



Willis Gregg Corbitt

1892-1982

Willis Gregg Corbitt was a professional forester, a poet, a genealogist, a collector and a traveler. He was rich with accomplishments and friendships. Willis died January 1, 1982, active and vitally concerned with his many interests as he approached his ninetieth birthday.

Willis was born on April 29, 1892, in Jefferson County, Iowa. At age 13 he moved with his parents, two brothers and a sister to Eastern Washington. There, where his father toiled at wheat farming, Willis found the open prairie a stark contrast to the green forests of Western Washington where he was destined to work.

In the fall of 1914 Willis enrolled at the University of Washington, majoring in Forest Engineering. Educational pursuits were interrupted, however, by the World War and 18 months of service in France. His duties as a Forest Officer in the Twentieth Engineers intensified Willis' forestry interests. Following the war he returned to the University and completed course work in 1920

for a Bachelor of Science Degree in Forest Engineering. At the University, Willis was a member of Delta Upsilon Fraternity.

Willis' poetic interests were documented in the lyrics of a 1920 song penned for the graduating foresters of the University of Washington.

Where're you find the forests, near
mountains, plain or sea,
You'll find the loggers cutting as fast as
possibly;

Where 'ere you find the forests gone,
you'll find there's work to do
In making young trees grow again into a
forest new.

There are many clubs in college but for us
there's only one,

The fellow who's a member is a lucky
son-of-a-gun;

We do our best and lead the rest, we have
our work and fun,

In sun or rain we play the game and work
for Washington.

We'll travel over all the earth, when
college days are done,

We'll help protect in every state from
Maine to Washington;
The forestlands and younger stands and
rivers where they run,
We've got a hunch we are the bunch that
knows just how it's done.
We are, we are, the loggers, the forest
engineers;
We are, we are, the foresters that plan for
future years;
We are, we are, the millmen that saw the
mighty firs,
Oh, we are, we are, a live bunch, the
Washington Foresters.

Professional employment quickly came with the Cherry Valley Lumber Company, a subsidiary of Weyerhaeuser Company, in Stillwater, Washington. In 1922 Willis moved to Scotia, California, to conduct topographic mapping and surveying for the Pacific Lumber Company. Increasing responsibility soon placed him in charge of the company's forest nursery in which seedlings were grown for reforesting logged hillsides.

With the Great Depression of the 1930s, Willis took a leave of absence from Pacific Lumber Company to join the Civilian Conservation Corps. His work soon came to the attention of the State Parks Department of California and Willis became a State Inspector of Civilian Conservation Corps camps in the Sacramento Valley. From there he transferred to the California Division of Forestry where he worked until 1939.

Always interested in reforestation of logged or burned forests, Willis learned of an opportunity at Cathlamet, Washington. Soon, employment with Crown Zellerbach Corporation placed him in charge of planting crews for reforestation of harvested sites. Serving in several locations, Willis remained with Crown Zellerbach for 17 years until his retirement at age 65 in 1957.

Perhaps the next 25 years were the most active of Willis' lifetime. A life-long bachelor, he invested in a multitude of interests. As a member of the American Legion since 1919, he served as a chaplain and a historian. He was a 50-year-member of his professional organization, the Society of American Foresters. Willis also was a member of and taught crafts for the Boy Scouts of America. He maintained, too, long-time memberships in Xi Sigma Pi, the national honorary forestry society, the Seattle Genealogical Society, and the Genealogical Forum of Portland.

Additionally, Willis always found time to compose poetry and to write and edit articles on forestry for various publications. Coin and stamp collecting and the tracing of family genealogy, interspersed with world-wide travel added to his activities. Volunteer work at the Oregon Historical Society rounded out a busy schedule.

Perhaps the organization that benefited most from the forester, the poet, the knowledgeable and caring, Willis Gregg Corbitt, was the Western Forestry Center (now the World Forestry Center). Thousands of visitors to the Center's Exhibit Hall and participants on study tours recall Willis as a helpful and delightful volunteer host. He was special to many people and following this death, prominent forester Merle S. Lowden wrote, "Willis did much to help others. He was earnest, sincere and energetic in passing on to others the information that he had. He was a credit to his profession and to humanity. I am proud to have known him."