Cora Alta Ray was born in Albany, Missouri of Virginian stock. Her ancestors had migrated to Missouri earlier via Kentucky. Her avid interest in history was further heightened by this personal background. During her childhood her family moved to Kansas and as a young woman she came to Minneapolis where she did clerical work until her marriage to Dr. A. D. Corniea.

Only in hearing one after another describe her in similar terms does one realize what an unusual person she was. One could not but be impressed by the number of people who described her boundless enthusiasm, her tireless energy and vitality, her warm out-going cheerfulness and her wren-like manner. People interested her and she loved children. She was a person who derived much pleasure in finding small ways of making life more pleasing for those around her.

Her keen mind and unusually excellent memory revealed themselves in her varied activities. She was an ardent student and extremely widely read. She particularly delighted in histories, biographies and varied scientific works. She enjoyed browsing through second-hand bookstores and several people related how she had located for them a certain rare volume he or she had been seeking.

Her wide reading led to the collecting of antiques. Several acquaintances commented on her almost professional knowledge of both antique furniture and glassware. They recalled trips with her in search of antiques which were hardly ever without adventure because of her inborn sense of humor and her forthright manner.

She and her husband shared their many interests and were active in a number of organizations. Through the Archeological Society she became further interested in the early history and Indians of this region. She participated in many of the Geological Society’s field trips and in listening to others reminisce one again heard frequent mention of her lively sense of humor. She also belonged to the Minnesota Botanical Club and was rather well known in this group as an amateur mycologist.

She was a charter member of the Minnesota Bird Club and also a member of the Audubon Society. Participants in the annual Christmas Bird Census at the Cedar Creek Natural History Area remembered her entertaining the group each year at her cabin, providing them with hot coffee and delicious food. They also recalled how the birds would always single her out of a group and perch on her hand to be fed individually. They seemed to recognize in her a true and devoted friend. She fed them throughout the year and often walked into the area through the snow to replenish the feeding stations.

Both she and her husband were charter members of the Natural History Society of Minnesota. In the early years of the organization she was particularly active in recruiting new members. Many people laughingly recounted that they first joined literally in self-defense, so ardent was her zeal for promoting the infant organization.

The role for which she will be remembered the longest, however, is the important part she played in the establishment of the Cedar Creek Natural History Area located north of Minneapolis. Originally discovered
independently by Cooper, Rosendahl and Butters in the early thirties, she learned of the area and in 1937 purchased an 80-acre tract in the heart of the area. Soon she envisaged the addition of many more acres, all of which would be preserved in their natural condition for study by future generations.

Certain members of the Minnesota Academy of Science including the discoverers of the area were also interested in such a project. During the summer of 1937 she invited the membership of the Academy out to her cabin in order that they might see the area personally and thus be persuaded to support the Academy’s desire to save the region. This was only the first of many groups and individuals she entertained in order to interest them in the project.

In 1939 she made the first of many subsequent additional purchases of land as desirable parcels became available. In 1940 she was made a member of the Academy Committee for the Preservation of Natural Conditions. She studied the tax delinquent lists assiduously and her correspondence reveals dozens of communications from the county auditors of both Isanti and Anoka Counties. These letters show that they also became interested in “her” project and sometimes took it upon themselves to notify her when land in which she might be interested was to become available.

These purchases were made and the land held by her until the Academy could take it over and reimburse her for it. In some cases this meant holding the land for many years. The importance of these purchases lay in the fact that the land could be saved from lumbering and other undesirable use only by buying it as it was put on the market or allowed to go for taxes. A search through the records reveals that she personally bought parcels of land totaling about 600 acres which were eventually added to the natural area.

She furthered the development of the project in three ways. First she helped sell the value of preserving this area to the local people. Though some were hard to convince, she had a knack for understanding people and getting to know them. Through her convincing arguments she persuaded more than one farmer to deed land to the Academy for inclusion in the tract “for the sum of one dollar and other good and valuable considerations.” Her success was due to her deep interest in people and her unbounded enthusiasm for the area.

A second way in which she helped establish the refuge was through interesting other people and organizations in the project and persuading them to buy the land and deed it to the Academy. The National History Society, for example, through her efforts bought a tract of land and presented it to the growing preserve.

The third way in which she stimulated the growth of the area was through helping to keep the Academy and later the University informed of new parcels of land which might be available. Her correspondence indicates that farmers in the locality whom she had interested in the project kept her informed about land which was to be sold before it was put on the open market. Interviews and records indicate that it is a conservative estimate to say that another 500 acres were added to the area through her influence as described above.

She had three great fears for the area — fire, depletion of wildlife and lumbering. In order to cut down the hazard of fire and protect the wildlife, she was instrumental in getting the area declared a state game refuge. To make it even more effective, however, she personally circulated petitions among the farmers who owned adjacent land which asked that their land also be included in
the game refuge. This greatly increased the acreage for the refuge and thus the safety of the animals. Lumbering she tried to prevent by early purchase of the land and by apprehending poachers. The writer remembers several hilarious (but successful) adventures with her while tracking down leads on timber poachers.

The Cedar Creek Natural History Area thus has grown from a nucleus of 80 acres originally purchased by her in 1937 to over 4,200 acres at the present time. Following the Fleischmann Foundation Grant of $250,000 which resulted in most of the additional increase in area, a research laboratory was built and formally dedicated during the summer of 1957.

Cora Alta Corniea provided the foresight, dynamic drive, persistence and enthusiasm which are necessary to get such a project successfully under way. At the time of her death she was already working on the preservation of another natural area near Kenyon and had made the first contact with the owner of one of the tracts in which she was interested. Yet she did all of this in such an unassuming and matter-of-fact manner that many never fully realized the extent of the role which she played. However, as Dr. W. S. Cooper, Dr. Donald B. Lawrence, Dr. Arthur N. Wilcox and others have commented, without her efforts it is doubtful that there would be a Cedar Creek Natural History Area today. Her early purchases including the land deeded to the area by her husband and herself constitute the very heart of the tract.

To characterize such an individual briefly is difficult. Perhaps it is just best to say that she was an inspiration and friend to many and particularly a friend of the land. — Department of Biology, Western Washington College, Bellingham, Wash.

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**CORRECTION FOR HARLEQUIN DUCK RECORD**

In my article for the June 1960 issue of *The Flicker* I listed a report that Mr. and Mrs. Roy Naddy of Duluth had seen a Harlequin Duck on Tofte Bay. I stated that this report should probably be considered as unverified. Since this I have had correspondence with Mrs. Naddy to verify this observation. The pair of Harlequin Ducks were seen on February 22, 1960 on Tofte Bay at a distance of only about twenty feet. This is surely an authentic record. — Forrest B. Lee