

George D. Curtin, Sr.



George D. Curtin, Sr., born in Sutton, W.Va., January 24, 1892, received a Master of Forestry degree from Yale University in 1916, making him the first West Virginian and one of the first Americans to be a college-trained, professional forester. After graduation from Yale, he served overseas during World War I. After the War, he joined his family's lumber business in central West Virginia.

He first made his mark as a forester-businessman in 1925, when his intense lobbying of the West Virginia Legislature for forest fire protection led to the initiation of systematic, professional forest fire protection efforts, including many of the first fire towers in the nation. It was through his visionary efforts that the West Virginia Game and Fish Commission became the Game, Fish, and Forestry Commission in 1929. (The agency ultimately became known as the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources.) As one of three appointed commissioners with the organization, Mr. Curtin was instrumental in hiring a technically trained forester to be Chief Forester for the state.

He urged the West Virginia Legislature to use 25 percent of hunting and fishing license fees to support the West Virginia Forestry Department, a move that served as the unit's base funding through the early 1960s. This was a pivotal move in initiating the practice of professional forestry in the state. Both as commissioner and woodland and mill owner, Mr. Curtin talked the forest industry into organizing a West Virginia General Forestry Committee to assist in the development of commercial forestry as an ongoing industry. He led the organization of the first West Virginia Commercial Forestry Conference in 1929.

He was the third generation of Curtins to manage the family's lumber business. His grandfather, George W. Curtin, moved the operation from Pennsylvania to the Grafton, W.Va., area in 1873, and to Nicholas County in 1890. George W. Curtin incorporated the Pardee and Curtin Lumber Company. His son, Harry B. Curtin, served as general manager of the company, and then passed the reins to his son, George Sr. The company's historically significant mill at Bergoo in Webster County opened in 1928 and produced more than 200 million board feet of quality hardwood lumber.

Mr. Curtin also operated underground coal mines, producing more than 23 million tons. He passed away in 1967 in Clarksburg, W.Va.