

233

TORONTO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB NEWSLETTER

Visitors welcome!

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FEBRUARY MEETING

Monday, February 5, 1968, at 8.15 p.m.
at the
ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Speaker: MR. GRANT TAYLER

Subject: THE 1968 EDITION OF ONTARIO'S PROVINCIAL PARKS (illus. with colour sides)

Mr. Tayler, Supervisor, Park Interpretation, Parks Branch, Ontario Department of Lands and Forests, will discuss the great number of changes, past, present and future, taking place to provide a balanced park system which will meet the requirements of the recreationist, naturalist, scientist and educator.

BIRD BULLETIN. Ken Walton, 24 Moore Park Ave., Willowdale, appreciates the interest shown in his weekly Bird Bulletin. Its success depends upon the continued reporting of bird observations to Ken: telephone 225-9560.

FEBRUARY OUTING

Sunday
Feb. 11
10 a.m.

LOWER ROUGE CONSERVATION AREA - Birds. Leader: Miss Ruth Marshall. Going west on Hwy. 401, exit at interchange 63 for Sheppard Ave., but turn left onto Island Rd. at stop sign. Going west on Hwy. 2, turn south onto Port Union Rd. (watch for 'GO' transit sign) and then turn immediately left onto Island Rd. In both cases, signs indicate that this leads to West Rouge. Go east 1.6 miles on Island Rd. & turn right onto Rouge Hill Dr. Go south on Rouge Hill Dr. & take right fork at Taylor Rd. The area is about 1 mile south on this road. Morning only but lunch recommended. Drivers with space & passengers requiring transportation, please call Jack or Mary Gingrich, 489-9953.

Chairman: Jack Gingrich, 489-9953

JUNIOR CLUB
Saturday
Feb. 3
10 a.m.

The Museum Theatre meeting is in charge of the Botany Group & Mammals Group with 2 speakers from each group and 2-3 films.

Director: Mr. Rob't MacLellan, 488-9364

BIRD GROUP
Thursday
Feb. 8
8 p.m.

Meet in basement of St. James Bond United Church, west side of Avenue Rd., 2 blocks north of Eglinton. Mr. Wm. Carrick, Director of Cartwright Winter Fowl Park, will give an illustrated talk on ducks, geese and swans. Also: Bird Quiz: some general books on birds available for examination.

Chairman: Mr. Clive Goodwin, 241-1572

BOTANY GROUP
Thursday
Feb. 15
8 p.m.

Meet at Hodgson School, Davisville Ave., just east of Mt. Pleasant Rd. Speaker: Mr. Kenneth Strasser. Topic: Educational Programme of the Metropolitan Toronto & Region Conservation Authority. Come & hear what the M.T.R.C.A. is doing to introduce children & others to the outdoors.

Chairman: Miss Edith Cosens, 481-5013

President: Dr. Peter A. Peach

Secretary: Mrs. H. C. Robson
49 Craighurst Ave.
481-0260



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NEWS AND VIEWS

.....Britain's recent troubles have had an unexpected silver lining--at least for some wild creatures. Due to devaluation, the Defense Department has decided not to continue with its plans to turn Aldabra Atoll into an airfield. Thus its unique plant and animal life have been saved for the time being. Also the dread foot and mouth disease has put a ban on all game shooting in Britain thus preserving millions of birds for another day's 'fun.'

.....GASP - Group Action to Stop Pollution - is now a reality. Some 450 'cranks' attended the inaugural meeting at Convocation Hall, Dec. 8. The group intends to put pressure on the government and industry to do something - besides talk - about the air pollution problem. As a start they are planning a newsletter and studies of pollution. More power to these 'cranks and crackpots' - they will win in the end. Before it's too late, we hope.

.....Look for a new five-cent stamp to be issued on Feb. 15 with a design by Glen Coates of Willowdale. The stamp shows a pair of male and female grey jays (Canada jays to you die-hards.)

.....It appears that even the animals at the Zoo are having trouble digesting the news these days. London's Regent's Park is putting a ban on feeding the animals after an investigation showed that the elephants in one week had eaten such things as The Evening Standard, a man's umbrella and 15 paper bags. Toronto's Riverdale Zoo plans a similar ban. The Rio de Janeiro Zoo animals are also having feeding problems - the director has been eating them. He's accused of putting away 4 boars, 4 alligators and 12 wild ducks.

.....The Belt-Line Ravine will get a new lease on life soon. It's being turned over to

Metro for possible use as a park. That's better than a garbage dump any day - unless you're a garbage collector.

.....Dr. Helen Hogg, former Club president, continues to reap fresh laurels and responsibilities. Recently she has been nominated to the board of directors of the Bell Telephone Co. of Canada.

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COMING EVENTS

CBC - RADIO: Yesterdays for Tomorrow. Mondays at 7.30 p.m., Jan. 8 - Mar. 18. A centennial history of the public management of Ontario's wildlife, lands and forests from 1763-1967.

CBC - TV: The 21st Century. Thursdays at 6.00 p.m. An occasional topic in this new series may interest naturalists: e.g., the new biology and oceanography.

ROYAL CANADIAN INSTITUTE: Saturday Evening Lectures. Convocation Hall, University of Toronto at 8.15 p.m.; Jan. 27 - 'The Stars Fell Out of the Sky'; Feb. 3 - 'Living Light on Bioluminescence from Fungi to Fish'; Feb. 10 - 'The Perception of Colour'; Feb. 17 - 'Insects, Pesticides and Food Chains' (given by Prof. David Fowle - joint meeting with F.O.N.); Feb. 24 - 'Man and His Genes'. For more information, phone 922-2804 or the Editor, 231-1064.

ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM: Free Sunday films at 2.00 p.m. Feb. 4 - films about India including Taj Mahal; Feb. 18 - Quetico - Ontario canoe country - among others.

TORONTO PUBLIC LIBRARY: Nature slides shown by Mr. R. L. Charles at Beaches Branch, 2161 Queen St. E., Tuesday, Jan. 30 at 8.30 p.m.

ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM: Univ. of Toronto Extension Course - 'The Great Lakes as an Environment'. Wednesdays at 8.00 p.m., Jan. 10 - Mar. 13. For more information, phone 928-2393-4.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO: 'Education in the 19th Century without the Darwins'. Free centennial lectures given by Dr. W. E. Swinton. Mondays at 5.30 p.m., Seeley Hall, Trinity College. Jan. 8 - Feb. 26.

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THE NATURE CONSERVANCY OF CANADA

The following is an extract from a letter sent by the Nature Conservancy of Canada to all donors to the Rattray Estate campaign:

'I want to bring you up-to-date on the Rattray Estate situation and also ask for your continued support. The Conservancy sponsored the Rattray Estate Preservation Committee in their untiring efforts to purchase the whole Rattray Estate. When it proved impossible to buy the whole estate the committee tried to work out arrangements to buy the marsh area alone. Every effort was made by the committee to save the marsh in whole or in part but I have to advise that no solution was found and the property will probably be developed as a residential area. The marsh area itself will probably remain in its natural state so long as it can survive the surrounding conditions.

'Although the loss of the Rattray property is unfortunate, the Conservancy intends to pursue its aims of purchasing natural areas across Canada. The Rattray campaign has

shown that we must buy these areas before development takes place around them and inflates the price beyond reach. We have already purchased a 30 acre parcel of original woodlands near Owen Sound, Ontario, and are negotiating the purchase of another 50 acre parcel adjoining it. 12 other desirable properties are being investigated at the present time. We are determined to purchase as many areas as we can afford...'

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SAW-WHET

by Pat Weese

A feathery ball pressed close to a tree,
A tawn and white body so hard to see
That either a bird or a bump
It could easily be.
Two remarkable eyes give the secret away:
Two centres of black set in gold light of day.
And even their glance in itself is a search;
For the bird is high on its look-out perch.
How silent the bird - not a hoot or a howl.
Well hidden he is - the Saw-Whet Owl!

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THE HEAVENS ABOVE - FEBRUARY

Feb. 1 - Sunrise at 7.37 a.m. E.S.T.; sunset at 5.27 p.m. E.S.T.
Feb. 20 - Jupiter at closest distance to earth ('opposition'). Jupiter is at its brightest this month and is visible all night in the constellation Leo.

JUPITER - THE RUMBLING GIANT

This February is a good month to look in the sky for Jupiter, the giant planet of our solar system. Fifth in order from the sun, it stands first in size with a mass nearly 2 1/2 times the other planets combined and a circumference 11 times that of Earth's. Despite its huge mass, Jupiter is almost as 'light as a feather' in density, for it seems to consist solely of gases - from its frozen core to its vast clouds of hydrogen, ammonia and methane. Jupiter rotates at a surprising speed; its 'day' is less than 10 hours long - the shortest of any planet's. This rotation causes great turbulence in its heavy atmosphere and a noticeable bulge at its equator. Recent radio telescope observations have shown that Jupiter is always 'rumbling' - emitting radio waves, sometimes of great intensity. Strangely, the strongest outbursts seem to be influenced by Io, one of Jupiter's 12 satellites. If you have a telescope, look for some of these satellites. 4 of them are usually bright enough to be seen as they were 358 years ago when Galileo first discovered them.

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ADAPTATION IN NATURE

by G. MacGregor Grant

One of the impressive aspects of Nature is her marvellous processes of adaptation. She rarely creates but she is always modifying and adapting existing functions and organs to meet the challenge of specific circumstances.

The cormorant lives on rocky islets in isolated lakes. It lays its eggs in thousands of such places and these are preyed upon by crows. Crows normally frequent cultivated regions and build their nests in trees. But some of them, contrary to all their usual habits, domicile themselves near the cormorants and build their own nests on the rocks. Here is an instance of adaptation to food supply which has changed the habits of the crow and taken him out of his normal range.

The cormorant himself has developed a pouch or false stomach in which he stores fish for his young. The food is regurgitated for the benefit of the fledglings as they require it. This is a rather striking example of Nature's capacity to modify organs according to the needs of a species.

Alligators and crocodiles are accustomed to seize their prey under water or to drag it under water and then drown it. Necessarily, the mouth must be open during this operation and the crocodile would himself drown unless special provision were made against this. Such provision has been made. The skin of the throat has been modified into a flap or valve which 'clicks up' and closes the orifice. Other marine creatures (e.g., the whales) have developed a similar device.

The horn of the rhinoceros is not a true horn in that it is not a part of the bony structure. It is not bone at all but a mass of bristles so compacted as to constitute a most effective weapon for offence or defence. This is another remarkable adaptation of unpromising material to a special purpose.

Examples of this sort of transmutability are innumerable. They are not accidents but deliberate techniques which Nature uses to enable particular species to survive in difficult circumstances and environments.

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PLANT FAMILIES

The Lily Family - Liliaceae

The lily family is the flower lover's and gardener's delight for in it are found many of our most beautiful garden and wild flowers. The family is a very large one of some 250 genera and 3700 species. Its members are widely distributed throughout the world but are most common in the north temperate zone where they are often spring-blooming perennial herbs. However, a few genera are vines, shrubs and even trees. Few of the species are of food or economic value but many are grown for their beautiful flowers.

There are about 25 species growing in the Metro area.

The lily family is recognized as being a typical member of the natural class of plants called the monocotyledons or monocots. (The complementary class is the dicotyledons or dicots.) Because of the enormous variety in method of growth, inflorescence, distribution and anatomy, the lily family is sometimes subdivided into as many as a dozen 'tribes'. These will not be considered here.

To identify this family look for the following characteristics:

1. The flowers are usually showy and may be solitary or arranged in racemes (a main branch bearing stalked flowers), panicles (compound racemes) or umbels.
2. The flower parts occur in threes and sixes. Often the petals and sepals are the same colour and shape and form a floral envelope (perianth) of six regular parts.

There are 6 stamens, one opposite each petal or sepal and a long style of 3 united pistils.

3. The fruit is a capsule or berry divided into 3 parts.

4. The leaves are usually long and narrow with parallel veining running the length of the blade and without marginal teeth. Sometimes they form a sheath around the stem at their base (tulip).

5. The plants grow from bulbs, rhizomes or corms. In some lilies (Lilium) little bulbs, called bulbils, form in leaf axils, drop off and grow into new plants. Bulbils also form in onion flowers.

Some members of the family are:

Garden flowers: Tulips, hyacinths, true lilies (Lilium), lily-of-the-valley, fritillary, day-lily, Hosta lily, Scilla, Chionodoxa, Puschkinia, grape hyacinth (Muscari), foxtail lily (Eremurus), red-hot poker (Kniphofia) and many others.

Vegetables: Asparagus, onions (Allium) and relatives (garlic, leek, chives, shallot).

Wild flowers: Bellwort (Uvularia), false spikenard (Smilacina racemosa), false Solomon's seal (Smilacina stellata), Canada mayflower (Maianthemum canadense), Solomon's seal (Polygonatum bistortum), Trillium - Ontario's floral emblem; - yellow adder's tongue (Erythronium americanum), Canada lily (Lilium canadense), Clintonia, carrion-flower (Smilax herbacea).

The dry ones: Desert dwellers include Haworthia, Aloe and Yucca. The latter shows an interesting case of symbiosis, being pollinated only at night by a special Yucca moth (Pronuba yuccasella). In payment for her job of pollination, the moth bores a hole in each ovule and deposits an egg. Subsequently the caterpillars hatch out and live off the Yucca seeds.

Some houseplants: Dracaena (in all supermarkets), snake plant (Sansevieria), Veltheimia, Eucomis, Lachenalia, Aspidistra (Gracie Fields' favourite), lily of the Nile (Agapanthus).

The dragon's-blood tree: On the Canary Islands grows a remarkable tree, the dragon tree (Dracaena draco.) Some specimens are known to have reached a height of 70 feet, a diameter of 20 feet, and an age of 6000 years! The reddish resin oozing from the trunk is sold as dragon's blood and is used in varnish and lacquer manufacture.

Drugs, medicines, nostrums, etc: Sarsaparilla comes from Smilax and is a useless tonic; it's used to flavour root beer, also.

Colchicine from the autumn crocus (Colchicum) is used by geneticists to produce remarkable changes in the chromosomes of plants.

Aloe vera is the source of bitter aloes which sounds nasty enough. The death camas (Zygadenus venenosus) sounds even nastier; it poisons western sheep and cattle.

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WE TOLD THEM SO!

by

A. A. Outram

Pollution of air, soil, and water and conservation of non-renewable resources are much in our mind. The vast public is conscious of the gravity of the situation and in some cases is deeply concerned. Not long ago these subjects were dismissed with a tolerant smile or derisive shrug. The few voices crying in the wilderness seemed those of fanatics to the great majority. Now that there is not only local but international alarm, it may be of some interest to note some quite early prophets.

Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote a poem called Inversnaid. The last of four verses is as follows:

What would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and wilderness? Let them be left,
O let them be left, wilderness and wet;
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.

Hopkins lived from 1844 to 1889 and so his plea may well have been issued a century ago.

John Aubrey, 1625-1697, was not erudite. However, he was interested in everyone with whom he came in contact, and wrote about them. The following quotation from Aubrey appeared in the Ontario Naturalist of March 1964:

He was the first that used the Improvement of Land by Soape ashes when he lived at Bristowe, where they then threw it away, and the Haven being like to be choaked up with the Soape ashes (for which severall Complaints and Indictments) considering that grounds were improved by Compost, he made an experiment of improving by soape ashes, having land near the City, and mightily improved it. This I had from himselfe.

'Aubrey was writing what he had been told him by one Edward Broughton of Herefordshire, England. Broughton was much older than Aubrey and so this event probably took place over three centuries ago.'

Perhaps other readers will note early incidents of a like nature and report them to our editor.

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OUR WINTERING HERMIT THRUSH

by

Mary and Ray Pannell

It is not unusual for a hermit thrush to stay until late in the fall. However, one that had been around the garden was still with us in December. Concerned for its survival, we felt it necessary to do something about it. Feeding as it had on the Virginia creeper berries, currants appeared to make a good substitute. So a feeder was erected and a generous spread was placed on the table. No luck! Although the bird flew over the feeder many times to its perch in the spruce tree close to the house, it

never once used the feeder as a perch or feeding spot. Realizing that the bird preferred to feed from the ground, a good scattering of currants were thrown over its foraging area. Over a period of time, this area was gradually constricted toward the direction of the house. In two weeks, it was feeding under the verandah, also under the back porch. Fortunately, little snow had fallen during this operation. Its diet was varied with chopped raisins, suet and pieces of apple. For drink, the bird 'eats' snow. It prefers to be under the verandah, as there is a large area in which to roam, also an all 'round escape. Cats! That's the problem for the bird. We have a problem too...the voracious squirrels gobble too much food.

Hating to be beaten by squirrels, we initiated 'operation circumvent'. A medium-sized wooden box open at one side was used. 8 inch lengths of wire cut from coat hangers were nailed on to form vertical bars. The width apart had to be approximated, for there was no way of measuring the bird, or a squirrel's head. This was to be a ground-feeding box which was placed on a strip of earth between the alleyway side-walk and the house. Glory be! - it works. Strangely enough, the bird eats his first and last meals of the day at this spot, other times under the verandah. We suspect that the morning and evening feedings at the box are due to the light factor.

Shy, wary and suspicious, typical hermit behaviour when we first made the bird's acquaintance, it is no longer so. Should the side door be opened, and the bird is spotted in a bush a few feet away, it cocks its head watchful, unperturbed, when a handful of currants are thrown around him. One might suspect that it had reached the point where it didn't give a 'hoot'--or should we say 'chuck'. But let a cat show up, then it is away like a flash. Does the bird view us as a source of sustenance? Or has it become used to our movements around the house? Who knows! We are now in the throes of a very cold spell; 5 nights of sub-zero temperatures, yet the bird looks very well.

Each morning a check is made to locate our little hermit and happy are we when it is spotted. Having observed it on 40 consecutive days, we hope with continued care to bring it safely through this extremely cold winter. Anyone for a hermit?

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BOOK REVIEW

The Birds of Simcoe County, Ontario, by O. E. Devitt. A Centennial project sponsored by The Brereton Field Naturalists' Club, Barrie, Ont. 1967. 192 pp. 1 map, 32 photographs. Cover drawing by Ron Scovell. \$2.75 (plus 25¢ postage)

This soft-covered book is an up-to-date record of the bird life of Simcoe County written by an expert naturalist, well known to many Torontonians, Mr. Ott Devitt. The Simcoe lists consist of 284 species of birds of which 148 are known to have bred in the county. Each species is described as to its abundance and its occurrence (resident, transient, etc.) in the county. Sightings and nesting records are then given, fully documented by observers and dates. Average arrival and departure dates are shown and R.O.M. specimens noted.

The first 20 pages give a useful account of Simcoe County topography, weather, forests, history or ornithology, life zones, migration flyways, and changes in bird life. The Appendix includes a bibliography and an index.

To any of us who are summer residents, transients or just visitants in Simcoe County, this book should prove a valuable guide to its abundant and interesting bird life. Buy a copy now to take with you next summer to your cottage on Lake Simcoe or Georgian Bay.

Obtainable from: The Brereton Field Naturalists' Club, c/o Mrs. J. L. Westman, R. R. #4, Barrie, Ont., or: Federation of Ontario Naturalists, 1262 Don Mills Rd., Don Mills, Ont.

E.T.

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IVORY-BILLED WOODPECKER, FEARED EXTINCT, SIGHTED
(from The New York Times, Sunday, Aug. 27, 1967)

Ivory-billed woodpeckers - spectacular red, white and black birds of the Southern swamplands that ornithologists had long feared extinct - have been found in Texas. 3 pairs of the 20-inch birds - as big as crows - have been sighted in the Neches River Valley in the Big Thicket country of eastern Texas by John V. Dennis of Leesburg, Va., America's leading expert on woodpeckers. Mr. Dennis, who searched for the woodpeckers under a contract with the Interior Department, estimated on the basis of his study and reports from amateurs that there are 5 to 10 pairs of the birds in the Big Thicket. The last previous confirmed sighting of an ivory bill, America's largest woodpecker, was of 1 bird on the Chipola River in Florida in 1950...

One of Mr. Dennis's findings raised hope that the ivory bill would survive. Ornithologists have long attributed the species' decline to the disappearance of hardwood forests, where the ivory bill fed on the larva or wood-boring beetles. Mr. Dennis, however, discovered that the ivory bill also fed on insects in pine slashings, indicating that the bird might be adapting to the changed environment.

Harry Goodwin, chief of the office of endangered species of the Bureau of Sports Fisheries and Wildlife, has asked timberland owners in the Big Thicket to help preserve the ivory bill. Although there has been a campaign to make the Big Thicket a national park, Mr. Goodwin said that he was not asking that the Government acquire the land. Mr. Goodwin is, however, asking timberland owners to rotate their cuttings of pines so there always will be a supply of branches to feed on. The lumbermen are also being asked to leave pockets of cypress in deep swamp, which are uneconomical to cut anyway, and to leave some of the older trees standing in other areas for nesting.

In addition, Mr. Goodwin said, the East Texas Wildlife Federation has promised to patrol 100,000 acres it controls in the Big Thicket to prevent shooting of the ivory bills. Federal law provides for a maximum penalty of \$500 in fine, 60 days in jail or both for injuring an ivory bill.

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TORONTO CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Dec. 24, 1967, by Toronto Ornithological Club

113 observers covering 28 local areas counted 21,415 birds of 83 species. Following are the species in order of abundance:

house sparrow - 3,221; oldsquaw - 2,528; mallard - 2,495; starling - 1,960; herring gull - 1,330; greater scaup - 1,160; tree sparrow - 1,089; black duck - 994; black-capped chickadee - 861; ring-billed gull - 815; American goldfinch - 656; slate-coloured junco - 648; Canada goose - 487; ring-necked pheasant - 363; common goldeneye - 351; blue jay - 327; downy woodpecker - 304; bufflehead - 256; red-tailed hawk - 195; common crow - 165; cardinal - 148; golden-crowned kinglet - 84; song sparrow - 82; brown creeper - 74; white-throated sparrow - 71; sparrow hawk - 65; white-breasted nuthatch - 62; rough-legged hawk - 57; mourning dove - 57; common redpoll - 45;

common merganser - 42; great black-backed gull - 42; red-winged blackbird - 28; American widgeon - 27; gadwall - 26; ruffed grouse - 24; long-eared owl - 24; hairy woodpecker - 23; pine siskin - 21; great horned owl - 19; canvasback - 12; yellow-shafted flicker - 12; field sparrow - 10; swamp sparrow - 10; marsh hawk - 9; northern shrike - 9; rufous-sided towhee - 8; ruby-crowned kinglet - 7; winter wren - 7; pileated woodpecker - 7; robin - 6; snow bunting - 6; snowy owl - 6; pintail - 5; common grackle - 5; red crossbill - 5; great blue heron - 4; red-breasted merganser - 4; belted kingfisher - 3; red-breasted nuthatch - 3; hermit thrush - 3; cedar waxwing - 3; brown-headed cowbird - 3; white-crowned sparrow - 3; goshawk - 2; Bonaparte's gull - 2; Iceland gull - 2; Oregon junco - 2; brown thrasher - 2; myrtle warbler - 2; eastern meadowlark - 2.

And the following 12 singles:

mute swan; brant; sharp-shinned hawk; screech owl; short-eared owl; horned lark; mockingbird; catbird; orange-crowned warbler; rusty blackbird; purple finch; Langland longspur.

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Elmer Talvila, Editor
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