

## An Essay on Pluviculture

*By Dennis Payton Knight*

There is nothing more important to life on earth than beautiful, life-sustaining, cooling, cleansing, rain. Contrarily, the frequent lack of it has brought us *pluviculture*, a fancy word for the dubious science of rainmaking.

Societies around the world, including Native Americans, had rain dances. Ancient Africans held kings accountable for rainfall and killed them off when it didn't. In China, Shamans danced in a ring of fire until their falling drops of sweat produced the desired rain.

Thais believed cats were afraid of rain and water, and farmers performed a "cat parade" to make it rain. A single grey or black female cat was put in a basket, neighboring farmers did the same. Together they formed the cat parade and, when it marched through a house, the residents splashed water on the cats, believing rain would fall within a few days.

In 1890, Congress, taking the word of General R.G. Dyrenforth, authorized and paid him to light up the Texas skies with military-grade dynamite. Promising clouds could be made to rain by a loud noise, Dyrenforth was dubbed "Rain-maker." But after his efforts yielded nary a drop, he was redubbed "General Dry-Henceforth."

In 1902 in California, Charlie Hatfield created a mixture of twenty-three chemicals in large evaporating tanks that he advertised as a moisture accelerator. Los Angeles ranchers promptly hired him. His first attempt succeeded, but later it was proven the rain that fell was part of a storm that was already coming.

Hatfield kept after it until 1916 when, after he placed similar tanks to help replenish Lake Morena, heavy rains began. Riverbeds flooded, destroying bridges, marooning trains, cutting telephone lines, flooding homes and farms. Dams broke, and the devastation cost about twenty lives. Hatfield denied the damage was his fault, claimed he had fulfilled his contract, and sued for \$4,000. The city sued him for back for damages. Eventually courts decided the rain was an act of God, which absolved him from blame, but also meant he didn't get paid.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century an Austrian-American psychoanalyst, Wilhelm Reich, said he could mend not only minds but weather when he designed a "cloudbuster" to manipulate streams of "orgone energy" to make it rain. He inserted hollow pipes and cables into water, calling it "cosmic orgone engineering". That didn't work, either.

Twelve years ago, Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue, on the statehouse steps, with a choir behind him, launched into prayer. "We've come together here simply for one reason and one reason only: To very reverently and respectfully pray up a storm." He prayed an entire hour. Eventually it did rain in Georgia, but it took two years before the state got its rivers and lakes refilled.

Like the search for perpetual motion, the idea of pluviculture still goes on even now with states, municipalities and ski barons investing in cloud seeding. Evidence to-date seems to show it works every bit as well as rain dances, orgone engineering and cat parades.