

10-2002

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### Recommended Citation

Baker, Robert D. (2002) "Two Who Stood Tall in the East Texas Piney Woods," *East Texas Historical Journal*: Vol. 40: Iss. 2, Article 8.  
Available at: <http://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj/vol40/iss2/8>

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## TWO WHO STOOD TALL IN THE EAST TEXAS PINEY WOODS

*by Robert D. Baker*

Two academics at Stephen F. Austin State University during the second half of the twentieth century stood tall in recording the history of forests and forestry in East Texas. One was my neighbor for twelve years and the other was my boss for eleven years. I worked with them closely and marveled at their dedication to the history of the piney woods and their ability to make it come alive. Dr. Robert S. (Bob) Maxwell, a professional historian, and Dr. Laurence C. (Larry) Walker, a professional forester and an avid lay historian, both former teachers and administrators at Stephen F. Austin State University, exhibited a deep interest in East Texas forests and their history.

**Dr. Robert S. Maxwell** was born in Newport, Kentucky, on November



26, 1911. He attended public schools in Kentucky, received an undergraduate degree from Kentucky Wesleyan College, and taught high school for four years. Maxwell obtained a master's degree at the University of Cincinnati, then taught at Missouri Military Academy. Between 1942 and 1946 he served in the U.S. Army in Europe, mustering out just before V-E Day. He had already begun graduate work toward a Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin and, upon returning, resumed his academic pursuits and obtained a doctorate in history in 1949. From 1950 to 1952 he taught history at the

University of Kentucky, and arrived at Stephen F. Austin State College in the fall of 1952.

Although research did not have a high priority at Stephen F. Austin State in those years – it was primarily a teachers' training college – school president Paul F. Boynton was delighted when faculty members involved themselves in research as well as teaching, and Dr. Maxwell was accustomed to doing just that. In 1953 Dr. Boynton presided over the creation of the Bureau of East Texas Research, and Dr. Maxwell was named its first director. This allowed for a reduced teaching load, and he embarked upon a number of projects. Among the most significant of these was acquiring the records of several East Texas lumber companies, which laid the foundation for one of the foremost archival

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collections of its kind in the United States at the Stephen F. Austin State library. The major contributors and some of the dates of acquisition of Texas lumber industry records were Angelina County Lumber Company (1955 and 1966); W.T. Carter & Bro. Lumber Company (1996); Chronister Lumber Company, Frost-Johnson Company, and Kirby Lumber Company (1970); Lutcher & Moore Lumber Company (1972); and Newton County Lumber Company, Southern Pine Lumber Company, and Thompson Bros. Lumber Company (1987). The author has visited these forest history collections 120 times since 1990.

These archival records formed the basis of Dr. Maxwell's noteworthy efforts in documenting the history of early East Texas forests, forestry, and the forest industry, as well as the transportation of primary and secondary forest products. The results were an impressive body of publications, academic papers, and presentations on East Texas forest history. Dr. Maxwell received a Fulbright award to England in 1960 and was designated as a Distinguished Professor in 1966. He was named a fellow of the Forest History Society in 1972, and served as president of the East Texas Historical Association from 1973 to 1974. He was the first recipient of the Regents Professor for Research award in 1980 from Stephen F. Austin State University, and was honored with the Ralph W. Steen Award for service to the East Texas Historical Association in 1983. When he retired in 1983 he had written or collaborated on three forest history books; after retirement he contributed three additional books.

Among his books and articles on East Texas forest history are the following:

"The First Big Mill: The Beginnings of Commercial Lumbering in Texas." *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, July 1982.

"Lumbermen of the East Texas Frontier." *Forest History*, April 1965.

"Manuscript Collections at Stephen F. Austin State College." *The American Archivist*, July 1965.

"One Man's Legacy: W. Goodrich Jones and Texas Conservation." *Southwestern Historical Journal*, January 1974.

"The Pines of Texas: A Study in Lumbering and Public Policy." *East Texas Historical Journal*, Fall 1964.

*Sawdust Empire: The History of the East Texas Lumber Industry, 1830-1940.* With Robert D. Baker, 1983. Winner of the Texas Historical Commission's Best Regional History Publication award, 1983.

*A Short History of Forest Conservation in Texas, 1880-1940.* With James W. Martin, 1970.

*Whistle in the Piney Woods: Paul Bremond and the Houston, East and West Texas Railway,* 1963. Winner of L. R. Bryan, Jr., award.

Dr. Robert S. Maxwell died December 29, 1990. To honor his contributions, and in fitting tribute to his legacy, *Whistle in the Piney Woods:*

*A Symposium on Railroads and Logging in East Texas*, was held October 18, 1997, at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches. The title, of course, was from Dr. Maxwell's 1963 publication of that name. Dr. Archie P. McDonald, executive director of the East Texas Historical Association, opened the symposium with a tribute to the pioneering forest historian. The inside cover of the program presented photos of Dr. Maxwell and a woods train, as well as a quotation from *Whistle in the Piney Woods*, which was reprinted for this occasion.

**Dr. Laurence C. (Larry) Walker** was born in Washington, D.C., September 8, 1924. As a youth he joined the Boy Scouts, which provided him a lifelong sense of dedication and perseverance. He earned the rank of Eagle Scout and continued in scouting, accumulating numerous awards including the Silver Antelope and the Distinguished Eagle Scout for service to the forestry profession.



In 1943, while a student at Pennsylvania State University, Dr. Walker was called up from the enlisted reserves, took basic training at Camp Fannin in Northeast Texas, and served a stint at Washington & Jefferson College in western Pennsylvania. He was then stationed in Europe, even

past V-E Day, as a member of the occupation forces before returning to continue his education. He earned a BS degree at Penn State, a master of forestry at Yale University, and in 1953 a Ph.D. at New York State University College of Forestry. He did not pursue these degrees consecutively, but worked between his studies for the USDA Forest Service as an assistant district ranger on the Sabine National Forest and as a research forester at Brewton, Alabama.

Dr. Walker began his teaching career in 1954 at the University of Georgia, and moved to Stephen F. Austin State College in September 1963 as head of the Department of Forestry. There were fewer than 100 forestry majors when he took over, but when he retired as dean of the College of Forestry in 1977 there were more than 1,000 majors. He was the Lacy Hunt Professor of Forestry until his retirement from teaching in 1988.

Dr. Walker was instrumental in continuing the pamphlet collection of the Forestry Library, housed in the Department of Forestry, and insuring its permanence in 1965 when it moved to the college library. The collection contains many East Texas forest history items.

The Texas Society of American Foresters, for which he chaired numerous committees, honored him in 1999 by renaming the Distinguished Service to Forestry Award as the Laurence C. Walker Distinguished Service to Forestry Award. Dr. Walker had received the award in 1968.

Dr. Walker was a prolific author. His repertoire ranged widely, including history, silviculture, forest fertilization, Texas timber economy, and other topics. He was a frequent contributor to the *Farmer-Stockman* from 1971 through 1985. He also conducted oral history interviews with many individuals made famous by the East Texas timber trade. Those included Paul Hursey, Don Young, Joe McPherson, W. E. Merrem, Ed Prud'homme, "Andy" Anderson, and Caton Carter.

Among Dr. Walker's books and articles are the following on East Texas forest history:

*Axes, Oxen, and Men*, 1975. Pictorial history of the early days of the Southern Pine Lumber Company.

*Excelsior: Memoir of a Forester*, 1995. Autobiography.

"Four Who Counted." *East Texas Historical Journal*, Fall 1991.

*The Southern Forest: A Chronicle*, 1991.

*The Southern Forest: Geography, Ecology, and Silviculture*, 1996.

"Young: Early Professional Forester in Texas." *Texas Forestry*, May 1982.

"Camp Fannin: A Reminiscence." *East Texas Historical Journal*, Fall 1999.

Bob Currie paid Larry the ultimate compliment in his article, "Trail Blazers: Laurence C. Walker," in *Texas Forestry*, March 1988. The sentence that exemplifies what Dr. Walker meant to East Texas reads: "Dr. Laurence (Larry) Walker of Nacogdoches, is a good steward, well known in the field of forestry, but possibly destined to be recognized as an even better steward of life." Dr. Laurence C. Walker died July 26, 1999.

I knew both Dr. Maxwell and Dr. Walker well. I worked with each of them and understood their intense devotion to their professions. Not only did they stand tall in their professions and in their published remembrances of East Texas forests and forestry, but tall in their fights against cancer. Neither gave the disease any quarter, confronting it head-on in a positive manner. They then served as character models for me when I, too, was diagnosed with cancer.