All human communities – past, present, and future – must reckon with the challenges of balancing our immediate needs and wants with the needs and wants of both non-human communities and tomorrow’s world. How do we ensure the soil that grows our food now can continue to do so in the future? How can we drink and use water while keeping it clean and abundant? Who ensures that the sound of the bobolink, or chorus frog, or pileated woodpecker will echo through Iowa’s hills and valleys in each passing year? Who protects the rich biological diversity of our prairies and forests? Who honors the history of the people who live off this land and ensures future generations can do the same? This account tells the story of the voices that have championed a caring ethic for this land and the stories it holds in Iowa and beyond.

The people profiled in these pages range from scientists to activists, educators to legislators. They all worked in some way to understand, protect, or care for land and the people and organisms that depend on it for spiritual and physical sustenance. They all shared a few other things in common: a deep, personal connection to the natural world, generally derived from spending a great deal of time outdoors; a concern over the stewardship or loss of our natural resources; and a desire to ensure that natural resources be available for future generations to experience, learn from, and enjoy.

The pen of history is not infallible, and this is perhaps especially true in documenting the individual actions of people taking steps, both small and large, to save the rich natural resources of Iowa’s 36 million acres. Indeed, millions of people have at some time cared for this land, protecting hillsides, nurturing plants, lighting life-rejuvenating fires, planting seeds, and more. Each of these actions deserve our praise, for each action helped ensure future Iowans had their chance to work, love, and enjoy Iowa’s land. But each of these stories cannot be told. This is the challenge of writing a biographical history of a story that has no clear beginning and no clear end.

The beginning of the story of conservation in Iowa must, at least, start thousands of years ago with the earliest arrival of people. Surely in their day, just as today, these small groups of hunter-gatherers toiled with questions...
of wise use of natural resources, learning about the land, and interacting with the environment to meet their needs for survival and well-being.

Through time, a diversity of cultures and traditions evolved, and with them grew deeply entrenched spiritual, emotional, and practical relationships with plants, animals, and land. Some plants were used to care for the sick, others for shelter or food. Whole ecosystems, such as the tallgrass prairie, were modified through use of fire to improve conditions for hunting. Rivers served as natural highways, facilitating commerce between cities.

The history of these times – the efforts to understand, manage, and improve the natural resources of the land that today is called Iowa – and the people who made those efforts is mostly unrecorded. However, oral and written histories passed down through some cultures reveal not just the importance of natural resources to their survival, but also the reverent, reciprocal relationship many Native cultures and communities have with the land. But the names of the champions of those causes are largely unknown, and thus go unfeatured in these pages. Though these important early voices cannot be individually profiled here, the authors emphasize the importance of their work and their legacy that is reflected today in Iowa’s rich biological and ecological diversity that modern Iowans, both Native and immigrant, benefit from.

Thus, we are left with the history books and accounts of the work of champions of land that came after the arrival of Europeans during the mid-1800s. Even during this period, we know the actions of many people are unrecorded, particularly for women and people of color whose work may have been disregarded or unrecognized in their time. Though we tried to include a diversity of stories in this booklet, the biographies nonetheless still feature predominately white men from relatively recent history. We acknowledge this shortcoming and its failure to accurately and fully describe the pivotal role that all Iowans – Black, brown, white, Native, immigrant, male, female, and more – have played and continue to play in conserving the land we today call Iowa, its history, and the natural resources that have for generations allowed people to prosperously live here.

This booklet provides only a brief snapshot of the voices of some of the people who demonstrate what it means and why it matters that we care for Iowa’s nature. We hope that it serves as inspiration for further research into individuals and organizations, both past and present, creating a chorus of voices for Iowa’s nature and all the promise it holds for people today and for generations to come.
In recognition of Lacey’s work, Louis Pammel stated in 1915 that “John Lacey had done more for the protection of wildlife and to stimulate forestry than another man ever did in our national life.” John Lacey is often considered the “Pioneer of Federal Conservation Legislation” and the “Pioneer of Federal Game Protection.” Lacey-Keosauqua State Park in southeastern Iowa was named in his honor in 1915.

Thomas Macbride
July 31, 1848 – March 27, 1934

Macbride served at the University of Iowa for nearly fifty years as professor, administrator, and eventually president. He was a renowned botanist and authority on fungi (slime molds in particular). In 1909, he founded Iowa Lakeside Laboratory at Lake Okoboji “for the study of nature in nature.” Macbride was the first president of the Iowa Park and Forestry Association and passionately advocated for the development of state and local parks, including his namesake state park in Johnson County. He was awarded an honorary LL.D. from the University of Iowa in 1928 and the university’s Hall of Natural Science was renamed in his honor in 1934.

BOHUMIL SHIMEK
Scientist, botanist, educator
June 25, 1861 – January 30, 1937

Bohumil Shimek was born in east-central Iowa soon after statehood as large influxes of people were beginning to plow up the prairie for agriculture. His parents moved to Iowa to escape political persecution in what is now the Czech Republic. Shimek’s father had been a noted scientist in Europe and no doubt guided Shimek in the study of science and literature.

The Shimek family was poor. Bohumil Shimek often sought to escape the struggle to eat and stay warm by retreating to the woodlands surrounding the farm. He was a keen observer and studied all he could about the natural world, from the tallest trees to the tiniest insects. It was in these woodlands that Shimek began a lifelong passion for collecting, identifying, and classifying the variety of species he encountered. Of particular interest to Shimek were the species that dominated the Iowa landscape prior to arrival of European descendants.

Shimek entered the University of Iowa, obtained a degree in engineering, and embarked on what would be a short-lived career as a civil engineer. After just two years, he turned to teaching to more fully immerse himself in his primary interest, the natural sciences. Shimek eventually became a professor of botany at the University of Iowa and devoted the rest of his professional career to teaching, research, and co-founding and directing the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory at Lake Okoboji in northwest Iowa.

He conducted scientific fieldwork across all of Iowa, the Midwest, and the nation. His personal research collections included 2.4 million shell specimens eventually sold to the Smithsonian Institute upon his death. He is estimated to have added more than 200,000 specimens to the herbarium then housed at the University of Iowa, including vascular plant specimens from every county in Iowa.

Though largely considered one of the country’s leading plant ecologists, one of Shimek’s most interesting scientific contributions was geological. In a series of papers written in the 1890s, Shimek concluded that the loess sediments found across the state were deposited by wind, not water.

Shimek was a scientist, but he was also an educator, believing the best place to teach natural history was in nature. He was among the first to espouse a comprehensive conservation and environmental education program for Iowa. In the wetlands, on the prairie, and among the trees, he helped his students not only learn about the natural world but also protect it. He shared with them his love of nature and helped them develop their own conservation values. He focused the educational process on awareness and knowledge of the natural world, sharing and facilitating positive attitudes toward the environment, and teaching the skills required to act for the protection of nature. These same concepts are still considered fundamental in the field of environmental education.

He is the namesake for the Shimek State Forest, an elementary school, an award for environmental educators, and a species of snail, Discus shimekii.
Although George Washington Carver is best known for his work in championing the uses and benefits of the soil-rehабilitating peanut on southern farms, his impacts in the realm of conservation, environmental stewardship, and wellbeing of rural communities go largely unnoticed in the “Peanut Man” caricature commemorated in children’s books. In retracing George Washington Carver’s path to eminent leader in caring for the land and the communities of plants, animals, and people that depend on it, the impact of his training and time in Iowa are unequivocal.

George Washington Carver was born into or in the immediate shadow of slavery in Missouri during the 1860s, to a mother that had herself been enslaved there. The earliest years of George Washington Carver’s life are not clearly documented, but it is known that he was once kidnapped and then returned to the family that had enslaved his mother, raised on their Missouri farm until

Althea Sherman
October 10, 1853 – April 16, 1943

Though originally trained as an artist, Althea Sherman is best known for her scientific studies of the life cycle of birds – chimney swifts in particular. In 1915, she built a 28-foot-tall wooden tower in Clayton County, Iowa. The tower had an internal staircase and special doors and peepholes that allowed her to be the first to observe and document the chimney swifts’ life cycle. She published more than seventy articles in scientific and ornithological journals.

Ecology, is thought to be the first text to use the word ecology in its title. Through his work as a teacher, he served as a mentor to such individuals as Ada Hayden and George Washington Carver.

Pammel’s early explorations in the natural world and his extensive scientific training came together in a personal philosophy based upon the belief that humans could not exist without direct contact with the living world. Pammel suggested that it was our duty to hand to the next generation some “typical and scientific areas in different parts of the state,” leading him to play a key role in establishing the first Iowa State Board of Conservation in 1917. The board’s mission was to determine what natural places in Iowa were of value for conservation and preservation, for the value of their natural history, their forestry reserves, their archaeological or geological resources, or their plant and animal life.

Pammel was named the first president of the board and he immediately began working to develop the state park system by acquiring land; investigating the forestry, plant, and scenic value of sites; and securing donations and funding. He helped established 38 state parks during his tenue as president, the first of which was Backbone State Park in Delaware County. Pammel State Park, near Winterset, was dedicated in 1930 to honor the man now recognized as the “Founder of Iowa’s State Park System.”
around 1876 and then departed to pursue what would become a lifetime defined by service and education. Carver was enthralled by nature at an early age and found inspiration there for his art, science, inventions, faith, and hope for people and communities.

“Wherever the soil is wasted the people are wasted.
A poor soil produces only a poor people – poor economically, poor spiritually and intellectually, poor physically.”

George Washington Carver, 1938

In the late 1880s Carver moved to Winterset, Iowa from a farm in western Kansas he had been tending. By 1890 he enrolled at Simpson College in Indianola to study art and piano. Although he was successful as an artist throughout his life, Carver soon decided to focus his studies on the emerging field of scientific agriculture and matriculated at Iowa Agriculture College in Ames in 1891. Despite the challenges he faced as the first African American student at the institution he thrived in the classroom and field, earning the respect of his fellow students, the community, and the life-long adoration of his most important mentor, Louis Pammel. By 1896, Carver had completed a bachelor’s and master’s degree in agricultural science at Iowa Agriculture College, become the first African American faculty member there, built a strong and trusted network of colleagues and peers, and defined a focus for his life’s work in service of “his people” through research and education on agricultural sciences and the emerging field of ecology. So, when the nationally prominent Booker T. Washington wrote to ask Carver to lead an agriculture program at the budding college for African Americans in Alabama called Tuskegee Institute, Carver packed his bags one last time and left for a life in Alabama.

Upon arriving at Tuskegee, Carver found ample work to do on behalf of the African American communities and students engaged in agriculture there. He championed practices that worked well for the land and people, such as growing a diversity of crops, raising or harvesting wild foods to feed families (rather than buying them), using products from the farm or surrounding environment (like “pond muck”) for fertilizer, and reducing input costs on the farm related to capital or fertilizer. He delivered his educational messages with remarkable skill, inspiring generations of students in the classroom and in communities reached through the Tuskegee extension program and speaking engagements across the country. He was prolific in his education in surrounding communities, writing bulletins on uses for acorns, plums, and famously peanuts, as well as championing the importance of connecting kids to the environment and farm through nature study programs in rural schools.

Owing to his intellect, gifted communication skills, and creativity, Carver would eventually earn international notoriety, primarily as an inventor and icon for racial equality. But his stature as an inventor and associated monikers like “Peanut Man” or the “Creative Chemist”, as he was often known, is today generally recognized as having been overstated. Understated, however, was Carver’s clear message and work on the inextricable links between people and land. As captured by the quote that leads this account, Carver saw clearly that what was good for land was good for the people that lived there, and what was bad for land, in the long term (though not clearly in the short term) was bad for people in the long term too.

In this way, Carver’s was one of America’s earliest voices for conservation and wise use of natural resources. Unfortunately, this voice was not elevated in the way his white contemporaries working primarily in forests and other natural areas like Muir or Pinchot were. Today, with the benefit of hindsight and reduced fog of racial inequality, we can see unequivocally that Carver’s voice for nature was strong and as important today as it was in rural Alabama in the early 1900s.

Ellison Orr
June 14, 1857 – January 25, 1951

Along with Charles R. Keyes, Ellison Orr was a founding figure in Iowa archaeology. He carefully surveyed and documented an immense number of archaeological sites and collections across the state, particularly in northeast Iowa. Orr recognized archaeological resources as limited and worked for their preservation and protection. He lobbied for the creation of Effigy Mounds National Monument, and some of the sites he documented were included when the monument was established in 1949.
ADA HAYDEN
Botanist, educator, herbarium curator
August 14, 1884 – August 12, 1950
Ada Hayden grew up on a farm north of Ames where her family kept a small tract of virgin prairie simply to preserve its natural beauty. This sparked not only Hayden’s love for prairie, but also her scientific curiosity that would remain the focus of her scholarly and educational pursuits throughout her career.

By the time she was a teenager, she was encouraged to pursue her interest in botany and prairies by Louis Pammel, who eventually became Hayden’s mentor, colleague, and friend. By 1918, Hayden became only the fourth person, and the first woman, to receive a doctoral degree from Iowa State University.

She then became a professor of botany and curator of the herbarium at Iowa State University, which was renamed in her honor in 1987. She is estimated to have added 40,000 meticulously preserved and recorded specimens to the herbarium collection over her time there.

Hayden’s career was focused on the documentation and conservation of prairies and prairie plants, often incorporating her accomplished skills in art, photography, and writing to make her reports thoughtful, informative, accurate, and exceptionally well-illustrated.

In 1944, Hayden was tasked with surveying remaining prairies across the state to select the best for potential protection. With the support of a $100 grant, she traveled to, photographed, and documented 22 prairie tracts in 10 counties, eventually recommending the purchase of these sites as prairie preserves. She became the “champion” for Iowa’s most special remnant prairies: firmly, knowledgeably, and convincingly arguing for state preservation based on their roles as “a historic preserve illustrative of the native cover as the settlers found it; as a living museum of flora and fauna; as a reference specimen of vegetative structure; as an example of the native landscape; and as a field laboratory.”

Of Hayden’s original 22 recommended sites, two were protected in her lifetime, including the 240-acre Hayden Prairie State Preserve, in Howard County, purchased by the state in 1950 and named in her honor. The State Preserves Advisory Board was formed in 1965 and took on Hayden’s vision of officially recognizing preserves as a means of permanently protecting Iowa’s special sites.

JAY NORWOOD “DING” DARLING
Journalist, cartoonist, federal administrator, activist
October 21, 1876 – February 12, 1962
Born in Norwood, Michigan, on the banks of Lake Michigan, Jay Norwood Darling moved to Iowa by his tenth birthday and it became a home base for his life-long battle to protect wildlife and wild places.

Darling spent his youth exploring the hills and marshes surrounding Sioux City. His exploration was so thorough that his biographer would later remark that it was Darling’s intention to “not to let any marsh, lake, or pothole escape his attention.”

After high school, Darling left Sioux City for college, first in South Dakota and then in Wisconsin. There he started what would become his life-long passion and work, political cartooning. Darling signed his cartoons with the pen name “D’ing” – a contraction of his last name – for anonymity at first. The name stuck and he became known throughout his life simply as “Ding.”

Soon after his college graduation, Darling returned to Sioux City to save money for medical school by working as a journalist. Years later, having never gone to medical school, he retired in Des Moines as a Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist and lifelong champion of journalism, art, and conservation.
Ding’s journalistic work served to raise a new ecological awareness not only within the general public but also among politicians. He was appointed to Iowa’s Fish and Game Commission in 1931 and convinced the commission to fund a state biological survey, later conducted by Iowa native Aldo Leopold, that would result in a model, 25-year conservation plan for the state, featuring many of Ding’s drawings.

Darling also served in several leadership and administrative roles within the federal government, as Chief of the Bureau of Biological Survey, the agency responsible for federal wildlife law enforcement, the budding National Wildlife Refuge System, and scientific monitoring of wildlife populations. During his eighteen-month tenure as chief, Darling worked to protect over three million acres of new national wildlife refuges. Perhaps most importantly, he lobbied for the creation of the “Duck Stamp” program that would fund wildlife habitat conservation through the sale of annual federal stamps required for hunting migratory waterfowl. Fittingly, Darling drew the first stamp released in the program.

Back in Iowa, Ding invested his own money and leveraged his state and national connections to start a cooperative wildlife research and education program at Iowa State University (then Iowa State College), a system that would eventually catalyze wildlife education and research programs at public universities across the country that continue today.

Of his own cartoons, Darling said, “The cartoon is the applesauce in which political pills were immersed and fed to unwilling children.” He was aware of the educational power of a well-crafted message, and his messages indeed left a lasting legacy on the land and in the hearts and minds of generations of Iowans. His library of over 20,000 cartoons captured the spirit of political and social discourse of the time and, in many cases, still ring true to the challenges and opportunities for natural resource conservation today.

### ALDO LEOPOLD
**Author, professor of wildlife management**
**January 11, 1887 – April 12, 1948**

Aldo Leopold was born in and spent his childhood in Burlington, Iowa, eventually graduating from Burlington High School before heading to Yale University in Connecticut. He worked for Gifford Pinchot in the U.S. Forest Service in New Mexico, completed Iowa’s first statewide biological survey, and created the nation’s first comprehensive university curriculum in wildlife management at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Throughout his academic and professional career, Leopold studied literature, philosophy, and the full range of biological sciences and applied those lessons in writings that remain as important today as they were in his day.

Even with his impressive academic and scientific career, Leopold’s most influential and lasting contribution to modern conservation came through his work as a writer. His literary classic, *A Sand County Almanac*, published posthumously in 1949, not only explains his view of the natural world as a complex, beautiful, and living community, but also provides a view of the stages through which Leopold traveled on his journey to those visionary conclusions, lessons from which all can learn.

> “Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and esthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”
> 
> *Aldo Leopold, 1949*

Through his letters, journal entries, and early essays, Leopold proves himself an intelligent scientist and keen observer. He enjoyed and wrote about the outdoors, Mississippi River backwaters, and hunting game with his father. He carefully and creatively documented the experiences and efforts of his family as they worked to restore and reinvest a worn-out farm on the banks of the Wisconsin River near Baraboo, Wisconsin.

Leopold was not static in his beliefs. In one essay from *A Sand County Almanac*, “Thinking Like a Mountain,” he writes that he “thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunters’ paradise.” As an avid hunter, he thus despised wolves and worked to eradicate them. But, over the course of the essay, he relates personal experiences that taught him, and the
SYLVAN T. RUNKEL
Biologist, naturalist, educator
August 30, 1906 – January 22, 1995

Sylvan “Sy” T. Runkel received a degree in forestry from Iowa State College (now Iowa State University) in 1930, working as a forester before being appointed superintendent of the first Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp in Iowa in 1933. He then returned to forestry, serving with the United States Soil Conservation Service until World War II, when he was a glider pilot for the United States Air Force. He was shot down in the June 6, 1944 D-Day invasion of Normandy, wounding his leg and leading to his use of a walking stick.

“Getting people, getting children, acquainted with what's out here will make people concerned about what is happening here. If we get acquainted with natural communities, we feel at home. Any place we feel at home, we feel like protecting.”

-Sylvan Runkel
The Sylvan Runkel State Preserve in Monona County, Academy of Science, the Iowa Chapter of the Wildlife Society, and the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, his greatest legacy. Runkel was also the author of three wildflower identification guides, all written during “retirement”, that are still considered classics in Iowa. These books are yet another demonstration of his commitment to engaging people with the natural world, as they do more than simply provide plant identification, also explaining how the plants could be used by people.

The Sylvan Runkel State Preserve in Monona County was dedicated posthumously in 1996. While Runkel has received many awards and accolades, from the Iowa Academy of Science, the Iowa Chapter of the Wildlife Society, and the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, his personal, hands-on approach to helping people appreciate and understand the natural world could be considered his greatest legacy.

GLADYS BLACK
“Iowa’s Bird Lady,” educator, writer, activist
Born in 1909 near Pleasantville, Iowa, Gladys Black’s formal education was in nursing. In the early 1940s, she and her husband moved to Robins Air Force Base in Georgia, where she worked for the U.S. Public Health Service, became active in community affairs, and was named Woman of the Year in 1953. Upon her husband’s death in 1956, Black returned to Pleasantville and, despite maintaining a full plate as a public health nurse and caregiver for her mother, embarked on a new phase of civic engagement: studying, educating about, and advocating for birds. A self-described “amateur” ornithologist, Black eventually documented more than 300 bird species around Pleasantville. She spent time every day for 35 years, with only a single five-day break due to a hospital stay, observing birds and compiling species data in the area near Lake Red Rock, ornithological work that eventually earned her an honorary doctorate from Simpson College.

It was her dedication to sharing her love and passion for birds with others, however, that earned Black the nickname “Iowa’s Bird Lady.” She wrote for the Des Moines Register and several weekly papers for decades, becoming a household name through her folksy, lively columns that enlisted thousands in her campaign to protect land and birds. Through these columns and because of her willingness answer questions from, correspond with, or listen to birding stories from just about anyone, Iowans regarded her as the bird expert.

Black’s columns were far from the only way she spread her message of conservation. She regularly squeezed kids into her old Ford for back-road birding, banded birds with local students, and helped students conduct science experiments in her own backyard. She testified at meetings, wrote letters to the editor, visited service clubs, and called radio shows. She dogged bureaucrats and politicians about environmental issues ranging from roadside spraying to habitat loss to lead ammunition.

Black was a trailblazer. She led nature hikes before the advent of county conservation board naturalists. She espoused the risks of pesticides in the early 1970s, before most people recognized their hazards. Black taught respect for the Earth before “environmental education” caught on and cared for sick and injured birds before “wildlife rehabilitator” became a profession.

Black was inducted into the Iowa Women’s Hall of Fame in 1985. She received a certificate of appreciation from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for her conservation and education efforts around Lake Red Rock and a popular birding area near Red Rock Reservoir she frequented was dedicated in 2004 as the Gladys Black Bald Eagle Refuge.

Arthur Carhart
September 18, 1892 – November 27, 1978
Born in Mapleton, Iowa, and then trained as a landscape architect, Arthur Carhart was one of the original Forest Service “recreation engineers” and designed the then-radical “roadless” plans for the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in Northern Minnesota. He believed in the social value of wilderness and outdoor recreation and approached management decisions and issues with local ecology and local partnerships in the forefront. He later became a full-time writer, eventually producing 24 books and more than 4,000 articles and stories, many focused on forestry, wildlife management, and reconciling sport and conservation. Carhart received the Izaak Walton League of America's Founder Award in 1956 and the Outdoor Writers Association of America's Conservation Award in 1958. He is the namesake for the National Wilderness Training Center run by the U.S. Government in Montana.
At its core, Pearson’s advocacy was about reconciling the complex and historically fraught relationship between people and land in the U.S. This land, where millions of people were once enslaved and millions more were involuntarily driven off ancestral lands amid broken treaties and brutal wars, has scars from more than the transgressions of the plow, dredge, and ax ordinarily recognized in the conservation conversation. Voices like Maria Pearson’s have been and continue to be pivotal in reconciling this complicated history and moving towards a relation between people and land that respects a diversity of cultures and ensures future Americans have their chance to enjoy nature and its life-sustaining resources.

"Your culture does not lie in this land, it lies across that ocean. You go over there and practice your grave robbing if you want and I won’t bother you. Otherwise I’ll fight you until there is no damn breath left within me to see that this does not occur again in my land."

-Maria Pearson, 1971

In early 1971, Pearson’s activism on behalf of Native Americans was catalyzed when she learned that remains of 26 white people and a Native American mother and child were uncovered during road construction near Glenwood, Iowa. While the remains of the white people were quickly reburied in a nearby cemetery, the remains of the Native American mother and child were sent to a lab to be studied. Pearson was appalled at the discrimination in protecting and respecting the white remains, but not the Native American remains.

The story of her subsequent protest and the activism, born out of the so-called Glenwood Controversy, has become legendary. Soon after learning of the incident, she sat outside the office of Governor Robert D. Ray in full traditional attire until she was granted time with him. When he asked what he could do for her, she responded “You can give me back by my people’s bones, and you can quit digging them up.”

The remains of the mother and child were reburied in the same cemetery as the other people, and Pearson met with legislators, archaeologists, and tribal representatives to determine how to guarantee equal treatment of Native American remains. The Iowa Burials Protection Act was passed by the state legislature in 1976, the first law in the nation to specifically protect Native American graves and burial mounds and provide for repatriation, the return of Native American remains to their community.

Pearson’s activism didn’t stop in Iowa. She took her concerns to Washington D.C. and became an instrumental figure in the eventual passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990. NAGPRA dictates that all human remains of any ancestry “must at all times be treated with dignity and respect.”

Pearson continued to fight for indigenous rights and respect in Iowa, in part by serving as chair of the Indian Advisory Council of the Office of the State Archaeologist and president of the Governor’s Interstate Indian Council. Her work in Iowa, the United States, and beyond led to two nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize.

The movement for repatriation for which Maria Pearson is widely regarded as the “mother” was one step toward reconciling that complicated history and healing the wounds bore by people who cared for this land first and continue to care for it today. Thanks to her advocacy at state and national scales, steps were taken in this journey here in Iowa, across the U.S., and even across the world. Through incremental steps in repatriation and reconciliation, a clearer picture emerges of how people and land are inextricably linked together, and that what’s good to heal peoples’ relations to land is similarly critical to heal the health of the land itself.
Dr. Lois Tiffany was nicknamed the “Mushroom Lady” for her groundbreaking and expansive mycological (study of fungi) research, though she was also an accomplished botanist and field ecologist. In addition to her scholarly research, Tiffany taught and inspired thousands of students during her 40-plus-year career at Iowa State University and was the first female president of the Iowa Academy of Sciences. She faced, and overcame, the challenges of sexism faced by women in academics in the 1940s and 1950s, becoming one of the most respected and recognized faculty members at Iowa State University.

SUMMING IT UP

We study our past to learn for the future. As Iowans, we can look to the history of human interactions with our land, both the good and the bad, as we adapt to new changes and challenges facing our land, water, wildlife, and people. To achieve true health and sustainability of both the land and the people it sustains, we must accept the inextricable link between the wellbeing of land and people. We cannot work for healthy land and water without working for equitable access to healthy land and water for all people and we cannot achieve these ideals without engaging all Iowans in the fight.

Luckily, there is a path forward for ensuring well-being of people and land together. The lessons from the strongest voices for Iowa’s nature from its first century and a half told here can help us light that path. Each of these stories show us that careful observation in nature, listening, cooperation, and fearless leadership in the face of scrutiny can ensure Iowa’s nature continues to sustain her people for the next few centuries. Indeed, in studying these stories and the stories of Iowa’s nature, we find Iowa’s people, water, land, and wildlife are resilient and the future for these people and this land is bright.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This article was produced through a collaborative project led by members of the Iowa Association of Naturalists (IAN) and Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Funding for the project was provided by a Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) Conservation Education Program grant.

Portions of the text were adapted from or originated in the Important Iowa Conservationists booklet published by IAN. That booklet, along with others originally produced as part of a larger series by IAN are digitally archived at lib.dr.iastate.edu/extension_ian.

Authors
Lilly Jensen, Winneshiek County Conservation
Adam Janke, Iowa State University
Bruce Ehresman, retired, Iowa Department of Natural Resources
Larry A. Stone, Clayton County Conservation Board
Jon W. Stravers

This article and others in the Iowa’s Nature series were reviewed and approved by the Iowa’s Nature Editorial Board: Heidi Anderson, Polk County Conservation; Rebekah Beall and Elizabeth Waage, Story County Conservation; Lilly Jensen, Winneshiek County Conservation; Stephanie Shepherd, Iowa Department of Natural Resources; and Adam Janke and Julia Baker, Iowa State University.

Photo Credits
National Youth Administration Trail Work—State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines
Whitebreast family—Iowa State University Library Special Collections and University Archives
John F. Lacey—State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines
Bohumil Shimek—Frederick W. Kent Collection, the University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa
Althea Sherman—Oberlin College Archives
Louis Pammel—Iowa State University Library Special Collections and University Archives
Louis H. Pammel, August Emmel, Robery R. Moton, and George Washington Carver—Iowa State University Library Special Collections and University Archives
George Washington Carver—Iowa State University Library Special Collections and University Archives
Ada Hayden—Iowa State University Library Special Collections and University Archives