

Evan Frank Allison

Pioneer in Conservation

1865-1937

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“In the management of his lands he led the way in Alabama to profitable forest conservation through selective tree cutting and reforestation. He restored species of wildlife indigenous to the area and taught methods for their conservation.”

*Alabama
Hall of Fame, 1961*

Those two powerful sentences summarize the life of Evan Frank Allison - a man devoted to a practice of conservation that provided multiple benefits. As a matter of personal interest he loved nature; as a sound business practice he cultivated the forest assuring a harvest for his own and future generations.

Allison was a pioneer in his efforts to preserve forest and wildlife resources in his native West Alabama and he preached, with vigor, a practical course of conservation that influenced many landowners and future generations of landowners.

Although born to a family of limited resources, he established Allison Lumber Company in Sumter County and guided it to a position of leadership in the pine and hardwood industries. He gained control of wide timber interests and took an active part in the economic development of the state.



Allison erected the first fire tower in Alabama and it served as the company logo for many years. The tower remained standing until the mill and lands were purchased by the American Can Company which later razed it.

While others were stripping the land of timber growth, he selectively cut crooked, forked, and mature trees, leaving superior trees for reproduction. He

also planted large numbers of seedlings each year. He met the ever-present threat of wildfire through developing a cooperative understanding with neighbors, con-



At one time, Allison (at left with cigar) and his forester counted less than five deer on 10,000 acres. Following years of careful forest management and partnering with local hunting clubs, his more than 100,000 acres became a vast preserve for deer, wild turkey, and other game. He is pictured here at one of the large annual hunts he hosted for influential guests which highlighted the fruits of his woodland and wildlife conservation program.

taining fires through an early warning system, and by erecting Alabama's first fire observation tower.

At the time of his death in 1937, he was the majority owner of a business that owned a town, the Sumter & Choctaw Railroad, a sawmill, and over 100,000 acres of prime timberland in Sumter and Choctaw Counties.

Allison Lumber Company

E.F. Allison and Steve Smith started in the sawmill business in an area east of York, Alabama in central Sumter County. They sold this operation to the Sumter Lumber Company in 1889. Then in 1899 Allison and Smith, along with a third

partner, R.C. Derby (also of Sumter County), established the Allison Lumber Company at Bellamy, Alabama.

Bellamy was founded as a sawmill town. It was home to Sumter County's first hospital. It also contained a pressing shop, shoe shop, carpentry business, a slaughter house, library, telephone office, post office, commissary, filling station, train depot, a hotel, three churches, an opera house, two recreation halls, two swimming pools, and a gambling house.

As local history goes, the residents of the town decided to break with the tradition of naming the town after a prominent citizen. Instead, they sought out the least respected person in town. It was so

named for Volney Bellamy, a Union Army veteran.

In 1902, the company was incorporated, and J.G. Mitchell and Charles Rowland of Toledo, Ohio bought out the interest of Smith and Derby. The mill capacity was increased and operations continued without interruption until 1922 when a new plant was built.

The new plant was described as "magnificent," with an eight-foot band head saw, a six-foot vertical resaw, and a gang saw. The plant had a daily capacity of 75,000 feet of lumber on a ten and one-half hour run.

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An early 1930s publication about the Allison Lumber Company stated, "This capacity was determined by two main considerations: First, through careful cutting, fire prevention and reforestation, a perpetual operation could be maintained at this rate of depletion. Second, the State of Alabama, through conservative forestry laws, has so distributed the tax burden as to make it economically possible to reforest and guarantee to posterity a supply of forest products."

The company also employed a crew of strictly all-hardwood men that worked the mill's night run, devoted to cutting hardwood.

Wildlife Conservation

As Allison conserved the woodland, he conserved its animals as well. After he and his forester counted less than five deer on 10,000 acres, he immediately suspended hunting of whitetail deer for several years to restore stocks. He later instituted a practice of allowing large tracts to be used by local hunting clubs, with the stipulation that they complied with his rules and partnered with him in protection from forest fires.

Eventually, his more than 100,000 acres became a vast preserve of untold numbers of deer, wild turkey, and other game. He hosted large annual hunts for influential guests to highlight the results of his woodland and wildlife conserva-

tion program. The State of Alabama adopted some of his policies regarding hunting and preservation of wild game as laws and regulations.

As a conservationist and lumberman, Evan Frank Allison provided business, social, and political leadership for his contemporaries and an inspiration for all stewards of the forest. He was inducted into the Alabama Hall of Fame in 1961. 

Editor's Note: We appreciate the accompanying historical photos generously furnished by the family of the late Billy Rumley, former AFC Sumter County Manager.



A special dinner at Allison Lumber Company. Date unknown.