

# Forest History Society



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## **Guide to the Early Forestry Education in North Carolina Oral History Interview Collection, 1959**

The Early Forestry Education in North Carolina Oral History Interview Collection documents the origins and early development of professional forestry in North Carolina during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The collection consists of interviews with four foresters -- Inman Fowler "Cap" Eldredge, Clarence F. Korstian, Reuben B. Robertson, and George H. Wirt -- who reminisce about their forestry careers. Specific topics discussed include the foresters' experiences at the Biltmore Forest School in North Carolina and their impressions of the school's founder and director, German forester Carl Alwin Schenck. The Forest History Society conducted the interviews in 1959. The reminiscences span the years 1880 to 1959.

**2003**

# Guide to the Early Forestry Education in North Carolina Oral History Interview Collection, 1959

## Descriptive Summary

**Collection Title:** Early Forestry Education in North Carolina Oral History Interview Collection, 1959

**Creator:** Forest History Society

**Extent:** 7 file folders, 22 stenorette tapes, and 12 cassette tapes; ca. 2 linear feet

**Location:** For current information on the location of these materials, please consult the Forest History Society Archivist/Librarian, Cheryl Oakes (coakes@duke.edu)

**Processed By:** Elizabeth Arnold

**Date Completed:** March, 2002

**Encoded By:** Michele A. Justice

## Information for Users

**Restrictions to Access:** This collection is open for research.

**Provenance:** Interviews conducted in 1959 by the Forest History Society. Part of the larger Forest History Society Oral History Interview Collection.

**Preferred Citation:** [Identification of Item], Early Forestry Education in North Carolina Oral History Interview Collection, Library and Archives, Forest History Society, Durham, North Carolina.

**Copyright Notice:** The Forest History Society does not own copyright to this collection. Individuals obtaining materials from the Forest History Society Library and Archives are responsible for using the works in conformance with United States copyright law as well as any donor restrictions accompanying the materials.

## Biographical Note

Biographical information about the foresters and forestry educators interviewed in this collection -- Inman Eldredge (1883 - 1963), Clarence Korstian (1889 - 1968), Reuben Robertson (1879 - 1972), and George Wirt (1880 - 1961) -- is included within the detailed description of each series below.

## Scope and Content Note

This group of oral history interviews drawn from the Forest History Society's Oral History Interview Collection is unique in that the reminiscences of the interviewees focus on the formation and early evolution of the forestry profession in North Carolina. The four foresters interviewed all had connections to either the Biltmore Forest School in North Carolina or the school's founder, Carl Alwin Schenck (1868 - 1955). Two of the interviewees -- Inman Eldredge (1883 - 1963) and George Wirt (1880 - 1961) -- were students at the Biltmore Forest

## Guide to the Early Forestry Education in North Carolina Oral History Interview Collection, 1959

School, founded by Schenck on George Vanderbilt's (1862 - 1914) estate in Asheville, North Carolina, in 1898. Reuben Robertson (1879 - 1972) was a forester with Champion Paper and Fibre Company in Canton, North Carolina, and a colleague of Carl Schenck. When George Vanderbilt fired Schenck from his official job as forester for the Biltmore Estate in 1909, Champion allowed the Biltmore Forest School to continue operating on Champion-owned land in the town of Sunburst, North Carolina. Clarence Korstian's (1889 - 1968) connection with Carl Schenck was in his capacity as a forestry educator and dean of Duke University's School of Forestry. In his interview, Korstian discusses Schenck's influence on the development of forestry education at Duke.

### Organization of Collection

The collection is organized into four series, each consisting of a single oral history interview conducted in 1959: (1) [Inman Fowler "Cap" Eldredge Oral History Interview](#); (2) [Clarence F. Korstian Oral History Interview](#); (3) [Reuben B. Robertson Oral History Interview](#); (4) [George H. Wirt Oral History Interview](#). Each series describes the various materials created during the interview process and includes a link to the full text of a final edited version of the interview.

### Online Catalog Headings

Biltmore Forest School -- History.  
Champion Paper and Fibre Company.  
Duke University. School of Forestry.  
Eldredge, Inman Fowler, 1883 - 1963 -- Interviews.  
Forest History Society.  
Foresters -- United States.  
Forestry schools and education -- North Carolina.  
Forests and forestry -- North Carolina -- History.  
Forests and forestry -- Pennsylvania -- History.  
Forests and forestry -- United States -- History.  
Korstian, Clarence F. (Clarence Ferdinand), 1889 - 1968 -- Interviews.  
Robertson, Reuben B., 1879 - 1972 -- Interviews.  
Schenck, Carl Alwin, 1868 - 1955.  
United States. Forest Service -- Officials and employees.  
Wirt, George H., 1880 - 1961 -- Interviews.

**Guide to the Early Forestry Education in North Carolina Oral  
History Interview Collection, 1959**

## **Detailed Description of the Collection**

### **Series I: Inman Fowler "Cap" Eldredge Oral History Interview, 1959**

#### **Biographical Note**

**Photo Source:** Photo courtesy of the Southeastern Society of American Foresters.  
[Photographer and date unknown.]



Inman F. "Cap" Eldredge was born on 24 March 1883 in Camden, South Carolina. He attended Clemson College and in 1904 enrolled at the Biltmore Forest School and studied under Dr. Carl A. Schenck. He earned a Bachelor of Forestry degree in 1905 and entered the U.S. Forest Service as a student assistant. He was appointed forest assistant in 1906, and in 1908 was made forest examiner assigned to timber sales with headquarters at Albuquerque, New Mexico. The next year he was appointed supervisor of the newly created Choctawhatchee and Ocala national forests in Florida, which he organized and managed for eight years thereafter. During this time he developed new methods of conservative turpentining, now in general use throughout the naval stores region.

Eldredge married Callie Landrum in 1913. He was commissioned in the Army in 1917 at the outbreak of World War I, and served as a captain in the 10th Engineers (forestry) in the Landes region of southern France. He returned to the Forest Service after the war and was promoted to chief of the Division of Timber Management in the Eastern region, and subsequently became forest inspector of management and timber sales on all national forests under chief forester W. B. Greeley. He interrupted his Forest Service career in 1926 to accept industrial employment as manager of the Suwanee Forest in southeastern Georgia. Six years later, Eldredge returned to the Forest Service as regional director of the forest survey of the South, at the Southern Forest Experiment Station in New Orleans. He retired from the Forest Service in 1944 but continued to work in the forestry profession as a private consultant.

Eldredge's honors include election as a member to the Society of American Foresters (SAF) in 1911 and to the grade of Fellow in 1942; he was chairman of the Southeastern Section in 1930 and of the Gulf States Section in 1935; he served on several SAF committees and was a Council member from 1940 until 1943. In 1956 he received the

## Guide to the Early Forestry Education in North Carolina Oral History Interview Collection, 1959

Gifford Pinchot medal for distinguished service to forestry. "Cap" Eldredge died on 15 April 1963 at the age of eighty.

**[Note:** The above biographical information about Inman Fowler Eldredge was drawn from the following sources: (1) Inman F. Eldredge, "Autobiography of Inman F. Eldredge, Biltmore Forest School, 1905," in *The Biltmore Immortals, Biographies of 50 American Boys Graduating From the Biltmore Forest School Which Was the First School of American Forestry on American Soil*, Volume II ([Darmstadt, Germany: L. C. Wittich, 1957]), pp. 23 - 28; and (2) Inman F. Eldredge, "Inman F. Eldredge (1883 - 1963)," *Journal of Forestry* 61 (1963): 470. [Obituary.]

### Scope and Content Note

Forest History Society executive director Elwood R. Maunder conducted this oral history interview with Inman Eldredge in New Orleans, Louisiana, on 3-4 February 1959. Topics discussed in the interview include: Eldredge's time as a student at the Biltmore Forest School; his employment with the U.S. Forest Service and Superior Pine Products Company; forest surveying work; the pulp and paper industry; the turpentine industry; educating the public about forestry; forestry in the southern United States; fire control; forest utilization; and his impressions of foresters Carl Schenck, Gifford Pinchot, William B. Greeley, Arthur B. Recknagel, Austin Cary, and Charles Holmes Herty.

**Final Transcript of Interview:** 100 leaves [\[See Full Text of Interview\]](#)

**Original Transcript of Interview:** 128 leaves

**Original Audio Recording of Interview:** 13 stenorette tapes

**Preservation Copy of Audio Recording of Interview:** 7 cassettes

## Series II: Clarence F. Korstian Oral History Interview, 1959

### Biographical Note

**Photo Source:** Clarence F. Korstian, *Clarence F. Korstian: Forty Years of Forestry*, an oral history interview by Elwood R. Maunder (New Haven, Conn.: Forest History Society, Inc., 1969), p. [ii]. [Photographer and date unknown.]



## Guide to the Early Forestry Education in North Carolina Oral History Interview Collection, 1959

Dr. Clarence Korstian, through his career with the U.S. Forest Service and the Duke University School of Forestry, established his reputation as an early leader in the development of forestry in North Carolina as well as throughout the nation. Born in Saline County, Nebraska, in 1889, he obtained his forestry education at the University of Nebraska and later at Yale University, from which he received his doctorate in 1926. His early career was with the U.S. Forest Service, including several years of field assignments in forest research activities in the Arizona, Utah, and Idaho. In 1921 he was transferred to the newly organized Appalachian Forest Experiment Station in Asheville, North Carolina. There he was one of the original technical staff team members at the station; his assignments were in the field of silviculture.

Korstian's long and distinguished career with the Forest Service ended in 1930, when he received an offer to join Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, as professor of silviculture and first director of the Duke Forest. He organized the Duke graduate school of forestry, of which he was made dean in 1938. Dr. Korstian was largely responsible for establishing its excellent reputation for scholarship.

Korstian participated in numerous other professional activities, including serving as a member of the Society for American Foresters' national council and later as its president in 1938-1941, and was elected a Fellow in 1942. Dr. Korstian was a prominent member of the North Carolina Forestry Association and served as its president from 1943 to 1947. Among other things, he was a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science; a charter member of the Committee on Forestry and Related Training for the Southern Regional Education Board; and served as vice-president of the American Forestry Association. He contributed many bulletins, reports, and articles to the literature on forestry. Additionally, Korstian was husband to Catherine Dick Korstian and the father of three children. Dr. Korstian remained active in the field of forestry from his retirement in 1959 until his death in 1968 at the age of seventy-eight.

**[Note:** The above biographical information about Clarence F. Korstian was drawn from the following sources: (1) "Korstian, Clarence Ferdinand", *Who Was Who in America, Vol. IV, 1961 - 1968*, p. 1060; (2) "Clarence F. Korstian (1889 - 1968)," *Journal of Forestry* 66 (1968): 435. [Obituary.]; and (3) Elwood L. Demmon, "Clarence F. Korstian: Forty Years of Forestry" (paper read at a meeting of the North Carolina Forestry Council and of the Appalachian Section of the Society of American Foresters, Greensboro, N.C., 12 February 1970), [3] p. [Demmon described the contents of *Clarence F. Korstian: Forty Years of Forestry*, an oral history interview conducted by Elwood R. Maunder (New Haven, Conn.: Forest History Society, 1969). At the meeting, Demmon presented a bound copy of the interview to the Duke University library.]]

### Scope and Content Note

Forest History Society executive director Elwood R. Maunder conducted this oral history interview with Clarence F. Korstian in Durham, North Carolina, on 16 February 1959. Topics discussed in the interview include: Korstian's employment with the U.S. Forest Service from 1912 to 1930 in such areas as Arizona, Utah, Idaho, and North Carolina; Carl Schenck's influence on the establishment of a forestry school at Duke University and on forestry education in the southern United States; Korstian's term as dean of Duke's

## Guide to the Early Forestry Education in North Carolina Oral History Interview Collection, 1959

School of Forestry from the 1930s to the 1950s; and his relationships with and impressions of foresters and forestry educators, including Filibert Roth, J. Wilbur O'Byrne, G. A. Pearson, Leon F. Kneipp, Carl Schenck, and Austin Cary.

**Final Transcript of Interview:** 74 leaves [\[See Full Text of Interview\]](#)

**Original Transcript of Interview:** 48 leaves

**Original Audio Recording of Interview:** 6 stenorette tapes

**Preservation Copy of Audio Recording of Interview:** 3 cassettes

### Series III: Reuben B. Robertson Oral History Interview, 1959

#### Biographical Note

**Photo Source:** Forest History Society Photograph Collection, Durham, North Carolina. [Photographer and date unknown.]



Reuben B. Robertson was well-known and respected not only in the paper and pulp industry, but throughout the southern United States. As a leader of the Champion Paper and Fibre Company for more than half a century, Robertson played an important role in the development of the economy of the southern states. He was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, on 11 June 1879 and received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Yale University in 1900. That same year he entered the University of Cincinnati law school, and in 1903 was admitted to the bar and entered into practice at his father's law firm, Robertson and Buchwalter.

In 1904 he married Hope Thomson, daughter of Peter G. Thomson, organizer of the Champion Coated Paper Company of Hamilton, Ohio. Robertson went to western North Carolina in 1906 as a favor to his father-in-law to help Champion through financial difficulties in establishing a pulp mill in Canton, North Carolina. What was to be a fifty-day assignment turned into a long and distinguished career. Robertson became general manager of the mill at Canton in 1912, was promoted to vice president four years later, and in 1925 was made president and general manager of the company. In 1935 Champion Fibre Company at Canton and Champion Coated Paper Company merged to become Champion Paper and Fibre Company, of which Robertson was named executive vice president. He became president in 1946. Under Robertson's management, the company sustained its progressive policies of integration, development and leadership in

## Guide to the Early Forestry Education in North Carolina Oral History Interview Collection, 1959

the field of paper production and met with great success and expansion.

Robertson was well known for his interest and participation in improved forest management; he was one of the earliest industrial leaders in the South to recognize the need for a dependable supply of pulpwood and to encourage public support for forest protection. The forest conservation program he developed on his company's lands served as an example of good forestry practice in the pulp and paper industry. He received many honors for his work: he was named Man of the South in 1950; in 1954 he was appointed to a professorship at North Carolina State University in pulp and paper technology and was given a Conservation Award from the American Forestry Association; and in 1956 he received an honorary doctorate from Western Carolina College. Robertson served on several federal committees for the Department of Commerce, and made extensive contributions to his state and local communities: he served as director of Wachovia Bank and Trust Co.; on the boards of trustees for Western Carolina University, the University of North Carolina, and the Asheville School; and as a leader in the religious community. Reuben B. Robertson died on 26 December 1972 at the age of ninety-three.

**[Note:** The above biographical information about Reuben Robertson was drawn from the following source: (1) John Parris, "Reuben Robertson was Industrial Giant," *The Asheville Citizen*, 27 December 1972, p. 13. ]

### Scope and Content Note

Forest History Society executive director Elwood R. Maunder and Mr. Elwood L. Demmon conducted this oral history interview with Reuben Robertson in Asheville, North Carolina, on 15 February 1959. Topics discussed in the interview include: Robertson's work for Champion Paper and Fibre Company in North Carolina beginning in 1907; the growth of the pulp and paper industry in the southern United States; Champion's reaction to the proposed formation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Tennessee and North Carolina; the New Deal era; the conversion of chestnut logs into pulp; the American Paper and Pulp Association; and his association with and impressions of Peter G. Thomson (founder of Champion) and foresters Walter Damtoft and Carl A. Schenck.

**Final Transcript of Interview:** 30 + ii leaves [\[See Full Text of Interview\]](#)

**Original Transcript of Interview:** 34 leaves

**Original Audio Recording of Interview:** 3 stenorette tapes

**Preservation Copy of Audio Recording of Interview:** 2 cassettes

## Series IV: George H. Wirt Oral History Interview, 1959

### Biographical Note

**Photo Source:** George H. Wirt, "Autobiography of and by George H. Wirt, Graduating from Biltmore Forest School in 1901," in *The Biltmore Immortals: Biographies of 50*

## Guide to the Early Forestry Education in North Carolina Oral History Interview Collection, 1959

*American Boys Graduating From the Biltmore Forest School Which Was the First School of American Forestry on American Soil*, Volume I ([Darmstadt, Germany: L. C. Wittich, 1953]), p. 311. [Photographer and date unknown.]



George H. Wirt is one of the foremost names in Pennsylvania forest history. As the state's first state forester and Chief Forest Fire Warden, Wirt came to be known as one of America's most influential forest protectionists. Born on 28 November 1880 in McVeytown, Pennsylvania, he received a B.E. degree from Juniata College in 1891 with aspirations of becoming an engineer. But a close friend of Wirt's father, Dr. Joseph T. Rothrock, a prominent botanist and forest enthusiast, had other plans in mind for him. Under advice from Rothrock, Wirt enrolled at the Biltmore Forest School and received his Bachelor of Forestry degree in 1901.

By this time Dr. Rothrock had been appointed the first Pennsylvania forestry commissioner. Wirt accepted the job of state forester, at which position he authored the first technical bulletin on forestry issued in Pennsylvania. In 1903, Wirt and Rothrock organized the opening of the Forest Academy at Mont Alto, Pennsylvania, of which Wirt was named the first director. Under Wirt's guidance, the academy operated as a higher ranger school and advanced to provide college-level courses of professional caliber only to the most deserving students. The Forest Academy later merged with the Department of Forestry of Pennsylvania State College.

Wirt married in 1907 and left the academy in 1910 to accept the job of forest inspector for the Department of Forestry at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. During this time he supervised the newly-educated staff of foresters at work in portions of the State Forests. In 1913 the proposition of forest protection in the state was recognized as fundamental, and Wirt was assigned the job of drafting a forest protection law. It was presented to the legislature in 1915, and in the fall of that same year Wirt was made Chief Forest Fire Warden of Pennsylvania, a position he held until his retirement in 1946.

Wirt was known as the primary architect of the unified forest fire control structure for Pennsylvania, which became a model for many other state protection organizations. He solicited the appointment of 4,400 fire wardens and 30,000 crew members. Forest fire loss dropped from an average of half a million acres per year to about 25,000 acres a year in the period of Wirt's leadership. He was honored in 1928 with a monument erected in his name at Mont Alto and was awarded an honorary Master of Science degree from Juniata College. He was a fellow in the Society of American Foresters, served on a number of committee assignments, wrote many articles, and delivered many public lectures. He remained active in state and local conservation movements after his retirement. George H. Wirt died on 8 November 1961 in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania.

## Guide to the Early Forestry Education in North Carolina Oral History Interview Collection, 1959

**[Note:** The above biographical information about George H. Wirt was drawn from the following sources: (1) George H. Wirt, "Autobiography of and by George H. Wirt, Graduating from Biltmore Forest School in 1901," in *The Biltmore Immortals, Biographies of 50 American Boys Graduating From the Biltmore Forest School Which Was the First School of American Forestry on American Soil*, Volume I ([Darmstadt, Germany: L. C. Wittich, 1953]), pp. 310 - 314; and (2) "George R. [sic] Wirt (1880 - 1961)," *Journal of Forestry* 60 (January 1962): 60 - 61. [Obituary.] ]

### Scope and Content Note

Charles D. Bonsted conducted this oral history interview with George H. Wirt in March 1959. Topics discussed in the interview include: Wirt's time as a student at the Biltmore Forest School; his employment as a forester in the state of Pennsylvania; fire protection; forestry practices in the state of Pennsylvania; and his association with and impressions of foresters Carl A. Schenck, Gifford Pinchot, and Joseph T. Rothrock.

**Final Transcript of Interview:** 62 leaves [\[See Full Text of Interview\]](#)

**Original Transcript of Interview:** 69 leaves

**Original Audio Recording of Interview:** None Held by the Forest History Society

**Preservation Copy of Audio Recording of Interview:** None Held by the Forest History Society