Oral History Interview
With
GEORGE H. WIRT

March 1959
By Charles D. Bonsted

There follows an oral history interview with George Herman Wirt of Camp Hill, Pennsylvania, the first trained forester to be employed by the State of Pennsylvania. This is the first oral history interview of Pennsylvania forest history by the Forest History Foundation.

Charles D. Bonsted: Mr. Wirt, would you tell me about your family background? What influences led you into forestry? I thought perhaps these influences began with your own father.

George H. Wirt: No, I don't believe any particular influence came from my family with respect to forestry, except by reason of the fact that my father was an intimate friend of Dr. J. T. Rothrock and quite frequently Dr. Rothrock, when he came home to McVeytown, Pennsylvania, would spend a considerable part of his time with my father.

CDB: Your father was a justice of the peace, did you say?

GHW: Yes. Daddy started in life as a schoolteacher in Juniata County, and after having taught for several years in Juniata County he came to McVeytown and took over the McVeytown bank. Following that he got into politics and was elected justice of the peace of the town and was re-elected year after year after year from then on 'til the time of his death. He liked to study botany, which, of course, was Dr. Rothrock's specialty. He liked to study geology and he was the first man to develop the sand industry in the neighborhood of McVeytown. But there was no particular contact between my father and the forest, other than, as I said, the conversations and discussions with Dr. Rothrock.

CDB: Which might be on natural resources and natural history to some degree, but not especially related to forestry?

GHW: Yes.

CDB: Now, to clear up something that is in Rodger's biography of Fernow, and other

publications, too, it was not the Dr. Rothrock you've been speaking of, who attended at your birth, but J. T.'s father who was also a doctor, is that correct?[1] What was the older man's name?

GHW: Abraham Rothrock, although sometimes, and I think quite frequently, he preferred Abram as his name. He was the family physician in McVeytown for a good many years.

CDB: This was the way your father and the younger Rothrock became friends then, wasn't it? There was a difference in ages, though, between the men.

GHW: No, they were pretty close together. If I am not mistaken my father's birthday was in the same month as Dr. Rothrock's (Dr. Joseph Rothrock).

CDB: This friendship then began in the 1880s or something like that?

GHW: It dated from the time my father came into McVeytown. He came in contact with this young man who was a professor at the University of Pennsylvania. And as to Dr. Rothrock's ideas with respect to forestry, and devoting his life to forestry, that goes back to as early as 1877, when he became lecturer under the Michaux Legacy Fund.

CDB: Well, then as Joseph Rothrock visited your home while you were a boy and growing up, you naturally heard the conversations. Would you say that was the beginning of the influence?

GHW: Well, yes.

CDB: Were there men earning their living in forestry or something like it at that time?

GHW: No.

CDB: When did the idea of adopting this new field as your own calling first occur to you or was suggested to you? How old do you think you might have been?

GHW: I was in attendance at Juniata College from the fall of 1895 until January, 1899. When school closed for the Christmas vacation in 1899, I went home to McVeytown fully expecting to come back to Juniata in January when school opened again. My father met me at the station at McVeytown, with a horse and buggy, and told me that he was going to take me along down the valley to see some people with whom he had business and that was the reason we didn't go right home. On our way down there he told me of having met Dr. Rothrock in the last few days and that they had discussed the matter of my taking

[1] Andrew Denny Rodgers III, Bernhard Edward Fernow, A Story of North American Forestry, (Princeton University Press, 1951).

up forestry and studying for that instead of engineering, as I had in mind. The matter wasn't discussed very long because my father knew very little except what Dr. Rothrock had told him about the school that he wanted me to attend. But, in discussing the matter, there were two things that perhaps stood out. One was that as a youngster going to school I wasn't any too strong from the standpoint of health. As my father related the prospects ahead in the matter of studying forestry, he told me that Dr. Schenck was planning that summer to take his boys to Europe, and that appealed to me very greatly[2]. There were apparently two things that I had in mind as a youngster: one was that I hoped I would be able to live down South for a few months of a few years and also that I would have a chance to go to Germany to see the people there. We came back home and at that time, as a result of my father's description of the prospects, I was almost persuaded to take up forestry. Well, when we got home we discussed the matter with mother and we asked some more questions of the doctor, if I am not mistaken by mail, and then it became a matter of money enough to see me through.

CDB: How much was the tuition?

GHW: We paid $200 for tuition, which was very reasonable for me, who had no money, and who would have to get a scholarship or borrow that money. Well, that was the main problem then. I went to see a man who lived in our town and who owned the sand business, the biggest industry in the neighborhood. I asked him very frankly and bluntly whether he would stand back of me and give me enough money to go through with the particular thing I had in mind. He very graciously consented, telling me that I could have all the money I wanted; all I had to do was tell him when and how much and he'd see that I had it.

CDB: What was his name?

GHW: C. P. Dull.

CDB: Didn't you have as much money as this, or more, each year to go to Juniata?

GHW: I had a scholarship there.

CDB: You had been intending to become a teacher or an engineer?

GHW: An engineer was what I wanted.

CDB: But Juniata did train teachers?

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[2] Dr. Carl Alwyn Schenck.

GHW: Yes. I had to take the preparatory course before I could go into the college course, because I did not attend a high school. We had no high school in McVeytown. So we got in touch with Dr. Schenck and made inquiry as to admission to the school at Biltmore, North Carolina, and on the ninth of January, 1900, I started for Biltmore. At Juniata I had one of the professors who took quite an interest in me. In December of '99 I was studying in regular classes English, Latin, French, German, Greek and, according to my professor, was doing pretty well in all of them. When the Christmas vacation was over this young professor, who lived down in the neighborhood of Philadelphia, came up and stayed over night at my home. We were then intending to go up to Juniata together. The morning after he arrived, at the breakfast table he told me that he had some business he wanted to transact with me and we should go into the sitting room and he would tell me what it was. So the two of us went into the sitting room and sat down and he told me that while he was home during vacation time he had gone to a professor that he knew at Princeton University and through the two of them he could promise me a four-hundred-dollar scholarship for four years if necessary, in order to take a course in philology, if you please – the study of languages.

CDB: At Princeton, you mean?

GHW: Yes. Somehow or other he had worked out the scholarship plan. At any rate I was guaranteed the scholarship. As he told me this, he reached in his pocket and gave me a letter from the professor at the University of Pennsylvania and I was supposed to go to him at the university. I shook my head to him and said no, I had already written to Biltmore and I preferred forestry to philology. Well, it just about stumped him. He didn't know what to do. But that's the way it wound up. The ninth day of January I went to Biltmore and started my course with Dr. Schenck.

CDB: As I understand it, a student could come in almost any time during the year at Biltmore.

GHW: Yes. Dr. Schenck had a regular course and it didn't make any difference if you entered that course at the end or the beginning. You covered the field and when you got through you could leave, or you could stay as long as you wanted to – repeat if you wanted to.

CDB: The idea of going to Biltmore, did that come as a surprise to you when your father brought it up on that vacation?

GHW: Yes. I had no idea at all that they had it in mind. No reference had ever been made to it

in my presence before.

CDB: Do you understand, as Rodgers indicates in his book, that Dr. Rothrock had been talking to your father about persuading you to go into forestry?

GHW: Yes, it was definitely so, but I didn't learn it until afterwards. The president of Juniata College was Dr. Brumbaugh, who later became governor[3]. Dr. Brumbaugh was a frequent visitor in our home in McVeytown and he was a friend of both Dr. Rothrock and my father, and of the county superintendent of Mifflin County whose office was in my father's office. It seems that the three of them at times got their heads together and talked about this prospective work in forestry and that I was just the boy for it. But they said nothing to me at any time. My father's breaking it on the trip down the Juniata River was the first I knew of it.

CDB: Did you and he also look upon the field as healthful?

GHW: Yes. From the way it was described to me by my father it was outdoors and it would be a good, healthy job, and all that kind of thing. And, as Dr. Rothrock said, I'd get in on the ground floor in this forestry business and he thought it was a very good move. Well, I was nineteen years old and it wasn't too hard to make it look pretty rosy.

CDB: He was confident that it was going to grow into a sizeable vocation of even profession?

GHW: Yes. I don't know definitely, but I think in one of his letters the doctor had banked very definitely on my going up to State College to open the course there.

CDB: The one that he had been corresponding with them about just a few months before, or just that previous month? December 1900?

GHW: He looked ahead and felt that when I got out the next year I would have the first chance at the Chair at State College, but in the meantime after I graduated from Biltmore, the state forest work, came first. I got the appointment from Dr. Rothrock right away about a month after I had graduated.

CDB: You entered Biltmore in January, 1900 and finished in…

GHW: March, 1901.

CDB: Then you did go to Germany that first summer? You were on the road a lot, weren't you, during the year of the Biltmore school?

GHW: Yes. But I wasn't employed until April, 1901. It was stationary when I was there. We

[3] Martin G. Brumbaugh.

had an office in the real estate building of the Biltmore estate, on the second floor; had all our lectures there; went back and forth from there on field trips. That was our headquarters the whole time.

CDB: Where did you go in Germany?

GHW: We landed at Hamburg, went down the Rhine River to Mains, I think it was, and then through the Odenwald and over into Darmstadt, which was the center of Bavaria. That was Dr. Schenck's home. We holed up at Darmstadt and made our weekly trips from Darmstadt and back. Then every Saturday evening we had a description and review of the forestry activities that we covered during the week on foot. But we did cover a tremendous amount of country even then, so you might way we covered practically all of Bavaria. We were down in the section of Munich; we were in the Tyrolese Alps; we were along the Rhine valley as far as Cologne.

CDB: What were the things that Schenck had you see particularly?

GHW: He arranged an outline for us that covered practically the whole subject of forest management as practiced in Germany. He made arrangements with particular foresters, each of whom had a certain phase of forest management as the outstanding project in his district. For example, if we wanted to see a hundred-year stand of white pine, he would contact the forester that had such a stand in his preserve. And we'd go and visit it, count it, measure it, study its growth record and all that kind of business.

CDB: Were these government or privately-owned lands?

GHW: Both. We had a couple of private estates that we traveled over and for which we made working plans and measurements. Schenck himself had first studied law. His father was a judge in Darmstadt. Alvin was his pet son and he wanted him to study law, but Schenck disliked the study of law and went into the forestry school. When he finished his forestry work, they had a system there at the time in which a fellow who graduated in the forestry course and who wanted to get into forest work would be appointed by the government as a forest assessor, which was simply a name that they gave to fellows who graduated from the course and wanted jobs. Many of them worked as forest assistants just to be with the forester they thought they would like. Schenck was legally and economically tied up to the chairman of the government as a forest assistant. But having nothing to do except to accompany this forester. Dr. Schlich called on him to assist him

when he was taking his class around Germany, pointing out the professional points that he wanted his men to cover[4]. And Schenck was such a pleasing, agreeable, and intelligent individual that Schlich just about patted him on the back. It was through Dr. Schlich that George W. Vanderbilt got Schenck for his estate. He followed Mr. Pinchot, he didn't like[5].

CDB: What kinds of jobs did Schenck tell you fellows you could expect?

GHW: He didn't tell us that we could expect anything. He very consistently told us that we wouldn't get into forestry in America anywhere until it paid. You couldn't induce lumbermen to cut timber and let it lie and that's what you had to do if you wanted to carry on a productive forest. Dr. Schenck used to say that the first and most important tool of a forester was the axe. That used to make Mr. Pinchot extremely sore. That raised Mr. Pinchot's temper.

CDB: What was his motive then in conducting the school? Was it a practical training school in philosophy?

GHW: What he had was an opportunity to do the best he could, just as he expected our boys to do the best they could with what they had. Vanderbilt had a fifty-thousand-acre estate and Schenck was asked to come in, practice forestry on it, and see if he could demonstrate to this country that it was a good proposition. So all Schenck had to do was to do the best he could with Mr. Vanderbilt's estate. Vanderbilt didn't feel that he had too much money that he wanted to put into the project, so he arranged with Dr. Schenck that if he wanted to take boys on the master-scholar scholarship plan, he could charge them whatever he chose for tuition, half of which would go to Mr. Vanderbilt.

CDB: The tuition at Biltmore school was two hundred dollars, of which half went to Mr. Vanderbilt and half to Dr. Schenck, is that right?

GHW: Right.

CDB: How much did you have to draw on the funds made available to you by Mr. Dull for your living expenses and traveling expenses during the year?

GHW: Directly from Mr. Dull I borrowed two thousand dollars, pretty close to the beginning of

[4] Dr. William Schlich.
[5] Gifford Pinchot.

the course. As time went on, and most of the two thousand dollars was used up in the trip to Germany, I was able to borrow money from one of my brothers and one of my sisters and some from my mother, all of which was paid back to them, just as was Mr. Dull's.

CDB: Do you think that this was about the sum of money that each of the students had for the year?

GHW: I really don't know. I don't know how their expenses ran. For example, Zell Tenley and I, didn't pay as much board as some of the other fellows did. Some of them paid more room rent than we did.

CDB: What did you pay, for example?

GHW: Frankly, I don't know. I don't remember.

CDB: The men came from a number of states, didn't they?

GHW: Yes. During my course they came from Texas, Oklahoma, New Jersey, Canada, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and other places.

CDB: They came from a variety of different backgrounds as regards family and level of income and cultural experience?

GHW: Yes.

CDB: You were speaking of Rankin as being one of the fellows who did ranger duty at the estate on Thursdays[6]. The big house, the big castle-like residence had been completed just before you came there? And it was quite an attraction for tourists?

GHW: Yes, indeed.

CDB: Well, how did it happen that they could draw on the student body for help in guiding people around?

GHW: At that particular time Ranking was not a student; he was purely and simply a ranger on the forest. That was part of Schenck's organization.

CDB: You lived in private homes in the neighborhood then?

GHW: Yes.

CDB: And had your classes in the real estate building? And then you had the use of the grounds of the estate for tennis and recreation?

GHW: Yes, but I don't remember any tennis courts there. We weren't supposed to have

[6] Cyrus T. Rankin.

recreation. We were there strictly for forestry business and nothing else. I never saw a tennis court around the place.

CDB: Were the horses part of school? I mean, did you use the horses in going on field assignments? Did you have to furnish your own horse?

GHW: We furnished our own horses and used them mostly for getting about. Distances were too far to walk and, of course, there were no cars. The only thing left was horseback riding.

CDB: You kept track of some of your classmates over the years, didn't you? You spoke of Norman Ross in Canada[7]. He has been in charge of a nursery, hasn't he, up there?

GHW: He took charge of the nursery when he went up there and continued that until he either died or retired.

CDB: What happened to some of the other fellows? Do you remember?

GHW: Well, Tenley is still living in California. Franklin Reed died. Coert Dubois, I think, is still living, I'm not sure. Alfred Gaskill, who was state forester of New Jersey, is dead.

CDB: Well, in general did they go back to the regions from which they had come to the Biltmore school? Or did this experience in school change their lives?

GHW: I don't believe that many of them went back home. Some of them found jobs with lumber companies in one capacity or another; some of them went into the Forest Service in Washington, D.C. Dubois, for example, was in the Forest Service as supervisor of a national forest in California. He was out there and had charge of the forest that our friend Gaskill burned over. Of course, that was a small portion of the entire district that Dubois had. Some of them wrote bulletins on some phase of the forestry work in their district.

CDB: Would you repeat that misfortune that Gaskill had?

GHW: Gaskill was assigned a technical job in the Forest Service and was sent out to the Pacific Coast to look after the Pacific forest area. In his plans he developed necessary information to carry on his work in a tenting campaign. He had been in California only a short time when somebody in the outfit permitted a campfire to get away from them and it resulted in a tremendous fire which, of course, didn't set well on the authorities and considerable fuss was raised about it.

CDB: What region was it in? What species region?

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[7] Norman McKenzie Ross, chief of the Dominion Forest Nurseries in Indian Head, Saskatchewan.

GHW: California. I think it was in the redwood section of the country.

CDB: Mr. Wirt, what was the attitude of the fellows toward Dr. Schenck? Were they in awe of him, afraid of him, or fond of him, or what?

GHW: There was no reason at all for us to be afraid of him. We all liked him.

CDB: I thought he was pretty severe.

GHW: He was, but we took that in good faith and respected his wishes and were always glad to be associated with him. He was always telling us something that was interesting and valuable. And he had a considerable amount of humor. Also, temper.

CDB: For example? Can you think of a time when he lost his temper?

GHW: I can't think of any humorous thing. But he lost his temper one time while we were in Germany. In his outline for us to study he had put down that we were to make analysis of a certain stand of Scotch pine, along the very fine German highway. There were three or four of us given this assignment. We went in and made the measurements and when we explained how we had calculated the volume, and so on, it provoked him because he had given us very definite steps in his outline and presumably we didn't follow them step by step. So it was complete disobedience and he took it out on us by taking his hat off and dancing on it in the road. It was rather humorous to find that a staid gentleman like he was could lose his temper completely and dance around over the road. But when he quieted down, one of the crowd read his notes which indicated that we had made the stem analysis exactly as Schenck had told us to do and he didn't know how to get our forgiveness for cussing us out. (While he was dancing he was doing considerable cussing.)

There was always an argument between Schenck's way of measuring trees for stem analysis work, volume work, and the way Washington did it. We counted the rings and made the measurements. For example, if the growth for this year was for 1897, the growth for 1897 would be for the even decade. Then from there we'd measure every ten years so that we had the thing stacked up; as we went down the sheet we could get these things together by decades. The other fellows in Washington measured from the outside ring. Well, it's practically the same thing – we'd measure from the outside into such and such a year and then from the outside to ten years, that was it. We'd have 1957 was ten years past 1947 and every time we measured a decade we had as odd number of years.

German foresters don't measure that way; it's from the odd years and left over, and so on. And we always had an argument with Schenck. He'd give us the devil if we ever slipped over onto the other fellow's method. Sometimes we'd do it for devilment to see him dance and rave. He'd see that we got it straight before it wound up.

Well, in this stem analysis work that we were assigned to by Schenck, in the early part of January, 1900, he had a contract for lumber down at Bogatoona in southern Mississippi. We went in there and made the stem-analysis and we did measure them according to Pinchot's way of doing things instead of the way Schenck wanted them. And when it came time to turn these stem-analysis strips in to the Forest Service, they wouldn't accept them, and so they wouldn't pay the ten cents a strip they had promised Schenck if his boys would do the analysis. That was way back in the first part of January, 1900, just after I had gotten there. That was the first story I heard about Mr. Pinchot – that he cheated us poor devils out of ten cents a strip for stem analysis. And it also made Schenck mad. So as things came along, time after time, we'd stack them up against the old boy and you wouldn't find a Biltmorian that had anything to say for Mr. Pinchot. He was taboo.

CDB: Then, too, as a new student you learned about the events leading up to Mr. Pinchot's leaving the Biltmore estate?

GHW: Of course. That was wide open to our sight every time we rode up the French Broad River.

CDB: And what was the particular culminating event – the splash dam?

GHW: Well, Pinchot opened a splash dam just to float the logs that he had cut down the river and it did so much damage that Mr. Vanderbilt was very glad to get rid of the gentleman and hire somebody else. Then he hired Dr. Schenck, through the efforts of Dr. Schlich in England.

CDB: Had there been an unusually large cut of timber?

GHW: As I remember it was about five million feet cut.

CDB: Hadn't they been floating them down the river before?

GHW: No. This was the first try at it.

CDB: And the amount of water built up by the splash dam was very considerable. Was this in March, or when was the high water period?

GHW: Frankly, I don't know. I don't know what month it was. It was in the spring sometime, of course.

CDB: You spoke of the banks of the river being damaged by the logs. This would be on property owned by a number of other persons, and some of the logs were tossed high on the banks where they couldn't be recovered.

GHW: Well, not without considerable expense. I think they were pretty much gathered up, but at a tremendous expense.

CDB: And there were damage suits filed probably.

GHW: Yes, according to rumor.

CDB: Mr. Wirt, I believe that you were one of the first few men graduated by the Biltmore school, weren't you?

GHW: Among the first.

CDB: It had started in 1898 and you went down there in 1900. Men could come in at any time and finish after being there twelve months, right?

GHW: Yes.

CDB: Would you tell us about your arrival at Biltmore after you had decided to enter forestry training?

GHW: It was about midnight when I got off the train at Biltmore station. There was about a foot of snow on the ground, and it was cold. I had nothing but my overcoat to keep me warm and when I first got off the train and the train pulled away, there were no signs of life except the stationmaster in the station itself. I wandered around awhile until finally I saw a streak of light through a board wall which looked as though there might be somebody around. I went up and it was the caretaker at the Biltmore Club. After I told the guard about arriving at midnight and having to stay there until morning before I could find anybody in town or get in touch with Dr. Schenck, he said he'd look around and see if there were any blankets or anything that might be used for making a bed. There was a little old straw mattress on a cot, but no covers. So I left the clubhouse and walked back to the station and finally persuaded the telegraph operator to let me sleep in the station. We put two or three chairs together, and I stretched out on them and stayed there for the rest of the night. Along about eight o'clock, when life became active, Dr. Schenck got

back to his office and I was able to talk to him and find where I was assigned board and room.

CDB: What were your brothers' names and their different fields of work?

GHW: My oldest brother was a clerk in a Philadelphia bank. His name in Lucius. The next brother is William, who had just about completed his apprenticeship as a railroad upholsterer, working for the Norfolk and Western Railroad down in Roanoke. And the third brother, John, was a farmer on a farm just outside of McVeytown, on which he got poorer every day he worked. He finally had to give up his farm and he became a day laborer in the neighborhood of his home.

CDB: I see. Were there some sisters, too?

GHW: Two sisters.

CDB: Where did you come in the order of birth?

GHW: I was the baby of the family.

CDB: Then your brothers were a number of years older than you and already in their twenties and so on, out working, when you were going to school.

GHW: Yes.

CDB: When you arrived at Biltmore, as you told me, you were the youngest boy in a group of about how many?

GHW: Well, during the period I was there there were about ten or twelve all told.

CDB: Then as you had hoped, you did go to Germany for three months that summer?

GHW: Yes.

CDB: You were telling about Professor Green.

GHW: Samuel B. Green from Minnesota. Well, Professor Green was a professor at the University of Minnesota and I presume that he was influenced by Colonel Andrews, who was ambassador to Sweden[8]. At any rate, Professor Green was interested in forestry and I believe had a series of lectures on the subject of forestry and forest protection in the state of Minnesota. He prepared a book, which was published, containing his lectures and ideas in regard to the care and production of forests[9]. These lectures he gave to his boys who came to Minnesota University to study agriculture or some phase of

[8] Christopher C. Andrews.
[9] Samuel B. Green, Principles of American Forestry, New York, 1903.

agriculture. That book was a complete coverage of the field of forestry, but was very little known outside of the state of Minnesota. To my mind it served its purpose considerably better than a certain other book which was published about the same time and was very highly recommended by the U.S. Forest Service.

CDB: And what was the name of that book?

GHW: A Primer of Forestry by Mr. Pinchot[10].

CDB: How did Mr. Green happen to be with you at Darmstadt?

GHW: He was one of our number who went with Dr. Schenck in the summer of 1900 to Germany.

CDB: This would be between his own teaching semesters at Minnesota?

GHW: Yes.

CDB: You finished your twelve months in February, 1901, is that right?

GHW: Yes.

CDB: In the meanwhile, what had been happening with Dr. Rothrock and his forestry cause back here in Pennsylvania?

GHW: Between times he had persuaded enough members of the legislature of Pennsylvania to feel that considerable improvement could be made in the situation here if the legislature would give the commissioner of forestry cabinet status. Up until 1901 Dr. Rothrock was a member of the State Department of Agriculture as a bureau chief. The legislature gave Dr. Rothrock authority to head up his own department, with the bill signed, on the twenty-fifth of February, 1901, making him commissioner of forestry and directly responsible to the governor. The bill which enabled him as a department head to go ahead with his work included a provision by which the doctor was authorized to employ whatever trained men or employees were necessary for the accomplishment of the work that he felt ought to be done. And it was under the bill of February 25 that he was authorized to employ a forester, which he did, ready to start work on the first day of April, 1901. And that first trained forester for the state of Pennsylvania was George H. Wirt.

CDB: Was this agreeable with you or had you some other ideas in mind for work – where you

[10] Gifford Pinchot, A Primer of Forestry, 2 vol. (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry Bulletin 24, Part I and II, Washington, D.C., 1903 and 1915).

wanted to work and what you wanted to do.

GHW: It was perfectly agreeable to me because I couldn't have found anybody else any better to work with or for.

CDB: This bill authorized him as the commissioner of forestry to employ the men, and so forth, that he needed, and in effect, removed him from the Agriculture Department and set up a new department in the state government. Then everything was brand new, a newly-hatched egg. What was there ready for you to do when you showed up for work on April 1?

GHW: My first assignment was a sort of gap-filler, the preparation of a bulletin entitled "The Propagation of Commercial Trees of Pennsylvania," which became the first technical bulletin published by the new department. In between times, and when occasion demanded, I went into the field to inspect and evaluate the land which was being offered to the department to serve as state forest reserves, as they were known at that time. In other words, a man would come in or write in and say that he had some land he'd like to sell to the state for state forest reserves and he'd like to have so many dollars an acres for his land. Dr. Rothrock would send me out into the field to look over this tract of land and see what was on it, and make a rough estimate of its value in comparison to other land which we had bought, or which might be available for buying. This report of mine would be given to the State Reservation Commission and it was acted upon by them. The legislature had set a maximum limit as to the amount of money we dared pay per acre for this land that was being bought by the state. And it was customary in the legislature to make appropriations for a specific thing and a specific amount. This land-purchase bill set a maximum limit; we did not dare exceed that, but it did not give us a specific and total amount of money for appropriations. We bought land and paid for it out of any money not otherwise covered by an appropriation. In other words, if there was any money in the treasury over and above the specific appropriations granted by the legislature, we dared use that money. Later that provision was revised. Transactions were kept within a certain maximum amount and there was a specific appropriation given and we dared spend only as much as the legislature said we might spend.

Now, frequently there were cases where the landowner, not appreciating the current value of his forest property, would offer a tract to the department at a ridiculously

low price, just out of ignorance. And Dr. Rothrock and his commission, which backed him up, after the act of 1901, would approve the purchase of such land at a figure that was fair to the landowner and to the state as well. His argument was that he didn't believe the state of Pennsylvania was so little as to go out in the open market and beat one of its citizens out of money to which he was entitled and for which he should be paid.

CDB: Were people making offers of land – good land, say – because they wanted to help build up the forest reserves idea, or was it simply that they didn't value their own timberland very highly?

GHW: I think the latter was probably the case. Yet a good many of them, at least, recognized the fact that there wasn't anything but scrub oak and berry bushes on their land and it would be long past their death before any profits would come from the land which they owned. And there was the subject of taxes that had to be paid yearly whether they got a sawlog off their land or not. So in order to save the taxes they sold the land to the Commonwealth.

CDB: How many acres were already in forest reserves when you came into the state government?

GHW: I don't remember how many there were when I started, but Dr. Rothrock resigned in 1904 and, if I'm not mistaken, there were then about two hundred thousand acres owned by the Commonwealth. Now, as interesting sidelight to that situation was that the state of Pennsylvania bought this land at an average of $2.25 when only about ten years before – that would make it about 1890 – there was almost same amount listed by county commissioners as state land available for purchase by citizens or patented by citizens. And all the state would have had to do at that time was have a law passed taking over that unpatented land and turning it over to the department.

CDB: This was in the summer of 1901, so then you had some assistance given you, didn't you? Some young men?

GHW: That wasn't until 1902.

CDB: You continued the survey work then for the better part of the whole year?

GHW: After the survey assignment and the current matter of inspecting the land and reporting

upon it, came the formulation of the school idea. And up until the time of January, 1902, I worked in and out of the office on land inspection. Then in May, 1902, a young Negro went to Mont Alto with me.

CDB: What was his full name?

GHW: Ralph E. Brock.

CDB: Before we go on with that, Mr. Wirt, I read somewhere that you were concerned with catching timber thieves during the period that you were doing the survey. What was the story on that?

GHW: Oh, that was in the summer of 1901, a continuation of the same job surveying that was assigned to us. I was sent up to Pike County to help the county surveyor survey that land. Well, we knew from a number of sources that nobody cared to own the forest land or the land that should be forest land because if the assessor knew that it was theirs, they'd be assessed, and if he didn't know whose it was, then nobody was bothered and there were no taxes lost. We knew that wood was being stolen from these lands, particularly barrel hoops, railroad ties and things of that kind – small stuff that could be easily handled. And all we wanted to do, for the time being at least, was to give the impression that we were perfectly satisfied for anybody to hunt and fish on land that became property of the state, but we didn't want any cutting and we didn't want any fires. But some people persisted in seeing to it that they got a good railroad tie when they needed thirty-five or forty cents. They cut it and hauled it into the railroad and got paid for it. Up in the Pike County region, where we surveyed practically all summer, there was an old gentleman and family of three or four sons who where making their living cutting ties on state land. Well, we wanted it stopped, so Dr. Rothrock gave me the job to see if I could get the fellows who were stealing the timber.

We had an old ranger on the edge of the property by the name of Rake and he and I took up the job of watching for this timber thief. We did all kinds of stunts to keep undercover and all that kind of business, until finally one day when it was raining very hard, old Hiram Rake and I went out to see if this was the day that the fellow would try to steal timber because he felt reasonably sure that nobody in their right senses would go out in this storm. We went out and, sure enough, we caught Hiram Miller and one of his boys chopping railroad ties. I had a 22-colt revolver and I also had a 44 rifle – a

Winchester pump gun. Old Hiram Rake carried it under a raincoat and I carried my revolver under my coat. We sneaked up on the old son-of-a-gun to about twelve or fifteen feet of him. With the rain the way it was coming down, he never heard us. Finally when Hiram thought we got close enough he called to the fellow, who was very much surprised to see two gentlemen with guns standing back of him. We told him to leave the property. Later the next fall we had a law suit in Milford, the county seat, and put the man in jail for a while, then let him out. And that stopped the timber thieving in that neighborhood.

The first time I went down over the Mont Alto property from the little village of Mont Alto, the old gentleman, Mr. Knepper who had been the superintendent of the iron company, took me down[11]. He had an old buckboard with two mules, and one of the furnace men drove us. He acted as driver-chauffeur of this two-mule buckboard, and as we went down along the mountains, Mr. Knepper would say, "Now, you see that schoolhouse over there? Not so very long ago one of the fellows that lived there pounded the brains out of his wife." We went a little further and he'd see that place over there. "There so-and-so stabbed his neighbor and killed him. See that fellow over there? There a fellow shot a neighboring farmer for interfering with his wife."

Thinks I, "Holy Moses, from the frying pan into the fire. Leaving one place where a fellow would shoot me if he got a chance, into another neighborhood where things were worse because they actually do murder them." But I came back to Mont Alto and for one year I carried my revolver in my belt every time I went out of the house. Never went out without it. I did get a couple of threats from some of the mountain people who thought we were coming up there and were going to dispossess them, but when we got the persuaded to believe that we didn't mean any harm to them, that we were going to make it easier for them to make a living, they became my loyal servants and it wouldn't have been healthy for anybody to have disturbed me. Of course, they all knew I could shoot; I wasn't very fast on the draw, but once it was drawn it was a dead give-away.

CDB: How old were you at this time?

GHW: Not quite twenty-two, in 1902. I would be twenty-two in the fall.

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[11] David Knepper.

CDB: How much was your salary?

GHW: Sixty dollars a month.

CDB: Now sixty years later you say there are how many employees?

GHW: I think about three hundred in that department in the capitol office.

CDB: And how many foresters?

GHW: I think there must be about sixty or so. I don't know exactly.

CDB: Brock went along to Mont Alto when you were going down there to look over this new property?

GHW: When I went there for good.

CDB: The state had already bought it and you were going down there to start a nursery?

GHW: Yes, and start actual forestry work, which to me meant the beginning of improvement cuttings, road work, planting, demarcation and boundary lines, and things of that kind.

CDB: What was the condition of the acreage or nature of it?

GHW: Not nearly as badly burned as much of the land we bought up in the central part of the state, but still with a fairly good sprinkling of burned sprouts and a few conifers scattered here and there through the area. Actually the iron company's management was very definitely a forestry program because the chestnut yielded about fifteen to thirty cords to the acre, about a cord per acre per year on a rotation of along about thirty years. In other words, they cut the sprouts, which were mainly chestnut, when they were thirty years old and got from each acre of land about thirty cords – a cord per acre per year. The result of it was that when they did have fires on the land for the most part there were enough old rough trails scattered through the forest so that the men could put the fires out fairly easy. And these men were accustomed to taking care of fires because they had to do that under the iron company management. That was just good iron company business. Of course, they got pretty careless between the time the Mont Alto operations were actually going and the time when we came in ready to buy for the state. So they had a pretty well-covered forest.

CDB: What did they use the cut for?

GHW: Made charcoal for the charcoal iron.

CDB: There wasn't any nursery in the state before this one that you were going to develop?

GHW: No forest nursery. There were nurseries and nursery men who raised white pine and

other pine seedlings and that's why we felt that if we could distribute the trees free of charge, we could get lots of these farmers to plant up their waste lands and eroded lands and so on, and we'd have accomplished what we wanted as a state and they would be pleased with their returns. But no such luck.

CDB: Meanwhile, Dr. Rothrock was getting something else under authorization – the school. Didn't that require a legislative act?

GHW: In the legislature of 1903 – it was the beginning of 1903 – he got authorization to buy or equip a sufficient number of buildings, which were available on the land we had purchased, to develop and maintain a school of forestry to train forest wardens – to train forest rangers to take care of the forests. Well, we had on the Mont Alto forest a number of very valuable buildings in very good repair, chief among which was a mansion that had been occupied by Colonel George B. Wiestling who had been a member of the first forestry commission. Just a coincidence, there was no intimation that there would be any tie-up at all; it just so happened in the course of events. Well, the proposition that came o the doctor and myself was whether we should grab onto this building over on the other side of the Gettysburg Pike from Chambersburg to Gettysburg. We also had some very good buildings, one of which is still standing, the Graffenburg Inn, which would have made a beautiful dormitory and so on. But a railroad ran into Mont Alto Park, right on the edge of the forest and right below the Wiestling home. At Caledonia there was nothing of that kind, only the pike for access in and out. So we decided that the Most Alto property was the better one of the two and we set up our school at Mont Alto.

CDB: The idea of the way the school would operate was influenced by your experience with the Biltmore school, wasn't it? You told Dr. Rothrock what that was like on occasions when you were home during 1900 or 1901 or had he been picking up his own scheme for how he would train forest rangers?

GHW: Well, of course, all we know from documentary evidence is that he was interested and, to tell the truth, he was. He was the one who contacted State College, the University of Pennsylvania, and Andy Carnegie; he sounded him out, thought we could get money enough from him to set up the school. A fellow by the name of Welch of Philadelphia was very much disappointed because we didn't finally settle on property around Eaglemere up in the central part of the state, a summer residence area and health resort.

And then there were a couple more fellows with land they wanted to get rid of, although they tried to make us believe that somebody else wanted to get rid of it. But we found this place down here at Mont Alto such an ideal place that we gave up the other ones in disgust.

CDB: I've been told that the term, Pennsylvania Forest Academy – was that the first name of the school?

GHW: Yes.

CDB: It was selected by Dr. Rothrock because it was reminiscent of the United States Military Academy at West Point and the Naval Academy at Annapolis.

GHW: Yes. He wanted that association for whatever it might be worth to give the fellows and develop in the fellows an esprit de corps that couldn't be lost, and that's exactly what it did.

CDB: That name stayed then until 1926?

GHW: After the war when Dr. Edward A. Ziegler became director of the institution, the name of the school was changed. At least he had it changed; I don't know whether he did it or somebody else did it.

CDB: What was this appeal or ability and persuasion that Dr. Rothrock had with the legislature? Here were two remarkable novel bills about forestry that he apparently got passed within a couple of years of each other.

GHW: You know, I'd like to know that myself!

CDB: Had he been active in politics?

GHW: No, anything but active. He never turned his hand toward politics. At least not that anybody knew about. But there are two factors or personalities that I think had something to do with the doctor's activities. As far as I know he never talked this matter over with me, but we had what was known as the State Board of Agriculture. On that board, which was appointed by the governor and was responsible to the governor, the secretary of the board was a man by the name of Thomas J. Edge. Thomas J. Edge was along about this time secretary of the Department of Agriculture. Dr. Edge lived in Westchester; so did Dr. Rothrock. As far as I know they were very good friends always. I never say or heard any bickering such as the letters evidence between Dr. Rothrock and

Dr. Armsby of State College[12]. Evidently, Dr. Rothrock and Dr. Edge had a great deal in common when they were home in Westchester. Secretary Edge, as a matter of fact, in one of the bulletins of the Board of Agriculture, had a more complete bibliography on the subject of forestry than anybody else that I know of. And quite frequently he dropped this and that into the pot at the board meeting until he must have accumulated the support of a number of people on the subject of having the forest school and training young men to practice forestry.

Now, that was one thing. That was purely and simply a fraternal contact. In Westchester there lived a very prominent and powerful senator named Boise Penrose. He was also a senator who was a good friend of the doctor's – at any rate they used to get together – and I think judging from what we knew of the doctor, any time he found an opportunity to talk and discuss forestry and forest schools at the time of Forest Academy, he talked. I think he persuaded Senator Boris Penrose – that's not the fellow either, but Penrose has run into the game. Well, at any rate, it was this senator, and at that particular time, anything that the senator said the legislature did. He was boss and boss completely. And I think that Dr. Rothrock filled him so doggone full of this stuff that he was willing to go along on most anything the doctor proposed. So the doctor saw his opportunity to get a bill in there and appropriations for the school and he went ahead a got it. Now that's pure imagination. I think the first bill was $30,000.

CDB: Did you also go on giving talks and lectures to the public a great deal while you were forester for the state?

GHW: Yes, all over the state.

CDB: What was the purpose of that?

GHW: To get them acquainted with the work that was being done and build up their support for continuation. The doctor had in mind the purchase by the state of about three million acres of forest land and his principal object in buying that much was to make sure that he had enough land to accomplish some real, honest-to-goodness forestry activities, which we could point to for the private individual to follow. That is one of the ideas that the doctor had in mind from the very beginning. There are a great many people who think they know, but don't know. It wasn't just simply a case of buying land for the state to

[12] Dr. Henry P. Armsby, Pennsylvania State College, Agricultural Experiment Station.

own. It wasn't purely and simply a case of buying land for the raising of timber. From the very beginning there were three things that we saw as problems to be dealt with. There was the matter, of course, in the first instance, of the production of timber someday. Dr. Rothrock and I agreed in the proposition and never failed to tell our visitors and people who came to hear us talk that the forest was to be protected for the water supply, for the recreation facilities of all kinds, and for what we could get out of the stuff, for timber.

CDB: Timber economics, pure and simple, was number three on that list?

GHW: Yes. So we talked high, wide and handsome whenever we got an opportunity to deliver a lecture and show pictures; show what it could become without care and what it could become with care.

CDB: You were taking you story right to the people then, knowing that this sentiment would have some effect on the legislature.

GHW: That takes us back to 1877 when Michaux Legacy became available. Incidentally, I got a very interesting bulletin this week on the Michaux Lectures from the Philosophical Society. Dr. Rothrock delivered these lectures, as I understand from this, about fourteen a year, from 1877 to 1924.

There was a time in the beginning of our work when it was required by law that a report tot he State Board of Agriculture was expected from the head of the bureau because he was actually the committee head of a committee in the State Board of Agriculture dealing with this particular subject. Each subject had some fellow at the head of its committee, and Rothrock, of course, being the commissioner of forestry, headed up the committee on forestry. Now, lots of times during those early years I was sent out to deliver that message or read the report, so-called, from the Committee on Forestry. It usually amounted to one printed page. Any request that came along for a lecture on forestry I was given the job and went out. Once in a while they didn't want an address, they just wanted a brief report to cover the whole field and let it go at that.

A temporary program was developed based on a three-year course and the program was filled with subjects which I believe to be intensely interesting, in order to give a boy a wide enough background on the subject of forestry for him to go ahead and make a success with it. So the Forest Academy, from everything except the beginning,

was based on a three-year college course and it was based on eleven months of the year instead of the usual college break in the summer. So actually when you figure it up, the three-year course, with half-day labor and half-day study, just about equaled the number of periods in the average college course. In other words, we had enough points or enough items in our three-year course to offset the number of points that were obtained in a four-year ordinary college course. Now that, of course, was a break away from the Biltmore business because the only thing we had there was forestry. We had lots of mathematics but it was forest mathematics – how to estimate timber , how to estimate ages, volumes, surfaces, and so on. Down here at Mont Alto we had to have a course in arithmetic because some of those hadn't graduated; there were no high schools for them; they didn't know it and we had to teach it to them.

CDB: Well, I would think one advantage might be, too, that you knew exactly the kind of jobs these boys were likely to be offered or what kind of jobs they were going to get, whereas at Biltmore there wasn't this certainty as to the nature of the careers the men were going to have.

GHW: Yes. Frankly, I think I must have been in a position where by reason of proximity to the doctor and perhaps by conversation with him, I was pretty sure that he himself would ask the governor for my appointment. And that, of course, gave me a considerable degree of safety because I had all my money borrowed and I was expected to pay it back anywhere from 4 to 6 percent, which I did on sixty dollars a month.

And those fellows just came and went. There was this, of course, to keep in mind, and that was that the Forest Service under Pinchot was moving along so rapidly in the matter of growing foresters and working out so-called working plans and all that kind of business, that actually a fellow didn't have to worry too much about getting a job because he could go up to Washington – Pinchot and his men took pretty near anybody that came along. If they could make a stem analysis of a strip, why that was about all that was necessary. That program, when it was formulated, was the result of a lot of praying.

CDB: How so? Were you worried about where you were going to get students?

GHW: No, whether I'd measure up to their requirements and what they'd need, and at the same time please the doctor and everybody else that was concerned on the outside. You had no example or precedent to follow. I got my books and ponied up to the mountain.

CDB: I see what you mean now. For example, Dr. Rothrock had been a university faculty member for a number of years, hadn't he?

GHW: Yes, quite a number of years.

CDB: It is true, however, that you yourself had thought of going into teaching?

GHW: Not to teaching particularly. My hobby was engineering. I wanted to become an electrical engineer. And I missed it by taking up forestry instead of philology.

CDB: You mean that philology scholarship would have led you into engineering?

GHW: No. That would have resulted in teaching; that would have been the only place for it. I wanted to be an engineer and I wanted to go to the University of Pennsylvania. Well, not having gone any further than the place I did in public school because of the absence of a high school, I couldn't get any further. The fellow who was head of our schools, simply being a teacher of the third room in the school building, came to us one night at home and in the conversation he turned to my daddy and he said, "Now, Mr. Wirt, if George is to get anymore education he's got to get out of McVeytown. I've given him as much as I can give him." And he did; he gave me good, stiff courses in arithmetic and algebra and started me on Latin. So I had a pretty good foundation, as far as it went, when I left school at McVeytown. I was less than fifteen years old. In order to get into the University of Pennsylvania I had to spend more time studying. Dr. Brumbaugh, who was a very dear friend of mine and of my family, was then a professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania. He was also a friend of Dr. Rothrock, and the whole bunch of them conspired to get me to see this forestry business. So I went into forestry.

CDB: You seem to have been a picked man then.

GHW: Everything went wrong.

CDB: Yes. So all of these things, of course, had something to do with your state of mind as you were given the job of preparing a curriculum or training course for young boys such as you had been a few years before at Mont Alto, right?

GHW: Yes.

CDB: So you went up on the mountain and boned up on some of your books?

GHW: Yes, the subjects rather. I'm sorry I don't have that course as it was outlined first. I'd like to show it to you.

CDB: It must be in the Penn State Archives?

GHW: It will probably be in the Mont Alto material of mine. Along about 1904, the winter of 1904 and 1905, we had a printed flyer setting forth the courses, the program, so that any kids that came in after 1904 would know what they were going to study.

CDB: Your first students were some boys that had already been working with you.

GHW: Yes, there was Brock to start with; then came Bob Conklin, a son of the clerk in the department; the Harvey Frankenfield, who the doctor picked up at Pike County, Pennsylvania and who, as a kid hardly any older than myself, had learned how to do county survey work and was one of the engineers that helped survey all that Pike County land. After the survey was over Harvey and I did this Daniel Boone stuff with the timber thieves. Then we came back home. Incidentally, Harvey had gotten an attack of smallpox. I nursed the kid through his smallpox case, then went home for Christmas. We fumigated, we closed down the department office, and went home. Some trip! But fun! I had more fun that you could shake a stick at.

CDB: Well, now, you recruited some of your staff and faculty how? You persuaded your sister to come and help you, I think, run the housekeeping side of it, was that the idea?[13]

GHW: That was the idea. She had just come home from Puerto Rico where she had buried her husband, who was a schoolteacher. So I persuaded her to stay with us until we got settled. We lived in a two-story house that had been the Iron Company office. The people that lived down there in that furnace community were all believers in ghosts. You can imagine this little old house. Being the office, the Iron Company covered the floor right inside the outside door with a sheet of brass or copper. As you walked over that it made a screechy noise; once in a while a nail would hit the doggone thing and scratch and make all kind of sounds. Brock slept upstairs and he would awake and hear this rattle on the metal floor, you know. He had the finest imagination you would want to find; that was old Colonel Wiestling coming up the steps with his sword dragging on the steps. And the poor little nigger boy would lay half scared to death, you know, thinking that Colonel Wiestling was coming up to get him. Then on the side of the house somebody sometime, probably one of the furnace boys, knocked a hole in the siding of the house. This chip of wood would blow around when the wind was good and strong from the east and south, and my sister would hear that and knew it was a bunch of

[13] Mrs. Irene W. Bontree.

robbers trying to get in the house. I was in between the two of them – Brock on one side and my sister on the other side of the hall. I'd get up and scout around to see if there were any robbers and then I'd go downstairs and see if there were any ghosts.

CDB: How did the other fellows come in to make up the thirteen you had?

GHW: The doctor, in some fashion or other, got in touch with people that he knew here and there, all over the state, and asked them for recommendations for a boy for the Academy, and in that way he accumulated a number of references from people whom he knew, for boys who might fit what he wanted. Then sometime in September these boys would gather together, were checked over, and ten were picked out to add to the three which we already had – Brock, Frankenfield, and Conklin – which made the first class thirteen. Now, as to whether the doctor realized that they would have to be worn down, picked out, I think he did because he, too, was as you say, a polished man. At any rate, that's exactly what happened. Before the Christmas season was on us, more than half of the boys that came in that first class were dismissed because they wouldn't have fit a round hole to save their necks.

CDB: Let's explore this for a minute. For one thing, I was going to ask you if you agree that we must remember that this was a time when youngsters were accustomed to taking their parents' or their elders' advice as to what career they should prepare themselves for, far more than follow their own inclinations. Would you agree that this might mean that there was less motive perhaps in some of the boys than was necessary to carry them through training for forestry?

GHW: I don't quite understand your question.

CDB: I meant that they had come at Dr. Rothrock's invitation because older people had said that it would be a good idea for them to do it, and that they didn't come out of their own personal zeal. And, as a consequence, the test of the early weeks and months was too great for them and you had dropouts.

GHW: No, I think that they all followed the old routine of getting permission from their parents to do whatever they wanted to do. But the matter of their doing what had to be done was just an impossibility because these kids had never gone through any more than a three-year course in the mountain public school. They had nothing to build a foundation on; we just couldn't do it. And, as I told the doctor from the very beginning, we didn't want

rangers or wardens; it was in the bill – we didn't want wardens, we wanted foresters. You won' have time to read the early reports of the department which covered the years 1901 to about 1924. The department put out reports – not always annual, several times biennial – but in those first reports of the department, there is a pretty good resume of the whole development. I urged the doctor, right from the beginning, not to take the boys that just came from public school any old where, but to at least limit the minimum ability to a high school course and, where it was possible, to get something better than that. This was finally done when we required the boys to take first a physical examination and then a mental examination.

CDB: You mean as a sort of admissions test?

GHW: Yes. There were plenty of them that took that test and we couldn't use them; they just weren't worth anything. So we finally got that to become a routine, until after Pinchot came in, and then Dr. Ziegler, who became the head of the school when I left, persuaded Pinchot to wipe out examinations entirely[14]. He had the idea that Mont Alto was the best place in the world for a forest school and that the school as it was was the best forest school in the world, that its facilities should be used to the fullest, and not only that, but they should be augmented until the attendance at the school reached a higher number than anywhere else in the world. They just went flooey on the doggone thing. They just gave up the whole business and when it was taken over by State College, then, of course, it came under State College rules and regulations of college admission, and it's been so ever since.

CDB: That was quite a number of years later, wasn't it?

GHW: That was about 1924 or 1925, right in there somewhere, when Pinchot's first term came. He couldn't see any advantage, which was reasonable, of having two schools of forestry in the state. He was the governor of Pennsylvania and there was a school of forestry up at State College and there was a school of forestry down at Forest Academy. That was just plain foolishness, so we'd try to get together. That's a very interesting story as to how various committees met. We finally decided that the two schools should be united and then something cropped up somewhere. Pinchot didn't like the way the things was

[14] Dr. E. A. Ziegler.

turning out, so he cut the examinations and he forgot about combining the schools, and now we have two schools again. We've had two schools again for some time.

CDB: What period do you mean that you had them again?

GHW: I shouldn't have said that. They fell into the same routine they had been in before Pinchot wanted them to combine. I think Johnny Ferguson, the head of State College forestry work, probably might have given Mr. Pinchot some information by reason of which he decided that after all it was best to leave them alone and let them go their way, which they did, up until the time that the Academy was taken over completely by State College. Then they combined and we've had one school of forestry since then.

I was constantly looking ahead, but my notion from the beginning was like this: We had a good location, we had plenty of forests which in the course of time – sooner than we would think – would have material there to do something with. None of us knew any too much, and don't yet know too much, about forest methods and forestry activities, and so on. We're stabbing along in the dark. Every German government forest has a research department in which their men are constantly researching problems in line with the growth of forests and so on. One of the first things I did, even before setting out the nursery, was to plan for the fencing-in of an experiment station where we had about forty acres of land fenced in and where we proposed to plant seedlings, seed, and whatnot to see what we could get out of certain methods. My plan was that we would get this research experiment station set up and they could go ahead while we were monkeying along with the nursery. So actually I started that research proposition right from the very beginning, as I say, before the nursery job. But when I came to get authority to fence this in and go ahead with the planting, we got about a third of the fence work done. By that time a change had been made in the authority of the tuberculosis sanitarium, who wanted to take over all of this land that I had set aside for the experiment station, and, by golly, they got the upper hand and took the thing away from us and we never had time or opportunity to develop the research proposition. But, as you will remember perhaps, years went by and the fellows in the field were having more and more problems that they knew nothing about, and we actually set up a research bureau. Willis Baker was put at the head of it. He is one of the strong men on TV down South.

CDB: What happened to the idea, Mr. Wirt?

GHW: It just died. When the Health Department took over the proposed acreage for the work, there wasn't any place else that we could use so we just dropped the idea entirely. Couldn't do anything.

CDB: This was at Mont Alto?

GHW: Yes.

CDB: Well, did it have to be there?

GHW: Oh, probably not, but we had no jurisdiction anywhere else than Mont Alto. At least that was my plan. I never figured on having any competition from State College, or the idea of combining the two schools. Several times the proposition came up of allowing State College to have a certain tract of timber or a certain number of acres of forest land to go ahead and work out their problems as they wanted to on their own land. The commissioner of forestry then, Mr. Conklin, had no particular love for the people at State College, partly going back to this old conflict with Dr. Armsby. Conklin wouldn't give him a piece of paper. The result of it was there was a block. I always felt that if we had cooperated with State College and said, "Yes, we've got a million acres or more, we'll give you ten or twenty thousand and you can go ahead," it would have pacified them, you know, and they would have stayed home and tended to their business and we, as a department, would have swung what we wanted any way we wanted to, pretty nearly. But it wasn't that way. It was all balled up and messed up and even now the department carries on a great many research problems on the state forests without any reference to the school. It's our land and we can do pretty nearly as we please as far as that kind of stuff is concerned.

CDB: Well, despite your youth and other factors that concerned you in beginning the school, you did get under way with those thirteen boys. Do you want to speak of the course of the school as you saw it develop under you until you left to go up to Harrisburg? What were some of your greatest problems? Finding faculty or finding students, or finding jobs for the students?

GHW: I should say we had no problem in any of those subjects. We always had more boys than were acceptable, as a result of their examinations, than we needed.

CDB: How many would survive the exams, proportionately? You made them fairly tough, I believe, didn't you?

GHW: Yes, they were tough. I should say that usually more than half of them were dropped. Occasionally we would get some fellow who was distinctly bad. I remember very definitely one young fellow. A year or so before he actually came down he took the examination. He was from my home town, and when this subject ever came up he would always blow around that I was just his ideal; he hoped that as a young student he could do as I did, and so on and so on. Made a thing out of it, you know. He went down to Harrisburg and took the examination and passed it. And he came into the school. But if there was anything around the school that he could devil around and mess up, that was his meat. He just enjoyed making trouble. Before he left, one of the last things he did was to raise trouble, as a result of which Brock was fired as a Negro. He wasn't going to work beside a Negro anytime, and he got the other fellows all "het" up and it resulted in a couple of fist fights over at the nursery. The only thing we could do – that was what the commissioner thought – was to drop Brock out of the company and try to get along without him.

CDB: Even though he had been the first one.

GHW: Even though he had been the first one and even though he would have developed into as good a forester as any of them. So we did get a few like that. Then there were a couple that never could stay home at night. They'd ride to Chambersburg or Fayetteville, or Waynesboro, or somewhere. My point was with the boys that I wasn't there to act as dry-daddy to them. If they didn't have sense enough to know how to behave, out they'd go. So there were several classes where we wound up with about half the boys who entered just because of their deportment being anything else but what we wanted. And the thing worked. One time a committee of the boys active there visited me in my office at the school and made out a program of discipline in line with an honor system in the school. Well, I knew what the honor system was. I think it had been developed in Chicago a short time before that, in the University of Chicago. And at Mercerburg College, a school for boys down in Franklin County, we had a very interesting headmaster. So I went over to see the doctor and talked this honor system over with him. After I told him the whole story I asked him if he would be good enough to give me the benefit of his experience and what he would recommend in the case. He looked across his desk at me very sharply and he said, "George, you go home and tell those boys of

yours they haven't any honor." Well, I thought that was pretty tough, but we discussed the matter and left it at that – that that group of boys didn't have any honor. And, by golly, the old doctor was right and he's been right ever since.

CDB: You mean they weren't mature enough then to maintain an honor system?

GHW: They didn't have enough backbone or development to be honored. He wouldn't approve of honor, said they didn't know what honor was, and he turned out to be right. So we just had one rule and regulation, "We've no regulations of any kind until you make it necessary to have one, and then we'll make a recommendation." And we couldn't have had better deportment on the part of those boys. As you say, some of them were older than I was. But as far as man handling them physically, I was strong enough to do it. I could handle a four hundred pound weight without too much trouble. More than once I grabbed a fellow by the cuff of the neck and the seat of his pants and threw him out on the porch. I only had to do it once or twice and they behaved.

CDB: How did you collect your faculty?

GHW: Just by letting it be known that we wanted a forester to teach so and so, or a chemist to teach chemistry, or we'd write perhaps, to some of the schools and see if they had anybody that was ready to be handed out on a fellowship or something of that kind. Then we'd take our pick of the ones who were given to us. We got one fellow from the Forest Service who gave me more trouble than all the rest of the fellows during the time I was there, and that was J. Fred Baker. He just didn't know what to do to keep himself out of trouble. He did anything he could do to raise Cain and make a fuss about. Well, he wanted my job, for example, and he did everything that I'd tell him not to do. I couldn't get with him. Finally I reported the thing to Conklin and Conklin fired him. He left the school in the afternoon; took his stuff over to Caledonia and from there he expected to go to Chambersburg and get the train.

CDB: This was Baker?

GHW: Baker. Conklin happened to be down in the neighborhood that particular day and he also stayed at Graffenburg Inn that night. Conklin was a late-night sleeper; he went to bed late. And by golly, Baker sat up until the two of them were alone, and then he sidled up to the table and told Conklin that he had a proposition for him. He said he'd come back

to Mont Alto and take charge of the school for so much. Made Conklin so doggone mad that he got up and walked off to bed and never said aye, yes, or no to the fellow.

CDB: What would give Baker this idea that such as appeal might work?

GHW: I haven't the slightest idea, except his innate meanness, I guess.

CDB: Baker was mean?

GHW: Yes.

CDB: He was the younger brother of Hugh Baker.

GHW: Yes. He would up with encephalitis so there wasn't much satisfaction to him afterwards.

CDB: How long was he with you at Mont Alto?

GHW: Just one year.

CDB: Where did he go?

GHW: Michigan, I believe. He entered the Michigan Forest Service and it wasn't long after that until he got encephalitis and finally he went out.

CDB: Well, your first budget you said was $30,000. How did you fare financially in the subsequent years?

GHW: All right, because whatever we wanted we just took out of some other appropriation.

CDB: Some other forestry or educational appropriation?

GHW: Forestry, always. We had no association with the education department until after they changed the name of the school and it came under the supervision of the State Council of Education.

CDB: You mean that there was an overall departmental appropriation out of which you operated the school?

GHW: Yes.

CDB: There was some legislation that was passed which resulted in the establishment of the forest inspector's job, wasn't there? I mean your change from Mont Alto to the capital again followed legislative action, didn't it?

GHW: Just pure and simple departmental policy. We felt that there were enough foresters in the field by that time, that they needed supervision and cooperation in the development of their program, and I was it.

CDB: You were the senior member of the department, as far as staff anyway, and so it

automatically fell to you to take up this larger responsibility. Did you at the time or later regret leaving the school?

GHW: I have since then, yes. A good many times I've wondered what persuaded me to leave the pleasant location and pleasant activities there at Mont Alto, but I found my new work very interesting and came here to live in Harrisburg from then on.

CDB: Forest inspector is a rather rare title nowadays for a job. It really amounted to state forester or chief forester, didn't it?

GHW: Chief forester. I had nothing to do with the school then.

CDB: Did you go back to the school for lectures occasionally?

GHW: Occasionally yes, but very occasionally.

CDB: Had Ziegler been on the faculty before?[15]

GHW: He had been on the faculty a little over a year under my direction.

CDB: What was his field?

GHW: He had a doctor's degree in economics, but that the economics were or what the subject was, I don't know. He got his degree from Franklin and Marshall. He graduated from Franklin and Marshall College and had been in the Forest Service under Pinchot as a forest economist. Most of his work, as I understood it, was tabulation work of various kinds – tree growth and finances and acreage and all that kind of business, and whatever problems for which they needed figures – and some of them were fearfully and wonderfully gotten and obtained and made. But as a professor in the school he was very good. Otherwise I wouldn't have left him when I did in 1910. I felt that he was able and willing to take the thing up. I've always felt that Ziegler was not entirely loyal, but I wouldn't want to say that entirely because there were times when things looked rosy and then there were times when there was a considerable amount of worry about what would happen, what was going to be done, and so on. But he apparently made a success of it because the fellows kept him until here not too long back. When the two schools were combined he was offered a job at State College in the department of economics and he didn't accept, so that cut him out of Mont Alto and State College both. Then he found work down at the University of Florida and also for a couple of lumber companies down

[15] Dr. Edwin Allan Ziegler.

there. He was also a major in one of the world wards – an instructor in artillery. While he was away Illick was director.

CDB: Illick had been kept on the faculty?

GHW: Yes, he came in in place of Baker. When Baker left, Illick came and he stayed until he decided to go with Schenck for awhile. He went down and took Schenck's course and came back.

CDB: What else was happening at the time you went up to Harrisburg? Now, Pinchot was where in forestry at that time? Was he out of the federal government?

GHW: Let's see. Martin G. Brumbaugh was governor in 1915 when the Forest Protection Law was passed; then William C. Sproul followed Brumbaugh as governor and Pinchot became a commissioner of forestry. Sproul was governor from 1919 to 1923 and Pinchot came in as governor until 1927. So you see, I came up to Harrisburg under Governor Edwin S. Stuart, who was governor from 1907 until 1911. He was from Philadelphia and was owner of the Stuart secondhand bookstore down there.

CDB: There were all Republican governors, weren't they, and so the continuity of the commissionership stayed with Rothrock until his deputy, Robert S. Conklin followed him.

GHW: He stayed four years. He retired in 1904 and then Conklin came in. And there was dirty work on the part of Pinchot in that connection. Dr. Rothrock was in poor health and he felt that he just simply had to get out so he turned in his resignation effective, I think, in May or June of 1904. The question came up as to his successor. Conklin had been with him since way back in '94 or '95 while he was making his '95 report. He was a very loyal gentleman. He didn't know a darn thing about forestry but he had been with the doctor long enough so that there weren't very many things in the program that he didn't know about and knew what was back of them and all that kind of business. Conklin went over to see Sproul, the governor, after the doctor had told him that he would have to resign and that he would support Mr. Conklin in a recommendation to become his successor. Whatever the doctor said or did or what contact he made with the governor, I don't know, but he made what he believed to be sufficient support so that there would be no question about appointing Mr. Conklin. Rothrock told Conklin to go and see the governor, which he did. Governor Sproul asked him one question and that was, "Do you

know anything about forestry?" Mr. Conklin said, "No, I don't know anything about forestry, but I can buy people who do know forestry, and I believe I can give you as good a program of forestry as the doctor did." The governor studies a while and told Mr. Conklin that he would appoint him as commissioner of forestry that weekend. I went to New York the day that he got that promise from Governor Sproul in order to make some research into the problem of the use of radio in our fire towers in our protection work. I had an appointment with DeForest.

CDB: Lee DeForest?

GHW: The radio man. I had an appointment with him at nine o'clock in the morning. Sometime in the evening, along about ten or eleven o'clock, my room telephone rang and the boss said, "Come home right away on the next train in the morning. Mr. Pinchot has been appointed commissioner of forestry in my place." So I came home and on the twenty-first day of March, 1904, I think it was, Conklin left office and Pinchot came in.

CDB: You mean Conklin had only been in the job – how long?

GHW: He had been in since 1894 under Rothrock.

CDB: Well, I was trying to trace Rothrock. He had to resign the top job because of his health and Conklin succeeded him, didn't he?

GHW: Yes, and as such he continued his work, which was also done under the commissioner of forestry and he got a salary which was just about the same, if not the same, as he got as clerk in the Department of Forestry. So he was taken care of, expect that he was taken out of his element and assigned this work which he didn't like instead of the forestry work with which he was very much in love. Pinchot was United States forester from 1877 to 1898. Pinchot went into the Forest Service in 1898. When Taft was president, he fired him. You know he was a great friends of Teddy Roosevelt's – Mr. Pinchot; Taft fired him.

CDB: Why, in your opinion?

GHW: Because he didn't like him, and because he made some unsatisfactory comments which Mr. Taft didn't like. And there was the Ballinger controversy which gave Mr. Taft a good many sleepless nights – the fight with coal and the preservation of resources, so-called, up in Alaska. Taft fired him with no good recommendation and after Taft fired Pinchot, Mr. Roosevelt himself took a shot at him and plugged him a couple of times.

And Mr. Graves, I believe, succeeded him by Taft's appointment. Then he was without a job for a while, and with his money, I think, more than anything else, he set up a National Conservation Association, and became the big bug in that national association. As a matter of fact, to give the fellow credit for what he did, I think that he did put out, as leader in that particular group, some very good information and publicity. As a matter of fact, from the time he entered the Forest Service 'til he left it and all the rest of the time until his death, he carried on practically all his own publicity matter and he swayed the people and fooled them. He was without a job as president of the association for some few years.

CDB: Pinchot criticized you for not attacking the railroads. Why?

GHW: I can see him yet sitting at the table with the commissioners around, Conklin up there at the head of the table, head of the commission; Pinchot sitting down there in this corner, and he was just generally complaining about everything under the sun. Finally he said, "And finally, your chief forest warden hasn't done a thing with the railroads of Pennsylvania. There's nothing that I would like better than to have a fight with them and see if they can't do better on their fires." Conklin sent a messenger over to me to my office and asked me to bring over some correspondence with the railroads which he wanted to see. I didn't know what he wanted, but I got the stuff out of the file. I had a file with the Pennsylvania railroad that thick.

CDB: About six or eight inches thick?

GHW: Yes. I brought the whole drawer over and laid it down in front of him and said, "There's what's happened in the last two years." He just seemed to fade back into his chair for making a faux pas like that because he was just talking out of his hat, you know, and didn't know what I had done nor what had been done by anybody else. We had one of the finest examples of cooperation between the railroads and our fire wardens.

Finally it came to some kind of a showdown one day after this business, and the representative of the B & O Railroad Company came in the office and asked specifically if he could see Mr. Pinchot. When he got in to Pinchot he stood across the desk from the gentleman and he said, "I'm here to tell you that as long as Mr. Wirt is chief forest fire warden you don't need to fret about anything that the railroads will do or won't do that isn't satisfactory. We endorse him wholeheartedly." He treated me with a little better

respect than he ever had before. But he was just that kind. Anything that he thought he could pick a scrap about, he did.

CDB: What period was this?

GHW: That would be ’23.

CDB: Mr. Wirt, C. B. Stott, whom you know, is forester with the Division of the State of Pennsylvania in private forestry in the Northcentral Region of the Forest Service – or he was a number of years ago, at the time the celebration in honor of your forty years with the department was held. He wrote you a letter in which he said that “Out here it means something for a Pennsylvania Dutchman to say he once worked for the Pennsylvania Department of Forests and Waters. It has its reputation for the earlier and best fire-protection program.” I was going to ask you, why is it possible for a man like Stott and Henry Clepper and others to point to the department’s reputation in this regard? What were the tings that enabled you to organize this unifier of forest-fire control structure of organization? Was it because you had a larger budget or did you try some new methods, or what was it?

GHW: Who was Stott?

CDB: Well, he apparently was one of your former employees, C. B. Stott.

GHW: I don’t remember him, but that’s neither here nor there. Let’s start back at the beginning of the protection organization, if you will. I told you that after I came up here in 1910 Conklin assigned me the job of checking up of these two fellows that were tabulating the forest fire statistics for the year. Just as a matter of curiosity I got up from my desk that particular day and asked them what they were doing. They told me and explained to me the whole business and I said, “Well, don’t you fellows realize that all these figures you are gathering together just don’t amount to anything and don’t tell anybody anything? They are completely incorrect. It wasn’t any use in you making them up.” Well, of course, they had orders from the boss and they were just doing what they were told to do. It was just a matter of tabulating figures and that was all. For example, we were required by law to get up fire reports, which took a considerable period of time, as a matter of bolstering the recommendations of Dr. Rothrock and his ’95 report. We wanted to know ho many acres were being burned, what kind of stuff was on them, and anything that we could pick up in regard to forest fires.

I took the reports that they were working on to Mr. Conklin and told him to look over them and explained what they were doing and he said, “Well, you know so damn much about this forest fire business you can take it over yourself, and do it right.” Those were his words. I’ll never forget them. So I had the fire reports come to my desk and it was up to me to do something with them, which I did. And when I got through with the figures which they had for fire loss in Pennsylvania it was quite different from their figures. You could see at a glance, theirs were no good. Well, that as I remember, was about 1913.

So when the boss said, “You take it and do what you please with it,” I said, “All right, we’ll start right now.” I sent out an inquiry all over the United States to all foresters and asked them for their fire laws and their recommendations as to where their laws didn't give them all they wanted and where they failed. I got that stuck together and tabulated and the next year when the tabulations came in they were done the way I recommended. In the meantime, I gathered together all these laws and tabulated them and itemized them and studied them. As we’d come to a particular section of the law we’d study the thing pretty carefully. In the meantime, let me say that we had acquired a deputy secretary by that time. I. C. Williams became deputy secretary, a might fine fellow both from the standpoint of gentlemanliness and intelligence and he was quite a botanist, which didn’t help him very much, of course, but still was an indication that he was thoroughly interested in these things. He was a lawyer by profession. So I’d study these sections of the various laws, and, as I say, tabulate them and compare them and pick out the best ideas and give them to him to scan and criticize from the legal standpoint. And so we went through all of the fire laws of all the states and wound up with what we believed to be a pretty good law.

We got it prepared for introduction into the legislature of 1915. Then a funny thing happened. Conklin gave this law to a representative and asked him to introduce it. He did. Some senator had a bill for the protection of bull frogs that he wanted passed and was having trouble with it. It seems that the fellow that had our protection bill was having trouble getting his bill passed in the legislature and by golly we wormed the thing around until we found that these two fellows were fighting each other and that we wouldn’t get either bull frog protection or forest protection as long as we left it with the

two of them so we got them together and one promised he'd pass the law he had, if the other fellow would pass the law he had. And we got our protection that way – log rolling they call it.

One of the things that the chief forest fire warden was supposed to do in this 1915 law was to create an organization of forest fire wardens, with no other purpose than protecting the forests from fire. When I dug into the proposition to find out how many fire wardens we had left from the 1909 act, I found it was just a transcript of the Republican or Democratic county committee of men of various counties, nothing else. If you were on a committee you were a forest fire warden; if you were a forest fire warden you were on a committee. So one of the first letters that I wrote was to these fellows that were on our list as so-called fire wardens and I found that about six hundred out of something over twelve, fourteen, or fifteen thousand were fellows who really were interested in protecting the forests in their community from fire, and I started with them. My assistant (who then was Howard Siggens who died out on the West Coast in forestry work out there) and I traveled up and down this old Commonwealth until we had been all over the state and had covered the whole territory and had picked out enough wardens, if they served their purpose (which some of them didn't), so that we would have as fine as organization as you could find anywhere, amounting to about four thousand men. We didn't have any women at that time in that particular stage of the game. Well, we began then with this four thousand – I think it was 4,800 to be exact – to read into them very definitely that if they had any political ambitions they should quit because we didn't want anybody that was in the organization because of politics. Well, of course, we didn't clean out all of them, but we cleaned up most of them, and finally got it down to about 980 and then built it up again.

CDB: What qualities did you seek in these people?

GHW: In the first place, they had to be able-bodied; in the second place, they had to be good citizens in the neighborhood, anybody that anybody could recommend. Sometimes we got some whoppers but, frankly, I think we made more men good citizens than we ever made fire fighters perhaps. But that was it. Now, how it happened and why they were as loyal to me as they were I don't know, but that's what actually happened. And I took advantage of it.

CDB: How much was the pay?

GHW: To start with, 15 cents an hour. Gradually, we hated to see it come, but they now pay a fire fighter a dollar an hour, by reason of minimum wage. It started at 15 cents, then jumped to 25 cents for a fire warden; finally to 30 cents and so on, step by step.

CDB: This was pay for only when they were on a job fighting a fire?

GHW: That's it, only when they were fighting a fire.

CDB: There wasn't any fixed amount that they could depend on as yearly income for being fire warden?

GHW: No, sir. There was no intimation of anything like definite pay coming to them. They got paid for what the job called for and nothing more.

CDB: Does that include manning the fire tower?

GHW: No, the fire wardens on the fire towers and the inspectors were paid a definite salary. To start with that varied. Some places where a fellow only had to be on duty half a day, he only got half a day's wage. And that's where, as I told you, we had men of all grades and values and ideas, but as long as they were dead set on keeping fire out of the woods we didn't care what else they did. Got a letter from an old lady who was disappointed because she heard that the fire wardens that were on a fire near her home cursed, and there were a lot of Boy Scouts on the line which was just too bad – that I would permit fellows helping to fight fire who would curse in the presence of Boy Scouts.

CDB: Well, was this rather unusual, or had other states organized? It's really on a volunteer basis, isn't it? Except that they get a token fee.

GHW: Very definitely. There are a few states who introduced the volunteer idea into their building of an organization, but very few. And even within the last three or four years, since I retired, I was called down into Tennessee to try to persuade the forester and what crew he had to depend on a volunteer crew and to lead them up to an esprit de corps in the community so that they would be anxious to do the job instead of sitting back and letting somebody else do it or not having it done at all. As I say, I don't know how they did it or why they did it, but I can say definitely, without boasting, that I think most of my success in organizing the wardens and their crews was pure and simple flattery perhaps, appealing to their better side and the fact that they weren't fighting fire for the protection

of the forests from fire, but they were fighting fire for the protection of the community. And everybody in the community lost if fires occurred.

CDB: Well, that would put a degree of self interest into it then.

GHW: Yes.

CDB: It's the same, wouldn't you say, as the volunteer fire department in a community?

GHW: Very much so, the same idea. They don't get paid for doing what they do; the pay they get is their own satisfaction. Then there comes not only the organization, but the equipment. Now we realized that we had to have equipment and for a long time we didn't have money with which to buy equipment. We resorted to homemade material. We had little homemade rakes and we had brush cutters and we picked out a fire tank, a five-gallon back tank that answered the purpose. With the manufacturers we worked out little odds and ends of improvements here and there and got the tank where we wanted it and we had the so-called Rich rake, which was a matter of mower blades. Everything else that we got we studied very carefully and tried out very carefully before we bought.

And it's a fact that time after time things would come back to us, even as far west as California, "What's Wirt doing with that particular kind of equipment. If it's all right for him it's all right for me." We got that from all over the country. So we built up our activities on the basis of equipment which answered the purposes and to a considerable extent led the rest of the procession in what they had and what they used. I hate to tell you that the way I've told it to you, but it's the truth.

CDB: No, I like that, except what Henry Clepper called "unified forest fire control structure." Well, I don't know exactly what he does mean by that.

GHW: I don't either.

CDB: How did you train these volunteers?

GHW: Gathered them together in fire warden meetings. The fire wardens had their meetings where they would have ten or twelve members of a crew, each one having explained how to handle a Rich rake, a grubbing hoe, a shovel, how to use the pumps and hose, and all that. We had meetings sometimes once a month, sometimes once a season. We taught the fellows how to take care of their tools; to hang them up, dry them out, and all that kind of business. One of the interesting situations that developed was that every two years the government called for an audit of all accounts in all departments. The auditors

came to our bureau and got the information in regard to Rich rakes, for example. We had reached a stage where there were probably ten thousand Rich rakes in the hands of fire wardens and crew members. In the study of our report the auditors discovered that we had lost about two thousand rakes over a period of two years. So when we told them that we had 30,000 fire fighters and had only lost 2,000 rakes in two years, they thought we were doing pretty good.

CDB: Did they agree?

GHW: They agreed. I was not put in jail.

CDB: Mr. Wirt, over the years have the causes of fires changed in the order of their importance in Pennsylvania?

GHW: Not in the order of their importance, but they have changed. The railroad fires, for example, are pretty nearly wiped out because of the change in railroad equipment. Brush burning is almost a cause of no degree at all anymore. There have been certain locations where forest fires have been eliminated entirely; no kind of forest fires occur because people won't let them. They not only watch against the setting of fire, but they get on them so quick if they do start that there is just no loss.

CDB: Did you used to have an incendiarism problem years ago?

GHW: Some few, no question about it. We had fellows set fire for all kinds of purposes. The common cause for fires, aside from railroads, used to be fires to burn over huckleberry land or other kinds of plant growth of some kind that somebody wants and thinks he can get only by burning over the land. But there hasn't been too much of a change. We are working not so much for change in the source of fires as we are for entire elimination; that is our motto. We took that attitude from the very beginning, and tired to put it across to the fellows – and I think it's there now – that we didn't want fires. There was no reason why we should have them. The thing was to jump on them and stop them before they amounted to anything. In the last few years, in keeping our records (we built up our records and tabulations right from the very beginning) we now have listed how many fires start and never amount to anything. It's wonderful to see the change in those figures. Where we used to have five or six thousand fires, in the whole state we now have maybe a couple hundred.

CDB: In spite of the fire warden program being organized differently from what had been tried

in the first years of the century, nevertheless the number of jobs involved, the number of persons (I think you said there were 4,300 jobs) and you had as many as 35,000 in the fire fighting organization. Is this sort of a political force?

GHW: It would be to anybody who's inclined to be of a political nature, but we kept the thing down very definitely by our own bearing on the subject, constantly telling these fellows that if they were interested in politics we didn't want them. We wanted service to the community. If we couldn't get service to the community, willingly and of personal interest to these fellows, we would just as soon they quit. We were hard-boiled about it.

CDB: I should think this would risk your being called down by a politician back at Harrisburg.

GHW: Well, as far as being called down, I was called down lots of times and pressure was brought to bear in the Harrisburg office. But we consistently and persistently say "No politics," and that's it. I guess as early as the twenties (about the time that the Pinchot change was made) we tired very definitely to build up the idea that the forest fire crew had fire work to do in the two seasons, spring and fall. Now, if we're going to have the fire crew continue we've got to have something to keep them busy. Your community is wide open. If there is anything your community needs, get in and do it and get it to build up your community. Forget all about fires for the time being. You'd be surprised, if we could show you a tabulated list of the number of projects and the wide reach of projects that have been done just under that idea.

CDB: That's marvelous. Well, these peoples sound like the ones who would be asked to serve in the civilian defense program when that was organized.

GHW: Some of them did. Many of them did. Any catastrophe, as a matter of fact, the fire wardens and their crew men were always ready to go.

CDB: Like the floods.

GHW: Long before they had this high-falutin civil defense program.

CDB: Speaking of the conditions of service through forestry here in the state, Mr. Pinchot is known for favoring civil service for foresters when he was in Washington. Was this true in Pennsylvania?

GHW: He muffed the ball time after time in Pennsylvania.

CDB: What do you mean by that?

GHW: He was commissioner for over two years, governor for three to eight years and didn't do

a doggone thing to help civil service.

CDB: Well, what held this up?

GHW: Politicians. Politicians don't want civil service.

CDB: But don't they agree that the forestry department, forest and water, should be staffed by professionally-trained people?

GHW: Certain people agree, but not enough to pass a law. We still don't have…Now this governor that just went out of office, Governor Leader, here about a year ago had a committee who went all over state jobs and listed them and tabulated them and dissected them and combined them and all that kind of business, with the idea that they were going to build up a place were so-and-so with job so-and-so would fit into such-and-such committee and get such-and-such a wage. I don't know how long it took them to do that, but they've got it and very shortly I expect the governor to wave it off again, just like it's been done two or three times, and we'll have no more civil service than we had fifteen, twenty, thirty years ago. In fact, one of the reasons why we had any trouble at all with our 1915 act was that the power that existed in the legislature didn't want to create a new organization to become political appointees – even after we assured them that as far as we were concerned and as long as we were in there there would be nothing of that kind. Now, frankly I don't know why the politicians kept me in there. I served through eight or ten governors. Plenty of chance to wipe me out and smother me time after time, but they let me go through and lift $500,000 out of the treasury one time for forest fire work and never said a word.

CDB: How did that happen?

GHW: We had a tremendous drought in 1930. We had something like 6,000 fires burn 300,000 acres. We needed money to pay the fire fighters. Broke up the Republican budget to smithereens and they gave us $500,000 to pay the bill.

CDB: I'd like to know more about the fire warden system that you organized. I believe you went around the state in horse and buggy naming the people.

GHW: The development came about in this fashion: those who were interested in forestry or in the protection of forests in Pennsylvania were anxious to have some body of men who were given the definite job and the authority that was necessary to go with it, some kind of organization that would accomplish some results. The politicians, however, were not

disposed to create any kind of an organization at the time which might become a political system. The result of this was that, in consultation with the politicians, Dr. Rothrock was able to have a law passed which put the responsibility of extinguishing forest fires on the shoulders of the constables of the townships.

CDB: When would this be?

GHW: I don't know anymore. You can pick it up in the first report of the forest fire wardens, the chief forest fire warden, for the year 1915. A separate report was printed and the whole background of the fire warden organization is rehearsed in there. But at any rate, the answer to the questions why didn't we have a fire warden organization sooner than we did was due to the fact that the people who were in charge of political affairs saw an opportunity for a great, wide-spread group of appointments through this warden system which they didn't want for some reason or other at that particular time. So instead of appointing or organizing a completely new group, they put this business onto the shoulders of the constables of the town ships with pay for fighting fire on the part of the county. A little later, a couple years after that was accomplished, the legislature added the constables of boroughs and towns to the group. You see, the thing worked in this fashion: the constable, who for some reason or other might have some interest in forests, when forest fires occurred was the Indian who gathered up a few men and went out to fight fire. Other constables who didn't have any interest in the forests didn't care whether they went to the fires or not. The result was that in some boroughs and towns the constables were extremely inactive – in other words, they just didn't bother. Well, everybody saw that there was no hope of getting any good results, satisfactory results in that fashion, so efforts were made to create this fire warden organization again, made up of men who would at least get out and do something when fires occurred and not let them go on a rampage, as was the usual situation before. So in 1907, I think it was, we finally got a system of fire wardens on the statute books of the state. That, headed up with the chief forest fire warden – well, put it this way the commissioner of forestry was made the chief forest fire warden of the state and a semblance of organization was created. In other words, the commissioner of forestry was the chief forest fire warden and he had the authority to appoint men to assist him as fire wardens and men as assistant forest fire wardens. They dropped the borough constables. The fact of the matter was that the chief

forest fire warden, namely, the commissioner of forestry, had too many other responsibilities in the department so that practically little or nothing was done and we were not much better off than we were with the constables. There were several changes in the legislation on this forest fire wardens' organization in the matter of who paid the bill and how. Counties paid some and the state paid some. Finally that got worked out to where the state paid the whole bill on the extinction of fires.

CDB: Was this in hourly wages for…..?

GHW: Hourly wages.

CDB: Do you remember how much it would be?

GHW: To start with the first bill where wardens were paid, if I'm not mistaken, was twenty-five cents for the warden and fifteen cents for his assistant and helpers. At any rate, when we came down to preparing the bill for what became the 1915 Forest Protection Act, we provided that the state should pay the bill and the chief forest fire warden was to be the head of the organization, under the commissioner of forestry.

CDB: Well, now this was creating a new job.

GHW: This was now creating a new job. That's in the 1915 act. I was designated chief forest fire warden and in that act of arranging and establishing a system of organization one of the first things that I did as chief forest fire warden was to get in touch with the wardens that were a matter of record in the department.

CDB: About how many were there?

GHW: Well, if I'm not mistaken there were something like nine hundred. When I dug into the records I found that the forest fire wardens that came to me as a new head of the organization, were simply the members of the strongest political party in the county – in other words, the county committee. In other words, if I wanted to contact the fire warden in Cumberland County I would contact the chairman of the strongest political party in office, which for a great man years, of course, was the Republican Party. That chairman was the fire warden in his particular district and his committee member was fire warden in his particular district. Well, there was little more in that organization than there had been in the one before, or the one before that. So one of the first things I had to do was to clean up that political group. I contacted every fire warden who was a matter of record and asked him specifically if he knew that he was a fire warden if he was interested in

protecting the forests from fire, and if he would join our organization and become the forest fire warden with real intentions of doing something for the group.

CDB: How did you contact them? By letter, or did you go in person?

GHW: Well, to start with it was just a letter. I think out of that group of something a little over nine hundred we got a residue of about four hundred and some. Now, the proposition for us was to complete the organization and cover the entire state and that's where Siggens, who was then my assistant, and myself started out over the state of Pennsylvania to see if we could locate wardens where these fellows that were on the list were not doing anything. In other words, whether we could organize a group that had a definite job and would live up to their responsibility. Yes, we traveled by horse and buggy, we traveled by train, and we walked, and got around any way we could. We would go to the man who seemed to be willing to give his time to the community. We'd find out about some local sportsman, for example. We'd go and talk to him and find out from him some man or men whom he thought might be interested. Then we'd go and contact them – maybe by letter or by actual personal contact. And in building up an organization to cover the entire state we just listed about 4,800, if I'm not mistaken, 4,800 men.

CDB: How long did you spend building the four hundred and some odd group up to 4,800? A couple years was it, or more?

GHW: Yes, a couple years. We tried to build the thing up as we could find men. We plainly told the fellows we didn't want them on the list as political appointees; we wanted men who were actually going to get out and take care of the fires and do the other things that we had to assign to them. One of the strong points of the 1915 law was that we provided for not only the fire warden and his assistant, but we provided for a job known as inspector in the fire warden organization, and the idea was that we would give a certain individual who was enthusiastic and who could be depended upon, the job of checking up on a certain number of wardens in his neighborhood. I think we had provision, and we got the organization started for about sixty such inspectors in the state.

CDB: Were they paid any differently, or were they still doing this as a voluntary service?

GHW: The inspectors for a while were paid just lie any other fire warden. As we got them tied into the organization and had given them some instruction by reason of calling them together and telling them what it was all about and some of the things they needed to

know, we got men who really would go out and see that the wardens were on the job when fires occurred.

CDB: The wardens still were volunteers until the time they went to work fighting a fire, and then they would get paid an hourly wage?

GHW: Yes, an hourly wage for the time they put in. then gradually, as these inspectors became a little stronger in their activities, we put them on straight salary, something like thirty or forty dollars, anything. It varied according to the location, the warden, and the number of fires that were occurring in his district and so on. In other words, we kept the business away from politics as far as we could, and insisted, both in the office and in the field, that the men do something for their community, before they got something, before they got paid. And, of course, all of that kind of service was volunteer service.

There were only a few fires occurring. We kept records of all of our fires and counted them and studied them from every possible detail so that we knew exactly what the situation was all over the state. We made them understand that they would get paid in that fashion and we hired them under any arrangement, only during what we knew to be the forest fire season, in a community. For example, up in the hard coal region where we were having fifteen to twenty, thirty, forty fires a day we wanted wardens who would be on the jump and we checked them to find out if they were because their reports came in and we studied them. We had all kinds of people on the job as inspectors and as forest fire wardens. We had men who were professional men; we had men who were lumber jacks; we had men who were sportsmen. In fact, all kinds and classes of fellows. We had some that even went so far as to five up their regular job at fair salaries and come with us as inspectors and tower men and just plain fire wardens. They would give up their own jobs and their own pay for the service that they rendered to the commonwealth under our organization.

CDB: Now, what were the salaries for those jobs that these men gave up their other work for?

GHW: Well, of course, that varied. To start with, however, we gave them anywhere from twenty-five to sixty dollars a month. Maybe the next year we were required to pay them a little more because of the kind of people that we got and what service they rendered. It was a heterogeneous mass of people; we used some psychology and we took advantage

of every point of human nature that we could in order to get good men to fill the jobs and somebody to definitely and actually look after the fire work.

CDB: For example, what were some of the appeals that you used?

GHW: Well, we had a fellow up in Clearfield County who did some good work on fire lands and the next season we wanted to get him to serve as an inspector. He was a preacher in the local church up there. I don't know that he ever left his pulpit in order to go and fight a fire, but I know that in times when fires occurred some of his parishioners left the church. We had a fellow up in Clarion (he was a clerk in the bank at Clarion) and he was just up and doing all the time during forest fire season. If a fire occurred and the report came to him, he left his clerkship in the bank and went to the fire. I could tell you all kinds of stories about people of that kind. But as might be expected, here and there there were a few fellows who were on the job purely and simply for the money they could get out of it, small as it was. And occasionally we had to bring a fellow into court and sue him for setting fire intentionally in order to get the pay.

First, as we developed our appointments and filled in the gaps and so on, we organized what we called the Forest Fire Crew and we told the fire wardens very definitely, "Now you're all right as far as you yourself are concerned, but you can't do very much fire work by yourself; you've got to have some help. You might just as well attempt to organize that help that you usually get when an fire occurs in your neighborhood into an active crew so that you know that you're going to have something there." And we have those crew members whatever their wage was at the time in their locality; we gave them five cents extra over and above what we paid the straight fire warden, so that it formed an inducement for the organized crew. And we finally got so that we had maybe five hundred or more organized crews throughout the state. Now, finally that grew in numbers to about a total of thirty thousand men and women as organized crew members. As the crew increased in efficiency the fire wardens increased in efficiency. After a few years when the foresters came in – and I want to touch on that – the forester going into Potter County came in 1909 and he ran across an experience which we found was rather common throughout the state. There were a lot of our fire wardens, and a lot of our crew members even, who thought that forest fires just couldn't be taken care of during the daytime. They'd always have to wait until night until the dew

fell and the wind died down before they could even go out on a fire line. We soon broke that up by having the foresters simply go as soon as the fire alarm sounded and gather up his crew and go to the fire, and we finally convinced our en all over the state that there was always something to be done during the day or night. Of course, putting a fire out you didn't have to sit down and let it go; it was prompt action. We organized our crews and gave them instructions and hints and suggestions.

CDB: Did you go out from Harrisburg to make demonstrations or did you do this by mail?

GHW: No, we went right in the woods and had a demonstration there in the woods of how to fight a fire and the tools to be used, to get them accustomed to using tools satisfactorily. As might be expected, some fellows were about as dumb with the tools we had as a kid would be in fishing trout with a fly rod. So we finally wound up with about four thousand fire wardens over the state. Oh, yes, two things I want to mention. In 1907, you see, we had the forester – two classes out in the woods. The class that graduated in 1906 was the first class and then there were the classes of 1907, -08, 09 – we were beginning to get foresters in there. And one of the specifications in our protection code was that these district foresters would become automatically district fire wardens. I assigned to each forester a certain territory where he was located, which was very flexible. He had charge of the wardens and had charge of the fire work in his territory, above the inspector. So we had a forester, inspector, fire warden, assistant fire warden, fire crew members. And one of the things which we were very proud of after it was all over was the fact that we inserted in the law a provision that the chief forest fire warden would have the authority to gather the men together and instruct them in forest fire activities. That was the salvation of a great many districts.

Well, as I say, we took advantage of every possible freak of nature that we could pick up in our men and gradually and finally, I think, the last step in the grouping of men was our effort to get the fire crews to see that they were helping themselves, their community, and the state, and their friends. And since the forest fire seasons in Pennsylvania were definitely at two times of the year, spring and fall, we cooked up the idea that in order to keep the men interested as a fire crew they ought to have some community job during the summer and winter to maintain that interest. Since forest fires and extinguishment of forest fires was to the benefit of the community, anything else that

the forest fire crew could do for the good of the community just came back to their forest fire activities and they could go to people who were accustomed to burn brush and otherwise set up a hazard – the railroad companies, the lumbering companies, any kind of group that was in the woods – and we'd get them to take an interest and the fire crew would do what the community needed. And, by golly, we got parks, we got fire houses, we got town fire-fighting equipment, and all of those kinds of projects on the strength of the fact that this forest fire warden and crew was doing something for the good of the community. They handed over to the fire warden a job and when the community had received say, a fire truck at the hands of the fire crew, they didn't need to be ashamed to go and say, "Say, Mister, there's a forest fire. You remember when we got the fire truck for you. No we'd like to get it used here in this particular fire." And that's still in effect.

CDB: Were the organized crew like a local volunteer fire department?

GHW: In a sense, yes. When fire season occurred, we'd say, "Now, in February and March the fires will start to come in here. We'll have a forest fire season some time in February or the middle of March sometimes. Sometimes when it's all over we'll have a year when there are more fires between the first of March and the middle of March than we'll have from the first of April to the first of June." So it varies.

CDB: How much would a crew member or a warden even – these volunteers – have made over a year? I thought that the size of the figure might indicate the quality of the volunteer service, quality of the volunteering motive that they had.

GHW: I couldn't give you any figure of that kind because it varies in a particular season and it varies in a particular year. I can say definitely that the amount would vary. Some of our fellows who were very active on fires (and I mean by that that they made it a point to do as much work as they possibly could, not from the standpoint of wages but from the standpoint of actually desiring to help) they made about all that could be made in a definite period, at a definite rate of wage. But to say that in Clinton County, for example, the inspectors of the tower men or the fire wardens themselves and the assistants, averaged a hundred dollars a month – no, we could not say that because one month they may have nothing the other month they may have ten, fifteen, twenty dollars. Some of these inspector jobs, in the course of time as I said, they jot to be up around the eighty

and ninety dollar figure. They might make that much and they might not. They run the risk of making considerably less.

I know we had a fellow down in Easton. He had a slight touch of tuberculosis – a nice, young fellow; had a very attractive lady for a wife. We had a tower out in Westmoreland County, fire tower. He used to have some relatives in the neighborhood of the tower so he came in one day and wanted to know if he and his wife (incidentally we had a cabin at that particular tower, and very satisfactory cabin to live in) could move up and live there at the tower and act as tower men. Well, we hadn't any objections to that at all. He went up and was up about three months, from the last of February until the first of June. He gave up the job; he was making in Easton $250 a month and he went up there for $60 a month, on the strength of his tuberculosis contact. We had an old lady up in above Williamsport. She wanted a little bit of extra money and there was a tower job not very far from her home. She wanted to know if she couldn't act as an observer on that particular tower. She turned out to be one of the best tower observers, one of the best observers that we had anywhere in the state. It didn't make any difference what time of the day or night a fire occurred. If she thought when she went to bed that there might be fire in the night – and there were some in that particular neighborhood, fellows that were setting fires would set them at night – she'd get up two or three times in the night, go up to the top of the tower and look things over and see if there were any fires on the horizon. Well, we gave her something like $80 a month for the time she was there.

CDB: The time. You mean the number of months in the year or the time of day?

GHW: Well, she was there three months and we paid her full time. Three times eighty is $240.

CDB: You mean three months of spring fire season and three months fall fire season? Is that the way it would work out?

GHW: Usually one month in the fall. In our forest fire job we don't have very many fires in the fall. May have a heavy fire season in the spring and nothing in the fall. We have now a great many towers and I would say we have at least a few towers that don't need to be manned at all except on very bad days. A forester, supervising the whole job, it's his responsibility now. He sees to it that the fellow on the tower – the inspector, the patrolman, or whatever we have – is on the job only on the days or weeks when there's something to do. If we have a wet season and no fires, no organization.

CDB: Mr. Wirt, you spoke of men giving up their regular jobs to go to work for the department in this fire prevention-control work. They didn't even have the reason of sickness, like the fellow from Easton that you were describing. Why do you think they did this? They felt so deeply about conservation or what?

GHW: The answer to that is very difficult to formulate. The only thing we know is that when the fellows come into contact with what they had to do, it gets into the inside of them and they do things that there just isn't any rhyme or reason for that I know of. The common expression is that forest protection activities get inside of us and we just want to do all we can in order to keep fires down.

CDB: Well, do you feel that this is true of people nowadays?

GHW: Yes.

CDB: As true as it was back in 1915 and so on?

GHW: Yes. Just as much loyalty and devotion given by many of these fellows as there ever was. It's something you just can't explain.

CDB: Are we referring to the volunteers as well as to the men compelled to go?

GHW: Yes.

CDB: Well, apparently there were a good many incendiarists back in those times. Now has that dropped off, or is that still a serious problem in Pennsylvania?

GHW: It's still a serious problem, but there are not very many incendiary fires any more, compared to what there were.

CDB: What were the reasons for the incendiarists setting the fires years ago? Were they different reasons from what are true nowadays?

GHW: No, I think the reasons are just about the same, except let's say railroads; we don't begin to have the number of railroad fires we used to have because of the change in railroad equipment. They have better engines, they have diesel engines and one of the things that we developed in the last years of my administration were the safety strips along railroads and elsewhere. We had in our new forest protection law of 1915 a provision that the chief forest fire warden may declare a forest fire hazard a public nuisance. A forest fire hazard was a public nuisance; public nuisances have to be eliminated. So we'd find a bad place along the Pennsylvania railroad or the Baltimore railroad. I would go in and look over the right-of-way and the situation along the side of the right-of-way and I'd find a

forest fire hazard. I'd get back to the office and I'd declare it a public nuisance and notify the railroad company. It was up to the railroad company to get out there and burn a safety strip. Well, instead of being roughshod, we'd contact a railroad man and then we'd make arrangements with him so that if they would burn a safety strip or do anything toward eliminating the forest fire hazard, we'd go along with them. We'd furnish them with a fire warden and a fire crew and they'd add their own railroad crew and --- even now I think it still continues – the railroad company would set aside so many dollars in the spring for developing safety strips, and our men would help them. So we had the finest kind of relationships with the railroad companies, and we eliminated thousands of forest fires by burning that safety strip.

It was the same with lumbermen, lumber jobs and anywhere else. Say, up in the hard coal region, those people, a large percentage of them, live out along what they call shacks and places where there is almost nothing but brush, but they are good fire hazards. If they got started in there they'd run all over kingdom come. Patches, we'd call them. Well, our patrol man would go along before the fire season and he'd see somebody that was accustomed to burning rubbish or what-not on the edge of their lots. He'd go in and tell them there was the forest fire season coming along, "Don't burn any brush, don't throw out any live coals, don't do this or that or the other thing, so as not to start a forest fire." It prevented fires in a good many instances. People were a little more careful and we didn't have quite so many fires. Then we went a little further up there in that territory and occasionally in other sections of the state. People would have what they called community parks and they'd set fire for cooking or what-not; baseball game in an open field or brush area, and fellows sitting around smoking and building small fires. We got a lot of fires from such communities so we forgot the responsibility of the other fellow; we just went in and burned the safety strip around where these fires had been occurring and that's all there was to it. Maybe it took a warden and two or three men a half day to do that job. For about ten or fifteen dollars we eliminated what very definitely would be a fire before the season was over, which might cost us a hundred, a hundred and fifty or more. So with railroads we had some contrary Indians. We couldn't sue them; we knew darn well we couldn't sue them, but we could go in there and eliminate the hazard ourselves and it would be cheaper than letting the fire occur. So we had things cleaned

up. Now we've got certain communities up there in the coal region where we don't get fires any more at all.

CDB: Mr. Wirt, there are more people in the woods than ever before and yet the incidence of fires has gone down steadily from the time that we were talking about. How do you explain it, in terms of Pennsylvania anyway? Education?

GHW: I think it's education. Let's take a case up in Potter County again. When we tabulated our first reports on fires in the state under our new organization, we found that we had more fires and more area burned over in Potter County than any other county in the state. Now, that may just have been a coincidence that happened in that particular year or years but, at any rate, the record was there that we had more fires in Potter County than any other county. I sent a forester up to Potter County in 1909, a fellow by the name of Lynn Emerick, a fellow that graduated from the 1909 class at Mont Alto. He got the assignment in Potter County. He was a fellow whose constituents couldn't do anything with fires until nightfall came. At any rate, after he was located there and got on the job, fires began to crop out, and in a few years Potter County became one of the cleanest counties, as far as fires were concerned, that we had in the state.

Now, we looked around to see what we could find. In the spring of 1910 Emerick, as a forester, got an assignment of planting something like a million trees in a certain valley there in Potter County. We had a crew camp set up in the neighborhood of the planting area. It was the first effort that we made in the state to plant a considerable quantity of trees in one area. We planted these million trees and we had something like thirty or forty men in a tent colony in the valley to do this planting. They planted some larch. All of the plantings succeeded very nicely. Then the men who had done this planting saw that the larch were dropping their needles; the needles turned yellow. There was a feeling all through the men of the community that they had planted all these larch seedlings – (they had never seen larch before) – but they planted these peculiar seedlings and they were all dead. They just worried sick. They had spent all that effort to plant those trees and here the first year after they were planted they dropped their needles. Well, that was bad enough, but when the fires came and were about to burn up a considerable quantity of these planted seedlings, they just all turned out of their homes without being called. And some of them even without being paid. That was very nice,

we thought, so we favored them every way we could. We gave them work in cleaning up things here and there and we found that in a couple of years, as the fellows observed the trees which actually grew and seeing this larch come back the next spring, the sum total result was we had fewer fires in Potter County than in any other county in the state and today I believe very few fires from one year to the next. Now, these men simply had enough of personal reaction toward that particular situation so that they practically became self-protectionists.

CDB: Through Emerick?

GHW: Yes. Through the forester.

CDB: Well, now you kept in touch with these local situations through sending literature and that sort of thing, too, didn't you?

GHW: Yes.

CDB: And didn't you have a system of recognition at five year intervals or something like that?

GHW: Yes, we gradually developed that. A fellow who stayed on the job as a fire warden five years got a marker of such and such a color keystone put in his house or barn. And when he had served ten years the inspector took the ten-year award to the place and took the five-year award off and put the ten-year award on. Just a little but of psychology. We found it worked very well. I should say that perhaps twenty-five percent of the wardens aren't particularly enthusiastic over the award system, but most of them are and they like to see the changes.

CDB: The title then is one of honor and prestige in the local community.

GHW: That's very definitely so. Whey we started in 1915 we had just had in the state the development of the state police force. We had the authority to pick up anybody and everybody when fires occurred and send them on the fire line. Well, I guess we did some funny things to start. I remember one place up in Centre County a fire occurred and nobody responded. The fire wardens were a little hesitant about picking up their friends and neighbors, you know. Word came down here that there was a fire raging up in the neighborhood of a town called Snowshoe and, of course, old smarty had to get on the job somehow or other and he went up to Snowshoe by car; exceeded the speed limit in getting up there, but when we got there I had requested the presence of two state policemen. They were there when I got there, hanging around in the pool room. When I

came I took the two state policemen in the pool room and you ought to have seen the fellows going out the windows! But there were a few that got caught, and the state policemen got them by the seat of the pants and the cuff of the neck and he just lifted them up into the truck and we had a truck load of fire fighters before very long.

So in some other places we were pretty tough on them. They'd hide numbers of places – fire wardens and their men would hide; they didn't want to fight fires. Nothing like that occurs now. Time after time, here, there and elsewhere we had too many men on the fire line. We'd send them home. No use in running up an expense if we didn't have to. There were just those fundamental things at different places, in the different steps in the game that we took advantage of. I used to say, and I feel very definitely the fire warden organization trained men to become good citizens.

CDB: Now other states have tried the system or have it, but….

GHW: They don't have the enthusiasm.

CDB: Where do you think they have fallen down in getting the attitude that your people have?

GHW: I hate to say it, but I think that in a good many places the forester were to blame.

CDB: In what way?

GHW: Well, you know there is such a thing as one man feeling that the other man looks down on him, or doesn't play the game with him. He'd an old pain-in-the-neck, no praise being handed out for what he has done, nothing to tell the man where he fits into the community and the benefit that he does. A little bit of praise goes a long way. Now, I don't mean to say that I was an angel and all this kind of stuff but, nevertheless, I know that there was something in our system and in our contacts that appealed to the men. I went down to Tennessee here some time back. There was a group of men organized. They wanted the state forester to develop an organization something like I had. The forester was definitely against any organization that was built on the principle of volunteer service.

CDB: Why?

GHW: I don't know. I went down and talked to the committee and the people that they were able to gather together and explained some of the things we were trying to do and what results we thought we were getting. Said they would have none of it. They didn't want anybody that was a volunteer in service at all; they wanted an organization where they

could tell this fellow and that fellow just exactly what to do and if they told them they wanted it done, they wanted it done. Well, we took the other tactic. We tried to tell the fellows what it meant to themselves and to their community; what they could do for the community, and that it was a community service, not a political job. As a matter of fact, we told a good many of them when the fires occurred it was their responsibility, they themselves were the cause of the thing regardless of how the fire started. The responsibility was theirs to put it out.

CDB: As you built up this large organization of loyal people looking to you for leadership, you must have struck the political men as someone to seek out.

GHW: Our theory was that the political gifts (as we spoke of the ones who came to us that way, and we couldn't do otherwise than fit them into the organization) – we took the attitude that the gentleman that came to us didn't come of his own initiative; he came because politicians wanted him. We accepted him and then started to train him right off the bat. And many and many's the man that came to us perhaps with the idea that here was a place where he had a chance to make some easy money, because it could have been possible you know. The fire warden could have loaded his bills and the fellows concerned could have made money out of the thing, but not so. In a way we showed a shortcut on that proposition. I don't care who the man is, when he'd got a chance to fill out a payroll or any expense account he met a temptation. We showed our men how not to get themselves into trouble.