

DON BLANKENSHIP, "MR. FIRST", REMEMBERS



Don Blankenship retired this year after 25 years of active service, 20 of which he spent here. He is often referred to as "Mr. First" as he was one of the first sent from Wilmington to help start up the Plant. When he arrived here in April, 1957, as an employee relations supervisor, he worked

in a temporary office that was located in an old garage on N. Caldwell Street in Brevard because "they were still in the process of grading and pouring the footings for the plant."

Don has many fond memories of those first years. He recalls Brevard as "a very attractive small town that was very cordial. Everyone welcomed us with open arms. People were very anxious to get jobs at Du Pont." It seems that Du Pont was well-known in Brevard even then because Du Pont Construction built Olin's cellophane plant in 1951 and was admired for their high safety standards.

Don had the job of screening 300 anxious applicants. He said, "The characteristic applicants were young, in their late teens or early twenties, and were looking for the opportunity to get their first real job. They tried very hard to please. Some of them even brought in

written recommendations which was interesting because I had never encountered this before."

It wasn't until January, 1958 that Don moved to the plant and production didn't actually begin until a month later. He said that "commuting to and from the plant was like riding through a scenic park, but I wore out a couple of sets of tires on the old Cascade Lake Road."

It has been twenty years since that time and Don says, "In comparison to then, the Brevard plant is a huge one. The most obvious change has been its growth in space and number of employees, especially since Photo Products took over."

Don said he has really enjoyed himself since retiring this year, but he readily admitted that "the worst part of retirement is that I miss everyone at the plant." Mr. First may be retired, but he is not forgotten . . .

CHARLIE PAXTON RECOUNTS HISTORY OF PLANT PROPERTY

The 11,000 acre tract of land where our plant is located has a colorful and interesting history that dates back almost two centuries. Charlie Paxton, Plant Ranger, is deeply involved in this history. Charlie was the professional N. C. State forest ranger hired by Du Pont to maintain and manage this forest property when it was purchased by the Company in 1956. A native of Transylvania County, he learned the general history of this area from talking to the old-timers whose families have lived here for generations.

Early artifacts such as arrowheads found in several sites indicate this area was well known by the Indians who once roamed the Blue Ridge Mountains. The early settlers called this area Buck Forest and in the early 1800's it became popular as a picturesque and peaceful place for wealthy families to "get away from it all". A lodge called Buck Forest Hotel was built near High Falls by a man named Thomas to take care of the tourist business that came from South Carolina by stagecoach.

While logging, Charlie found the remains of a rock house built, he was told, by the slaves that Thomas used to till his land. He has found two cemeteries on the property dating from the early 1800's and he knows the general location of a third slave cemetery. The slaves called this property "The Happy Land", which is now the title of a book about this area.

Buck Forest Hotel later became Buck Forest Lodge. When the property was purchased, the lodge was in bad repair. Charlie had it torn down and employees helped make it into a picnic area with a

shed attached to the old original lodge chimney.

At the turn of the century, there were 6-8 farms on the property. Several grist mills tapped the streams for water power and a saw mill was built on Mill Shoals. In addition to farming, there was another small but booming industry on the property called *bootlegging!*

The land has gone through quite a few changes. The overgrown farmland had been badly abused by indiscriminate timber cutting, farming, and fires. There were only five miles of logging roads so Charlie immediately began building trails and fire roads to clear dead timber and undergrowth. There are now 40 miles of trails and fire roads on the property.

Twelve years ago, Charlie began a forestry program to "upgrade our forests

from poor grades of Appalachian hardwoods to evergreen and white pines." This was financed by logging and selling pulpwood. He supervised the planting of more than 2 million white pine seedlings obtained from N. C. state nurseries. Now many are over 100 ft. tall.

Several years ago, a rock and earth dam was built near the plant to back up water from the springs in a 400 acre watershed. This filled Lake DERA where employees and their families now go swimming and boating. Hiking, fishing, horseback riding, and camping are also enjoyed on the property.

This area has been popular for entertainment, recreation, and natural beauty for over 100 years. Charlie believes "the forestry program here on the property will help keep it that way."



Charlie Paxton, Plant Ranger, checks property.