

FERDINAND A. SILCOX, 1882-1939

Ferdinand Augustus Silcox was born on Christmas Day 1882 in Columbus, GA. He grew up at his boyhood home at Charleston, SC. As a young man he attended Yale University Forestry School.

His first forestry experience was in 1904, when he worked as a timber cruiser (one who measures standing timber) in West Virginia and Kentucky. He then went on to become a Technical Assistant 1905-06 in Colorado for the newly-formed USDA Forest Service. After a short assignment in New Mexico he moved to other Forest Service work in Idaho and Montana. In 1907 he was the Acting Forest Supervisor on the Cabinet National Forest at Thompson Falls, MT.

Recognizing the important role of both professional forestry and a professional forestry organization, Silcox became a member of the Society of American Foresters at Missoula, MT in June 1907.

Silcox continued his FS employment and from 1911 to 1917 he served as the Northern District (now Regional) Forester in Missoula. He resigned from the FS to enter private employment in the printing industry from 1919 to 1933.

In the Great Depression year of 1933 Silcox became the fifth Chief of the Forest Service in Washington, DC. During his 6 years as Chief he oversaw the FS role in many important national programs, including the outstandingly successful Civilian Conservation Corps, which provided employment and education to more than 3 million young American men. Another great accomplishment during this time was the FS role in salvaging much of the enormous volume of timber blown down during the 1938 New England hurricane.

Yet another major accomplishment was the FS leadership role in establishing the tree/shrub shelterbelt program in wide belts ranging from North Dakota to Texas.

This major planting effort was intended to reduce crop damage and soil erosion from winds which together with drought had produced the "dust bowl" in the Great Plains. Over the duration of the shelterbelt program (1934-42) over 200 million trees and shrubs were planted in belts up to 100 miles wide on more than 30,000 farms - a total length of 18,600 miles if measured end to end.

In these and many other activities, Silcox provided the leadership that enabled the FS to become internationally known as a real can-do outfit. The Society of American Foresters is also proud to claim Silcox as one of its early members.

Silcox died at his home in Alexandria, VA on Dec. 20, 1939.

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Ferdinand A. Silcox—
Fifth Chief, 1933-1939