In the late 1980's, the Archives Division had a grant to inventory and schedule all records created by state agencies. It was my good fortune to be assigned the Department of Forestry. The result of this inventory was the transfer of hundreds of boxes of their records to the Archives and, my luck continued as I was assigned to go through the records to arrange and describe them.

Since I was a relative newcomer to Oregon and had a secret desire to work in Forestry, I spent quite a bit of time going through and reading the records that we had received. Some of the most interesting records related to the Civilian Conservation Corps, Forest Practices, World War II books and pamphlets relating to "Forest Watch" and other precautions taken by Forestry to protect Oregon forest lands. But imagine my surprise when I began reading the State Forester's correspondence and found two letters from a world-renowned forestry pioneer and a man who helped spark the American conservation movement!

This letter, dated December 1938, is from the pioneering forestry educator, Carl A. Schenck. Schenck is best known as the forester of George W. Vanderbilt's, Biltmore Estate and founder of the Biltmore Forest School, one of the first forestry schools in the United States. Schenck managed the 120,000 acres of forested lands at the Biltmore using a combination of scientific management and practical techniques that emphasized sustainability, a practice that had not been used in the United States. Disagreements with Vanderbilt led Schenck to leave the Biltmore in 1909 and he returned to Germany. Before World War II, Dr. Schenck made frequent trips to the United States to lecture on forestry issues but could no longer travel during the war.

His letter is not unlike Christmas letters today where we re-hash our year's events. Noting that he does "not applaud everything in Germany" in 1938, Schenck discusses the "rise in Germany of autocracy" and despairs of the growing rift between the United States and Germany by saying: "But why do I talk about this [discord between the United States and Germany] at the risk of talking myself away from you? I tell you: Loving both countries, I feel like a boy whose parents got a divorce."

Schenck then quickly moves on to his vacations and activities throughout the year before becoming philosophical at the end of the letter: "Maybe that years have passed since I saw you last. Never mind. Time is of no moment because love is transcendental and eternal. Listen! It cannot be otherwise but this…. Love is radiation unseen and love is power unseen, too. If that is so, love is immortal and endless. I believe it. And I hope and pray that everything may perish on this globe that is incompatible with love."

Dr. Schenck survived World War II living in retirement, and first-hand accounts recall how he greeted with joy the first American soldiers he met after the war. During the United States' occupation following World War II, Dr. Schenck was appointed by the American Military Government as the chief of forestry for West Germany in 1945. Dr. Schenck returned to the United States in 1951 – including a visit to Coos Bay, Oregon – during which his pioneering achievements in forestry were celebrated.

An interesting read and to think, I found it in the Archives!

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