

6-1-1931

Comment

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Recommended Citation

Briggs, John E. "Comment." *The Palimpsest* 12 (1931), 254-256.

Available at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol12/iss6/5>

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Comment by the Editor

A MEASURE OF CIVILIZATION

Conservation is a measure of civilization. If greed and bigotry are traits of barbarism, then general altruism and tolerance proclaim tremendous progress in the art of living. It is hard to conceive of a public policy more generous than the preservation of primeval beauty and natural resources for the benefit of everyone, even the generations of the future. The recognition of such a social obligation is a distinct manifestation of high cultural attainment — all the more significant for being voluntary. It indicates a moral attitude as idealistic as the Golden Rule. Any people who place the welfare and happiness of their neighbors and successors above private gain deserve the epithet of "civilized".

For many years the pioneers of Iowa were too busy making homes and earning a living to heed the need of conservation, either of human energy or of natural resources. Even into the nineties the breaking of the prairie and the clearing of the timber continued. At last, in 1895, the voice of Thomas H. Macbride was heard urging that romantic, wooded spots should be reserved for general use and devoted "purely to the public happiness, a holiday ground for country and city folk alike." The establishment of parks, he be-

lieved, would promote public health and happiness, serve as community object lessons in forestry, and "preserve to those who come after us something of the primitive beauty of this part of the world", to the end that the benefits of our natural heritage might be shared by all.

When the Iowa Park and Forestry Association was organized in 1901, upon the invitation of L. H. Pammel, these objects were incorporated in the constitution and Professor Macbride was selected as the first president. To arouse "an interest in, and to encourage the establishment of parks," to aid in the "protection of our wild game and song birds," and to create "one or more state parks in the vicinity of our lakes and streams" were among the avowed purposes of the Association. Yet after more than a decade of persistent agitation not a single State park or forest reserve had been established. As late as 1916 Governor George W. Clarke declared that only a veritable John the Baptist could arouse Iowa to its need of recreation grounds.

Nevertheless the Iowa conservationists had exerted a steady influence which made eventual success all the more secure. In 1917 the General Assembly authorized the establishment of State parks and created a Board of Conservation "for the preservation of places of historic, natural or recreational interest". Within five years more than one hundred and fifty applications for State parks were filed with the Board, fourteen sites

were acquired, jurisdiction over meandered lakes and streams provided seventy more potential "beauty spots", and the public park system had become a popular State institution.

Now there are thirty-six State parks containing approximately seventy-six hundred acres, acquired at a cost of half a million dollars. Last year more than eighteen hundred thousand people visited these Iowa State parks. That is half as many as went to all of the national parks in 1930. It is as though seven of every ten residents of Iowa use our State parks every year.

The hopes of Professors Macbride and Pammel are being realized. Iowa is becoming civilized.

J. E. B.