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A MAN AND HIS SCHOOL

Banquet, Department of Forestry, Iowa State College
Fiftieth Anniversary
DeWitt Nelson, Director
California Department of Natural Resources
October 15, 1954

During the past two days we have been reviewing and reliving fifty years of Forestry at Iowa State College. We have brought into focus the influence which the school has had on the lives of each of us. We have renewed our acquaintance with a campus of outstanding beauty and inspiration. All of us have thrilled to the clear tones of the Campanile in the Indian Summer dusk, the crystal sharp morning after a dawn’s ice-storm, the crunch of snow as impatient feet beat a path to the girls’ dormitories on the eastern knoll and the peal of the Victory Bell following a football game.

It is significant in the history of our State and College that we gather here to commemorate the Department’s Golden Anniversary with reminiscence of the past and contemplation of the future.

Few of us have spent much time on the campus in recent years. It is stimulating to renew old friendships and to see the growth that has taken place in the College. Many of us recall the biennial problem that “Prof. Mac” had in convincing the State Legislature that in this great corn state we needed a department of Forestry in the College of Agriculture. This spring, while visiting California, President Hilton assured me that there no longer is any question about the permanence of Forestry at Iowa State. With fifty years of history and 993 graduates I’m sure it would be hard to dislodge.

During this time many professors have devoted their best years to teaching at Iowa State. It is good to remember these men with whom we had such valuable associations. They left indelible impressions upon us. They taught us more than that found between the covers of a book. Among them were the strict disciplinarians, the idealists, and the realists. They all went beyond the call of duty in trying to teach us the theories, principles and facts of forestry; and more than that, the common sense application of that knowledge in the field. Theirs has been a hard task—one that has required the utmost in faith, hope and charity. To them, our professors, on behalf of all Ames Foresters I pay great tribute. To them, we owe a great debt of gratitude—a debt that can be paid only by passing on to others the same type of devotion, leadership and inspiration that they gave us.

In 1904 Forestry was an embryonic profession—something practiced in the Old World, but many doubted its need in this land of abundance. As a profession, Forestry still is young, but fifty years of growth and experience has well-justified the visions and dreams of those pioneers. This half century has seen it grow from a land full of federally-employed foresters drafting presidential proclamations which established great National Forests, to scientists working in laboratories, to trained foresters building and executing long term management plans for continuous forest production, and to teachers training more foresters for tomorrow. In every field of forestry endeavor Iowa State is well represented. A check of the 1954 roster shows 341 employed in private forest industry, 244 in the several federal services, 68 by states and counties, and 34 in education. Seventy percent of our graduates stayed with their profession or in directly allied fields. In each of these categories we have men who have risen to top levels of responsibility. To mention any of them by name would do an injustice to the others. After all, how can we judge success? Who is contributing the most—the man at the policy level, or the man with the marking gun? Each plays an essential part in this drama of the woods.

The romance of forestry is one of the magnets that has drawn men to it throughout the years. I know of no young forester who did not dream of working in the “Big Woods”, of planting trees, or of being responsible for a small empire.

It has been said, “What would man do without his tomorrow? The past, though usually pleasant to remember, is over and done with. The present is always tugging us. But tomorrow, that is the dreamer’s paradise. Everything is possible with tomorrow; no dream too foolish, no goal too high.”

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I think this quotation bespeaks that which has been the keystone of education at Iowa State College, particularly of its Department of Forestry. It has turned out men with dreams, and the desire and the courage to make those dreams come true.

The founders of this Department probably did not think of the day fifty years hence when we would be celebrating its Golden Anniversary. They could not have foreseen that in fifty years this prairie state would produce a thousand professional foresters whose "dreams of tomorrow" would play such a dynamic role in the forests of every state in the Union.

Today we dedicated a young forest to Professor G. B. MacDonald—"Prof. Mac" to us all. In that forest there grows something more than trees. In it is "Prof. Mac", and fifty years of forestry professors, and a little bit of each of us. It symbolizes the years of work and vision on the part of those leaders; the disappointments and heartaches they had with us as undergraduates; the struggles with the Legislature to continue the forest school in a state that grows few trees, the romantic appeal that grips most young Paul Bunyans, and the hard, practical sine of the professional practicing his trade. To us it is the heart of a growing monument that is multiplied many times over by Ames men throughout the forests of every state. The MacDonald Forest, for decades to come, will transmit to each new class lessons of the past and inspirations for the future.

What are some of these lessons and inspirations? First, there are the lessons of history which reach into antiquity—the stories of the forests and their relationship to land and people. We know that forests and species have disappeared from once-lush countries. Many fascinating historical tales include the forests and the use of wood—the Trojan Horse, the ships of the Phoenicians, the Sherwood Forest. There are also the pages of history which tell of men and nature working together to maintain a forest economy, such as those of Switzerland, Germany, and Scandanavia.

Close association with nature brings out the best in a man. It creates a comradeship which first is felt when a student goes to summer camp, and it continues throughout his career. While recently reading an English History of Forests, published in 1853, I noted this passage—"when civilized men take up their abode in forests, they relapse into a state of semi-barbarism." I'm sure the author must have been a forester professor just returned from summer camp.

We have a wealth of humorous anecdotes and lusy tales. No patron saint he, but Paul Bunyan has sat beside every forester's campfire. The songs of the French Canadian lumberjacks and the memory of the ring of the woodsmen's axe and the shrill whistle of the steam donkey engine are sounds dear to the heart of every forester.

And then there are the men—men of courage and vision. Some in forestry schools some in government and some in industry, but all driving toward a common goal.

And then there are the women—the women who have played a major role in the making of our traditions. Just as the close association with nature brings out strength of character in men, it also brings out strength of character in women. A forester's wife must say, as did her sister Ruth, "Whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge, thy people shall be my people", and, if I may paraphrase, because the groves were God's first temples, "thy devotions will be my devotions."

Each present time is destined to add its bit of wealth of the past. The aspect for foresters today is the necessity for, and the privilege of, working with large numbers of people. Population no longer is a static thing. The ratio of urban and rural population has changed alarmingly in the last decade. The impact of fuller use of the forest lands, and the demand for more forest products, has created a new concept in forest administration and management.

There are ever increasing conflicts of interest and philosophies of use as more people seek the forests for homes, recreation, sport and commercial enterprises. More and more the forester must adjudicate and integrate these uses with each other.

The need is for more than just a good technician. The forester today should be grounded in sociology, psychology and the humanities, for at nearly all levels he works with people as much as with trees. Learning does not cease when he receives his degree—it has just begun. A forester must keep abreast of a rapidly-expanding science, and follow the developments in other related fields, sciences and industries; for there is an interdependence of many of them. He should affiliate and actively participate in his professional societies, for by so doing he not only gains personally but also makes a greater contribution to his profession.

In what fields are men exemplifying their ideals in practical application? They are being exemplified in the search for factual knowledge in the class room, in the field, in the laboratory; and in the translation of this knowledge into techniques of application. The real tests of practical application are: first, the teaming of wood technology and forest management; second, the task of solving the problems of a widely-dispersed pattern of forest ownership and intensive competition for land use; and third, taking full advantage of the ground swell of industrial expansion in tree growing, in woodland management and in utilization. In these areas we can deal only with facts stripped of emotionalism.

It has been only during recent years that we have had adequate facts with which to work. Each year our library of knowledge is growing. Early American forestry was an attempt to transplant European techniques to a land where neither the people nor the woods were receptive to the application of such a rigid science. But the early foresters—and many of

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We must stimulate progress and yet be tolerant of our form of government, progress is made through knowledge and to teach others. As foresters our great
teamwork between the people, the public foresters have an obligation and a responsibility to exert real leadership—leadership that is willing to compromise issues but not principles; leadership which recognizes that, in our form of government, progress is made through a process of evolution and not revolution.

Forestry today is going through its greatest period of transition. Forestry is coming of age. It is beginning to be truly recognized as a profession and to be accepted by the public, by the land owners and by the forest industries. Forestry is on the threshold of great opportunities and greater responsibilities. Can we as professionals meet the new challenges? Forestry’s future cannot be left to chance. Our schools and practicing foresters have an obligation and a responsibility to exert real leadership—leadership that is both technically sound and practical of application; leadership that is willing to compromise issues but not principles; leadership which recognizes that, in our form of government, progress is made through a process of evolution and not revolution.

Here is a challenge for all of us. Here is a task that we can achieve only through understanding and teamwork between the people, the public foresters and industrial foresters striving for a common goal. We must stimulate progress and yet be tolerant when it comes painfully slow.

On a firm foundation this college has been built brick by brick and building by building. It has sent men and women throughout the world to apply their knowledge and to teach others. As foresters our greatest task is to teach others the methods and techniques of good resource management. No longer is a timber famine feared by those who know and understand the productive capacities of our lands. The only danger is the lack of willingness on the part of the people to make full production possible.

Today’s concept is that of more effectively blending the theoretical with the practical; the fusion of the using industries with the science of land use and timber production. More and more the laws of economics are playing a leading role in sound forestry. No longer are there great frontiers of virgin forests to tempt exploitation, yet there still are many who give little heed to tomorrow’s crop. Opposing these are an ever-growing number of land owners and operators who are applying the principles of sound management and utilization as rapidly as the economics of their industries can absorb them. The idea of “Tree Farms” is taking hold from coast to coast. While these gains are being made within the limits of prudence and practical vision, the scientist must look to distant horizons; he must continue to strip the shroud of mystery from the problems of the field. We must learn the relationship between plants, soil and water. We must realize that soil, like a tree, is a living thing—it has physical structure, chemical composition and biological components. We must learn how to get the most from our soils and climates. The science of chemistry is opening new opportunities in forest growth, protection from insects, disease and fire, as well as in the fields of utilization. There undoubtedly are biological controls of forest pests which we must discover. We must seek better ways of integrating the production from many small mills to secure better utilization of valuable raw material. In this field many large operators have accomplished complete utilization. These are among today’s frontiers. They are the uncertain and undeveloped regions in the field of forestry and utilization. They will provide new opportunities for the younger generations.

The Department of Forestry at Iowa State can be proud of its 50 year record; proud of its professors who have produced continuing crops of skilled foresters; and proud of its men who have given outstanding leadership in a profession that is little older than the Department itself.

Many years ago President Wheeler of the University of California told a graduating class, “Our future concerns the use we make of our training here—the result will be what we make it. Destiny is a great word, but so far as each of you is concerned, it is a home-made article.” Iowa State has produced many skilled craftsmen, each of whom is playing a part in shaping the destiny of America’s forest resources and industries today. We, as alumni, are proud of our school and we pledge our best to make the school proud of us.

I have spoken of the inspiration that comes from our associations and from the traditions of our past. I have tried to present for your consideration some of the present problems and some of the future aims of professional foresters. There is a phrase which I wish to add which extends my meaning—an eye on the stars and feet on the ground.

The challenge to the school becomes simply this—can it train young men who, armed with idealism, can apply their ideals as well as their technical knowledge to their profession? Those of us who have graduated from this school of forestry believe that this challenge has been met during these past fifty years, and that this school will continue to educate men who will be a credit to their profession, who will be confident in their technical knowledge, and who will follow their lodestar and lift their eyes unto the hills.

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