

THE MISSISSIPPI KITE

In Memoriam: Miss Fannye A. Cook

By B. E. Gandy



Miss Frances A. Cook, better known to her friends and colleagues as Miss Fannye A. Cook, was a native of Crystal Springs, Mississippi.

A graduate of Crystal Springs High School, Miss Cook received her bachelor's degree from Mississippi State College for Women. She taught History and English Literature at West Point and Louisville, Mississippi, and in Panama, and Wyoming. By-passing a master's degree to work directly toward a doctorate, Miss Cook majored in ornithology at the University of Colorado and at George Washington University. Studying science at night at the latter university, she completed all the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts except the thesis. She spent a year at the Smithsonian doing research and preparing specimens of plants and animals she had collected.

For a while Miss Cook was employed as auditor of income tax returns for the Bureau of Internal Revenue in Washington, D. C.

In 1926, after observing the damage done to her native state's resources following two years of drought and fire, Miss Cook dropped her studies and resigned her job in Washington to return to Mississippi and spearhead a drive for conservation.

She began her campaign with a poster display at the Laurel Fair. At the request of officials she also placed the exhibit in the Meridian Fair the same year. There her posters showing the usefulness of birds in combating harmful insects attracted Professor R. W. Harned, head of the State Plant Board. The board was then concerned with the insect problem and Professor Harned asked Miss Cook to go to State College where she was given space for research and promotion.

For five years Miss Cook traveled from one end of the state to the other, mostly at her own expense and without salary, pointing out the need for a state agency to protect

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and preserve the state's last vanishing wildlife. Her message was brought before schools, clubs, and at various fairs where she prepared wildlife exhibits. She encountered much opposition because market hunting was quite common.

Miss Cook was aided in the fight by Dr. W. F. Bond, the late Wiley P. Harris, J. W. Tucker, and other conservation-minded citizens. In 1927 Miss Cook organized the Mississippi Association for the Conservation of Wildlife, serving as executive secretary. This group was instrumental in improving conditions, and in cooperation with the American Legion and various other clubs was largely responsible for legislation creating the State Game and Fish Commission. A bill was presented to the Legislature in 1928, in the hope of establishing a conservation department. It failed. Four years later in 1932, the Legislature under Mike Conner, established the present State Game and Fish Commission.

In the fall of 1932, Miss Cook was appointed by the Game and Fish Commission as research assistant to the director. During her early years with the Commission she frequently conducted game censuses in rugged terrain and camped out under primitive conditions. Working on a survey of freshwater fishes, she often waded Mississippi streams to collect specimens.

In 1935 Miss Cook planned a State Plant and Animal Survey. This project was financed by the Works Progress Administration and sponsored by the Mississippi Game and Fish Commission in cooperation with the State colleges. Miss Cook was leader of the project and from 1935 to 1941, all her attention was directed to this assignment. During this project 18 district museums were established and her dream of a state museum was realized when the Wildlife Museum was opened to the public as a permanent state museum on January 3, 1939. Miss Cook was director and curator of the museum from its inception in 1933 until her retirement December 31, 1958.

Upon her retirement the employees of the Commission sponsored an appreciation dinner honoring Miss Cook for 26 years of public service in wildlife conservation. State dignitaries present included the principal speakers, Governor J. P. Coleman and Judge W. E. McIntyre.

During her years with the Commission Miss Cook wrote numerous articles and survey bulletins about the wildlife of Mississippi, including a 103-page bulletin entitled "Game

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Birds of Mississippi." Articles by Miss Cook were published in Mississippi Game and Fish, Mississippi Ornithological Society Newsletter, Journal of the Mississippi Academy of Science, Copeia and the Journal of Mammalogy. As a fitting climax to her life's work, Miss Cook wrote a book, "Fresh-water Fishes in Mississippi," published by the Mississippi Game and Fish Commission in 1959. This book was recognized nationally and praised highly by fisheries experts.

Miss Cook was instrumental in organizing the Mississippi Ornithological Society on April 30, 1955, and was its first president, serving for two years. She was serving a third term as president of the society at the time of her death.

Miss Cook was a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, a member of the Mississippi Academy of Science, American Ornithologists' Union, Wilson Ornithological Society, Louisiana, Tennessee and Alabama Ornithological Societies, the American Society of Mammalogists, American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists, the Mississippi Genealogical Society and the Daughters of the American Revolution. A counselor for Scouts, she enjoyed working with the youth of Mississippi as shown by the fact that she had taken some young people on a bird trip the day before her death.

In May of 1964, the Mississippi Legislature passed a resolution commending the life of Miss Fannye A. Cook, and particularly her contributions to wildlife conservation in Mississippi, and recommending that the State Wildlife Museum be named in her honor. On July 14, 1964, the Mississippi Game and Fish Commission approved the name for the museum as the State Wildlife Museum, the Fannye A. Cook Memorial.

No more fitting tribute could be paid than the words contained in the resolution passed by the Mississippi Legislature which stated in part: "Now, therefore, be it resolved by the House of Representatives of the State of Mississippi, the Senate concurring therein, that the life of the late Miss Fannye A. Cook who passed away on April 30, 1964, is honorably commended and pointed out as an example for all Mississippians to admire and seek to emulate for her contribution to wildlife conservation and for her example as a patriotic leader."

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