



WETLAND *matters*

Published bi-monthly for the Friends and Members of Oxbow, Inc.

Have you visited our website?...www.oxbowinc.org

Morris Mercer, Oxbow, Inc. Co-Founder, True Friend of the Environment, Died February 17 at Age 84

Morris Mercer, Mr. Oxbow, died February 17, 2005, at a hospice in Dayton, Ohio, near his daughter's home, where appropriately several Mallards were swimming in the lake outside his window. He was 84 years old and had been in ill health for more than a year.

Surviving him are children Marilyn Simpson (Jim) and David (Vicky) and grandchildren Sarah Simpson, Noel and Katie Mercer. Morris's wife, Frances, died in June, 2003.

Mr. Oxbow Moves On

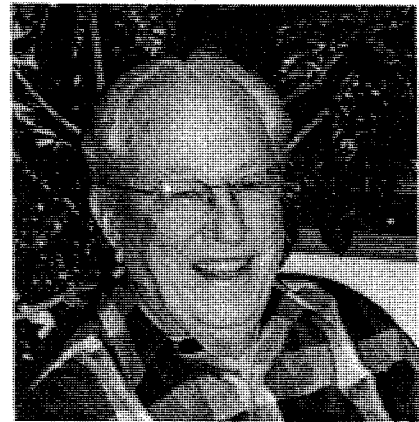
...by Dave Styer

About fifty years ago, my brother told me a story he had read, perhaps, in one of Will Durant's history books. In ancient times a king asked the court philosopher to name the happiest person he knew. The king expected to be named, but the philosopher named someone who had led a complete life, but who was not longer alive. The king asked for a second name, and got the same result. The philosopher said he couldn't name someone alive because of the vagaries of life. Disappointed, the king probably had the philosopher executed. But then the king was overthrown, and lived the rest of his life in misery. He could only think back at what the philosopher had said, and how it turned out to be all too true. If the philosopher were here today, he could well name Morris as the happiest person.

Morris enjoyed a wonderful family life. He fell in love with Frances when he thought she was too young for him to date, so he tried to get his younger brother and Frances together. That didn't work out. Morris and Frances only had eyes for each other. They were deeply in love throughout their lives.

Although Morris lost his brother in World War II, and felt a great sorrow, he was never bitter. He told about coming upon a dead Japanese soldier on one of the Pacific Islands, and thinking that that poor fellow didn't likely want to be there any more than he did.

It is nearly impossible to view Morris as a macho Marine. Maybe I could have done so during those amphibious assaults on the Great Miami River. Many friends enjoyed summer evening canoe trips with Morris. He would put in at the boat ramp at Shawnee Lookout, paddle up to Lost Bridge, and drift back in the moonlight. I went on several of these trips. We enjoyed the serenity, the scenery, and, of course, we



Morris Mercer

watched birds. There were the Herons and the shorebirds, the Osprey, the Great Horned Owls at dusk, the blackbirds and the swallows. On one trip, I remember, in response to a woodpecker, Morris was quoting Poe "...and so gently you came rapping, and so faintly you came tapping, tapping.... ." Morris wrote his Field Notes from his poetic joy of the wonders of life, especially as experienced in the Oxbow area.

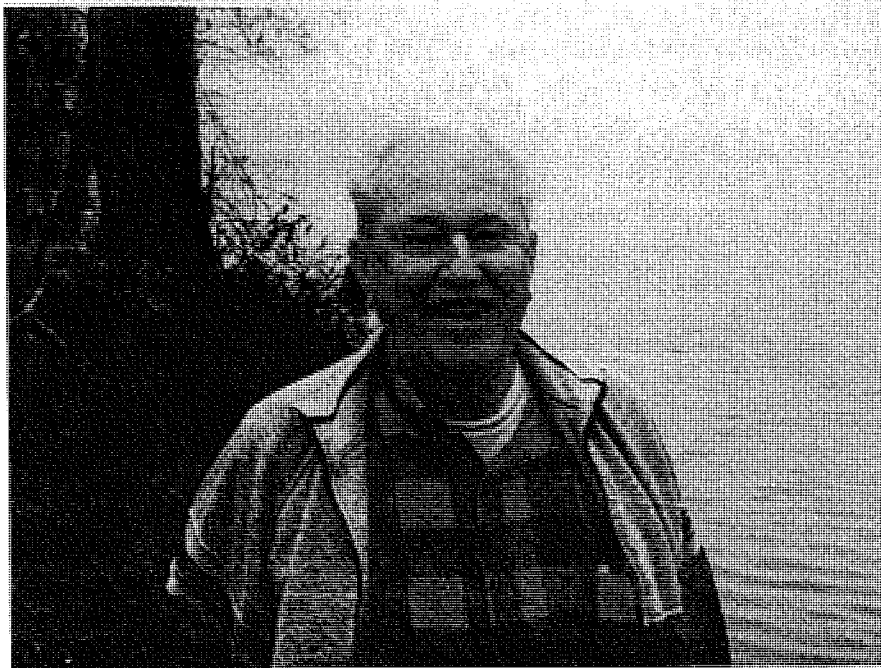
Morris was not given to strong language. The strongest oath I ever heard from him happened as follows. Several Oxbow, Inc. board members were riding with Morris to Indianapolis, perhaps to meet people in the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. We were on an Interstate highway in the Indianapolis area when a tractor-trailer entered the highway as if we didn't exist. Morris pulled out of the way without incident, exclaiming "Why, you ding-a-ling." Wow! That's tellin'em!

Mr. Morris Mercer became Mr. Oxbow naturally, and over a long time period. He loved to show people the Oxbow area. In 1972, when I started going there a lot on my own it was Morris who showed me the subtleties of getting around in the area. Morris led field trips there. When I-275 opened he took people on "the three state tour," that is, the field trips would go to the first Kentucky exit of I-275 to the Kilby Road exit in Ohio, and of course, pass through the Indiana portion. When Oxbow, Inc. was formed Morris took charge of the Speakers Bureau. In fact, with a set of slides that Morris kept modifying, he personally made nearly all presentations. That was great for Oxbow, Inc. because goodwill and memberships flooded in whenever he spoke.

Long before Oxbow, Inc. was formed Morris knew the complexities of land ownership in the Oxbow area. Thus, he was delighted in the progress Oxbow, Inc. made that far exceeded what he thought possible in his lifetime.

Morris' Field Notes have been a main attraction of Wetland Matters from early issues on. But Mr. Oxbow didn't stop there. When I became a member of the Langdon Club, Morris was president. And guess what! At every meeting we were given an update on the Oxbow.

We all loved Morris. As his health declined he had to curtail his speaking duties. One of his last talks was at a school, where he more-or-less collapsed during the show. He overheard one of the alarmed children cry out "Has Mr. Wonderful died?" Well, not then, but now. Certainly we can count Morris, Mr. Oxbow, as one of the happiest people we have known.



Morris on the shore of Oxbow Lake.

...photo by Jim Simpson

Oxbow, Inc. Memorials

<i>Donor</i>	<i>In Memory of</i>
Wanda Apgar	Morris Mercer
Herb & Wilma Beigel	Morris Mercer
Jeanne Bocklage	Morris Mercer
Allen & Katherine Bornemann	Morris Mercer
Marjorie Burress	Morris Mercer
Dottie & Al Campbell	Morris Mercer
Cincinnati Bird Club	Morris Mercer
Cynthia Cook	Morris Mercer
Jean Crontz	Morris Mercer
Richard & Mabel Derickson	Morris Mercer
Sr. Marty Dermody	Morris Mercer
Jean Durbin	Morris Mercer
Joanne Earls	Morris Mercer
Mr. & Mrs. James Eversole	Morris Mercer
Judy French	Morris Mercer
Denise Frey	Morris Mercer
Marvin & Norma Gambill	Morris Mercer
Dr. William J. & Ruth Gerhardt	Morris Mercer
Darlana & James Graham	Morris Mercer
Velma Hausfeld	Morris Mercer
Dr. Jerry Heath	Morris Mercer
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Kemp Jaycox & Cynthia Fink	Morris Mercer
Robert Lacey	Morris Mercer
George & Ellen Laycock	Morris Mercer
Judy Lee	Morris Mercer
John Leininger & Ann Carpenter	Morris Mercer
Karl & Steve Maslowski	Morris Mercer
Loren & Beverly McGuire	Morris Mercer
Graham & Sharon Mitchell	Morris Mercer
John & Carol Mollerman	Morris Mercer
Regeana & Al Morgan	Morris Mercer
Betty Lu Myers	Morris Mercer
Alfred & Dolores Niederhelman	Morris Mercer
Wilson C. Palmer	Morris Mercer
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Meg & Ron Riestenberg	Morris Mercer
Richard & Katherine Robertson	Morris Mercer
John & Judy Ruthven	Morris Mercer
Pat Scharf	Morris Mercer
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Jon & Jackie Seymour	Morris Mercer
David & Suzanne Skidmore	Morris Mercer
Hugh B. Trimble, III	Morris Mercer

Ron & Dottie Troeger
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Dave & Vera Williams
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Russ & Jinny Witte
Nancy Whitaker

Morris Mercer
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Special Thanks for Generous Gifts to

The Cincinnati Wild Flower Preservation Society
Bob Bergstein, President

The Outdoor Club, Sycamore Junior High
Bryan Jones, Teacher

The Allan & Dorothy Campbell Fund
of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation

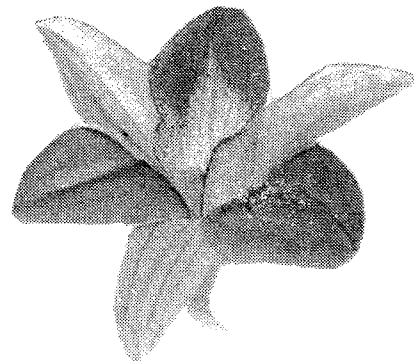
Oxbow, Inc. Extends Special Thanks to

Sherwood W. McIntire
for his Generous Donation of
Books, Slides, Tapes and Projector Equipment

Oxbow, Inc. has established Memorials in honor of those who have passed on. Each Memorial established in the name of a friend or relative will be enrolled permanently in the records of the Corporation. Each contribution to a Memorial will be acknowledged to the family or to those selected by the donor.

Tributes are also enrolled permanently in the records of the Corporation. Some tributes are birthday or anniversary remembrances, holiday greetings or gratitude acknowledgments. If so desired, "Happy Birthday!" or the like can be inscribed in the tribute notice.

Contributions should be sent to Oxbow, Inc., P.O. Box 43391, Cincinnati, Ohio, 45243-0391. Be sure to enclose the names and addresses of those to receive the acknowledgment.



Oxbow, Inc. Activities Schedule

Programs

Tuesday, May 10, 2005, 7:30 PM
EarthConnection, Mt. St. Joseph College

Dr. Michael Miller, representative from Friends of the Great Miami, will present information from recent research and lead a discussion on non-point source pollution reduction in the Great Miami River. This is a PowerPoint presentation to encourage questions and discussion with the audience.

To get to EarthConnection in Delhi: S on Neeb Rd past the Delhi Rd traffic light, turn up first drive on L.

Tuesday, June 14, 2005, 7:30 PM
Public Library, Lawrenceburg, Indiana

Jerry Lippert & Jon Seymour. Experience Birdathon through Jerry's and Jon's Birdathon adventures. Joys and trials and exciting finds of 2005 and past Birdathons. Should be fun! Take US 50W to Lawrenceburg, turn L onto Walnut Street, then R on High Street. Library is #123 on the R.

Field Trips

Friday, May 13, 2005, 6:30 PM

Meet Dan Boone at the upper boat ramp parking lot at Shawnee Lookout Park for this search for plants and birds. Dan will search for Cerulean and Parula Warblers, and other spring migrants, as well as unusual plants such as Running Buffalo Clover which should be in bloom at this time. (481-5997 or e-mail Dan at jerboo@fuse.net)

Saturday, June 11, 2005, 8:00 AM

Meet Darlena Graham at the Oxbow, Inc. parking lot near the cement plant. Darlena knows her birds and they will all be at the Oxbow on this late spring day! (859-341-4893)

Oxbow, Inc. Birthday Picnic

Come and Celebrate our 20th Birthday!
Reserve the afternoon of Sunday, August 14, for a Birthday Celebration.
Oxbow, Inc. is turning 20 and we want to celebrate our success with friends and family.

We will have Oxbow tours, speakers, activities for children and a picnic buffet. Reserve this date now and plan to help us celebrate.

Specific details, costs and location will be revealed in the July-August issue of *Wetland Matters*.

Act Now - It's Birdathon Time!

...by Meg Poehlmann

It's spring, which is a sure sign that there will be several teams of birders out in the field trying to count more bird species than any other team. The Cincinnati Nature Center and Hamilton County Parks are sponsoring this year's Birdathon. This year, there will be four Oxbow, Inc. teams participating in the event. The fun begins on Friday, May 6, from 5:00 p.m. to Saturday, May 7, until 5:00 p.m.

But these teams aren't just in it for the fun - backers are putting cold, hard cash on the line. A donation is promised for each species heard and/or sighted. Because this is Oxbow's one annual fundraiser, we hope everyone will pledge for their favorite team - so act promptly and mail in the pledge form below. We promise to print the names of all those folks who participate in the next issue of *Wetland Matters*.

Here are the official teams competing to find the highest number of bird species:

#1 - Finneytown's Fabulous Flying Fortune Seekers: Jerry Lippert, Wayne Wauligman, Matt Stenger and Erich Baumgardner.

#2 No See'ums East: Steve Pelikan, Charlie Saunders, Mike Busam, Bob Laker.

#3 Fire & Brimstone Birders: Jay Stenger, Jack Stenger, Joe Bens and Paul Wharton.

#4 Junior Gents: Jerry Meyer, Bob Schrimper, Jay Lehman and Randy Lakes.

We heard from Karl Maslowski that he and George Laycock may participate at the backyard level due to senioritis.

Birdathon 2005 Pledge Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

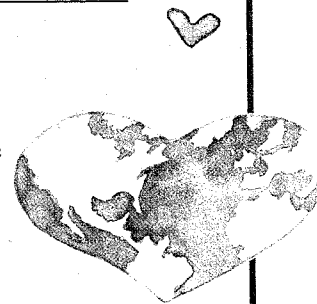
My Pledge is for:

- Oxbow Team #1: Fabulous Seekers
 Oxbow Team #2: No See'ums East
 Oxbow Team #3: Fire & Brimstone
 Oxbow Team #4: Junior Gents
 Karl and George
 Highest Scoring Oxbow Inc. Team

My pledge per species found is:

Please circle: \$1.00 50¢ 25¢ 10¢ Other: _____

Mail to: Oxbow Inc.
854 Ligorio Avenue
Cincinnati OH 45218-1521



Annual Oxbow, Inc. Treasury Report -- 2004

...by Jim Poehlmann, Treasurer

Oxbow, Inc. purchased a 40-acre parcel on the Ohio River from the Whitacre family in 2004. This was an exciting purchase for the organization as it contains an old riverbed of the Great Miami and has much archaeological interest. The total purchase cost, after extensive negotiations on the part of Jon Seymour and Tim Mara, was \$152,355.78.

Excluding this land purchase, Oxbow, Inc. experienced a positive cash flow for the year of \$71,959.76. Revenues were down in 2004. This was due in part to a land donation from Cinergy valued at \$70,000 in 2003. Expenses were also lower in the past year due to lower security and legal costs. Miscellaneous expenses for the year included \$1,400 for a survey of unclaimed land in Hardintown which we hope to acquire, \$1,200 for a sign, \$2,600 for a new culvert for the causeway which has yet to be installed due to weather conditions, and \$3,182 for a computer and projector for preparing and giving presentations. Other miscellaneous expenses were incurred for surveying to settle property line disputes and general upkeep of the Oxbow.

Administrative expenses were about \$2,300, or about 1.9% of revenue. The only fundraising expense for the year was a \$50 fee for participating in Earthday at Sawyer Point.

Oxbow is a 100% volunteer organization -- there are no salaries, expense accounts or offices -- and is beholden to the generous support of the membership and the public. The IRS Forms 990 for Oxbow, Inc. and Oxbow of Indiana, Inc. may be inspected on www.guidestar.org.

Revenue

	2004	2003
Dues	\$ 30,412.00	\$ 153,705.00 (1)
Land Acquisition	\$ 1,800.00	\$ 70,000.00 (2)
Donations	\$ 46,920.79	
Interest	\$ 6,220.37	\$ 4,000.00
Memorials	\$ 2,757.00	
Birdathon	\$ 2,639.49	\$ 3,693.00
Crop Income	\$ 26,887.00	\$ 26,567.00
Merchandise	\$ 86.00	
LCD	\$ 500.00	
Equity Gift	\$ 681.80	
Realized Gain on Equity	\$ 39.69	
Miscellaneous	\$ 914.19	\$ 565.00
Total Revenues	\$ 119,858.33	\$ 258,530.00

Expenses

Postage & Phone	\$ 1,442.42	\$ 1,766.00 (3)
Office Supplies	\$ 858.30	
Newsletter	\$ 3,731.15	\$ 4,479.00
Taxes & Insurance	\$ 5,053.12	\$ 8,647.00 (4)
Fund Raising	\$ 50.00	
Security	\$ 8,340.00	\$ 17,310.00
Legal	\$ 6,602.47	\$ 18,450.00
Merchandise	\$ -	
Miscellaneous	\$ 21,821.11	\$ 17,508.00
LCD	\$ -	\$ -
Total Expenses	\$ 47,898.57	\$ 68,160.00
Net Increase	\$ 71,959.76	\$ 190,370.00

Assets & Net Worth

	2004	2003
Cash & Investments	\$ 854,782.45	\$ 935,690.00
Land	\$ 1,526,907.66	\$ 1,374,452.00
Land Easements	\$ 231,963.28	\$ 231,963.00
Assets	\$ 2,613,653.39	\$ 2,542,105.00
Debt	\$ -	\$ -
Net Worth	\$ 2,613,653.39	\$ 2,542,105.00

(1) Dues, Donations and Memorials Combined

(2) Value of Cinergy Land Gift

(3) Postage & Phone and Office Supplies Combined

(4) Dearborn County Is Currently Behind on Tax Billing, and we expect this figure to fluctuate.



End of the Trail

...by Jim Simpson

On February 17, 2005, Morris Mercer passed away. For family and friends throughout the area, we have lost a very special person and we have been enriched by knowing him.

The first time Morris took me to the Oxbow was in the winter of 1976. I was dating his daughter at the time and had heard about "the oxbow" from Marilyn when she talked about her family but I knew nothing about it. Or ducks. ("There's more than one kind?") Or wetlands. So one day I got shanghaied on a family trip "to the waterhole." The water was up, Morris set up the scope, and soon he (and everyone else) was excited about a Hooded Merganser. I took a peek, not knowing what to expect, and saw essentially a black-and-white blob. It wasn't clear why that was good, but I took the group's word for it that it was. In the ensuing decades, I have come to delight in that little duck just as Morris did and now wonder after I show something to newcomers if they saw more than a blob.

My last trip with Morris to the Oxbow was last September 4. As had become the norm these last couple of years, Morris did all his looking from the car. We were able to see a few of his favorites like Wood Ducks and Common Egrets. I walked on and came back with a report on a White Pelican. I think we both expected that there would be at least a few more trips.

In between that first trip and the last one, we logged an awful lot of miles together. For almost 30 years, his official title has been "father-in-law." But much more than that, he has been a mentor, best friend, constant field companion, and one of the nicest people I've ever known. We have made hundreds of trips to Shawnee Lookout and the Oxbow but we've also traveled to the four corners of the country in pursuit of birds and wildlife and the great outdoors. Right up to his last days, we enjoyed reliving those trips - the marvelous, the silly, and the few that fell flat on their faces - and have been grateful for those shared times.

Since he was a kid, Morris was always an outdoors person. Fishing, hunting, and any sort of outdoor activity were an inevitable part of almost every day, most of it in the backwaters of the Wabash in southern Illinois. At the beginning of World War II, he joined the Marines and saw action in the South Pacific. He never did say much about combat, but he'd gladly tell of the times he was able to borrow a shotgun and do a little duck hunting in his off hours. He commented many times that he wished he had had some sort of guide book so he could tell what he was looking at. Certainly wasn't like anything in Illinois.

He married Frances after the war, got a job with Otis Elevators, and moved to Cincinnati but he was still an outdoors guy. Duck hunting in the fall, duck looking in the spring, and many hikes in Shawnee Lookout years before it became a park. Somewhere in there he found a spot called "The Oxbow". A number of years before I knew him, Morris came home from a

hunting trip and told Frances, "I just can't shoot them anymore", to which she replied (being very practical), "Well, then don't." And he didn't. That was his last hunting trip. But his "looking trips" were just getting warmed up.

A visit to the Oxbow back then could be something of an ordeal: there was no I-275 and few roads, so to see what was on the river might require a mile or two hike through a huge corn field. It was a regular Mercer family event to return from a trip spattered with mud from head to toe.

For many years, Morris seemed to be whistling in the wind when he would tell folks what he had seen at the Oxbow and what a great spot it was, because "the place" to look for waterfowl in the Cincinnati area was the Newtown gravel pits. It's my impression that somewhere in the 1970s the Oxbow started coming into its own as a hot spot. More folks were visiting and reporting what they saw. Some of the sightings were pretty spectacular, many of them by Morris: Eurasian Widgeon, Avocets, Hudsonian Godwit. I can still recall my conversion. The week after Marilyn and I were married, Morris took me down to see two Bald Eagles. The next weekend it was a Tundra Swan and Snow Buntings (whatever a bunting is). The week after that it was a Snowy Owl. There was no turning back.

A likely sighting for any visitor to the Oxbow (or Shawnee Park) was Morris Mercer --on weekends, the occasional weekday, whenever the opportunity presented itself. If not by himself, then leading a group from here or there, or showing some folks he had just met where the good stuff was. Over the years, he has touched thousands of lives with his warmth, generosity, and love of nature.

When development pressure cast its eye in the direction of the Oxbow, it was no surprise that Morris became one of the founding members of Oxbow, Inc. On the other hand, I think it was surprising to him when he started to become the unofficial voice of the Oxbow as well. It started with his Field Notes column in the Oxbow, Inc. newsletter which was well received by one and all. From there, he was talking to garden clubs and classrooms, leading trips of school kids, college kids, and all those birders, plus giving a few newspaper interviews. For someone who never made formal presentations, he was sometimes speaking two and three times a week. Morris delighted in telling about an incident that occurred a few years back, during one of his hospital stays. One of the nursing staff, who had never met him but recognized his name, came to see him. "So, you're Mr. Oxbow!"

When gambling fever hit Lawrenceburg and things got pretty intense, Mr. Oxbow was still a quiet, yet determined, voice for his namesake. Oxbow, Inc. was no longer just a bunch of tree huggers, they were a major landowner and someone to be courted by all the companies that wanted the gaming concession. I listened as Morris recounted all the offers that were made. They'd build Oxbow, Inc. a museum, a boardwalk, a visitors' center. "No thank you, we don't need any of those things." They'd explain, since it was obvious they weren't making their point, that there would be a lot of money to be made if everyone played their cards right. "That may be, but we didn't do this to make money. We did this for the ducks." It's tough for avarice to make much progress against logic like that.

Time eventually took its toll and in his latter years Morris stopped speaking and leading trips. He wasn't able to walk very far so he did most of his visits to the "waterhole" by car.

Additional problems limited even that option. Instead of him taking me, I was taking him. In the last year or two, I felt like his proxy as far as his Field Notes were concerned, since my name seemed to show up a lot. Any time I went out "in the field", one of the first things I did when I got back was to give him a report. Maybe he couldn't be there in person, but he still enjoyed hearing about it. As far as I was concerned, a piece of him went with me every time. I expect that to continue until I'm the one who can't go anymore.

My friend Morris never went to college and spent most of his life fixing elevators, but he kept company with professors and artists and professionals of all sorts because they recognized and appreciated his passion for the natural world. He was a lousy

speller (he always had a dictionary whenever he wrote anything), but thousands have looked forward each month to his reports from the field. He was a reluctant speaker at the best of times, but he spoke about a place that he cared about with a sincerity that touched his audiences. On a field trip he might not be able to give you the detailed life history of some bird, but the joy he felt in being where he was and doing what he was doing was infectious to the whole group. I can't think of a better ambassador for a place like the Oxbow.

Though he has passed over to be with his Lord, for friends and family it's pretty easy to imagine him glancing up from his scope and saying, "I'm just going to have one last look."



Morris unwrapping his 2004 Earth Day Conservation Educator Award, a crystal tree.

Morris Mercer
Mr. Oxbow
Co-Founder of Oxbow, Inc.
Author of "Field Notes"
Oxbow Tour Guide and Lecturer
Friend-maker, *Extraordinaire*

No one could be in Morris Mercer's company for five minutes without succumbing to his charm. That quiet, unassuming way he had, combined with his love of nature and his own generous nature, gathered in friends by the dozens.

No proof is needed. Nevertheless, read and remember the following tributes to a fine gentleman from old friends and new, from colleagues and gentle readers.

Morris Mercer, 1920-2005
A Life Well Lived, A Life with Meaning

How do you say good-bye to a legend? How do you lose Mr. Oxbow and lose that great soul? Morris Mercer was the Oxbow! He spent his young adult years hunting ducks in the Oxbow. He brought his children on regular trips to the Oxbow and taught them to love and respect nature. He defended the Oxbow from attack as he had defended his country during WWII, with all his mind, his courage, his strength, and his love. He taught thousands of others to enjoy the Oxbow and believe in the healing and regenerative powers of nature. He spent his last years frequently visiting the Oxbow and enjoying the ducks, beaver, eagles, cormorants, egrets, herons, and shorebirds that would not have been there if it were not for his efforts. If it was in the Oxbow, Morris had a way of enjoying it and teaching you to enjoy it also. Morris could also find mystery in a morning fog, elation in an evening sunset, resignation in a flooded river, peace in a flower blossom, and majesty in the call of a crane. He was one of nature's true gentlemen.

His "Field Notes" in the Oxbow, Inc. newsletter, *Wetland Matters*, were legendary. Every time I went to speak to an organization or conducted an Oxbow meeting, I heard how much everyone loved the homespun stories that Morris called "Field Notes". They were never just "Field Notes" but an intriguing mixture of observations of nature in the Oxbow, personal reflections on how observing the beauty of nature wove into the fabric of his life and memories, and those of his family, and a glorification of how being one with nature refreshes the soul.

I lost a friend the other day, a mentor, a teacher, an inspiration and a model of gentlemanliness. In fact I did not lose him as I know just where to find him. On the shores of Oxbow Lake. Along the banks of the Great Miami. Overlooking Lost Bridge. And wandering the woods of Wood Duck Slough. He is there, he will always be there. By following his path I know what I must do and that is to see his dream of saving the Oxbow to completion.

That is what he would expect, and that is my charge. In the end it seems fitting to celebrate the fact that he was here among us for but a short time, but taught us by deed and example how to live "a life well lived". Thank you, Morris!

Jon Seymour, Oxbow, Inc. President

blustery day with snow flurries coming in on the horizontal. The Oxbow proper was partially flooded, but one strip of slightly higher ground jutted out into the flood for about a quarter of a mile, forming a muddy peninsula. Morris, of course, was in his element and he led our group out to the end of the point. Ducks were everywhere that day, and I could tell, even then, that Morris was at home. It's been so long ago that I cannot remember the exact birds we saw that day, other than to say there were hundreds of several species, but I'll never forget Morris pointing out a male Eurasian Wigeon, my first one, and his unabashed love for the entire scene before him. From the inclement weather and the host of birds right down to the five pounds of Oxbow mud attached to all of our feet, it was obvious that Morris loved this place.

Over the next twenty-two years, I was lucky to be around Morris many times. I've birded with him, and saw him at many Oxbow Inc., Audubon Society and Bird Club functions. My Morris memories are many, but what I seem to remember most were the simple, subtle things, like his calling Scarlet Tanagers "black-winged redbirds", or his car stuck in the Oxbow on Easter Sunday story. I remember a couple of times he took me on a canoe float on the Great Miami River and the way he and his wonderful wife Frances made me feel at home when I made an occasional visit. I remember him always being a voice of reason at Board meetings, and I remember the time a Virginia Rail walked across his boots at Spring Valley.

But of all of my memories of Morris, the one that will always stand out, is of that first trip into the Oxbow, with Morris standing on that muddy point on that blustery March day, surrounded by water and birds, with a fixed smile on his face and sharing his Oxbow and welcoming me, a newcomer, into his place.

Morris touched so many people and I am grateful to have been one of them. To me, Morris and the Oxbow will always be one.

*Jay Stenger,
Birdathon Team Captain*

Morris Mercer's Monument

Birds were never far from Morris's mind. One day at his work as an elevator inspector he learned of a female Mallard nesting on the flat roof of one of Cincinnati's tallest buildings. He checked her progress regularly until she brought off her brood of ducklings. She had obviously given no thought to how she might get her young ones down to ground level, but Morris had an answer; he gathered up the whole Mallard family, took the duck and her hatchlings down on the elevator, and released them into the wild.

The first time I met Morris was at a meeting of two dozen or so people wanting to shortstop a threatened port authority from turning the Oxbow area into a busy commercial scene. Morris spoke of the importance of this wetland area to wildlife, especially waterfowl and shorebirds. There was agreement that the group should form an organization to defend the Oxbow. Because there was the need to incorporate, a hat was passed and the Oxbow group had its initial success in fund raising.

Morris never tired of stumping for the Oxbow. He told

of his observations there and people came to expect his first-hand reports. He was an effective public speaker and his programs brought new supporters to Oxbow, Inc. Morris ranks high on the list of those for whom the Oxbow area stands as a permanent monument.

George Laycock, Advisory Councilor

A Poet of the Wetlands

With the passing of Morris Mercer we have lost one of the most remarkable people in the area. He was a poet of the wetlands and though his poetry didn't scan, it resonated in our hearts. His articles must be published and I'd like to be one of the first to buy his book. I'll never forget his deep voice, his winning smile and his keen eye for the beauties that surround us.

Marcia Winborne, Cincinnati, Member

Morris Showed Me the Oxbow

I read in the Enquirer that Morris Mercer has died. I am sending this extra contribution in his honor.

I gave money to Oxbow for many years without ever visiting the place but in every newsletter Morris showed it to me. Better than being there since my knowledge of nature and powers of observation are poor. Just to hear Morris' enthusiasm made saving the Oxbow worthwhile.

I hope Oxbow will always be safe but without Morris, it will never be the same.

Wilson Palmer, Amelia, Oh., Member

Giving Thanks for Morris Mercer

I was saddened to hear of the death of Morris Mercer. He was definitely an important ally for the environment. In high school, my zoology teacher, Jeff Davis, introduced our class to Oxbow. As chairman of our Forestry & Wildlife Committee, I helped raise \$ for Oxbow, Inc. Several years later (1996) I got to see the Oxbow area for the first time. My graduate program class at Miami University was given a tour and hike by Morris. And now nine years later I have the opportunity to make a small contribution to Oxbow, Inc. as a way of giving thanks for Morris Mercer and for the efforts of your organization to protect the health of a local ecosystem.

My best to your organization and to Morris' family.

*Kemp Jaycox,
Project Scientist, ATC Associates, Inc.*

What a Warrior!

My memories of Morris start with walking out of an Oxbow, Inc. Board meeting late one winter evening within the last several years, the stars brightly shining and the air sharply cold. I simply said "Good night" to Morris and he said the same to me, then he added, "Thanks for all your work," and I replied, "No, thank you for yours". As I walked to my car, I thought

*St. Patrick's Day
and the Search for the Green-winged Teal*

It all began when Morris Mercer, George Laycock and I were attending a meeting at the Natural History Museum on Gilbert Avenue about a decade ago. It was shortly before St. Patrick's Day. Among the three of us, there was not one who liked Irish whiskey, could do an Irish jig or sing ballads in a tenor voice.

By sheer chance, Morris suggested we celebrate the approaching Irish holiday by going to the Oxbow and searching for Green-winged Teal. We agreed to meet at 9:00 a.m. on St. Pat's Day at a shop in Elizabethtown that served donuts and coffee. George and I arrived on time and Morris pulled in a few minutes late but before we could scold him, Morris announced, "The Green-wings are here." He lived close to the Oxbow and had gone out early to scout the area in advance with his powerful telescope from the overlook on I-275.

Coffee and donuts were gulped and off we went to the overlook. In short order George and I confirmed Morris's report. There were at least a dozen Green-wings, including four or five males in nuptial plumage courting more somberly colored hens. Morris drove his van that day and toted us around for the next 3-1/2 hours to various vantage points throughout the Oxbow, as well as to several nearby lakes and ponds. We saw at least two dozen more Green-wings during the tour and by the end we had listed some fifteen kinds of waterfowl. More importantly, we three WWII vets had started a tradition. In time, though, Morris found it impossible to drive and enlisted his son-in-law, Jim

Simpson, for this. Jim has become an essential part of the annual St. Pat's Day foray. Next time, I need to ask him if he drinks Irish whiskey, can dance a jig or sing tenor.

Another tradition I failed to mention: the individual who first spotted a Green-wing was always rewarded with a Lorna Doone cookie. Morris always managed to get that first cookie. I suspect his spirit will always be present at the Oxbow and of course ready to claim the first cookie on St. Patrick's Day. We all hope so.

Karl H. Maslowski, Advisory Councilor

An Unassuming Gentleman

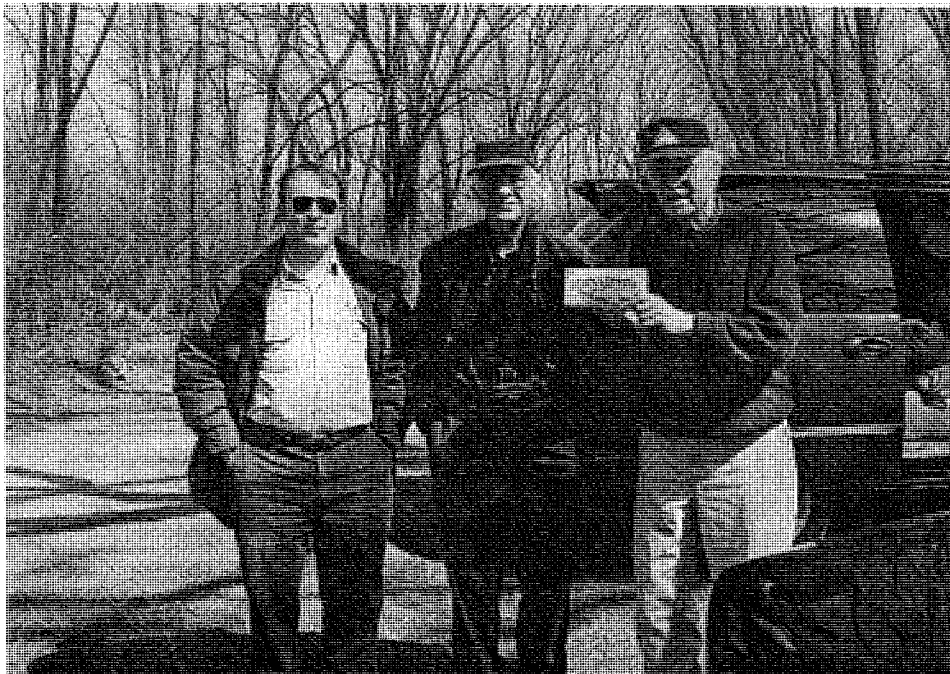
The best word I can use to describe Morris is that he was a gentleman, unassuming but very positive and articulate. Ever since I joined the Board of Directors and met him, I looked forward to seeing him and talking to him. I was an avid reader of his "Field Notes" and could not put them down.

Morris was a quality person and added much quality to my life and I will never forget him.

Aaron W. Perlman, M. D., Board Member

His Unabashed Love for the Oxbow

One of my earliest memories of Morris, not surprisingly, is also one of my earliest memories of the Oxbow. It was early March 1984 and Morris was, big surprise, leading an Audubon field trip there. I remember it was a cold, gray and



L to R: Jim Simpson, George Laycock and Karl Maslowski prepare to open the traditional box of Lorna Doone cookies after finding eight Green-winged Teal in the Oxbow on St. Patrick's Day this year. This year's hunt was dedicated to Morris Mercer who originated the event. Morris's son-in-law, Jim Simpson, fittingly was the first to find the Green-wing and claimed the first cookie. Jon Seymour rounded out the party and took the photo.

what a warrior, even at his advanced age. This man fights his battles silently with determination and grit. No fanfare. No glory. He just does what is right, quietly and with dignity. We need more men like Morris Mercer.

I am grateful for the battles for the environment and for Oxbow Morris fought in his younger years along with Norma Flannery, Aaron Perlman and others I never had the privilege to meet. The ones I have known I greatly admire and respect, those now gone and those remaining. As one of the younger Oxbow, Inc. Board members, I think to myself, we need more strong fighters like them. A few will not do the job given the opposition, otherwise known as development.

Another memory I have of Morris is Morris stating strongly at a Board meeting that he was opposed to raising the amount of membership dues. He normally did not say much at the meetings but when he did we all listened intently and took note.

I will miss Morris. I hope more young fighters will follow his example. His family should be proud of him.

Dwight Poffenberger, Recording Secretary

A Lovely Book with Line Drawings

The "Field Notes" Morris wrote would make a lovely small book -- perhaps with line drawings to illustrate. Morris' love of nature, love of family and friends, love of country and the goodness of the man are revealed in his articles. I'm sure many people who love nature would enjoy such a book in their nature collection.

Jean Crontz, Cincinnati, Member

Heart and Soul in His Writing

Please accept this small donation in memory of Morris Mercer. I never met Morris but I feel like I knew him through "Field Notes". His article was always the first thing I turned to in *Wetland Matters*. He put his heart and soul into his writing and we, the readers, got to know him. I will really miss Morris but he and his beloved Frances are reunited.

Pat Scharf, Sunman, In., Member

The Passing Seasons Despite the Miles

From afar, I could glimpse the passing of the seasons at the Oxbow because I was a devoted reader of Morris Mercer's "Field Notes." He observed the natural world with the eyes of an artist and described it with the words of a poet. He spoke of summer nights under a summer moon, autumn mornings and deer at dawn, spring migrations, tracks in the snow, lightning bugs in evening fields, egrets and eagles, the bend of the river at twilight, and a thousand more images that conveyed his love of life and his recognition of its beauty. Morris was truly a gentle soul and I shall miss him.

**Paula Steenken,
Austin, Texas, Member**

A Privilege to Have Worked with Him

Morris Mercer was one of the nicest persons I ever met. It was a privilege to have known and worked with him on the Oxbow, Inc. Board for many years. I often called him "Mr. Oxbow" because he cared and worked unceasingly to protect an area he loved. His awesome knowledge of this wetland will be sorely missed. My husband, David, and I were saddened to learn of his passing. We are sure he is now with his beloved wife, Frances. All of us, as well as the Oxbow, have lost a wonderful and dedicated friend but what a wonderful memorial he left behind.

**Suzanne Skidmore,
Former Corresponding Secretary**

Morris Mercer

Look for him in the morning mists.
Listen for him in the whisper of wings.
For a part of Morris will always
be there in the Oxbow.

He will be watching
as the beaver totes another branch
to fortify his home
or a deer stoops to dip his head
for an evening drink.

He will be listening
for the honk of the geese
or the call of a hawk overhead.

When the summer sun
bakes the parched earth
he will be there.

When the shorebirds come
in early fall
he will be there.

When earth is frozen
through the nights of winter
he will be there.

And when the spring floods come
to cover the fields
he will be there.

Remember him for
he will be there.

**Carol Molleran,
Contributor, Wetland Matters**

Miss Him

Enclosed contribution is given in memory of Morris Mercer. We always looked forward to his writings in the Oxbow newsletter and miss him with each issue. He was great!

Herb & Wilma Beigel, Covington, Ky., Members



*U. S. Marine Morris and Frances in 1945
when they announced their engagement.*

Much to Admire

I will always remember Morris Mercer as being a very nice, modest and humble person. I admired him not only because of his dedication to preserving the Oxbow area, but also because of his military service during World War II and his devotion to his family.

Denis Conover, Board Member

Morris + Oxbow = Commitment

I think that I have been in deep denial about Morris. My first visit to the Oxbow was with Morris...he took me there for birding, of course. It was a rainy day and we stood under the tailgate of his van so the scope would remain dry and peered over the shrubs and trees to Oxbow Lake. I really don't remember what we saw but it was a most pleasant experience to be in his enthusiastic company. My husband and I took several later trips to the area with him and Morris' dedication, enthusiasm and just all 'round personable nature lead me to join the Oxbow Board in 1986. He is very, very much missed!

Kani Meyer, Vice President

Oxbow's Ambassador

When I heard of Morris' passing I reflected a bit on knowing him for the past 20 or more years.

I did not know him when I first volunteered for a Board seat but that did not last long. Morris was one of the first to introduce himself and help a couple of the "new guys" get acquainted.

He held several positions on the Board over the years but he was surely Oxbow's Ambassador through his writing for

the newsletter and his many speaking presentations for Oxbow, Inc. He had a way to communicate just what he was seeing and experiencing when he went on one of his many trips to the area. We all will miss him.

Dennis Mason, Corresponding Secretary

Memories of Morris

What do you say about a man like Morris Mercer. He was such a quality person in so many ways. I was lucky enough to know Morris as both a friend and a neighbor. Morris became sort of a father figure to me after I lost mine in 1988. He lived only a few short blocks away from me which allowed for many canoe floats (on short notice) together on the Great Miami. We'd put in and take out at the Shawnee Lookout boat ramp. We'd usually paddle upstream so if we got tired, we could always drift back. I still remember our first trip. As soon as we were upstream of Lost Bridge. Morris said, "This is where we get out". I started steering toward the bank but he said, "No, right here!" He put his life jacket on, stepped out of the canoe and floated on his back over the riffles that were there. He was having so much fun that I immediately parked the canoe and joined him. Afterwards this activity became a regular part of our trips when weather allowed.

Sometimes we'd stay out past dark. When the canoe was drifting safely downstream and there were no obstacles ahead, we would lay back in our seats to see only the moon, stars and silhouettes of birds flying over. What a great way to enjoy the river!

Perhaps what I'll miss most about Morris is his youthful enthusiasm for nature. He preferred hiking in deep snow when he was able, and scheduled our annual Oxbow Winter Night Hikes at Shawnee Lookout during a full moon in January. He loved talking about the rich history of the area and used to say that "the history around the Oxbow is so thick that it drips from the trees".

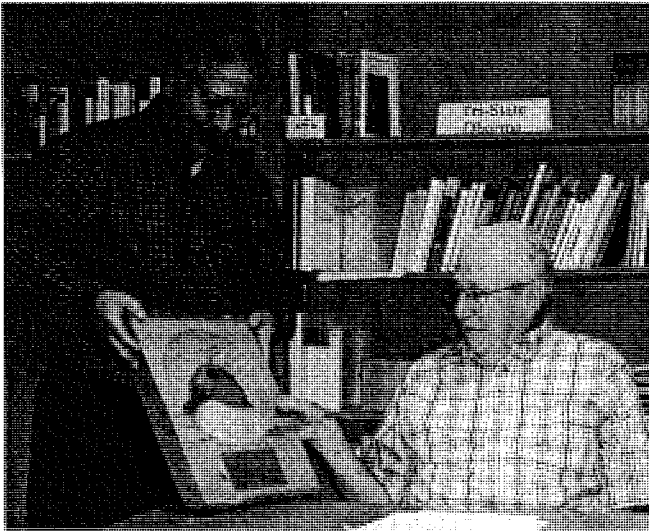
So many of us who work in the field take nature for granted. Morris never did. He was a self taught naturalist with no formal training, yet was able to accomplish so much. He won awards for his work with Oxbow, Inc. and even has a pond named after him. Yet he remained humble and preferred that others take the credit.

Morris was not a big sports fan. He did tell me once that his favorite basketball player was Larry Bird (partly because of his name). While at the Oxbow one Sunday evening in late January, Morris was reminded that he was missing the Super bowl. He paused a moment, looked all around him and responded: "This is the Super Bowl!"

During his illness this past winter, I kept telling Morris that we would be on the river again soon. I so wanted to take one more canoe trip with him that I found myself at the funeral wondering how well his wooden casket would float. The cemetery was only a short distance down the Great Miami from the funeral home. I'm sure Morris would have approved.

Morris is with his beloved Francis now. It's so fitting that their grave markers join to form a bench. It's a great place to rest after taking a long hike in the Oxbow. We will never forget you, Morris.

John Klein, Land Manager, Hamilton Co. Parks



At a 2003 Board meeting, Oxbow, Inc. President Jon Seymour presented Morris with a carved relief plaque of the head of a Green-winged Teal (which, along with the Wood Duck, was one of Morris's favorite Oxbow visitors) by Indiana artist Bob Van Hoff. The inscription read:

"Morris Mercer, Mr. Oxbow, Honored by Oxbow, Inc.
September 24, 2003,

For Dedication, Inspiration and Genuine Love Shared with All --
Truly the Soul of the Oxbow."

Earlier, the Board of Directors had voted unanimously to rename Beaver Pond at the Oxbow "Mercer Pond".

Legendary Support

Gentleman,

Please accept this gift in memory of Morris Mercer. His support of the Oxbow is legendary.

Sincerely,

**Mr. & Mrs. Howard H. Withrow,
Cincinnati, Members**

Here's to Morris!

I'd been birding as a hermit for just a few years when I stumbled on this huge flooded field along I-275 near Lawrenceburg. What a great discovery I had made! Thousands of waterfowl, gulls, raptors and shorebirds-- and I had found it all by myself. But all of those ducks were so far away, and I had no idea how to access the area. By a stroke of luck, I ran into a Cincinnati Bird Club field trip at Shawnee Lookout on March 16, 1985, and that was my lucky break. The leader of the field trip was this really great guy who politely explained that "my great find" was the Oxbow and that was the destination of the day's trip.

This guy really knew his stuff, but he was as friendly and down-to-earth as you could ask for. He showed us the ways to access the area, plus he let me look through his spotting scope....a Questar. What a day! We had 16 species of waterfowl including 23 Greater White-fronted Geese, all three Mergansers,

lots of Pintail, Lesser Scaup and on and on. This guy was a genius without the arrogance that ace birders sometimes have, and I had a new hero.

Of course, it was Morris Mercer who was leading this trip. I'm sure that he would have seen more birds if he had been birding by himself that day, but he chose to share his knowledge with others, and I am grateful that I was there that day to meet up with him.

Over the next many years I ran into Morris many times at the Oxbow and he was always the same genuinely nice person that I had met that day in 1985. He was an instant friend to everyone and always went out of his way to share his knowledge with anyone interested. When he asked me to lead Oxbow field trips, I was honored to help him. Who could say "No" to Morris? Not me.

The most recent trip I led to the Oxbow was February 27 of this year. The weather was nice and almost 30 people showed up and were treated to a beautiful pair of adult Bald Eagles flying over the group. There are currently three breeding pairs of eagles within an hour or so of Cincinnati, and I believe that due to the hard work of people like Morris Mercer, our beloved Oxbow will have a breeding pair of Bald Eagles within the next few years.

Morris was a great person who will be greatly missed but never forgotten. Many of us are better people just for having known Morris.

Paul Wharton, Advisory Councilor

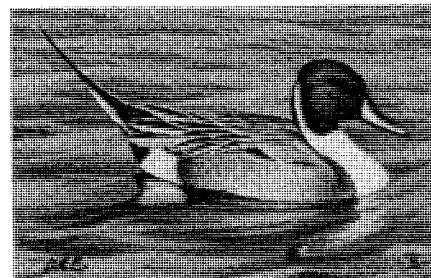
Harvester Soul Mates

I'm very fortunate to have been able to share time in the Oxbow with Morris Mercer. Often, as I worked the fields of the area, he would happen upon me and we would both stop and share our observations. Of course, I would ask questions and he would supply the answers and point out some things that I'd missed.

My favorite times though were when he was able to ride along with me in the Harvester and make me notice the great show that Mother Nature was playing out before us. He could take the smallest natural event and turn it into something you wouldn't want to take your eyes away from. And then he'd describe it in a colorful way that only he could do, almost corny, yet always sincere.

Whenever I'm in the Oxbow, I'll still look up and expect to see that white mini van creeping along. Morris will always be there, making me slow down and notice the little things.

**Rick Pope, Board Member
& Oxbow, Inc. Farmer**



An Extraordinary Introduction

It was March, 1984, and I would get my introduction to the Oxbow at the peak of waterfowl migration, on a trip led by Morris Mercer. Two friends and I saw an advertisement for a birding hike at Shawnee Lookout and the Oxbow. We made the long drive to Shawnee Lookout. Soon Morris was showing us some Hooded Mergansers in the flooded parking lot by the boat ramp. What kind of place was this, that exotic birds like Hooded Mergansers could be found in a flooded parking lot? Erich, Gary, and I were astounded. Morris next took us to the overlook of the Great Miami River and set up his spotting scope. With the naked eye, one couldn't tell there was much out there. But when Morris trained his Questar on the area, it was another story. I'll never forget my first look through Morris' Questar. I couldn't believe my eyes! It was like being transported to the ducks' world, amongst them on the water in their whirl of seemingly happy activity, even though we were over a thousand yards away! Had it not been for Morris, I might never have gained an appreciation of waterfowl or the Oxbow.

We youths were amused that day because Morris' jacket had two name patches on the front, one above the other, both reading "Otis." (Morris worked for Otis Elevators.) We called him "Otis Otis" and when we found out his real name was actually Morris, we then referred to him as "Morris Morris." Some years later, after becoming an Oxbow Board member, I told Morris how we had joked about his name(s) and he laughed and got a kick out of it.

Another thing I'll remember about Morris is how warm he was to me and others. At Oxbow Board meetings, he did not dominate the conversation, spoke his mind when need be, and lent his knowledge when called upon. Morris' speech was authoritative, yet with a built-in humility that furthered the effect of his contribution. There was unpretentiousness, and contentment, in the way he conducted himself. Though we won't see another person exactly like Morris, we can strive to keep alive his warmth, his ideals, and his love and knowledge of the Oxbow region and its creatures.

Jerry Lippert, Programs Chair

The Elvis of the Oxbow

I cannot imagine how many thousands of people Morris must have talked to about the Oxbow, or toured through it. He was truly gifted in his ability to communicate his love of the natural world to different kinds of audiences, whether it was school kids, business people, or anywhere in between.

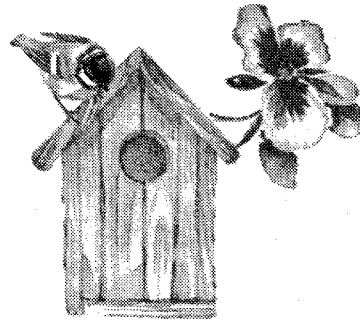
I think Morris was so effective at this because he loved people too. The way he shared his knowledge of the Oxbow and its feathered, furred and finned inhabitants made it seem a special gift. And in return, his audiences loved Morris right back.

Morris did a lot of talks to garden clubs. One talk in particular was received so enthusiastically by the ladies of the club that he sold every single Oxbow t-shirt he'd brought along, and could have sold many more if he'd had them. When Morris

reported on that talk at the next Board meeting he lamented he hadn't thought to bring more shirts. We teased him that he should have auctioned the Oxbow t-shirt he was wearing right off his back, or at least flung it into the crowd a la Elvis.

Oxbow, Inc. later received a check in the four figures from this garden club.

Anita Buck, Former Board Member



"Getting to Know You"

For a number of years I edited the Oxbow newsletter. Every issue, Morris wrote a column, which he gave to me in longhand, and which I typed up and edited a little. Inevitably, I received more compliments on Morris's column alone than I did on all the rest of the newsletter put together.

You get to know a person when you look at a lot of his writing, particularly when you look at it as an editor. And one thing I learned about Morris is that he never had a bad day at the Oxbow. Whether it was 20 below or 102, whether he saw a field full of sandhill cranes and a couple of eagles or nothing but starlings and carp, he loved the Oxbow, he loved being at the Oxbow, and he always found time spent there not just worthwhile, but downright enjoyable.

I am reminded of what the writer Joseph Wood Krutch said about Thoreau, which I don't remember exactly but goes something like this: that Thoreau could get more out of ten minutes with a chickadee than most men could out of a night with Cleopatra. I can safely say that Morris got more out of an afternoon at the Oxbow than most men could out of a week on the Amazon.

Steve Pelikan, Research Chair

In His Neat, Large Handwriting

My husband loved talking birds and nature with Morris, especially on their drives to and from Oxbow, Inc. Board meetings at the zoo. I got to know Morris when I became editor of *Wetland Matters*, almost four years ago.

Morris would mail me his "Field Notes", always several days ahead of the deadline, written in his neat, large handwriting from one edge of the paper to the other. I would open the envelope eagerly, read the contents, then phone Morris that his copy had arrived-- "Another good one!" We had the most pleasant conversations and Morris never neglected to encourage the new editor. Morris was a sweet, kind man and that shone through in his column.

If eye has not seen nor ear heard the wonders of heaven, can you imagine Morris's delight with his new avian friends and their unbelievable birdsong? Can you imagine those "Field Notes"?

Jeanne Bocklage, Editor, Wetland Matters

Oxbow, Inc.

A nonprofit organization formed by conservation groups and concerned citizens of Ohio and Indiana for the purpose of preserving and protecting a wetlands ecosystem known locally as the Oxbow, Hardintown, or Horseshoe Bottoms, from industrial development and to preserve the floodplain at the confluence of the Great Miami and Ohio rivers for use as a staging area for the seasonal migrations of waterfowl. This agricultural area is rich in geological, archaeological, and anthropological history.

Help us save this unique wetland ecosystem. Make your state a richer place in which to live by helping us preserve this precious resource. Membership in Oxbow, Inc. is encouraged and solicited.

Individual	\$10	Family	\$15
Contributing	\$25	Supporting	\$50
Patron	\$100	Cornerstone	\$250
Sponsor	\$500	Benefactor	\$1000
Organization/Club	\$25		

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Wetland Matters, the newsletter for members of Oxbow, Inc., is published bimonthly.



43231+2329 23

Dues Renewal Date: Feb 06

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