

*The following passage was adapted from a chapter in Dr. James Fickle's book entitled Mississippi Forests and Forestry available from the University Press of Mississippi. Fickle was commended by the Mississippi Historical Society for significant contributions that increase the knowledge and awareness of our past through publications related to Mississippi history.*

# EARLY FORESTRY IN THE SOUTH AND IN MISSISSIPPI

**I**n the early-twentieth-century southern lumber industry, timberland was acquired at relatively low prices, large mills were constructed, and the operations were based on getting a rapid cut to pay interest, dividends, and taxes and to depreciate the plant on the theory that everything—plant, railroad rolling stock, equipment,

town, and so on—would be liquidated when the last tree was cut. The prevailing attitude was summed up in 1919 by the general sales agent of the powerful Kirby Lumber Company, which operated in Texas and Louisiana. "As a lumberman," said he, "my interest in forestry is nil. . . . When the lumberman of today saws the trees he owns and scraps his plant, his capital will enable him to become the banker, the ranchman, or the manufacturer of some other commodity."<sup>1</sup>

Most lumbermen were not convinced that forest management made sense economically. J. B. White, one of the most influential leaders of the southern pine industry, delivered an address to the American Forestry Association in 1912 at Biltmore, the cradle of American forestry. But after paying homage to Vanderbilt, Pinchot, Schenck, and others associated with the Biltmore efforts, White concluded, "Conservation of natural resources comes only when it is discovered where and how it will

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