

## **FOREST HISTORY**

Florida's moderate climate provides for subtropical to tropical forests dominated by pines, palms, cypress, and oaks. Mangroves, sea grape, strangler fig, mahoganies, and other trees commonly occurring in the Caribbean islands are found in extreme south Florida.

Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leon discovered and named the land that now is Florida. He is credited with sighting it on Easter Sunday, March 27, 1513, a holiday which the Spanish called "Pasqua de Flores," from which Florida gets its name.

Originally, forests covered about four-fifths of Florida's 35 million acres of land. Throughout some 300 years of struggle by England, Spain, and France for dominance in Florida, the forests were left largely intact. During the American Revolutionary War, Florida forests supplied lumber and **naval stores** (products derived from the gum of pines) to England.

After Spain sold Florida to the United States in 1819, the demand for forest products slowly increased. By the middle of the 1830s, Pensacola, on the northern Gulf coast, was becoming a shipping point for exporting lumber to other states and the Caribbean islands. This exploitation was limited mainly to the forested areas near rivers where logs could be floated to sawmills.

After the Civil War, forest exploitation began in Florida on a massive scale. Several large influences combined to bring this about. First, the nation's population was growing and moving westward, creating a large need for lumber to build new cities and homes. Second, large, steam-powered logging equipment was developed. With this machinery, timber companies which had logged virgin timber in the Midwest moved into southern states to harvest the pine stands. Third, the naval stores industry in the Carolinas moved west and south to tap Florida's slash and longleaf pines. Finally, railroads pushed into all parts of Florida, which created a fast, efficient means to transport the wood.

After 1870, lumber production climbed rapidly from less than 200 million board feet a year to a six-fold peak of more than 1.2 billion board feet by 1909. It stayed near this peak for 20 years. Naval stores production of north Florida peaked between 1900 and 1910, when up to 1.5 million barrels of **rosin** and **turpentine** went to market every year.

During those years, the population of Florida rose from 188,000 to around 1,000,000 people. This growth was a direct result of the forest exploitation,

and such coastal cities as Jacksonville, Pensacola, Panama City, and Cedar Key grew rapidly as shipping points for forest products.

During the 1930s, lumber production dwindled rapidly as the big companies ran out of readily available virgin timber. Practically all of them followed "cut out and get out" timbering practices that closely resembled mining. A mining approach, although unthinkable today, was understandable for the times because the lumbermen of that day saw virtually inexhaustible stands of virgin trees everywhere.

When trees ran out, the lumber mills closed down and the companies moved to other parts of the nation, leaving the Florida land barren, nonproductive, and almost valueless. Frequent fires kept forests from regenerating. Vast acreages reverted to local governments for non-payment of taxes.

Landowners and far-sighted lumbermen began working in 1923 to bring about improvements in the situation. The Florida Forestry Association was formed in Jacksonville and, in 1927, played a leading role in the establishment (by legislative act) of the Florida Board of Forestry. The state agency was given the responsibility of controlling fires on land of qualifying landowners, developing methods of reestablishing and improving forests, and making forest information available to the general public. By 1930, this agency was expanding its activities in all three areas with active help and support from local governments, the federal government, and landowners.

Two remarkable men deserve special attention for contributions which heavily influenced the direction of southern forestry. One was Austin Cary, a native of Maine who became a forester. From 1917 on, Cary worked in southern states for the U.S. Forest Service, encouraging long-range planning and good management practices. In Florida and elsewhere, he preached planning, ***sustained-yield*** cutting practices, soil conservation, tree planting with superior seedlings, and similar practices to both landowners and industry. By 1930, he was called the "Father of Southern Forestry."

The other individual whose work was important to Florida was a soft-spoken Georgian native, Charles H. Herty. A professional teacher like Cary, Herty was also a research chemist. He developed a system of collecting rosin from pines in clay or metal cups. It ended the practice of chopping cavities into the living tree trunk to catch the gum, a practice which resulted in extensive damage to the tree. Eventually, the Herty cup replaced the destructive old "chopped box" practice.

But his largest contribution was pioneering methods to show how southern pines could be turned into good white pulp for the newsprint paper industry. This reduced publishers' dependence on Canadian newsprint and provided a

new market for millions of acres of second-growth pine being produced on the land left ravaged by the earlier lumbermen.

In 1936, Herty also discovered a process to produce a wood-**cellulose** that was excellent for manufacturing **rayon**. He died in 1938 before his work reached full application, but this chemist established a new papermaking technology that provides one of the largest markets for Florida's timber production today

Several pulp mills presently operate in Florida, most of them owners of vast acreages of forests, which are carefully managed to provide wood to meet demands indefinitely. In addition, these private forests also serve large numbers of people as recreational areas and improve the quality of the environment.