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The Centenary of Forestry in America

A century ago, on 10 September 1875, the American Forestry Association (AFA) was formed in Chicago. This was the first organized effort to protect the forests of the United States from wasteful cutting and fire and to promote the propagation and planning of forest trees.

The founder-president of the AFA was John Aston Warder of Ohio, a physician, author of several medical treatises, but chiefly remembered as a prolific writer on forestry, horticulture, and landscaping. Midway in his medical career, he gave up his practice to become a professional horticulturist. He was the founder and editor of *Western Horticultural Review* and the author of a manual on evergreens and a monograph on pomology. He became a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1851. Although long interested in tree culture, he first came in contact with professional forestry when he was appointed a U.S. commissioner to the International Exhibition in Vienna in 1873. For the U.S. government he wrote an extensive report on forests and forestry in Europe.

As AFA president until 1882 (he died a year later), Dr. Warder was indisputably the planner and leader of the conservation movement in America. The exact number of founding members present at AFA's organizing meeting is unknown, but there were probably not more than 35. Most were horticulturists, but the group also included botanists, a clergyman, a lawyer, and physicians.

Without public support, a body so small could hardly exert much influence to halt the spread of forest destruction. But the general public were largely indifferent to timber cutting and fire, unless their own lives or property were endangered. Some states had laws for the protection of forests from fire, but for the most part they were either weak or seldom enforced.

The third quarter of the 19th century was an era of profligate exploitation of the nation's forests, unchecked burning of cutover lands, and extensive land clearing for agriculture. Concerned citizens foresaw the possibility of timber famine and advanced this threat to alert the public to the crisis. With several notable exceptions—for example, Carl Schurz, Secretary of the Interior from 1877 to 1881—they were unable to enlist the support of federal executives and members of Congress. Indeed, Congress would not even provide protection from fire and theft for the timber resources on millions of acres of public land.

Thus, the time was right for a national citizens' conservation organization. Historically, the AFA was a needed development in the public interest. In the beginning, the founders concentrated their activities in the area of their main interest, tree planting. As writers and lecturers, they publicized the need for reforestation of land denuded by logging and fire, afforestation of the treeless prairies of the West, and tree planting for home and community beautification. These worthy enterprises were advanced through the promotion of Arbor Day and by the publication of articles in the journals of state horticultural societies, in agricultural and garden magazines, and in the proceedings of AFA meetings.

But more was needed. Soon the AFA began advocating the creation of national and state forests and parks and the establishment of federal and state forestry agencies to administer them. Laws were needed to protect woodlands from fire, insects, and disease, and the association worked with Congress and the state legislatures to get them passed. For years, it urged colleges and universities to offer technical education in forestry to prepare students for professional careers. Cornell was the first to do so, in 1898; Yale followed 2 years later. In 1898, the association started publication of its own monthly journal, *The Forester* (now *American Forests*). This has been an educational organ, providing information on the conservation of forests, soil, water, wildlife, and related resources.

The AFA is still a citizens' organization. In this, its centennial year, scientific and professional people comprise 46 percent of its membership of 80,000. This is a heritage of which the association is proud.—HENRY CLEPPER, *American Forestry Association, 1319 18th Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036.*