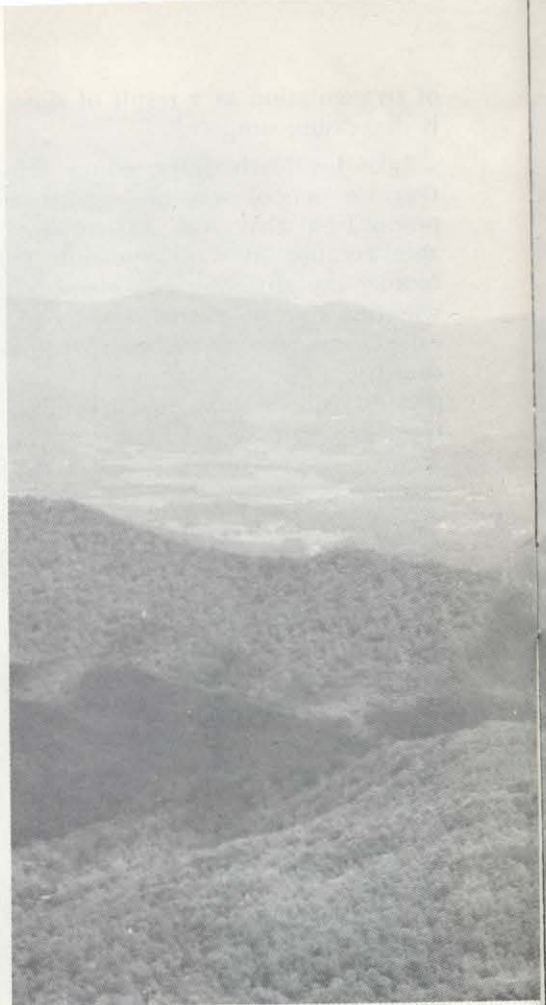


*The Cradle
of
Forestry*
Part III

by Harley E. Jolley



This area, now the Pisgah National Forest, served as an outdoor classroom for students at Biltmore Forest School





Looking Glass Rock in Pisgah National Forest is so named because water seeping down its bare sides glistens in the sun



WHILE Dr. Fernow hailed the demise of the Biltmore School as the end of a "pedagogic abortion" and was even less charitable with his countryman and colleague, Dr. Schenck, most foresters and industrialists felt quite differently about it. Former students received a double shock—the "no more doings" letter and the doctor's later statement that the school would not have closed had his students achieved more after leaving the cradle of forestry.

But Dr. Schenck's charisma was such that his erstwhile students rallied to his support and gave him comfort. The long geographical outreach of Schenck's teaching was exemplified by Yung-hsi Tong, class of 1910, from the Chinese Department of Agriculture and Forestry, Peking, who wrote, in pidgin English, that the farewell letter has stunned him so severely that "it came nearly stopping my heartin from biting [sic]. I felt my lost [sic] in many respects." And he invited his former teacher to the forests of

Manchuria to establish a new fortune. "When that is successful, I shall be willing to devote all my lifetime to you."

An old comrade and sometime lecturer at Biltmore Forest School, Dr. Hermann von Schrenck, was furiously passionate in his comments: "On my return here today I find your announcement. Words will not express what I feel: anger, disgust, and . . . despair. I will not try to say what I really feel, because I cannot. It's made me blue all day, and I would like to explode. . . . Aside from the personal loss, I deplore the loss to my profession. The d-n fools will wake up some day to a fuller realization of what you stood for and did."

From the Washington office of the United States Forest Service—a service for which Schenck had provided numerous men—came word via E. G. Bruce that "I want to say to you, Doctor, that in my judgment (and I believe I am in a position to judge) your Biltmore School and the principles taught there have had most

decided and necessary impressions on forestry in the United States; in other words, the practical in preference to the theoretical features have been emphasized and that is what the young men are going to find that they need, first, last, and all the time when they go out into the actual, practical work. . . . In my judgment, Doctor, you have stamped your impression of 'practical forestry' indelibly on American forestry in a form and manner that will be more and more appreciated as time rolls on; and so far from being downcast at having, as you put it, accomplished so little, I believe you should be congratulated upon having accomplished so much; more I think than you fully realize at this time, and the good seed which you have sown in your school will go on bearing fruit that will do you credit, and the cause of forestry in the United States good. . . ."

The president of a Missouri lumber and mining company, J. B. White also complimented Schenck and gave the information that his "farewell letter to the public and to the students of the Forest School was made an official part of the Proceedings at New Orleans. I read the letter with a great deal of feeling, because I have looked upon you as a thoroughly practical forester and lumberman for they go better together—forester and lumberman—than they do separately . . . I have had two thousand copies of your letter printed and circulated . . . You have done good to the cause here in America. . . ."

Austin Cary, one of the most highly respected men in the United States Forest Service, used the pages of the *Forest Quarterly* to offer "An Appreciation of Dr. Schenck" in which he said: "When Dr. Schenck gave up his work among us, America lost its most picturesque figure, also one of its strongest individual forces. . . . It is hard to write of the Biltmore School as a thing of the past. We shall miss Dr. Schenck, and the country has lost a force that was highly useful. Nobody will grudge him anything good that he carries back home. We wish he might find a way to return to work among us. If ever he feels like coming back for a visit, there are men all through the country, from one coast to another, whose pleasure it will be to



Dormitory study area for a Biltmore Forest school student showing the school banner

U. S. Forest Service photos

take hold and give him the time of his life."

Tragically, between publication of the "no more doings" letter and Cary's article, the guns of August, 1914, had set off World War I and impelled the editor of the *Forest Quarterly* to add a mournful postscript to the article: "We regret to state that it is creditably reported that Dr. Schenck fell in battle in France." Fortunately the report was in error and it was Schenck's great good luck to survive two world wars and to be repeatedly feted through-

out the United States by admirers who, true to Cary's promise, gave Schenck the time of his life.

Prior to the publication of the appreciation article, Cary had shown his own regard for Schenck by writing him an eight page letter saying, among other things, "You can rest assured that there are very many over here besides Biltmore graduates who will gratefully cherish recollections. We know you did us a lot of good; we feel your kinship with our spirit; we have the greatest admiration for a man who could shake



Carl Schenck (left) poses in front of a 9 foot, 6 inch Douglas-fir cut by the McDonald & Vaughn Lumber Company, Coos Bay, Oregon. Photo taken in 1913

off the shackles of early training . . . Darmstadt, I think, will be a Mecca for American foresters. . . ."

Cary's letter had an especial significance to Schenck who had just written to a former student, prior to receiving it, that "I had a large number of touchingly good letters from many sources. But, I am so sorry, there was but one man in the U.S. Forest Service in which there are so many of my old boys who had for me a kind word of affection when I closed the school. One man in all U.S. Forestry Service!!" His reaction

to Cary's letter was revealed in the answer sent to it: ". . . I'll cherish that letter because it came from that man among the American foresters for whom I have the highest measure of esteem."

One of the few students who proposed a way of continuing the school was J. Harold Peterson, class of 1910, who in later years played a major role in keeping the old Biltmore spirit bright. He had just read in the local newspaper about the death of George W. Vanderbilt and the obituary stated that Mrs. Vanderbilt

had fallen heir to the Biltmore Estate. Recalling that she had always been a good friend of the forestry students, he declared that "there would be nothing finer in the world for a woman of her present means to do philanthropically than to turn over to the Biltmore Forest School that which really ought to be theirs by right of precedent and allow them to go back to Pisgah Forest." It was his opinion that if the right parties could take the matter to Mrs. Vanderbilt "in the right lines it could be put across."

For various reasons, including the outbreak of World War I, the idea never matured but two years later Mrs. Vanderbilt did sell the Pisgah Forest to the United States government and thereby facilitated a later restoration of Schenck's summer campus in the Pink Beds section of Pisgah. And Peterson had a hand in that restoration, half a century later!

Last Rites

Meanwhile, out in Marshfield, Oregon, the young men most immediately affected by Schenck's farewell—the class of 1913—took on the task of conducting "last rites" and disposing of personal effects. Nor was their schoolmaster forgotten: his last class pooled their money and provided him a chain and locket with the Biltmore Forest School emblem on it. This act deeply touched their mentor whose thank you note said, "How really sweet, lovely, touchingly affectionate was it." In reality, he had expected, or so he said, "curses rather than blessings from those boys" because of his leaving them in the lurch.

And, not satisfied with a mere memento of locket and chain, the last class held a meeting and drew up a formal four page eulogy, combining mournful regrets about the passing of their alma mater with high praise for their master. As survivors and heirs they expressed appreciation for the many benefits received from attending their beloved Biltmore Forest School and for the training it had provided them. But primarily they paid homage to Doctor Schenck for "his untiring years of labor, for the example he has set us and for his unselfish devotion to the School." They acknowledged that he had left each of them

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a legacy of training and opportunity and proclaimed their obligation to make the most of their training and to bring honor to Schenck and the school. Eerily prophetic was their remark about the resurrection of Biltmore Forest School:

The clergy when speaking at the side of a dear departed declares that there is no death but that our beloved merely sleeps for a time to rise again to a new and better life, and we, who now mourn the death of our alma mater, refuse to admit that she is dead. We must bow to the will of Providence in part, however, and consider that the School merely sleeps for a time to rise again to a new and better life.

Their prophecy came to pass in a unique fulfillment. With the death of George W. Vanderbilt the forests which had served as their working fields passed into the custody of Mrs. Vanderbilt who, in 1914, sold 80,000 acres of her holdings to the United States Forest Service. The land was acquired under power of the 1911 Weeks Law authorizing purchase of forest lands for watershed protection; and the new acquisition was incorporated into the recently established Pisgah National Forest. In the ensuing years many conservation oriented people kept a watchful eye over these former working fields of Pinchot and Schenck. And from time to time meaningful tribute was paid to them in various ways; but it was a heritage minded Secretary of Agriculture who brought "rebirth" to the Biltmore Forest School. While involved in a ceremony celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Weeks Law, United States Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman was given a tour of the Pisgah National Forest, including the Pink Beds. He was so impressed with the historical role these working grounds had played in the national conservation movement that he initiated the establishment of a suitable commemorative, the Cradle of Forestry in America. As a result, today in the Pink Beds there is coming into fruition the fulfill-

ment of the Class of 1913's prophecy.

The Cradle of Forestry in America, now in stage two of a proposed four phase development, is "a cathedral to forestry," using the most advanced interpretive techniques to tell the story of forestry in America. Every significant aspect of the American forest and its historic multiple uses will be interpreted, using indoor and outdoor dioramas, exhibits, reconstructed buildings, nature trails, recreation areas, etc. The project has won the support of The American Forestry Association, which is jointly sponsoring it with the United States Forest Service. Thus, to the delight of the surviving Biltmore Forest School alumni, their school in the Pink Beds has been reconstructed and a vital part of any visit to the Cradle of Forestry in America involves, first, seeing the exceptionally well done "Cradle of Forestry" movie, featuring the pioneering forestry efforts of Pinchot and Schenck; second, taking the "Campus Tour" and thereby reliving the glorious days of the Biltmore Forest School, pioneer in forestry education in America.

The class prophecy, therefore, is in process of fulfillment.

Successful "Failures"

But was Schenck right about his boys being "failures?" One "failure" serving as forester in Michigan urged Dr. Schenck neither to be discouraged about his place in American forestry nor the ultimate success of his students. "You should not feel discouraged over anything . . . Of course the fellows as a whole are not at the head of forestry affairs in this country but you take them in comparison with any other forestry school in the country and you will find that the real Biltmore graduates never suffer by comparison. Give them time and they will prove all that you have preached!" He also urged Schenck to remember that the sensational rise, in one year from office boy to head of the firm, was a fictional occurrence; hence, the wise thing to do was to "Give them time and let them prove you were right."

Later study has supported this contention and revealed that the

Director was, indeed, much too pessimistic about the potential of his graduates. Out of the more than 365 men who attended the school, about 300 completed the required courses. More than half went directly into forestry work. One, Overton Price, became Associate Forester of the United States under Pinchot. At least four became district or regional foresters. Twenty or more served as forest supervisors or deputies. Some dozen earned fine reputations as state foresters. A similar number served with distinction as valuation engineers for the Internal Revenue Service. Others served as forestry consultants to British India, Canada, Puerto Rico, The Philippines, Sumatra, etc. And in private forestry the Biltmore training and spirit helped to change the old policies of "cut and git out" to wiser ones of scientific management, better fire protection, more efficient combatting of forest diseases, and better marketing procedures. Wood preservation became the speciality of some, as did tree surgery. To mention a few by name, Inman F. ("Cap") Eldridge organized and directed the Forest Survey of the South and has been called "the man who knows most about the forests of the South." Co'ert DuBois served as regional forester in California and also as a consul for the United States. Verne Rhoades became the first forest supervisor for Pisgah National Forest. And almost sixty years later some of Schenck's "boys" are still "living advertisements" for the Biltmore Forest School, serving as chairman of the board of well established and highly respected companies.

Because his students succeeded in a wide variety of careers, including mining, exporting, and farming, Schenck on one occasion said he felt like a hen that had hatched ducks. Illustrative of this "brood" is Lorraine F. Jones, Jr., '01, who is one of the leading manufacturer's brokers in St. Louis, Missouri. And, as if doing penance for his "no success" remark, Schenck in the 1950's compiled and edited all available biographies of his students and published them with a typically flamboyant title, *The Biltmore Immortals*. ■