

William Abbott

“Somebody left the backdoor open at IRG and I slipped in.”

I got my start in wood preservation operating the business end of a shovel. Digging around poles paid more than making pizzas. After a year as a digger, Osmose made me a pole inspector. My title was foreman. Two years later I enrolled in college, but kept “Osmosing” in the summer, there was a wife and child to support. By the time I graduated with a degree in history and a second major in theology five years later, we had four children



to support. I worked one more summer for Osmose before starting my own pole maintenance company. The debt associated with starting Pole Maintenance Company precluded other career options. I had jumped in with both feet and there was no turning back. I owned and operated Pole Maintenance Company for twenty-five years, and then I sold it to Osmose Utility Services for a tidy sum. I retained ownership of [Copper Care Wood Preservatives, Inc.](#) Copper Care manufactures and repackages remedial wood preservatives. I also own the [Sawle Mill](#), which specializes in producing naturally durable juniper wood products.



Pole Maintenance Company’s customers expected and needed me to know something about wood preservation. It was a professional responsibility and it became a practical curiosity. What worked? Why did it work? Was one product or technique better than another? What was decay? What caused decay? There was a lot to learn. I joined



AWPA in 1985. [Carl Bechgaard](#) in Denmark had the patents for fused boron rods. I contacted him, and he came to visit me. He was an old man and had been involved in remedial and prophylactic utility pole treatments for decades. He was an active promoter of IRG - but never a member. In his opinion, IRG was not for the likes of him and me. We ought to go to the meetings and read the papers, but we ought not to join. In the early days of IRG, perhaps it was more than merely Carl’s opinion. I applied for membership in ’86 or ’87. Membership was the cheapest way to get the papers. It took a while, but they finally let me in. I have always appreciated IRG indulging me. I feel like I have observer status. I joined in the spirit of Carl Bechgaard’s rule; even though I violated the letter.

My research has been quasi-alchemical. I am not at home in the laboratory. I want to know what works and why, but it is hard for me to use metrics exclusively to arrive at the truth about things. It’s just as well I didn’t pursue an academic career. Serving customers is a



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good practical way to apply the benefits of wood preservation research, but it shouldn't be mistaken for research itself.



I have been happily married for forty-two years to Janette and we have six children. We have lived on a farm in [Platte County, Nebraska](#) for thirty years. I am something of a gentleman farmer - and I am very interested in gardening. I like to fish. I'm active in our church. My son Benjamin is the chemist and is a big help to me in running Copper Care Wood Preservatives, Inc.



I am especially obliged to IRG for the contacts and professional friendships it has nurtured. We all stand on the shoulders of giants and we must learn from one another.



How can we do that if we don't know one another? Fundamental science is learning first what others have observed and measured. Thank you IRG for how you've helped me.