

VERNE RHOADES TRIBUTE FOR FOUNDERS DAY — OCT. 5, 2001

This Founders Day the university is honoring the late Verne Rhoades Sr., for whom the UNC Asheville science building is named. Mr. Rhoades was a pioneer forester, visionary leader, and builder of Asheville and Western North Carolina in the first 60 years of the 20th century. He was involved in many vital activities of the time that have, quite literally, shaped this region and the city as we know it today. One of the first scientific foresters in North Carolina, he played an important role in the formation and administration of Pisgah National Forest and later in the creation of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. He was a business and civic leader after his marriage in 1926 to prominent Ashevillean Dorothea Johnston Weaver.

Mr. Rhoades came here from his native Missouri with the direct purpose of attending Dr. Carl Schenck's Biltmore Forest School, the first forestry school in America. According to Mr. Rhoades' own account, he was convalescing from typhoid when his brother sent him Dr. Schenck's catalog of the school. "I read it from cover to cover, not once but many times. I had not heard of forestry before, but this outline of the life of a forester and the possibilities of a career in a pioneer profession fired my imagination as nothing else had ever done to that moment. Then and there I decided that when I regained my strength I should study at Biltmore."

After graduating in 1906 with a degree as forest engineer, Verne Rhoades worked as a U.S. Forest Service examiner, valuing the timberland that would make up the Pisgah National Forest. He was named the first supervisor of the Pisgah National Forest in 1915, and held that position for 10 years. He was appointed executive secretary of the North Carolina Park Commission, in charge of buying land for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. The

project took five years of persistent effort to acquire the acreage for what Mr. Rhoades called “one of the greatest attractions in our Southern Appalachian scenic wonderland.”

In Asheville, he served on bank, government, corporate and community boards until he was in his 80s. Verne Rhoades’ mark is everywhere around us—not only on our science building, but our main access road, a scholarship fund and the Botanical Gardens. Besides his family, perhaps Mr. Rhoades’ most personally satisfying legacy is the Cradle of Forestry in America Museum and Visitors Center at the Pink Beds. He worked tirelessly to see this project through, on the site of his own introduction to the profession of forestry and to Western North Carolina. Mr. Rhoades and the Biltmore school alumni were instrumental in working with the Forest Service in the 1960s to establish this wonderful museum that displays so effectively the rich history of our region, including Dr. Schenck’s original schoolhouse. Mr. Rhoades raised the funds to restore that building.

When Verne Rhoades died in January 1969, the *Asheville Citizen-Times* carried an editorial that said, “He had a quality of gentleness that belied his strength of purpose, and a quiet generosity that masked his essential firmness. His good works were recognized by a wide circle of friends — rich and poor, high and low — who revered him. Here truly was a Christian gentleman, always courteous, always kind, always thoughtful of others. He was one of the most beloved men who has lived in Asheville.”

The 1957 book, *The Biltmore Immortals*, which contains autobiographies of the alumni of the Biltmore forestry school, reportedly was held up in publication until Mr. Rhoades made his contribution. A classmate wrote: “I met many a fine forester, but when I met and did business with Supervisor Rhoades, I encountered a gentleman of wisdom, intelligence and fairness, one of God’s noblemen. Forestry happenings of importance taking place in North Carolina have usually shown that Verne Rhoades had been consulted.”

At the University of North Carolina at Asheville, we are proud to have one of our first buildings named for this man whose important legacy to the state and region also continues in his three children and their families. They are: Verne Rhoades Jr. of Asheville and his wife, Sally; William Weaver Rhoades and his wife, Elizabeth, and daughter; and Anne Johnston Rhoades Farquharson of Toronto and her husband, Robert H. Farquharson, and their three children; and five great-grandchildren.