

ANNUAL REPORT 2004

From the Chairman

Larry W. Tombaugh



An old Forest Service friend, Jack, visited us last week. In catching up on each other's lives, I mentioned that I had recently become chairman of the Forest History Society's board of directors, following the extraordinary leadership of Dick Porterfield. He asked me why I was donating time to this organization. I told him how excited I am about the mission of the Society and about the new directions that have been chartered by our indefatigable president, Steve Anderson. Rather than just talk about my excitement, I invited him to join me on the 30-mile drive from my home to Durham to visit the Forest History Society and see firsthand the reasons for my enthusiasm.

As a Forest History Society member, Jack thought that our most important function is to publish *Forest History Today* and the *Environmental History* journal. To him, these are the public faces of the Society. He became almost childlike with enthusiasm as he wandered through the impressive library collection. He was entranced by the archives, the oral history collection, and the incomparable collection of forestry-related historical photographs.

When we finished the tour of the facilities, we talked about future activities and needs. We discussed the critical need to build upon the Alvin Huss Endowment to improve access to the archives that he so enjoyed. It is essential that our 25,000 historical photographs be digitized so that they will be preserved and be electronically available to scholars or journalists throughout the world. I also told him about our plans to build upon the Lynn W. Day Endowment to further enhance scholarship in forest and conservation history. The Society should be, and can be, an internationally recognized stimulus for all forms of scholarly activities related to forests.

Our oral history collection is unique, but every day we lose

opportunities to hear from people who actually made forest history. We need a full-time historian who is skilled at working with oral histories.

Because of its rich collection of materials, the Forest History Society is uniquely postured to bring forest and conservation history education into classrooms. We have a good start at this, but our opportunities to educate teacher and students outstrip our existing resources.

Finally, an appropriate vision for the Society is that no newspaper reporter would ever write an article that has a forest history component without drawing upon the resources of the Forest History Society. Overcoming the misinformation and misrepresentations about forests that abound in the popular press is our most powerful means of informing public policy.

Armed with this new understanding of the Forest History Society, Jack asked how he could help the organization reach its enormous potential. It was just the right question. I told him there are two ways. First, in his 2003 report to you, Dick Porterfield discussed our transformation from a membership-based funding program to an annual fund based on annual contributions. The response to the Annual Fund has been most impressive to date. A growing number of supporters are joining the President's Circle with a \$1,000 annual contribution, but lesser contributions are also welcome and are critical to the success of the Society.

Second, we have recently laid the groundwork for the Society's first major fund-raising campaign to address the aspirations that I discussed with my friend. You will hear more about this in future issues of *Forest History Today*. I think that when you hear details about these goals and aspirations, you will share the enthusiasm of our staff and board of directors in becoming an active supporter of this unique institution.