



Bits of Business

A Biographical
Synopsis — This
appears as the
foreword in the
latest edition of
"Those of The
Forest" by W.B.
Grange —

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"There is a day for all things. And in that day they are there."

Wallace Byron Grange wrote that. He also lived by it. He was an ecologist at a time when such were sorely needed and he left a lasting legacy for all who cherish wildlife. Part of that legacy is this book which, when it was first published in 1953, won wide acclaim not only from nature lovers but from the scientific community.

"It is truly a story of the woods, now and through the ages," declared Adolph Murie, then a research biologist for the National Park Service.

"A great achievement," declared Prof. Arthur A. Allen of Cornell University.

"It will be regarded as a natural history classic," predicted Herbert L. Stoddard, Sr., one of the principal founders of the science of game management.

Capping such acclaim, Grange was awarded the John Burroughs Association award for distinguished nature writing, an honor previously conferred on such famed authors as William Beebe, Ernest Thompson Seton and Edwin Way Teale.

It was typical of Grange that, instead of capitalizing on such recognition, he turned his attention and energy back to the challenge of converting more than 9,000 acres of derelict land in central Wisconsin into a conservation showplace. The Sandhill Wildlife Demonstration Area, now state-owned, is another part of the Grange legacy.

The fifth of six sons of a minister, Grange was born Sept. 10, 1905, in Wheaton, Ill. From his earliest days, he exhibited a keen interest in nature. His mother remarked on how attentively he watched birds, even before he could walk. When Wallace was 13, the family moved to a rough farm in the cutover country of northern Wisconsin. He hiked the railroad tracks to enroll in high school in Ladysmith, 14 miles away. He boarded and worked in town, walking back home on weekends and taking nature notes along the way.

At school he met two people who had a great influence on his future. One was his science teacher, E.M. Dahlberg, a pioneer in the conservation movement in Wisconsin. In young Grange, Dahlberg saw a spark to which he added fuel. Another lifelong flame was lit by Hazel St. Germain, a classmate who was destined to be his helpmate for 60 eventful years.

Working for the local newspaper helped Wallace hone his writing skills. While still in high school, he sold an article about ruffed

grouse to "Forest and Stream" magazine. It was based on daily observations made over a three-year period. The same findings were later incorporated into a technical bulletin published with the assistance of Aldo Leopold. So began a long list of popular and professional articles authored by Grange.

His horizons widened rapidly. He spent a summer working for the U.S. Forest Service in Wyoming; then went to Florida to assist Arthur H. Howell who was studying the birds of that state for the U.S. Biological Survey.

He attended the University of Wisconsin for a year; then transferred to the University of Michigan. He and Hazel were married in 1927, while he was still a student in Ann Arbor. Members of the wedding party were the Murie brothers, Adolph and Olaus, already famed naturalists for their work in Alaska.

In 1928, at age 22, Grange was appointed Wisconsin's first superintendent of game. He stayed two years, establishing the state's first game farm and instituting other lasting programs before moving on to an administrative position with the Biological Survey in Washington, D.C.

The federal post broadened his already-wide acquaintance in professional circles and permitted a closer study of techniques in the emerging science of game management.

In 1932 the Granges bought a farm on Wisconsin's Door County peninsula and began raising wild birds and animals. Although that venture was succeeding, Grange had a bigger vision. Straining his meager financial resources, he had bought thousands of acres of abandoned, tax-delinquent lands in the middle of the state. Its woodlands ravaged, streams ditched and wetlands drained, the region had been the scene of a brief and disastrous attempt at agricultural development. In 1937 the Grange's moved again, and during the next 25 years they triumphed over diverse obstacles to restore that land to nature.

During the early struggles at Sandhill, Grange worked as project leader in grouse research for the Wisconsin Conservation Department. World War II intervened. Then 38, Grange enlisted in the Navy and served in the South Pacific while Hazel dealt with the complexities of keeping their enterprise together.

The research project resulted in his first book, "Wisconsin Grouse Problems," published 1948. It was followed in 1949 by "The Way to Game Abundance," a text which Hazel helped compile and edit from a mountain of data and field notes. It received praise from other professionals and was assigned as a text in some college courses.

However, it was this story which Wallace wrote for Hazel that won

him greatest acclaim as an author. He presented her the manuscript on their 25th wedding anniversary. Far more than a charming story about the life of the snowshoe hare, it was an insightful view of the world of the rabbit and all life on earth.

Nothing escaped Grange's notice and sense of wonder. He looked below the surface and beyond the moment, probing and sifting, perceiving causes and consequences. Thus, on one level "Those of The Forest" is a fine natural history narrative in the tradition of Seton; on another it is a well-written course in ecology, drawn from the author's encyclopedic knowledge of the natural world, and on yet another, it is a poetic sermon; a celebration of Creation.

Nature books were not in vogue in 1953, but with the total confidence she always had in Wallace's work, Hazel formed the Flambeau Publishing Company and boldly ordered a first printing of 10,000 copies. Orders for the book were soon overwhelming the little postoffice at Babcock, Wis.

In 1962 the Grange's sold their Sandhill property to the state with stipulations that it be used as a wildlife research and demonstration area and that the northern half be maintained as a waterfowl refuge for at least 50 years.

In retirement in northern North Dakota, Grange continued to work on his papers and another book. He fought a delaying action against cancer, determined to complete an autobiography. He died on June 8, 1987, leaving the final editing for Hazel, who has also written her own memoirs, soon to be published.

Just one year after his death, a group of old friends and admirers gathered at Sandhill to dedicate a memorial to Wallace Byron Grange. The monument overlooks one of the scenic flowages on the once-ravaged land. Standing there, you may see the sandhill cranes arriving like "a tracery of colorful arrows gliding across time."

Of such timeless scenes and words Wallace Grange crafted this book. Its reprinting will prove a wonderful discovery for another generation -- one more environmentally aware than Grange's contemporaries, who often thought him out of step.

Indeed he was. He was a long stride ahead.

DON L. JOHNSON