

THREE DAYS' FOREST FESTIVAL ON THE BILTMORE ESTATE.

Start of the Second Days' Outing—A Midstream Spectacle—Macadam Roads of Western North Carolina—Object Lessons on the Biltmore Estate—Commercial and Manufacturing Features of Asheville and Vicinity.

CHAPTER XXIV—AFTER THE THANKSGIVING DINNER.

The last instalment of this chronicle of the great Biltmore forest fair—Chapter XXIII—took leave of the guests of Dr. C. A. Schenck on the midnight that closed Thanksgiving day, amid sumptuous scenes of enjoyment in extreme contrast to that depicted in an accompanying cut, of a freedman's Thanksgiving, which is racy of the soil in the poorer quarters of Asheville, on the outskirts of the Biltmore estate and throughout western North Carolina. The festivities of Thanksgiving evening at the Battery Park hotel, Asheville, while in no case indecorous, had been so thorough in a hospitable sense that most of the participants were disinclined to rise at a reasonable early hour Friday morning; but the edict of Forester Schenck, who is of that class whom people obey instinctively, forced an early beginning of the second day of the forest festival. It began at the portals of the



THE LODGE—ENTRANCE TO THE BILTMORE ESTATE.

Battery Park hotel with the arrivals of open carriages and saddle horses and their departures, bearing the eighty or more fortunate ones who were to participate in a perfect day's outing—a smart, imposing pageant that enlivened the steep drives around the hotel and quickened the life of the streets of Asheville. It moved quickly to Biltmore village, whence, reformed and under the marshalship of Dr. Schenck, it started through the picturesque lodge of the Biltmore estate, one of its artistic show places, of especial interest to the visitors because it is adorned with a perfect specimen of hard maple ("avenue" maple). This is a tree fifteen to eighteen inches in diameter, typical of numerous others on the estate, which have grown beautifully and rapidly, a demonstration of what proper care of shade trees will do and how quickly it can accomplish their growth. This lodge is the main entrance to the estate. On certain days any reputable person will be given a permit to go upon the estate upon the payment of a 25-cent fee, which is devoted to a worthy charity. Formerly permits were granted only to those known or introduced to the Vanderbilt family or to those high in charge of the estate, and a certain number of permits were given each day to the better class hotels for the use of their guests. This plan did not work satisfactorily, as it was accompanied by a great deal of vandalism despite all that could be done to prevent it, and the fee system, with care as to whom permits are issued, succeeded it. A long and delightful drive from the lodge followed, sweeping past the Biltmore truck farm, Dr. Schenck's office and school building and other points of interest.

CHAPTER XXV.—AN INTRODUCTION TO THE FRENCH BROAD.

At a point variously estimated as to distance from Biltmore village—by the inexperienced at six miles, by those more familiar with the estate at ten miles—the beautiful French Broad river was reached. Here it became necessary to ferry the party across to the opposite bank. The ferry is a primitive affair, typical of the section but effective. It consists of a flat bottomed scow propelled by broad sweeps operated by manpower and guided by an overhead cable through a rapid current. Most of the carriages and the saddle horses were carried over, two or three at a time, several trips and the loss of considerable time being thus necessitated.

Some of the more venturesome forded the river. The writer of these chronicles was one of the latter, essaying a "grand stand play" that gave some apprehension to himself and caused considerable entertainment for the spectators on both

banks of the river. The other occupants of his carriage, with the exception of the colored driver, discreetly used the ferry boat to cross. The driver of the AMERICAN LUMBERMAN carriage guided his team nonchalantly down the steep bank and boldly out into the swift stream. The writer curled his feet under him and watched the rising water apprehensively. His eyes bulged as it passed higher than the axle. A few yards farther the bulge became more pronounced as the waters rose to the level of the box and the carriage wobbled dangerously over the boulders in the river bed. Still farther, past the middle of the stream, that bulge became a grotesque facial phenomenon as the water entered the box of the carriage and it lurched violently from side to side; but the objective bank grew nearer and nearer, the horses pulled sturdily and the crowd on the bank laughed, shouted and cheered derisively, the other side was gained and the writer, conscious of an acquirement of "fisherman's luck," breathed more freely as the big team dragged the carriage clear of the river and up a steep incline to safety.

One of the carriages, with its team, became stalled in the river and had to be assisted from the bank, but, aside from that mishap and the humorous side, the fording of the French Broad river was one of the most picturesquely interesting features of the three days' forest fair.

CHAPTER XXVI.—OBJECT LESSONS IN GOOD ROADS.

At this point in these chronicles a digression may be made in behalf of some of the numerous object lessons acquired during the three days' forest fair that are not specifically treated of elsewhere. Among these object lessons that were prominently in evidence was one on good roads.

Except upon the steep mountain sides and through the forests, good roads are the rule throughout the Biltmore estate. They aggregate in the neighborhood of 200 miles, all macadam. Mr. Vanderbilt's road work may be said to have introduced macadam roads to that section of western North Carolina, and it was one of the main causes in inducing Buncombe county, in which Asheville and the Biltmore estate are located, to start the system of macadam road construction throughout the county. Specifications used by Buncombe county are almost practically identical with those used on the Biltmore estate, though it is probable that the county roads are more heavily built on account of the greater traffic that they have to bear. But, unequivocally, Mr. Vanderbilt's initiative is what started the movement, and it had its advent at a time when the question of good roads was being agitated throughout the country. The commissioners of Buncombe county adopted the construction of macadam roads among the first in the state, though Mecklenberg county was perhaps the first, and it has a high reputation today all over the state and in fact all over the Union for good macadam roads. The county has been systematically building such roads as fast as it could do so with convict labor—it has employed no free labor—since some time prior to 1895, perhaps twelve or fifteen year ago. The building of these roads is expensive on account of the grades. The engineers are required to get the grades below an average of 3 percent and are never allowed to exceed 6 percent except on the short hills.

The estimated cost of building these macadam roads by convict labor is between \$2,500 and \$3,000 a mile. That is as near as the good roads commission could figure it from the returns of the county commissioners. But an estimate on the Vanderbilt estate with its less heavily built roads is \$2,000 a mile. The average cost might safely be placed between \$2,500 and \$3,000 a mile. These macadamized roads, on the Vanderbilt estate especially, are kept in

perfect repair, and form a useful object lesson of which advantage has been taken in other and even in distant sections.

CHAPTER XXVII.—STOCK RAISING.

The whole Vanderbilt estate has been an object lesson not only in road building but in agriculture and stock raising, a fact which was more or less impressed upon the participants, and specifically by the visit to the Vanderbilt model dairy. Owing to the importation of blooded hogs the razorback has practically disappeared from the mountains of that section. A decade ago he was practically the only representative there of the porcine race. The contributing influence to this end was the fact that one can buy in that section a blooded boar pig at a comparatively small price. At one time the Vanderbilt blooded hogs were sold at very fancy prices but as they have been bought and bred throughout the country there no longer remains a local market at such figures.

One progressive step in stock raising which is noticeable is the character of the milch cows. One can hardly find a herd of cattle in western North Carolina that does not include numbers of the Jersey or Alderney blood, a result directly traceable to either Mr. Vanderbilt's own herd or to his example in breeding blooded stock. Before Mr. Vanderbilt came to Asheville a good Jersey cow was something of a rarity; it was the show piece of the average farm and was exhibited with pride and the details of its cost and performances were enlarged upon. A notable fact since that date is that no one pretends to raise cows in that section for dairying purposes but that his herd is based upon thoroughly good stock. Many herds through western North Carolina embrace a high percentage of full blooded Jerseys, Alderneys or some of the other high grade breeds.

The Vanderbilt estate has exploited extensively the raising of chickens. The poultry show held recently in Asheville included one of the finest exhibits of chickens ever seen in the south and they came largely from western North Carolina, including many entries from the Vanderbilt stock. Poultry raisers from all over the state and many good judges from elsewhere declare that the recent Asheville poultry show was one of the best exhibits if its kind ever seen anywhere—thoroughbreds and chickens that lay big eggs.

Improvements in these matters of course are not altogether due to Mr. Vanderbilt but are directly traceable to his influence. At one time Mr. Vanderbilt furnished free the services of a thoroughbred Jersey bull, and through this good blooded stock was disseminated through that section.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—TITLES TO THE BILTMORE LANDS.

Titles to the great area now known as the Biltmore estate were acquired largely through stress and active opposition. When George W. Vanderbilt started his land purchases in North Carolina it was discovered that he was likely to outrun his supply of ready money and it is related (this without violation of the family confidence) that the rest of the family feared that he was spending too much money in that section and sent a committee to investigate. They looked the situation over and concluded that George was not giving his money away. They saw the utility of the proposition, not in an entirely unselfish way but as one out of which they could get personal enjoyment and which would afford personal and public advantage and at the same time ex-



THANKSGIVING MORNING IN WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA—A COLORED FAMILY'S FEAST IN PROSPECT.

tend the usefulness of the valuable object lessons which George W. Vanderbilt was offering the south.

The titles are generally good but as to many of the tract defects in title have been caused by carelessness in conveyances by former owners at a time when land was worth 50 cents to \$1 an acre and it did not pay to employ a lawyer to draw up a deed. Every chimney corner lawyer in that section thought that he knew all that was necessary to be done and drew up deeds with the result that a great deal of time and attention has been necessary on the part of the last purchaser to cure some of the evils caused by slipshod methods. In the language of one interested, "Where you find a defective deed unless you antagonize the people you go and get a quitclaim to cure it." During most of the time that the titles belonged to the Cherokee Indians when the lands were thrown open to enterers they were limited to 64 acres as a maximum. A result was that enterers pasted one land grant on top of another, so that titles became clouded and a map of the section resembles a crazyquilt. To get a good title a problem is to learn who has it all, having acquired it from the states, and considerable of the area has been granted three or four times. The oldest title is the one to be sought, after which final acquirement is progressive. The Vanderbilt estate is now a strong, impregnable holding.

CHAPTER XXIX.—MANUFACTURERS OF WOOD PRODUCTS.

Manufacturers of wood products in and about the Biltmore estate are few, and these are practically encompassed within three small furniture factories. Murphy, a contiguous point, holds one and one has been in operation at Asheville. The furniture manufacturing center of the section is at High Point, farther east. There considerable quantities are manufactured, but only a very small percentage of lumber cut in the western part of the state is there manufactured into its final forms. One establishment is being erected at Biltmore and another, for the manufacture of caskets and coffins, is being started at Asheville by Pittsburg (Pa.) enterprise. This is to be a large plant, to be located just below the town.

The available timber is drifting rapidly into the hands of operators—people who are buying for immediate or future operations by themselves. It is passing now from the hands of the speculator and the original owner through the hands of the speculator into the ownership of the final operator. Practically no large tracts are left but those held by people able to hold them or to operate them. This does not mean to imply that one can not buy timber land in that section now, but timber lands bought there will be acquired from men who know their worth.

CHAPTER XXX.—RAILROAD AND FREIGHT RATES.

Western North Carolina in a measure is handicapped, or would be under less fortunate circumstances, by enjoying but one system of railroad, the Southern railway. The Louisville & Nashville reaches Murphy, but none of the North Carolina timberlands. It does tap a considerable area of Tennessee timber lands of the same character, but they are just over the line dividing the two states.

The freight rates on lumber made by the Southern railway are said by lumber shippers to be generally satisfactory, and they appear to have little to complain of in that road considering length of haul and general service. At one time, in the days of the old Richmond & Danville road, a predecessor of the Southern, the existing policy is said to have been to "charge all the traffic would bear." It learned the market prices of lumber and the cost of its production and figured its rates as close to the aggregate as the industry could stand and live. That is said to have been the avowed Richmond & Danville policy.

The principle of rate making is now changed radically. The Southern railroad is credited with using the contrary policy, charging rates on commodities only fairly commensurate with the length of haul and the adverse nature of the mountainous country traversed by its rails, and relatively no higher than rates in similar country in other sections. The average haul is a long one; for instance, 500 miles to Washington, and on the rates in effect lumbermen are said to have made satisfactorily financial progress in recent years.

CHAPTER XXXI.—BARK AND TANNING EXTRACTS.

A steady and by no means inconsiderable source of revenue for the Biltmore estate is the neighboring tanneries. These buy continuously bark and chestnut unsuitable for manufacture into lumber, of which the estate produces large quantities. Of these patrons of the Biltmore estate the establishment of Hans Rees' Sons, Incorporated, and the Brevard Tanning Company are the most conspicuous.

Hans Rees' Sons, with tannery at Asheville and office at 39 Frankfort street, New York city, are tanners of oak belting butts and scoured butts and manufacturers of belting leather. Their Asheville plant, on twenty acres of land on the French Broad river, represents a considerable investment and is one of the largest tanneries in the south. It is a large buyer of extract and bark procured from the Biltmore forests. The tannery is one of the important commercial factors of Buncombe county and has an extensive domestic and foreign trade. The family of Hans Rees, a son of the founder of the enterprise, is one of the few in Asheville with which the Vanderbilt family is upon cordial terms of social intimacy.

The Brevard Tanning Company's plant, one of the most successful in the south, is located near Brevard, the county seat of Transylvania county, and its postoffice is Pisgah Forest, which is the site of the lumber mill operated under the name of C. A. Schenck & Co. W. F. Decker, resident at Pisgah Forest, is superintendent of the company's plant. It is a large consumer of products of the Biltmore forests.

Pertinent to this chapter may be quoted data compiled by the Forest Service relative to the country's consumption and value of tanning materials, the aggregate of tanbark last year being given as \$21,205,547, showing a decrease in quantity from the previous year but a marked increase in price. Commenting upon this subject, a recent issue of the LUMBERMAN said editorially: "There is an increasing use of extracts, due probably to the fact that they may be more advantageously shipped than the raw material. Of 583 plants reporting in 1907, 121 used tanbark exclusively, 122 extracts exclusively, while 340 used both. * * * Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and West Virginia rank in order in the consumption of bark, consuming 60 percent of the output. There has been a decrease in New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Michigan and an increase in West Virginia and Wisconsin. * * * The most important and interesting feature of the whole subject is the steady increase in tanning extracts. The growing scarcity of bark and native extracts makes necessary the use of chemicals or imported wood extracts. The tanbark industry is certain to be continuously affected by the influx of tanning extracts because of the greater ease with which they may be handled."

All of which will be of interest to those who feel an interest in the future commercial prosperity of the Biltmore estate and Dr. Schenck's efforts to continue it as self supporting.

CHAPTER XXXII.—SOME BILTMORE TIMBER.

At the "pink beds" of the Biltmore estate (to this section reference has already been made) and in that vicinity a large part of the timber growth is native forest, in contrast to the neighborhood of the residence of Dr. Schenck, where planting operations have been started in what were old barren fields, some of which is already bearing good results. From Asheville west well into east Tennessee, embracing the Great Smoky mountains and Balsam mountains, is doubtless the best of the hardwood timber left east of the Mississippi river. Most of the notable varieties will probably run in this order: poplar, oak, chestnut.

A considerable amount of the hemlock is just coming into the market. Heretofore the price of hemlock did not justify cutting it in the Biltmore forests and shipping it to northern points, and until recently the local demand for hemlock had been practically nil. Pine in central North Carolina was formerly the staple building material and all needed could be bought at \$10 a thousand feet. In later years the

price in Asheville has doubled, and a considerable local demand for hemlock has arisen for framing materials and this timber, once considered an incumbrance on the land, is now proving to be a valuable asset. Several lumber companies are cutting hemlock regularly and selling it at profitable prices.

Considerable ash and some cherry are found. Such cherry as is left is of extra fine quality, but, like walnut, it has been valuable for so many years that long ago it was largely cut out separately. The Biltmore forests at one time grew large quantities of black walnut, but little of that remains, as is the case also with most of the cherry, though of the latter fairly large quantities are still to be found. Of other merchantable timber are linn and basswood, with an admixture in smaller quantities of other varieties.

(To Be Continued).



TANNERY PLANT OF HANS REES' SONS, AT ASHEVILLE, N. C.