An Affinity for Nature: Liberty Hyde Bailey

Liberty Hyde Bailey was born in a rural community in Michigan in 1858 on the first acknowledged commercial fruit farm (Cornell University Library, 2004). At the age of nineteen, and without completing high school, Bailey attended the Michigan Agricultural College (MAC) where he earned a degree in botany (Seeley, 1990). While matriculated at MAC, Bailey founded the *College Speculum*, a student publication, and was employed as the publication’s first editor-in-chief (Seeley, 1990). Additionally, according to Seeley (1990), Bailey, as a student, published two papers: *Michigan Lake Shore Plants* in 1980 and *Limits of Michigan Plants* in 1982. Thereafter, upon graduating, Bailey joined the preeminent botanist Asa Gray at the Harvard University (Cornell University Library, 2004). Not soon afterwards, Bailey returned to MAC to lead the nation’s first department of horticulture and landscape gardening (Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum, 2018). Once again, at the age of 30, Bailey departed Michigan, this time, for Cornell University where he served as professor of general and experimental horticulture (Seeley, 1990). Without further elaborating on Bailey’s educational background, one can posit he (Bailey) was deeply passionate about botany as well as horticulture.

In addition to Bailey’s interest to elevate horticulture as a science, the Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum (2018) asserts he (Bailey) was determined to improve the standard of education accessible to children residing in rural areas. For example, as a student at MAC, Bailey sought to engage students by employing an approach which focused on a learner’s interest which encompassed tangible experiences with nature. Concisely, Bailey’s approach concentrated on nature that could be seen or experienced, as opposed to uncultivated arid areas or jungles which students may never see (Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum, 2018).

Bailey (1909) asserts “nature study is a revolt from the teaching of formal science in the elementary grades” (p. 5). Furthermore, “it (nature study) is a natural outgrowth of modern teaching and investigating of what we call natural science” (Bailey, 1909, p. 7). In the years following the depression of 1893, Cornell received state funding to teach *nature study* in throughout New York state’s rural schools with the hope of encouraging children in these areas to engage in farming (Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum, 2018). As part of this initiative, Bailey and an associate, A. Botsford Comstock, published the “Home Nature Study Course” and other texts in addition to organizing a Nature Study School in 1897 (Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum, 2018). In subsequent years, *junior naturalist clubs* were formed attracting thousands of children. Moreover, Bailey authored numerous texts about nature and plants for a wide audience encompassing all ages which contributed to reinforcing his construct of nature study.

The accumulation of published texts, the development of a nature study school, junior naturalist clubs and the subsequent junior naturalist camps are representative of Bailey’s influence on the development of youth programs and of extending the concept of nature among school children and students alike. Arguably, these combined elements contributed, in part, to Bailey being often regarded as the father of horticulture in America (Perry, n.d. & Seeley, 1990).
**Literature Consulted**


