

George M. Hunt and the Forest Products Laboratory

By RAFAEL MOLINO

Mr. George M. Hunt, adviser and consultant to the new Forest Products Laboratory at the Forestry Campus, College, Laguna, finished his Bachelor of Science in Chemistry at the University of California. He passed the Board in 1911 and was immediately assigned to the U.S. Forest Service at San Francisco. In 1913, he was transferred to the Forest Products Laboratory at Madison, Wisconsin. For many years, he was Chief of the Division of Wood Preservation of the Laboratory and in 1946, he became Director of the entire Laboratory which, at that time, had over 500 employees. He retired in 1951 after 40 years of service. He remained for two years longer, however, as a consultant.

Sometime last year the United Nations' Food and Agricultural Organization headquarters at Rome cabled him, asking him if he is interested in coming to the Philippines as an adviser and consultant to the Philippine Forest Products Laboratory. His reply was favorable and Mr. Hunt arrived here last April, 1954. He has at present a temporary office at the Division of Forest Investigation pending the completion of the new Forest Products Laboratory building. Here, he will assist in building up the Laboratory's equipment, organizing its staff and starting the program of research. Among the many problems to be tackled after the building is finished, he pointed out the following:

1. Preparation of a long list of additional equipment and apparatus.
2. Beginning the organization of the staff. This will be small at first but is expected to grow during the year.

3. Applications for jobs. There are more applicants than the available positions can accommodate. These positions need technically trained men but most applicants do not have the required training and experience.

4. The problem of installing the machines after the building is finished.

5. The problem of using the equipment after it is installed, and the staff, to produce research results.

"The Philippines," he pointed out, "long has needed such an institution and now that she has it, it must diligently work to serve the country's need. Only a few of the 3,000 species of trees in the Philippines are being commercially used. In the United States, there are only about 400 to 500 species to choose from."

"Among the objectives of the Forest Products Laboratory is to learn the different properties of Philippine woods, how they compare with each other and with the woods of other countries, and what they can be used for. Most of the Philippine woods are short-fibered. If we can only find long-fibered hardwoods to mix with the short-fibered, it would be a good combination for the manufacture of pulp and paper and thus make the Philippines more nearly self-supporting in the field."

"In the Philippines," he said, "we have not found a wood that can compare with the American Hickory for toughness. But with so many species to select from, I hope we can find one for it will be very useful for tool handles and other purposes where toughness is of great importance."

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who patiently followed the progress of the bill from day to day in Congress; the alumni and friends who wrote and spoke to their Congressmen in behalf of the Bill; and to all who do not wish their names to be mentioned and who in one way or another also helped in the passage and implementation of the Bill.

House Bill No. 324 eventually became Republic Act No. 989 upon its signing by President Magsaysay on June 2, 1954.

When the Forester-in-Charge went to see the President of the University of the Philippines to show him the certification of the Budget Commissioner for the release of the counterpart fund as embodied in Act No. 989, which after so much red tape, was obtained through the explanation of Dr. Paul Bedard, FOA technical adviser to the Bureau, Dr. Tan said, "Congratulations to the faculty, alumni, and student body for their wonderful work. Such a small school to be able to lobby in Congress and get money for its new building, deserves my heartiest congratulations. I was skeptical that you would succeed. As a matter of fact, at the very beginning, I had a feeling that the bill was bound to fail in Congress."

And when the new and beautiful building shall open its doors to welcome the honored guests and the alumni at its inauguration ceremonies, we shall tell again how a small college, so often called the "Forgotten College" in the past, took a chance when it presented a bill asking for the counterpart fund. Nobody then gave it a Chinaman's chance that it would succeed, for Congress was believed to be at the time in no mood to tax the already taxed purse strings of the government. Perhaps the congressmen realized the importance of our College and its graduates to the national economy. And the lobbying done merely consisted of writing and speaking and convincing everyone of them that the bill vitally affected the training of young men who would be entrusted to carry on the task of conserving our forest resources, one of the most important assets of our national economy.

This is the simple story of how a small College left to struggle for itself was able to get what it wanted. It is also the story of its alumni, their love for their Alma Mater and their loyalty to it. It is also the story of faith, patience, courage and prayer answered.

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When asked for suggestions to solve these problems and make the Forest Products Laboratory efficient, he said, "This is an institution that will be in operation for 100 or more years and its work will never be finished. As present problems are solved, new problems will arise, just as in other fields of research. The cost of wood will change and so will the economic and industrial condition of the country. Wood will become increasingly important as a source of raw material for the chemical industries. The Laboratory must always be a pioneer in these developments.

"The Laboratory, in order to accomplish its purposes, must have a staff of competent

people who are devoted to their tasks and who work together in harmony as a team. It must have good equipment. It must have enough money to operate at a reasonable level. It must have good leadership and freedom to concentrate on technical tasks without regard to politics. Since there are very few people in the nation who are trained for forest products research, the early years of the Laboratory must be training years.

"In the beginning, the staff will consist of only 30 to 40 people but it should grow fairly rapidly and ultimately may have from 100 to 200. The wood utilization problems of the country are big enough and broad enough to keep such a staff occupied indefinitely."