



Because of conservation practices and irrigation it would be impossible to locate this scene in Texas county from the above photo made in 1941.

Oklahoma's 50 Years of Concentrated Conservation



George Tarpenning and Charles Hollopeter show erosion in 1947.

Conservation History Made in Oklahoma

By Ferdie J. Deering

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first installment in a series of articles about the soil and water conservation movement in Oklahoma by one who has been an interested observer of it all. The story is so extensive that only the highlights will be covered, but we might overlook some of them. If you know of important conservation developments that are not mentioned, please write: Ferdie J. Deering, The Farmer-Stockman, P.O. Box 25125, Oklahoma City, OK 73125.

PART ONE

FIFTY YEARS ago the "new state" of Oklahoma was a badly eroded, drought-stricken farming area. Gullied fields produced low crop yields. Cattle and calves from the overgrazed pastures had to be "backgrounded" before they could qualify for feedlots.

Today Oklahoma agriculture stands as an example of what people who love their land can do to restore soil fertility and increase productivity.

This has been accomplished because Oklahomans recognized that they could not go on plowing up-and-down hills, allowing water to cut deep gashes across their fields. They determined to stop these tragic losses and to a large extent have succeeded. The people who had a part in this movement are legion and this magazine would not contain all of their names if they were available. This review can only mention a few of those whose roles were performed in public. Much of the good work that was done on farms and ranches over the years was recorded only as statistics.

The conservation efforts that began in the early 1930s resulted in a state law in April 1937

that permitted Oklahoma landowners to form local "soil conservation districts." The districts then could arrange for the U.S. Soil Conservation Service to provide technical assistance to individuals and the Agricultural Adjustment Agency could help farmers pay the costs of conservation.

There always have been some individuals who tried to take care of their land, but the apparently endless opportunity to break out new land led to destructive exploitation of millions of acres. Early settlers didn't understand what they were doing.

We ought not be too hard on them, even though some have accused the pioneers of "robbing the soil, devastating the forests and exterminating the wild life."

They did much good. They built cities, produced food in abundance, established schools and churches, built roads and enacted laws to guarantee freedom for all, even the dissidents.

The effort to "save the soil and stop the water where it falls" took hold somewhat slowly at first. It gained momentum as farmers, ranchers, bankers, county agents, SCS people and others preached the urgency and the opportunity.

The fervor of conservation advocates often was compared to that of religious evangelists conducting revival meetings.

Eventually, the entire state of Oklahoma was voted into 88 conservation districts, the state conservation board was elevated to become the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and activities received stronger funding from federal and state sources.

Few of those who got in on the very beginning in Oklahoma are around today. One of the first is Charles Hollopeter of Blackwell. Fresh out of Oklahoma A&M College, he was assigned in 1930 to work with a crew to map the soils of Oklahoma. This had never been done in detail here or elsewhere.

These soils studies covered only topsoil and the scale was one inch to one mile. Nevertheless, Hollopeter says they were used in initiating conservation in Oklahoma. Grant county was first, followed by Kiowa and Tillman counties. Later Oklahoma and Muskogee. Eventually, larger scale maps were used and the entire state was mapped.

The surveys were used at first primarily by insurance companies and mortgage people in evaluating land for loans.

"We recognized that erosion was occurring but we did not realize its significance at first," Hollopeter said. People who had settled Oklahoma came from Texas and southern states and from Kansas or states to the north and east. They farmed as they had done elsewhere, not reckoning with the violent rainstorms, high winds and long dry periods in the new country.

The Red Plains Experiment Station south of Guthrie was established in 1929. It was assigned the task of doing something about erosion in central Oklahoma. Scientists quickly found that cultivating up and down slopes probably was the major cause of erosion and that soils by themselves were not the principal cause.

Dr. N. E. Winters, head of the agronomy department at Oklahoma A&M College, had been su-

pervising the soils studies and when the Soil Conservation Service was created in the Department of the Interior, it was natural that he be put in charge of Oklahoma.

Winters had graduated from OAMC in 1911, worked in Texas, North and South Carolina and had spent several years in cotton work in Argentina before he returned to Stillwater. He also had acquired a doctor's degree at Cornell University.

Dr. Hugh Hammond Bennett had been head of the soil survey work in the U.S. Department of Agriculture for years and when Congress decided in 1935 to transfer the SCS from Interior to Agriculture, he was the natural choice to head it up. (SCS was called the Soil Erosion Service at first.)

The key people had no difficulty in determining that erosion was a big part of an enormous farm problem. The Great Depression was in full swing, farmers were plagued by drought, surplus commodities and low prices, as well as eroded farms.

In fact, almost anybody driving along narrow pavement or dusty county roads of the time could see that farms were washing away and ask "Why doesn't somebody do something?"

The question was "What shall we do?"

Dr. Winters called in his young assistants and they sat down to try to find an answer. This group included Earl P. Weston, Irvin Nicholas, Henry Bergschneider and Charles Hollopeter. Bergschneider still lives in Nebraska and Hollopeter near Blackwell, on the farm his father bought in 1926. The others are deceased.

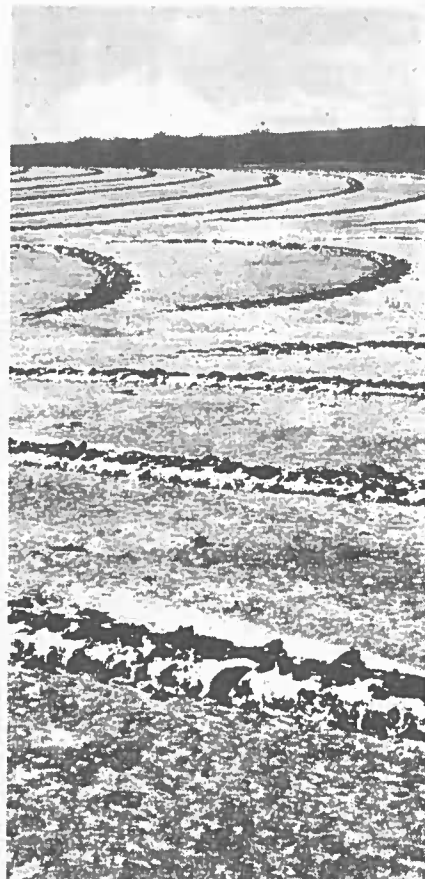
Oklahoma was one of the first states to get organized to save soil and water. Many leaders think that no other state has done more to correct a bad situation, but few will claim that there is not a great deal more to be done.

To Be Continued
OCTOBER 1983 13



Dr. H. H. Bennett, SCS chief, toured Oklahoma conservation projects in 1948. Here he consults with Dr. Lloyd E. Church, now living at Wilburton.

Oklahoma's 50 Years of Concentrated Conservation



Contour furrows in Stillwater were photographed in 1937.

Different Plowing Saved the Soil

By FERDIE DEERING

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is another installment in a series of articles about the soil and water conservation movement that had its beginning in Oklahoma 50 years ago. If you know of important conservation developments that are not mentioned please write: Ferdie J. Deering, The Farmer-Stockman, P.O. Box 25125, Oklahoma City, OK 73125.

PART TWO

THERE IS no telling what Oklahoma might be like today if the conservation movement had not taken hold when it did in 1934. Dust had been whipped into huge fence-row sand dunes, soil devoid of humus and fertility eroded easily. Prickly pear and mesquite trees were spreading in many pastures and nearly everybody was short of water.

Even worse, financially destitute land owners and tenants were loading their remaining possessions into old cars and heading for California or to cities to find jobs.

Those farmers who stayed on the land demonstrated courage and perseverance that would have cheered the pioneers who had homesteaded on the prairies only a generation or two earlier.

The drouth was recognized as a national disaster when high winds whipped loose soil into "black blizzards" that rolled

across the Great Plains to obscure the sun and blot out hope.

Charles Hollopeter had gone to work for the Soil Conservation Service as chief soils scientist Nov. 1, 1933. His father had come from Iowa to claim a homestead in the land rush opening of the Cherokee Outlet. The family settled in what is now Grant county but later moved to Kay county, where the elder Hollopeter was recognized by The Oklahoma Farmer-Stockman as a "Master Farmer" in 1930.

"I was in Chicago attending a conservation meeting when the first big black blizzard hit the plains," Charles Hollopeter recalled. "I was assigned to go to Lamar, Colorado, immediately. That was considered to be the heart of the Dust Bowl. I never felt so sorry for a bunch of people in my life as I did for those poor farm families out there. It was a frustrating experience, trying to help them when they had lost their crops, their farms and all."

It was fortunate that the United States had begun to gear up to save the soil. When asked what had brought the erosion problem to a head, resulting in the conservation program, Hollopeter said:

"It was recognition that hazardous farming up and down slopes was the principal cause of erosion and changes were needed."

This finding of the Red Plains Experiment Station south of Guthrie may have been discovered elsewhere about the same time but it was important in Oklahoma. H. G. Lewis, first superintendent of the Red Plains station, demonstrated it in various ways, as did his successors, Harley A. Daniel and Harry Elwell.

Discovery of oil in the area and construction of Interstate 35 through the land resulted in closing of the station.

The first director of SCS in Oklahoma was Dr. N. E. Winters. When Oklahoma was combined into a region with Kansas and Nebraska Dr. Winters became regional director with offices at Salina, Kans. Earl E. Weston, former vocational agriculture teacher at Caddo, was named Oklahoma state conservationist, followed by Leo Workman.

First SCS project manager for Oklahoma was Earl Smith, former county agent at Muskogee, where the initial major project was set up. He was succeeded by Clyde Hastings, former experiment station director.

The soils survey work that was begun in Oklahoma in 1930 proved to be valuable in launching the state conservation program under federal legislation enacted in 1933, 1934 and 1935.

When it was determined that slope appeared to be more important than soils as a cause of erosion, survey teams were put to work mapping both, using

larger scale maps than previously.

"We tried to find out how much soil had been lost," said Charles Hollopeter, "and to see how suitable it would be to keep the soils in cultivation. Fellows kept coming out from Washington bombarding us with new regulations on how to map soils and slopes, and we couldn't get all required information on the maps."

Finally, Dr. Winters appealed to Washington for help. Dr. H. H. Bennett, chief of SCS, replied he was sending six men, all of whom had worked in the Maritime Commission and knew how to handle government regulations.

"We took the six of them down to the Grand hotel in Stillwater," Hollopeter remembered, "One night Ike Warner, one of my staunchest lieutenants, and I were working in the office when one of these men from Washington, a man named Mead, saw the light on and came to investigate."

"Mead asked 'What the hell are you doing here at this time of night?' and we told him that we were working because we had to be in the field the next day and needed to get ready."

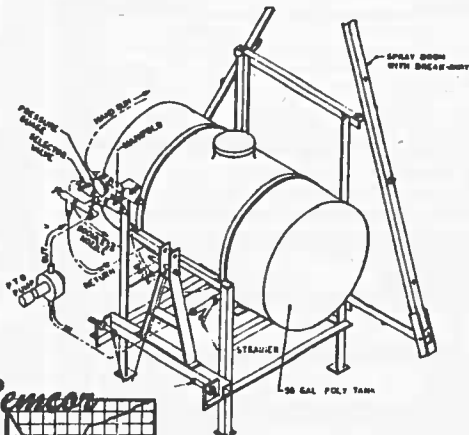
"Mead told us 'Where I come from we get our work done in eight hours or it isn't done!' That was news to us. We thought we were supposed to work until we got the job done."

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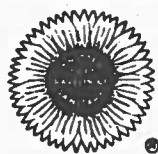
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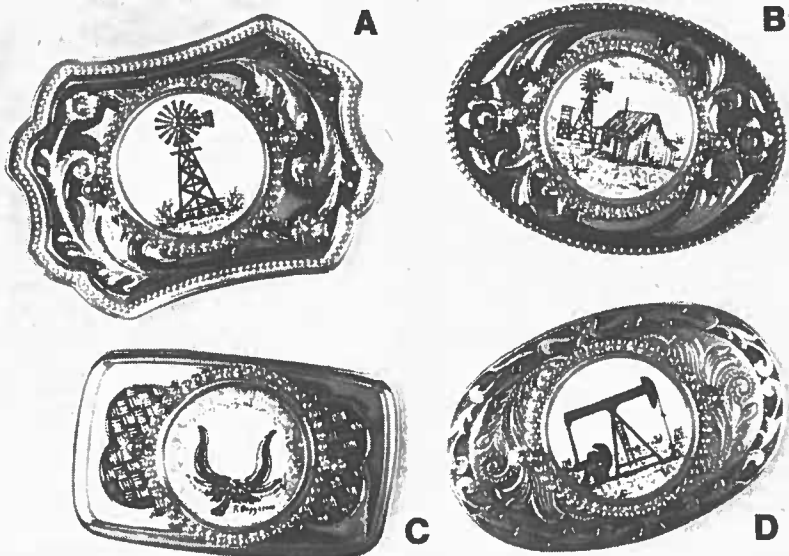
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Survey team included Louis Derr, Henry Orsuki, W. A. Spawasser, Fred Dries, Isaac Warner, Alvin "Buck" Clements, Harold Welch and Charles Hollopeter.

Different Plowing Saved the Soil

Continued from Page 14

The Oklahoma maps of soil types and slopes were reproduced and copies sent to senators, congressmen and legislators. This gave them a picture of what was happening to the land in Oklahoma.

Although federal conservation legislation was not authored by an Oklahoman, Hollopeter remembered that Congressman Nicholas of Eufaula fell right into line and became a strong booster for doing whatever was necessary to start building soil instead of losing it. He wanted to make soil conservation work permanent.

"I attended meetings three times in his office in which he called in Department of Agriculture officials and asked them what they had done about the soil erosion problem," Hollopeter said. "They replied they had been working on it but did not have the background on soils and slopes that you fellows in Oklahoma have."

In the early days of conservation the main objective was to build terraces to move the rainfall off the fields as rapidly as possible with as little loss of soil as could be managed. It later was found to be more desirable to keep the water on the land as long as possible to reduce erosion and increase insoak.

In addition to terracing, the early 10-point conservation program included strip cropping, cover crops, grassed waterways, legumes for green manure, and contour furrows for spreading water over the fields.

It was necessary to spread manpower, too. To help accomplish this SCS set up 10 major conservation projects in the state. First ones were at Muskogee, Stillwater, Ardmore, Pryor, Elk City, Duncan, Seiling, Stigler, Guymon and Chickasha.

As results of these demonstrations became known the conser-

vation movement began to spread. Farmers, ranchers, county agents, land owners, bankers, business men, farm magazines and others joined in the campaign to stop erosion.

It gained momentum as all concerned realized that the same practices that would save the soil also would save water and the soil wouldn't produce much without adequate water.

OSU Scholarship Honors Deering

FERDIE J. Deering has been honored by the establishment of a "President's Distinguished Scholarship" at Oklahoma State University.

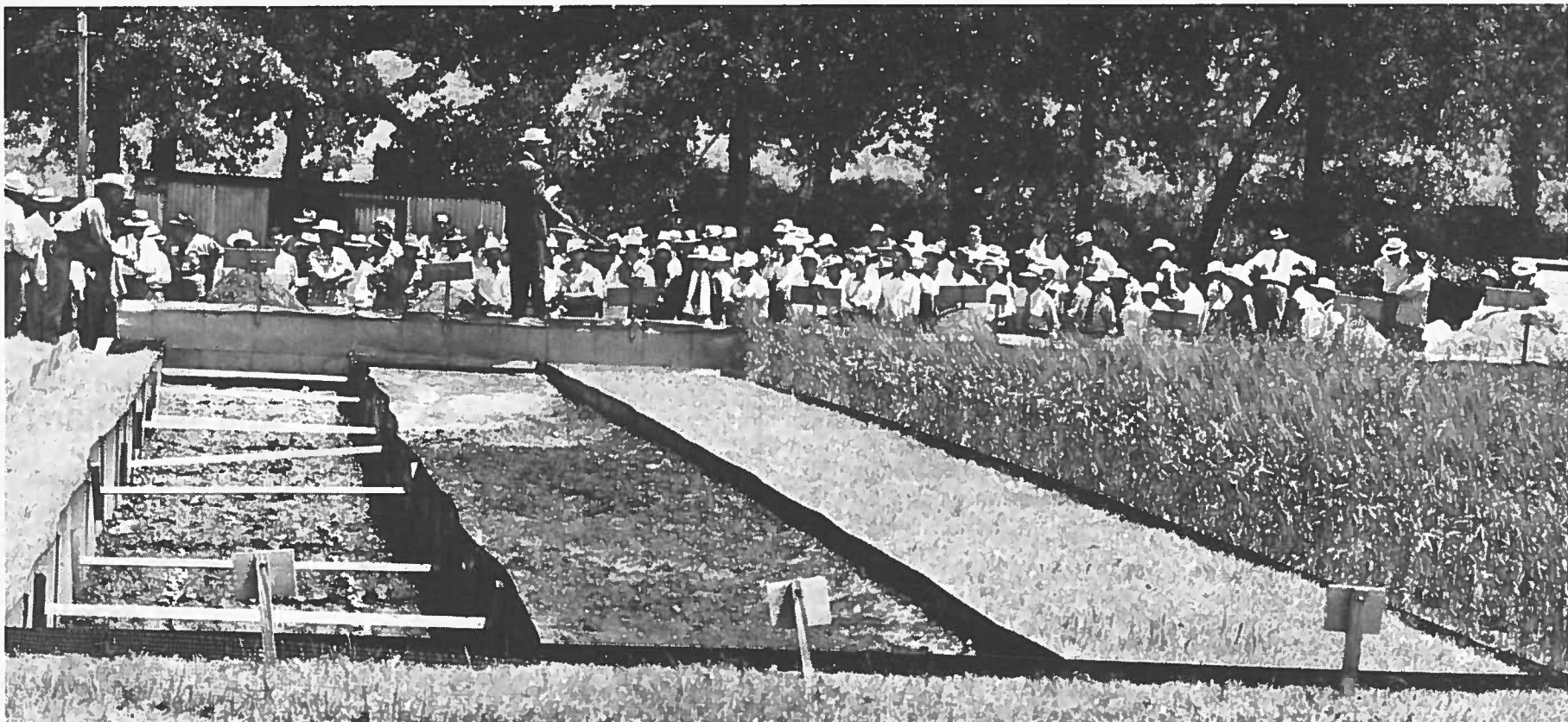
The scholarship is supported by a \$25,000 endowment created by Deering's friends and several agricultural organizations in the state. A student majoring in agricultural communications will receive the award of \$1,500 annually.

Deering, a native of Texas, spent most of his early years in Ada and attended public schools there. He graduated from East Central Oklahoma State University and worked for The Ada News before moving to Oklahoma City to become associate editor of The Farmer-Stockman in 1937. He later became editor, then vice-president and editorial director.

He retired in 1975 but has continued to write and maintain an active interest in Oklahoma agriculture.

Deering has received OSU's Henry G. Bennett Distinguished Service Award, East Central's Distinguished Alumnus Award and the Reuben Brigham Award from the Agricultural Communicators in Education.

He has written several books and still writes editorials and columns for The Daily and Sunday Oklahoman.



Leon J. "T-Bone" McDonald explains how different farming methods affect erosion in 1952 at Red Plains Experiment Station, Guthrie.

Dedicated Leaders Spread the Word

By FERDIE DEERING

EDITOR'S NOTE: Other conservation leaders will be mentioned in future issues in this series. If you know of outstanding individuals or particularly successful projects, let us hear from you. Address: Ferdie J. Deering, The Farmer-Stockman, P.O. Box 25125, Oklahoma City, OK 73125.

PART THREE

THE 1983 program of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts included an anecdote headed: "The Secret Is Out!"

It related that 20 years ago Richard Moore of Arkla Gas had told a group of board members that the conservation district program was one of the world's best-kept secrets. He had asked about 100 people what their local conservation district did and he had failed to get a satisfactory reply from any of them.

Prior to the 1983 convention Moore was asked if the statement still was true. He emphatically stated: "No! The secret is out!" A new survey had shown widespread knowledge of conservation.

Much of the credit for this understanding must go to early conservation workers, county agents, vocational agriculture teachers, participating farmers, bankers, businessmen, farm publications, newspapers, radio and television broadcasters, 4-H and FFA, rural homemakers, farm suppliers and other volunteers.

These same groups are still helping, although conservation campaigns may lack the fervor of earlier evangelistic efforts.

Thousands of farmers who were having a hard time of it in

the 1930s and 1940s sacrificed crop income and spent money to complete conservation plans, partly paid for by government programs.

Results pleased them and every county had farmers who became enthusiastic boosters for well-planned conservation. Just one example: Harley Kellogg of Logan county had outstanding success with hairy vetch in his legume rotations. He told the story so many times that his friends sometimes called him "Vetch Kellogg." He had many counterparts over the state.

An outstanding lay booster for conservation was and is Dr. Lloyd E. Church, Wilburton dentist more widely known in this area than in his profession. He served a year or so as chairman of the Washita Valley Council before he moved from Clinton to Wilburton.

Church grew up near Helena in Alfalfa county, where he learned that water is a precious commodity and that all depend upon the soil for food. He never forgot and his entire career has been divided between his dental patients and the conservation movement. He served as chairman of the state water study policy committee in the 1950s, which drafted much of Oklahoma's present water legislation.

Church was succeeded as chairman of the Washita Valley Council by a young man who had grown up and farmed near Pauls Valley, Richard Longmire. More about his contributions will appear in later articles, but it should be noted here that Longmire estimates he had spent one-fourth of his career working on conservation.

While he was chairman of the Washita Valley Council a Chey-



Church



Roberts



McDonald

enne banker, L. L. "Red" Males, served as secretary, and a Chickasha newspaperman, Dave Vandever, was treasurer.

During this period, the upstream flood control program was developed in Oklahoma, pioneering in procedures and promotion. Longmire made more than 200 trips to Washington and Males traveled across the nation to tell what was being done to stop flooding.

Under state law adopted in 1937, hearings were required to be held in each area where a conservation district was being considered. Responsibility for conducting these hearings fell upon Edd Roberts, a Lincoln county farm boy who had worked his way through Oklahoma A&M College to earn degrees in animal science and agronomy.

He had been a county agent before he was appointed Extension conservationist, a job to which he devoted his efforts for 19 years. He held hearings in all 77 counties and sometimes became embroiled in heated discussions because of fears that the government would bill farmers for conservation done and other misunderstandings.

After Sam Lowe, district conservationist in Garvin and Murray counties proposed that soils be judged like livestock, Roberts

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helped devise score cards and rules. He also prepared illustrated publications and visual aids on everything from terracing to stubble mulching. The International Land, Pasture and Range Judging contest held annually at Oklahoma City for 32 years is an outgrowth of the first "Soils Rodeo" held near Pauls Valley.

Widely acclaimed as the leading orator for conservation, lay or professional, is Leon J. "T-Bone" McDonald, now living in retirement at Edmond. He was a vocational agriculture teacher, county agent and chamber of commerce executive before he joined the Soil Conservation Service in 1934.

As assistant state conservationist McDonald delivered hundreds of speeches throughout Oklahoma and in many other states from coast-to-coast. The enthusiastic, informative addresses of this tall, lean "conservation evangelist" made him a popular guest wherever boosters were gathered and he was willing to oblige.

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Dedicated Leaders

Continued from Page 14

McDonald used charts, slides, pointers and any other gimmicks he could think up to interest and motivate listeners to cooperate in saving soil and water. He promoted "Soil Stewardship Sundays" in churches and worked with the Oklahoma Press Assn. to develop pages of booster ads for conservation in local newspapers.

Benefits of these ads were generally recognized and some tangible evidence was tabulated in Western Kay County District. After a page advertisement had been published monthly for a year it was found that referrals had increased 145 percent; pond construction rose by 64 percent; waterways sodded grew by 215 percent; and terraces built increased by 78 percent.

Hardly any means of communication was overlooked: Field days, demonstrations, pamphlets, tracts, billboards, fair exhibits, civic club meetings, and booths at conventions were used.

McDonald persuaded Eugene P. Gum, long-time executive secretary of the Oklahoma Bankers Assn., to sponsor a "Bankers Award Program." Certificates of achievement were presented to conservation co-operators at community meetings. Often local banks or civic clubs provided a meal. These were impressive occasions and the honorees treasured their awards.

This brought into the picture George H. C. Green, Oklahoma City banker who served a number of years as chairman of the OBA agriculture committee. Green attended award meetings throughout the state and became a popular speaker.

Other leading conservationists will be mentioned in later articles in this series. There is Nolen Fuqua of Duncan, now 89, who served as the first president of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts, which he helped organize. He later travelled 100,000 miles a year at his own expense while serving as president of the National Association of Conservation Districts.

Dairying is one of the steadyest jobs in agriculture but Paul Mungle of Atoka found time to serve 20 years as a member of the first state conservation committee composed of district supervisors. His wife, Ethie, became known as "the crusading grandmother."

The list of pioneer conservation boosters who gave generously of their time and resources to save soil and water for our country's future and for the next generation never will be complete, and space would not allow it to be published.

It was the teamwork of lay people and professionals that made Oklahoma a leader in many phases of conservation.

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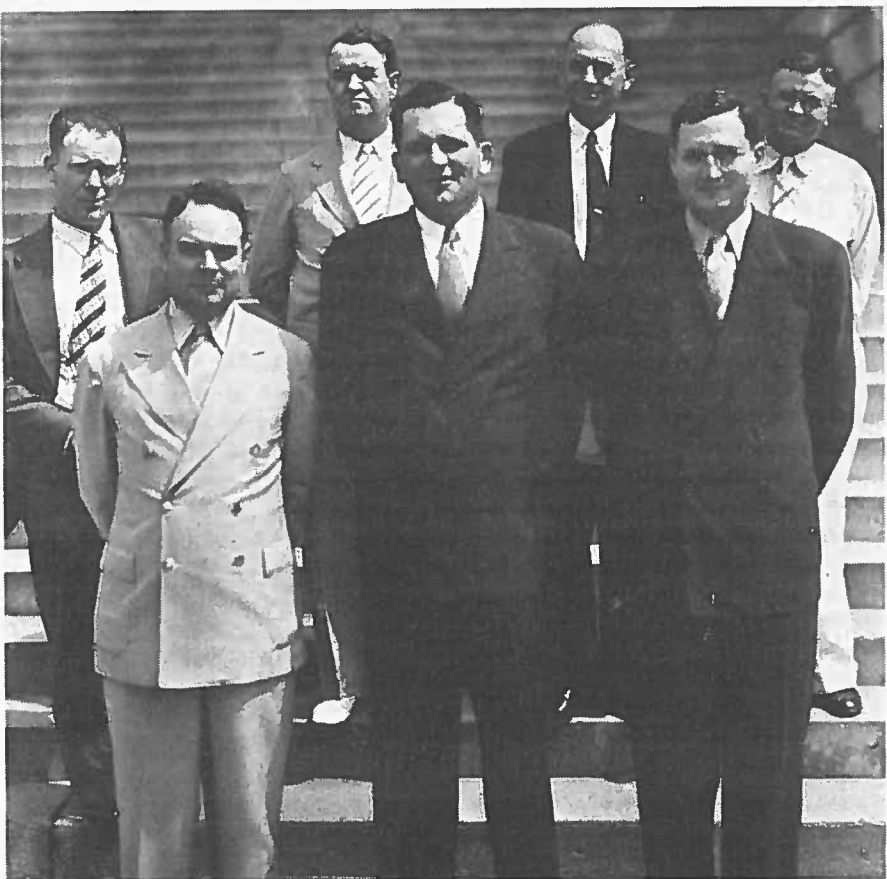
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The first state conservation committee: (front) Ellis, Perky, Lowe; (back) Denny, Bennett, Scholl, and Weston, state soil conservation co-ordinator.



Oklahoma Conservation Commission (clockwise) George Wagnon, Hal Clark, Leonard Graumann, Bill Joe Culver, Scott King.



Paul Mungle



Laurence Drake



Ethie Mungle



Nolen Fuqua

A Stormy Beginning

By FERDIE J. DEERING

PART FOUR

THE OKLAHOMA Association of Conservation Districts was conceived in "bureaucratic boredom" and born into controversy.

The motive, according to those who were there, was to stop doing so much talking and start saving soil and water.

The OACD story begins with enactment of enabling legislation for formation of conservation districts by the Oklahoma legislature in 1937, one of the first states to take such action.

According to "The History of Conservation in Oklahoma," prepared by Laurence Drake, Leonard A. Solomon and Harry Birdwell, the first three districts were organized in 1938. They were the Arkansas-Verdigris, Garvin County and McIntosh County districts.

Within a year 28 districts had been formed, including about one-third of the state. Eventually the entire state was included in one of the present 89 districts.

The original law created a state soil conservation committee to oversee activities of local districts, whose supervisors were farmers and landowners. Experience in operating co-operative conservation programs was lacking at all levels.

Members of the first state committee were: Dr. Henry G. Bennett, president of Oklahoma A&M College; E. E. Scholl, director of OAMC Extension division; Dr. Lippert S. Ellis, director OAMC experiment station; J. B. Perky, supervisor of vocational agriculture; and E. P. Weston,

state co-ordinator of the newly created Soil Conservation Service. Staff members included Earl Lowe of the college as secretary, and Raymond Denny.

"The legislature was very generous to the conservation movement," recalls Richard Longmire of Pauls Valley, who had been appointed to the Garvin County board in March 1938. "They gave us \$150,000 for the biennium, which was a lot of money then. The next two years we got \$50,000. That money was sent to Oklahoma A&M but we could not find where it was spent on conservation districts."

It was a hot summer day in 1939, before air conditioning, that a group of district supervisors got fed up with procedures used and with speeches by bureaucrats sent down from Washington.

"We were called to Stillwater to be educated," said Nolen Fuqua of Duncan, who is still a local board member after 45 years. "They had a big bunch of us there and we were just burning up. One bureaucrat after another came in to explain the conservation movement over and over.

"We were there for almost a week and we got just about all of that we could stand. So some of us at lunch said we ought to get organized and tell those guys what we were going to do and then get on home," Fuqua said.

That is what happened. A meeting was called that night by Fuqua, Longmire, Frank Duna-

way of Jones, Charles Hollopeter of Blackwell and a few others, with only district supervisors present. They wrote a constitution and by-laws, then elected Fuqua president. He and Longmire took the lead in wresting control of conservation funds and administration from the college.

"Bob Kerr (then governor) didn't know what was going on," Longmire said, "and Dr. Bennett had gotten crossways with the legislature, possibly over rumors he planned to run for public office, but he and Governor Kerr were political allies.

"There was about a dozen of us old country boys who didn't know when to quit. We stayed in there and fought for the change we wanted and we got it," Longmire remembered.

The action came after a joint session of the legislature was held one night at the call of Governor Kerr. It was a stormy meeting but Fuqua and Longmire, the only district representatives present, stood their ground.

That state committee was represented by J. B. Perky, who evaded questions by saying that only Dr. Bennett could supply information requested and that he was out of town. When a legislator reminded him that refusal to answer might cost him his job, Perky responded.

The legislature created a new state committee composed of district supervisors. The Oklahoma Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (the name then used by OACD) wanted to select all of them but Governor Kerr insisted on the right to name one. He chose D. H.

Oklahoma's 50 years of concentrated conservation

Brown of Norman. Others were Laurence Drake of Gate, E. H. Houston of Grove, Paul Mungle of Atoka, and Claude Ingram of Hollis. This committee set a new pattern for administration.

Dr. Bennett didn't give up. He recommended a new program with a state appropriation of \$1 mil. and called a meeting of supervisors at Stillwater to review the situation. Many supervisors resented this move but Fuqua suggested they attend and "settle this thing once and for all." A big crowd turned out.

"We just went in and sat down," Fuqua said. "Dr. Bennett was on the stage. He said, 'Mr. Fuqua, will you come up and sit with me?' I replied 'No, sir, this is your meeting. You go ahead with it.'

"Dr. Bennett put on quite a show about what could be done, with it all tied into his operation, but he didn't get anywhere with his talk. At noon time he invited Dick Longmire and me to go to lunch with him. So we did and we got down to the nitty-gritty. We told him how it was going to be and that was all."

Fuqua recalled that Harry Chambers, who served as state SCS conservationist from 1942 to 1954, was "a big help to us when we had no money and nothing to operate with." Dues were only \$1 per year per supervisor, hardly enough for postage.

Presidents of OACD

Nolen Fuqua, Duncan, 1939-1946
 Richard Longmire, Pauls Valley, 1947
 A. P. "Red" Atkins, Guymon, 1948-1950
 Claude V. Thompson, Ada, 1951-1953
 Frank C. Dunaway, Jones, 1954-1955
 Harral Allen, Ada, 1956
 Lavern Fishel, Coalgate, 1957-1961
 Ward Perryman, Duke, 1962-1963
 Hugh Green, Carmen, 1964-1965
 Joe Hill, Fairland, 1966-1967
 Dick Piner, Idabel, 1968-1969
 Richard Longmire, Pauls Valley, 1970-1971
 Laurence Drake, Gate, 1972-1973
 Jack Hudman, Chattanooga, 1974-1975
 Wallace C. Denny, Guthrie, 1976-1977
 Jack Grimmett, Pauls Valley, 1978-1979
 Leonard Graumann, Granite, 1980-1981
 Ervin Mitchell, Bako, 1982-1983

Because they were supervisors themselves and in close touch with soil needs and local resources the new state committee was able to identify problems and find solutions. They had the support of OASWCD leaders in mobilizing support for legislation and appropriations needed.

OASWCD leaders also worked to overcome opposition to the movement due to misinformation and jealousy.

"I talked with lots of farmers who were just so hardheaded that they wouldn't listen," said Laurence Drake regarding efforts to overcome customs and prejudices. "They weren't convinced that there was a need to turn the state's land care techniques around."

Fuqua served as president of OASWCD for its first nine years. He was succeeded by Richard Longmire who served in 1947 and again in 1970-1971. Fuqua helped organize the National Association of Conservation Districts and served as its president 1955-1959. The annual convention of NACD was held in Oklahoma City in 1951.

Conservation farmers' wives weren't content to stay home. They wanted a part in the movement and in 1953 they formed the Oklahoma Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts Ladies Auxiliary, the long name resulting from the title then used for OACD.

Mrs. Paul (Ethie) Mungle of Atoka was elected president. Her husband, Paul, was a member of the state committee but Ethie became a leader in her own right. She impressed Robert S. Kerr so much that he titled a chapter in his book, "Land, Wood and Water," written while he was United States senator, "Crusading Grandmother."

Kerr described her leadership and how she rode buses 50,000 miles a year after she was elected president of the NACD Ladies Auxiliary. She pecked out hundreds of letters on her typewriter and made numerous speeches to try to convince landowners

that conservation was not just for today "but for our children and grandchildren."

One of her grandsons, Mason Mungle, son of Mr. and Mrs. J. Jene Mungle who still operate the family dairy, is now chairman of the Atoka County Conservation Board.

"Mother was a devoted believer in conservation of our natural resources," said Jene Mungle. "Dad's motto was that rules and regulations are guidelines to go by but at times they have to be bent a little to fit a given situation to serve the people and the project."

That was pretty well what organizers of the original Oklahoma Association of Soil and Water Conservation meant when they went into business. They weren't interested in bureaucratic regulations as much as they were in getting on with the business of saving our natural resources.

Nolen Fuqua described the attitude that hot summer in Stillwater when supervisors had all of the "bureaucratic boredom" they could and organized for action.

"Next day when we went down for a session," Fuqua said, "there was an old boy from Hugo, Barney Barnhill, who rose up and said 'Gentlemen, if you'll give me a desk and a blonde secretary with a typewriter I'll go back home and start this thing to rolling. Let's go home and get to work!'"

Eventually, OASWCD shortened its name to OACD and the state soil and water conservation committee became the Oklahoma Conservation Commission in 1970. Names have changed but the aim has remained the same, and dedicated supervisors are still working at the job.

The procession of distinguished leaders have good reason to be proud of OACD accomplishments during the first half century of concentrated conservation in Oklahoma. There is hope for even greater achievements in the next 50 years.

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Civilian Conservation Corps workers busy in the mess hall at Geary between assignments to build dams and plant trees.

Unemployed work saving soil

FEB 1984

By Ferdie Deering

PART FIVE

THE FIRST commissioner of agriculture for the United States was Isaac Newton appointed by President Lincoln in 1862. He felt that significant changes were ahead for American farmers.

"Hitherto the American farmer had been taught, and had been accustomed to cultivate a primitive soil," T. Swann Harding wrote in a 1943 USDA publication that included Newton's views. "He must now unlearn those old habits and theories and be taught instead how to utilize manures, crop rotations, careful cultural methods and intensive cultivation. He could no longer move on to a rich land frontier; he must stay put . . . to make two blades of grass grow where but one grew before."

Although others also may have observed what was happening, it was not until the 1920s that severe soil erosion, farm surpluses and low commodity prices made the farm situation a matter of national concern.

A notable event of the late 1920s was a National Land Use conference held at Chicago where agreement was reached that soil erosion must be stopped. Preliminary work on conservation started in the USDA Bureau of Engineering which was expanded in 1931.

However, when Congress created the Soil Erosion Service in 1935 to deal with the problem on a larger scale it was placed in the Department of the Interior for political reasons. Later that year it was transferred to the Department of Agriculture, where its name was changed to the Soil Conservation Service.

Conservation got a big boost from the Emergency Conservation Work Act under which was established the Civilian Conservation Corps to provide jobs for unmarried young men from families on relief.

The CCC lasted nine years, with as many as 500,000 youths at a time engaged in work on wildlife refuges, parks, national forests, shelterbelts of trees, roads and conservation projects on farms. They were paid \$30 a month, of which \$25 had to be sent home to their families.

"The young men in the CCC camps were destitute, willing to work because they wanted some money," recalled Charley Hollopeter, Blackwell, who helped organize personnel to supervise their work. "They did a good job, with SCS supervision. We used grass and vegetation mainly to slow down water runoff."

Nationally, it has been estimated that as many as 40,000 illiterate young men learned to read and write in CCC camps. Technical personnel in the 37 CCC camps in Oklahoma taught many of them.

"These boys who learned to write were the happiest boys you ever saw when they got to where they could write letters home and read the ones they got back," Hollopeter said. Land owners who learned about conservation from the CCC boys also were happy.

Richard Longmire of Pauls Valley, one of the state's staunchest conservation boosters, first became interested in saving soil and water through CCC projects.

"My dad had a little old farm of 40 acres that he had taken in on a debt," Longmire said. "He gave it to me and said, 'Do what you want to do with it.' In 1935 they had put in a CCC camp at Wynnewood, filled with grown young men out of jobs.

"Some fellows from SCS came to see me—Dave Putman, Sam Lowe, a vo-ag teacher from Vannoss who had moved over to SCS, and Kelly Wilson, who was head of the Wynnewood CCC camp. We agreed to plant that land to bermuda grass.

"I took an old riding lister frame to the CCC blacksmith shop and they turned it into a bermuda grass planter," Longmire said. "There weren't any on the market then. We planted the first bermuda grass ever planted in Garvin county.

"Then I put some heifers in there on that pasture and I have never seen anything grow like they did. The next year some

land next to it was for sale. I bought it and planted more bermuda grass. I furnished tractors and mules and the CCC built a dam for a big lake—a whole acre," Longmire said. "It was big for that time. It is still there, but the land is now a golf course."

Nolen Fuqua of Duncan is another of the many who became conservationists because of the CCC-SCS program.

"The first notice I had about conservation came when they set up a CCC camp here," Fuqua said. "They happened to work a couple of my places and did a nice job on them. They cleaned up my pastures, built a pond or two, took care of prairie dogs, built terraces and put in nice grass, set out a post grove and I thought that was out of this world."

Fuqua was so proud of what they had done that he talked about it a lot—"more than I should have, I guess, and they took notice of it." That led him to become a conservation district supervisor in 1938 after the state conservation law was enacted.

"The SCS district man working with the CCC camp, an old timer named J.A. Kellogg, caught me one day on the No. 9 green and introduced himself," Fuqua said. "He asked me how I would like to be a supervisor in a conservation district. I told him I didn't know anything



The Agricultural Extension Service began setting up soil testing laboratories in counties after World War II. Here Tillman County Agent Wayne Liles (later KWTV farm director) and Asst. Agt. Leonard A. Solomon (now Oklahoma Conservation Commission director) are testing the fertility of soils for local farmers.

about that, but he said I could learn." He did and Fuqua is still serving on his local board after 47 years.

Although lots of men were out of work when the SCS was started there was not enough engineers, soil scientists and agronomists available to fill the sudden demand. Higher salaries paid by SCS caused many county agricultural agents and vocational agriculture teachers to hear a call to new duties.

This generated friction between heads of the agencies, even though all agreed conservation was a job that had to be done.

"For a time this had a very crippling effect on (vocational agriculture) programs," Roy P. Stewart wrote in his latest book, "Programs for People," a history of vocational agriculture in Oklahoma. "There were more than 30 teachers attracted to the SCS, for a variety of reasons, some being tenure without boards and administrators in almost daily contact, salary and less expense for doing one's job as a vo-ag teacher did in those days, and, perhaps, last, the challenge of something new."

Clarence Kingery, one of the transplanted teachers, recalled (in Stewart's book) that most of the first teachers to make the move were appointed around July 1, 1935. He said "A few, like Harry Chambers, John Underwood, Tom Dale and myself, received WPA part-time training before beginning in May that year."

Stewart's list of vo-ag teachers who became SCS employees includes many well-remembered names. No doubt a similar list of former county agents who entered SCS might be compiled.

Eventually, all positions were filled and conservation was settled in as an integral part of the agricultural scene. The ASCS and its predecessors assumed a vital role in financing conservation.

Conservation spread, with women, youth and urban people taking an interest in it. Both 4-H and FFA activities include conservation projects. Enlarged in-

terest by farmers stimulated the establishment of soil testing laboratories in every county.

In 1976 conservation districts began recruiting in-service teachers and providing scholarships for them to attend conservation leadership programs at Oklahoma State University and East Central University, Ada. These have now been expanded to include most of the major colleges and universities in the state.

These are only examples of continuing educational work going on. It is vital, but there still are indications that many land owners and farmers neglect or postpone changes that may be needed to protect their soil and save their water.

The cost-sharing plan for assisting in conservation projects is essential, but it has one drawback. Too many farmers schedule their conservation according to funds available, rather than on the basis of conservation work that needs to be done.

Dedicated conservationists will tell you that conservation pays well enough that its cost is justified without federal help.

Co-ordination of conservation activities is a responsibility of executive directors of the state boards. First, this was the state soil conservation committee, then the state soil conservation board, and now the Oklahoma Conservation Commission.

These key positions have been filled by Earl Lowe, Vernon Howell, Joe Preston, E. B. Smith, Clarence Ramming, Word Cromwell, Herschel Burris, Marvin C. Emerson, and Leonard A. Solomon, who has served as executive director of the Conservation Commission since 1971.

SCS state conservationists for Oklahoma include Harry M. Chambers, Ray Walker, Courtney A. Tidwell, William L. Vaught, Hampton Burns and Roland R. Willis, who was appointed in 1975.

Each of these individuals made a substantial contribution to the progress of conservation in Oklahoma.

TO BE CONTINUED
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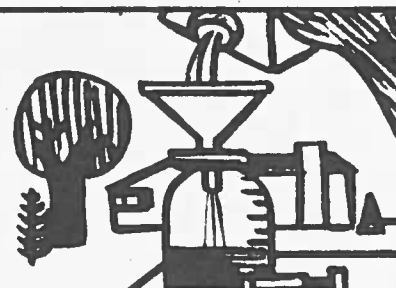
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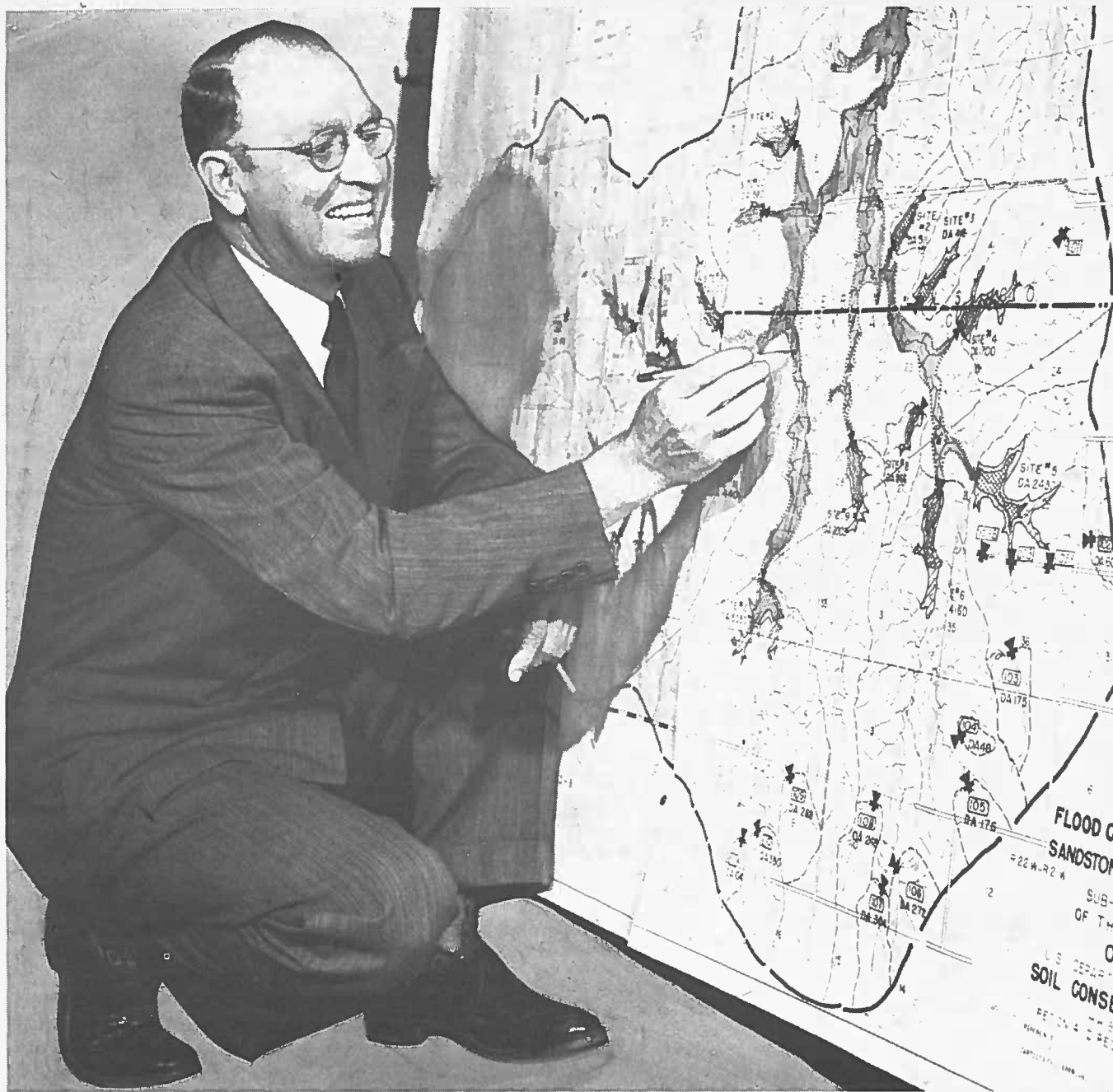


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L. L. "Red" Males, Cheyenne banker, traveled thousands of miles to present his lecture reviewing benefits of flood control.

Oklahoma's 50 years of concentrated conservation

momentum. On May 14, 1976, Lake Liberty in Pontotoc county was dedicated as the 1,776th flood control dam to be built in Oklahoma, far more than any other state.

The first application of upstream flood control measures to an entire stream's watershed was the Sandstone creek project. It includes about 65,000 acres, mostly in Roger Mills and Beckham counties in Oklahoma plus a small area in Texas. A key figure in this projects was L. L. "Red" Males, Cheyenne banker.

Males dates the Sandstone project from April 4, 1934. That was when the Clinton Daily News reported a disastrous flood that took 17 lives, washed away houses, barns, railroad tracks, crops and livestock and brought a delegation from Washington to investigate.

"We had had floods before," Males recalled, "but this one was so much bigger and so many lives lost, most of them around Hammon, where they got only 1.6 inches of rain. At Cheyenne we had 13.79 inches of rain. The flood struck Hammon at 2:30 in the morning. The river rose five feet in 30 minutes. They didn't have a chance."

"We got very little benefit from that 13 inches of rain. We had been in a drouth, then we had this flood, followed by another drouth," Males said. "People realized something had to be done and a conservation district was formed in 1938. Later when we asked for easements for Sandstone they were ready to sign up for it."

As work progressed and results became evident, Sandstone attracted visitors from most states and many countries. Males was in demand across the country to show his watershed success slides.

As word of Sandstone's success spread, work began on other projects. Eventually, 64 watersheds along the Washita were treated and flood prevention measures applied to watersheds of more than 100 other Oklahoma streams.

"We did not expect to stop all flooding," said Alvin M. "Buck" Clements of Ninneka, who served as area conservationist for the Upper Washita district during some of its busiest years. "We hoped to stop a lot of small floods and to take the top off of the bigger ones. That has been done."

A later project on Wild Horse creek in Stephens county reflects comparable success in flood control on the Lower Washita. A brochure summarizing benefits there says that damage from 70 floods that occurred between 1923 and 1942 along the

Upstream flood control

By Ferdie J. Deering
Part Six

MOST present-day Oklahomans either hadn't been born or were only children in the dust bowl days of the 1930s, but they've heard tales of vicious floods and disastrous drouths.

Even so, it is hard to visualize the severity of those problems when one sees alfalfa growing along creek bottoms that once overflowed, uplands producing good crops, ponds filled with stock water and municipalities assured of adequate water.

Much of this progress may be attributed to Oklahoma's unsurpassed upstream flood control program. State conservationists pioneered this movement and local projects became national examples.

The tremendous accomplishment of bringing almost 11 mil. acres—one fourth of the state's area—into approved watershed districts, construction of 2,541 flood prevention dams, and 415 miles of channel improvement did not come about quickly or easily.

It might not have happened at all without the perseverance of

dedicated leaders who gave unstintingly of their time and resources.

It began in 1936 when Congress designated the Washita river as one of 10 watersheds for flood prevention treatment under responsibilities of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Studies of those watersheds were made and in 1944 Congress authorized expenditure of some \$11 mil. over 15 years for conservation treatment on 2.8 mil. acres of U.S. farm land.

It was another two years before the first flood detention structure was completed on Cloud Chief creek in Washita county, Okla.

In 1947 the Washita Valley Council was formed. Dr. Lloyd E. Church, Clinton dentist, was elected president, with Richard Longmire of Pauls Valley as vice-president. Dave Vandever, Chickasha newspaperman, was secretary, and L. L. "Red" Males, Cheyenne banker, was treasurer. When Church moved to Wilburton in 1948 Longmire succeeded him as president.

The council consisted of representatives of 19 soil and water conservation districts in Oklahoma and three in Texas. It met

once or twice a month at Chickasha.

"There were no guidelines for upstream flood control, so what we decided there often became policies for development of watershed programs for the entire United States," Longmire said. "There was a lot of controversy—I mean, lots of it. Our meetings became very heated at times, but we got the program going, dams built, and conservation demonstrated its value."

In 1953 Longmire and about 20 other conservationists were called to Washington by President Eisenhower to explore expansion of the Washita program nationwide. This led to enactment of P. L. 566, which designated SCS as the primary agency for USDA co-operation with local watershed units.

Originally P. L. 566 provided for local people to pay half of construction costs but in 1956 Sen. Robert S. Kerr of Oklahoma obtained passage of an amendment authorizing SCS to pay 100 percent of costs if local watershed organizations provided the land easements.

When that measure cleared Congress the watershed program in Oklahoma really gained

Wild Horse caused damage averaging \$605,000 a year.

Floods rendered much of the bottomland unproductive and drouth in the 1950s led to water shortages, rationing in Duncan, and threatened operations of the city's two largest industries.

In 1955 Nolen Fuqua, Lawrence Humphreys and other conservationists asked Duncan officials to join in a flood prevention program. The worst drouth in the city's history the following year put the project in motion. Duncan voters approved a \$1.8 mil. bond issue by a 13-1 majority to pay the city's share of costs.

The two largest lakes on Wild Horse now provide Duncan with ample water. Bottom land values have increased from five to eight times, farm income is up, and thousands of acres that had been too risky to cultivate now produce alfalfa and improved pastures.

Retail sales in Duncan are up, industrial employment has expanded and the Upper Wild Horse has become a recreational center.

Similar stories of success and profit might be written about scores of other upstream flood control systems in Oklahoma. However, much remains to be done. Following heavy rains in October 1983, President Reagan designated 10 Oklahoma counties as major disaster areas because of flooding. Some of them



Visitors from 19 countries visiting upstream flood control structure on Barnitz creek in Custer county in 1959.

were in the Washita river watershed system.

In late October Alvin "Buck" Clements, former SCS area conservationist on the Upper Washita, and I drove through Clinton, Elk City, the Sandstone creek project, Cheyenne, Hammon and other upstream areas that formerly suffered tremendous flood damage.

Erosion was evident in places, especially in newly-planted wheat, and some rural bridges had washed out. However, benefits of the flood control program were plainly visible. Alfalfa on bottom-lands had not washed away or silted over. Urban communities had not suffered serious flooding and no lives were lost. There was no way to calcu-

late the dollar value of flood damage prevented.

The conclusion must be that concentrated conservation applied by Oklahomans over the past 50 years to save our soil and water is working. It was worth doing and it undoubtedly will be worthwhile for us to continue working for more and better conservation.

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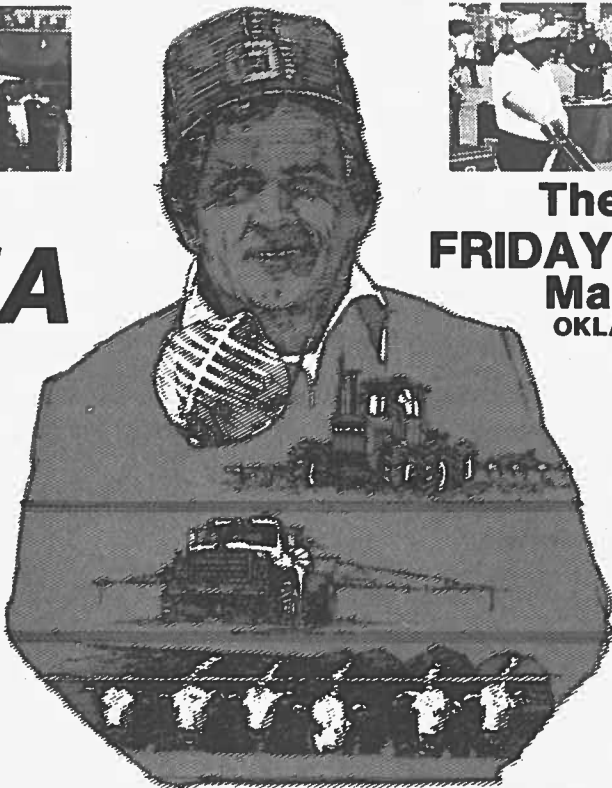
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Robert Toole, assistant director, Oklahoma Conservation Commission.



Gene H. Sawyer, Oklahoma Assn. of Conservation Dists.



Leonard Solomon, executive director, Oklahoma Conservation Commission.

Conservation Meeting

The 39th annual meeting of the Soil Conservation Society of America will be held at the Sheraton-Century Center hotel in Oklahoma City July 29—August 1. Hosts will be the Oklahoma Council of Chapters.

SCSA was founded in 1945 as a private, nonprofit, scientific and educational organization. It has more than 13,000 members worldwide.

The purpose of SCSA is to promote the science and art of good land use, with emphasis on the conservation of soil, water and related natural resources, including all forms of beneficial plant and animal life."

Our children's inheritance

An organized conservation effort has been going on in Oklahoma for 50 years; has it been enough?

By Ferdie J. Deering

Conclusion

CONSERVATION is a process, not just a project. It has been going on in Oklahoma for 50 years. What about the next 50 years?

The answer lies in what is happening in world population and in what each land owner does about conserving soil and water on his patch of ground.

Experts say that by the year 2000—only 16 years away—world population will grow from the present 4.6 bil. to more than 6 bil. Demand for food will increase by a third just to keep people eating as well as at present. Greater demands for water for all purposes will occur also.

We asked a number of experienced conservation leaders what they foresee in this regard. Here is what some had to say:

"First, the problems we have are ours," said Dr. Lloyd E. Church, Wilburton dentist who has devoted much of his life to conservation efforts. "There are people who don't care what happens to those who come after us. Too many people don't realize that we are using up our natural resources faster than they are being replenished. We must motivate people to actuality."

In a letter addressed to Secretary of Agriculture John Block, Church stated that he believed the greatest responsibility for conservation rests in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, with local burdens carried by soil conservation district leaders.

"Restorative work will be very expensive, and the land operator or owner could not afford to pay the costs," Church said. "The people who eat the food and drink the water should bear the costs."

Nolen Fuqua of Duncan, who has been a district conservation supervisor for more than 45 years as well as serving as president of state and national conservation organizations, says he had two objectives in life. One is to preserve our national character and the other is to conserve our soil and water.

Fuqua firmly believes that soil and water conservation must be developed together. "We not only need to conserve our water but when we build lakes we need to put in grass to protect the soil from being washed away," he said.

Another long-time conservation leader is Richard Longmire of Pauls Valley. He said, "The thing that concerns me right now more than anything else is that land which washed away 50 years ago is eroding again. People went in there on land that was gullied and almost past redemption and brought it back into production. Now they're plowing it up again."

The continuing nature of conservation was emphasized by L. L. "Red" Males, Cheyenne banker who helped develop the nation's first complete watershed conservation project on Sandstone Creek.

"Because it has been here all their lives, some younger land owners may assume that conservation has always been here or that it is all done," Males said. "Well, we never get all of the conservation done. Each generation must carry on its own conservation."

When asked how present and future land owners might be motivated to assume its conservation responsibilities, Males said:

"Without finding fault with SCS and other agencies, there was a time when nearly everybody who worked for SCS was an

evangelist for conservation. In every little district office there were two or three people who were conservation evangelists. Maybe we need to recharge these people with some of the same medicine."

One of the leading evangelists was Leon J. "T-Bone" McDonald, now 87 years old and living at Edmond. He formerly was assistant state conservationist for SCS in Oklahoma and "preached" conservation to audiences coast-to-coast.

McDonald said field services are not "leading the cheering" as they once did and people in the country have sort of lost sight of Main street and Main street has lost sight of the country.

"We've got to raise up a new generation of people who have their feet on the ground and who are dedicated to saving the soil and water," McDonald said.

Roland A. Willis of Stillwater is present state conservationist for the USDA Soil Conservation Service. He had this to say:

"Oklahoma's 89 conservation districts have provided strong local leadership in motivating one of the greatest conservation ethics and volunteer efforts ever undertaken. About 60 percent of the land area in the state is adequately protected from soil erosion."

"We must continue to find new, better and more cost-effective ways of solving critical soil erosion problems, yet preserve the volunteer approach which has been so successful."

Gene H. Sawyer of Carnegie was elected president of the Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts in January. He, too, is optimistic about the future of conservation, noting that we have come a long way in the past 50 years.

"The Governor, Oklahoma legislature, and U.S. Congress have a good understanding of what it will take to get the job done," Sawyer said. "Because of our work with educators, conservation is part of the curriculum for

thousands of young people and I believe that the general public has a good understanding and appreciation of the need for a strong conservation program at the federal, state and local levels."

Sawyer expressed strong belief that the conservation effort will continue to grow and that the public will demand that conservation programs receive adequate funding and support.

Work of Oklahoma's 89 conservation districts is co-ordinated by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission. Leonard A. Solomon, executive director since 1971, sees a great need for accelerating conservation in spite of our accomplishments to date.

"We keep patting ourselves on the back for the great conservation program we've developed over the past 50 years, but it's not enough for the next 50 years," Solomon said. "Even if we get soil loss down to our goal of five tons per acre per year on cropland and three tons per acre per year on pasture, at the rate we are losing farmland to irreversible uses, that loss is too great."

"The problem is that Americans only react to crises. Until we have a real shortage of food and fiber or another dust bowl which affects every American home, we will not have the demand from the public to give soil conservation a top priority."

In summary, the problem does not seem to be opposition to soil and water conservation. Almost everybody seems to be in favor of it in an apathetic sort of way.

But that might be like expecting to go to heaven when you die, even though making no preparations for the trip. A lot of people who think conservation is a good thing may be neglecting it.

Preservation of our soil, conservation of our water and wise utilization of both these vital resources is essential. Land and water are the most valuable property inheritance that one generation may pass along to the next.

Readers on conservation

DEAR EDITOR: As a young girl I moved to a broken-down farm near Guthrie with my mother in 1939. My father was scheduled to retire in a year and my mother and I moved to the farm. It was a dairy project, but suddenly we realized the land had to support the cows and somehow the land took preference. As World War II began, Dad's retirement was deferred, so my mother took on the job and with the help of SCS people did an excellent job. The Daily Oklahoman did a story on the project. Although I've been away from the farm for many years, I still have a certain love of the land that feeds us all.

Helen Springer Matoy
Stillwater

DEAR EDITOR: Two very important practices are grassed waterways to protect against soil washing away and planting tree shelterbelts to protect against wind erosion. It's difficult to get combines over high, sharp, curved terraces. Grassed waterways could do about as much good, depending upon ground around your field. Legumes are tops for building up worn-out soil and they help hold the soil.

Alta M. Evans
Vici

DEAR EDITOR: My mother, Ruby Springer, was the superwoman in early conservation. My proof is a tattered and torn article from The Daily Oklahoman, July 20, 1947. It gives her credit for some of her land work and also pictures some of the people you mentioned in your article on conservation.

Rubylea Farmer
Guthrie

DEAR EDITOR: I have read your articles about the soil and water conservation movement that had its beginning in Oklahoma 50 years ago. I don't know of any conservation that you have not mentioned but I would like to tell about my first experience with conservation.

In 1923 I was nine years old. Daddy had some corn planted on rolling upland in McClain county near Purcell. We got a big rain and part of our corn was almost washed away. All the loose dirt was washed out down to the hardpan. Daddy called on every member of the family, which was five.

We went to that field with our hoes and picked up that corn by the blades and hilled up dirt around each stalk. Daddy plowed it with the cultivator. We did this before the ground dried out. The corn was hanging by the roots. I don't know how much of it was in this condition but to a nine-year old boy it looked real big.

I guess the real reason I wanted to write you is to pay tribute to my father, who was a tenant farmer.

In 1928 we lived on a farm that was suffering from soil erosion. Daddy asked the landlord to build some terraces but he would not even help Daddy. So Daddy built some himself. He hired a man to survey the lines. He borrowed a V-shaped tool from a neighbor who was building some terraces. This tool was made from two 2x12s. The upside was fastened with hinges

with a stiff arm that you could make wider.

We would plow one round, then hook to this tool with four mules and move that dirt up-hill. We repeated the process until we built the terrace. We made the fills with team and slip. I drove the team and my elder brother handled the slip.

Daddy saw what was happening to the land and he did something about it before there was any organized conservation. We made fine cotton crops on this land.

Yes, you have guessed what happened. The landlord moved us because he wanted it all for himself, but he was not the farmer that Daddy was. He never made near as much as Daddy. One of his sons confessed that they never made any more than the rent that Daddy had paid them on "third-and-fourth" crop shares.

H. E. Colwell
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