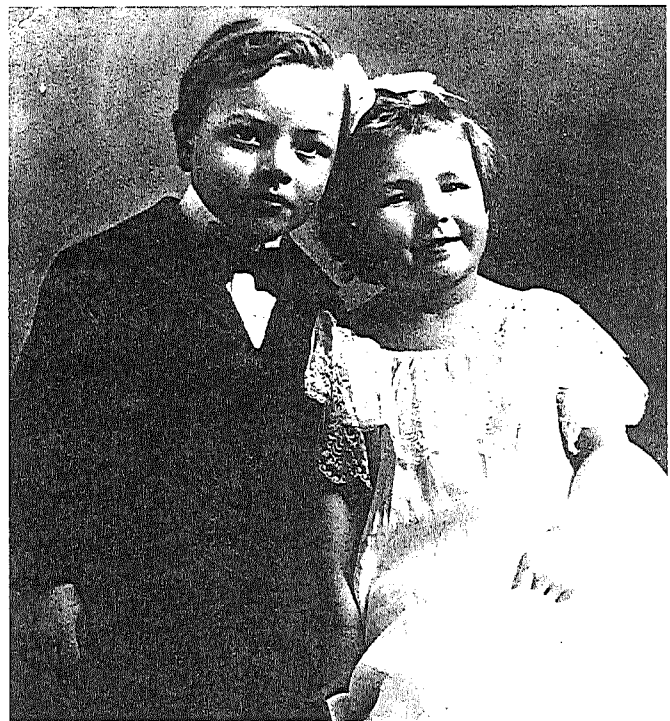
The loss of both parents, one by death and the other by something close to abandonment, had to be a terrible blow to Ben and Lula. From the testimony of those who remember Ben, he came to love his grandfather Frank greatly and to idolize his grandmother Rebecca. It was an affection that he signalled years later by naming his firstborn daughter Piper, his grandmother's maiden name. From 1914 on, Ben's primary family ties were to his grandparents.

The senior Cheneyes had arrived in South Bend in 1911 in the next to last move in a coast-to-coast migration. As compiled from newspaper stories and recollections of a cousin, Bonnie Merrell, 91, of Lima, they were natives of Pennsylvania, married in Iowa, farmed in Nebraska, and opened their first photo studio in Lima.

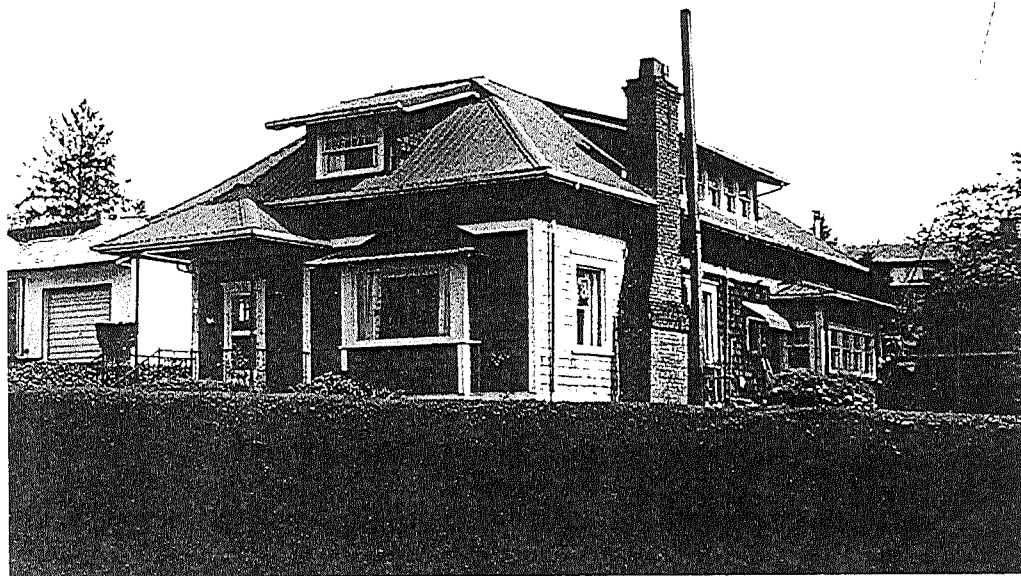
"He was the kind that moved on," Mrs. Merrell said in a phone conversation from Lima early this year. "After they were here a while, he was ready to move on. That's the way this country was built."

By 1911 the Cheneyes probably sensed that Lima, a railroad town of 200 persons in the shadow of the Continental Divide, wasn't ever going to amount to much. Two of their sons, Glenn and Victor, had already moved on to South Bend, Washington, on the Willapa River estuary in the heart of the booming timber industry. Why not follow them?

Yet the restless, innovative life that Ben Cheney was to make for himself may have been foretold by his father John's life as well as those of his grandparents. John began his working life in the adventurous job of driving tourists bound for Yellowstone National Park on a stagecoach route from Monida, Idaho, to West Yellowstone, Montana. He was later able to get work on the Union Pacific Railroad as a fireman assigned to the run into Burley, Idaho, in the Snake River



Ben looks to be five years old and his sister Lula three in this portrait photo, almost certainly taken in Lima, Montana, by their grandfather, Benjamin Franklin Cheney. B. F. Cheney's brother William was also a photographer in Lima. A photo-essay of W. T. Cheney images was published in the Colorado Rail Annual No. 15, from the Colorado Railroad Museum in Golden, Colorado. W. T. Cheney's daughter Bonne Merrell donated the original photos to the Montana Historical Society. Tacoma Public Library collection.



Ben's uncle Glen Cheney lived in this house on top of Eklund Park hill in South Bend. In 1912 Glen Cheney had a management job with the Columbia box sawmill down the hill. this house currently belongs to Rober and Annette Oblad. May, 2000 photo by Bruce Weillepp.

valley. There he met Martha Agnes Kidd, whom he married in 1903 and brought back to Lima.

Cousin Bonnie thinks John may have stayed behind in Lima after Martha died because he had a good job on the railroad, though he later gave it up to become a cowboy on the Glead brothers ranch in nearby Centennial Valley. Maybe he was simply restless; suffice it to say that all his life, Ben talked about his grandparents, South Bend, and the friends he made there, but rarely about his father who had stayed behind.

From South Bend to Tacoma

That Ben Cheney's formative years in South Bend were critical to his huge success in business is indisputable. So too, his deep love for his grandparents has to have been an important element in nurturing the philanthropic instincts that eventually led him to give back to the community so much of his great fortune.

But why he left South Bend High School two years before graduation is puzzling. Lack of money might have been involved, but if the Cheneyes were poor, they had a lot of company in South Bend. Maybe Ben, showing the same impatience with the status quo that marked his later business career, simply wanted to get on with his life.

In any event, he quit school—regretfully, he years later confided to his secretary, Tina Bemis—and spent the next year or so working in the woods as a whistlepunk and choker setter for Arthur Hammond and in the Columbia Box and Lumber Co. mill.

Several factors suggest why he decided at the age of 19 to seek a new life in Tacoma, so far removed both culturally and geographically from the woods and mills of Willapa Harbor. For one thing, though quick and agile, Ben probably wasn't big enough to excel in arduous physical work of the woods and mill. For another, his grandparents' status as business owners may have nurtured ambitions higher than he could expect to realize in South Bend. Then too, Ben's father John was by then relocated in Tacoma with a new wife, Irene, who "had reined him in," according to cousin Bonnie Merrell. Perhaps John urged his son to make the move.

And finally, after four westward moves the senior

Cheneyes may have viewed their experience in South Bend as another discouraging one, for the city's population and economic strength, key factors in the success of any retail business, had peaked about the time the Cheneyes arrived from Montana. Realizing that their bright young grandson was bent on enrolling in business school, B. F. and Rebecca could well have sensed that he would need a larger setting, and thus have encouraged the move.

So Ben was off to Tacoma and a course in stenography at Knapp Business College. In later years he liked to tell a story showing how broke he was when he got his diploma and had an interview set up at Dempsey Lumber Co. downtown. It also reflects the imagination and pride with which he attacked business problems throughout his life.

The challenge was to get on the streetcar headed downtown even though he was stony, cold, completely broke. A friend was to get on the car first, pay his fare, go to the rear of the car, and toss his pass out the window for Ben's use. But the pass fluttered out of Ben's grasp onto the pavement as other passengers watched. Too embarrassed to pick up the pass, Ben walked downtown, sold himself in the interview, and was hired at \$85 per month.

The Tacoma city directory for 1926 shows that Ben and his dad were living next door to each other, Ben at 3513 1/2 McKinley, his father and step-mother Irene next door at 3515 1/2, and sister Lula with them. Father and son were both employed at Dempsey Lumber, Ben as a stenographer and John as a truck driver. Whether either helped the other get a job at Dempsey has not been preserved in family lore.

When B. F. and Rebecca celebrated their golden wedding anniversary on September 14, 1931, with an open house at their photo studio in South Bend, a story in the South Bend Journal suggests that Glenn and Victor attended, but John is listed only as living in Montana. Grandchildren at the party weren't identified by name in the account.

Two years later, in September, 1933, the grandparents

were both injured in an auto accident in Chehalis. Sometime between then and 1940, when they were missing from the South Bend city directory, they closed their photo studio and moved to Portland. B. F. Cheney died there August 30, 1939, and his wife died almost three years later on May 1, 1942. By then, Ben was alone in the world and his career was accelerating.

Early struggles in the lumber business

Remaining in Tacoma, in 1929 he switched from Dempsey to Fairhurst Lumber, where he became office manager and developed a close business relationship with Gene Grant, a Fairhurst salesman who was to remain a lifelong friend and business associate. When Ben decided to strike out on his own in 1936, Grant joined him almost immediately, the first of many employees who would "walk through walls" to complete an assignment for Ben, in the recollection of his attorney and confidante, John Hansler.

"That sounds like a fair assessment," Grant agreed recently. "We were always in accord." At 88, he lives with his wife in Sun Valley, Idaho, and is still skiing, "though not the steep slopes anymore."

In 1936 the whole country was still wallowing in the depression and many mills around Tacoma were shut down, but Ben found a mill set up to produce railroad ties near the city and located in the middle of a good stand of timber. He was able to buy it for \$14,200 from savings he had accumulated over the last 12 years.

Cheney Lumber Co. was in business, but unfortunately American railroads weren't buying many railroad ties, and after a year the books showed a loss of \$511.96 on the sale of 14 million feet of lumber. So Ben tried a new tack, traveling to China, where he obtained an order from the Chinese government for as many ties as he could deliver.

It was a great break, but still he had to produce and ship. Back in Tacoma, he and Gene Grant contracted with other small mills to help fill the order, earning Cheney a commission but allowing the company to avoid tying up its money in production costs. Attorney Hansler describes the technique as an

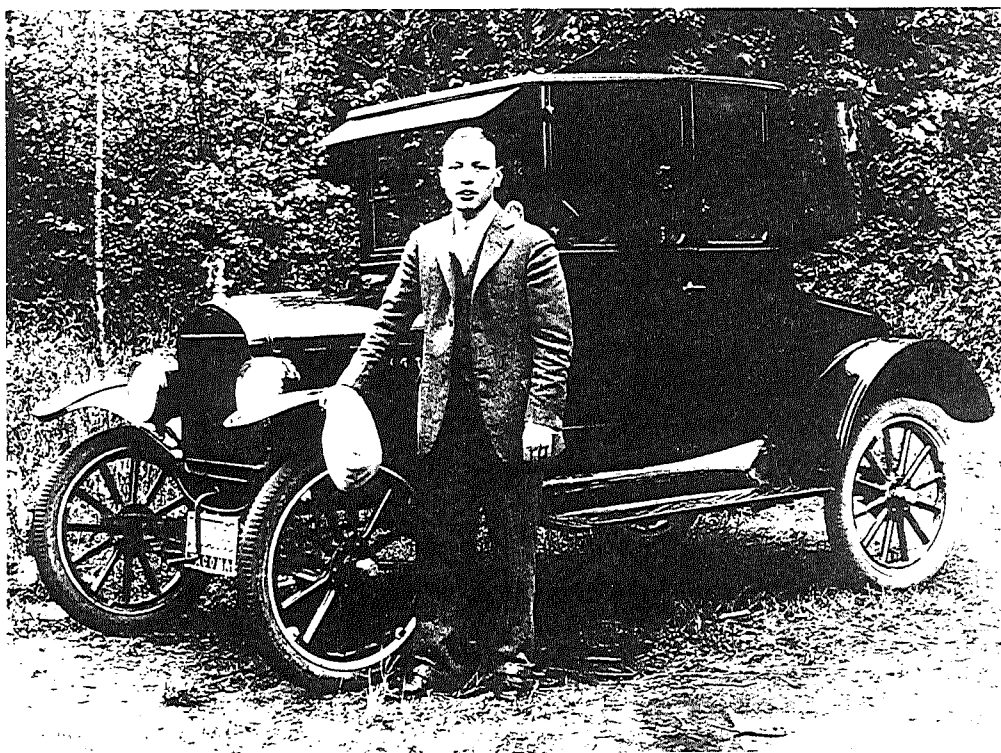
early use of Ben's great gift for overcoming business roadblocks.

"He had so much energy, he was so resourceful,"

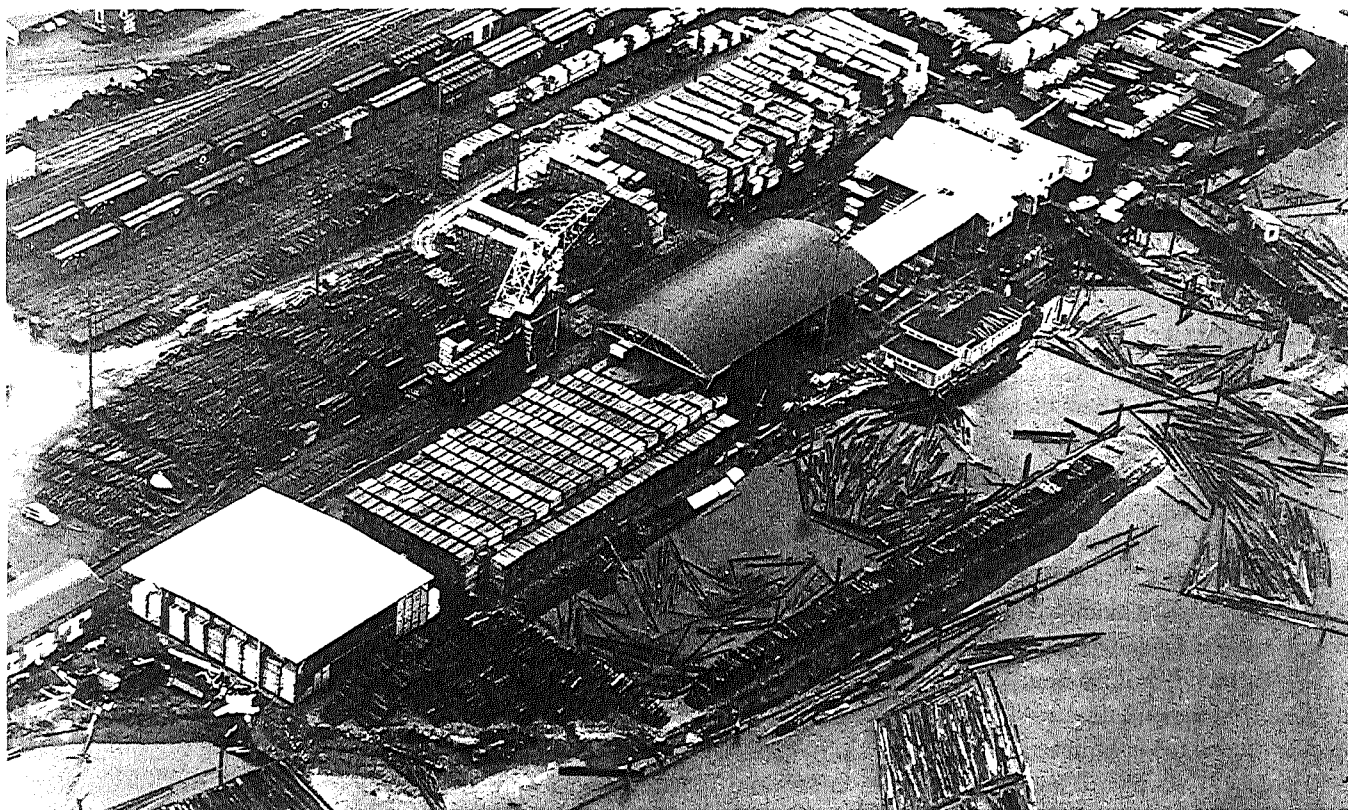
Hansler said. "If there was a problem, he would find an answer

There was still a problem. The railroad ties were piling up on the docks, but the steamship company wouldn't load them until it was paid or Ben showed them a letter of credit. Ben went to every bank in Tacoma, and they all turned him down. His situation became desperate. If Ben couldn't ship the ties to China his company might well collapse. At the very last minute, a bank outside Tacoma extended the needed credit, the ties were loaded, and the slow boat got to China in the nick of time to avoid default on filling the huge order.

Telling the story with relish recently, attorney Hansler couldn't resist pointing out that as Cheney Lumber Co. grew and prospered, the very banks which had turned Ben down in the early days came a'courting and one (National Bank of



Ben is a proud young man as he poses with a shiny new car, probably his first. The car is believed by Landy Briney of the Pacific County Cruisers to be a Model T, circa 1925. Tacoma Public Library Collection.



Cheney Lumber Company operated this mill at the Port of Tacoma. Tacoma Public Library, Richards collection.

Washington, later merged with Pacific National and now part of the Wells Fargo chain) even put him on its board of directors.

At the peak of his concentration on railroad ties in the late 1930s, Ben was arguably the largest supplier of ties to the North American railroad industry. He was wholesaling the production of 140 portable lumber mills throughout the northwest, selling their ties on a commission basis "without the

scratch of a pen" and proudly guarding his reputation as an ethical businessman. "His word was his bond, and his hours were long and hard," Crow's Lumber Digest wrote in 1959.

But times were changing. It was becoming more difficult to obtain cheaply the small tracts of timber in which Ben and his tie producers set up their portable mills, and the side-cut slab wastage was enormous, often two-thirds of the log.

From railroad ties to 2 x 4 studs

What to do with the slabs baffled Cheney. Broom handles? No. Fence posts? No. Lath? No. Toothpicks? Of course not. The solution came to Ben in the middle of the night: Why not supply the housing market with standard eight-foot studding, the same length railroad ties were cut. Many ceilings were then eight and a half feet, and builders were taking any length stud they could get, often ten or 12 feet. The waste was enormous.

"After that," Ben told Crow's Lumber Digest, "I couldn't sleep for thinking of the whole thing." He bought a squarehead Berlin planer from an old mill at Mukilteo for \$200, and traded the scrap of another mill for an edger. Thus was born the first Cheney stud mill at National, WA near Eatonville.

Production rose quickly, particularly after Ben testified at a meeting of the Interstate Commerce Commission in Washington, D. C., and showed photos demonstrating the difference between lumber and waste slabs. Convinced, the

ICC ordered a new, lower rate on rail transport of slab waste. It thus became much more economical to bring the slabs in to a central stud mill for production. Cheney obtained a car-load order for studs from an Oregon builder, and mills were established at Willapa Harbor, Vancouver, Chehalis, and Tacoma.

Ben was a skilled marketer. His eight-foot pieces had long been called "shorts" in the lumber trade. Viewing this as a derogatory term, Ben conceived of a new logo to be stamped on each stud, using the silhouette of a well endowed Belgian stud horse he had seen at the Puyallup Fair. He also painted the two-by-four ends with bright red wax for instant identification. His product was no longer a "short." It had become a "Cheney Stud."

The new product soon established the standard room height in residential construction throughout the United States, putting to use an enormous amount of formerly wasted timber and incidentally saving American homeowners

uncounted millions of dollars in heating expense by reducing the height of their ceilings.

Ron Magden, historian, author and retired faculty member at Tacoma Community College, found that thirty or more retired longshoremen remembered Ben fondly at a recent meeting of the retirees club. More than sixty years after they had worked for him several said that Ben kept the men on the payroll during slow times. When they were injured or too old to handle the arduous job of loading eight-foot studs onto railroad boxcars, he found easier duties for them, like night watchman.

Ben preferred to talk to the men one-on-one rather than in groups, several retirees told Magden, but he was approachable and an enthusiastic participant in games of catch they played during work breaks. He delighted in awing on-lookers with his ambidextrous skills. "First he would fire half a dozen pitches left handed and then follow up with half a dozen right handed throws at the same velocity," one longshoreman told Magden.

In Raymond, the first boatload of Cheney studs was shipped from the mill on the Willapa Port dock, where Ben was the second of six lumbermen to operate a mill between 1940 and 1977. As pieced together from Port records and newspaper accounts, Ben's mill was built by Ralph Tozier

in 1940 and acquired early in its life cycle by Ben's Port Lumber Co., which owned it from 1945 to 1949.

The next owner was Port Dock Lumber Co., the principals of which were Gordon Stine, Elwood Stout, Roy Wadhams, and Ralph Rosendahl. In 1951, the building burned and the property was acquired by Slattery Hardwood for use as an alder mill. Bert Korevaar and Louis Dokter converted the space to a shake mill in 1962, and Harvey Sedy took the property over for his Raymond Shake Co in 1968. Raymond Shake's bankruptcy in 1976 and the end of dredging at the Willapa bar ended the era of lumber mills at the Raymond Port.

Gene Grant never forgot the details or importance of that first boatload of Cheney studs that went out from Willapa Harbor. Many years later he wrote that it went to Burns Lumber Co. "on board the Lurlene Burns with a price of \$12.50 per thousand feet, F.A.S. vessel for standard and better grade Douglas Fir two-by-four-by-eight. This shipment was made at the Willapa Harbor port dock, destined for Wilmington, California."

By 1959, when the Crow's Lumber Digest story appeared, Cheney studs were well established in the trade, and the company production was approaching 100 million board feet a year. New mills had been established at Myrtle Point



A 2 x 4 stud mill at the Port of Willapa Harbor in Raymond. Ralph Tozier, who sold this sawmill to Ben Cheney in 1945, is with his staff and standing at right. Kneeling from left, Verne Little, (unknown first and last names), Bloddy Klonius, Elof Erickson, Victor Klonius, Walter Besonson, (unknown first name) Hunt, (unknown first name) Bergstrom, Bob Dilley, Glen Byers; standing from left, Alfred Stixrude, Stanley Kotula, Harold Pound, (two unknown persons), Lawrence Knutson, Dad Wells, and Tozier. Photo and identification provided by Alfred Stixrude.



The Ben Cheney family, circa 1959. From left, Piper, Ben, Marian, Brad, and Sandra. Photo by Bob Richards, Tacoma Public Library Collection.

Community leader and philanthropist

While building his company, Ben was at the same time establishing an unparalleled record as a community leader in Tacoma. Ben "always wanted to give back to the areas where he had lived and prospered," attorney Hansler said.

"Ben was the greatest friend of youth that Tacoma ever had," Doug McArthur, parks and recreation official there, said recently. By the time of Ben's death in 1971 it was conservatively estimated that 5,000 young persons of both sexes had participated in baseball, football, basketball, soccer, bowling, and hockey programs sponsored by the Cheney Lumber Company.

The Cheney Studs of Seattle, a group of top college-age players, dominated amateur baseball in the area for more than a decade and took second place in the AABC tournament in 1956 before winning the championship four years later. The companion Tacoma Studs never won the national crown but were equally successful locally.

Ben also backed the Cheney Stud Courteers, a basketball troupe which for a number of years entertained crowds at high school and college basketball games with half-time shows in the style of the Harlem Globetrotters. The Courteers, 12 to 15 years old, even did their show at one Seattle Sonics game.

And there was much more. Ben took a leading role in development of a lakeside camp for the Tacoma Boys Club and construction of Brown's Point Methodist Church just east of Tacoma.

(near Coos Bay) and Central Point, Oregon, and Arcata, Pondosa, and Greenville, California.

Counted among key staff members were sales chief and number two man Gene Grant, and Ben's cousin Francis Cheney, an attorney, self-taught engineer and coordinator of Oregon operations in Medford. Others were company secretary Roy Hatcher, attorney John Hansler, Neal Murphy, Peter Vale, Bob Knight, Gene Anderson, Stan Misoski, Arnold Olson, Arnold Kettler, Wright Larky, and Preston Gunther.

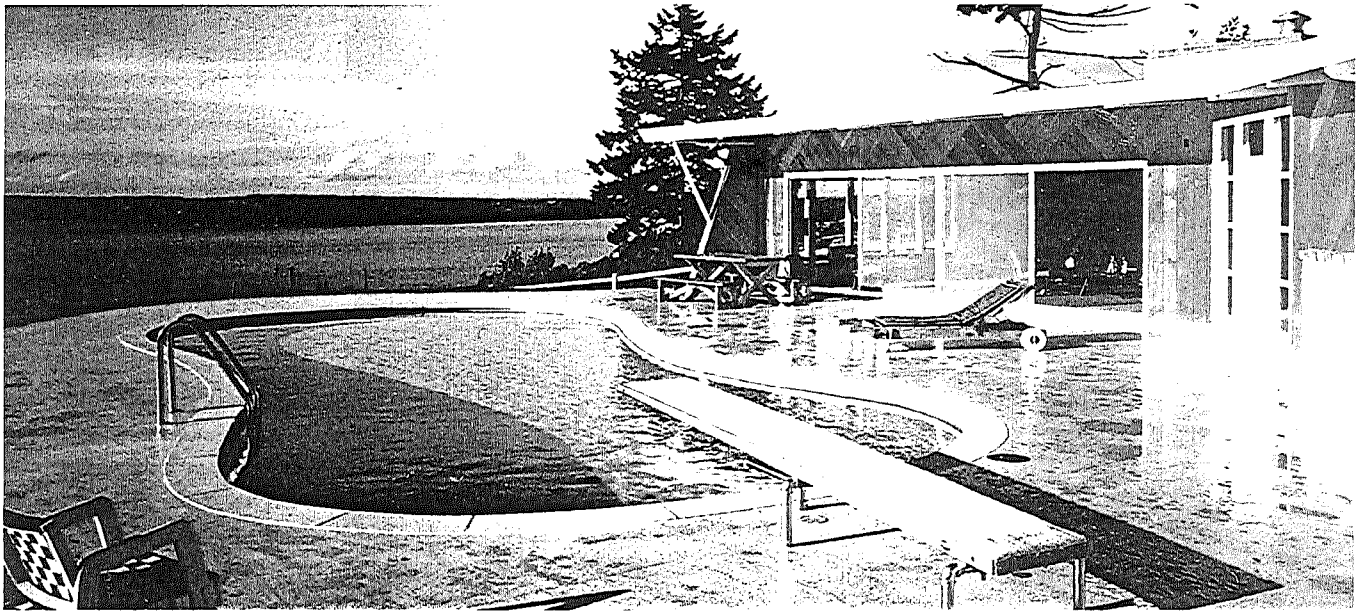
His home on Browns Point had been the scene of a brush with death for Ben on Jan. 11, 1949. He was alone there when a fire of undetermined origin broke out in the basement. Awakening, he tried to crawl to safety, but found smoke and heat blocking his exit. After retreating to his bedroom, he threw a portable radio through the window and called to neighbors who brought a ladder to the scene and rescued him.

Ben became active in local politics, usually on the Republican side, though "more influenced by the man than the party," in attorney Hansler's words.

Besides becoming an owner and board member of the San Francisco Giants, Ben took a role in the development of the Francisco Grande golf and resort complex at the team's training site in Casa Grande, Arizona, and had a key role in construction of a modern baseball park in his home town.

The city of Tacoma, facing a tight deadline to build a stadium for its new Pacific Coast League team in 1960, turned to Ben. Named general contractor because of his unblemished record as an ethical businessman, he got the job done on time, under budget. In recognition of this accomplishment and many other civic contributions, the new facility was named Cheney Stadium at the dedication ceremony June 9, 1960.

All his adult life Ben Cheney gave back his time and talents to the community. Undoubtedly the most significant financial gift emerged from his decision several years before



The Cheney home on Brown's Point east of Tacoma with a sweeping view of Commencement Bay. Photo by Bob Richards.

his death to establish the charitable foundation bearing his name. The Ben B. Cheney Foundation continues today with his son, Bradbury Cheney of Tacoma, as president, his daughter Piper Cheney a director, and Dr. William O. Rieke as executive director.

The Foundation "sets a high priority on funding projects serving communities where the Cheney Lumber Co. was active," including Tacoma, Pierce County, southwestern Washington, southwestern Oregon, and portions of Del Norte, Humboldt, Lassen, Shasta, Siskiyou, and Trinity counties in California. The Foundation was valued at \$84.9 million on December 31, 1998, and made grants of \$3.8 million that year.

While Ben Cheney's philanthropic interests were originally centered on youth sports, his Foundation's focus is now much broader. The board of directors has selected eight grant areas:

- ☐ Charity programs for basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing.
- ☐ Civic programs such as museums and recreation facilities to improve the quality of life in a community.
- ☐ Cultural programs encompassing the arts.
- ☐ Educational programs supporting capital projects and scholarships, primarily for 13 preselected independent colleges in the northwest.
- ☐ Programs serving the social, health, recreational and other needs of older people;
- ☐ Programs relating to health care.
- ☐ Social services for people with physical or mental disabilities or other special needs.
- ☐ Programs to help young people gain the skills needed to become responsible and productive adults.

Brad Cheney has described the Foundation operations as "a

quiet thing" and summed up his father's life: "He came from humble beginnings and never forgot to give money back to the community." Daughter Piper remembered that her father "was a very happy man who loved kids, loved sports, and reached out to everyone who touched his life."

Ben Cheney Foundation Grants To Willapa Harbor, 1975-99

American Red Cross, Raymond: new chapter headquarters, \$20,000, 1999.

POOL Foundation, Raymond: renovate Nevitt pool, \$30,000, 1999.

Pacific County Economic Development Council: renovate Bay Center kiosk, \$1,300, 1996; provide tourist information, \$3,000, 1986.

City of Raymond: improvements for Willapa Public Market, \$25,000, 1998; lighting for riverfront development, \$17,500, 1996; renovate Raymond Theater, \$25,000, 1991 Willapa River, \$15,000, 1989.

Shoalwater Jobs, Raymond: establish day care center, \$2,500, 1988; sponsor summer day camp, \$1,000, 1984.

South Bend High School: purchase new baseball uniforms, \$500, 1982.

South Bend public schools: upgrade playfields, \$15,000, 1996.

City of South Bend: complete waterfront walkway and dock, \$15,000, 1996; build new entrance to Boardwalk Park and connecting path to dock, \$15,000, 1993; complete Phase I of waterfront park, \$15,000, 1989; develop baseball field, \$10,000, 1975.

Willapa Harbor Baseball Association, Raymond: create indoor batting facility, \$7,500, 1998.

Willapa Harbor Hospital, South Bend: buy cardiac equipment, \$10,000, 1981.

Willapa Hotel Unmet Needs Council, South Bend: assist persons displaced by Raymond Hotel fire, \$3,000, 1998.

Total: 19 grants for \$231,300

Enjoying the fruits of success

The passing years never dulled Ben Cheney's enjoyment of life and the fruits of his success, or his attachment to the roots from whence he came. Half a century after his grandparents left Lima he took his wife Marian back there, where they met cousin Bonnie Merrell and Ben bought a pair of jeans at the family store. Bonnie remembers that Ben and Marian took an adventurous drive on the one-lane dirt road through Centennial Valley and that she received family photo Christmas cards from Ben and Marian every year.

There was another vacation trip in the family station wagon back to Yellowstone Park and Lima. Ben wanted to show his children where he was born and the ranch where his father had worked as a cowboy, breaking horses and that kind of thing. It served to introduce daughter Piper, then about eight, to horseback riding; when they got home to Tacoma, Piper began riding lessons and eventually got her own horse.

Baseball remained Ben Cheney's number one sport. Piper also recalls getting home for dinner late one evening after sitting through a 22-inning Seattle Pilots game with her dad.

Taped to the wall of Fred Arnott's barber shop on Water Street in South Bend for many years was a photo of Ben with Sandy Koufax, the star pitcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers. Ben gave it to Fred, probably while on his way to Bay Center to fish or plan the lodge he was building when he died. After Ben's death, his son Brad always stopped to see the photo. Then Fred Arnott died and Al Lavinder, the barber across the street, bought his equipment. The photo disappeared, only to resurface a dozen years later when Al heard that a story about Ben was being prepared by the Historical Society. Ben would have liked that.

Ben loved to tease friends with his horseplay,

such as answering his home phone by saying simply, "Fresh fish", a conversation opener which could befuddle strangers, but would invariably lead to vigorous repartee with friends.

And a generation after Ben attended his one high school reunion alone, he flew down to South Bend several times with his wife Marian for lunch at Bridges Inn with the Lebers, on one occasion staying overnight.

Returning to Seatac in his company plane once, he had the pilot pull right up to the terminal building, as then allowed. As his secretary alighted from the plane, Ben saw a crowd behind the terminal's glass wall. "Wave to them, Tina," he urged. "They'll think you're a movie star." Mrs. Bemis obliged, the gawkers waved back and Ben chortled. Tina never forgot the fun and flattery.

Ben showed his ability to deal with adversity when, af-



Ben Cheney with Sandy Koufax of the Los Angeles Dodgers in a photo saved by Al Lavinder when Fred Arnott closed his barber shop on Water Street in South Bend. Photo provided by Al Lavinder, PCHS#2000.13.1

flicted with diabetes and no longer able to play golf himself, he cruised around the Francisco Grande course in a cart so he could be with his pals. A friend in Casa Grande, Dr. Jim Wagoner, describes him as an "old shoe" fellow who never put on the airs which might have been expected from a wealthy entrepreneur. "He was a helluva guy," Wagoner says.

Dr. Wagoner still lives in the home he built with Cheney Studs on Bradbury Drive (named after Ben's son) in the Desert Carmel development adjacent to the Giants' baseball facility.

According to one newspaper account, the project, five miles west of Casa Grande and 60 miles south of Phoenix, was close by the route which "Arizona politicians" had told Giants owner Stoneham Interstate 10 would take from Phoenix to Tucson. Two thousand lots were laid out and a nine-story hotel built.

Ben was vice president of Desert Carmel when it opened with quite a splash in 1964. Hollywood luminaries John Wayne, Merv Griffin, Dale Robertson, and Gene Autry helped promote the development. An advertisement for lot sales (\$2295 each, with \$10 down) didn't mention Ben, but included a photo of crooner Pat Boone, wearing a cowboy hat and string tie. Boone was serving as president of the company.

Sales never took off at Desert Carmel and by the end of the century only 36 homes had been built there. Dr. Wagoner says one problem is that the indecisive Stoneham, who lived to be 91, never could pick out a lot for his own home. Another obstacle might have been that Interstate 10 was laid out east side of Casa Grande, rather than to the west. The San Francisco Giants left town many years ago, but Casa Grande is now a bustling retirement and vacation center with a population of 20,000.

According to Ben's son Brad, his dad sold out his investment in the Giants at a modest profit but the family has retained a lot

in Desert Carmel. The adjacent hotel tower and restaurant still operate, and the lush golf course that Ben so loved (and at 7,594 yards is the state's longest) is a busy place in the warm winter months.

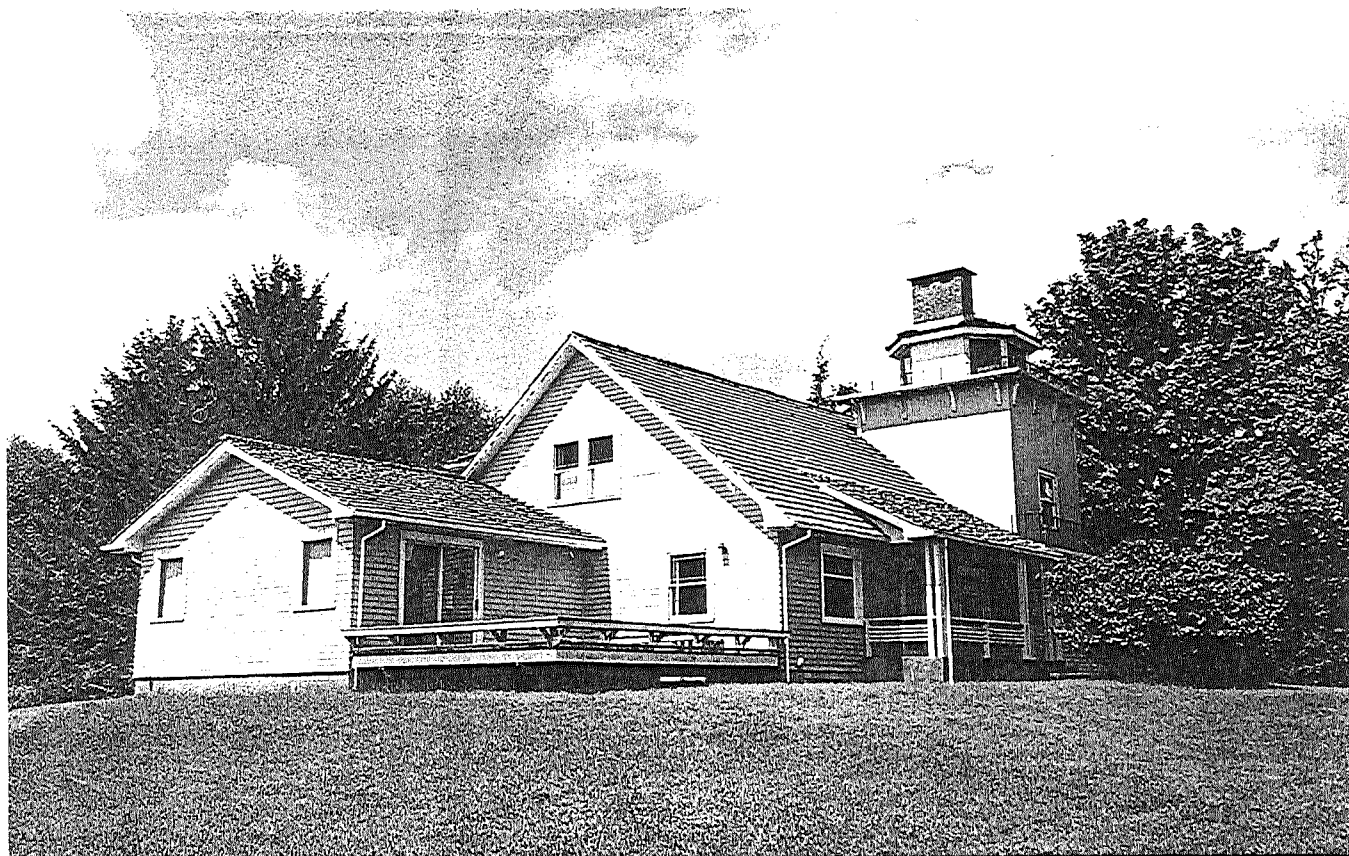
While Desert Carmel may have been a financial disappointment, it is difficult to picture Ben Cheney as devastated. His entire life suggests he got into it to have fun, and achieved his goal.

In Tacoma Ben was awarded the Charles E. Sullivan Award in 1961 by the Puget Sound Sportscasters Association for his "outstanding contributions to sports over the years," was Tacoma Sportsman of the Year in 1959, won the state Junior Chamber of Commerce physical fitness leadership award in 1965, and was inducted into the Tacoma-Pierce County Sports Hall of Fame in 1968. Governor Albert Rossellini named Ben to the state Sports Advisory Council in 1963.

Ben, still seeking new outlets for his energy, was on his way to Seattle to look at a boat for sale when he suffered the last in a series of strokes and died on May 18,



The Desert Carmel tower hotel and golf course development adjacent to the San Francisco Giants baseball facility, both of which were Ben Cheney investments in the 1960s.



The 4000 sq. ft. house on an 80-acre former dairy farm overlooking the Palix River in Bay Center, which Ben Cheney was having remodeled at the time of his death. He purchased the property from Norman and Myrtle Gunderson in 1971, who had owned it since their purchase from George Smith in 1958. Ben had planned to build a lodge on the 10-acre lake and a practice baseball field on the adjoining pasture land for Cheney-sponsored teams. Although he didn't live to realize his "Field of Dreams," the family completed renovation and used the house to entertain guests. The Cheney family sold the property to Willapa Logging in 1995. Photo by Charles B. Summers, 1996.

1971, at the age of 66. He is buried at Mountain View Cemetery in Tacoma.

His estate was probated in Pierce County. Court papers show that it was estimated at more than \$500,000, but professional fees paid by the executors exceeded \$800,000 and Washington state inheritance tax was set at approximately \$1.6 million.

Ben's first marriage ended in divorce. He and Marian, an employee of a lumber company in Westwood, California, were married in 1954. He adopted Sandra, her daughter by her earlier marriage, and they had two children, Bradbury and Piper. After Ben's death Mrs. Cheney served on the board of the Cheney Foundation. She remarried Elgin E. Olrogg and died in 1975.

At the time of Ben's death, Cheney Lumber Company was operating mills at Tacoma, Central Point, Oregon, and Pondosa and Greenville, California. These were sold to Louisiana-Pacific Lumber Co. in 1974 and the timber acreage sold piecemeal into the 1980s. As attorney Hansler put it, "The children were too young to run the company, the key men were approaching retirement age, and it was a good time to sell."

After Ben Cheney's death, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer described him as president of one of Tacoma's "largest industrial establishments," and Earl Luebker, sports editor of the Tacoma News-Tribune, wrote, "Men with Cheney's dedication to helping others don't come around too often. Tacoma is a much better place for his having passed through here."

Med Nicholson expresses his gratitude for the assistance of Ben Cheney's family, officials of the Ben Cheney Foundation, John Hansler, Gene Grant, Tina Bemis, Bonnie Merrell, Arnold and Isobel Leber, Elizabeth Gillies, Jim Neva of the Port of Willapa Harbor, Jean Shaudys, Rod Koon of the Port of Tacoma, Douglas McArthur, Ron Magden, Bruce Weilepp of the Pacific County Historical Society, Barbara Schoen of the Casa Grande Valley Historical Society, Al Lavinder, and especially, Bob Bailey of Olympia, whose skill and diligence in preserving records of Pacific County's past have been of inestimable value.