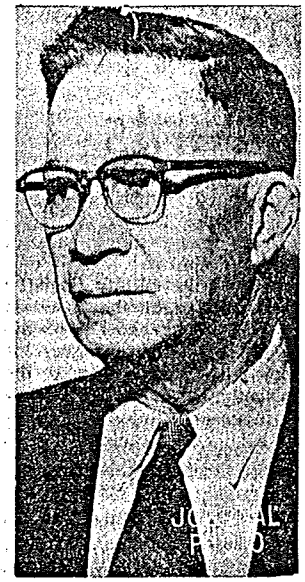
5-13-67

Schmeeckle, Conservation Pioneer, Dies



FRED J. SCHMEECKLE

Fred J. Schmeeckle, the father of Wisconsin State University's conservation program, died Friday night at the age of 74.

Mr. Schmeeckle had lived at Route 1, Eagle River, since his retirement in 1959. He became seriously ill a week ago, and his death occurred at St. Joseph's Hospital in Marshfield.

Conservation education, now a WSU specialty, was born under Mr. Schmeeckle's leadership. The university was the first in the nation to offer it as a major, in 1945.

Asked at the time of retirement what his reasons were for establishing the conservation program, he replied, "The need for it. Soil erosion, destruction of forests, pollution of water and misuse of wildlife were factors that started me thinking that something should be done to educate people in the wise use of resources."

The program has turned out a long list of conservation teachers, wildlife biologists, rangers, wardens and other resource workers, many of them in high positions in the conservation movement.

Mr. Schmeeckle was a native of Eustis, Neb. He graduated from Kearney (Neb.) State College and taught a year before entering the Army in World War I. He served overseas and was a scout and a sniper in the Argonne and at St. Mihiel.

After the war he was superintendent of schools at Marquette, Neb., for three years and then earned his master's degree at the University of Minnesota.

He came to Wisconsin State University (then the Stevens Point Normal School) as an agriculture teacher in 1923. In 1935 the Legislature passed a law requiring the teaching of conservation in schools, and the same year WSU instituted its first course labeled "conservation."

From this grew today's conservation education major, with Mr. Schmeeckle at first the only member of the department.

Mr. Schmeeckle always emphasized a broad approach to conservation, contending that problems of soils, water, wildlife and trees are inter-related.

He helped organize the Boston School Forest in the Town of Plover; was a member of the Portage County Park Commission and aided in the establishment of DuBay Park; was active in the Trees for Tomorrow Camp at Eagle River, where he formerly directed summer sessions; was Stevens Point's 8th Ward alderman in the 1930s; and was a charter member of the Stevens Point Lions Club.

Years ago, he spent a summer without pay developing a "pile of rocks" behind the present site of Delzell Hall into an athletic field. It was named Schmeeckle Field in his honor, and WSU played its football games there prior to World War II.

Schmeeckle Field is no more —the addition to the University Center occupies part of the site, and the rest is parking lot.

However, a new residence hall on the north campus, which will be opened next fall, has been named for Mr. Schmeeckle.

He is survived by his wife, the former Beatrice Cady; a son, Donald, 3227 Whiting Road; a daughter, Mrs. Eugene (Wilma) Waterstreet, Sturgeon Bay; and six grandchildren.

Mr. Schmeeckle was the last living member of his immediate family.

Funeral arrangements are pending at the Gaffney Funeral Home in Eagle River.