



Birds of an Iowa Dooryard: Althea R. Sherman

As we look back in Iowa's history, we discover an early Iowa bird researcher of great importance. Althea Sherman wrote many articles that appeared in many prestigious bird journals. She was one of the first researchers to study the nesting cycles of the chimney swift.

Sherman grew up in a frame house on the prairie near National in Clayton County in northeastern Iowa. Her first career was teaching art in schools and colleges, but by 1900 she had a new career as a scientist. She began observing the bird and animal behavior around her home and learned the importance of habitat and the effect of habitat loss on bird species.

In 1915, she built a tower nine feet square and twenty-eight feet tall. From this artificial chimney she could view the nesting, hatching, and rearing of chimney swifts. By 1932, 1,700 visitors, including college professors, students, and professional and amateur naturalists, had visited her farmstead to visit the tower and the swifts.

In 1912, Althea Sherman was elected by fellow ornithologists to the rank of "member" in the American Ornithologists' Union; only 100 members were so honored. In 1921, she was selected for inclusion in the third edition of American Men of Science.

The Johnson County Songbird Project is restoring Sherman's chimney swift tower. For more information regarding this project contact Barbara Boyle at 319/628-4824.

