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by Dr. Arthur W. Cooper, Professor Emeritus, Department Head 1979-1994

A BIT MORE ABOUT CNR'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE MONT ALTO SCHOOL OF FORESTRY

[Author's note: The relationship between NCSU's forestry program and the closing of the forestry program at the Mont Alto School of Forestry in Pennsylvania is well-known. However, some newspaper clippings describing the events in more detail recently came into my hands; the details those clippings provide and information obtained from additional research are interesting enough so that they deserve a place in the lore of the College of Natural Resource's history. Who knew Gifford Pinchot played a role, albeit indirect, in the creation of NC State's forestry program?]

By 1900 Pennsylvania had lost more than 60% of its forest land and that which remained had been badly damaged by destructive practices. As the State undertook to acquire forest land for preservation it was quickly realized that these efforts at protection would be of little use without a larger supply of trained foresters to manage the land. With legislative approval in 1903, George Rothrock, the Commissioner of the newly-created Department of Forestry and George Wirt, who received his degree in forestry from the Biltmore School in North Carolina in 1901, established the Pennsylvania State Forest Academy at Mont Alto near a forest reservation in the South Mountains. Together with the Biltmore School and Yale University, Mont Alto became the third forestry school in the nation.

The Mont Alto School produced a regular flow of trained foresters from its inception through the 1920s. Wirt was the Academy's first director and he developed a curriculum similar to those in Germany and patterned after that at Biltmore. All beginning students were required to bring a horse with them until the late 1920s. Julius V. Hofmann, who played the lead role in creation of North Carolina's first college-level forestry program, was appointed Assistant Director in 1924. He resigned from Mont Alto in early 1929 and on February 1, 1929 assumed the position as Head of the newly-created Department of Forestry at NC State.

By the early 1920s Pennsylvania's forest system was fully staffed and discussions began as to whether the state needed two programs and whether enough foresters were being trained in the program created on the State College campus in 1907. When Gifford Pinchot was elected governor in 1922 he initiated discussions on a possible merger of the Mont Alto program, by now a 4-year curriculum, with the forestry program at State College. Nothing happened during Pinchot's term but debate over the need for two programs intensified and in 1929 the legislature authorized merger of the two programs. Mont Alto alumni did not easily accept the termination of their program. A proposal to return to two separate programs, which Gifford Pinchot in a change of position actually supported, was floated in 1935 but failed to gain any significant support.

A committee was created to provide guidance on the merger. Apparently one of its functions was also to deal directly with Mont Alto on the details of closing its program. Initial discussions of merger centered on using the Mont Alto campus for the junior and senior years of the professional forestry program. When the final plans for merger limited use of Mont Alto to short periods of time during the summer, local government officials and the Mont Alto student body expressed themselves in opposition. Local government officials indicated the change would mean a loss of \$75,000 annually to the county in which Mont Alto was located. Students were particularly angry over the fact that the

director of the Mont Alto program was not consulted in developing the merger, a situation they considered an insult to his 20 years of effort in building the program. Letters were written and protests made to the Governor but nothing changed the decision to terminate Mont Alto.

On May 4, 1929, the students issued a lengthy statement describing the negative impacts and injustices of the merger. One of the persons handing out this statement was Howard A. Snyder, who later was a leader in organizing Mont Alto students to transfer to NC State. Points of concern were the high caliber of the program being eliminated, the fact that no clear plans had been made concerning the future of the faculty, that the students themselves stood to lose about \$10,000 of their own funds, and the loss of revenue to local businesses. To provide a clear public picture of their concerns the student body organized speeches and a demonstration at which effigies of the State Secretary of Forests and Waters and the State Forester, who at one point had taught at Mont Alto, were hung and then burned over a 30-foot bonfire made of old packing crates. Speakers stated that none of the current 62 students would transfer to State College the next year should the merger be carried out. Signs were erected near the campus saying "Drive slowly. School in mourning."

Despite the fact that state officials issued a statement that many of the student's complaints were at variance with what was really being proposed by the merger, the die was cast and virtually the entire student body made plans to further their education elsewhere. Between the demonstrations in early May and commencement on June 12, 50 students made arrangements to transfer to NC State in Raleigh. At the time of commencement, their "personal belongings and equipment, including books, victrolas, tables, desks, and other articles" were being loaded into a freight car for shipment to Raleigh where the students were to enroll in the fall. The role of Hofmann, who had earlier become head of the new Forestry Department at NC State, in promoting the move is unclear. It is a reasonable assumption that a factor in his move to Raleigh was the possible closure of the Mont Alto program. An article in the Waynesboro Record Herald of June 10, 1929, implies as much. Whether he approached the students about transferring or they approached him is unclear and really irrelevant. It is clear that Howard A. Snyder, who presented the student's bill of complaints about the merger in early May, was a main force in convincing the majority of his fellow students to move to Raleigh, thus presenting Hofmann with a ready-made student body for his new program. Snyder joined 16 of the other Mont Alto transfers as members of NC State's first graduating class in forestry.

[Author's end note: Information for this story came from local (Harrisburg and Waynesboro, PA) newspapers published in May and June, 1929, and from "A Century of Forest Resources Education at Penn State" by Henry D. Gerhold, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007. 282 pp. The clippings came to me from Ms. Sandra Snyder, widow of Daniel Snyder, who was the son of Howard A. Snyder mentioned prominently in the piece above.]

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- [History of the Department 1929-1979](#), written by Dr. William D. Miller