

# MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

## *Looking Back as We Look Forward*

STEVEN ANDERSON

The Forest History Society is about to reach an important milestone in its 72-year history. By early 2019, FHS will occupy the first building designed to accommodate its unique collections and important work of preserving and helping people use the documents of forest history.

Following its founding in 1946, under the auspices of the Minnesota Historical Society, FHS was an affiliate (and tenant) of Yale University and later the University of California–Santa Cruz. In the early 1980s, the Society moved to Durham, North Carolina, to be affiliated with Duke University. In Durham, FHS's home has been a repurposed, 1950s-era, 6,000-square-foot insurance building that for several years now has been inadequate to meet the needs of our growing collections. At 16,750 square feet, the new headquarters will not only provide much-needed space for the Society's archives and library but also add critical dedicated areas for digitization and processing, a soundproof oral history room, and flexible meeting space.

As we look forward to new opportunities it is also important to recognize how far we've come since 1946. I thought it would be interesting to look back to the year of our founding and see what has transpired in American society vis-à-vis our relationship with forests. Reviewing events reminds us of the context of forest history and how it applies to some of our current challenges.

At the end of World War II, returning service members faced major shortages in jobs and housing. As couples married and began families, what we now call the Baby Boom began. Within a few short years, jobs returned, incomes rose, and housing construction increased, placing significant stress on natural resources, especially forests. Industrial timberlands had already been heavily harvested in support of the war effort; now, public land-management agencies were asked to increase their timber output to keep up with demand.

The implications were many. As disposable income rose, people embraced outdoor recreation and ventured into more remote public lands, many affected by postwar tree harvesting. The resulting conflicts over resource use led to the promulgation of environmental laws in the 1960s and 1970s. Although the boom in housing eventually eased, harvesting on national forests and other public lands remained aggressive partly because of the fiscal incentives built into agency budgets. Litigation and gridlock ensued as these incentives clashed with the public's broadening environmental concerns. In response, as logging on public lands became more challenging, the forest industry again looked to private lands for timber.

From industry's perspective, investment in cooperative forest research during the last half of the twentieth century produced some of the most significant increases in forest productivity ever



seen. Industry reduced its dependence on timber from public lands and made long-term commitments to land management. Events external to the United States, such as the fall of the Soviet Union and increased forest production in South America and elsewhere, changed the price structure of raw materials. Combined with changes in U.S. federal tax laws, this led to the mass transfer of forestland during the past 30 years from vertically integrated forest companies to timber investment management organizations.

These events, the people, and the land are connected, and we to them. But these are just some of the stories that the Forest History Society's library and archives preserve and can share. And

they are from one country, and cover one short period of time. FHS has materials covering many countries throughout recorded history. The lessons to be found in our documents speak to us today and can inform future generations, but only if they are available for use. We must make the materials accessible to help researchers and writers reach and disseminate the most applicable information. We must be able to support or correct historical interpretation with integrity. It is important because facts matter.

Just a few short years after the establishment of the Society came the dedication of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. At the ceremonies on October 15, 1949, Cornelia Bryce Pinchot, widow of the late founding chief of the U.S. Forest Service, stated, "Conservation is today more than ever a philosophy of dynamic democracy. Still to be conceived not only in terms of science and techniques, but primarily in relation to men and to women. Their needs. Their aspirations. Their social demands. That fact is what gives conservation its basic unity. As such it is central to the domestic and international objectives of the American people."

Her words are as relevant today as they were in 1949. The Forest History Society continues to link the past to the future by documenting the evolution of conservation philosophies and the changing demands people place on our forests.

An expanded, state-of-the-art FHS headquarters will be the new nexus for forest and conservation history inquiries from around the world. With greater capabilities than any previous generation could have imagined, it will serve as a research home for our members, a source of pride for the greater forest and conservation community, and a treasure trove for current and future generations.

Your support over the years has put the Society in a position to serve audiences more effectively in the future. Students, teachers, journalists, landowners, and many others will benefit. We hope you will now join others in supporting the Forest History Society's work with a contribution to the Building on History Campaign and through your ongoing support of the Annual Fund. □