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THE DELANEYS OF WOODWORTH: A CENTURY OF INNOVATIVE FORESTRY



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Cover photo:

Charles (left) and Luther Delaney (bent over) with Paul Siggers, U.S. Forest Service Southern Forest Experiment Station (hidden), W.R. Hine, Louisiana State Forester (center), and N.D. Canterbury, Assistant State Forester (right), check seedling development in the Alexander State Forest Tree Seedling Nursery in 1928. (Photo courtesy of Louisiana Office of Forestry)

Photo credits:

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Abstract:

The Delaney family became involved in the lumbering industry in the early 20th century and in forestry as it was developed. The brothers Charles and Luther were employed in 1913 when the Alexander State Forest was established and provided leadership through the Civilian Conservation Corps years of the 1930s. Their sons Charles Jr. and Derwood continued the involvement and contribution to forestry throughout their careers. Although Charles continued involvement with the Louisiana Forest Commission, Derwood chose a different path and established a forest seed business that has significantly supported the development of forestry in the South. More recently, this business has expanded to a wider array of conservation needs. For over a century, the family has influenced the development of forestry and conservation programs throughout the South.

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James P. Barnett

In 1913, the Delaney family purchased about 200 acres of land from the Ashton Plantation near Woodworth. Thus, began over a century of leadership in developing and applying innovative forestry technologies.

T.R. Delaney and sons Charles and Luther grew alfalfa hay and shipped it by rail, via a railroad spur that extended from the property to Woodworth to sell it to logging camps. Hay was in demand to feed horses, mules and oxen used in logging operations. It was during this time that the Delaney's observed the need for reforestation of large areas of cutover forests.

LEADERSHIP IN FOREST TREE NURSERY PRODUCTION

With the establishment of the Alexander State Forest in 1923, both Charles and Luther, who had served in WWI, accepted positions with the Forestry Division, Department of Conservation, to begin developing the state forest. The initial 2,200 acres of land for the state forest was acquired from H.S. Burrowes. Somewhat later, additional acreage was purchased from the Ashton Plantation. This latter portion, adjacent to the Delaney property, became the headquarters site for the forest.

Much of the state forest land had been in agriculture and needed reforestation. A nursery was established in the late-1920s to provide tree seedlings for planting. Luther Delaney became the first manager of a state tree-seedling nursery in the South. He had little formal education but had a farm background and understood growing of plants. Philip Wakeley and other Forest Service, Southern Forest Experiment Station specialists provided technical information for seedling production and nursery management as it was developed. Soon Luther led the nursery to become a pioneer in producing tree seedlings in the South.

Since there was no public housing on or nearby the state forest, visitors who needed overnight housing stayed in the home of either Charles or Luther. This provided for some interesting and productive interactions with visiting professionals. One of Derwood's favorite recollections as a young boy was when, during a severe thunderstorm, the big family dog became so frightened of the thunder that he burst through a window and into the bed of the visiting state forester and his wife.

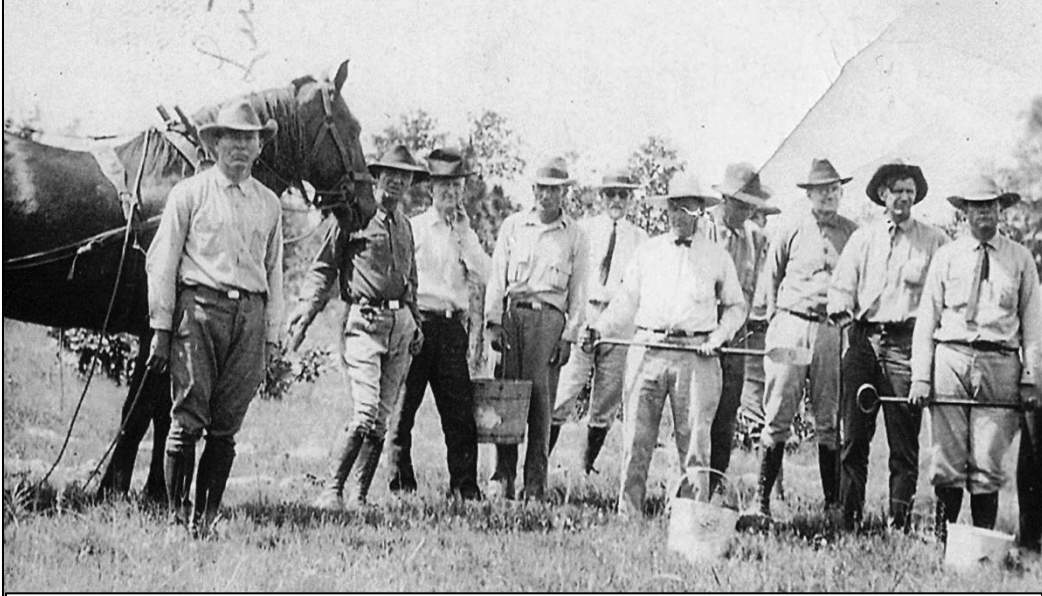


Luther Delaney inspecting a tumber built to separate seeds from pine cones. The cones were dried in the heated log cabin behind Luther. (Photo from Louisiana Office of Forestry)

INVOLVEMENT IN THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS

Charles was hired as the Alexandria State Forest Superintendent and served in that position until 1933 when a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp was established on the State Forest. Camp S-63, comprised of nearly 200 World War I veterans, was organized and supervised by U.S. Army personnel (Barnett and others 2016). Although Army officers oversaw administering the camp, their responsibility did not extend to the work projects. These were managed by a project superintendent and foremen, who were assigned by the sponsoring agency, in this case the Division of Forestry, Department of Conservation. Charles Delaney was chosen as the CCC Project Superintendent for the camp.

Charles was an effective and highly respected CCC Project Superintendent. Under his leadership the enrollees constructed two nurseries, 33 bridges, 100 miles of fencing with crosstie posts, twelve fish and bird ponds, 50 miles of gravel roads, 5 miles of telephone lines, 28 miles of firebreaks, and the world's tallest lookout tower. These things were done while planting 6 million tree seedlings and building Leche Lodge (named after Governor Richard W. Leche), the log building used as the headquarters for the Army and Project Superintendent during the CCC era and later for the state forest. Charles held the Project Superintendent position until the camp closed about 6 years later. He then returned to the position of Superintendent of the Alexander State Forest.



Luther Delaney (left), manager of the tree seedling nursery on Alexander State Forest, instructs Civilian Conservation Corps foremen on planting techniques for pines. (Photograph from Derwood Delaney)



The Civilian Conservation Corps built Lech Lodge served as the headquarters for the CCC camp and later the State Forest. This photo was taken before the building was donated and moved to the Southern Forest Heritage Museum about 2012.

Both Charles and Luther had sons that followed their fathers' forestry interests. Charles' son, Charles F. Delaney, Jr., obtained a forestry degree from LSU after serving in WWII and joined the Louisiana Forestry Commission in the late-1940s. After other positions, he was assigned to the State Forest at Woodworth where he followed in his father's footsteps and became

Superintendent of the forestry program. He did well, and State Forester Jim Mixon was grooming him for the position of state forester when Charlie developed multiple sclerosis and died at an early age.

Luther's son, Derwood, was determined neither to enter forestry nor to become a state employee. The experience of his parents in the era of Huey Long's governorship when payroll checks were delayed for months and when Gov. Long withheld a "deduct" from the checks to cover his election campaign expenses made him want to avoid such distressing situations. So Derwood attended LSU and graduated with a degree in animal husbandry.

However, after graduating and serving a stint in the Army, Derwood accepted a position in 1958 with Howell Cobb in his newly established American Forest Seed Company. Cobb promoted the company and developed customers, while Derwood worked to develop seed collecting, processing, and storing technology on an operational scale. Direct seeding of southern pines became a widely accepted method of regenerating large acreages of cutover land but required huge quantities of pine seeds. The seed company quickly expanded its production to meet this need.

LOUISIANA FOREST SEED COMPANY

Shortly before his untimely death, Howell Cobb sold his seed company to International Forest Seed Company, and Derwood remained as their manager for several years. In 1983, Derwood established the Louisiana Forest Seed Company on family land near Woodworth. He is fortunate to have two sons who were interested in the business. John Delaney, the older of the two, is mechanically inclined and has developed seed cleaning technology that has revolutionized forest seed processing.

Bald cypress seeds, which normally have only 35 to 40 percent viability, can be improved to over 85 percent germination by use of new seed processing equipment and techniques. Yellow-poplar seeds, which usually have the dismal viability of 6 to 10 percent, can also be improved to over 85 percent germination. A quantity of yellow-poplar seeds requiring an 18-wheel truck for transport when processed can be shipped back in a pick-up truck. These are examples of the innovative seed processing done by Louisiana Forest Seed Company.

Gary Delaney, who is trained in business and finance, now oversees the business aspects of the company and works to expand markets. The company sells forest seeds worldwide and continues to expand the number of species processed and handled for sale. Originally the company processed only southern pine seeds, but now it has diversified to collect and process seeds of over 200 species of forest trees, shrubs, and understory plants. Sales of these more non-traditional species now account for about 75 percent of their company's business.



Derwood Delaney (seated) with sons John (left) and Gary (right) at their offices in Woodworth. (Photo from Derwood Delaney)

The Delaneys are dedicated to providing seeds of high quality regardless of species. This has resulted in the Louisiana Forest Seed Company becoming one of the premier forest seed companies in the nation and world. There is hope that additional generations of Delaneys will continue the standards of excellence carried out by this family over the last century.

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