

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### PROMOTING CONSERVATION

When the original committee on public relations was set up in 1948, headed by John G. Bell, the Authority had little idea of what might be accomplished in the next two decades. At the time the concept of conservation over the watershed, and especially the matter of building big dams, was frowned on by most grass roots people, and only those who lived in the areas of the cities and towns, where flooding was a yearly threat, had any desire to see something done. This attitude was evident in 1948, at a meeting in St. Marys, when the idea of building the Wildwood dam was rejected.

Over the years the Authority depended to a great extent for its publicity on the news media in the watershed — newspapers, television and radio. While the publicity was not always favorable, the news media, on the whole, created a greater awareness of what the Authority accomplished and what still lay ahead.

Leonard N. Johnson, field officer, and William McNaughton, project engineer in the early days, through interviews and addresses at public meetings and discussion groups, made a valuable contribution toward spreading the gospel of conservation.

To create interest among the young people of the watershed the education and public relations committee sponsored essays on conservation for grade school children, soil judging contests for young farmers, and competitions for members of junior forestry clubs. Exhibits depicting points of interest in the watershed were placed at fall fairs, seed fairs and international plowing matches. Pamphlets and post cards were produced and many of these were distributed to border points to remind visitors from the United States of the Authority's recreation facilities.

The Authority also participated in a self-education program. With the assistance of the Provincial government, opportunities were afforded its members to visit different areas to see for themselves the scope of other programs, and to determine if they might be applicable to the Upper Thames.

The first such trip was to the Muskingum Conservancy District in northern Ohio in September, 1948. This district, then 14 years old, was formed to deal with problems similar to those existing on the Upper Thames, and some very worthwhile information was obtained. Other tours included New York State, 1950; Ontario, between London and Belleville, 1952; Muskingum Conservancy District, 1963; Tennessee Valley, 1965; Saskatchewan and Alberta, 1967. The biennial Conservation Authorities Conferences also were most helpful to those who attended.

Mr. Bell has been chairman of the committee since it was formed. Others associated with him: Joseph Bryan, E. E. Pearson, Oscar Sippel, A. D. Robinson, H. C. Prior, C. M. Peterson, A. E. Smith, T. J. Dolan, Clayton Smith, Cecil Glass.