

**EDWARD MERRIAM GRIFFITH**  
**1872-1939**

*"Mr. Chairman: One fact remains to be noted. We have just adopted a land use ordinance; we have our county forest, the first state forest has developed, and the plantation at Star Lake has become an attraction; we have industry forests owned by paper companies, and our recreation resources draw thousands, not only in summer. We have done everything Mr. Griffith advocated: He should have had our support."*

Ole Rimson  
November 16, 1933  
Vilas County Courthouse

Edward Merriam Griffith was born in Brooklyn, New York on February 8, 1872. He entered Yale University with the Class of 1895 as an engineering student but left school in his senior year to study forestry in Germany. There was no School of Forestry then in America.

Returning after two years of study in 1897, Griffith worked on the Biltmore estate in North Carolina to supplement his knowledge of silviculture, under the direction of Dr. Carl Schenck.

In October of 1898, Griffith was hired by Gifford Pinchot, the then Chief of the Division of Forestry in the Department of Agriculture, to promote the concept of management on the National Forest Reserves. Griffith's professional competence and ability lead to several special assignments from Pinchot to study the forest conditions in the Hawaiian Islands, the Philippine Islands, Japan, India, Austria and Germany.

Wisconsin enacted its first comprehensive forestry law in 1903. It provided for a Forestry Commission with power to appoint a State Forester whose professional qualifications required certification by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. E.M. Griffith came to Wisconsin as its first State Forester at a salary of \$2,500. He was formally

appointed on February 8, 1904 on his 32nd birthday. Thus began a decade of service to the advancement of Wisconsin forestry.

After acquainting himself with administrative procedures and acquiring a thorough knowledge of forestry conditions in Wisconsin, Griffith embarked upon a series of programs including control of forest fires, acquisition of land for the Forest Reserves, conveyance of federal lands to the state and protection of the headwaters of the streams flowing into the Mississippi River and Lake Superior.

Griffith steered through the legislation for the enactment of a forest fire control program against the wishes of an often times hostile citizenry. He then turned his attention to forest taxation which he viewed as the primary obstacle to forestry. His success in achieving remedial legislation for forest tax law reform was doomed to failure because of strong agricultural and county lobby against special treatment for growing trees. The flood of tax delinquencies that occurred two decades later forced action and proved the wisdom of Griffith's earlier efforts at tax reform.

Griffith continued to develop his foundation for forestry progress during the period 1904-1910. Establishments of state forest reserves and the state Board of Forestry to administer them were the results of Griffith's first major efforts on behalf of Wisconsin Forestry. His European experience had taught him that forests contribute other values without interfering with forest economics.

Griffith demonstrated his foresight in not only forestry but the environment when he repeatedly stressed the influences forests had upon the waters of the state with stream flow stabilization, retarding of snowmelt in the spring and ground water replenishment. He also conducted educational programs at the University of Wisconsin towards the

advancement of forestry, played a major role in the establishment of the U.S. Forest Products Laboratory on the University of Wisconsin campus, and displayed a continued interest in the establishment of a state park system sharply distinguished from forests.

During the period 1911-1915, Griffith added an additional 183,000 acres of forest to the Forest Reserves and approved the establishment of the Star Lake plantation in Vilas County - the first state plantation.

While Griffith was continuing his efforts at building and funding a statewide forestry program, opposition from educators, the lumbering interests and northern legislators grew to challenge him and his programs. Griffith saw the Wisconsin forestry problem as extending far beyond the limits of the state forest reserve. He thought of this reserve as a place where he could demonstrate that forestry was a sound and practical undertaking.

In 1915, a critical Legislative Committee report and ultimately a Supreme Court decision ruled forestry a work of internal improvement. The state laws regarding forestry and use of state funds to purchase forest reserve lands were declared illegal. All Griffith's programs except fire prevention and control, were immediately halted.

Griffith was assured that state forest land would remain forest lands, and after ten years of dedicated service, he left Wisconsin never to return again. He spent his remaining years in Connecticut and Florida, where he died on March 9, 1939 at the age of 67.

In 1921 a joint resolution for the adoption of a forestry amendment to the constitution cleared the legislature. It limited the appropriation for forestry in any one year to the identical rate Griffith and ventured to seek in 1909. Forest tax reform, state forest nurseries, land zoning, a fire control program, and a combined recreation and sustainable forest industry were all programs Griffith advocated with vision towards the industry and

people of Wisconsin. Without the support to fulfill his professional aspirations, none of Griffith's early dreams became reality during his career. Recognition of forestry as an appropriate and desirable form of land use had been his major objective.

On September 14, 1948, D. C. Everest, the then President of Marathon Corporation and later, president of the American Forestry Association, noted Griffith in his "Review of Forestry in Wisconsin" address. He remarked that Griffith was advocating a program for the perpetuation of forests back in 1909, but due to lack of vision in the men of that time, Griffith was literally "run out of the state."

E. M. Griffith received the Wisconsin Forestry Hall of Fame Award in 1984 in recognition of ten years of service as Wisconsin's first Chief State Forester. Griffith's plaque reads: "His pioneering spirit and foresight in forestry led to the development of forest reserves in northern Wisconsin, the beginning of farm woodlot research, recognition of the recreational value of Wisconsin's forests, the establishment of a state game preserve and development of a State Parks system." It is clear to see that Griffith's past efforts and contemporary thinking form the basis for forestry in Wisconsin today.

Sources:

Edward Merriam Griffith. Unpublished biographies received from Dr. Earl Spangenberg. UW-SP. October 1990.

Department of Natural Resources. E. M. Griffith and the early story of Wisconsin Forestry (1903-1915). Madison WI. 1982.

E. M. Griffith. Forestry Hall of Fame Plaque. College of Natural Resources. UW-SP. 1984.

EDWARD MERRIAM GRIFFITH

- BIRTH: February 8, 1872 in Brooklyn, New York
- DEATH: Died March 9, 1939 of coronary thrombosis at Ormond Beach, Florida
- MARRIAGE: to Alice Dunne on March 14, 1916 (died 1943)  
-one son (died 1954), 2 grandchildren
- EDUCATION: Kings School at Stamford, Connecticut  
prepared for college at Phillips-Andover  
Yale University, engineering course  
-he left his senior year to attend a German forestry school (America did not have any forestry schools at this time)
- CAREER:
- 1897 -worked without pay on the Biltmore estate in North Carolina under the direction of Dr. Carl Schenck; Schenck helped E.M.'s qualifications as a forester, and E.M. helped Schenck with his English
- 1898 -in October 1898, E.M. was hired by Gifford Pinchot to promote the concept of management on the national forest reserves  
-E.M. had special assignments in the Hawaiian Islands the Philippine Islands, Japan, India, Austria, and Germany to study the forest conditions
- 1904-15 -under Wisconsin's first comprehensive forestry law (1903) the Forestry Commission could hire a State Forester certified by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. E.M. became Wisconsin's first State Forester for a yearly salary of \$2,500.
- 1915-16 -consultant to the Taggart Paper Co. of Watertown, New York
- 1916 -retired to Merrifield, his country estate near Roxbury, Connecticut; his winter home was at Ormond Beach, Florida

PROJECTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS AS WISCONSIN'S FIRST STATE FORESTER:

\*Began and continued many programs including: the control of forest fires, acquisition of land for the Forest Reserves, transfer of federal lands to the State, and protection of the headwaters of the streams flowing into the Mississippi River and Lake Superior.

\*He viewed forest taxation as the primary obstacle to forestry.

- tried to get tax reform legislation passed, but was defeated due to a strong agricultural and county lobby against special treatment for growing trees

\*During the period of 1904-10, E.M. continued developing the foundation for forestry progress.

- he stressed the positive influences forests had on the waters of the state with stream flow stabilization, slowing snowmelt in the spring, and replenishing ground-water supplies

- E.M. conducted educational programs at the University of Wisconsin - Madison to promote forestry

- E.M. played a major role in the establishment of the U.S. Forest Products Lab at the UW-Madison campus

- he believed in establishing a state park system distinctly distinguished from state forests

\*Between 1911-1915:

- E.M. established the first forestry headquarters and nursery at Trout Lake

- hired first staff of rangers

- secured (for the State) all unsurveyed and unallocated islands in inland lakes north of Township 33

- added 183,000 acres of forest to the Forest Reserves

- approved the establishment of the Star Lake Plantation in Vilas county, the first plantation in the state

\*During this time, opposition from educators, lumber companies, and northern legislators built up. They challenged E.M. and his programs. Finally, a Supreme Court decision ruled that state laws concerning forestry and the use of state funds to buy forest reserve lands were illegal because forestry was a work of internal improvement. This halted all of Griffith's programs.

- forest fire prevention and control was not part of this court decision

- so, in the spring of 1915, E.M. became the first professional forester to use airplanes (in this case, a Curtis flying boat) to detect forest fires

\*The programs for funding forestry, forest tax reforms, land zoning, fire control, forest nurseries, a sustainable

forestry industry, and a recreational forest industry (ie. parks) were programs that Griffith supported and tried to make happen. These programs are now the basis of Wisconsin forestry.