

GEORGE R. COOLEY

PAPERS, 1941-1986

SC 18858

QUANTITY: 14 Boxes (6 cubic ft.)

ACCESS: Open to research.

ACQUISITION: Donated to the New York State Library by Barbara C.M. Dudley, September, 1988.

PROCESSED BY: Thomas E. Lavery, Student Intern, The College of Saint Rose, June 1990.

Biographical Note

George R. Cooley was born May 29, 1896 in Troy, New York. He graduated from high school in 1914 and subsequently joined the armed forces to fight in the first World War. After his tour of duty, he returned to the Albany area and got a job with the banking house of Dillon, Read, and Company. Shortly thereafter, he opened his own investment house and became a successful investment counselor in the Capital District. After he retired he became interested in the field of botany and deeply involved in the modern conservation movement. In 1960, he joined the Board of Governors of The Nature Conservancy and was responsible for the establishment of several sanctuaries in Florida and New York State. He later received the 1971 American Motors Corporation Conservation Award and the 1985 Oak Leaf Award. He died at his home in Rensselaerville, N.Y., September 27, 1986.

Scope and Content Note

This collection contains material on George R. Cooley's personal interests in botany and conservation. It also contains various papers concerning his involvement with the Lower Hudson, Eastern New York, and Florida chapters of The Nature Conservancy, an organization committed to the preservation of ecologically significant areas. Also included are general files that deal with his contributions to various religious and wildlife protection organizations. It consists of an assortment of letters, articles, maps, cassette tapes, printed brochures, reports, and field books generated between 1941 and 1986 which comprise approximately six cubic feet of material.

The fact that Mr. Cooley was an important figure in the field of botany is well documented in this collection. For instance, he made major financial contributions to sustain many botanical research projects. He also sponsored the Cooley Award that some consider to be "the most prestigious annual prize available to plant systematists in North America." In 1955, he also published an article on the vegetation of Sanibel Island in Rhodora, a journal of the New England Botanical Club. Also included are letters to and from prominent botanists from the United States, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, Jamaica, and Taiwan. Reports on Cooley's Jamaican expeditions of 1951 and 1952 are also available.

The fact that Cooley was a major force in the modern conservation movement is also well documented in this collection. For example, he made financial contributions to many organizations, such as the Florida Conservation Foundation and the Hudson River Conservation Society. A large portion of these papers reveal that he was an indispensable component of The Nature Conservancy. For instance, he was instrumental in the acquisition of several chapter preserves, such as Big Bear Swamp, Hannacroix Ravine, and Little Cumberland Island. The fact that he played a pivotal role in saving Tiger Creek is also documented. In addition, he was a trustee of The Mohawk Trust that was set up to "preserve the unspoiled natural beauty of the Shawangunk Mountains."

This collection unveils Cooley's interests in other areas as well. For example, he made substantial contributions to the National Council of Churches, the World Wildlife Foundation, "The 1001 : A Nature Trust," the American Baptist Historical Society, and the Colgate Rochester Divinity School.

The Cooley collection also contains material that might be of special interest to researchers in the field of environmental history. Included are financial reports of the Vroman's Nose Preservation Corporation, annual reports of the Nature Conservancy, financial and legal documents of the Mohawk Trust, and master plans for the Ten Mile Creek and Tiger Creek preserves. Also included is a copy of World Conservation Strategy: Living Resource Conservation for Sustaining Development that was prepared by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. This collection also contains a 1986 report by the Mohawk Preserve, Inc. on the endangered plants of the Shawangunk Mountains.

In short, the Cooley collection gives valuable insight into not only the field of botany, but it also provides the reader with the opportunity to peruse the papers of an extremely generous man who was dedicated to the preservation of our natural environment.

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