MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

“Not everybody trusts paintings but people believe photographs.”—Ansel Adams

STEVEN ANDERSON

When Gifford Pinchot hired the first forest rangers in the U.S. Forest Service, he outfitted them with cameras and asked them to document what they did and saw. He knew the power the photographs could wield as he fought for funds to manage the nation’s forests and sought public support for new policies. No one can deny that visual images have played an important role in the conservation and environmental movements.

That is why, from its beginnings in 1946, the Forest History Society has collected and preserved photographs of early lumbering techniques, forest products, forest management, and other subjects. The FHS staff has already helped thousands of students, writers, and scholars find historic photographs that advance understanding of forest history. Now, more than 25,000 images are available on the FHS website in an easily searchable database, with another 20,000 to come. Anyone can freely use the thumbnail and medium-resolution versions for educational and other noncommercial purposes. The photographs are also attractive for many commercial purposes and films, including Ken Burns’s documentary about the national parks.

Our collection of moving footage has also been used widely. The History Channel, PBS, and the Discovery Channel are among the many media that have sought out clips on a variety of topics. Swamp People contacted us about historic film showing Louisiana cypress logging for one episode. Most recently, FHS contributed numerous photos and film clips to the American Experience film “The Big Burn.”

We have posted numerous clips of historic footage on our YouTube channel. An example of the appeal of historic footage is a response to a clip about the history of the crawler tractor: it has been viewed more than 288,000 times. The clip is an excerpt from Timber on the Move: A History of Log Moving Technology, an award-winning documentary film that FHS produced. To see a selection of such clips, go to www.youtube.com/foresthistory.

I am pleased to announce two initiatives that make new use of our visual resources in important ways. The first is the web portal “Repeat Photography Collections for Sustainability and Working Forests.” These are before-and-after photo pairs or sequences taken at the same physical point at different times. Repeat photography is a powerful visual resource for scientific study and education in forest and landscape management. These photographs, whose subjects range from working forests to wilderness areas, can help us understand ecosystem processes and effects of human and nonhuman disturbances. They can inform our concepts of sustainability and help us understand the implications of public policy and assess the results of management decisions.

This is the first centralized location on the web for users to access, compare, and interpret such photographs. The images will come from both the FHS Photograph Collection and from institutional and individual collaborators. By providing an authoritative site on the subject, we expect to identify previously unknown repeat photographic pairs and sequences, promote the creation of new repeat sets, and foster interest in the future uses of repeat photography.

Sally Mann, a renowned American landscape and portrait photographer, said, “Photographs open doors into the past, but they also allow a look into the future.” We hope that providing access to and stimulating more work in repeat photography will help students, teachers, journalists, foresters, and many others gain insight that can elevate our awareness of conservation challenges. When you go to www.repeatphotography.org to see the initial postings of photos, and please contact Eben Lehman, FHS’s archivist, if you would like to donate photo pairs or discuss the project.

We have been working on the second initiative for several years and are excited that it is coming to fruition. FHS, in collaboration with the Cradle of Forestry in America Interpretive Association, is producing and distributing First in Forestry: Carl Schenck and the Biltmore Forest School. It will be the first documentary film to examine the pivotal role that the Biltmore Estate’s chief forester and America’s first school of forestry played in American conservation history. The film is being made by Bonesteel Films of Asheville, North Carolina. We expect to show it on PBS stations around the country in collaboration with UNC-TV.

Our film will mix interviews with leading scholars and experts with historical photographs and footage drawn in part from our holdings and recreation footage to vividly tell this incredible story. The film weaves together broad historical events with personal stories, highlighting individuals who, often acting in opposition to the prevailing attitudes, created sweeping changes with national implications: George Vanderbilt, Frederick Law Olmsted, Gifford Pinchot, and of course Carl Alwin Schenck.

Support for the film has come primarily from many individuals but also from two grants by the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area. Fundraising is continuing to ensure as wide a distribution of the film as possible and also to provide a short version of the film to show at the Cradle of Forestry Visitor’s Center as well as in school systems nationwide. Go to www.firstinforestry.org for more information and to support the film. Contributions of any size are most welcome, as they will be matched on a 1:1 basis by an individual donor.

As we embark on exciting initiatives in 2015 and beyond, I want to express our appreciation to our members, supporters, and leaders who have seen us through the past year. We have recovered from an electrical fire that temporarily caused significant disruption in daily activities for FHS staff, and your support and encouragement have brought us back stronger and more vibrant.