

There is no question that the profession of forestry is a profession with a long history of mentoring. Most, if not every forestry school also has a mentor that stands out in the school's history, one who touched the lives of so many and thereby affected the profession to degrees they may never had realized at the time. This reminiscence of James F. Dubuar, who served at the Ranger School of the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, is dedicated to the many mentors who made a difference.

JAMES F. DUBUAR:

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE MAN

For a period of years in the 1980s, John Shanklin urgently requested me to write a biography of James F. Dubuar. I got as far as asking Ranger School alumni for their input and then writing the first three paragraphs below. My intent was to do thorough archival research and write a real history for a scholarly publication like *Forest & Conservation History*.

It didn't happen, and I sincerely apologize to John Shanklin, who has long since passed the great divide, and to the many alumni who responded to my call for anecdotes about Jim Dubuar and wished me well with the project.

Recently I came across those responses, and I decided to write about Jim Dubuar based on them. So what follows isn't a learned treatise on James F. Dubuar, but something about the man as told by those who were his students, employees, friends, and family, and by Prof. Dubuar himself. Although he will not read it, I hope it meets the spirit of John Shanklin's request.

Jim Dubuar, James F. Dubuar, Mr. Dubuar, Uncle Jimmy, JFD. For those who did not know him or never heard of him, the names have no meaning, no memory. It's like saying "Babe Ruth" to someone who neither knows about or cares about baseball, or only eats chocolate bars.

To those who have become part of the Ranger School

community since he left (and it has been 43 years, longer than the 37 years he served as Director)—as students, faculty, staff, or friends—the name James F. Dubuar evokes an institutional memory. He is the benevolent face in the oil painting in the main hall; a face with a wry grin and penetrating eyes. (Kerm Remele, '43, reports Mr. JFD didn't like this painting, saying, "It makes me look like a beaver."). He is the name on the awards plaque, the name on the plaque on the rock in front of school, the man whose name the school forest bears. His spirit sweeps from the walls and cries out to all, "Listen, brother, there's a right way to do it and that's how you'll do it." These good folks say that Dubuar obviously touched many lives, and they're right.

But those of us who were his students, or colleagues, or friends, know more. Jim Dubuar didn't just touch our lives; he whacked them but good! We laugh, joke, and commiserate about the verbal whacks we took that were so obvious. Then we pause, and the enormity of the subtle, or not so subtle, message we

BY JAMES E. COUFAL, RS '57



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James Dubuar (left) with faculty members Phil Haddock, Jim Hensel, and Orrin Latham at the Ranger School.

received from James F. Dubuar the role model is felt more than known, tasted more than seen, and penetrates more than any 11 months of anything else most of us have experienced. Like so many things in life, it is an experience we wanted to escape while we were in its midst, and now cherish. "If I made it through that, I can make it through anything." Jim Dubuar may be long gone, but the tone and the standards he set live on. So let's hear what some of his students, colleagues, and friends had to say about Jim Dubuar and his effect on their lives.

Jim didn't wait long to start the learning process. Walt Sergeant, '49, recalls that,

At our first class in the drafting room, Prof. Dubuar entered the room and immediately climbed atop a drafting table on his hands and knees. He then said, "A drafting table is for drawing or map making, etc. and is not to be sat on, stood on, or used for any other purpose than drafting."

Jim must have been prepared to make an opportunity unless given one. In my class ('57), he came in to find a classmate (Herb Allen?) sitting on a drafting table. In this case, Jim didn't climb atop a table but much to Herb's chagrin he emphatically gave the same message about the use of drafting tables and fools who used them otherwise. Several alumni agree that it appeared Jim looked for instances during the year to give everyone a top sergeant dressing down, with a few exceptions for those older or more mature students who had sufficient life experiences so they didn't need to learn what it feels like to be verbally massaged. As Hal Bush, '27, put it while describing an incident, "No WWI Army sergeant

got his stripes for having seen and not heard. Needless to say there was never another disciplinary problem for the rest of the school year." My Class of '57 must have been different from your Class of '27 Hal, because even after the opening day chewing out about sitting on the drafting table, my classmates almost daily risked the royal reaming for a little adventure.

Not everyone thought the military treatment was wonderful. John Ackerman, '54, reminiscing in his class's neat publication, *Class of 1954 Thirty Years Later*, said, "I know how proud everyone is that managed to survive the Ranger School experience. But so much of it, in my opinion, was the product of a somewhat obsessed and maniacal individual bent on establishing a tradition based on pro-military lines." John spoke to the Ranger School experience most of us appreciate in his next sentence by adding, "They were able to instill more knowledge, however, than at any time in the next three years at Syracuse." This is an idea to this day that the Syracuse faculty doesn't understand and can't accept. Many cases also reveal that Uncle Jimmy had a soft side.

George Myers wrote in a letter to then Ranger School Alumni Association President Tom Martin,

My first impression of Professor Dubuar was very misleading in that I saw the person but did not know him. He reminded me of an angry owl with his short compact stature, his slicked-back hair, thick glasses and lantern jaw, and a mien that would frighten or give pause to the most stout-hearted. His abrupt "bark" assured him of our attention, and very few of us saw kindness, humility and gentleness lurking there.

Jack McConnell, '41, recalls that

We were having a “bull session” in one of the (dorm) rooms and got quite noisy. For some reason one of the guys put a laundry bag over my head and I guess I really got carried away. I must have sensed something was wrong because things became quiet—I removed the bag and lo and behold, Mr. J.F. Dubuar was standing in the open doorway. With his stern look & piercing black eyes he looked at me and remarked, “You sound like a Jack-ass braying in a rain barrel.” I didn’t think I’d be long at the school—Needless to say, the hallways became quiet once more and I even think he laughed to himself as he turned away.

I think many of us experienced the “sensing” Jack writes about, including a sense of foreboding when one received a terse note that said simply, “Please see me. JFD.” About what? What did I do? Oh my God, what will I tell Mom and Dad? But there was compassion. Hal Bush, '27, even recounts Dubuar overlooking the fact that adjacent dorm mates kicked a hole in the wall to have a dormitory suite. Of course, the building was scheduled for demolition and replacement by the main building. I’ll recount a situation of my own.

Recall that no drinking was allowed, anywhere, anytime. My class had lost a member the very first weekend due to a drinking incident. I lived in the Long Dorm and early one evening all the Long Dorm residents decided a drink was in order. But no one wanted to go to town—too much work to do. So we drew straws and I “won.” I collected the money and took the orders and off to Wanakena I did go.

With a brown bag full of beer and wine bottles in my arms, I made the turn onto the Ranger School Road and had not gone but a few chains when I heard a car behind me. With this load, a ride would be welcomed, but when I saw a black Buick driven by James



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James F. Dubuar was a dedicated fly fisherman and waterfowl hunter. His Afghan hound, Emma, was famous for chasing students.



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The ranger school in 1962. Before 1972, when the school year ran from March to February, some of the earliest surveying field exercises were conducted on the frozen Oswegatchie River in front of the school.



This is the millpond in Wanakena in the early 1900s. Wanakena had a variety of operations—sawmill, buggy whip mill, shoe-last mill—and a population of about 1,000. Today it is a tiny village of about 100 permanent residents.

THE RANGER SCHOOL TODAY

The Ranger School is located just outside the hamlet of Wanakena, New York on the western side of the Adirondack Park. Students attending this unit of the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry receive an associate in applied science degree in forest technology. The unique 1+1 structure of the program allows students to spend their first year of school at a college of their choice and the second year is spent at the Ranger School.

Ranger School students attend class 8 hours per day, five days a week and earn 48 credit hours during their 10-month stay in Wanakena. On a typical day students spend 4 hours in the classroom and 4 hours in field and laboratory exercises. Field and laboratory exercises held on the 2800-acre James F. Dubuar Forest provide students with a hands-on experience in the various aspects of forest technology.

An extremely diverse student body makes up the enrollment that ranges between 40–55 people. The five full-time faculty, most of whom live on the campus, bring a wide range of technical and professional forestry and surveying experience to the program. Graduates are heavily recruited by a variety of forestry companies and organizations. A significant number of graduates continue their studies at the College of Environmental Science and Forestry or other colleges offering forestry degrees.

The Ranger School boasts a very supportive and active alumni association. An endowment has been successfully established to help support student scholarships and provide program support. A \$4.5 million capital construction project is scheduled to break ground in the spring of 2001.

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F. Dubuar, I nearly filled my britches, especially when he stopped, looked out the window and said, “Get in, Brother,” indicating the back seat. The bottles rattling loudly were playing “Temptation,” but I thought I had an out when I saw Emma, his famous Afghan hound in the back seat (she also had a thing for britches!).

“I’m afraid of her,” I said as she bared her teeth and emitted a low grumble. “She won’t hurt you. Get in, Brother,” he said with that command module that allowed for nothing but getting in. Nary a word was spoken during the drive to school. Emma growled, I shook, the bottles rattled, Dubuar drove, and I swear I could see through the back of his head to a wry little grin. When we got to the Long Dorm—he knew where I lived like he knew so much of what went on—he stopped. I don’t recall that he said anything, just looked over his shoulder and dismissed me (from the car, that is). By this time, the bottles were playing the War of 1812 and I just knew I was done. However, nothing was ever said, and I’d like to believe that he saw something in me worth saving. These kind of remembrances served me well when I later joined the Ranger School faculty and then as Director. Still, Kerm Remele, ’43, remembers Jim Dubuar talking of ulcers and saying, “I don’t get ’em, I give ’em.”

Events such as those described may have been taken as “teachable moments” by James F. Dubuar. But he also used his famous course, Elements of Forestry, to teach much more than forestry. Long before forestry educators decided that they had missed the boat by not including large doses of the human element, Dubuar talked ethics, psychology, sociology, organizational behavior, and professionalism. Alumni talked in two themes about Dubuar and his course, Elements of Forestry; style and content.

Tom Farrenkopf, ’54, reminisced about both:

The first time Jim Dubuar lectured us I thought he was someone who had escaped from the state hospital. He laid his expectations on the line the first day. I remember sitting in the classroom near the end of the day, not quite awake, when he told us we were expected to be at each class on time, ready to go, and we should continue to work until it was time to quit, and how this related

to the working world and putting in a full days work for a full days pay. All the time he was talking he was pacing up and down, moving the chair, moving the table, and when he finished up it was the end of the day, and he said "...and when it gets to be five o'clock drop everything and quit for the day, don't you see?" With that he dropped a large wooden triangle (the one used to contain the tips of the transit legs when it was set up in the classroom) on the floor with such a bang that everyone rose up in his seat.

Walt Sergeant remembers something I also have fond memories of. Walt says, "I remember also being in the classroom at the head of the stairs when the bell would ring to begin. Prof. Dubuar would at that instant leave his office at the foot of the stairs. He would start his lecture as he cleared his office door, and continue up the stairs and into the classroom with no interruptions." In my recollection, he ended his lectures in a parallel fashion. That is, when the bell rang he turned and walked out the classroom door to his office, continuing to lecture until he arrived at his office. Good ears at the front and back ends of his lectures were an absolute must!

George Myers, '50, perhaps sums it up best; "The man would pace back and forth like a caged tiger and challenge you to try to meet his standards! (Author's comment: I and some others also remember a style where he seemed to hang on to the podium for dear life, with his head lifted skyward and never looking at the class, while continuing to lecture). He'd get on and really pound subjects (often remote from the official ones being taught)

dear to his heart: Morality, integrity, and the WORK ETHIC, as though the very force of his personality you would remember. We did." Therein was his secret; we remembered the message he gave by the way he lived.

How we each remembered has to do with "story," the most important method of transmitting values. Larry Hill, '50, writes that for him it was a lot of things:

It was that night in March 1949, the night before the first class day at Wanakena when I was fooling around with the piano in the "library" (such as it was in those days), when Mr. Dubuar came in all in a hustle and announced that he hoped that I was a better student than a piano player. It was that afternoon in mid April when I thought I had washed out after hitting Professor Hensel with a snowball destined for classmate Rene Elisar that he told me my aim was no better than my piano playing, but that he thought I could make it as a student if I'd just "grow up." It was that day in February when he shook my hand at graduation and suggested that now I had grown up.

Stories make myths, events, and people that become larger than life to pass on our fundamental values. Jim Dubuar is one of those myths or legends. As Larry Hill went on to put it, "There is so much that I owe that gentle giant. I can never repay him that debt except to behave like he did when he left Michigan in 1913....just be darn good at it." This requires just a bit more explanation.



James Dubuar with Tinker (center), a student, and Elmer Martin (right), the shop and maintenance man in 1920 at the Ranger School. Some students lived in tents that year.

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Larry wrote of how in 1958 he was vice-president of the Michigan Foresters' Club at the University of Michigan. It happened to be the 45th anniversary year of Jim Dubuar's graduation in 1913 from UM, so the yearbook was dedicated to Mr. Dubuar, and he was invited to give a talk on campus. Larry says, "I don't remember much of his talk, but I do remember him saying that when he left Michigan, he had 'no real clear idea of what he wanted to do, but whatever it was, he wanted to be darn good at it.'" My brief review of original correspondence kept in the ESF Archives indicates that Jim Dubuar was about as confused when he arrived at Wanakena as each of us were when we arrived as students. The common belief that he came to Wanakena as if on a mission doesn't hold up. What does hold up is that he went about figuring out what he wanted to do, and once figured out he was darn good at it.

Like Larry Hill's piano playing, snowball throwing, and growing up, Dubuar remembered. Many alumni sent in letters they had received from Jim Dubuar many years after their graduation. Dubuar had a regular correspondence with many alumni at Christmas time. But that was not all. Perhaps the most interesting is the note from an alumnus who while in the military wrote Mr. Dubuar and made an offhand comment about surveying. He was surprised and very pleased to get back five pages of hand written response going into great detail about surveying. Speaking of the military, George Fillian, '46, expressed something heard many times from others. George wrote, "I was 17 during most of my RS year and this was my first experience away from home. My 2nd was Army Basic Training and that was a piece of cake after the RS." I heard the same thing years later from Dan Mannix, only about marine Boot Camp. Of his correspondence with alumni, Roswell Miller, '52, summed it up by saying, "I know that many RS alumni also sent cards and letters, and each of them were answered as best he could, and always in such a way that I (we all) knew that he knew who we really were and was interested in what we were doing after graduation." Graduates remained, his "boys."

Jim Dubuar was a fully human person. Francis Smalley, '27, wrote that Dubuar said that "while walking along the campus one day he looked across the street and saw this young lady. He said that it was as if he had been hit over the head with a peavey and that he knew this was the lady for him, and it was. Mr. Dubuar often bragged on the beauty and energy of his 89-pound wife, Margareet, who many of us also have fond memories of.

He loved fishing and bird hunting. Sam Starbuck, writes how Mr. Dubuar told him of hooking a "monster trout" that, after a tough battle, he got up to the river edge only to have the fish slip away. Dubuar said he sat down on the riverbank and cried. He was also human enough that he got himself involved in a discussion of which was his favorite class, naming 1927 and 1942 as very special, but you'll need to ask members of those classes about this. He also had his idiosyncrasies, like never wearing snowshoes working the weather route (a series of weather stations measured on a daily basis for many years) even in the deepest snow.

Mr. Dubuar was one of the leading citizens in getting the Clifton-Fine Hospital started, and wrote fondly of his efforts, but that's another story. However, I must add my personal thanks for the presence of the hospital since my appendix ruptured two weeks before graduation and that is where Dr. Persson removed it and saved me. Dubuar's character came into play here too. I was only

17 and Doc Persson could not legally operate on me without my parents' permission. It was 1 a.m. and they couldn't get my parents in Syracuse, so Mr. Dubuar told Dr. Persson that he would personally take responsibility for the operation, and it was done.

Students keeping in touch with Jim Dubuar via correspondence or naming their children after him were only two ways he was honored. We all know that the school forest is named after him, but it was not the first James F. Dubuar Forest. In 1960, Art Flick, '53, named a 145 acre tree farm after Mr. Dubuar, saying that "The first couple of times I marked the lot for selective harvest, Jim Dubuar came down to tally for me. It was a tremendous experience." Prof. Dubuar was also very proud that the school's forest was named after him not because of the initiative of the college administration or staff, but because of "his alumni." Mr. Dubuar was also very pleased when the Class of 1927 made a donation to the Clifton-Fine Hospital in his name.

Roswell Miller, '52, actually took his wife to visit Mr. Dubuar and the Ranger School when on his honeymoon in the Adirondacks in 1955, and how many professors and schools are likely to have had that kind of honor! Ros went on to say that his wife, Ruth, later told him she was worried they would someday end up at Wanakena. Instead, Ros went on to a distinguished career at Michigan Technological University, in another hotbed of population and culture, Houghton, Michigan.

There is a bit of conventional wisdom that says Jim Dubuar was lucky to have retired when he did, because he wouldn't have taken to "modern times" and modern students very well. This overlooks the fact that he adapted to 37 years of changing conditions as director of the Ranger School, and that he lived through and adapted to three major wars (I, II, & Korea). However, let's hear from The Man himself.

In 1974, responding to Jack McConnell, '41, Prof. Dubuar wrote, "You have not let me down by not following the forestry profession.... Forestry, the forestry profession and the forestry schools never offered the students any guarantee of work & opportunities in forestry so, most certainly, the graduate was under no obligation to follow a line of work which the school taught him. What I have always been interested in is in seeing my former students find an activity in which they could live happily and produce some satisfying results." There is certainly nothing in this philosophy that would be "anti-modern."

In a 1975 letter to another RS graduate, Mr. Dubuar wrote that "Though the RS is not a professional school I suppose one can say it offers graduates work. It certainly is a far cry from its original purpose of offering a short course to those who could probably not make it in college, were afraid to try or who were held back by being unable to finance college training. Well, it will be interesting to know its history fifty years from now. I have no doubt there will be some startling changes." He presided over and recognized the need for change, and though it has only been 25 years since he wrote these words, there have been startling changes at the RS, with more to come.

In that same letter, he indicated that he was an "ecologist" ahead of his time. Writing of a fishing expedition on the RS property, he said, "I almost landed a fly on the back of an otter. It always seemed to me that if forestry was really interested in providing such forms of recreation as fishing, hunting and trapping, the swamps and low lands adjacent to the creeks should be left for wildlife, the trout, the black and wood ducks and deer." Today

we talk of riparian corridors and wetland preservation.

But what of things some alumni and observers think of as the biggest changes at the RS, the acceptance of women as students and changing student attitudes. Writing on April 1, 1969 to Frank Kuhn, '27, Mr. Dubuar said, "So Hildegard (Frank's daughter) would like to attend the RS! Well, this is the day when we are being reminded of civil rights and the fact that no one is to be discriminated against because of race, sex, color, or political or religious beliefs. I think that some day girls will be allowed to enter the RS, and why shouldn't she be the first one?" Lest anyone think the reference to "girls" is sexist or demeaning, recall that Mr. Dubuar referred to his students as "boys." And yes, Hildegard Kuhn did go on to become the first female graduate of the Ranger School, class of 1974, but more on that below.

In a 1971 letter to Frank Kuhn, Mr. Dubuar chastised the Ranger School, saying, "...it would seem that the RS would get with it and approve your daughter's application for admission..." He then went on to tell of having a girl at summer camp, which the College of Forestry held at Wanakena, during the War, and said, "My family solved the housing problem for the young lady by letting her have a room in our house."

Later Hildegard enrolled at the RS, and in October 1973 Mr. Dubuar again wrote to Frank Kuhn. "It is too bad your daughter has to live in town... This tendency for girls to want to enter at Wanakena will put it up to the state to furnish some dormitory space for them. If there is resentment at the school over girls enrolling there, the resenter's better take a tumble to themselves. Some things and ideas have been changing. There is no sense in resenting something that one can't control. In fact, there should be no reason in trying to control some of the changes that face us. Why shouldn't the girls be allowed to attend at Wanakena or any other school, for that matter?" So much for Jim Dubuar having problems with women students at the RS. And of course, the state did furnish dormitory space for them.

In addition, what of the "modern" students (modern of course meaning something different just about every year!). In 1974, Prof. Dubuar responded to Jack McConnell, '41; "So you would like to hear my remarks on the topic of the 'hippy' generation... I think if I had been at the RS as this new mode of life and attitudes changed I would have been able to get along and we could still have produced some worthwhile results." He then went on to recount his experiences with his grandchildren, not budging an inch on his standards, but finding ways to live with change and influence it. And who am I and who are we to think he wouldn't have got along and produced some worthwhile results. He was, after all, someone who was darn good at it, whatever "it" happened to be.

So what's the upshot of the legend of James F. Dubuar? It's in the way graduates felt after leaving, no matter when they graduated. Listen to Harold Densmore, '36, who wrote "Jim Dubuar had a profound influence on every student that attended the Ranger School during his tenure there. We were all aware of his deep dedication to the school and its goals. Jim Dubuar was a man of very intense nature who gave of his best constantly and expected no less of his students. I left the Ranger School feeling that there was no task too hard and no effort too great to achieve one's personal goals." This was written 52 years after Harold's graduation. In my opinion, Jim Dubuar has had a profound influence on every student that attended the RS dur-



A family affair: Frank Kuhn, RS Class of 1927 with his daughter Hildegard, the first female graduate of the ranger school, Class of 1974, at the Alumni Reunion of 1984. Hildegard's Uncle Cornelius was also a graduate, Class of 1937, and her brother Joe was in the class of 1957.

ing and since his tenure there, for it is his spirit that permeates the school, and his standards that still drive it.

Dave Clark, '52, a student near the end of Mr. Dubuar's tenure at the RS, said, "...no matter how difficult he seemed he was consistent and earnestly worked to develop good men as well as train competent rangers. He could be trusted and he supported anyone who made a genuine effort to improve.... Yessir, we were privileged to be directed by James F. Dubuar." What a legacy of consistency over his long tenure!

Jim Burnett, '38, put it a bit more personally, but in language, that makes Mr. Dubuar's wisdom clear. "He was exactly like my father who never accepted excuses for goofing off, but did understand that young men sometimes make mistakes because they just didn't know any better, and this was something that could be corrected by education."

So, "Don'tch ya know, brother," it comes down to the words on the Dubuar Memorial in front of the Ranger School. "Jim made men, therein lay his power."

Thanks, Jim!!

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Photographs are courtesy of the Terrence J. Hoverter College Archives, F. Franklin Moon Library, State University of New York, College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Syracuse, New York.