

Foreword

Ora Anderson and I sit on the edge of his farm pond and talk about his trees and hills, ponds and marshes, and all the changes that have occurred on this southern Ohio landscape. The essays in this book reflect such stories as I have actually heard. On such occasions by the pond, the pleasure is enhanced by watching a muskrat glide effortlessly across the water's surface or observing a family of turtles emerge from the depths for a morsel or two of fish food tossed out to the various bass, bluegill, and bullhead catfish. This is what it's like to spend time with this self-styled "Kentucky hillbilly," when the conversation may turn to many subjects, but those that harmonize best with the changing seasons are the retelling of anecdotes from almost a century of living in or near the Appalachian Mountains.

As he tells the story, Ora "Andy" Anderson was born in a log cabin on the Mill branch of the "fur" Middle Fork of the Licking River in Magoffin County, Kentucky, about three miles from Salyersville, the county seat. In 1913, his

family moved across the Ohio River to the flatlands or “the onion fields” of northwestern Ohio, near Ada, where the entire family could work on the peat moss farms, growing and harvesting onions, cabbage, and celery. En route they were stranded in Columbus by the February 1913 flood and lived for two weeks in Union Station (the railroad depot, since demolished), two weeks in a church basement, then in a small house across the Scioto River from downtown Columbus. At that point his father said, “That’s enough of Ohio.” The family moved back to Magoffin County, Kentucky, then two years later to Catlettsburg, Kentucky, where they remained until 1929. Anderson’s formal education, as he reminds his friends, culminated with a diploma from Catlettsburg High School.

In 1929 his father bought a forty-acre farm in Jackson County, Ohio, and moved his family to the Ohio foothills of the Appalachians. They worked the land; the Great Depression was on, and life was tough. But not for a young man like Anderson, who, through persistence, got a job as the only reporter on the twice-weekly *Jackson Herald* newspaper for a salary of \$6 per week. A year later he became the editor—thanks to the fact, Anderson claims, that the publisher could not afford a good, experienced editor. Anderson’s salary was later raised to \$29 per week. It was on one of his reporting assignments that he met and interviewed his future wife, Harriet Jacoby, an Athens County farm girl who had traveled two counties west to Jackson that summer to be the 4-H agent. Anderson often reminisces about his wife Harriet and about how, as a graduate of Ohio University and full of life, she taught him about love, good manners, the value

of art and drama, frugality, ambition, and the need for a career destination.

So Anderson moved his wife and their baby daughter, Jan, to Salem, Ohio, and became editor of the *Farm and Dairy*, a weekly farm newspaper serving nine counties in northeastern Ohio. By 1941, he had become the district manager of the Dairymen's Cooperative Sales Association, a dairy farmers' marketing cooperative organization. He recalls, "I scheduled twenty-one trucks that picked up milk at each farm and delivered it to dairy company plants. I was responsible for bargaining for the monthly price of milk per hundred pounds for the farmers." Anderson represented 1,400 farmers in transporting and marketing their milk and acted as the spokesman for dairymen on matters before the Ohio legislature. It was during this time that his second daughter, Susan, was born.

In 1942 Anderson became the executive secretary to the Ohio Dairy Products Association, representing processors and distributors in all typical trade association activities, including legislation. After relocating his young family to Columbus, his main task was working the Ohio General Assembly on issues of interest to the dairy industry. Nine years later he was hired by the Ohio Bankers Association as their assistant manager. All legislative issues affecting banking both in Ohio and Washington, D.C., became his interests; he also was responsible for editing bulletins and a monthly magazine, arranging conferences and conventions, and starting short-term schools for bank employees at various Ohio schools (Ohio University, Miami, Kent State, Bowling Green). He also served for seven years as chair of the board of trustees of the short-course school of

banking at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, serving banks in sixteen states. He retired as executive manager of the Ohio Bankers Association in 1972.

At the height of his bank association career, Anderson and his wife began looking for a place to which they could eventually retire. After considerable discussion and searching, they decided to return to Harriet's childhood home. They bought her family's farm in Athens County in 1956, built the first pond that year, planted trees, and built their family cottage one year later. They would slowly help convert the worn-out ninety-eight-acre farm into a true nature preserve, eventually planting thirty thousand trees, building three more ponds and marshes and two miles of trails, and maintaining open areas for wildlife and bird watching.

Anderson's lifelong interest in nature included decades of advocacy for natural areas in Ohio, and his role in shaping organizations such as The Nature Conservancy of Ohio has been well documented. His eyewitness account of the first land purchases in Appalachian Ohio that eventually became the Wayne National Forest has been made into an award-winning documentary video, *A Forest Returns*. In addition to witnessing and reporting on the beginning of Ohio's only national forest seventy years ago, Anderson remained an active participant during fifty years of public meetings regarding Wayne National Forest land management.

A longtime bird carver, poet, nature writer, and storyteller, Anderson guides his audience down a path paved with local lore and anecdotes. Through it all, he is an Appalachian—one whose sense of self is rooted in his

sense of place, as experienced in the rugged and scenic foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. This is especially evident at his tree farm, the inspiration as well as the repository of his memories. To talk with Anderson is to visualize a bygone era, as he paints a vivid portrait of the past through stories and anecdotes. His seasoned perspective on matters ranging from successful lobbying to mountain remedies passed down to him by his Kentucky grandmother, Queen Victoria Green, as well as his astute observations of seasonal changes in the Ohio hill country, contribute to a deepening sense of place for all who visit or live here. As Ohio University President Emeritus Charles Ping recently said to me as he described a walk in the woods on Anderson's farm, "When you walk the land with Andy, you see things that you see *only* when he helps you to see them."

Jean Andrews

Preface

Why I Write

The word “nature” has a precise meaning to me, as it does to almost anyone who takes a moment to reflect on a passing thunderstorm, the erratic flight of a monarch butterfly, or the wrack line of an ocean beach.

“Nature,” we readily agree, is in the touch of a cooling breeze on our sweating forehead in mid-July and the crunching sounds of hard-packed snow responding to our homeward steps in a January dusk.

The park in the heart of the city spells the word “nature” just as clearly as a float trip down the rapids of the Gauley River in West Virginia’s mountains. It comes as no surprise, then, that the nature observations I make speak as clearly as my vocabulary and my personal experiences will allow. Furthermore, I fully expect them to stir within those who hear my words a sense of participation, or curiosity, or discovery.

John James Audubon did not see or identify every bird species in North America. Daniel Boone wasn’t even

interested in such trifles as prothonotary warblers when he came to Kentucky. George Catlin painted American Indians throughout the western plains and mountain valleys, but he missed the Gros Ventre, the Blackfoot, and dozens of other equally colorful tribes.

That's just the "nature" of our world. Yet to me that is the charm of everything out yonder. The encyclopedic knowledge of geology of John McPhee, the passion of the late Ed Abbey, and the ability of Stephen Jay Gould to trace the ancestry of natural history from Eden to Einstein don't diminish my own meager observations one whit, whatever a whit is.

It is certainly unimportant that a yellow-breasted chat hooked me on bird watching more than seventy long and joyful years ago. If it hadn't been that chat doing its butterfly dance over a blackberry thicket on an eastern Kentucky ridge, quite surely it would have been a flock of nighthawks, a booming grouse, or a house sparrow in our chicken yard. Some things are predestined—in "nature."

So I write of nature—the outdoors, the roll of seasons, the pain of a yellow-jacket sting, the cooling touch of a spotted salamander just revealed under a decaying log, the sensory power of the school of old catfish in my farm pond.

Blame old Henry Thoreau, if you wish, or Rachel Carson. When Aldo Leopold wrote *A Sand County Almanac*, I had to buy a ticket to northern Wisconsin right away. There were others, of course, and other seasons of discovery. They led to the Serengeti Plains of Kenya, the jungles of tiny Belize, the endless outer bank islands of North America. The Rockies and the Smokies eased my

itching feet. There were sandhill cranes to bugle along the Platte River, flocks of whiter-than-snow geese gathering in Saskatchewan for their fall migration, and the twirping cry of bald eagles around Kachemak Bay in southwestern Alaska.

I have attempted to record my observations faithfully. They are my love letters, for my emotions still are stirred by such small events as a visit to my backyard by a flock of hungry wild turkeys, and the slow but deliberate arrival at my pond edge of the ancient old snapping turtle that feasted last summer on seven offspring of the resident Canada goose pair. Even now, in the late autumn of my years, my appetite remains unsated. Thankfully, the diet is nonfattening.

Don't say I didn't warn you.

Ora E. Anderson