

neers drilled a well 1500 feet deep, in a site chosen by the tribesmen.

Seven hundred gallons a minute of pure, soft water gushed forth to prove that the Indians were right in their advice. After this preliminary success, more than 180 wells were drilled to a depth averaging 500 feet.

With a cooperation strangely in contrast to the wars of only a few generations ago, Indians are doing much of the work on drilling these wells, and by agreement with the Indian Service, they will bear the cost of maintaining the wells and ditches and operating the pumps.

These wells may soon usher in a new era in Indian agriculture, lifting it from submarginal in character to profitable and making Acoma Village self-supporting again, as it was in the distant past, before the coming of the white man. Water, to the Indians of the arid Southwest, is as important as the "black gold" petroleum of the oil fields.

Science News Letter, September 4, 1937

ZOOLOGY

Skunks Justify Themselves By Destroying Insects

SKUNKS can justify their existence as man's neighbors by their high destructiveness to insects. Recent reports told of the knowing way they have with hairy caterpillars, removing the irritating hairs by rolling the caterpillar on the ground with just enough pressure to strip it, yet not crush it. Now Karl P. Schmidt of the Field Museum of Natural History tells of two young skunks raised from earliest infancy on the bottle. The first time they were given woolly caterpillars to eat, they went through the dehairing performance like experts. The knowledge of how to deal with caterpillars seems therefore to be something they are born with, and never have to learn from their parents.

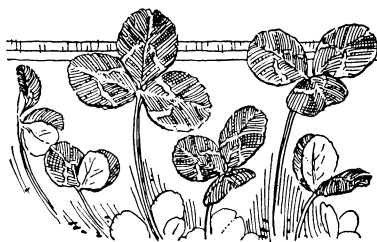
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Saving Their Country

SOIL erosion was a recognized menace to American agriculture even before the Revolutionary War, and the more progressive owners of land fought it with methods essentially the same as those employed today by the Soil Conservation Service.

How strongly early American agriculturists and statesmen felt about the matter is vividly brought out in a new Department of Agriculture publication, by A. R. Hall. That soil erosion should be a matter of public discussion was only natural, since the leaders of the people were often large-scale farmers themselves, like Washington and Jefferson.

Patrick Henry, whose electric phrase, "Give me liberty, or give me death!" helped to detonate the War for Independence, said after the war, "Since the achievement of our independence, he is the greatest patriot, who stops the most gullies."

The practical means for checking soil erosion adopted by Virginia farmers included contour plowing, which was then called horizontal plowing—furrows run around the slopes to catch and hold the water. Another device was leaving part of the land in permanently rooted vegetation, to bind the soil with roots. The colonists of Virginia also used what we now know as terracing.

Yet despite this recognition of the evil of soil erosion, and the knowledge of fairly successful methods to combat it, the soil of Virginia was nevertheless ruinously washed and gullied. Why?

Because, explains Mr. Hall, the Colonial farmer was an extreme individualist, and could not be induced generally to adopt sound soil conservation methods. Also, there was always a frontier of vir-

gin land to which he could retreat when he had ruined his farm.

Now, with the frontier gone, the problem becomes a national crisis. It is being met by common action organized through a national corps of scientific soil conservationists.

Science News Letter, September 4, 1937

PUBLIC HEALTH

Federal Health Aid to States Boosts Local Appropriations

FEDERAL aid to the states for health work has not resulted in a shifting of responsibility to Uncle Sam, Dr. Thomas Parran, surgeon general of the U. S. Public Health Service, stated on his return from a trip through the West. On the contrary, state and local health departments and private health agencies have increased their own appropriations for health work under the impetus of the \$8,000,000 which the U. S. Public Health Service, under the Social Security Act, has given to the states to aid in public health activities.

The gratifying situation described by Dr. Parran is in contrast to the relief situation, in which many local authorities are insisting that the federal government continue to bear the financial burden.

Dr. Parran said he found all over the country an increase in public health activities far out of proportion to the amount of money given by the federal government. In some places, under the impetus of the federal appropriation, local public health work has been started for the first time.

Science News Letter, September 4, 1937

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