A Brief History of the Cedar Creek Natural History Area

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According to William S. Cooper he first saw Cedar Creek bog while on an airplane trip on April 6, 1930, and later that year he and Dr. Rosendahl investigated the place on foot. There had been one previous visit to the Isanti portion of what was originally called the Cedar Creek Forest by N.C. Huff in 1929. Helen Buell, the wife of Dr. Murray Buell, had called attention to the fact that the Cedar Bog Lake was referred to as Decodon Bog because Drs. Rosendahl and Butters were so impressed with the amount of Decodon growing there.
As will become very evident, the Minnesota Academy of Science became much involved in the early development of the Cedar Creek Forest. The Academy held its first annual meeting in 1933 with William A. Riley serving as its first President. In 1937 the Minnesota Academy of Science was incorporated. That same year the Academy established a Committee on the Preservation of Natural Conditions. Dr. Cooper, who was President of the Academy at that time, asked Dr. Arthur N. Wilcox to serve as Chairman of the Committee and suggested that there should be six members, evenly divided between plant and animal fields. Soon after the Committee was appointed, its attention was called to the desirability for acquiring and preserving a portion of the area known as Cedar Creek Bog. Within the next few years, the Academy, with the aid of Drs. Cooper, Buchta, and Gould, was able to obtain the donation of sufficient funds from about 25 members so that by 1940 arrangements were made to purchase important parts of the area.

At this point one should pay tribute to Cora Alta Corniea who made truly outstanding and unselfish contributions to the project. From the 1930s through the 1940s and for most of the 1950s, she was either buying land herself, paying taxes on it, or holding it until a permanent organization could be formed to preserve the area in the public interest. She also took steps to interest scientists, professors, deans of the University and others to move in the direction of public or semi-public ownership. According to Grace Nute, if only one person could be held responsible for beginning the crusade to save Cedar Bog, that individual would be Cora Corniea.

The purpose for which land in the Area was desired seemed to justify and require a tax-free status, so it was concluded that the University of Minnesota would be the most suitable public agency to preserve the Area and administer it wisely for its intended uses. To further action on this conclusion, Dr. Wilcox and Dr. O.T. Walter, President of the Minnesota Academy of Science, wrote to University President Gary Stanton Ford saying that they would like to discuss with him the desirability of University ownership on a tract of land to be preserved for scientific and educational purposes. Two years later, in 1942 an agreement between the Academy and the University was executed, providing for the conveyance of lands and the establishment and administration of the Cedar Creek Forest as it was designated at that time.

Soon after this, a number of individuals including Dr. Donald Lawrence and his wife donated parcels of land, as did the Minnesota Natural History Society under the direction of Dr. Clayton Rudd. Thus, an ambitious land acquisition program got underway. And it now became time to make arrangements for the administration of the Area. Dr. Wilcox suggested to Dr. Walter C. Coffey, the University President, that there should be an Advisory Committee appointed that would be directly responsible to the Dean of the Graduate School, including representation from the Minnesota Academy of Science. Thus, in May of 1945, an Advisory Committee consisting of Dr. Wilcox as chairman, Professor Ernst Abbé (Botany), Professor Dwight Minnich (Zoology), and the Dean of the Graduate School, Theodore R. Blegen, an ex-officio, was appointed. The University President, J. Morrill, invited the Academy to select an Advisory Committee of three to advise the University Committee in the administration of the forest and its uses. Those selected were Professors O.T. Walter of Macalester College; Harvey Stork, Carleton College; and the Rev. Adelard Thuente of St. John's University. One of the first acts of the joint Committee was to request a grant from the Graduate School for an aerial survey and mapping of the Forest which was carried out under the direction of Dr. Lawrence. A more urgent matter was undertaken when the Committee drew up a set of regulations for the use of the Area. They included the provision that research projects involving collecting, experimentation, or other disturbance of natural conditions could be carried out only after application to and approval of the Advisory Committee.
Among the first to carry on comprehensive research on Cedar Bog Lake were Dr. Murray Buell and his wife, Helen. They established a transect in 1934 in order to make an elevation survey and marked trees with railroad spikes three of which are still visible. Dr. Lindeman and others used the transect for other purposes. It was at Cedar Creek Bog that Ray Lindeman did his monumental research. He published six papers the last of which is still referred to as the "Classical Paper of Lindeman," and has been described as the "most significant formulation in the development of modern ecology," The article, entitled "The Trophic-Dynamic Concept in Ecology" was published in Ecology in 1942. It had first been rejected by two prominent reviewers because it made too many assumptions.

In 1952 Dean Blegen mentioned to Dr. Wilcox that he had in hand considerable correspondence between Stanley Wenberg, then Director of the Greater University Fund, and Col. Schutte, who was not only a loyal alumnus of the University, but also a close friend of Wenberg and Mr. and Mrs. Max Fleischmann. The University took full advantage of these circumstances when it applied to the Max C. Fleischmann Foundation of Nevada for a grant. In June of 1854, Mr. Luden, the University Controller, received a message from Mrs. Fleischmann in which she said that the Foundation had voted in favor of a $250,000 grant. Of this sum, $165,000 was to be used for land acquisition, $75,000 for a headquarters laboratory building, and $10,000 for current operating expenses. During the next several months, there was a great amount of correspondence and many Advisory Committee meetings before a site for the laboratory
could be selected and purchased and construction could get underway. In the same year, 1954, President Morrill appointed a new Advisory Committee with Dr. Wilcox as the first Director of Cedar Creek Forest and Dr. Minnich as Chairman of the Committee.

In 1956, an important event took place when Alvar Peterson was appointed as caretaker of the new laboratory. The following year, 1957, it was decided to combine the dedication of the new laboratory with the annual summer meeting of the Minnesota Academy of Science. The dedication took place in September with a noon luncheon and dedication address by Dr. Stanley Cain, the subject, "The Need for Natural Areas." Also in 1957, an important decision was made when Dr. Lawrence's application to use Cedar Creek for a project called "Some Energy Relations of Terrestrial Ecosystems" was approved. It was approved as the first experimental study which involved the harvesting of trees and other plants. This research was funded by a grant from the Hill Family Foundation.

In 1958, the National Science Foundation provided funds for stereographic aerial photography and contour mapping, and for the purchase and installation of equipment for the measuring and recording of weather data. In March, Dr. Dwain Warner outlined his proposed research on the application of electronic methods to wild animal field studies. He applied to N.S.F. for a grant to support his proposed radio-telemetry project but was turned down because it was "too wild." However, Mr. H.H. Heckman, Director of the Hill Foundation, was much impressed with the idea and the Foundation awarded the University a $40,000 grant to begin the project. From this beginning, the project expanded to become the largest telemetry program in the world which has influenced biological studies the world over. This same year the name of the Area was changed from Cedar Creek Forest to Cedar Creek Natural History Area.

In 1962, the appointment of Dr. William Marshall to replace Dr. Wilcox as Director of Cedar Creek Natural History Area was announced. In October, the long and dedicated service of Dr. Wilcox as Director was recognized by a dinner attended by about 200 people. On the occasion, Dr. Wilcox was presented with a plaque which was mounted in the laboratory. It was fortunate that this event took place when it did because he died the following February.

By 1964, the activities at Cedar Creek had expanded greatly. Fifty research permits were issued and 800 persons visited the Area including students from the University and six local colleges. There were 175 visits by individuals who came from 19 United States and Canadian Universities and five foreign countries. There were also representatives from the Atomic Energy Commission, the Ford Foundation, U.S. Bureau of Sports Fisheries and Wildlife, and the U.S. National Museum. This same year the duck flight pens were constructed where waterfowl behavior studies have been carried out by Dr. McKinney and his students. At this time, Dr. Frank Irving started a prescribed burning program to maintain savannah-type vegetation. Other lines of research will be described by others contributing to this issue of the Naturalist.

In concluding this brief history, I would like to comment on a few more important events. In 1970, Dr. Marshall was replaced by Dr. David Parmelee as Director of the Field Biology Program to direct activities both at Itasca and at Cedar Creek. In 1975, the Cedar Creek Natural History Area was designated a Registered Natural Landmark by the National Park Service, and 1978 as a Scientific and Natural Area by the State. In 1981, Drs. Tillman and Tester were awarded $1.3 million to conduct a "long-term Ecological Research" project, one of 11 such projects in the United States. In January of 1983, a reception was held in the laboratory where Alvar Peterson was honored for completing 26 years of dedicated service to Cedar Creek. In 1984, the Field Biology Program was terminated and Dr. John Tester was appointed Director of the Cedar Creek Natural History Area.

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