George W. Peavy (1869-1951)

George Wilcox Peavy was dean of the School of Forestry at Oregon State College (now Oregon State University) and later served as OSC president (1934-1940) and mayor of Corvallis (1947-1951).

Born on November 12, 1869, near Howell, Michigan, Peavy attended the University of Michigan from 1890 to 1895, graduating with a bachelor's degree in science. After teaching in Michigan schools and working as a newspaper editor, he studied forestry at the University of Michigan, earning a master's degree in 1905. He worked for the U.S. Forest Service in California from 1905 to 1910, where his work included reforestation experimentation.

When the Oregon Agricultural College established a Forestry Department in 1910, Peavy was hired to direct the program. He was named dean in 1913 when the department was made a school. During his tenure, the School of Forestry became one of the most highly regarded in the nation. In 1934, a KOAC radio script noted that Peavy "developed the school of forestry from an abstract idea to a degree-granting institution equipped with modern laboratory facilities and owning experimental tracts of 5,400 acres" of forestland across Oregon. Under Peavy's leadership, the School of Forestry developed an arboretum in 1925, named for Peavy in 1926. Subsequent forestland purchases and gifts, often negotiated by Peavy, established the nucleus of the school's research forests, including several thousand acres purchased with funds donated by Mary J.L. McDonald of San Francisco.

Peavy served on the Oregon State Board of Forestry from 1911 to 1941, "from its ineffective, halting beginnings to a highly respected and competent arm of State government," one history of OSC reports. He wrote several bulletins on behalf of the board, including *The Forests of Oregon: Their Importance to the State* (1911); *Oregon's Commercial Forests: Their Importance to the State* (1929); and *Tree Planting on Oregon Farms* (1930). Peavy was assistant editor of the *Journal of Forestry* in 1930, a member of the Xi Sigma Pi forestry honor society and the Phi Kappa Phi academic honor society, and a fellow of the Society of American Foresters. In 1926, he was selected by the western division of the Society of American Foresters as its representative to the first World Forestry Congress, held in Rome.

When OSC's president, William Jasper Kerr, was named the first chancellor of the Oregon State System of Higher Education in September 1932, Peavy became acting president of the college. In 1934, he was named OSC's seventh president and served as both college president and dean of forestry until his retirement in 1940. During Peavy's tenure as president, OSC conferred its first doctoral degrees (1935) and established professional engineering degrees. He guided the college through the administrative restructuring that resulted from the establishment of the State System of Higher Education and the diminishment of economic resources during the Great Depression.

Peavy received honorary degrees from Michigan in 1936 and from Willamette University in 1937, and he was appointed Benton County's civil defense coordinator during World War II. He was mayor of Corvallis from 1947 to 1951. During his tenure, Corvallis adopted a council-manager form of government, acquired its present airport from the federal government, and expanded its water and wastewater treatment facilities. Peavy served as president of the League of Oregon Cities in 1949.

Peavy married Leona Bradley in 1894; they had three sons. He died in Corvallis on June 24, 1951. His personal papers are held by the OSU Archives.

Written by Larry Landis

Further Reading:

"George Wilcox Peavy." *Who's Who in the Faculties Series.* Corvallis, Ore.: Radio Station KOAC, 1934.

50 Years of Forestry at Oregon State College. Corvallis: Oregon State College, 1956.

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