

Schenck, Carl Alwin ^[1]

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by Pattie Bartee McIntyre, 1994

25 Mar. 1868–15 May 1955

See also: [Biltmore Forest School](#) ^[2]



"The Doctor Himself, Spring 1926." Kallitype photograph of Carl Alwin Schenck posing on a rocky outcrop; taken by "ah," taken 1920s. Item MC00035, Special Collections Digital Resources, Special Collections Research Center, North Carolina State University Libraries. Used by permission.

^[3]Carl Alwin Schenck, forester, was born in Darmstadt, Germany, the son of Carl Jacob and Olga Cornelia Alewyn Schenck. His grandfather was chief of forestry in Hesse. His cousin, George Merck, was the U.S. representative of the chemical firm, E. Merck of Darmstadt, whose son, George W. Merck, became president of the vast Merck Pharmaceutical Company.

At eighteen Schenck was graduated from the Institute of Technology in Darmstadt. He then studied botany at Darmstadt before enrolling at the University of Tübingen School of Forestry, where his work was interrupted by a severe lung infection. After his recovery in 1888 he entered the forest school of the University of Giessen; at Giessen he first passed the law examinations and remained to receive a doctor of philosophy degree summa cum laude in 1895. From 1889 to 1895 Schenck also served as assistant and secretary to Sir Dietrich Brandis, a former inspector general of forestry in India, who instructed candidates for the Indian Forest Service during their required year's tour with German supervisors of forestry. It was Brandis who recommended Schenck, through [Gifford Pinchot](#) ^[4], to [George W. Vanderbilt](#) ^[5] for the position of forester at his [Biltmore Estate](#) ^[6] in [Asheville](#) ^[7].

On 3 Apr. 1895, when Schenck arrived in the United States to become the forester for the Biltmore Estate, he became the third scientifically trained forester in the country (the other two were Gifford Pinchot and Bernhard Eduard Fernow). From 1895 to 1909, when his employment with Vanderbilt ended, Schenck developed a working plan for the [Pisgah Forest](#) ^[8] and managed Pisgah's 100,000 acres, setting up logging and lumbering operations, road systems, and firebreaks. Schenck was successful in getting laws favorable to forestry passed in the [North Carolina legislature](#) ^[9]. He also established practical scientific forestry on the 7,500-acre Biltmore Estate. This work became known as the first private forestry practiced in America.

In the early fall of 1898 Schenck opened, with the permission of George Vanderbilt, the first school of scientific forestry in the United States. A few weeks later the New York State College of Forestry was begun at Cornell University, and Yale University's Forest School was created in 1900. The Biltmore Forest School ^[2] provided a one-year course with lectures and textbooks on silviculture, logging, lumbering, timber cruising, forest protection, and forestry management, provided mainly by Schenck. Students observed and participated in all types of forestry and lumbering operations. Visiting specialists from American and European universities were among the lecturers at Schenck's school, which ultimately produced four hundred alumni.

In the summer of 1909 George Vanderbilt asked for Schenck's resignation as a result of a disagreement between Schenck and C. D. Beadle, chief of the landscape department and of the Biltmore Nurseries. Beadle accused Schenck of an untruth and in the ensuing fracas filed a complaint against him for assault and battery. Schenck's friends and acquaintances came to his defense and a justice of the peace in Asheville only fined him one dollar. However, the affair received much publicity and apparently led to unpleasant meetings with Vanderbilt.

Although forced to resign as forester at the Biltmore Estate, Schenck continued his school with the help of Americ

an lumbermen, his cousin George W. Merck, and his European professional and family ties. From 1909 to 1914 he secured six working fields for the forestry students, ranging from Oregon to Darmstadt, Germany, with two fields in North Carolina. Headquarters for the school during this period were at Sunburst on land owned by the Champion Fibre Company at the invitation of its manager, Reuben B. Robertson. Because of decreasing enrollments (down to twenty by the end of 1913), Schenck disbanded the Biltmore Forest School in the fall of 1913 and returned to his native Darmstadt. From there he wrote in the January 1914 issue of the monthly newsletter, Biltmore Doings ^[10], his reasons for leaving (reprinted in his *The Biltmore Story* [1955]) and sent it to his former students. The Biltmore Forest School and its director made a lasting impression on the alumni, many of whom continued their relationship with Schenck through correspondence and visits until his death.

After returning to Germany, Schenck was drafted into the German army and served until he was wounded in Poland in December 1914. He returned to his summer home in Lindenfels im Odenwald to recuperate and never returned to the army. In 1916, while working with the barley program in Brussels, Schenck met Herbert Hoover. He later was chief of a child feeding program operated by American Quakers ^[11] in Frankfurt.

Schenck refused an appointment as chief of forestry in Hesse in 1923 in order to be free to accept lectureships in the United States and conduct summer groups of American and English forestry students through Germany, Switzerland, and France for the Oxford University professors of forestry. During World War II he led a retired life at Lindenfels im Odenwald. It was here that a U.S. army officer and graduate of Cornell School of Forestry, Abraham George, saw him and wrote to Professor C. H. Guise of Cornell that Schenck had not been molested by the Nazis during the war. When the American Military Government was established in West Germany in 1945, Schenck was made chief of forestry in Hesse.

In connection with his work at Biltmore and with his forestry school, Schenck was active in national forestry and lumbering societies and organizations. He was one of the first eight members elected to the Society of American Foresters and served as a director of the Hardwood Lumber Manufacturers Association of the USA. He often spoke at forestry congresses in the United States and Canada. When he came to America in 1951 on a trip sponsored by the American Forestry Association, a plaque was erected in his honor at the site of the Biltmore Forest School near Pisgah. Other dedications during the visit included a redwood grove near Orrick, Calif., a working circle of a 200,000-acre tree farm at Coos Bay, Oreg., and a long leaf pine plantation near Aiken, S.C.

In 1952 Schenck received an honorary doctor of forest science degree from North Carolina State University ^[12]. After his death the Carl Alwin Schenck Memorial Forest ^[13], a 250-acre pine forest four miles west of Raleigh, was dedicated on 26 Apr. 1957. Other memorials established at North Carolina State University are the Carl Alwin Schenck Distinguished Professorship of Forest Management and four scholarships endowed by Biltmore Forest School alumni.

In 1896 Schenck married Adele Andrewna Bopp, daughter of Heinrich and Maria Bopp of Darmstadt. They had no children. According to *Wer ist's* (1935), he was married a second time in 1932, to Marie Louise Faber, widow of Hermann Kulenkampff-Post. When Schenck died, a memorial service was held in his native Germany, but at his request his ashes were strewn over the Carl Alwin Schenck Forest west of Raleigh.

He was the author of numerous publications, papers, and articles, some of which are listed in the bibliography of *The Biltmore Story*. There has been no extensive biographical study of Schenck, but the following sources contain substantial material about him.

References:

Biltmore Forest School—Carl Alwin Schenck Collection of papers ^[14] (North Carolina State University Library, Raleigh), described in *Listing of Biltmore Room Collections, North Carolina State University* (July 1975).

Collier Cobb. The Forests of North Carolina ^[15] (1912, reprinted from *North Carolina Booklet*).

Richard C. Davis, comp., *North American Forest History: A Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in the United States and Canada* (1977), describing a number of collections of papers with correspondence and information on Schenck.

Gifford Pinchot Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.).^[16]

Carl A. Schenck, *The Biltmore Story* (1955) (later published as *The Birth of Forestry in America: Biltmore Forest School* [1974]), and ed., *The Biltmore Immortals*, 2 vols. (1953–57).

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Additional Resources:

"First in Forestry: Carl Schenck and the Biltmore Forest School film project." The Forest History Society. <http://foresthistory.org/Events/SchenckFilm.html> [17] (accessed May 9, 2014).

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