



# NEWSLETTER

## OPENING THE DOOR

The Tuskegee Education Project To Train African-American Foresters

BY BRIAN R. PAYNE

IN JUNE OF 1968, I SAW A JOB ANNOUNCEMENT AT THE Pacific Northwest Research Station in Portland, Oregon, where I was a forest economist. It advertised a position at Tuskegee Institute, now Tuskegee University, in Alabama. The job was to create a pre-forestry curriculum with the goal of recruiting African-American students into the natural resources professions. I took the announcement down and phoned my wife.

“How would you like to move to Alabama?”

She replied, “Are you kidding? That’s where Selma is, Bull Conner and black people marching and getting killed. No, I don’t want to move to Alabama!” Martin Luther King, Jr. had been assassinated only two months earlier. And despite the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968, inequality and racial injustice were still prevalent.

At the time, counting only employees who were college graduates, the U.S. Department of Agriculture was the least racially diversified government department and the U.S. Forest Service was its least diversified agency. Since 1898, U.S. forestry schools had graduated only a dozen

African-American forestry professionals – only 18 were currently enrolled among 11,000 students. Forest Service leaders were determined to do something about the



**FUTURE LEADERS IN FORESTRY** Mack Hogans examines a pine cone on the Tuskegee National Forest in 1970. (Ross Tocher, University of Michigan)

imbalance. But were unsure where to find well-qualified, degree-holding, African-American forestry professionals.

Thomas C. Nelson, Director of the Southern Forest Experiment Station in New Orleans and Bennie D. Mayberry, Dean of

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**MUSEUM NEWS**

**ALBUQUERQUE BOARD MEETING** - Our board of directors held a regular board meeting during the reunion in Albuquerque last October. Board members have set a goal to meet in person once a year.



**BOARD OF DIRECTORS** (L-R) John Drake, Doug Leisz, Larry Gadt, Phil Aune, Lynn Sprague, Jim LaBau, Dave Stack, Pat Lynch, Lyle Laverty and Tom Thompson. (AI Wolter-NMFSSH)

**RALLY ON THE RIO FOREST SERVICE REUNION** - The Albuquerque reunion was a huge success, with 525 persons attending -- including 107 museum members. **Chief Tidwell**, along with national leadership, participated too. **Lou Romero and the Amigos Retiree Association** are to be congratulated for the planning and management of the event. As a co-sponsor, the museum's goal was to increase our awareness among attendees. Every registration packet included a museum membership brochure, a progress report and 1925 Ranger Exam. Museum board members and regional directors joined in the effort to spread the word; resulting in 38 new museum memberships, including two new lifetime members!



**TALKING US UP** Tom Thompson and Doug Leisz speak to reunion attendees. (AI Wolter-NMFSSH)

**MUSEUM'S ANNUAL MEETING** - President-elect **Tom Thompson** opened our annual membership thanking everyone for their support. Museum members are the life-blood in our continuing effort to open a

new operating facility. A report to membership of our current programs and future plans was presented by **Dave Stack, Lynn Sprague** and **Tom Thompson**. Stack detailed our current programs, including the repository program (cataloging, artifact loans and archival research), traveling exhibits and the sharing of conservation history on social media. **Lynn Sprague** discussed the current status of our capital campaign and the committee's focus on finding a lead donor. **Tom Thompson** described the work of developing interpretive themes for the stories we would like to tell; developed by the museum's panel of historians and social scientists. **Doug Leisz** talked about the importance of membership and how increased membership will support additional programs.



**Q&A** Dave Stack discusses how planned gifts support museum programs. (AI Wolter-NMFSSH)

Vice President **Dave Stack** presented the Gary G. Brown Founder's Awards to **Gray Reynolds** in recognition of his leadership and commitment as President of the National Museum of Forest Service History for 13 years. (Lynn Sprague accepted the award for Gray.) The second Founder's Award was presented to **William Cannon** in recognition of his dedication and support of the National Museum of Forest Service History. In all, the annual meeting was attended by 75 people and we received many positive comments after the event.

**ARTIFACT LOAN** - The Springfield Oregon Museum has returned artifacts loaned to them earlier this year for a smokejumper exhibit. **Benjamin Johnson**, Executive Director, said the exhibit, "Turned out great and your items really helped add some depth to the exhibit narrative." ■

the School of Agriculture at Tuskegee, had an idea. Nelson was looking for a wider range of research collaborators, especially among historically black colleges and universities. Mayberry was looking to fulfill a long-time dream of building a forestry education program – a dream already discussed with the universities of California, Iowa State, and Michigan. The two decided to work together.

First, Nelson proposed to help fund competitive research at Tuskegee. Second, the Forest Service would supply an employee at the school to develop a pre-forestry curriculum and teach one or more courses. In turn, the school would provide office space and adjunct faculty status for the new employee, along with access to its student body and 3,000 acres of forest land for field instruction and research. Funding for the new position would come from the Washington Office, where Chief Ed Cliff and Deputy Chief for Research George Jemison were enthusiastic supporters. University President Luther Foster committed Tuskegee to its part of the bargain.

## **“Are you kidding? That’s where Selma is, Bull Conner and black people marching and getting killed. No, I don’t want to move to Alabama!”**

My wife and I realized this was a rare chance to make a contribution to civil rights; something my brother had done rather dangerously as a student activist registering voters in Mississippi. The job at Tuskegee would not be so perilous. It would utilize my professional training and our interest in students and I would have the full weight of the Forest Service behind me. So, I flew to Tuskegee via New Orleans and with Assistant Station Director Vinse Duvall met Dr. Mayberry for a job interview. It was a perfect fit and I was offered the position. My wife and I arrived in Tuskegee with our two pre-school children the day before Thanksgiving in 1968.

Tuskegee Institute though small, with only 3,000 undergraduates, had a storied past. Founded in 1881 by Booker T. Washington, it was the home of legendary botanist and teacher George Washington Carver for 47 years. And it was the training site during World War II for the Tuskegee Airmen of the U.S. Army Air Corps – Tuskegee is now the national historic site. It would turn out to be a remarkable place for an unprecedented agency experiment.

Soon after I started, we heard from R. Keith Arnold, the Dean of the University of Michigan – School of Natural Resources. Michigan had been paired with Tuskegee under the 1965 Higher Education Act, which provided funds for faculty exchanges. Arnold wanted to send several professors



**FUTURE FORESTER** Tuskegee student John Yancy poses next to a university limousine in 1969. *(Brain Payne, USFS)*

### **A TUSKEGEE STUDENT REMEMBERS: JOHN YANCY**

When my high school vocational agriculture instructor asked me, “What are your career plans,” I replied, “To become a teacher like you.” He told me point blank, “Young man, you are too smart to become a teacher,” and asked if I had heard about Tuskegee Institute or forestry.

I’d heard of Tuskegee, but not of forestry. So, he took me to meet Dr. B.D. Mayberry, the school’s Dean of Agriculture, who spoke to me about Tuskegee’s historical role in educating blacks for professional careers. He listed engineering, veterinary medicine, nursing and a new program in forestry. He suggested I enroll in forestry, as the program might someday have a legacy similar to the Tuskegee Airmen. Dr. Mayberry sold me hook, line and sinker that day. And convinced me that the life goals I had set out, as early as the fourth grade, could be attained as a forestry professional.

I enrolled in August of 1968. After taking a math class with several engineering majors, I considered switching to engineering as it was a profession that I knew and respected. Forestry on the other hand was unfamiliar, but Brian Payne convinced me not to change by describing all that forestry had to offer. The immediate benefit would be a summer job with the U.S. Forest Service. But when it was discovered that my father worked for the USDA, nepotism rules canceled this possibility. “Maybe I should change to engineering after all,” I thought. However, within two weeks, Brian found a replacement job for me with the University of California’s experimental forest. Reassured, I continued my education in forestry.

From Tuskegee, I transferred to Iowa State University where I received a BS in Forestry. With the U.S. Forest Service, I served as the first African-American District Ranger in the south. Later, I served as supervisor for the Alabama National Forests, being only the third African-American forest supervisor in history. In 2000, I accepted a position with the National Park Service and retired in 2008 as Associate Regional Director for its Southeastern Region. ■

to Tuskegee in the spring of 1969 to teach an introductory course in natural resources. Twenty-eight students signed up in all – five were women. That semester, I helped nine different specialists set up classes and field exercises in forestry, wildlife and fisheries, outdoor recreation, environmental education, landscape architecture, forest economics and conservation policy; learning as much as any of the students.

We knew recruiting African-American students into forestry was not going to be easy – only one student from the group went on to a pre-forestry major. But, the “Michigan Course” as we called it, exposed students to the world

## “We knew recruiting African-American students into forestry was not going to be easy...”

of forestry and natural resources and gained attention across campus. That fall, I taught “Introduction to Forestry” and another team of professors arrived from Michigan in the spring of 1970. By then eight students had signed up as pre-forestry majors and two of them (see sidebars) were moving to upper division status.

A vital aid to student recruitment was our ability to offer summer jobs with the U.S. Forest Service. Nearly all of the students took advantage of this and a few even discovered that forestry was not right for them after all. But the ones who stayed were motivated by the possibility of a career with outdoor options. Another recruiting tool was visiting high schools. There supportive teachers and counselors gave us a chance to talk about forestry options at Tuskegee. My successors took great advantage of these opportunities and were able to enlarge the program substantially.

One final goal between the U.S. Forest Service and Tuskegee was to prepare a management plan for the school’s six tracts of forest land – the largest being 1,700 acres. These tracts had been inadequately stocked, unmanaged and subject to poorly compensated timber harvests by a local lumber company. Southeastern

Area, State and Private Forestry assembled a team to inventory the property and recommend how it might be better used for education, research, demonstration, wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation and income from timber harvesting. Not long after



**NEW OPPORTUNITIES** Mack Hogans stands by a large loblolly pine tree in 1970. (Ross Tocher, University of Michigan)

the plan had been completed, an outbreak of southern pine beetle required an immediate timber salvage operation. The school took bids: The local lumber company bid a few thousand dollars and two other forest products corporations submitted

bids – the largest being \$50,000 dollars. Delighted, the school used the proceeds to fund projects on campus and invested little in future management of its forest land. Thus, the just-completed management plan went on the shelf.

My two-year assignment at Tuskegee ended in September 1970, but the program continued under a series of Forest Service liaison officers hired by the school. Over 400 students have since enrolled in the program and about 120 of them have earned professional degrees at a dozen cooperating universities. One-hundred graduates have gone on to work for the U.S. Forest Service and half of those are still there.

Although Tuskegee is no longer the primary point of entry for African-American forestry students, it paved the way for

## “The U.S. Forest Service helped open the door and I believe the agency is stronger for it.”

efforts elsewhere. Other schools have come on line since, including a four-year program at Alabama A&M University, another historically African-American institution that was accredited by the Society of American Foresters in 2002. Today, there are ample opportunities and role models for African-American students who wish to pursue careers in forestry and natural resources. The U.S. Forest Service helped open the door and I believe the agency is stronger for it.

### AUTHOR BRIAN R. PAYNE

Brian Payne worked for the U.S. Forest Service for 38 years, primarily in Forest Service Research. His assignments included UNESCO in Paris, France and IUFRO in Vienna, Austria. From 1968 to 1970, Payne was assigned to Tuskegee, Alabama where he developed forestry career opportunities for African-American students. For his work he received the USDA Superior Service Award. Payne retired from the Forest Service in 2000 and lives in Fairfax, Virginia. ■



**NATURE'S CLASSROOM** Dale McCullough, University of Michigan, teaches Tuskegee pre-forestry in 1970. (Brian Payne, USFS)

### A TUSKEGEE STUDENT REMEMBERS: MACK HOGANS

I have vivid memories of a timber harvest on my father's scrub farm: loud chain saws, the smell of gasoline, oil, and grease from a portable sawmill, men dirty from sawdust and grinding physical work. I saw people with visible scrapes, cuts, missing fingers – one missing an arm. It was an ugly picture.

When I finished high school, I enrolled at Tuskegee as agronomy major. Professor Chahal introduced me to Brian Payne, who suggested I transfer into their new program in forestry. It was a difficult decision, as I was faced with two things I didn't have positive feelings about: forestry and a white guy!

Brian's description of forestry was in stark contrast to my experiences with logging – what I later learned to be bad logging. Forestry could be a career and he introduced me to John Yancy, the first student in the program. John was a confident, credible and passionate student leader and after our meeting I decided that forestry was worth considering. Somewhere in our discussion, Brian informed me that after I finished a two year stint at Tuskegee, I could transfer out of state to one of four major universities with an accredited 4-year forestry program. While that was what Brian said, what I heard was, "If you successfully complete this program, you can leave Alabama." I immediately said, "Sign me up!"

Two years later, I was in Ann Arbor receiving a bachelor's degree in Forestry and Natural Resources from the University of Michigan. After completing a master's degree at the University of Washington, I worked for the U.S. Forest Service in outdoor recreation research in Seattle, then for the State of Maryland, the National Park Service and was hired by Weyerhaeuser Company in 1979. I retired as the Senior Vice President of Corporate Affairs in 2004 and now do consulting. ■

**ANKLE DEEP** John Ramsey, U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Fish and Wildlife, studies life of Uphapee Creek with Tuskegee students in 1970. (Brian Payne, USFS)

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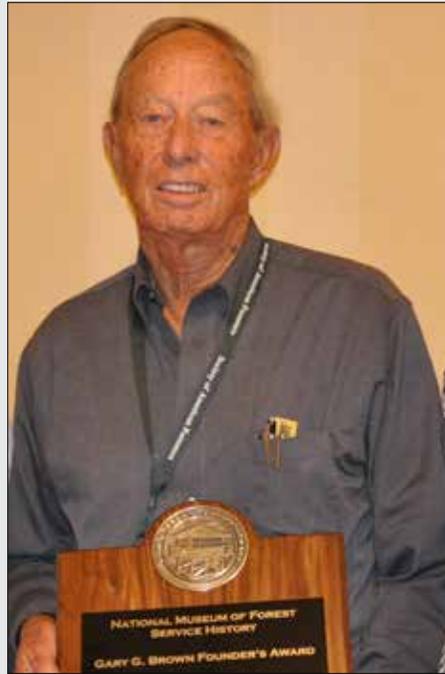
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## FAREWELL TO OUR FRIEND LYNN BIDDISON

Lynn and Sue Biddison were in an automobile collision on Sunday, October 11, 2015 in Albuquerque, New Mexico -- the same day many were arriving in town to attend the Forest Service reunion. Lynn's vehicle was rear-ended by an intoxicated driver, who was arrested and charged with DUI. Both Lynn and Susan were hospitalized, Lynn in serious condition, and many during the reunion expressed concern for his outcome. Sadly, Lynn Biddison passed away October 19, 2015 as a result of his injuries. He was 88 years old.

Lynn served the Forest Service with distinction for nearly 40 years before retiring in 1982. As a district ranger and fire control officer in California, he was regularly dispatched to fires all over the country. During those years Lynn played an instrumental role in developing an

"incident command" system for the agency, which involved establishing



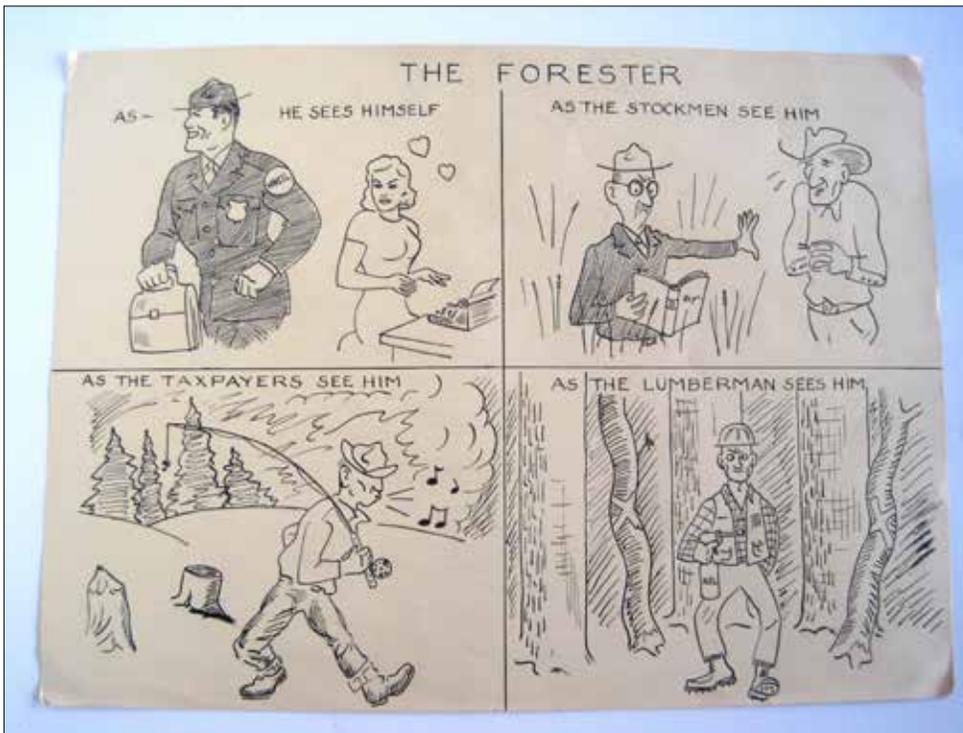
Lynn Biddison receives the Gary G. Brown Founder's Award in 2012. (AI Wolter-NMFSH)

standing fire management teams. In 1968, he moved to Forest Service Region 3 in Albuquerque, New Mexico where he became Regional Fire Director. He left 12 years later for his final post with the Forest Service, as Regional Fire Director for Region 5, based in San Francisco, California. After retirement, Lynn worked as a representative for Firetrol, a company that provided fire retardant products to agencies in the U.S. and other countries.

He was a driving force in helping to establish the National Museum of Forest Service History in Missoula, Montana. Lynn was a Regional Director for the museum and played an active role in fundraising. In 2012, he received the Gary G. Brown Founder's Award in recognition of his dedication and personal commitment to the museum.

Lynn will be missed by all those who were honored to know and work with him and he will especially be missed by everyone associated with the museum. ■

## MUSEUM REPOSITORY



Unknown artist and date -- Have you seen this illustration before? Help us identify it! *John F. Marker Collection 2015.33*

## DID YOU KNOW?



### HUGE FOOD ORDER FOR HUNGRY FIELD CREWS

In the Northern District (now Region), more than 150,000 pounds of ham and bacon and 31,000 pounds of lard were purchased for the 1925 field season. Some of the food was intended for units in District 6 and Glacier National Park. (2015.14 accession, *Service Bulletin*, Vol. IX, No. 41, October 12, 1925)

### 16 MM FILM PROJECTOR NEEDED

Do you have a working film projector that you would be willing to donate to the museum? We are in need of a projector to preview 16 mm films in our archives as some of the film canisters are missing titles and subjects. Please contact Dave Stack at (406) 541-6374 if you can help.



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