

BIRTH OF A SANCTUARY

BETTY STRATH

Five miles north of the village of Odessa, N. Y., in Schuyler County, lies a narrow valley known by our ancestors as "Texas Hollow". In this "hollow", where Cranberry Creek ends and Texas Hollow Creek begins, is a large marsh surrounded by deep woods — the location of Texas Hollow Wildlife Sanctuary. This wild area has been known to hunters for many years, to local birders for comparatively few.

In 1962 Cotton-Hanlon, Inc., local lumber concern, purchased this land, adding to its millions of acres of timber. This presented a horrible picture to the Schuyler County Bird Club: visions of lumber crews crushing the beds of Pink Lady's Slippers, and chain saws ringing through the woods drowning out the jackhammer drilling and raucous laughter of the Pileated Woodpeckers. S.C.B.C. members snapped to attention. After a heated discussion, a committee was sent to Cotton-Hanlon to see whether anything could be done. They were curious, and a little fascinated by our idea of turning this 50 acres into a wildlife sanctuary and nature center, and although they would not sell the land (we had no money anyway), they were willing to lease at a most reasonable figure. Thus began Texas Hollow Wildlife Sanctuary.

For a sanctuary of its size, T.H.W.S. probably has as varied a habitat as could be found anywhere. Texas Hollow Creek begins in a marsh which was dammed by beaver to form a small lake full of dead snags, perfect for heron roosts, Wood Ducks, woodpeckers, Tree Swallows. This lake is surrounded by Alder thicket, ideal for warblers, Alder Flycatchers, Song Sparrows, Catbirds. There are both deciduous and Hemlock woods; there are two more ponds, one with a Sphagnum bog. Bird-life abounds. To date we have a checklist of 138 species, with 86 species known or surmised to nest within the boundaries.

In 1960, the beaver dam was washed out by heavy spring rains (the beaver had been gone for some time), and the lake became no more than a narrow winding stream through the marsh grass. The herons left, but rails came in! Soon after Cotton-Hanlon purchased this property, which borders on state-owned land, they signed an agreement with the Conservation Department to rebuild the marsh. It was quite a shock to walk in and see bulldozers baring the woods and the area around the lake. Now the dam is completed, the dike and spillways seeded, and in addition to having the lake back again, the seeded open area provides yet another habitat. The S.C.B.C. signed up with the local Soil & Water Conservation Service and acquired seedlings of Multiflora Rose, High Bush Cranberry, Autumn Olive, and honeysuckle, which were set out along the spillways.

Posted signs were donated and put up around the perimeter of the sanctuary. With clippers, brush cutter, and strong backs the remnants of the old trail and logging road were cleared. With the aid of a Senior Girl Scout Troop, tree labels were placed; a younger troop painted a trash barrel. The S.C.B.C. planned to celebrate its 50th Anniversary by

holding an "Open House" on October 11, 1964. A pole-frame was erected, over which was stretched a large tarpaulin to make a crude but practical "Hospitality Tent". Members with printing facilities donated programs. Sunday, October 11, was a typical October day, clear and crisp. Over 100 people of all ages visited Texas Hollow Wildlife Sanctuary, walked the trails, and joined us for cider, donuts and coffee.

The sanctuary is now open to the public. The Nature Trail leads from the open area through low deciduous woods (Aspen, Witch Hazel, etc.), into the climax forest of oak and other hardwoods, down a mossy glade into the deep Hemlock woods. On the left lies the small pond, known as "Turtle Pond" for its large population of Painted Turtles. On the right is the Sphagnum bog with its larger pond. There is no path onto the bog, but it is possible to get out there via a fallen log during drier seasons. It is full of Hemlock snags, Winterberry Holly, American Larch, Poison Sumac, head-high Royal and Cinnamon Ferns, Pitcher Plant, Sundew, Wild Flag, and other bog-loving plants, including a large patch of Cranberries. However, we try to discourage people from going onto the bog, as it is tricky (and sticky!) going and one slip could be disastrous. The trail winds around the bog pond, making a complete circle, coming back into the deciduous woods before ending only a few yards from where it started. The Conservation Department machinery has kept open a rough lane along the east side of the marsh where they have been doing more seeding and working on windrows. Eventually we hope to build a connecting spur from the Nature Trail and keep this as another permanent path. The bulldozers opened a spring in the blue clay on the north edge of the east spillway. This has been dug out and a crock inserted, and surrounded by flat stones. The water is clear, cold and pure — a handy drinking fountain.

Botanically, Texas Hollow Wildlife Sanctuary is rich, too. Other than the plants growing in the bog, we know of several species of wild orchids: Pink Lady's Slipper, Rattlesnake Orchis, Summer Coral Root, Autumn Ladies' Tresses, plus others we have been told about, but have yet to discover. Trailing Arbutus lines the path; Clintonia, Bellwort, Gay Wings (Fringed Polygala) and other spring plants flourish. Just south of the sanctuary is a patch of the comparatively rare White Gay Wings.

The eventual aim of the S.C.B.C. is to build and maintain a Nature Center with a small rustic building as headquarters. We will, of course, keep a checklist of birds, nesting and migrating, and nest records. We also plan to keep a list of plants growing there. A feeding station will be maintained.

There are many problems, of course, especially for a small club with an even smaller treasury. The two main difficulties are shortage of money and labor. We have been most fortunate in many ways: we receive free legal advice; Dr. Peter Paul Kellogg of Cornell's Laboratory of Ornithology has given us wonderful publicity on his radio program "Know Your Birds"; club members who publish the local shopping guide give free publicity; one club member is giving a program on the sanctuary, with color slides,

to local service organizations and donating any money received. The most rewarding result is the community interest which has been awakened. Formerly, the S.C.B.C. has been referred to locally with more or less tongue in cheek. Even sponsoring paid lectures with fine films has not been too successful in this area. Many of us feel that perhaps from now on the attitude will change — already club membership has increased. People are beginning to realize that those "silly bird watchers" are actually a group of conservation-minded people with our country's wildlife heritage in mind. Of course, the S.C.B.C. cannot take all the credit. The whole country's growing awareness of conservation problems as publicized through all media certainly is keeping the subject before the public. Also, we must give credit where it is due; if it weren't for Cotton-Hanlon, Inc., Texas Hollow Wildlife Sanctuary might never be! This, too, is a political feather in the cap for a large lumber concern. But in its small way, we feel that the S.C.B.C. is contributing by sponsoring this wildlife sanctuary.

The 35-member S.C.B.C. has proved one thing — it *can* be done! Bird clubs need such projects not only to stimulate club interest, but to bring recognition to themselves as working organizations. The size of the club is unimportant. All that is needed is leadership and willingness to work. The interest will take care of itself.

Odessa, N. Y. 14869

CLINTON HART MERRIAM

Clinton Hart Merriam was born in New York City on December 5, 1855. He attended Sheffield Scientific School at Yale and later the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City, from which he was graduated in 1879. Two of his classmates in medical school were A. K. Fisher and E. A. Mearns, both destined to become prominent in ornithology. For several years following graduation Dr. Merriam practiced at Locust Grove, a small community a few miles north of Boonville, N. Y. During this period he was active in field work in Lewis County and adjacent areas and contributed to the Nuttall Ornithological Club Bulletin.

Of major interest to us is Merriam's "Preliminary List of Birds Ascertained to Occur in the Adirondack Region, Northeastern New York." It appeared in the N.O.C. Bulletin, 1881-2 and the "Auk", Volume 1 (1884). This is an annotated list of 211 species with relative abundance indicated in most instances. The area covered is not clearly defined but it is evident that peripheral territory such as Lake George, the western border of Lake Champlain and the upper Black River Valley is included.

A few of the common names used by Merriam are quite unlike the ones we now know. For example his Grass Finch is our Vesper Sparrow, and the Little Blackhead turns out to be the Lesser Scaup. One species whose status has changed radically is the Raven. It is given as a "common resident throughout the Adirondacks". Merriam includes the Masked Duck (*Oxyura dominica*), stating that "Dr. Cabot found it on Lake Champlain." This species, however, is omitted from later New York State lists and it is