H. Clay Myers II —
Log-trucker/inventor

Offspring of two pioneer Oregon families, H. Clay Myers II was born April 5, 1905. As a youth, he studied sheet metal work at Benson Polytechnic in Portland, and showed a flair for mechanics and practical engineering.

The young metalworker went to Colorado in 1926 to court a young schoolteacher, Helen Mackey, whom he had met in Salem; they made plans to be married.

But on April 15, 1926, while he was helping a farmer repair his tractor, a piece of metal they were hammering flew loose and struck young Myers in the face, destroying his left eye.

The marriage went ahead anyway—ten days later, after Miss Mackey's school term ended. Myers was still wearing a bandage over his eye, and his bride drove him to see a doctor.

Their first son, H. Clay Myers III, later to play a prominent part in Oregon politics, was born in 1927. Another son, Bill, now a Tillamook appraiser, was born in 1929.

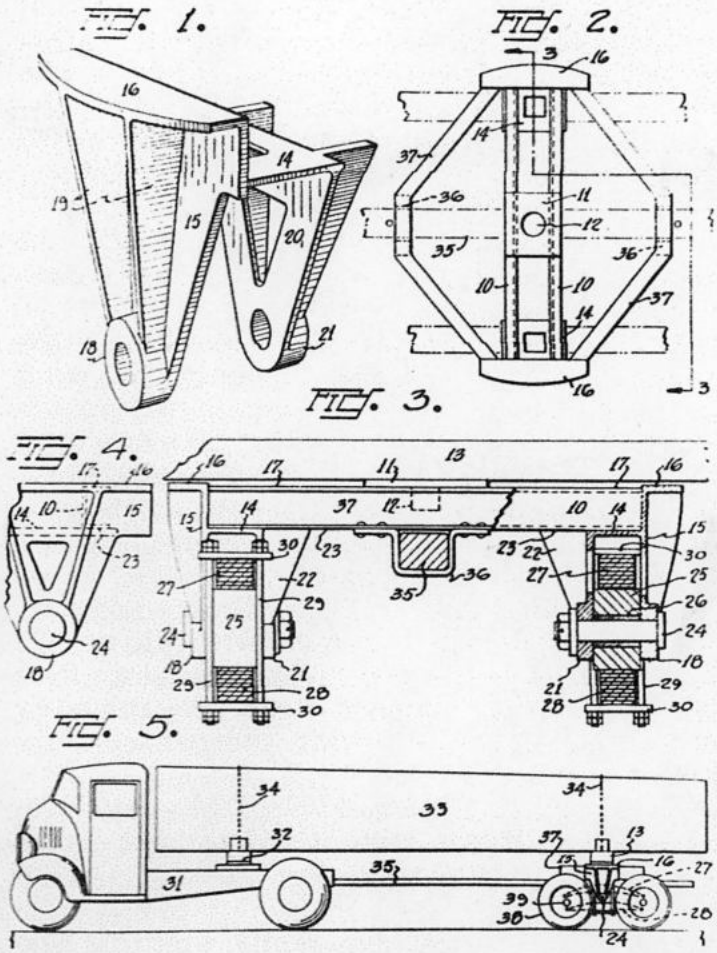
In June or July of that year Myers bought a Reo truck, and started hauling logs in the Tillamook area. By 1933 he was operating for Riggle Logging Co. around Jewell.

His son Clay Myers remembers that well, since "we had to start school late, because we were almost surrounded by the first Tillamook fire."

Myers' third son, Norman, was born the next year, when the family lived in a one-room cabin at Sand Lake.

Myers' mechanical mind was drawn to the fact that the light single-axle trailers of the day weren't much good. They were dangerously narrow and unstable, and, considering the laws which set weight limits according to square inches of tire on the road, they didn't carry much of a load. Myers started tinkering with some ideas of his own, and in the mid-'30s came up with a combination of the dual-axle trailer and a "straddle mounting" which made the trailer very hard to upset, and about doubled the possible load.

He went to Beall Pipe & Tank of Portland with his ideas, and had a set of castings made up to try on his trailer. It seemed to work—strengthening the trailer and greatly increasing the payload—so he went back and had two more



Clay Myers' patent drawings, filed April 3, 1937. (courtesy of Norman Myers)

sets of castings made for two Tillamook-area truckers, Harry Elliot and Connie Dye, and supervised their installation in a Tillamook garage.

By now other truckers were getting interested—this was the "by-guess-and-by-gosh" era of log-truck evolution, when ideas were appearing and spreading rapidly—and Beall began promoting the idea as their own, naming it the "Little Giant." Other makers also jumped on the idea, and for the next decade the young trucker was fighting a long and expensive legal battle to protect his patent.

In the meantime, he still had to make a living.

By 1939, the long legal battle was just getting well started—but, at this time, a diversion

The Myers family with a one-log load on the new trailer; Helen, Clay, Norman on Clay's shoulder, Bill on truck hood and Clay III on cab.
(courtesy Mrs. Helen Myers)

"Myers was sure excited when he finished the trailer—he drove it up and down the street, gave rides to the kids," recalled Mrs. Jean Walsh, who grew up with the Myers children.

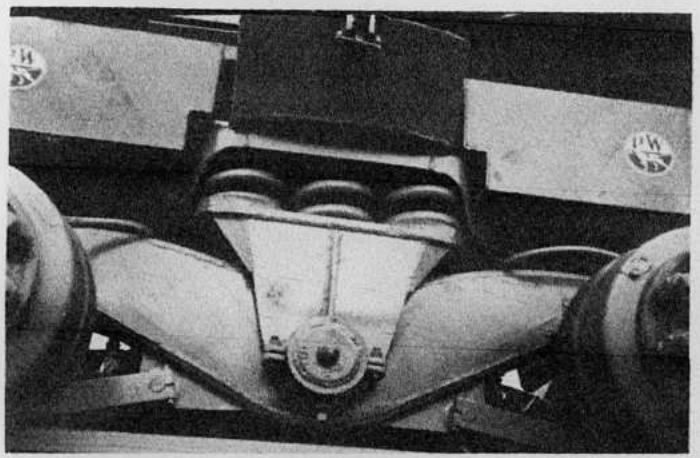
cropped up.

Myers' older brother Bob, a professional wrestler, was in Southern Rhodesia, Africa, prospecting for gold. While he was in the field one day, his little dog Gee-Gee chased a rabbit into a hole, and then dug up some rich ore while burrowing after it.

Jubilantly, Bob wired for Clay and Helen to come and help develop the mine. They were in Africa for six months, but the rich Gee-Gee Mine—still producing today—did not stay in their hands. A promoter got it.

Coming home, Clay went back to trucking—and, almost immediately, another disaster struck. Working on his trailer, Myers was installing a reach with the help of two other men; when one of them stumbled and fell, the entire 400-pound load came down on Myers, telescoping his lower spine so badly that the doctors gave him a fifty-fifty chance of being paralyzed for life.

He was in bed for three months, and an invalid for a year, with no income and no state insurance. "We lost our little house in Tillamook," Helen Myers recalled sadly, "and moved back to Sand Lake."



This "pirate" installation on a Pointer-Willamette trailer utilized coil springs.
(courtesy Mrs. Helen Myers)

Unable to drive a truck any longer, Myers had to rethink his future. One of the infringing trailer manufacturers gloated that Myers "didn't have the money or the guts" to continue the legal battle over his patent. "I may not have the money," Myers retorted grimly, "but I do have the guts."

He had to re-train for a job his back could stand, and his old trade of sheet-metal work seemed to fit.

When World War II broke out, Myers tried to enlist—and found to his indignation that the military wouldn't accept a willing recruit with one eye and a bad back. He spent the war years teaching aviation sheet-metal work to students, and working at Columbia Aircraft as an inspector.

Finally, in 1949, the long legal battle over his trailer design came to trial. Some manufacturers, seeing the handwriting on the wall, had settled out of court, but eleven or twelve others, including Fruehauf, carried on to a ten-day and one night battle in Federal District Court in Portland—which Myers won. The manufacturers' appeal to the Circuit Court in San Francisco had the same result; and the Supreme Court rejected another appeal. From then on, Myers received a royalty for every trailer made which incorporated his ideas.

He settled down as a partner in a company that sold logging equipment up and down the coast, and in the Sixties became a Tillamook County Commissioner and Judge.

He died in 1973—and, for a man who drove a log truck barely ten years, surely he had a great impact on the log-trucking industry.