

Dr. Wilfrid Creighton is a very special person. One could consider him a “guru” of forestry in Nova Scotia. As one of the true forestry pioneers, his intense interest, hands-on style, foresight, and leadership have had a profound impact on the shaping of forest management in Nova Scotia.

DR. G.W.I. CREIGHTON

75 YEARS OF LEADERSHIP IN FORESTRY

Dr. Creighton is the longest standing member of the Canadian Institute of Forestry, which this year celebrates its 75th anniversary. He has been an active and productive member during this time. Here is a man who at the age of 96 years regularly walks through his woodlot and discusses forestry

events of the past 80 years with the aim of learning from the past to improve the status quo. Considering the accomplishments of this incredible man, and the grand occasion of CIF's 75th anniversary, it is fitting that Dr. Creighton be recognized and honored.

Creighton has thrown himself into forestry for most of his 96 years. Even after a long and distinguished career of guiding the Department of Lands and Forests in Nova Scotia, he remains very interested and active in forestry issues and affairs. In recent years, it has been common to hear or read about something Dr. Creighton has expressed publicly regarding forest management issues such as clearcutting and uneven aged management (often quoting his experience and observations while in Germany many years ago). As was the case during his years with the Department, when Dr. Creighton speaks, people listen.

The late Lloyd Hawboldt in 1986, writing the foreword to Dr. Creighton's book entitled *Forest Keeping; a History of the Department of Lands and Forests in Nova Scotia Lands and Forests 1926–1969*, skillfully captured Dr. Creighton's career in the following:

Dr. G.W.I. Creighton was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1904. In 1926 he was graduated from Dalhousie University with a Bachelor of Arts degree, and in 1929 from the University of New Brunswick with a Bachelor of Science degree in Forestry. In 1953 that university awarded him an honorary Doctor of Science degree.

Between 1931 and 1934 he pursued postgraduate studies in forestry in Germany at the University of Munich, and at the Schools of Forestry at Eberswalde and Thorandt.

Before his appointment with the Province of Nova Scotia, Wilfrid Creighton had worked with the International Paper Company, the Dominion Forest Service, and the Canada Power and Paper Corporation (now the Consolidated Bathurst Company).

Dr. Creighton first became known to me in 1934–35 when, as the young, newly-appointed Provincial Forester, he presented a series of illustrated lectures to students at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College, of whom I was one. The lectures, related to woodlot forestry, were based on his personal observations of forest practices over a period of three years in Europe.

BY DON CAMERON & DAVID DWYER



PHOTO BY DAVIDE DWYER

Dr Creighton takes great pride in watching his woodlot develop and improve in health and density over time.

Although he had not chosen education as a career, having a family background of distinguished educators made him appreciate the value of extension programs in the promotion of forestry. He was well aware of the importance of those government services he performed with such distinction.

In 1934, as the new Provincial Forester for Nova Scotia, Wilfrid Creighton “had no set duties or responsibilities,” but over the next few years [he] learned by trial and error what his position in the Department [of Lands and Forests] was supposed to be.

He came to his profession at a time when the Department was still sufficiently young and unstructured to respond to the touch of such a brilliantly talented individual. Lands and Forests programs started during his time have continued without major change (save in degree of activity), but with more generous budget resources than the poverty of funds and expertise that existed during much of his term of office.

Many of the successes achieved by the Department were due to his patient nature and level-headedness. It was not unusual for him to obtain what he believed to be good for the Department and the people of Nova Scotia by quietly planting the germ of an idea with one of the seven ministers under whom he served, and waiting for it to come back as a ministerial suggestion.

If, indeed, he seemed “stubborn and difficult” at times, it was only because some of us did not appreciate the delicate and difficult position he held as mediator between government and his staff. There were many occasions when he was keeping a new minister out of trouble while also supporting his own staff.

Although never given to socializing closely with staff members, he was a warm and sensitive person. He possessed a fund of anecdotal wit and wisdom. Some of his stories and anecdotes arising out of his experiences were, of course, more colourful than others.

It can be said of him that, while he walked with heads of board rooms and government halls, he “never looked too good nor talked too wise” for the small sawmill operator or woodlot owner. Those who had the good fortune to work closely with him recognized his keen capabilities and his rare gift of resolute reliability.



PHOTO BY DAVIDE DWYER

One of Dr. Creighton’s most recent endeavours is developing a sugar bush (maple syrup production) on his woodlot over the past year.

Much of the active history of the Department and the forest industry of the province took place under his guidance and influence. Indeed, Wilfrid Creighton has earned, with his fellow forester Ralph Johnson, the title of father of forestry in Nova Scotia. As a member of the Maritime Section, Canadian Society of Forest Engineers (now the Canadian Institute of Forestry), he played a major part in the preparation and submission to the Minister of Lands and Forests of the C.I.F.'s policy document "Forestry, Economy and Post-War Rehabilitation in Nova Scotia."

His influence was most beneficial for the Department and the province generally. That influence extended to the rest of Canada. He was president of the Canadian Institute of Forestry for the 1957–59 term, which covered the fiftieth anniversary of the society in 1958. While president, he appeared on behalf of the Institute before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Mines, Forestry and Water. He received the Centennial Medal as a nominee of the Canadian Institute of Forestry.

Under Wilfrid Creighton the Department of Lands and Forests entered a period of expansion and expertise that moved the reputation of Nova Scotia into the front ranks of forestry. One must feel that what he accomplished for the Department and the province could not have been achieved by another.

Certainly he was the obvious person to write the history of the Department of Lands and Forests of Nova Scotia. A thoughtful reading of it will support my observations, which I am very pleased to have had the opportunity to make publicly.

Lloyd Hawboldt

MANAGING HIS WOODLOT TODAY

A few years ago Dr. Creighton decided, at the urging of his family, to form a company so that revenue and expenses from his woodlot endeavours could be recorded for income tax purposes. Since his ancestors had come from Alyth, Scotland, he decided to name his company Alyth Forest and Lands Ltd. This is appropriate since many of the original land settlers in Nova Scotia are Celtic Scots and Irish.

About an hour's drive northeast of Halifax, Nova Scotia, is the community of Middle Musquodoboit in outer limits of Halifax Regional Municipality. Just north of this village are the Glenmore Hills and the location of Dr. Creighton's woodlots on the height of land between the Musquodoboit Valley and the Stewiacke Valley.

Years ago the settlers in these valleys were fortunate to "lumber" these hills because hauling the wood downhill took much less effort. Today these woodlots are still productive but after years of "high grading" require diligent efforts to bring the stands back as they once were.

Dr. Creighton started purchasing his woodlots in 1937 and today has accumulated more than 1400 acres (600 ha). Bringing forest stands under management that have been logged ("lumbered") for over 200 years is a long and slow process. It can be a lifetime's effort once you learn the art of forest stand development, which Creighton demonstrates through his forestry practices.



Dr. Creighton enjoys the views of natural softwood regeneration under a tolerant hardwood stand. He encourages natural regeneration on his woodlot.

At age 96, Creighton is looking to the future. Over the past 65 years he has slowly developed his woodlots in his "spare time."

Recently (March 2000), Dave Dwyer spent a few hours with him and his son Hugh, on his woodlots. Creighton was Dave's Deputy Minister from 1946 to 1969 and, according to Dave, "his enthusiasm for woodlot forestry more than matched my own." (See: *Against the Grain* by Peter Clancy and Anders Sandberg, UBC Press, 2000). On the property, all the products were there; sawlogs, pulpwood, studwood, firewood, Christmas trees, blueberry fields, and his new endeavour—maple syrup.

While producing the many benefits from woodlot activities, Dr. Creighton is always planning ahead as to how he can best use land so that it will be productive from both a forest product and ecological perspective. In discussing recent public outcry about the need to clearcut areas in order to salvage overmature, bug infested timber, he said, "some of these people are getting too excited about clearcutting. They need to learn that one can have their cake and eat it too—if one uses common sense and realizes the limitations of our tree species. There is a time and a place for clearcutting, when used properly."

When Dr. Creighton speaks, people listen, and for good reason. It is due to his interest, foresight and many talents that Nova Scotia gained a reputation as a leader in forest management. Congratulations and thanks to Dr. Wilfrid Creighton.

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Dave Dwyer is a retired extension forester who worked his career with the Nova Scotia Department of Lands and Forests.

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