



Colonel Fox at Cornell University's College of Forestry at Axton

Forest Commission photo

The Fox and the Forest

by **Kenneth H. Hayward**

THE rain had stopped falling and a mist enveloped the land on the morning of September 17, 1862. The totally wet and miserable men of the Union Army, who crossed Antietam Creek during the night, were not afforded the luxury of a campfire lest they give away their position to the enemy. But Robert E. Lee and "Stonewall" Jackson knew that the Union Army was across the creek. Therefore, it came as no surprise when Hooker's 1st Corps began its assault, early in the morning, through the Miller Farm into that terrible acreage that forever after would be known as "The Cornfield."

The 1st Corps meeting with heavy Confederate opposition was soon supported by the 12th Army Corps. The

12th Corps had many new regiments assigned to it, among them the 107th New York Volunteer Infantry, "The Campbell Guards," mustered into federal service on August 13, 1862. It was the first regiment to enter the Army in response to Abraham Lincoln's second call for 300,000 more soldiers to put down the rebellion.

Commanding "C" Company was 22-year-old Captain William Freeman Fox who was going into battle for the first time, going into battle at Antietam, going into battle on a day that went down as the single bloodiest day in the history of the United States.

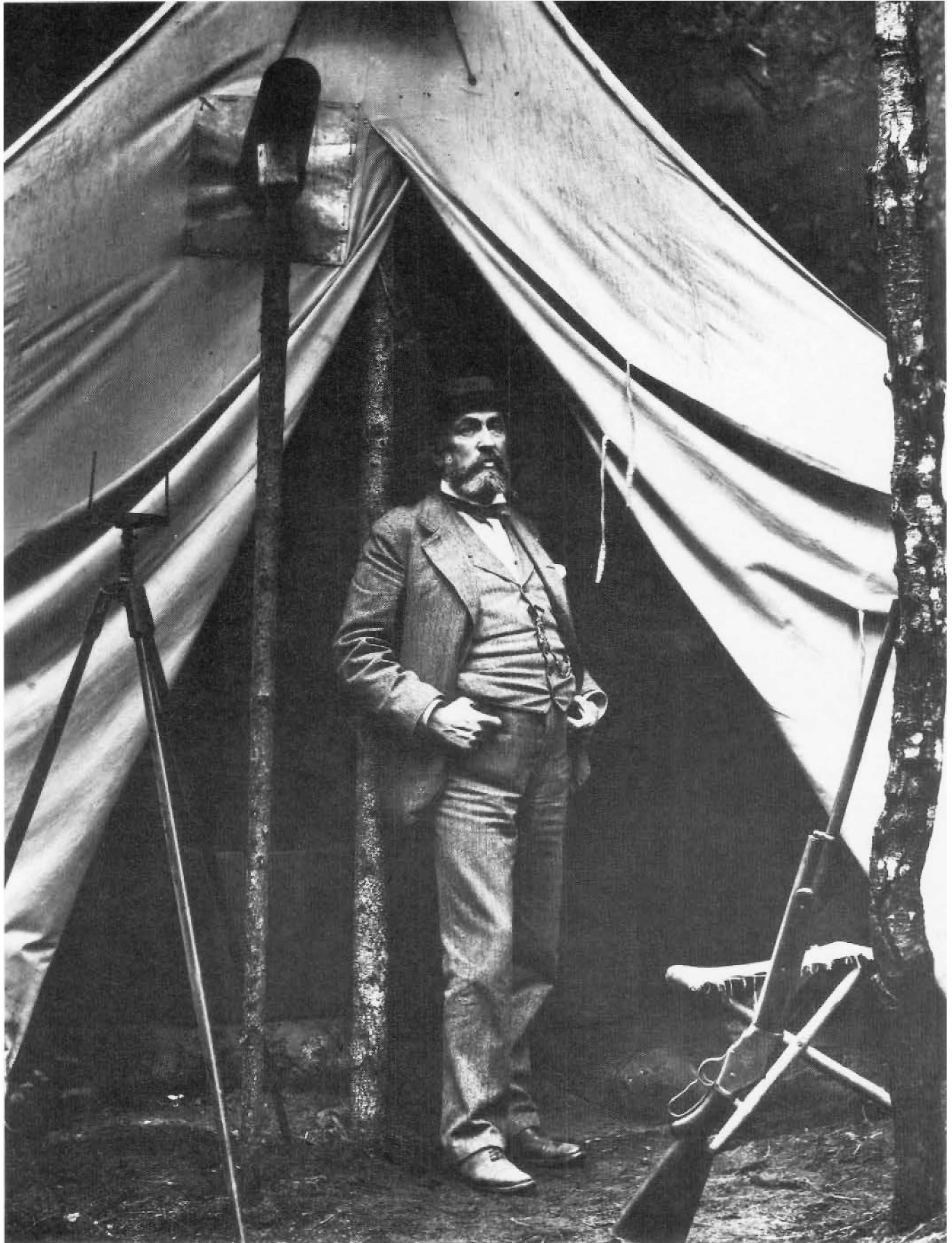
We, of course, can never know what thoughts passed through the mind of Fox as he led his company into that inferno, but they were probably not on the Adirondacks or the forests of New York State; those things which occupied most of his later life and came to be of paramount importance to him.

Official records noted that during

the battle, "Captain W. F. Fox was injured by the concussion of a shell." Fox continued to fight with the Army of the Potomac. Now a major, he was wounded a second time at the Battle of Chancellorsville. In September of 1863, his 12th Corps was transferred to the Department of the Tennessee. While with Sherman's Army, Fox, having been promoted to lieutenant colonel, was wounded a third and final time at the Battle of Resaca.

On July 8, 1864, Lieutenant Colonel William F. Fox was discharged from the United States Army on a disability. It was the end of Fox's participation in the Civil War, but not his association with it.

Fox was 24 years old, having been born January 11, 1840, at Ballston Spa, the son of Norman and Jane Fox. He had attended Union College for three years studying engineering, the same college his father attended as a member of the class of 1816. Prior to



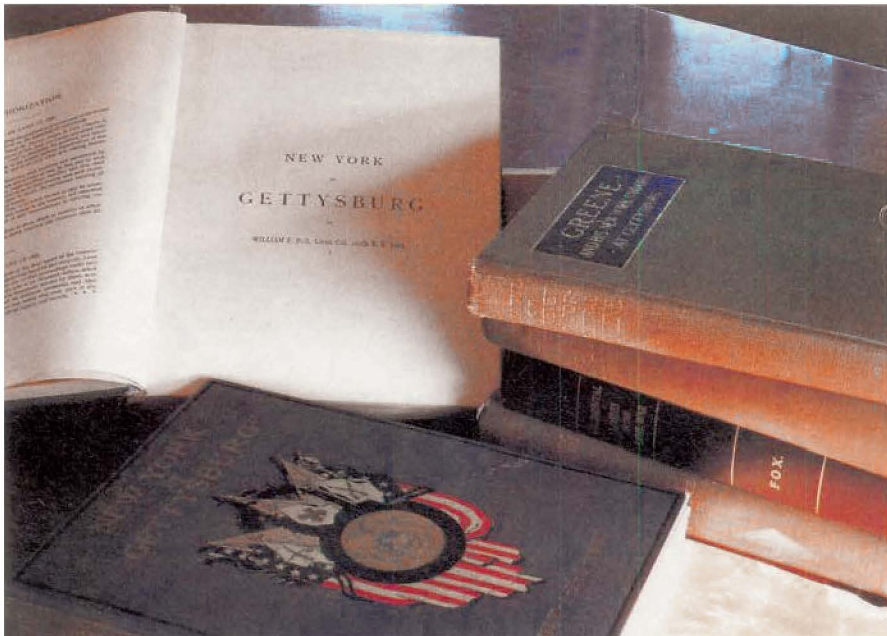
This photo of Colonel Fox was taken in Township 40 in the Adirondacks when Fox was with the U.S. Forest Service.

Courtesy U.S. Forest Service



F. Parks

Fox's grave at Ballston Spa. The small marker on the right indicates he was a Civil War veteran.



K. Hayward

In addition to books on forestry, Colonel Fox wrote several books on the Civil War.

his enlistment in 1862, Fox went to work at the family's lumber business of Fox, Weston and Bronson located at Painted Post. This was the first of the "gang mills" and one day became the most extensive, having many western branches.

In 1865 he married Mary Ann Shattuck and for the next 10 years continued to work in the lumber business at Oil City, Pennsylvania. It was here and at the mill at Painted Post that he gained his knowledge of the lumber industry, an education that served him well when he became superintendent of forests. In 1875 Fox returned to engineering by securing the positions of civil engineer and paymaster at the Blossburg Coal Company in Arnot, Pennsylvania.

On November 1, 1885, Colonel William Fox was appointed by New York's Forest Commission as assistant secretary. Thus, began a long association with the Forest Preserve, a relationship that would end only by his death 24 years later. Fox became assistant forest warden in 1888 and, in 1891, was appointed as New York's first superintendent of forests.

Amidst his routine administrative duties, Fox completed a comprehensive research work entitled, *Land Grants and Land Patents of Northern New York*. This was a necessary first step in locating the existing boundary lines of state-owned lands. Later developed into a map and published by the Forest Commission in 1893, it showed hundreds of separate patents that covered both the Adirondacks and northern New York.

Throughout his career, Fox was guided by expanding the Forest Preserve. He was unceasing in his attempts to purchase as much land for the preserve as was possible. Many of the acres of Forest Preserve that exist today are a result of his efforts.

Like many of the men associated with forestry at that time, Colonel Fox believed that the Forest Preserve would one day be opened to forest management. It is interesting to note

that Fox envisioned the Forest Preserve to be exactly what the state reforestation areas would become 50 years into the future.

Restricted by the state constitution, which prohibited forest management in the preserve, Fox proposed in 1898 that the burned over and barren lands be replanted.

Tree nurseries were established by the state. These nurseries developed under Fox gave birth to New York's reforestation and tree nursery programs, important forest management activities that still exist today.

In 1885 a fire warden force had been formed to be used in controlling forest fires. Totally dissatisfied with its operation, Fox urged that the fire wardens be replaced by, in his words, "forest rangers." Fox was credited with making New York the first state to put fire protection under public authority. Control of forest fires is still a state obligation today and the men who are responsible for it are known as forest rangers.

Fox maintained a strong belief that the woodlands of New York State should be managed for the production of timber and other forest products and that this management should be entrusted to professional foresters. For this reason, in the summer of 1898, Fox in company with Dr. Bernhard E. Fernow, a German forester-educator, traveled throughout the Adirondacks. Their task was to select the land upon which Cornell University would found the first College of Forestry in the United States. Thirty thousand acres were purchased in Franklin County for this purpose.

Major misunderstandings between Fernow and the public caused the college to last only five years. However, this school paved the way for the next, located at Syracuse University, now called the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. Through this and his other activities, Fox came to be recognized as one of the main advocates of bringing forest manage-

ment to New York State. The words of William Fox pertaining to reforestation are as appropriate today as in 1897. "The protection and management of this great source of industrial wealth is a question which demands today the thoughtful consideration of every citizen."

In 1900 he took part with the division of forestry, U.S. Department of Agriculture, in preparing a forest management plan for Township 40 of the Totten and Crossfield purchase. This masterful and quite detailed plan was to be used to help open the Adirondacks to forest management. Although this did not happen, it set the stage for the joint working relationship between the state and what became the U.S. Forest Service, a partnership that the forest service now has with all states in the United States and the territories of Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

Actively working towards forest management in New York, administering the forest preserves and carrying on his routine forestry duties, Fox still found time to write. In 1895 he finished writing *The Adirondack Black Spruce*, in 1897 he completed *A History of the Maple Syrup Industry*, and in that same year, he published *The Planting of Trees on Streets and Highways*, one of the first works on what is now classified as urban forestry. These were followed, in 1900, by Fox's large and highly detailed book entitled, *A History of the Lumber Industry in the State of New York*." In 1902 after a trip to Europe to study forestry, Fox wrote, *Forest Nurseries and Nursery Methods in Europe*.

In addition to his work in forestry, Fox took an active interest in the Civil War, belonging to and becoming an officer in many organizations associated with the Army of the Potomac. In the later years of his life, he began to write extensively on the war, both articles and books.

After 10 years of effort, in 1898 Fox produced *Regimental Losses in the Civil War*, a massive volume of Civil

War information that is, to this day, a major reference work for historians. In 1900 he completed *New York at Gettysburg* for the New York Monuments Commission followed in 1904 by *Slocum and His Men*, a history of the 12th and 20th Army Corps. His last work on the Civil War, *The Life of General Greene*, was published posthumously.

Colonel Fox died on June 16, 1909. His passing was noted by historical organizations, forestry agencies and his own commission. The full impact of a man may best be realized by reading those statements made about him after his death.

He is remembered by his successor, Austin Cary, who wrote, "Amidst the eddies and cross currents that swirled around him, he stood quiet and watchful, seizing whatever came within his reach for the benefit of the state's interest in forestry."

Norman VanValkenburgh in his book, *The Adirondack Forest Preserve: A Chronology*, stated: "Colonel Fox served as advisor to the various commissions and boards that existed during his career, and he was generally recognized as the one steadying influence in the troubled lives of these organizations."

Fox attended college at a time when few finished grade school; he was a soldier, an historian and a lumberman. Nowhere in his training do we find any formal forestry education, and yet, he was one of the first to grasp the principles of forest management.

He was a lumberman who dedicated the last 25 years of his life to forest protection and management.

Although time has dimmed his contributions to forestry, the land that he purchased is still owned and protected by the state and, for this reason, New York will always have a Fox in its forest. ●

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