

Early Colleges of the Department of Recreation and Park
Administration
Clemson University

Narrative by:

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The Department of Recreation and Park Administration (RPA) was originally a unit of the College of Education (1966). At that time, the Dean of the College was Harold Fochone Landrith (d.1984). He stated on several occasions that he knew nothing about our field, but he would give us his full support, which he did. Under his deanship, and with the full support of President Robert Cook Edwards -who founded the department, the department was able of flourish. The department's faculty held up its end by providing quality education and strong involvement with state agencies, local government agencies, professional organizations, and non-government organizations (NGOs). The department's staff was well respected across the campus as a result of its professionalism and efficiency.

By the end of the decade, events and pressures led to the creation of the College of Forest and Recreation Resources in 1970. Dr. William Henry Davis McGregor (d. 2014) of the Department of Forestry was the first Dean. Throughout the existence of the College of Forest and Recreation, 1970-1995, all of the deans had forestry backgrounds.

Three of the factors involved in the creation of the College of Forest and Recreation Resources were:

The Department of Forestry, in the College of Agriculture and Biological Sciences, requested a new building to provide space for its faculty, research laboratories, and extension services. The powerful South Carolina forest industry lobby placed a lot of pressure on Dr. Edwards and the Board of Trustees for a new building. The problem for President Edwards and the Board was that the Department of Forestry had a small number of majors, around 100 as I recall. This was insufficient to warrant a new building only for Forestry.

On the other hand, the Department of Recreation and Park Administration had outgrown its space in Godfrey Hall. With about 500 majors and its compliment of faculty and staff, it needed more space.

On top of that, the Department or Recreation and Park Administration was requesting a portion of the Clemson Experimental Forest for an outdoor laboratory which would provide residential camping experiences for special needs individuals in cooperation with the appropriate state Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) [e.g the Jaycee's Camp Hope] while providing enriched educational experiences for Department students, particularly, and other Clemson students and a research platform.

The Clemson Experimental Forest, consisting of about 17,000 acres, became part of the greater Clemson campus in 1954. It was jealously guarded by the Department of Forestry; probably rightfully so. The Department of Recreation and Park Administration's request for land on Lake Hartwell for its proposed outdoor laboratory was not well received by the Department of Forestry.

Faced with strong pressure for a new building for the Department of Forestry, which was unjustifiable by itself, and the Department of Recreation and Park Administration's need for increased space and its request to establish the outdoor laboratory, President Edwards thought that the perfect solution was to create a new college, the College of Forest and Recreation Resources, by combining the two departments, that he believed should be natural partners. The size of the Department of Recreation and Park Administration would justify the new building requested by the Department of Forestry.

The proposal was not welcomed by the Department of Forestry. So strongly did the department head, Dr. Koloman Lehotsky, object to being associated with the Department of Recreation and Park Administration in any manner, that President Edwards removed him as the department head. Lehotsky was the first Head of the Forestry Department at Clemson. His dismissal as department head, and his subsequent retirement, did not sit well with the Forestry faculty; an ill feeling that still persisted to some extent when I retired in 2005, 35 years after the college was formed.

The new building was named the "Forest and Recreation Resources" building over objections from the Forestry faculty and the South Carolina forest industry which wanted it named "Lehotsky Hall". Dr. Edwards, so angered by Lehotsky's lack of cooperation in the creation of the new college and his bias toward the Department of Recreation and Park Administration which he founded, said that the building would not be named after Lehotsky as long as he was president. Sure enough, shortly after President Edwards retired in 1979, the building was renamed "Lehotsky Hall" in 1980(?).

A committee made up of faculty members was formed to help with the new building's design specifications and to review the plans. A problem arose with the request for classrooms in the new building. A State agency had reviewed the classroom space on the Clemson campus and decided that classrooms were underutilized. So it would not approve additional classrooms in the new building.

This presented a dilemma. Faculty time would be wasted commuting between classrooms around the campus. Logistics were a problem. At that time audiovisual aids were limited to blackboards and various projectors (slide, opaque and, overhead). Most classrooms were not routinely "stocked" with those aids other than blackboards. Also, one could not be certain that a projector assigned to a room would be in working order when needed. Carrying projectors around the campus would have been difficult, if not impossible, at that time, particularly in rain or on snow covered sidewalks.

However, that State agency said laboratory rooms would be permitted. So, the committee thought of laboratory names for the needed classrooms. Today (2021) Lehotsky classrooms 134 and 138 still bear witness to this subterfuge. They were labeled "Audio-visual Laboratories". A shared projection booth, designed into in their adjoining back corners, lent credence to those designations.

Footnote 1: When it became clear that about 75 percent of the new building would be set aside for the Department of Forestry and the shared classrooms, leaving RPA, the department with the largest enrollment only 25% of the building, I suggested* that the new building should be round, in the shape of a cut-off tree stump: form indicates function.

Footnote 2: When word came that we would not be allowed to have classrooms and would have to traipse around campus to teach, I offered a suggestion* that instead of offices we be given small recreational vehicles (e.g. Winnabagos) as mobile offices, with guaranteed parking spaces, appropriate to the assigned classrooms, to be equipped with power and phone connections. This was pre-Internet.

*Suggested: A suggestion (i.e. suggestion) offered in jest. (2021, Gordon E. Howard).

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