

PIONEER NURSERYMAN RETIRES

C. Ralph Voris, Public Relations Assistant
Oregon State Forestry Department
Salem, Oreg.

Vern E. McDaniel, forest nursery superintendent, Oregon State Forestry Department, retired September 5, 1964, after nearly 40 years of growing tree seedlings for Oregon's forests and farms (fig. 1). He had administered the 76-acre Oregon forest nursery north of Corvallis in the Willamette Valley from its beginning as a stump ranch until it became a \$175,000 annual operation.

"I didn't really intend to become a nurseryman," Mac recalls. "But Dean George Peavy 'the grand old gentleman' of Oregon State University contacted me about taking on this relatively new field of forestry. I was working for the Eastern-Western Lumber Company at the time, with a woods superintendent's job in the office. The dean had a tough time convincing

me of the desirability of this move. But once involved in the work, it became more and more engrossing..."

Starting in 1925, McDaniel cleared and plowed the original 12-acre site. He lived in a tent for the first 4 months while extracting Douglas-fir stumps by using black powder and a pair of big mules. As a memento of his early work, McDaniel has a D-handled, squarepointed spade, worn and welded after lifting thousands of tree seedlings from nursery beds. In those early days all work related to raising nursery trees was done by hand. A tractor, pulling a horizontal blade, now does the spade-, work, permitting easy placement of seedlings into field boxes.

McDaniel also has a living memento of his early endeavors. The first seedling to germinate in the newly established nursery was transplanted into the nursery yard. This majestic ponderosa pine has attained a height of 107 feet. It is the tallest of the millions of trees that were produced under McDaniel's supervision.

Some additional recollections of McDaniel follow:

"We used to broadcast Douglas-fir tree seed in the beds by hand, aiming for about 35 to 50 trees per square foot. The ability to do this seeding was developed in the winter by about three CCC boys on an improved 4- by 12-foot canvas frame. We planted the Douglas-fir seed dry in those days--no stratification--only the most viable seed sprouted. We figured survival of the fittest a necessary factor in producing quality stock.

"Irrigation was done by water hose and nozzle. We watered by hand every other day--6 or 7 hours a day, starting early in the morning. Eventually we developed a reservoir, which formed Cronemiller Lake, with a capacity of 7 million gallons. Named for a former State forester, this body of water is held by a 35-foot concrete-cored, earthen dam and has taken care of all our water needs over the



Figure 1.--Recent picture of Vern McDaniel in his office at the Corvallis Nursery.

years. In conjunction with this, overhead sprinklers were installed and played an important part in the mass production of tree seedlings.

"Looking back at the limited tools that we started with, it seems like a miracle the trees survived. But they did because we produced only the best. No root pruning was done, nor did we practice soil treatment for the control of insects and disease. These all came as the science of growing tree seedlings developed. Books have been written on the subject, and they barely scratched the surface on the ins and outs of this trade. And we don't know it

all by a long ways. There really should be greater emphasis on research to further our knowledge on how to raise better quality trees.

"A lifetime of growing trees has been a rewarding one, and the many and varied contacts with people that the circumstances have afforded were especially enjoyable. My one regret is not having kept a daily diary. This would had to have been an ingrained habit to keep up during those many 12- to 14-hour days we worked. But had this been done, I could now very handily put into writing that nursery story several have urged me to do."