

THE ROLE OF THE CITIZENS' COMMITTEE

WILLIAM H. COLE, *Chairman*

The Citizens' Scientific and Historical Committee
for the Preservation of Mettler's Woods

Nineteen months ago a self-constituted group of people, aroused over the probable destruction of Mettler's Woods, announced that they would try to raise funds to save the woods. For a year before that some of them had been privately trying to find a benefactor. And for more than a year before that it was known by a few persons that the woods would be cut down unless the State or the University could buy them.

For 20 years scientists and students had used the woods as an outdoor laboratory. Evidence had accumulated that the forest was a continuing thing, though it was changing in the relative proportion of species. As the old trees toppled during the storms younger ones took their places. Studies of a fallen tree 323 years old proved that fires occurred about every ten years up to the last one in 1711. These were undoubtedly set by the Indians to aid their hunting. The last fire was about the time the white man took charge of the area. From this it was concluded that naturally occurring fires are not a serious threat to the continuance of the woods, though they may influence its characteristics since various species have differential resistance to fire. Studies of the soil in the woods showed that it had never been plowed. Evidence in the forest indicated that it had never been cut and cleared. Only after the windstorm of November, 1950, when fallen trees and trees very badly damaged in the tops were salvaged, had there been any major disturbance in the woods within the memory of man. The evidence led to the conclusion that the forest, at least its easternmost third, was a continuation of a very ancient one going back to the last ice age. All of this knowledge added up to the conviction that the woods should be preserved as a remnant of the original hardwood forest that covered the eastern seaboard when the white man took possession. It was also clear that the woods would constitute an unprecedented natural area for exhaustive study over the years to document the large number of complicated methods and processes which Nature uses in developing and maintaining such a forest.

When it became clear that University and State funds would not be available, the Citizens' Committee for the Preservation of Mettler's Woods began its public appeal for contributions. The owner, Mr. Thomas Mettler, co-operated with the Committee in every possible way and quickly agreed to accept far less for the tract than had been offered by lumbermen and developers. The sum of \$100,000 was set as a minimum amount to purchase the tract of 136 acres, to maintain it, and to carry on studies over the years. With no subsidy of any kind, appeals were made to public relations men, printers, writers, newspapers, magazines, clubs and societies for their respective help. Responses were generous and genuine.

Effective and continuing newspaper publicity was given by the *New Brunswick Daily Home News*, *The New York Times*, the *New York Herald Tribune*, the *Newark News*, the *Newark Star Ledger*, the *Elizabeth Journal*, and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Many other newspapers in New Jersey and elsewhere carried the story at least once. Special feature articles appeared in the following magazines: *The Flower Grower*, the *Bulletin of the Garden Club of America*, the *Garden Journal of the New York Botanical Garden*, the *Audubon Magazine*, and, finally the remarkably well told and beautifully illustrated story in *Life Magazine*.

Gifts came in daily, frequently accompanied by suggestions or offers of help. Within a few months it became clear that people throughout the country were deeply interested in having the woods saved. Organizations offered to assist—some local, others covering the whole State or more. Early among them were the New Jersey Audubon Society, the New Jersey Garden Club, the Nature Conservancy, about which you will hear more from Mrs. Hood. Others were the Adirondack Mountain Club, the Green Mountain Club, several different groups of Boy and Girl Scouts, the New Jersey State Federation of Shade Tree Commissions, New Jersey Parks and Recreation Association, the American Society of Foresters, local historical and nature clubs, chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Children of the American Revolution, Colonial Dames of America, Daughters of Colonial Wars, United Daughters of the Confederacy, Middlesex County rod and gun clubs, some local service clubs, and scores of women's clubs, veterans' clubs, and schools. Also responding to the appeals were 1350 individuals whose gifts ranged from a half dollar to five hundred dollars, many of whom wrote, "Wish I could give more." These persons represented seven different countries and 38 different states in the United States.

By early June, 1955, a bit more than half the goal had been raised or pledged, when the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America promised a most generous contribution provided arrangements could be made to transfer the tract to Rutgers • The State University to safeguard it in perpetuity and to carry on studies through the years ahead. Those provisions were all agreed to by the Trustees of the University, and today we are here to accept publicly that gift and all the other gifts which have made possible the saving of the woods. The funds raised were not only adequate to purchase the woods, but also to set up a reserve for future maintenance and study. To the Brotherhood and to all other contributors we are sincerely thankful.

At the end of this ceremony and dedication, the Citizens' Committee for the Preservation of Mettler's Woods will disband forever. Its work is completed. Rutgers • The State University will take over the trust for the benefit of mankind in perpetuity.

On behalf of you here this morning, and all others who have helped bring this event to pass, and on behalf of all those who will benefit from the woods in the future, I express thanks and appreciation to each member of the Committee for his unselfish service to the cause of conservation.