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# THE EDITOR'S PAGE

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ALTHOUGH the main concern of historians is to reconstruct the past, the complementary task of collecting historic materials is a present-oriented one. Environmental organizations, for example, are currently numerous and generating voluminous records and documents. To make possible a history of environmental preservation efforts, the Minnesota Historical Society is pioneering in a program to collect, systematically, the manuscripts of regional conservationists and conservation organizations. These original materials will be added to the society's already significant environmental holdings. In the United States only one other organization open to the public—the Conservation Library Center of the Denver Public Library—is engaged in a similar project.

Two years ago the Environmental Library of Minnesota, housed at the Southeast Branch of the Minneapolis Public Library near the University of Minnesota, was created to serve the community. Its holdings are lent or contributed by concerned individuals and organizations, and the library has been staffed by volunteers. In 1971 the state legislature appropriated funds for an Environmental Conservation Library (ECOL) to be established at the Minneapolis Public Library. ECOL is chartered to acquire books, government documents, research studies, hearing transcripts, newsletters, pamphlets, and other publications.

It should be underscored, however, that ECOL and the Environmental Library collect *published* information, while the Minnesota Historical Society and the Denver Public Library concentrate on *unpublished* source materials. These include personal and organizational correspondence files, organizational minutes and records, journals, diaries, manuscripts, and supporting photographic and oral history accounts. These documents will be prime sources for works still to be written and published. Such unpublished materials already in the possession of the historical society now enable scholars to study many aspects of conservation and environmental protection in Minne-

sota. Early forest conservation, for example, is amply documented in the papers of Christopher C. Andrews, Herman H. Chapman, and the Minnesota State Forestry Association, the first of its kind in the nation. The modern conservation movement is portrayed in the papers of such organizations as the Minnesota Izaak Walton League and the Nature Conservancy. Biographies could be written from the papers of such conservationists as Raphael Zon, Paul Clement, Ray P. Chase, Ernest Oberholtzer, and William Magie.

Two regions are particularly well represented in the historical society's conservation holdings: the St. Croix River Valley and the Superior National Forest's Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA). (The latter represents not only the largest remaining area of forested lakeland wilderness in the United States but also one of the finest surviving natural ecosystems in the Northern Hemisphere.) The long and stormy history of this area can be followed in the papers of the Quetico-Superior Council, Friends of the Wilderness, and the Superior National Forest. Relatedly, the papers of the St. Croix River Association and Save the St. Croix Committee testify to the importance of controls advocated by environmental organizations.

The large collections at the historical society also contain voluminous correspondence from such well-known individuals as writer-conservationist Sigurd F. Olson and organizations like the Wilderness Society. In several cases the papers of individuals and organizations are closely related and provide extremely detailed documentation of issues and actions. In all, the historical society possesses more than thirty conservation-environment collections of considerable size. In addition, the State Archives—now a unit of the historical society—holds the official records of the Minnesota conservation department. Future acquisitions—the society hopes there will be many—will add to these collections and give Minnesotans a historical heritage equal to their environmental heritage.

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