

75 YEARS OF THE FOREST HISTORY SOCIETY

By James G. Lewis

In December 1945, Theodore Blegen, a history professor at the University of Minnesota, met with a group of historians and forest industry leaders concerned with how the history of the state's forest industry was being interpreted and portrayed. He urged them to form an organization that would preserve and make available the records of lumber companies to researchers and journalists. To facilitate this, on June 12, 1946, the Weyerhaeuser family gave a start-up grant that established the Forest Products History Foundation of the Minnesota Historical Society.

The founders wanted the organization to focus on industry, but on a national scale, with some attention given to Canada. That national focus impelled the foundation to change its name in 1953 to the less-cumbersome American Forest History Foundation and to legally separate from the Minnesota Historical Society in 1955. Two years later, to reflect having expanded focus beyond industry to forest history in general, and to make fundraising easier, the foundation's leadership decided on another transformation: the institution would become a membership organization called the Forest History Society. Seventy-five years after its founding, the Forest History Society is still the world's only research library and archive dedicated to the history of how humans have interacted with forested landscapes around the world.

To accommodate its growing collections, FHS moved cross-country three times within a twenty-year span, with the last of these moves being from California to Durham, North Carolina, in 1984. Then, in 2019, FHS moved once more—this time just three miles, not three time zones—into its first purpose-built home. Space is no longer a concern: the archive has 7,500 linear feet of shelf space, and the new library's square footage equals that of the previous building.

The society's initial core programs encompassed identifying and collecting archival source materials, assembling a comprehensive bibliography, and publishing monographs and reference books in the new field of forest history. Conducting oral history interviews, producing a scholarly journal, and convening symposiums (and publishing their proceedings) soon followed. The 1980s and 1990s saw the addition of environmental education and public outreach programs that, because of the internet, can and do engage people around the world.

Over the last few decades, the scope of scholarship and archival holdings have been expanded to include underrepresented populations in forest history like women and African Americans. Though the scope of its scholarship and holdings have continually broadened over the last seventy-five years in response to the times, the Forest History Society's mission remains fundamentally the same today as in 1946 when it was founded: to collect, preserve, and disseminate our shared forest and conservation history, and for the Forest History Society to be the world's leader in that effort.

SOURCES: "Forest History Society Highlights, 1946 to 2006," *Forest History Today* Spring/Fall 2006: 54–55; Thomas R. Cox, "A Tale of Two Journals: Fifty Years of *Environmental History*—and Its Predecessors," *Environmental History* 13 (January 2008): 9–40; and Harold K. Steen, "The Forest History Society and Its History" (typescript; Forest History Society records).



1946

The Forest History Society (FHS) is founded as the Forest Products History Foundation of the Minnesota Historical Society, with Rodney C. Loehr as director.



Logo from 1948–1950

1950

Loehr returns to full-time teaching at the University of Minnesota, reporting twenty publications.

Assets of \$11,000.

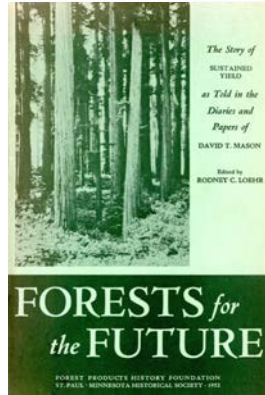


First director, Rodney Loehr



1952
Elwood R. "Woody" Maunder recruited as Loehr's successor.

Publication of *Forests for the Future: The Story of Sustained Yield*, the society's first book-length work.



1958
Newsletter is replaced by *Forest History*, an illustrated quarterly journal.



1964
Moves to Yale University and becomes affiliated with its school of forestry and university library.

1950



Logo from 1951–1961

1953
Renamed the American Forest History Foundation.

First oral history interview is conducted; more than 300 will follow.

Begins certification program for forest history repositories across U.S. and Canada to receive archival materials.

1955
Becomes independent of the Minnesota Historical Society.

1956
Forest History Sources of the United States and Canada, the society's first major reference work, is published.

1957
Renamed Forest History Society; becomes a membership organization.

Begins publishing *Forest History Newsletter*.

Accessions the records of the Society of American Foresters, first major collection.

1960



Logo from 1961–2002

1960
Begins bibliographic compilation as parallel project to archival guide.



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Harold K. "Pete" Steen,
FHS's third director

1978
Maunder retires,
succeeded by
Harold K. Steen.

Assets of \$148,000.

1984

Acquires its first computers.

FHS moves to Durham, North
Carolina, purchases headquarters
building, and becomes affiliated
with Duke University.

1969

Moves to the
University of California,
Santa Cruz.



1976

A biennial book award
is established.

1970

1980

1972

Creates two awards for best
forest history articles.

1979

Endowment drive
earns first \$1 million.

1966

Publishes first
conference
proceedings.

Begins active involvement with
International Union of Forestry
Research Organizations.

1977

Begins publication of
newsletter *Cruiser*.

1981

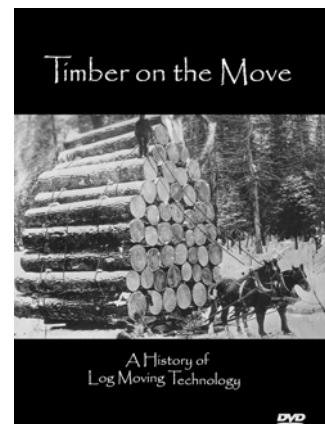
Produces *Timber on the Move*,
the first of two documentary
films in the 1980s.

1974

Forest History
renamed *Journal of
Forest History*.



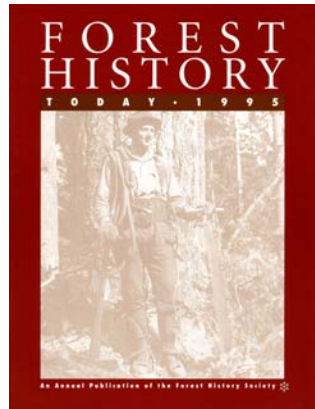
Cruiser newsletter





1988

Durham headquarters is refurbished and doubled in size. Archive is named for Alvin J. Huss.



1995

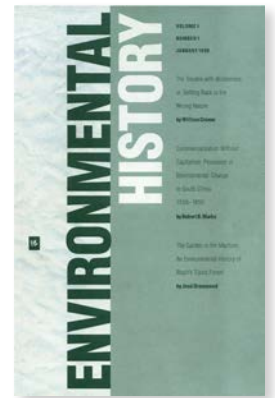
Begins publishing magazine *Forest History Today* for members.

Work begins on middle school environmental education curriculum.

Title of “executive director” changed to “president.”

1996

Forest & Conservation History is replaced by *Environmental History*, co-published with American Society for Environmental History (ASEH).



1986

Establishes the F. K. Weyerhaeuser Forest History Fellowship for Duke graduate students.

1993

Forest History Society Issues Series is launched with *American Forests: A History of Resiliency and Recovery*.

1990

1991

Biennial book award is renamed in honor of Charles A. Weyerhaeuser.

1994

Searchable bibliography and archival guide databases are posted on the Internet.

1998

Agreement with the U.S. Forest Service reached to house and curate its history reference collection. U.S. Forest Service History section of the website is launched.

1987

Establishes the John M. Collier Award for Forest History Journalism.



1990 Journal is renamed *Forest & Conservation History*.

Alfred D. Bell Jr. Travel Grants endowed.



FHS's fourth president, Steven Anderson

1997

Steen retires and is succeeded by Steven Anderson.

Assets of \$5.5 million.

1999

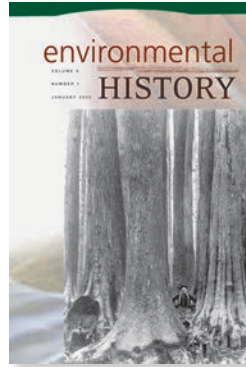
FHS newsletter *Cruiser* relaunches as *Forest Timeline*.

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2000

FHS establishes Lynn W. Day Endowment for Forest History Publications and the Alvin J. Huss Endowment for Digitization and Outreach of the archives.

FHS begins digitizing its photograph collection and posting images online.



2003

Environmental History is made available online through the History Cooperative.

2008

Two-year project to catalog all FHS archival collections using Encoded Archival Description (EAD), the accepted standard, begins.

FHS launches its blog *Peeling Back the Bark*. Other social media (Twitter, Facebook, etc.) efforts soon follow.

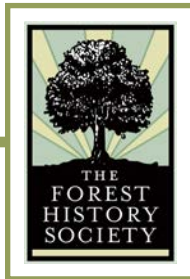


2006

FHS's publications exceed 200 books, manuscripts, and published oral histories.

Assets of \$8.5 million.

Logo from 2002–2016

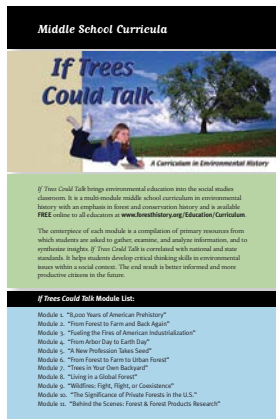


2000

2001

FHS and ASEH merge respective awards for best history article into the Leopold-Hidy Award.

Middle school environmental education curriculum "If Trees Could Talk" is made available on the internet.



2004

Charles A. Weyerhaeuser Book Award is changed to annual award.

2010



New Digital Exhibit Documents History of a Small-town Paper Mill

Located just west of Asheville, North Carolina, and within the headwaters of the Pigeon River, is the small town of Canton, home to the Evergreen Packaging mill, an employee-owned facility. Opened in 1908 as the Champion Fibre Company, the pulp and paper mill has been an economic engine for Canton for more than a century. However, it has also been contributing to the contamination of the

In This Issue

New Exhibit Documents Paper Mill's History
Join Us in Ottawa for Lunch
Former FHS Board Chair Passes
From the Blog: President Bans Christmas Trees and other seasonal favorites

2009

Forest Timeline newsletter becomes a digital-only publication.

2005

FHS joins with ASEH and the European Society for Environmental History to establish the International Consortium of Environmental History Organizations; they begin planning the first World Congress in Environmental History for 2009.



2015

Walter S. Rosenberry Fellowship is established for a graduate student attending a university in North America.

2013

Fire at FHS necessitates moving out of the building for nearly a year.

2019

FHS moves to its new headquarters, its first building specifically constructed as a library and archive.

U.S. Forest Service funds digitizing and posting of some 5,000 biographical files from its history reference collection at FHS.

2021

Monthly webinar series focusing on current concerns of social justice, the pandemic, and climate change is launched.

FHS marks 75 years in muted fashion due to ongoing pandemic.



FOREST HISTORY Society

2020

Logo adopted in 2017

2016

FHS documentary *America's First Forest: Carl Schenck and the Asheville Experiment* debuts on public television stations around the country and wins a regional Emmy Award.

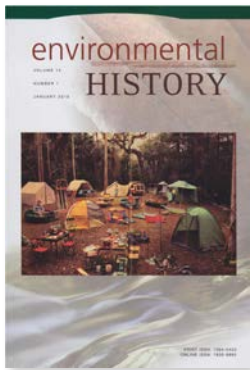
2020

In-person research is temporarily suspended due to Covid-19 global pandemic.

2017

FHS breaks ground for its new headquarters.

Assets of \$12.2 million.



2010

FHS board of directors determines that more space is needed and soon launches a campaign to fund a new building.

FHS and ASEH begin publishing *Environmental History* in partnership with Oxford University Press.

