

# Ralph Sheldon Hosmer

*March 4, 1874 — July 19, 1963*

Ralph Sheldon Hosmer was born March 4, 1874, at Deerfield, Massachusetts, the son of the Reverend George Herbert and Julia West (Sheldon) Hosmer. His death occurred July 19, 1963.

After completing his preparatory education, two years of which were at the Boston Latin School, he entered Harvard University from which he was graduated in 1894 with the B.A.S. degree. He spent an additional year at Harvard and then started in 1896 a career in government service that lasted until 1914.

His first government position was with the Division of Soils during the period May 1896, to November 1898. In the latter year, he became interested in Forestry through the influence of Gifford Pinchot, and, as a result, transferred his activities to the Division of Forestry, then just reorganized under Mr. Pinchot. Forestry was new and strange to the United States.

His early work in the field was spent principally in the Adirondacks and the White Mountains. After several years with Pinchot, Hosmer took a leave of absence to attend the newly established Yale School of Forestry, obtaining his Master of Forestry Degree in 1902. He was a member of the first class to be graduated from this School. He returned to his position with the government but stayed only until 1904, when he left for Hawaii to become the first Superintendent of Forestry of the Division established there in 1903. This position was held until he returned in 1914 to become Professor of Forestry and head of the Department of Forestry established in 1910 at New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell University. This position Professor Hosmer held until July 1942, when he retired from active service and was made Professor Emeritus of Forestry.

It was on December 30, 1913 that Ralph Hosmer was married to Jessie Nash Irwin; three children were born, David Irwin, Jane Sheldon (Mrs. Robert Hall Llewellyn), and Emily Francis (Mrs. Marc Daniels).

Only those who were associated intimately with Professor Hosmer know of his loyalty and devotion to forestry, his warm personality, extraordinarily generous nature, and his fair dealings with everyone.

He was one of the seven charter members of the Society of American Foresters and was the last living member of this group. He served as the president of the Society in 1923, was made a fellow soon after the grade was established, has been active on innumerable committees, and has prepared historical summaries of great and lasting value to

the Society. Especially noteworthy in Society affairs was the award to him in 1950 of the Sir William Schlich Memorial Forestry Medal. This award gave Professor Hosmer great pleasure.

A history of additional honors, positions, and memberships will give some idea of the extraordinary range of Professor Hosmer's activities. He was a delegate to the White House Conference of Governors in 1908, and, upon his return to Honolulu, was made Chairman of the Territorial Conservation Commission of Hawaii, 1908-1914; a member of the Research Council of the Northeastern Forest Experiment Station, 1926-1942; secretary of the Forestry Section, International Congress of Plant Sciences, 1926; a member of the City Planning Commission of the City of Ithaca, New York, 1928-1938; a member of the New York State Conservation Advisory Council, 1932-1941; and an honorary life member of the Empire State Forest Products Association from 1942 till his death. He was an active member of the American Forestry Association.

Professor Hosmer was a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, also a fellow of the Forest History Foundation, an organization in which he was much interested and to which he had given much of his time since retirement. He was a member of two fraternities, Alpha Zeta and Phi Kappa Phi. One of his many interests during his latter years on the Cornell Faculty and after retirement was the Cornell University Arboretum, later developed into the Cornell Plantations.

Professor Hosmer was over the years a writer of many articles, bulletins, and books. To be mentioned in particular are *Impressions of European Forestry*, written during a six-month trip in 1921 in various European countries; *A Forty Years' History of the Society of American Foresters* (1940); *The Cornell Plantations—A History* (1947); *The Society of American Foresters—An Historical Summary* (1950); and *Forestry at Cornell* (1950). His writings have always been characterized by an easy style and meticulous accuracy. It may be added here that, after his retirement at Cornell, Professor Hosmer spent a great deal of time in genealogical research and writing. The volume, *The Genealogy of the Irwin Family* (1938) is one of his noteworthy productions.

Probably the two periods in Professor Hosmer's professional life that are of greatest interest would be his careers in Hawaii and at Cornell.

As noted previously, Ralph Hosmer served as territorial forester in Hawaii from 1904 to 1914. His activities there resulted in the establishment of a system of forest reserves that by 1914 had reached an area of some 800,000 acres. The momentum of this project was such that at present more than 1,200,000 acres, one quarter of the land area of Hawaii, are now reserved. Following the establishment of the reserves, administrative measures were inaugurated

primarily those of protection from grazing, fire, and trespass. Professor Hosmer's foresight and energy were responsible for the start of forestry in Hawaii. His contributions were recognized and memorialized in the Ralph S. Hosmer grove of timber on the slopes of Mt. Haleakala in the Hawaiian National Park.

Professor Hosmer took an active part in civic affairs. He was a prominent member of the Unitarian Church and gave much of his time and effort to its administration.

He lived and participated in forestry during its entire span of years in the United States. During his active years on the Cornell Faculty, Professor Hosmer was especially interested in forest protection, policy, and history. As the years passed, his attention dealt more and more with matters of history. His contributions in this field have served forestry well, and, as time goes on, will be increasingly valuable.

*C. H. Guise, E. L. Palmer, D. S. Welch*