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A brief History of Conservation in
N. Y. State Development in Chautauqua
County by

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A Brief History of Conservation in New York State
and Recent Developments in Chautauqua County

When Christopher Columbus discovered the new world, the forces of exploitation he set in motion led directly to the need of conservation on this continent. These forces of exploitation gained momentum slowly but they spelled the ravishment of the untouched wealth of America, its peoples and its treasures, accrued through the long ages of antiquity.

Here in the orderly process of nature, a continent unspoiled by civilization had flourished, amassing its treasures and abundance. Defenseless against the armed predators of Europe, this wilderness was invaded by the Spanish, French, English and Dutch. Human life, gold, forests and game felt the hand of the invader and for Four Hundred years, nature alone carried the burden of exploitation until man came to her assistance with long needed conservation measures.

In 1683 Albany County was established. It included practically all of the Adirondacks. The upper portion was finally divided and named Montgomery and Washington in honor of the two generals.

Beginning about the time of the American Revolution, speculation in vast tracts of land began. Major Edward and Colonel Ebenezer Jessup purchased the Indian rights to 1,150,000 acres in northern New York at about six cents per acre. Alexander Macomb purchased 3,934,000 acres in Franklin, St. Lawrence, Herkimer, Oswego, Lewis and Jefferson Counties at eighteen cents per acre. John Brown of Providence, Rhode Island purchased 210,000 acres about the same time.

In this manner we will note, practically all of the land area of the entire state was sold to speculators at a very low cost. As you

all know, Chautauqua County together with other lands in Western New York, was purchased by the Holland Land Company.

As early as 1698, the Earl of Belmont, the Colonial Governor of New York, prohibited by proclamation, the cutting of big white pines for ship masts. During his second term of office, he urged that four or five trees be planted for every one cut. In 1723, Governor Colden recommended that one white pine be planted for each tree cut down or dying. The Earl of Hillsboro in 1768, wrote Governor Moore of New York, advising a survey of the pine districts and adoption of measurers to prevent further waste and destruction. In 1770 an inspector of His Majesty's woods and forests was appointed in the vicinity of Lake Champlain and in 1791 the New York Society for the Promotion of Agriculture, Arts and Manufacture recommended to the State that a system of tree planting be adopted and that preserving and increasing the growth of valuable timber be considered. Little attention, if any, was paid to these recommendations.

Forty one years later Governor DeWitt Clinton recommended strongly in his message to the Legislature, the protection and preservation of the Adirondack forests, largely because of the value of the Adirondacks as a source of water supply to the canals of the State. Thereafter, water became a major issue in the discussions which revolved around the Adirondack problem.

In 1850 a law was passed forbidding the State to sell lands along the Raccuette River at less than fifteen cents an acre. This was the first prohibitory act against the disposal of Adirondack lands.

Chapter 140, Laws of 1850, gave the Commissioners of the Land Office power to grant to any railroad company, land belonging to the State and required for railroad purposes. Under this law and the State's philanthropic salesmen, the Saratoga and Sackets Harbor Railroad

obtained 250,000 acres in 1855 at five cents per acre.

In 1872, as a result of sentiment which had been growing through the years in favor of some constructive legislation in relation to the Adirondacks, Thomas G. Alvord introduced a bill in the Assembly, creating a State Park Commission. The Act created seven Commissioners "to inquire into the expediency of providing, for the vesting in the State, the title of the timbered regions lying within the counties of Lewis, Essex, Clinton, Franklin, St. Lawrence, Herkimer and Hamilton and converting the same into a public park" and to make a report. Their report was dated May 15, 1873. It described the Adirondack region and its resources. It drew attention to the wasteful methods of the lumbermen, the tax situation which invited the destruction of immature trees, the need for control of the water supply and social reasons for forest preservation. The report was received but promptly forgotten. At that time there was still a deplorable lack of general intelligence on the subject of forest preservation and the public did not appreciate the necessity of legislative or other action looking toward the preservation of the resources of the Adirondacks. Consequently, the Legislature was unresponsive to such proposals.

The controversy continued until 1885 when a group headed by Professor Charles S. Sargent of Harvard University submitted recommendations for the management of State lands with additional information on the subject. With this data available, the Law of 1885 was drafted with great thoroughness. This legislation was signed May 15, 1885 by Governor David B. Hill and became Chapter 283 of the Laws of 1885. The forces of Conservation had won a great victory and forest protection, forest production and utilization were in the field in the cause of public welfare. Sections 7 and 8 of the Law established

the Forest Preserve in the well known language, which with few alterations was incorporated later in Article VII, Section 7, of the New York State Constitution; "All the lands now owned or which may hereafter be acquired by the State of New York, within the Counties of Clinton (excepting the towns of Altoona and Dannemora), Essex, Franklin, Fulton, Hamilton, Herkimer, Lewis, Saratoga, St. Lawrence, Warren, Washington, Green, Ulster and Sullivan, shall constitute and be known as the Forest Preserve. The lands now or hereafter constituting the Forest Preserve shall be forever kept as wildforest land. They shall not be sold, nor shall they be leased or taken by any person or corporation, public or private."

A great victory had been won for Conservation, at least for the Adirondacks.

While all these things were taking place in Eastern New York, the great territory to the west was being settled. Robert Morris had acquired huge tracts of land through negotiations with the Indians and various States. A portion of this property was purchased by certain parties as agents for a number of merchants in Holland, later known as the Holland Land Company. In the spring of 1798, the surveying of this land was started. In this locality it was done by Joseph Ellicott. Chautauqua was one of the first townships formed in this vicinity. It was formed from Batavia in 1804 and subsequently, the towns of Pomfret, Portland, Harmony, Clymer, Ellery and Stockton were formed from the original town of Chautauqua.

Since the early settlers were anxious to have good homes, one of the first industries to be started was the sawmills. The first sawmill established in Chautauqua County was located in Barcelona.

There is no question of the fact that the extensive forests so accessible to the pioneer, had a great deal to do with the rapid development of our country. It is true that this natural resource was

disipated rapidly, in order to make room for agriculture. In the 144 years since the first settlers came to Chautauqua County, 60% of the land surface has been cleared for agriculture. The remaining 40% has been covered, some of it several times, for the remainder of its valuable forest products. There are very few woodlots in Chautauqua County today in which there is left any of the original virgin stand.

Anything that is used continuously for a hundred years or more will naturally wear out. This is what has happened to many thousands of acres of farmland in Chautauqua County. In the late 20's a survey was made by the College of Agriculture at Cornell to determine the location and extent of the abandoned farms throughout the State. This survey revealed approximately five million acres of such land. Just what to do with this land that was producing nothing and was fast becoming a liability to the counties and towns in which it was located, was a pertinent question. A bill was finally introduced into the Legislature by Senator Hewitt, which was later passed as a Constitutional Amendment, giving the Conservation Department authority to purchase these abandoned lands for State Reforestation Areas. Land purchase under this program was started in Chautauqua County in 1930 and today there are approximately 15,000 acres here in State Forests. The maximum paid for lands of this type is \$4.00 per acre.

As soon as possible after acquiring title, these lands are planted to trees. Most of our planting stock is raised from seed in the State Tree Nursery at Saratoga. To date, over six million trees have been planted in Chautauqua County with varying degrees of success.

There are thirteen State Forests in Chautauqua County, located in the following towns, viz.: Cherry Creek, Charlotte, Stockton, Gerry,

Ellington, Chautauqua, Sherman, Clymer, Harmony and North Harmony.

I might state here that the planting of trees was started throughout the State many years prior to the establishment of the State Forests. The Conservation Department has furnished trees at cost of production to private land owners for the reforestation of their own lands. This method of tree distribution and planting did not fill the need for such a program so the State project was started to supplement the private program.

Forest plantations should not grow to maturity without proper silvicultural treatment to obtain the best results. At the present time we have approximately 75 men employed in Chautauqua and Cattaraugus Counties doing cultural work in the older plantations and second growth hardwoods.

There are many other things that enter into the management of forest property. Fire protection is very important and requires a system of detection and suppression to minimize losses. Road construction and maintenance are necessary to facilitate the transportation and marketing of forest products and are also important to fire protection. Tree diseases and insect pests are always on hand and certain steps must be taken from time to time to eradicate and control them.

The most recent legislation relating to forest lands was signed by Governor Dewey, February 28, 1946. This is known as "The Forest Practice Act". Under this Act, county, district and state forest practice boards have been set up. The district boards have drawn up and adopted certain forest practice standards for each district. The State Board has approved the standards of the various districts and will eventually draw up standards on a State wide basis. Any woodland owner may become a cooperator with the Conservation Department under this act by agreeing to follow the forest practice standards set

up for the district. Cooperation is entirely voluntary and the timber land owner can withdraw at any time.

The only objective of this act is to grow more and better timber in New York State and by so doing to increase the revenue of the woodland owner and furnish more raw material to the States wood using industries. The State will assist any cooperator by furnishing technical services, assist the woodland owner in marking any material to be removed, in marketing this material and also make a management plan for his woodland property. Since farm woodlots comprise a large portion of the wooded areas of the State, it is hoped that over a period of years, the work done under the "Forest Practice Act" will materially benefit the people of the State, both socially and economically. At the present time, we have two foresters giving most of their time to this project. In Erie County, the County Forester is cooperating by giving part of his time to this work.

The forest lands of Southwestern New York produce some of the best forest products to be found anywhere in the Northeast. Chautauqua County wood using industries consume an enormous quantity of raw materials. To be sure, we cannot produce Mahogany in this locality, but we can produce more and better species such as black cherry, white ash, white and red oak, basswood, hickory, hard maple and some less important species. The scarcity of this material is due mostly to improper cutting practices and the lack of knowledge of both operators and woodland owners of good forest practices. It is hoped that under the "Forest Practice Act" an increasing number of woodland owners will become interested in better forest practices and in this way increase the productivity of their woodlands. This will also assure the wood using industries a permanent source of more and better raw materials.

Unlike the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserve, where no commercial forestry can be practiced, the State Reforestation Areas

or State Forests as they are now known, are intended to produce forest products for commercial use. At any time when there is material available, it can be advertised and sold. The first income derived from this source was from the sale of Christmas trees. From 1941 to 1947 inclusive, 85,550 Christmas trees have been sold, with an income to the State of \$41,041.18. The removal of Christmas trees is done as a thinning, since only a small percentage of the stand is suitable for Christmas trees. Small sales of other forest products such as sawlogs, fence posts and fuelwood have been made. This type of sale will increase as the trees develop into merchantable products.

These "State Forests" belong to "The People of the State of New York". That is the name in which all the deeds are recorded in the County Clerk's office. Therefore each one of you has an interest in this project. It is only right that you should know how your money is being spent and what is being accomplished. These State Forests, which, according to the State Constitution, are to remain forever as forest land, are a sound, long term investment of the peoples money. In addition to the tangible values in forest products, there are other values that cannot be estimated in dollars and cents. The recreational value increases every year. From the very beginning they have been "Public Hunting Grounds". Their value in regulating stream flow and erosion is also important.

These forest lands are always open to the public for legitimate purposes, and it is hoped that the people will use them and not abuse them. The most serious hazard is from fire, often caused by matches or cigarettes carelessly dropped or from camp or picnic fires left inextinguished.

As District Forester for the Conservation Department, I am acting as custodian of these lands for the citizens of the State. My staff and myself are at your service and in return we desire the help and

cooperation of the public in this enterprise which is not only economically sound, but of great social importance to our County and State.

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N.Y.S. Cons. Dept -
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