

Smithsonian Folklife Festival

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Pisgah National Forest
Brevard, North Carolina

Interviewer - Jim McConnell
May 2004

Cindy Carpenter: Hello, I'm Cindy Carpenter. I work for the Forest Service and here I manage the Education and Interpretation Programs. I also like to sing and I like to share music and I'd like to share this song that is an old German folk song. Here at the Cradle of Forestry we commemorate the first forestry school and that was started by a German forester, Carl Alvin Schenck. And he, of course, was trained in Germany since there weren't any schools at that time in the late 1800s here in the United States. So he probably was familiar with this folk song and you may be too. It's called "A Tree in the Wood". [Sings and plays "A Tree In the Wood"]

Well, the Cradle of Forestry is a wonderful place for music and interpreting themes of the forest through music. There's music of the birds around us here. We have a third grade social studies program called Living with the Forest and there's a traditional song called {The Groundhog Song} that we suggest as a pre visit activity, that the kids learn that, the groundhog being, oh, a good symbol of scarcity and being frugal. And here at the Cradle of Forestry with our historic cabins we take kids back into time to simpler times when they were, of course, depending on the same resources from the forest that we do today, just a little more directly. So the children can learn that song. We also have some volunteers from the community that come up on occasion during the summertime and they sit on this very porch. This porch has been filled with fiddle music and dulcimer music and we've started a music series in the summertime in July called the Song Catchers Music Series. We have some folks that are involved in traditional music, some seventh generation ballad singers as well as old time musicians. And so they give concerts here in our outdoor setting then also musicians from the community come up and we have informal music jams for that. Also I enjoy during volunteer training interpreting some of our events and welcoming our volunteers with music. I'd like to share with you another song. This is one about a flower that occurs in the rocky areas of our Blue Ridge Mountains, called the "Acony Bell". [Plays and sings "Acony Bell"]

Mike Milosch: Okay, to end this little interview I just want to talk a little bit about what we would do at the centennial celebration on the mall. We would probably have a power point presentation on what you've seen today, plus more of the interpretative and educational programs that we do here at the Cradle so that the audience would have a

very good idea of what they could see if they ever did visit our site. And we would like to staff our booth with two or three people who could use our interpretative materials to engage the audience in hands on activities, such as demonstrating traditional hand tools used in logging, including the Biltmore stick. [Recorder is checked.] We just want to demonstrate hand tools used in logging, including the famous Biltmore stick, the traditional wooden toys that we demonstrate here in our cultural programs. We use several activities to show the traditional use of forest products in the southern Appalachian farmsteads from around the turn of the 19th century. And we also have several activities dealing with forest management such as Sallie Snag, a life size puppet of a dead tree. Of course, we'd also have our general brochures to hand out to the public. So I hope you've appreciated this little tour of the Cradle of Forestry and will look favorably on our interview. Thank you very much.

Mike Milosch: Welcome to the Cradle of Forestry in America Historic Site. This is the birthplace of scientific forestry and forestry education in the United States of America dating back to the 1890s when this was part of the Vanderbilt Estate that was centered in Asheville, North Carolina. My name's Mike Milosch with the U.S. Forest Service. I'm the director here at the Cradle of Forestry and have been for fifteen years. I'm a twenty-five year veteran with the U.S. Forest Service. This site is a sixty-five hundred acre site within the Pisgah National Forest in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. We have a beautiful area here. Our site has a forest discovery center. We have a forest discovery center as our main visitor's center and we have two interpretative trails here with seven historical buildings, a restored logging locomotive, American log loader, and portable sawmill. So hopefully today you'll take a look at all those and I'll tell you a little bit more about the Cradle of Forestry.

Hello again. We're in the Biltmore Schoolhouse. This was the site of the summer campus of the Biltmore Forest School that was started in 1898. It's a one room schoolhouse that served as the church and schoolhouse for the Pink Beds community. This community was purchased by George Vanderbilt, George Vanderbilt, and became part of his hundred and twenty-five thousand acre estate. The school would be in here during the summer months. The students would be in the school for six days a week, summers mostly, and the lectures would be in the morning and then in the afternoon they would be out in the forest practicing some of the things that they had been talking about. Because Dr. Schenck who established this school thought that it was important for the students to go out and practice what they were learning, so it was a very practical college. The students would study for one year and they would get a degree in forestry. This was the first school of forestry in the United States. It graduated about three hundred and sixty students before it closed its doors in 1913 so this was a very historical school here. Students were taught by Dr. Schenck as well as other visiting professors. Dr. Schenck taught a very practical forestry because he believed that the only way that forestry could succeed in the United States was to get the landowner to understand that he could make a profit from practicing conservative forestry, as Dr. Schenck called it. So the students spent a lot of time talking about and learning about how you get the logs out of the forest and to the mill, grading lumber, as well as learning about silviculture and growing trees. This was a very practical school and the students learned quite a bit.

Hello again, we're now in the commissary. This originally was a barn for Hiram King but when Mr. Vanderbilt purchased this land it became the commissary, the company store for the students and the people who worked up here for Dr. Schenck, Mr. Vanderbilt's forester. You'll see in the corner there's a little bit of cupboards. That's the mail house there and this served as the post office for the students. The window would be left open when the commissary manager wasn't here. That's so the students could climb in through the windows to get their mail. They were always looking for money from home. There was no electricity in this building. There's no electricity here in the Pink Beds so there was no refrigeration. It was all dry goods, canned goods. There might be crackers and cheese could be a common lunch for the students. And you'll see there several examples of things on the shelves as the students may have seen it while they were here. The store manager, Mr. Jennings, would bring up fresh meat once a week from the town of Brevard, which is about ten miles away by horseback. The commissary served as a social center point for the community. Outside they'd often be playing horseshoes or even a game of baseball or football. The students liked to put a team together where they could go into Asheville in the evening weekends and play the local teams there either in baseball or in football. Often it would get quite rowdy but Dr. Schenck could always rescue them from the local sheriff.

You're looking at the Hiram King house. It was built in 1882 by Hiram King, who was a landowner here and also a mill owner, which made him one of the most prosperous people in the Pink Beds community. This later served as a home for one of Dr. Schenck's rangers and often the students of the Biltmore Forest School could take meals here at the Hiram King home. We're on the porch of the Hiram King house. This stairway right here was not part of the original fabric of the house. There was a rope ladder that came down from these steps, which lead to bedrooms upstairs. Now when this became property of Mr. Vanderbilt Dr. Schenck's secretary, Mrs. Ketchum, and her two boys would board upstairs for the summer. Dr. Schenck didn't think that was very proper for a woman to have to climb up this rope ladder to get upstairs, so he asked his carpenter to build these steps out on the porch so she wouldn't have to climb up that rope ladder. Dr. Schenck was very proper.

We're inside the Hiram King house looking at one of the main rooms. This is the weaving room and a loom was very common in the homes in Southern Appalachian. This is no different. In fact, we have a lady who works this loom every weekend. She's quite the accomplished textile lady. She starts with the material right off the sheep and breaks it right down to where she has some yarn to work with in her loom. But you can see that this is a quite nice room but very simple, with a bed that is made with a rope mattress and then filled with corn shucks to make a very comfortable little bed.

This is the kitchen in the King house. You can see the open hearth where the cooking is getting done. This is the site of a lot of education programs for us here at the Cradle of Forestry where we do a program with third graders to take them back a hundred years to see how the family and the children interacted with the forest. The open hearth cooking is a real treat for the students. They get to make some biscuits on the hearth there. Then at

the end of that little session they get to use some sweet birch twigs to mix with baking soda and brush their teeth just as children did a hundred years ago.

This is a replica of Dr. Schenck's office. Dr. Schenck did a lot of correspondence and also had to write the textbooks for the school since there were no textbooks on American forestry. So he did a lot of writing when he wasn't teaching or managing the forest timberlands of the Biltmore estate. When he was here Dr. Schenck asked his carpenter to go out and find himself a building that he could use as his office. So the carpenter, Judson Meese, looked around and this is what he came up with. Can you recognize it? It's an old tobacco barn, actually half of a tobacco barn. This is where the farmers here would hang their burley tobacco to dry after they had harvested it. So Mr. Meese put this back together and called it an office for Dr. Schenck where he would work during the day writing correspondence and textbooks.

You're looking at the Black Forest Lodge, one of twelve buildings designed by Dr. Carl Schenck to house his rangers that were to patrol the estate of Mr. Vanderbilt. There are two of these buildings that still exist today. They were built around 1902 and 1903. It's post and beam construction. The posts and beams are made out of American chestnut and the siding is made out of tulip poplar. They're fairly buildings but they reflect that German architecture that Dr. Schenck brought with him. Inside there's a fireplace. Do you want to go inside?

Jim McConnell: Yeah, let's go inside.

MM: Okay.

JM: Just say we'll go inside.

MM: We'll go inside here and take a little bit at the furnishings of this primitive cabin. We're looking at the kitchen of the Black Forest Lodge. It's fairly primitive, benches for seats at the kitchen table, a few simple dishes here and there, a few cupboards, a black fire burning woodstove to do the cooking. It's plumbed into the back of the fireplace that heats the other living room. You can see by the well worn floor that this was used quite often. This was probably the social area of the building. These houses were built for the rangers of Dr. Schenck and Mr. Vanderbilt, whose job was to patrol the fires, the forest, looking for fires, and to keep poachers out as well. The pay for these rangers was about twenty-five dollars a month and they had to provide their own horses.

We're looking at the Hell Hole student quarters. When students arrived here to start school with Dr. Schenck he told them go find a place live, because there were several cabins like this that had been abandoned by the people who had sold their land out to Mr. Vanderbilt. You can see it's just a cheap house, board and batten siding, usually called a shotgun dwelling because there's just two rooms here and you can stand at one end of the building and shoot a shotgun right through it to the other door that's at the other end. It's very cheap housing. The students would give them these names like Hell Hall and that's beside a smaller building that's called Little Hell Hole. They also had buildings that were

called Little Egypt, Rest for the Wicked, Little Bohemia, just like college students today. Inside it's pretty sparse, very Spartan almost, because the students had to come up here on horseback so they couldn't bring very much with them and usually what they brought was left behind for the next student. The porch was an important place because the warm, humid summers here; this became a place in the evenings to study, as well as a game of checkers. These buildings were like every other college campus became the real social center of the student's life here.

Earlier we were on the Biltmore campus trail looking at some of the buildings that made up the community where the forestry students lived during the summer. Now we've shifted over to our other interpretative trail, the Forest Festival Trail, looking at one of our exhibits there. This is the portable sawmill and it's powered by a Frick steam engine. These portable sawmills were common throughout the South around the early 1900s. This is one of the ways to solve the transportation problems associated with heavy, heavy large logs. The sawmill could be set up wherever the source of the logs were at, sawn, the boards removed, and then just transport the boards to the town. These were common throughout the South, very cheap, economical operation for many people to get into. There were two sawmills located on the Vanderbilt's property that Dr. Schenck oversaw and they would have been places where the students could study the practical part of forestry as far as how much boards you can get out of the logs, what quality they are, how to grade the lumber, and then the pricing of the materials. This became a very important aspect of the forestry students training.

[Bell rings] You're looking at our 1915 Climax logging locomotive. It's on display here at the Forest Festival Trail. It actually worked the mountains around western North Carolina and this was the big coming of the industrial age to the forest. In the background you'll see the American log loader that was again part of the industrial age coming to the practice of moving logs out of the forest, greatly accelerated the rate and the profitability of moving the logs out of these steep mountains. The Climax logging locomotive is a gear driven, narrow gauge locomotive specifically designed to work in tight spots and curves through the mountains. We also have a train shed. This has just been reconstructed. The original one burned down here and this is where we'll store our logging locomotive during the winter. It's built out of yellow pine and is a pretty handsome building.

“A Tree In the Wood” written by Luther Frank, Embassy Music Corporation, BMI.

“Acony Bell” written by Gillian Welch and David Rawlings, Cracklin Music, Irving Music, and Say Uncle Music, BMI 1996.