

Darling Gives State 1425-Acre Tract for Zoar Nature Retreat

A large parcel of land meant as a nature retreat has been given to the state by Herbert F. Darling of Eggertsville.

The papers were signed Friday and mailed to the Conservation Department today.

By **TERRY DORAN**

The gift, made by Mr. and Mrs. Darling and their family, comprises 1425 beautiful acres bordering the Cattaraugus Creek in the Zoar Valley region.

At the same time, Mr. Darling contributed 86 additional acres in the region to the Western New York Chapter of the Nature Conservancy.

This parcel will be assimilated into the chapter's preserve, called Deer Lick, on the south branch of the Cattaraugus Creek.

At the signing of the papers, Mr. Darling told The Buffalo Evening News that the land donated to the state is not to be used for park purposes.

Natural Beauty—Not Cans

"The principle reason for the gift," he said, "is that the people of the state can enjoy nature in its simplest state."

"We wish to have New Yorkers see the land as the good Lord intended them to see it—not full of empty beer cans and park benches.

"To use a highfalutin phrase, my family and I are interested in nature in its pristine state. We are particularly interested that other people learn to love nature in this way."

Mr. Darling's latest gift is 465 acres. Previously he had signed to the state 672 acres on Feb. 24, 1962, and 288 acres on Jan. 3, of this year. In 1960 he gave 10 acres in the Cattaraugus Creek area to the William Alexander Preserve of the Nature Sanctuary.

This acreage plus the 86 acres given to the Nature Conservancy brings Mr. Darling's gifts of land in the Zoar region to 1521 acres.

Boat, Hunt and Fish

In 1920 the donor, who is a Williamsville contractor (Herbert F. Darling Engineering Contractors), bought about 2500 acres from the then Niagara Hudson Electric Co. The utility had planned a power development in the Zoar area but later abandoned the project.

Mr. Darling's intention was to "afford opportunity for conservative work and wildlife refuge."



HERBERT F. DARLING
Wants People to Enjoy Nature

His family has kept the land and paid taxes on it to the Towns of Collins (Erie County) and Persia and Otto (both in Cattaraugus County).

They retain about 1000 acres on the northern side of Zoar Valley proper on which they have built a cabin.

Over the years the Darling family has boated, hunted, fished and generally "tramped through beautiful nature."

Border Both Sides of Creek

"Only last week," he said, "my wife and I were bird watching. We saw a bald eagle, whistling swan, turkey vulture, mallard ducks, wood ducks—that was very fine, because a few years ago they nearly were wiped out—red-tail hawk, great-horned owl, a towhee and a blue bird."

Mr. Darling said that he does not intend to give any of the remaining 1000 acres to the state.

Through the Darling family's generosity, the state now has land bordering the Cattaraugus Creek on both the main branch and the southern branch.

It begins about one mile southeast of Gowanda and follows the main branch east about four miles to the Zoar Valley proper.

At the creek fork, the land parcel dips down about a mile and a half along the southern branch of the creek.

Abounds With Animals

It is known generally as the Zoar Gorge; the creek sides of shale rise as high as 200 feet. In the springtime there are waterfalls up to about 60 feet and the terrain is thick with hemlocks, white pines, yellow birch, maple and wild flowers such as red and white trillium, colt's foot, may apple, violets, jack-in-the-pulpit and hepatica.

There are also, Mr. Darling reports, deer, rabbit, raccoon, mink, beaver, squirrels, porcupine and skunk.

"Looking into the creek mouth, with its walls of shale and trees, is like looking into the entrance to a castle," Mr. Darling says. "The south branch, with its high walls and cliffs, reminds me of the West."

To Retain Wild State

Mr. Darling has been assured by the state that it is trying to acquire about 4000 acres surrounding his gift to serve as a "buffer zone or as marginal land" for hunting, fishing and naturalists' work.

The land is being acquired under the Park & Recreational Land Acquisition Bond Act.

Mr. Darling's gift is made to the Conservation Department and not to the State Parks Department.

In his agreement with the state he states:

"This land is conveyed as a gift to the State of New York in the thought that its gorges be retained in their wild state; that for the enjoyment of the public no development other than simple trails be made . . ."

This, however, is not a condition to the grant.

To Establish Foot Trails

Conservation Department Commissioner Harold G. Wilm has given Mr. Darling his written assurance that:

"It is the department's plan to continue the Zoar Valley gorges in their present natural state and to preserve their wild, esthetic values:

He writes that a few foot trails and guard rails will be established, but otherwise: "The gorges will remain as they are."

"Since I was a youngster," Mr. Darling said, "I have hunted and fished. It was natural. But it is more natural to want to protect the nature you love.

"In our family, we believe that we, for one, have put back more into nature than we have taken."