

EDITOR'S NOTE

by James G. Lewis

I was recently talking with someone about our new building, which we expect to move into come the autumn of 2018. As part of the conversation, I was explaining what the Forest History Society does—that we are a library and archives open to all researchers, and that we hold records from all kinds of organizations—from the tree huggers to the tree cutters, is how I characterize it. We provide them access to the facts, but it's up to them to assemble them and form their own interpretations. "It's like our new building," I said. "Facts are the foundation of history. The documents and photographs our building will house are a historian's construction materials. Historians can go through and select their materials, and then build their structures of interpretation on top of that. Some are small, like articles. Those might be houses. Books are like office buildings. But each historian designs their own building. And our library will be like a city, home to a combination of houses and buildings—in this case, journals and books."

I could've kept going with the analogy but stopped for fear of boring my friend. So instead I said that even though he wasn't a historian, I hoped that once the building opened, he'd come visit so I could give him a tour. After all, you don't have to have studied architecture or be a structural engineer to enjoy walking around Home Depot, looking at tools and supplies you'll never use. You can pick them up and hold them, and then put them back.

Later on, I revisited the analogy. A historian is like an architect. We have the latitude to design (write) the structure (article or book or film) however we want. But we all have to obey the same basic rules of design: start with facts to build a foundation, and then construct interpretations that are solid and sound and, we hope, will be used and useful. Fail to do these things and no one will want your building—meaning, your work won't get published.

My job as this magazine's editor is a bit like being a city planning commissioner, and the magazine is a planned community within the larger city called Forest History. I know there are designated city limits to build within (our maximum page count), and that the buildings will be restricted in size (the word limits for each article). The community has two districts: Features and Departments, the latter of which includes Biographical Portrait, History on the Road, and Books of Interest. There are variances within each (different topics, different article lengths), and every neighborhood (issue) will look different from the others yet seem familiar.

Sometimes I work with historians whose "structures" I enjoyed helping them build before. In this neighborhood they include Thomas Straka ("History on the Road: Catoctin State Park"), Joseph J. Jones ("Biographical Portrait: Charles William Garfield"), and Stephen Arno ("Slow Awakening: Ecology's Role in Shaping Forest Fire Policy"). Tom's subject struck a chord with me. I



remember as a child listening to my dad talk about Camp David and the not-so-secret emergency Pentagon site just north of it as we drove past on the way from our home in western Maryland to Gettysburg. Like Tom with his work on iron furnaces, Joseph continues contributing excellent work on the forest history of Michigan. Steve's article is like a repurposed building. I had originally published it on our blog, *Peeling Back the Bark*, in 2014. Given the continued relevance of the topic, it's been updated to reflect the scholarship that's come out since, so it's worth revisiting. The same is true of my own article. The ongoing problem of discrimination in the U.S. Forest Service,

which I first wrote about in 2005 in a book, became front-page news in March 2018, so I posted a relevant excerpt on our blog. I've revised that introduction and am repurposing it yet again here. Eben Lehman and Jason Howard of the FHS library staff once again helped "construct" Books of Interest.

Architects whose work is less familiar to me will contribute to keeping Forest History thriving and growing in different directions. Larisa Miller's article, "Permitting Native Americans in California's National Forests," touches on an aspect of U.S. Forest Service history not often visited—what the agency tried to do about the Native Americans living on national forests at the time the federal government established them. Mason Carter and James P. Barnett examine the causes of the first lumber boom in the Gulf South, which had run its course by the time the Great Depression hit, and its consequences. Richard Judd discusses "The Trouble with Thoreau's Wilderness." The trouble is not with a piece of land owned by Thoreau but with our (mis)interpretation of Thoreau's interactions with wilderness. Michael O'Hagan brings to light a topic I first heard him discuss at an American Society for Environmental History conference—how German POWs employed in Canada's timber industry during World War II found "Freedom in the Midst of Nature." Of course, any community worth visiting has trees worth saving. And so, in this one, Sara deFossett documents the efforts of several groups trying to save hemlock trees in eastern forests from the hemlock woolly adelgid.

Lastly, my thanks to my fellow "commissioners." It's reassuring, to say the least, for me to have someone of the caliber of Sally Atwater doing the copy editing and providing editorial feedback. The same is true of Kathy Hart and Zubigraphics. She somehow interprets and implements my cryptic instructions to produce a beautiful magazine.

I hope you enjoy visiting our fair city and will continue to come back. □