

## Delaneys of Woodworth: Innovative forestry for decades

By Jim Barnett and Anna Burns

In 1913, the Delaney family purchased about 200 acres of land from the Ashton Plantation near Woodworth. Thus began nearly a century of leadership in developing and applying innovative forestry technologies.

T.R. Delaney and sons Charles and Luther grew alfalfa hay and shipped it by rail, via a railroad spur that extended from the property to Woodworth to sell it to logging camps. Hay was in demand to feed horses, mules and oxen used in logging operations. It was during this time that the Delaneys observed the need for reforestation of large areas of cutover forests.

An uncle of Charles and Luther, J.M. Delaney, was superintendent of the high school at Lamourie in the late 1910s and traveled to school using a hand-powered rail cart from his home near Woodworth. The students frequently hid the cart and his trip home was delayed until he could find and retrieve it.

With the establishment of the Alexander State Forest in 1923, both

Charles and Luther, who had served in WWI, accepted positions with the Forestry Division, Department of Conservation, to begin developing the state forest.

The initial 2,200 acres of land for the state forest was acquired from H.S. Burrowes. Somewhat later, additional acreage was purchased from the Ashton Plantation. This latter portion, adjacent to the Delaney property, became the headquarters for the forest.

Much of the state forest land had been in agriculture and needed reforestation. A nursery was established in the late-1920s to provide tree seedlings for planting.

Luther Delaney became the first manager of a state tree-seedling nursery in the South. He had little formal education, but had a farm background and understood growing of plants. Philip Wakeley and other Forest Service, Southern Forest Experiment Station specialists provided technical information for seedling production and nursery management as it was developed. Soon Luther led the nursery to become a pioneer in producing tree

seedlings in the South.

Since there was no public housing on or nearby the state forest, visitors who needed overnight housing stayed in the home of either Charles or Luther. This provided for some interesting and productive interactions with visiting professionals.

One of Derwood's favorite recollections as a young boy was when during a severe thunderstorm, the big family dog became so frightened of the thunder that he burst through a window and into the bed of the visiting state forester and his wife.

Charles was hired as forest superintendent and served in that position until 1933 when a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp was established on the state forest. Camp S-63, comprised of nearly 200 World War I veterans, was organized and supervised by U.S. Army personnel.

BELOW: Charles (left) and Luther Delaney (bent over) examine seedlings with Paul Siggers, Southern Forest Experiment Station (hidden), W.R. Hine, State Forester (center), and N.D. Canterbury, Asst. State Forester.



Although Army officers were in charge of administering the camp, their responsibility did not extend to the work projects. These were managed by a project superintendent and foremen, who were assigned by the sponsoring agency, in this case the Division of Forestry, Department of Conservation. Charles Delaney was chosen as the CCC Project Superintendent.

Charles was an effective and highly respected CCC Project Superintendent. Under his leadership the enrollees constructed two nurseries, 33 bridges, 100 miles of fencing with cross-tie posts, 12 fish and bird ponds, 50 miles of gravel roads, five miles of telephone lines, 28 miles of firebreaks, and the world's tallest lookout tower.

These things were done while planting six million tree seedlings and building Leche Lodge (named after Governor Richard W. Leche), the log building used as the headquarters for the Army and Project Superintendent during the CCC era and later for the state forest.

Charles held Project Superintendent position until the camp closed about six years later. He then returned to the position of superintendent of the Alexander State Forest.

Both Charles and Luther had sons that followed their fathers' forestry interests. Charles' son, Charles F. Delaney, Jr., obtained a forestry degree from LSU after serving in WWII and joined the Louisiana Forestry Commission in the late-1940s. After other positions, he was assigned to the state forest at Woodworth where he followed in his father's footsteps and became superintendent of the forestry program.

He did well and State Forester Jim Mixon was grooming him for the position of state forester when Charlie developed multiple sclerosis and died at an early age.

Luther's son, Derwood, was determined neither to enter forestry nor to become a state employee. The experience of his parents in the era of Huey Long's governorship when payroll checks were delayed for months and when Gov. Long withheld a "deduct" from the checks to



Charles Delaney in the 1920s is shown with a tumbler to extract seeds from cones dried in the log building.



Luther Delaney (left) leads a tree planting crew of CCC foremen.

cover his election campaign expenses made him want to avoid such distressing situations. So, Derwood attended LSU and graduated with a degree in animal husbandry.

However, after graduating and serving a stint in the Army, Derwood accepted a position in 1958 with Howell Cobb in his newly established American Forest Seed Company. Cobb promoted the company and developed customers, while Derwood worked to develop seed collecting, processing, and storing technology on an operational scale.

Direct seeding of southern pines became a widely accepted method of regenerating large acreages of cutover land, but required huge quantities of pine seeds. The seed company quickly expanded its production to meet this need.

Shortly before his untimely death, Howell Cobb sold his seed company to International Forest Seed Company and Derwood remained as their manager for several years. In 1983, Derwood established the Louisiana Forest Seed Company on family land near Woodworth. He is fortunate to have two sons who were interested in the business. John Delaney, the older of the two, is mechanically inclined and has developed seed cleaning technology that has revolutionized forest seed processing.

Baldcypress seeds, which normally have only 35 to 40 percent viability, can be improved to over 85 percent germination by use of new seed processing equipment and techniques.

Yellow-poplar seeds which usually have the dismal viability of 6 to 10 percent can also be improved to over 85 per-

cent germination. A quantity of yellow-poplar seeds requiring an 18-wheel truck for transport when processed can be shipped back in a pick-up truck. These are examples of the innovative seed processing done by Louisiana Forest Seed Company.

Gary Delaney, who is trained in business and finance, now oversees the business aspects of the company and works to expand markets. The company sells forest seeds worldwide and continues to expand the number of species processed and handled for sale.

Originally the company processed only southern pine seeds, but now has diversified to collect and process seeds of over 200 species of forest trees, shrubs, and understory plants. Sales of these more non-traditional species now account for about 75 percent of their company's business.

The Delaneys are dedicated to providing seeds of high quality regardless of species. This has resulted in the Louisiana Forest Seed Company becoming one of the premier forest seed companies in the nation and world. There is



Derwood Delaney (center) is shown with sons, John (left) and Gary in this early business shot.

hope that additional generations of Delaneys will continue the standards of excellence carried out by this family over the last century.

*(Dr. Jim Barnett is an Emeritus Scientist with the U.S. Forest Service. Dr.*

*Anna Burns is a respected author specializing in forest history.)*

*(The Delaneys can be reached at Louisiana Forest Seed at (318) 443-5026.)*

## School of Renewable Natural Resources

Researching and teaching ways to improve our environment since 1928.



An Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer



*This is my office.  
What does yours look like?*

[www.rnr.lsu.edu](http://www.rnr.lsu.edu)