

Robert Edward Keiling

Robert Edward Keiling was born in Gary, McDowell County, West Virginia on May 12, 1927.

After graduation from high school he began service in the United States Navy. Upon his discharge, he used the “GI Bill” to pursue a Bachelor of Science degree in Forestry, graduating in 1953 from North Carolina State University.

He worked briefly with the West Virginia Conservation Commission, a short time for a forestry consulting firm and in 1954 became the chief forester, later logging superintendent and still later division manager of sawmill and logging for the J. P. Hamer Lumber Company, the position from which he retired in 1981. Bob’s tenure included preparing some of the very first management plans for landowners and using the first rubber-tired skidders to tram logs in the state.

He also served on the 25-man review board that approved the widely acclaimed West Virginia Forest Practice Standards a full two years before the United States Environmental Protection Agency adopted silvicultural best management practices to assist in controlling water pollution. This was a major step forward for forestry and led to Mr. Keiling assisting with numerous log road workshops designed to show foresters and loggers alike how to apply best management practices.

Mr. Keiling strongly supported forest fire prevention efforts including the preparation of a movie for use in schools and civic meetings. He was also very instrumental in assisting with the development of a 25-acre forest demonstration area (the Howard Bennett Forest Demonstration Area) near the town of Oak Hill in Fayette County. The forest had been provided for this purpose in 1948. He measured the timber on five, one-acre permanent plots each ten years through 1979 and supervised the first two timber harvests. This work proved that landowners could harvest timber sustainably each 20 years using single tree selection methods without any reduction in timber, wildlife or recreation opportunities. The work was deemed so important that a self-guided interpretative trail was established in 1976 to explain the soil, tree succession, log roads and best management practices, forest fire damages, timber harvests, timber regeneration, etc. In the ensuing two decades, hundreds of school children and others have availed themselves of these tours.

Mr. Keiling is known throughout the forestry community for his dedicated work with the American Hardwood Manufacturing and West Virginia Sawmill and West Virginia Forestry Association organizations. He organized his own consulting firm in the 1970s which continues under his sons. He was a well liked instructor at many West Virginia forest industry camps, has volunteered with the Boy Scouts of America including being a scout leader, strongly supports the Society of American Foresters and is active in the St. Francis Defales Church in Beckley.

