

EDITOR'S NOTE

by James G. Lewis

When I came onboard at the Forest History Society in 2003, I was asked to write the companion book to the film *The Greatest Good*, which was being prepared for the U.S. Forest Service's centennial in 2005. While reading in the secondary literature, I kept coming across mention of a historian named Gerald Williams. (In all, he would publish more than 75 books, chapters, book reviews, articles, and conference papers, one of which is reprinted in this issue.) I wouldn't meet this Gerald fellow until the following year. It turned out that he was not "Gerald" but Jerry, and he was as easygoing and approachable in person as he was on paper. Then the national historian for the Forest Service, Jerry more than loved his job; in fact, I don't think he ever regarded it as a job. He loved history, particularly but not exclusively that of the Forest Service. One only has to look at the breadth and diversity of his collection at Oregon State University's library to see that. But his passion for preserving Forest Service history was legendary.

Perhaps more than collecting and preserving history, Jerry loved *sharing* history. When I needed photos for my book, he'd quickly send images from his own pictorial history of the agency to use. We still hadn't met; I made these requests by email or phone. It was not until Jerry visited FHS that I gained a greater understanding of what made him tick. He'd periodically make the four-hour drive from DC to Durham with a carload of boxes filled with documents, binders, and folders to add to the U.S. Forest Service History Reference Collection at the Forest History Society. When our librarian told me that Jerry had been "Dumpster diving" again, I thought she was speaking metaphorically—that he'd simply gone around to various offices and picked up boxes. Jerry gently set me straight. With a self-effacing chuckle, he told me about literally going to the Dumpster on numerous occasions and retrieving boxes. What some in the agency considered unimportant he believed held value for historians—if not immediately, then at some later point. I couldn't tell you how many times he ferried archival records to our library before moving back to Oregon after retiring in 2005.

Indeed, those records are an important part of Jerry's legacy from his time as national Forest Service historian. And yet, there is almost nothing about him in the reference collection—which in many ways fits with his character. When in January I learned of his passing, I went to the biographical files, expecting to find a thick folder overflowing with details about his career. What I found was a single piece of paper, a letter, probably from the early 1990s, from the director of the Public Affairs Office in the Washington Office (WO) to the regional forester of the Pacific Northwest. At the time, Jerry worked for the Planning and

Environmental Affairs (Strategic Planning) office in Portland. The letter informed the recipient that Jerry was receiving a nominal cash award from the WO history unit—"a small amount," the director noted, given all the extra time he had contributed to preserving and interpreting agency history. "The history task is dependent on employees who do special services such as this, because there is no history function area or budget beyond the one-person staff in the WO Public Affairs Office." The commendation read, in part:



The award recognizes Jerry Williams for helping to tell our story to the public, an especially important job in recent years; special services that range from the curation of agency records and artifacts, to the authoring of numerous papers and publications, to that of public speaking at gatherings of employees and the public ... This vital role may not be recognized by others, but we certainly appreciate it.

That was all, but it captured Jerry's work on behalf of the Forest Service's history program.

After he retired, Jerry happily continued responding to queries. (That's him on the left with me at the 2012 Forest Service Retirees Reunion.) But he was more than just the man with the answers, more than a prolific chronicler of Forest Service history. In addition to being a scholar, he was true gentleman. And a gentle man. And it is those latter two attributes that I'll miss most about him. This issue is dedicated to Jerry, and in appreciation for all he did.

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Jerry's reprinted article about the Spruce Production Division is in a special section about World War I created to mark the centennial of the end of "the war to end all wars." I'd like to thank Byron Pearson for inviting me join him in writing about the 20th Forest Engineers. I could not find information about the authors of the other two reprinted articles to include. My apologies to them.

Char Miller and I would like to thank the University of Pittsburgh Press for permission to reprint our chapter on the U.S. Forest Service and herbicides. I'd like to thank Ten Speed Press for allowing us to publish the excerpt from Julia Plevin's book *The Healing Magic of Forest Bathing*; the Association of Consulting Foresters for permitting the reprint of their 70th anniversary timeline; and Alexander Poole for allowing an adaptation of his Harold Pinkett article. Whitney Forman-Cook, communications director for the National Association of State Foresters, gave me the initial draft of the article on Smokey Bear to work up as I saw fit and—graciously—the byline. Only you, Whitney. As always, thanks to the FHS staff for their contributions, Sally Atwater for her editing prowess, Kathy Hart at Zubigraphics for her stellar design work, and Dianne Timblin for her patience with all things FHS. □