



Thornton Taft Munger

1883-1975

If any one man can be named the father of forest research in the Pacific Northwest, it is Dr. Thornton Taft Munger. Born in North Adams, Massachusetts, October 1883, the son of Reverend Theodore Thornton Munger, a Congregational clergyman, author, and a member of the Yale Corporation Board, he grew up in a center of progressive religious and social thought. Thornton Munger received a classical education in secondary schools and graduated from Hotchkiss Preparatory School in 1901. Matriculating at Yale University, he graduated in 1905 with a Bachelor of Arts degree. As a boy, Thornton Munger developed a life-long interest in natural history. His father's house in New Haven fronted on the Hillhouse Woods covering 18 acres, a natural park and plant laboratory in the heart of New Haven. Thornton spent much time in these woods collecting flowers and plant specimens and in his undergraduate years, he hiked through the extensive woods neighboring New Haven enlarging his interest

in the natural sciences. The proximity of Yale Forest School, established through the efforts of Gifford Pinchot, directed Munger's interest to forestry and in 1902, he attended a summer short course in forestry at the Pinchot estate at Milford, Pennsylvania.

Following graduation from Yale in 1905, Munger went abroad for nine months studying forestry practices in Europe. Upon his return, he entered the Yale Forest School, receiving the Master of Forestry degree in 1908. During his last term at Yale, Munger passed the federal civil service examination for Forest Assistant and was appointed to the U.S. Forest Service, reporting to the Washington, D.C. office, July 1, 1908. He was assigned to the Division of Silvics under Raphael Zon and his duties were research in nature, but chiefly conducted in the office. However, inspired by Zon, Munger became interested

in a career in forest management research that was to span half a century.

After a few months in the Washington Office, Munger was sent on his first field assignment, a study of the encroachment of lodgepole pine on the more valuable ponderosa pine in eastern Oregon. In December 1908 he was assigned to the newly created North Pacific District (District 6) of the Forest Service in charge of the section of Silvics, which widened the scope of his forest management studies. Munger became a resident of Portland, the district headquarters, and he has resided there continuously after that date.

In 1913, the Wind River Experiment Station was established near Carson, Washington. This installation became the cradle of organized forest research in the Pacific Northwest.

Munger gave general supervision to the studies conducted at Wind River. His foresight of the complex problems certain to develop in managing the extensive and nationally valuable old growth forest resources of this region led to a foundation of basic studies at Wind River which continues to guide the current progressive forest practices on public and private lands. Early attention was given the major problems of reforestation and fire protection in the Pacific Northwest. Also, at Wind River, heredity plantations of Douglas fir and ponderosa pine were established to study genetic characteristics of these important trees. Permanent sample growth and yield plots and spacing test plantations were established to provide basic data needed for second-growth management. An arboretum was installed to test and compare exotic forest tree species with indigenous species and a Douglas fir natural area was set aside to insure

future ecological studies of this important species in an undisturbed condition.

On July 1, 1924, the Pacific Northwest Forest Experiment Station was established by an act of Congress and Thornton T. Munger was named its first director. Headquarters were established in Portland and a small staff was recruited. Funds were limited and Director Munger, with traditional New England thrift, planned a program that would use available funds to the greatest advantage. At the same time, his vision recognized an inevitable expansion of research programs.

The initial technical staff was selected carefully and within a few years, study programs were expanded and work was underway regionwide. The first professional employed was Richard E. McArdle, later to become Chief of the Forest Service. Others added shortly were also to attain national prominence and included Leo A. Isaac in Douglas fir silviculture, Ernest L. Kolbe in ponderosa pine management and private forestry in the west, Dr. Walter H. Meyer in forest mensuration and forest education. Director Munger was a demanding leader insisting upon scientific integrity, precise composition or correspondence and scientific reports, scrupulous use and accounting of public funds, and overall consideration of the public interest.

During Munger's tenure as Station Director, its research activities were greatly expanded, additional experimental forests were established throughout the Northwest, new research programs planned and undertaken, and an enlarged staff of young foresters recruited and trained in experimental methods. Munger's policy was to expedite and complete studies insuring prompt

release and use of information needed by forestland managers. He personally authored many scientific publications, delivered a number of addresses and gave guest lectures at the forest schools of the Washington and Oregon universities and colleges. He would never compromise proven facts for political expediency on public forest administrative policies. In recognition of his outstanding contributions, he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Science degree by Oregon State College in 1938. Later that year, Dr. Munger, at his own request, resigned the Station Directorship to free himself of administrative tedium and became Chief of the Station Forest Management Research Division. This gave him undivided time to direct and do personal research as a climax to his career. At this time, conditions were appropriate for adoption and use of improved management practices on public and private forestlands. Munger's findings and recommendations were the basis for many improvements in forest management practices regionwide.

At the end of 1946, Dr. Munger retired after nearly forty years in the Forest Service. However, after retirement, he continued to contribute, as he was appointed as a collaborator. In this capacity, the Forest Service continued to benefit from his knowledge and experience of forest resource problems and procedures.

From his early days in Portland, Thornton Munger took an active interest in civic affairs. He was an early member of the Portland City Club, the Chamber of Commerce, and the University Club. He was a prime mover in the creation of Portland's notable Forest Park and Hoyt Arboretum. Munger was known worldwide in scientific and professional circles. He was a fellow in the Society of American Foresters and American Association

for the Advancement of Science, a member of the Ecological Society of America, Audubon Society, Northwest Scientific Association, and charter member of the Oregon Academy of Science. He was active in a number of other conservation and natural resource agencies such as the Oregon Roadside Council, Save the Myrtle Woods, Oregon Museum of Science and Industry, Western Forestry and Conservation Association, American Forestry Association, and Western Forestry Center (now the World Forestry Center) giving freely of his time and generously of his personal funds.

Although Thornton Munger was frugal in expenditures for personal pleasures, many charitable, church, and cultural institutions in Portland profited from his benefactions.