

Scheme for Conserving Iowa Subsoil Moisture

ISSN 0003-4827

No known copyright restrictions.

Recommended Citation

"Scheme for Conserving Iowa Subsoil Moisture." *The Annals of Iowa* 15 (1927), 624-626.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.6811>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

ANNALS OF IOWA

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

SCHEME FOR CONSERVING IOWA SUBSOIL MOISTURE

For some years our scientists in Iowa have observed the lowering of moisture reservoirs beneath our soil. They prove that this increases crop uncertainty. They remind us of the vanished well sweep that in early Iowa was as conspicuous as windmills are in Holland. They warn us that to continue in our present course a few centuries will probably produce a different if not a desert Iowa and they point to Chinese areas which a thousand years ago were covered with forests but which now are arid as Sahara.

While our scientists go on warning us, we very properly go on protecting private property notwithstanding the inevitable penalty upon both public and private future interests. The private owner of a forest of today is obliged to derive the greatest possible return in money on his investment. He must convert it into a more remunerative crop. To retain it at his private loss is wrong. The public should acquire his forest if it would save it as a public boon. Or through tax exemptions of substantial character, or by other bounties, the public should justify the private owner in holding areas in what owners know and the public knows are less profitable if more beautiful and interesting forms.

In this conflict of private and public interest scientific opinion is not regarded practical by private owners of forest lands, swamp lands, sinuous streams and shore lines of Iowa lakes, because as yet no substantial law has been enacted by which the thrifty private owner can increase his wealth by withholding the axe and tiling spade.

The ANNALS OF IOWA in Charles Aldrich's time was in accord

with scientific views upon our natural resources. Its articles on the prairies, woodlands, and waters of Iowa are part of the literature of the Parvin, Calvin, and MacBride era, of conservation of natural resources. The ANNALS after the Aldrich regime has continued its interest in the Beyer, Shimek, and Pammel era of constructive conservation. In the latter period came legislative recognition. The General Assembly created a Conservation Board, appropriated for its support and introduced the state park system. The first conservation law made the ANNALS' editor a member of the board, and the board made him its secretary. The minutes of the board throughout that period disclose the application of his time and attention to all practical conservation tasks. So the ANNALS OF IOWA had part in the theoretical and has a continuing interest in practical conservation. But there is one phase of the matter which seems to have escaped attention of both our lay and scientific conservationists.

Prior to the plow, our forests, ponds, lakes, and crooked streams fed the under strata. The area and depth of each of these surface reservoirs are known from notes and maps of the first land surveys and of later engineering. Removal of those land wastes and their replacement by farms and homes is our best improvement over our natural physical geography. The ancient surface reservoirs of water overflowed their natural embankments and ran to the sea. They are now reservoirs of surplus foodstuffs flowing by roads and rails to the markets of the world over and across culverts for the ancient waterways.

Each culvert of railroad and highway in Iowa is constructed from known scope and slope of soil area pitching in its direction. The known maximum rainfall is calculated into the design of every culvert. As it is foolish to imagine foodstuffs flowing upon the highways over these culverts forever into the Atlantic Ocean, it seems a foolish fact that all surplus moisture actually flows under the grades and through the culverts to the ocean. These culverts might and should control this water waste. The basins formed could serve as did the ancient ponds. They occupy less fertile lands. They would form stopping places for migrant fowl and excel our streams for fish. Their outlets lead down past homes and farms now short of water for livestock, fire protection, and sanitation.

The municipal water supply of cities such as Fairfield and Chariton are impounded by dams the size of many highway and railroad grades across the same and similar streams. It seems strange that these standing structures, built and maintained at public cost, are not adapted to their every practical use. What forbids adjacent and remote lands the direct and indirect advantages respectively of such possible water supplies? Why not adapt these dikes to the restoration of subirrigation? The thousand ancient forests, ponds, and lakes could in effect be re-established and maintained on less fertile lands in ten thousand eligible places for ponds and lakes which existing culverts, slightly altered, could economically create and effectually control. Could this not be restitution of ancient advantage to the public of now and future through merely economizing opportunity today? Could there not be an increase of subirrigation and surface waters by the public for its perpetual use, while private enterprise goes on adapting its choicest lands to highest agricultural uses? We have yet to hear that it could not be done and we have yet to see a move to do it.

PORTRAIT PAINTERS

The four portraits installed in a ceremony of the Pioneer Law-makers, as shown in their proceedings published in the present number of the ANNALS, are the work respectively as follows:

Senators Cummins and Dolliver, by Arvid Nyholm.

Senator Young, by Karl A. Buehr.

Governor Garst, by Louise Garst McBroom.

Arvid Fredrik Nyholm was born in Stockholm, Sweden, July 12, 1866. He was a pupil in the Royal Academy, Stockholm, Colarossi Academy, Paris, and of Anders Zorn, the well-known Swedish artist. For many years Mr. Nyholm has been a resident of Chicago. In 1915 he was awarded the Municipal Art League prize, also the popular prize of the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1924 he received the Municipal Art League prize for portrait. He is best known as a painter of portraits and among his works are the portrait of Captain John Ericson in the National Gallery, Washington, D. C., that of General Whipple at

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.