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CENTENNIAL YEAR • 1921-2021

MIFFLIN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



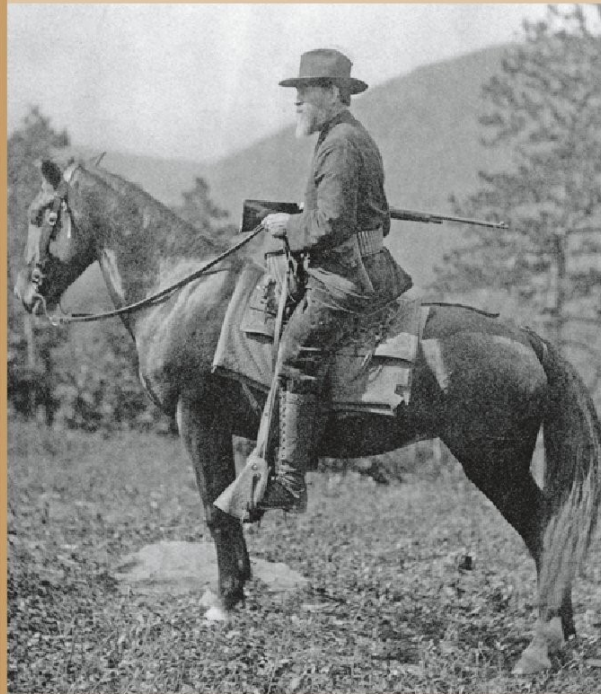
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#RothrockWeek

Information by:

George H. Wirt, "Joseph Trimble Rothrock: Father of Forestry in Pennsylvania," 1956.

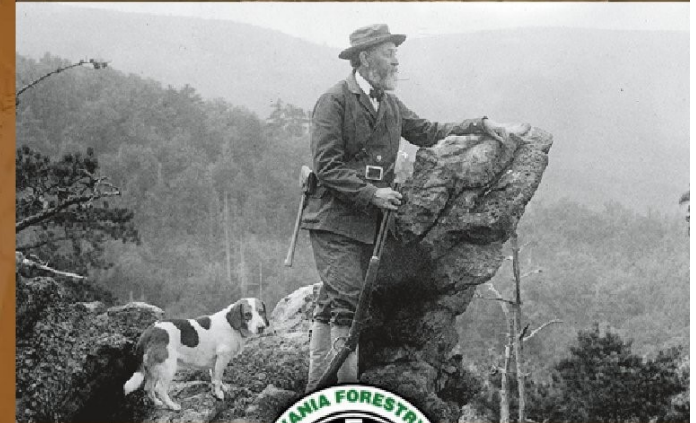
Rothrock established a training program for foresters which he personally supervised. He often traveled to the training areas on his horse, Pet.



Father of Forestry IN PENNSYLVANIA

DR. JOSEPH T. ROTHROCK

Conservationist • Botanist • Physician • Forester
Educator • Author • Pioneer • Soldier



Education

Joseph Trimble Rothrock was born April 9, 1839, in McVeytown. This small, rural community allowed him to experience agriculture, the environment, and nature from a very early age.

As a young man, Rothrock attended the Tuscarora Academy in neighboring Juniata County. At the time, the Academy was ranked high among the educational institutions of the state and nation. He was known to frequently walk across the forested mountains and valleys between his home in McVeytown and the Academy, known as Licking Creek Valley. Years later, he led the purchase of thousands of acres of these forests with which he had become so familiar including a large section of the Licking Creek Valley.

Rothrock studied at many institutions including Harvard University, where he studied botany, and the University of Pennsylvania where he earned his medical degree. He was also a professor at the Agricultural College of Pennsylvania (a precursor to Penn State University) and the University of Pennsylvania where he taught botany and medicine.

His studies were interrupted by the Civil War. Rothrock enlisted in the 131st Pennsylvania Infantry and was wounded at the Battle of Fredericksburg. While recuperating in the army hospital, he was visited by President Lincoln who shook his hand and encouraged him. Rothrock later returned home and organized Company "E" of the 20th Cavalry and became its captain.

After marrying Martha E. May in 1868, Rothrock practiced medicine in Wilkes-Barre, PA, and was part of several expeditions to the west to study and report on botanical specimens.

The Seven Mountains, located within Rothrock State Forest, are part of the thousands of acres purchased by the Commonwealth that became state land.



Photo: Jessica Imes

Pennsylvania Forestry Association

Dr. Rothrock's frequent lectures on botany and forest management played an integral role in starting the nationwide conversation about forest resources, especially the deforestation of the Penn's Woods. In 1886, the Pennsylvania Forestry Association was created and Rothrock was named its first president.

The Pennsylvania legislature responded to his efforts and in 1895, Rothrock became the first commissioner of the newly established Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry in the Department of Agriculture. He established technical training for foresters, which he personally supervised as he traveled on horseback into the most remote valleys of the state. During his term, the state forests were established, protecting thousands of acres of Pennsylvania's woodlands.

Rothrock State Forest

In 1903, the forested area now known as the Rothrock State Forest was stripped bare of trees to provide wood to make charcoal for locally operated Greenwood, Monroe, and Pennsylvania furnaces. These furnaces were used to smelt iron which was a major industry in the 1800s. When two of Greenwood's furnaces closed in 1903, Rothrock was instrumental in leading the state to purchase approximately 35,000 acres in Huntingdon County from the iron company. More purchases of land followed until most of the Seven Mountains forested area in Centre County became state land.

When the Great Depression hit, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a work program for unemployed men. Across the state work



Rothrock State Forest amenities include:

- 300 miles of hiking trails including the Mid State Trail and the Standing Stone Trail
- Attractions on the SST are Thousand Steps, the Throne Room and fire towers
- Mountain biking trails including the best singletrack riding in the state at Cooper's Gap
- Hiking
- Snowmobiling
- Camping
- Sightseeing
- 4 state parks and Raystown Lake
- Fishing
- Cross-country skiing
- Picnicking
- 8 Wild and Natural Areas

campers were built on the state land with six of these camps located in the now Rothrock State Forest. Much of the land was cleared of dried underbrush by the men of the CCC who then built roads, trails, and many of the recreational facilities still used today. Thanks to their efforts, Rothrock State Forest is home to four state parks including Greenwood Furnace, Penn-Roosevelt, Trough Creek and Whipple Dam.

Legacy

Tributes to the "Father of Forestry" can be found throughout the Commonwealth. Rothrock, who died at the age of 83 on June 2, 1922, was recognized for his contributions both before and after his death. Those who knew him expressed their admiration in many ways.

• In his hometown of McVeytown, a monument (see below) featuring the iconic image of Rothrock was placed in the town square. The monument was unveiled and dedicated on Nov. 1, 1924, where Gov. Gifford Pinchot stated that Rothrock was one of the "greatest public servants in the history of our Commonwealth."

• Several plaques honoring Rothrock can be seen across the state including a plaque at the Pennsylvania State Capitol, the Mont Alto Sanatorium, his family home in McVeytown, and two Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Historical Markers.

• Initially, Arbor Day was held on April 9th in Pennsylvania to honor his birthday. Arbor Day is now held the last Friday in April.

• A unique memorial to Rothrock was proclaimed in 1961 by Gov. David Lawrence and the Pennsylvania General Assembly, stating the last week of April was to be designated as Dr. J.T. Rothrock Memorial Conservation Week.

• His name is also reflected in many annual events and businesses including the Rothrock Fair, Rothrock Grit, Rothrock Outfitters, and Rothrock Coffee.



In his hometown of McVeytown, a plaque featuring the iconic image of Rothrock and his dog, Rab, on top of a mountain, was placed on a native mountain boulder and placed in the town square. The monument was unveiled and dedicated on Nov. 1, 1924.