

2018 Forest Service Retirees National Reunion

Final Report

On June 3, 2015, the Southern Forest Service Retirees Association (SFSRA) approved a recommendation and motion to request from the National Museum of Forest Service History that the SFSRA host the Eighth National Reunion of Forest Service Retirees in Asheville, North Carolina, the last week in September 2018. (Note: the NMFSH is the “keeper of the queue for Reunion hosts.) The SFSRA membership appointed Dave Jolly and Sid Haggard as Co-Chairs. Since that approval 3 ½ years ago a lot of work has gone into making it happen. Along with Dave and Sid, there has been more than 30 people involved spending their time and sometime personal funds to ensure the Reunion would be one of the best ever.

The week of September 20, 2018, about 450 retirees, employees, and friends met in Asheville for the Reunion At The Cradle. With a theme of “Rediscovering the Birthplace of Forestry in the United States” they reconnected with old friends and co-workers, heard presentations about the early beginnings of the Forest Service, and visited sites in the Asheville area. There were stories and history of the Pinchot family shared by Bibi Gaston, a great-grandniece of Gifford Pinchot. She shared untold stories of brave souls who launched the American Conservation Movement. They also heard from Chase Pickering, a great-great-grandson of George Vanderbilt. As a fifth generation family owner of Biltmore, he shared his family’s mission to preserve Biltmore as a conservation effort. These two speakers set the stage for the week for exploring the Cradle of Forestry in America, the Birthplace of science-based forest management in the U. S. Everybody enjoyed a presentation by Lisa Tate, Executive Director of the National Museum of Forest Service History. She shared recent happenings with the Museum which will include a premier virtual exhibit which is now available to view at www.forestservicemuseum.org

There were two field trips: One to the Cradle of Forestry which included a visit to the Blue Ridge Parkway Visitor Center and to the Cradle located on the Pisgah NF. The group learned about Carl Schenck and saw his first American forestry school in Pisgah. This unique tour showcased the culture and music of the Southern Appalachian Mountains. A luncheon of local taste treats followed by a local musician and story teller was also included. Great stories, all in attendance won’t soon forget!

The second field trip was Biltmore Behind the Gate Tour which took folks behind locked gates to explore conservation history connections with Gifford Pinchot and Carl Schenck, who established the first American forestry school on the Biltmore property. This tour also included the Mansion, gardens, and highlighted a limited engagement of Chihuly Glasswork.

A highlight of the week was the banquet on Thursday evening that featured the Bailey Mountain Cloggers from Mars Hills College in the Mountains near Asheville. They even taught some brave folks to Clog—our group has talent!!

Friday morning saw a tired, but happy group sad to say “Goodbye” to those they had reconnected with during the week. The Southern Forest Service Retirees Association closed out the Reunion

by passing the baton and a \$5,000 check to the 2021 Reunion Hostess, Nancy Gibson. The 2021 Forest Service Retirees National Reunion will be held September 13-17, 2021, at Harrah's Lake Tahoe, Stateline, NV. It was a great week that was enjoyed by everyone.

The Reunion was also very successful financially. While there were no plans to raise money for the SFSRA, the Reunion included a fundraiser for the National Museum of Forest Service History. The Silent Auction, which included items donated by many people, netted over \$7,800. There were several monetary donations made to the Museum. Others made donations to help with the expenses of the Reunion. The registration fees paid for the food and other Crowne Plaza Resort expenses. In the end the Museum received a check for \$24,341.87. The Southern Forest Service Retirees Association received \$13,057.47.

By any measurement, the Eighth Forest Service Retirees National Reunion was a huge success. Many thanks to all of the volunteers that made it possible.

December 14, 2018