

# Gilbert A. Martin



Gilbert A. Martin (dec.) was born in 1905 in Watson, Marion County. He attended Union School and graduated Fairmont Senior High School in 1924. He attended WVU for two years, then transferred to Fairmont State College, which he graduated from in 1928 with a degree in Industrial Arts.

He began teaching that year at Koon's Run School at a salary of \$150 a month, moving to Barrackville High School and the Miller School in subsequent years. He continued working in the Marion County School System, serving as head of maintenance and transportation, eventually retiring as assistant superintendent in 1964.

He also was a pioneer in the Christmas tree industry. In 1930, he received 4,000 seedlings as part of a Depression-era program. By the early-1960s, he had more than 25,000 trees for sale and employed approximately 20 full- and part-time employees.

Commercial Christmas tree farming at the time was in its infancy, with little in the way of organization, methods or tools. Over the years, Martin developed a variety of machines to improve production and marketing of trees.

In the early 1950s, he designed and built a drilling machine that augured a hole in the center of the tree base, enabling it to be quickly and effectively set on a stand with a centered screw. He also developed a stand for home use, which allowed the tree to stand straight regardless of trunk form. Around the same time, he built a tree-planting machine that could be pulled behind a tractor and perfected a tree baling machine that allowed tree to be efficiently compacted for transportation. One of these machines is still in use today on the Martin farm. Variations of his inventions are common today on tree farms across the country. However, none of these designs were ever patented.

His impact on the industry was not related merely to hardware, though. In 1953, Martin helped to form and was elected the first president of the West Virginia Christmas Tree Growers Association (WVCTGA). Two years later in Columbus,

Ohio, Martin was elected the first treasurer of newly minted National Christmas Tree Association.

In the summer of 1956, the Martin Farm hosted the summer meeting of the WVCTGA. In 2014, Martin's Mt. Zion Nursery hosted the WVCTGA's 60th annual summer farm tour.

He also worked closely with WVU forestry professors, opening his farm to students, and helping the teachers to better understand Christmas tree farming. A number of visitors later developed Christmas tree farms of their own.

He was a strong supporter of the Mountain State Forest Festival and a member of the Church of Christ.