



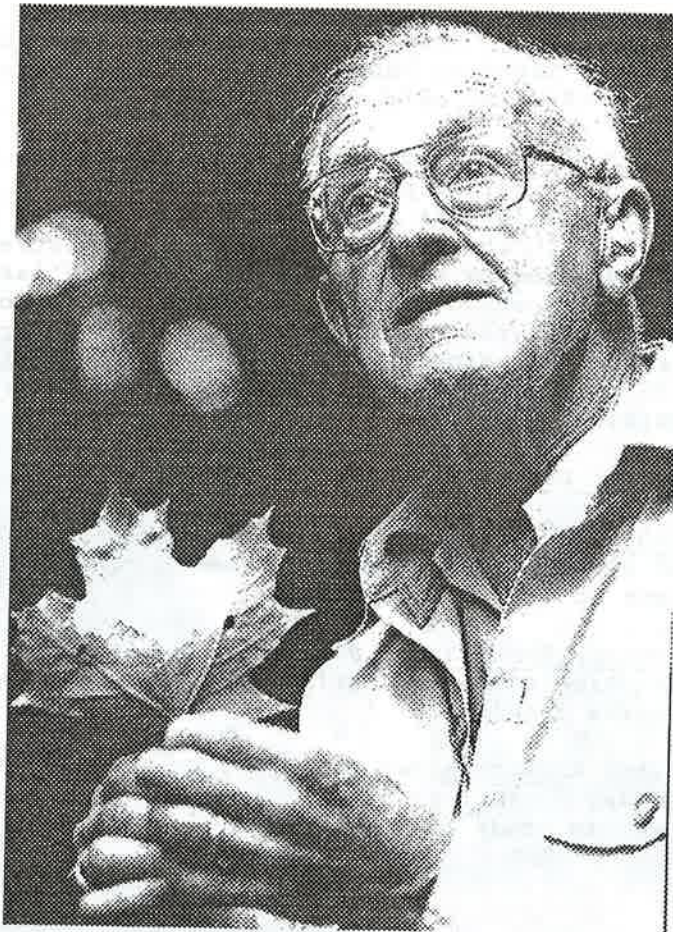
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JAMESTOWN AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

1600 Riverside Road
Jamestown, New York 14701-9340
(716) 569-2345 • FAX (716) 569-2765

BLUE BIRD NOTES

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**In Memoriam
O. Gilbert Burgeson
1897 - 1997**

AND IT ALL BEGAN WITH A TOWHEE

It was one of those hot summer Sundays in the late 40s. We were having a picnic at one of our favored spots up back of Gerry. As was our custom, we took a walk, this time up a dry creek bed. As we emerged from the creek and approached a wooded area, Inez Burgeson said "Look at that robin scratching, just like a chicken!" Now, Inez was, at that time, the birdwatcher of the group, but we all watched what we thought could be a robin scratching away in the dry leaves. Gib Burgeson said, "That's no robin - we'll have to ask Mr. Parker about it."

And ask he did. That is what got us started in the nature business! Claude Parker identified the scratcher as a Towhee and this led us right up that Nature Trail.

Thereafter came the excursions, many times with a carload of kids, to Chautauqua Lake, Allegany Park, Presque Isle, Pymatuning, Onoville, Randolph and Clymer Swamps, and to Riverside. Riverside was a revelation in those days to those so new to birding as we were. Such an abundance of bird life! And today a portion of it is the Burgeson Wildlife Sanctuary.

Gib Burgeson was no stranger to the outdoors. He had grown up in the Ludlow, PA area, well known for its rural woodlands - especially today's Tionesta Overlook and its virgin trees. Gib loved to remember this area and fishing in the "East Branch". He took his Sunday School class from Jamestown on a camping trip there.

However, Gib hadn't yet become a bird watcher, an expert on wildflowers, and an excellent wildlife photographer. This started to take shape in the early 1950s when we were out on all those early field trips. Claude Parker and Annabelle Hiller encouraged and tutored us and at every other turn in the conversation kept saying, "We ought to have an Audubon Society in Jamestown".

Gib was a person who believed anything can be done - you simply went ahead and did it and persuaded others to help!

Gib was headed for New York on business. While there he visited Audubon headquarters. He met all the important people and told them he was from Roger Tory Peterson's hometown. He got all the particulars on forming a society. And in 1956-57 our Audubon Society was formed. Can do!

In the early days of Audubon much discussion took place on the steps of Gib's backporch during his lunch hour. Inez would be working in the kitchen and listening through the open window. "What are you hatching now?" she would ask. Gib would be asking, "Who would make a good program chairman?" "Who can do the social committee?" Those whose names came up would find Gib at their elbow at the next Audubon meeting, "You're going to be our program chairman, aren't you?" Gentle persuasion.

And so Audubon became Gib's life. From the first, his aim was education and enjoyment of nature and how to get more kids into nature study. One of the things done was to sponsor Audubon Junior groups in the schools. Several of our members were teachers who helped with these groups. Can do!

Gib was instrumental in the arrangements with Gustavus Bentley for the land which became Bentley Sanctuary, the first property to come under Audubon protection. Can do!

Acquiring the Riverside property was another story. Gib applied his gentle persuasion for the better part of two years before the owners agreed to sell the house and property to Audubon. Can do!

Then the question was, how to finance it? Gib headed for the bank and a loan was arranged. The house was sold and those proceeds and member contributions repaid the loan. Can do!

Gib and Inez had traveled to Tennessee to visit their daughter. While there, they heard about the Smokey Mountain Wildflower Pilgrimage and arranged to attend. Gib returned from this pilgrimage pumped up with enthusiasm. After some pondering he said, "Why can't we have a pilgrimage? Why not at Allegany Park?"

Soon he was in touch with people in the Buffalo Audubon, the Buffalo Ornithological Society, and the Buffalo Museum of Science. Could they supply help and field trip leaders? Let's have a meeting! And so the Allegany Nature Pilgrimage Committee became a reality. It is still working over 30 years later. Can do!

People at the Pilgrimage would ask, "Where does the wildflower trip meet?" Answer, "Look for the man in the field jacket and the little pork-pie hat." The hat became Gib's trademark.

Gib became more and more interested in wildflowers, mentored by Gus Bentley and Clarence Beal. At the same time he was learning more about photography. Our friend, Mabel Lawson, used to worry about Gib on our field trips when he disappeared with his camera. "Where's Gib?" If you didn't watch out, you'd be likely to trip over him, lying flat on his stomach, eyeing some tiny wildflower, ready to snap its portrait, or he'd be calling "Bring the mirror!", when he didn't have enough light.

Gib began to put together programs of his slides which he gave at Audubon meetings, service and garden clubs. Soon this expanded to programs given at the Pilgrimage, in Rochester, in Buffalo, in Erie, and in Florida during the winter months. Programs on wildflowers became especially popular when Gib told interesting stories about the flowers. Gib was pleased to give a program at the Smokey Mountain Wildflower Pilgrimage. Buffalo Museum of Science has copied Gib's wildflower slides for their collection.

After the Burgeson Sanctuary was established, a need for a building was seen. Gib's eyes were on the knoll next to the big maple tree. The committee commenced a study and the original building was built in 1975 - the same time Jim Yaich came to start the education program. And so the aim of education was realized. Can do!

In the 1960s, Gib established his long-term connection with the Bird, Tree, and Garden Club of Chautauqua. Over the years he never missed a Chautauqua Saturday nature walk. He chose a different topic each week, gave a short lecture, which always included a good word for "Mother Nature", the environment and ecology. Then he led the group on walks through Chautauqua. It was not uncommon for at least 100 to attend the final walk of the season.

Chautauquans too, kept their eyes on the meanderings of the little pork-pie hat. The O. G. Burgeson Outdoor Classroom was dedicated in July 1996, a tribute to his dedicated service.

A few years ago, Gib decided that Audubon should have a spring walk in Bentley Sanctuary when the flowers were at their best. He picked a Sunday in May. "But Gib, that's Mother's Day!" So, why wouldn't Mother enjoy a walk after you take her out to dinner? So it went - mothers escorted by their children enjoyed the bright Spring flowers and Gib's inspiring comments.

At this time of year I am always reminded of the Christmas Bird Count where we were up on Sprague Hill. Gib was driving my car. He wheeled into a side road to nowhere and into more than a foot of snow. There were screams, "We're going to get stuck!" Gib's only comment was, "Oh my stars!" (I thanked my lucky stars and the push-button shift on my car!), but as for Gib - he knew he could do it.

And so it seems there was this serendipity of events and opportunities that launched a second career for Gib Burgeson. Perhaps a third is up-coming? Roger Tory Peterson is busy listing the birds of Paradise, but don't you see a figure with a little pork-pie hat following him?

This verse was one that Gib liked to recite at the end of his lectures:

"All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful:
The Lord God made them all."

Thank you to Corl "Corky" Belknap for sharing her reminiscences of Gib with us. He was a special person! I will never forget seeing him mowing his lawn at age 98! I also well remember a neighbor of mine telling me that an old man had been taking flowers and flower seeds from my front bed; I told her it was fine, he had permission. Ed.



Karner Blue

MOTHER NATURE'S FAVORITE SON

It was twenty years ago that my wife Jane introduced me to the Allegany Nature Pilgrimage.

During that weekend in Allegany State Park, I went on a nature walk led by a little man who wore a little pork-pie hat, and a warm smile that could turn any gray day into a sunny, warm experience. I can still hear him say "let me take you into my classroom" as he pushed a bushy branch back that revealed an afternoon of natural wonders. As the Pilgrimage continued year after year, I never missed the opportunity to enter Gib's class room. Gib had the knowledge and stories to enthrall young and old for hours. Sharing "Mother Nature" was his life.

The Allegany Pilgrimage will commence for the 39th time on May 29th of this year. The pork-pie hat will not be there, the warm, sunny smile will be missed, and his words of welcome at the Saturday night program in his soft, assuring tones will be heard no more. Gib Burgeson died on 12/1/97 on his 100th birthday.

Gib your legacy lives on whenever we meet on that last weekend in May. Farewell Gib, we won't forget you.

Gib Burgeson started the Jamestown Audubon Society in 1957 and the Allegany Nature Pilgrimage in 1959.

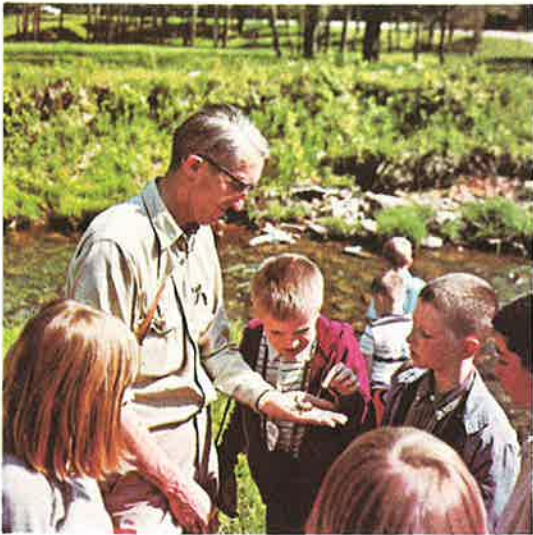
Submitted by: Harold Stock

THE CONSERVATIONIST

State of New York Conservation Department

August-September 1967

THE LIFE OF A DEAD TREE



A junior biologist advises Frank A. Myers, Burroughs Audubon Nature Club



The children's field trip



Pilgrimage

Four Western New York Groups Unite To Bring A

by Marilyn J. Fried,
Associate Editor of Publications,
Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences

AT first glance Allegany State Park appears merely picturesque — scenic, flat-topped hills gracefully centered around a reflective lake. But in early June came a thousand soft-treading feet and the flourishes of magnifying glasses and binoculars. Allegany received a closer look. It showed the prints of a deer on its way to a beaver lake, a painted trillium holding its own in the forest, a crayfish gingerly held up in a child's hand. The 8th annual Allegany Nature Pilgrimage was under way.

"We're here mostly for the newcomers to conservation," said General Chairman Nina Bates of Jamestown, "to give them a taste of the many phases of nature study, rather than great depth or detail."

Four sets of field trips from Friday afternoon to Sunday morning made a choice difficult. Sixteen areas of study beckoned — forestry, wild flowers, geol-

ogy, Indian lore, nature photography, fossils, reptiles and amphibians, ferns, trees and shrubs, mosses and liverworts and nature in general. Trips planned especially for children and teen-agers left parents free to explore Allenberg Bog or go hiking on McCarty Hill. Or one might choose to concentrate on one subject for the week end. In that case, one could select birds, ecology or field botany.

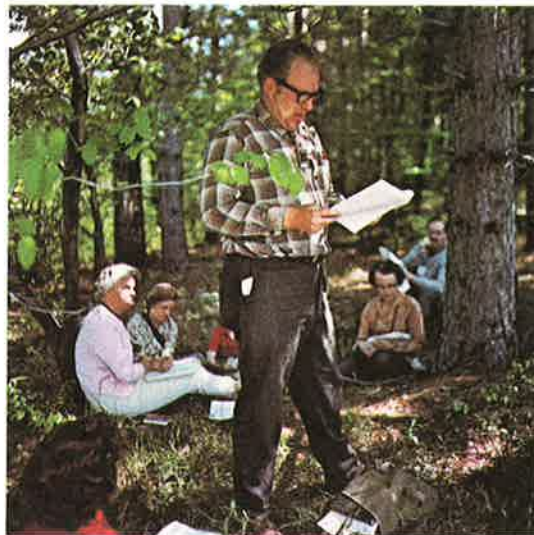
The trip leaders were an energetic group who had left classrooms, labs, and offices to volunteer their services to the pilgrimage. For them it was an opportunity to spread the gospel of knowledge of and respect for wildlife. Seeing interest and enthusiasm awaken in beginning students of nature was their reward. On a field trip with Dr. Irving Tesmer one could learn that the hills and valleys of Allegany aren't really hills and valleys at all! The Allegany area is a high plateau dissected by the Allegheny River. By the

time the glacier got here, explains the geology expert, it had lost its oomph and so deposited materials rather than gouging out land.

After Dr. George Laug pointed out a pine tree's reddish bark, the shape of its needles and their numbers in clusters, his raspy voice would conclude: "Therefore, it should be what tree?" After an initial response comes the challenge: "How do you know you're right?" Enroute through a deciduous forest with David Bigelow you consider a tableau of individualistic trees caught in the slow process of fighting for survival. "Observe and draw your own conclusions," advises the Buffalo Museum of Science's Curator of Education. No object was too small to go unnoticed. A child brought him a spring peeper to hold and a white-haired "trooper" identified wild strawberry for a first-timer. The pilgrimage is a family affair.



Lewis Ives of Jamestown guides a group identifying wildflowers



Prof. George Laug of S.U.N.Y., Buffalo, checks a tree guide



Cook-out on Sugar Bush Trail, General Chairman Nina Bates at far right

To Allegany

Taste Of Nature Study To Newcomers To Conservation

In 1959 some seventy pilgrims of nature lore first came to Allegany for a week end program organized by the Jamestown Audubon Society. The prime mover here was O. Gilbert Burgeson who had conceived the idea while at the Spring Wildflower Pilgrimage in the Smokies. Since then attendance has soared and sponsoring members increased to four. The Jamestown group, the Buffalo Audubon Society and the Burroughs Audubon Nature Club of Rochester were this year joined by the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences. The three-day event drew over 500 registrants from western New York and Pennsylvania on June 2-4 this year.

Area naturalists envision the re-establishment of a summer program similar to the Allegany School of Natural History which began in 1927 under the auspices of the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences, the New York State Museum and the Allegany State Park Commission.

This popular program provided in-the-field training and experience for teachers, group leaders and students. It was discontinued during the war years.

For this year's pilgrims who had energy to spare, there were early morning and late evening incitements to seeing and hearing more of nature's ways. The delicate job of bird banding was demonstrated for those who made it up and out by 7 a.m. An hour earlier a sturdier group had emerged through the morning mist, binoculars focused on darting birds. Still they were the late-risers compared to the 5 a.m. wild turkey hunters. The choice of when to begin the day was, of course, up to the individual.

In the evenings after dark everyone gathered in a large tent to socialize and attend a slide and lecture program. On Friday evening Mr. Burgeson described edible and medicinal plants. Charles H. Callison, Executive Director and Vice President of the National Audubon Soci-

ety, discussed the situation of the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary on Saturday.

As is only fitting on a pilgrimage, the general attitude was thoughtful. A field trip might be interrupted as caretakers gathered up strewn food wrappings and carried them through the woods to a refuse can. They were advised that although white-footed deer mice might make a home out of a rusty can, the right angle of a sun ray on a clear glass bottle or fragment could start a forest fire. And no matter how lovely the delicate dog-tooth violet looked, it would have occurred to no one to pick one.

Some might say the pilgrimage is a reciprocal affair. One group on an early morning bird walk had spotted a colorful species of birds in the early morning sunlight. However, they were not so intent on warblers and sparrows that they ignored a feeling of being watched themselves.

A raccoon was peeking out of the foliage — curiously watching them.