

Aspects of Conservation of Man in Indiana

STEPHEN S. VISHER, Indiana University

Although most people consider that conservation deals with wild-life, forests, fish, soil, water and minerals, the most significant aspect of conservation is that of man himself. How can mankind be helped to contribute more effectively?

In Indiana, five major methods of increasing the efficiency of people are 1) by better education; 2) by curtailing premature deaths; 3) by increasing vigor as well as prolonging life; 4) by making available better tools with which to work; and 5) by improving incentives, goals or objectives.

In the early decades of Indiana's history very few people had more than a little formal education; now most young adults are high school graduates, many have had college training; and a much larger percentage of our young adults have had post-graduate studies than had even 18 months of total schooling a century ago. The education has become increasingly diversified or enriched, permitting people of varied interests to receive help in the subjects of their special interest. For example, while at Indiana University a century ago, there were only a very few course offerings, now there are many hundreds of courses and scores of diverse curricula.

Formerly, a large share of all infants died, and many other children died before reaching adulthood. The death rate of adults also was high. The vast improvement in the prospects of attaining a "ripe old age" is the result of numerous earnest efforts, in many lines, including improved sanitation, diet, treatment of contagious disease, and surgery. Indiana has contributed notably in this work. One example is Harvey W. Wiley, the person chiefly accredited for the federal pure food and drug act passed in 1906. A postage stamp bearing his portrait was issued in 1956 to honor him. Other Hoosiers who contributed notably in the medical field were J. S. Billings, the famous bacteriologist and medical educator and historian who was awarded honorary doctorates by Edinburgh, Harvard, Yale, Hopkins and Oxford; G. F. Dick, the discoverer of inoculation for scarlet fever; Frank C. Mann, long director of research at the famous Mayo Clinic. John N. Hurty and Thurman B. Rice contributed much to the health of people in Indiana and elsewhere. Three Indiana pharmaceutical concerns also merit mention here: Eli Lilly & Company, Meade Johnson Company of Evansville, and Miles Laboratories of Elkhart.

Increasing the vigor or activity of people is scarcely less important than prolonging life. This has been accomplished partly by improving health with better diet, more wholesome living and working conditions, and increased incentives.

The increased efficiency of people attributable to improvement of the tools with which they work is widely illustrated. For example, farmers now can produce at least ten times as much as equally-able and hard-working farmers could produce a half century ago. In manufacturing the contrast is even greater. With the help of equipment worth on the average several thousand dollars, a factory worker can produce many times as much goods as could a person a century or even half a century ago. Likewise, with the help of labor-saving devices and mass-produced products, a housewife can prepare the meals, clothing, etc., for a family in only a small fraction of the time that was formerly required. The improvement in the transportation of goods and ideas made possible by better tools is spectacular.

The improving of the incentives of the people is especially significant in increasing their efficiency. This requires special education, only a part of which can be supplied by schools. Almost essential are wise leadership and worthy examples; good laws are also important.

Improving the inherent ability of the people is a method of notably increasing their productivity, but we have not been successful in this respect in Indiana. Indeed there is considerable evidence that the average person now is less able than the average was a century ago. The fact is that many of our people are the children of parents who possess less than average ability and vigor, while many of our better endowed people have an insufficient number of children to perpetuate themselves.

Hence, although in many respects Indiana has made excellent progress in increasing the efficiency of our people, much remains to be done in each major line, and especially in the last mentioned, improving the inherent quality of the population.