

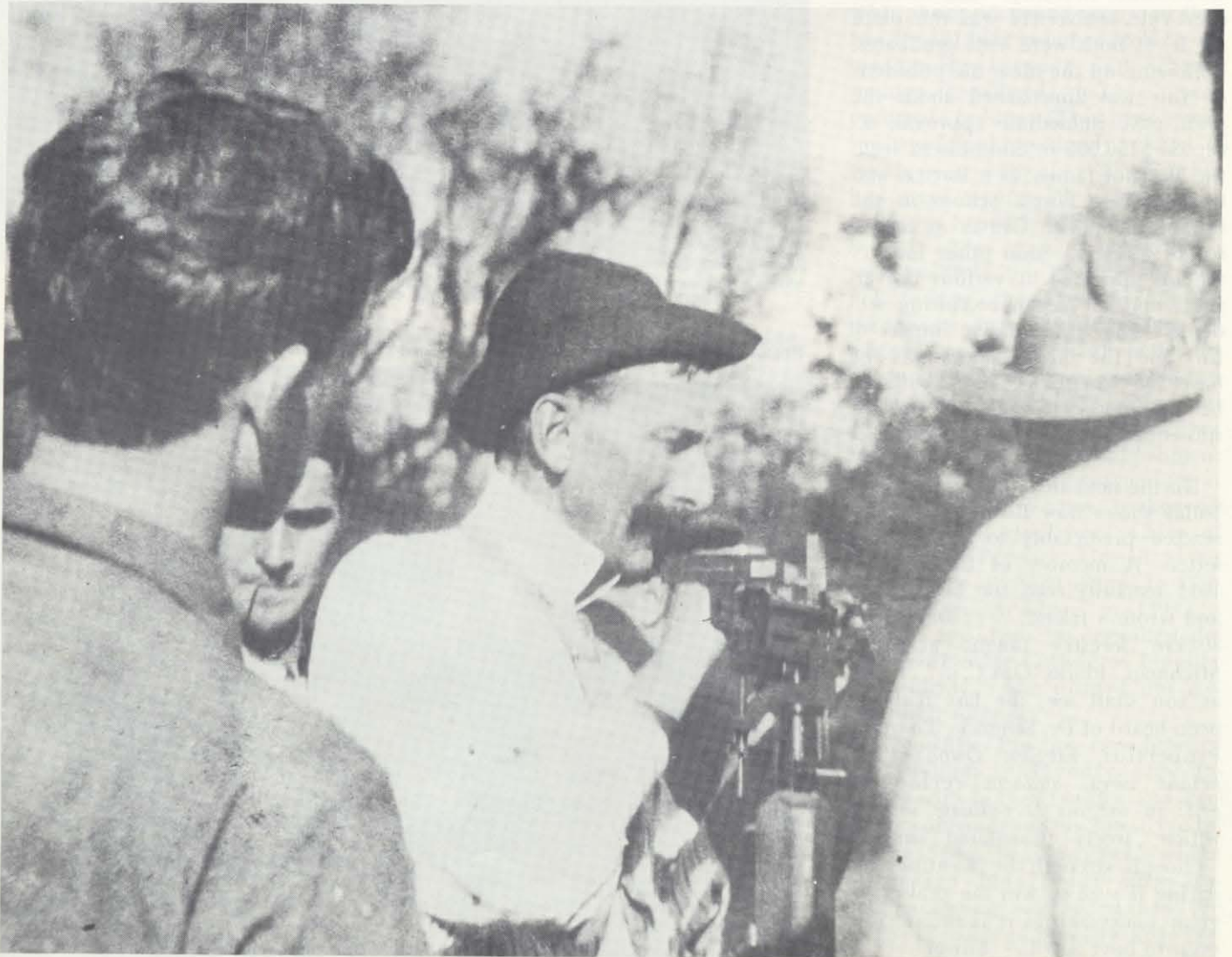
The Cradle of Forestry

Part II

by Harley E. Jolley

Young people seem to have been drawn to the first installment of Mr. Jolley's article. One asked, "Why couldn't they make a go of it? It seems to have been a *different* kind of college where the students got *personal* attention." This is a question no lay editor should attempt to answer. As you will see, Dr. Fernow, of AFA, called the school a "pedagogic abortion" in the most unkind cut of all. But despite its short duration and its smallness, the school did have tremendous impact. People still talk about it. The students heard lectures in the morning and rode around the estate in the afternoon as Schenck attended to the estate's forestry affairs. On occasion, the school moved to Oregon and on several

Dr. Carl Alwin Schenck instructs a group of students in the field. Dr. Schenck emphasized the importance of a "practical" forestry education for his students



occasions to Germany for field work. After Mr. Jolley completes his presentation in this issue and the next, perhaps some trained teacher will attempt to answer the question raised, "Why couldn't they make a go of it?" Editor

WHY did Dr. Schenck throw in the sponge? Foreseeing the reaction to the shut-down of the school he presented a full argument to explain his actions in typical Schenck language.

He reminded them how, after splitting with Vanderbilt, he had centered "all my nerve and sinew and energy and all my hopes on the development of a really American Forest School." And he reempha-

sized his philosophy of forestry education as represented by the Biltmore Forest School: "That school was not meant to be an institution of the usual kind, *viz.* a school attached to a college away from the woods, a school preaching conservation and second growth and theory. No! My Biltmore Forest School was meant to be a practical and technical school, the teachings of which, notably in lumbering and in financing, might be capable of immediate application in the American woods; it was to be a training school for the sons of every lumberman and of every timber owner in the country."

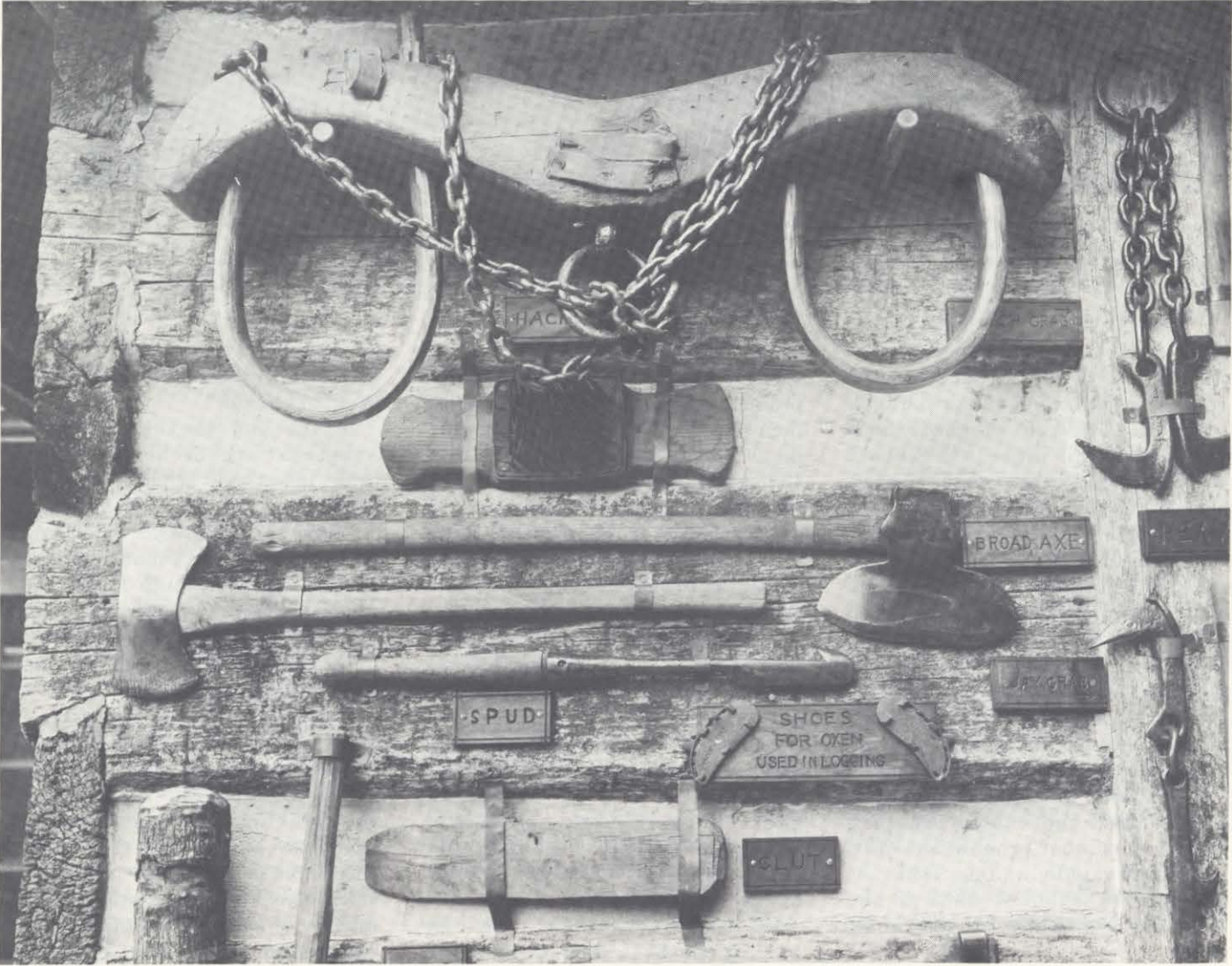
But, he concluded mournfully, "It was to be; it has not been."

Initially, it was the only forest school in America. Yet in the brief

span of 15 years more than 83 American schools had entered the arena of forestry education, siphoning off Schenck's potential recruits. Hence, he lamented, "There seems to be no more need of a unique school like the Biltmore Forest School."

Ironically, poor Schenck was in a sense the victim of the very thing which had promoted him in the first place—a growing awareness of the need for conservation and for scientific management of our natural resources. His Biltmore Forest School's life span, 1898-1913, practically coincided with the almost revolutionary conservation movement sparked by men like Pinchot and Theodore Roosevelt. This period of progressivism spawned multiple conservation movements and institutions, all

Some of the early equipment used by foresters at the turn of the century which can be seen on display at the Cradle of Forestry in the Pisgah National Forest, Asheville, N.C.





Members of the last (1913) class of the Biltmore Forest School after it moved to Coos Bay, Oregon. Fifteen have been identified, one is unknown. Dr. Schenck is fifth from the left, standing. Included are: Gerald R. Green, Frank Heath, Fred Hillers, A. Russell Ives, Foster R. Jewell, Russell G. Lafferty, C. A. Lagerstrom, David Bruce Otis, Robert R. Otstot, A. A. Segersten, H. W. Shawhan, Carol D. Stowe, L. Emans Sutton, Charles E. Wells, and T. Sterl Zimmerman

intended to cope with and stay the ruthless exploitation of our national resources. The raft of newly born forestry schools, whose rise Schenck was bemoaning, was part of that spawn and his forestry school was an unwitting victim.

In the meantime, a constantly decreasing enrollment convinced him that continuance of the school was neither worthwhile nor "in keeping with the dignity of the interests which I have advocated incessantly." By this he had reference to the fact that, as forester for George W. Vanderbilt and as Director of Biltmore Forest School, his forestry philosophy had attained and enjoyed the privileges of national prominence—privileges now rapidly waning. Hence he preferred to withdraw while he and his school still enjoyed a good reputation.

Also shaping his decision was a problem common to many schools, then and now—finance. The Biltmore Forest School had never had any endowments or permanent provisions for support. It had operated on the Biltmore estate solely from student fees and even half of them had to be turned over to Vanderbilt. Later, it survived on tuition fees supplemented by gratuities from the lumber interests. Thus, as Schenck told his students and friends, "The Biltmore Forest School has had nothing to support it except the good will, free from any financial obligations, first of G. W. Vanderbilt's Biltmore Estate, and thereafter of such firms as Cummer-Diggins at Cadillac, Michigan, of C. A. Smith, at Marshfield, Oregon, of J. L. Roper of Norfolk. . . Had we 50 such friends instead of three, this

Biltmore Forest School might have been *conserved*."

In the soul searching which accompanied the decision to discontinue his school Schenck asked the associate editor of *Hardwood Record*, a former student, "Did I do wrong? Would it have been more honorable to die slowly? Could I have continued to ask the youths to come to a school which had no students in prospect? Which had no money to pay its teachers and to give the students the best experiences, because it lacked any endowments?"

The reply confirmed the appropriateness of discontinuance: "I agree with you that the most honorable course to pursue was to withdraw with honors while the school was yet a live and important factor in forestry circles of the United States, rather than let it die a slow death

of strangulation as a result of slowly decreasing support."

Like his teacher, the editor felt that the school was up against a proposition that was insurmountable because "it was impossible to combat the glittering and attractive scientific courses offered by the so-called other forestry schools in this country, particularly when the greatest calls seemed to be coming from the Federal and State forestry service for so-called scientifically trained men."

Even in the face of such discouraging trends Schenck tried to stimulate renewed interest in and support for his school. He sent out broadsides to all leading lumbermen, seeking sustenance. He had hoped to receive some tangible indications to prove that his work was still in demand: "Mind you, I did not seek to get their money; not at all. I asked for a word of encouragement, and for students to be taught." But to his chagrin, the response was so weak that less than 20 students sought enrollment in 1913. He declined to teach so small a class on two grounds: "First, because I cannot teach without the inspiration of a larger audience; second, because I cannot foot the bill of a staff of teachers on fewer than some forty students."

He then voiced publicly an opinion which must have been forming, ever so gradually, for months: "The conclusion is evident that such a school as I had been planning or as I had been developing, is not so badly needed by the lumber interests of the United States, as I had been supposing to be the case." Several lumbermen tried to reassure him that his sad deduction was erroneous. One told him, "I do not agree with you in your conclusion that the Biltmore Forestry School is not needed by the lumber interests of this country. I believe it is needed by them and also by the entire country."

Still, no appreciable assurance of tangible support was forthcoming. So, grasping for an answer as to why his school was seemingly no longer needed, Schenck began to rationalize, saying that if his graduates had only made notable successes of their forestry careers then "this Biltmore Forest School would not

have become anemic for lack of encouragement and lack of students." He must have pained, even appalled, the majority of his alumni by grumbling that not one of them had made any striking successes; all had had to start at the bottom everywhere; and none had become a "live advertisement" for the Biltmore Forest School. Yet, on their behalf he mourned: "I am sorry for my boys; I had meant to lead them to victory; I have led them to sorrow, and their alma mater is about to die."

Being "sorry" did not ease the biting sharpness of his grumbling, and adverse reactions began to pour in on him. Even Fernow spoke out in behalf of the Biltmore boys and in the process got in a good whack at their director. First he ridiculed: "The Biltmore bubble is burst! We do not intend to convey any invidious insinuations on the enterprise by this alliteration, but only to express in the picturesque language which the director of the Biltmore School would be apt to use [to describe] the cessation of a picturesque institution. Dr. Schenck has written himself its picturesque obituary, and in doing so has departed from the usual mode of obituaries, which are built on the maxim *de mortuis nil nisi bene* [of the dead, speak ever charitably], by giving a slap to its graduates." Then he lambasted Schenck for complaining about the lack of living advertisements and notable successes among his boys and for fuming because they had "to start at the bottom everywhere." Fernow caustically commented: "This last statement is indeed amusing. What did the director expect? Did he suppose that they would start at the top? We can name at least a half dozen of his men who have made good, and a few who are first class and do not deserve the slap." The critic then departed from his quoted maxim of *de mortuis nil nisi bene* by laying the whole burden of culpability upon Schenck rather than his students: "It is our suspicion that they made good in spite of the school, which was carried on upon mistaken pedagogic principles; . . . what would have been an excellent post graduate course after the theoretical work had been done was bound to become an impossible pedagogic abortion for undergraduates."

Not satisfied with that blow, Fernow laid on another, saying, as he had so often, that "the hunting after *practicality* before the *theoretical* foundation is a fad, which will usually revenge itself by short duration . . . He [Schenck] is right, there is 'no more need of such a unique school as Biltmore'; it was, as he now admits, 'visionary'".

At the same time many other letters were expressing discontent and unhappiness with the "no success" interpretation issued in Schenck's farewell address.

One Biltmorean, serving as associate forester for a large Canadian pulp and paper company, scolded Schenck: "You seem to have lost faith in your boys. You have no cause to do so as there are several, whom I know personally or by reputation, that have done, and are doing fine work either for their employers or as their own employers. Please, for the love of Mike, don't give them a bump like that. Remember that there are some of us that are just as keen to uphold the good name of the School as you are to have us."

But from another of his boys came a six page letter manifesting sorrow for being among those who had contributed to the closing of the Biltmore Forest School through his failure to make a glaring success in forestry. He tempered his "sorrow", however, with a most telling remark: "But as far as I can see there are no very noted men in the profession from any school." And, turning some of Schenck's own philosophy to an unexpected use, he made a statement which many a forester has repeatedly had reason to appreciate: "Forestry is too slow a process to attract attention—an engineer in other lines builds a bridge or a canal or a building and it is completed in a few years and can be seen and used and written about, but your forester saves little waste here, plants a few trees there, cuts a few fire lanes another place, and gets about as much attention as an old maid's tea party. It will be thirty years before you can use the trees he plants; and in the meantime he can plant some more trees and be very happy—if he doesn't starve." ■

[The third and concluding part of this article will appear in our next issue. Editor]