

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

John A. Gustafson

(NOTE: In 1958, on the occasion of its 50<sup>th</sup> 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 100<sup>th</sup> 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 50<sup>th</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> 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