

Historic Southern Indiana

Interpretation Workshop, March 6-8, 2000

Charles Deam: In His Own Words

Presented By Sam Carman

About Charles Deam: Charles Clemon Deam was born August 30, 1865 near Bluffton, Indiana. It was here that young Deam developed an uncompromising work ethic that would drive him toward perfection the rest of his life. As a young man, long hours of work in his pharmacy eventually took a toll on his health. His doctor insisted that he take time off work and encouraged him to take long walks outdoors to relax. Ironically, it was this advise that led to Deam's life-long obsession with botany. His "long walks" eventually took him to every township in Indiana. Even today, foresters are amazed as they read through his journals and classified forest reports. One forester recently related finding a rather unusual tree growing in the middle of a large, obscure woods. He was excited about "discovering" this tree, only to find that Deam had described that same tree decades earlier in one of his reports. Such stories are typical when discussing Deam. His influence on the management of Indiana's forests and the extent of what is known about the flora of Indiana cannot be overestimated. Deam is largely responsible for initiating the state forest system we have today. His foresight also gave us the Classified Forest program, which has ensured that hundreds of thousands of forested acres will remain as forests. Charles Deam was one of a king!

Indiana's Forests -- Then and Now: Historic and scientific records indicate forests covered 85% of Indiana in the early 1600's, about the time European settlement began in the eastern U.S. As recently as 1800, Indiana's land base included nearly 20 million acres of forest. By 1900, less than 2 million acres of forest remained. Early timber harvests filled a wide variety of pioneer needs; fencing, fuelwood for cooking and heating, planks for flatboats, telegraph poles, charcoal for steel making, railroad ties, bridges, furniture, and, of course, wood for building homes. In 1899, Indiana led the nation in hardwood lumber production--1.037 billion board feet! Although European settlement had a significant impact on Indiana's forests, the forests that grew here before white settlement began were not undisturbed wildernesses. Written records dating to the early 1600's describe widespread Indian settlement, and an advanced agricultural society based on cultivation of beans, peas, squashes, pumpkins, melons, tobacco and corn. To clear the land and keep forests from re-entering clearings, Indians routinely burned timber stands. Burning was also used to stimulate prairie grass growth, which attracted buffalo, deer and elk -- game Indians

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hunted. While the proportion of forestland today is far from the 85% it once was, a steady increase in forestland occurred during the last half of the twentieth century. The recovery of our forests is a tribute to nature's resiliency, advancements in forestry, and the public's desire to conserve forests.

Some Quick Indiana Forest Facts:

- Indiana's forests cover 19% of the state, roughly 4.5 million acres.
- There are 13 forest types in Indiana: oak-hickory is the dominant.
- Almost 90% of Indiana's forestland is privately owned.
- Our forestland base had expanded from 1.6 million acres in 1917 to 4.5 million acres today.
- More than half of Indiana's forests are less than 50 years old.
- Forest growth exceeds harvest by more than a 30% margin.