

A BRIEF HISTORY
of the
AMERICAN NATURE STUDY SOCIETY
with emphasis on its publications
during its second half-century
1958 – 2008

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(NOTE: In 1958, on the occasion of its 50th anniversary, E. Laurence Palmer published "Fifty Years of Nature Study and the American Nature Study Society" in *Nature Magazine*. What follows is a summary of those early years, and a brief description of the years since 1958 leading up to the Society's 100th anniversary.)

The American Nature Study Society (ANSS) was founded at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in Chicago in 1908, at which time Liberty Hyde Bailey was elected its first president. It aspired to be a national forum for implementing the nature study philosophy throughout the United States. Its members were prominent in the field of nature and science education, widely separated throughout the country, maintaining contact through the AAAS annual meetings and through publications of one sort or another. (In several parts of the country regional Nature Study societies were formed, all loosely affiliated with the national ANSS.)

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of ANSS in 1958, E. Laurence Palmer used one of the educational inserts which he regularly published in *Nature Magazine* to review the history of nature study and the American Nature Study Society. After summarizing the "nature study idea" going back to the 18th Century, he gives a brief description of the work of ANSS decade by decade from 1908 to 1958. (Palmer makes a clear distinction between what passed as "science education" in those days and nature study.)

Because the members of ANSS were widely scattered throughout the country (and some in Canada), the principal means by which it maintained some measure of cohesion and purpose was through the publication of an "official organ" of some sort. The membership of ANSS has never been large, consisting mostly of educators and authors active in nature and science education. The history of ANSS is essentially the history of its publications.

When the organization was formed, it was decided to use *The Nature Study Review* as its official publication. This quarterly, scholarly journal was started in 1905 by Maurice Bigelow of Columbia University, and continued to be the official organ of ANSS until it discontinued publication in 1922. During the last four years of its life it

was edited by Ana Botsford Comstock of Cornell University. She continued thereafter to publish educational supplements in *Nature Magazine*, which became the official organ of ANSS for providing nature education information to its members.

These educational supplements in *Nature Magazine* continued, written by E. Laurence Palmer. In his "Fifty Years of Nature Study and the American Nature Study Society" mentioned above, he had this to say about the Society's publications:

"During this decade (1928-1937) the Society had no official publication other than space that was available through the pages of Nature Magazine, and no means to keep the group together except the annual meetings"

Some time during the 1940's Richard Weaver produced a mimeographed newsletter to keep the membership informed, and in the May, 1947 issue President Edwin Way Teale gave this report in his "Message from the President":

"Great advances have been made in the past year such as the publication of a printed News Letter and the appearance five times a year of a full page devoted to the work of the ANSS in Nature Magazine"

That was the year in which the Society gained 175 new members in six months, with the ultimate goal of 1,000 members, which Mr. Teale said "seems within sight". The editor of the *News Letter* in 1947-48 was Dwight E. Sollberger of Indiana, PA, followed by Hazel A. Fink of Elmsford, NY from 1949 to 1951. From 1952 to 1954, Malvina Trussel, of Tallahassee, FL was editor.

In 1955 Stanley B. Mulaik of the University of Utah became editor, retaining that position until 1974, except for a brief period in 1958-59 when he was ANSS president during which Dorothy A. Treat of Dayton, OH served as editor.

During the early 1960's *ANSS News* had grown from a four-page newsletter to a respectable journal of twelve pages. In 1964 John Gustafson, who was serving at the time as Treasurer, realizing the educational value of the papers presented at the week-long sessions ANSS held in conjunction with the annual meetings of the AAAS, proposed to issue an Annual number in which these papers could be printed and thus receive a wider audience. The June, 1964 issue of *ANSS News* was twenty-eight pages with colorful front and back covers; the front cover with an original sketch of a raccoon by Rita A. Kason of Fenn College, Cleveland, OH, which she donated to ANSS and which remained the signature "mascot" of the Society's publications for fifteen years. Gustafson agreed to serve as Associate Editor. (Stan Mulaik continued to serve as editor until 1974.)

That initial effort in producing this enlarged "magazine-style" issue was well received. The "*ANSS News*" format was continued through the end of 1964, after which the new format, entitled simply "*Nature Study*", with the subtitle "*The journal of the American Nature Study Society*", became the official publication of the Society.

As Associate Editor of the journal, John Gustafson was given the task of doing the final proof-reading of each issue. Park Press in Indiana, PA did the layout. (This printing firm had been doing the *ANSS News* since Dwight Sollberger was editor in 1947.) To give continuity to the Society's publication, Gustafson decided to begin identifying each issue with a volume and number. He counted back to 1947, when the *NEWS* became commercially printed, designating it as Volume 1. The issues for 1964 were designated "Volume 18": the first issue so identified was Vol 18, No. 3 (September, 1964)

(Dr. Mulaik's departure as editor in 1974 was marred by some misunderstanding. He became increasingly critical of the Society because it was not assuming enough of an activist role in conserving the environment, such as was being done by the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society, and many others. In what turned out to be his final editorial, he expressed his frustrations, to which Helen Ross Russell, who was then president, responded, which resulted in an assumption that Stan wished to be relieved of the editor's job. John Gustafson was asked to step up from Associate Editor to Editor. It was later learned that Mulaik had not intended to resign.)

It is interesting to note that for a time in the 1970's the issues failed to indicate the date of publication, except for small print identifying the printer and date on the back cover. Toward the end of the 20th Century it was difficult to maintain a quarterly publication schedule (all the Society's work was done by volunteers), resulting in doubling-up issues once or twice a year.

After John Gustafson resigned as editor in 1979, Helen Ross Russell became editor, producing a "Special Combined Issue" (Volume 33, Numbers 2 & 3, June 1980). Russell put together a stellar staff of volunteers to assist: John Lubbe as Associate Editor; Contributing Editors Karen Nolan, Ruth Yarrow, and Mary Houts; Staff Artists Brad Hartley, Susan Burleigh, and Donna King; and even an Advertising Manager (Anne Cloutier). For a while, John Gustafson was listed as "Production Editor"!

Helen Russell moved the "journal" to new heights! She gave a theme for each issue: "Insects", "Native Americans", "Sharing", "Interrelationships", "Water" and many others. She solicited articles from experts in natural history areas, with photographs and sketches highlighting the texts. A valuable feature in each issue was the "Naturalist's Sketchbook" on the inside back cover, designed to be copied for classroom use. Lang Elliott did the first three in 1984-85, followed by a long series by Robert McClung, prize-winning author and illustrator of nature-focused books for children. McClung used the title "Naturalist's Notebook", with the series running from 1986 to 1997. John Wiessinger's sketches appeared in the issues 1998 to 2004. (For many years, up until 1998, ANSS did not copyright its publications, with the goal of expediting the use of the material for teaching. Some authors and illustrators did copyright their work, but granted blanket permission to copy for educational use.)

Over the years there have been several "special issues" of the journal. In 1974, on the occasion of the centennial of the birth of poet Robert Frost, one number

highlighted his impact on nature appreciation and understanding through his poetry, with articles by several persons who knew him personally, and an original portrait sketch by Michael D. Klein on the cover. Inserted into this issue was a copy of the *Kansas School Naturalist* devoted to nature poetry. (The *Kansas School Naturalist* was a quarterly publication sent free of charge to teachers in the schools of Kansas. ANSS arranged to have it sent, without charge, to all of its members as a benefit of membership. For several years all ANSS members also received *Canadian Nature*.) In 1991 another issue, "Environmental Celebrations", highlighted the "Ten Most Significant Environmental Events of the 20th Century", with a lead article by Frank Knight.

In 1978, Volume 31, Number 4 was almost entirely devoted to an index listing all the authors and their articles published since 1964 – fourteen pages, three columns of fine print to the page. (The arduous task of compiling this list was done by Walter A. Gustafson, father of the editor.) The issue also listed the recipients of the Eva L. Gordon Award for children's nature and science literature up to that year. Also, it was noted that all articles listed were available on Microform at University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, MI.

In 1989 John Gustafson discovered a source for full-color magazine covers, available in quantity free of charge. The issues on *Weather* and *Food, Nutrition and The Environment* were graced with appropriate color photographs.

With Volume 48, in 1997, Helen Russell arranged for Janet Hawkes to be "guest editor", producing "A Sampler of TIPS", reprinted from earlier issues. (These "TIPS for Environmental Education and Interpretation" were a regular feature of each issue for several decades starting in the 1960's.) Hawkes continues as editor to the present, with John Serrao as guest editor of the issue devoted to amphibians in 2002, and Mark Baldwin doing the 2004 issue entitled "Keeping Nature Journals".

In 1983 Helen Russell put together a special 75th anniversary number, with brief biographical sketches of the forty-eight persons who had been president up to that time. Volume 51 in 2003 was devoted to "Childhood Memories", with brief personal anecdotes by two dozen "old timers".

Through the years the Journal has featured reviews of relevant books. Benedict A. Hall served as book review editor during the 1970's. During the early years of the printed *ANSS News* a roster of the membership was provided occasionally, with the idea of encouraging interaction between members. The last membership directory appeared in 1990.

In summary, it can reasonably be stated that the American Nature Study Society, firmly founded on the basic idea that both an understanding of the natural world and an appreciation leading to its preservation and wise use was the foundation of the education of all persons at any age and condition, has "kept the faith" throughout its history. Educational fads come and go; many are tempted to follow the pied-piper idea that the human species can do what it wishes and technology will solve all our problems. About

every decade or so someone "discovers" the idea that technology must be tempered by an attitude of caring and relationships with the natural world, a world of which we are a part and from which we cannot be separated, and that no child (or adult, for that matter) should be left indoors. Through the years Helen Russell did her "ten-minute field trips" looking at "city critters" in the middle of Manhattan. L. H. Bailey eloquently urged that nature study was the way to put every person into sympathetic relationship with the natural world. These themes need to be emphasized more than ever in the emerging iWorld, where electronic gadgets let too many people live in a bubble of unreality while the natural world, with all its restorative powers, takes a beating.

The "golden age" in ANSS's first century was post-WWII, when, with its affiliation with the powerful American Association for the Advancement of Science, it gained a national audience at AAAS's annual meetings. AAAS provided rooms and equipment for meetings, gave the ANSS Program Director (the job of the ANSS president-elect!) a suite in the hotel to stay in, and space for exhibits. ANSS held its Annual Meetings with catered dinners, often hosted by local natural history museums after closing hours: AMNH in New York, Philadelphia Academy of Science, Cleveland Museum of Science, etc. – "dining with the dinosaurs"! Those days are gone forever, but the 21st Century is ripe with opportunities to get the message out in new and effective ways.

In its second century, the American Nature Study Society can co-opt the iWorld and greatly expand its impact in saving the planet and its inhabitants – and re-connecting people with a world that sustains, restores, and satisfies.