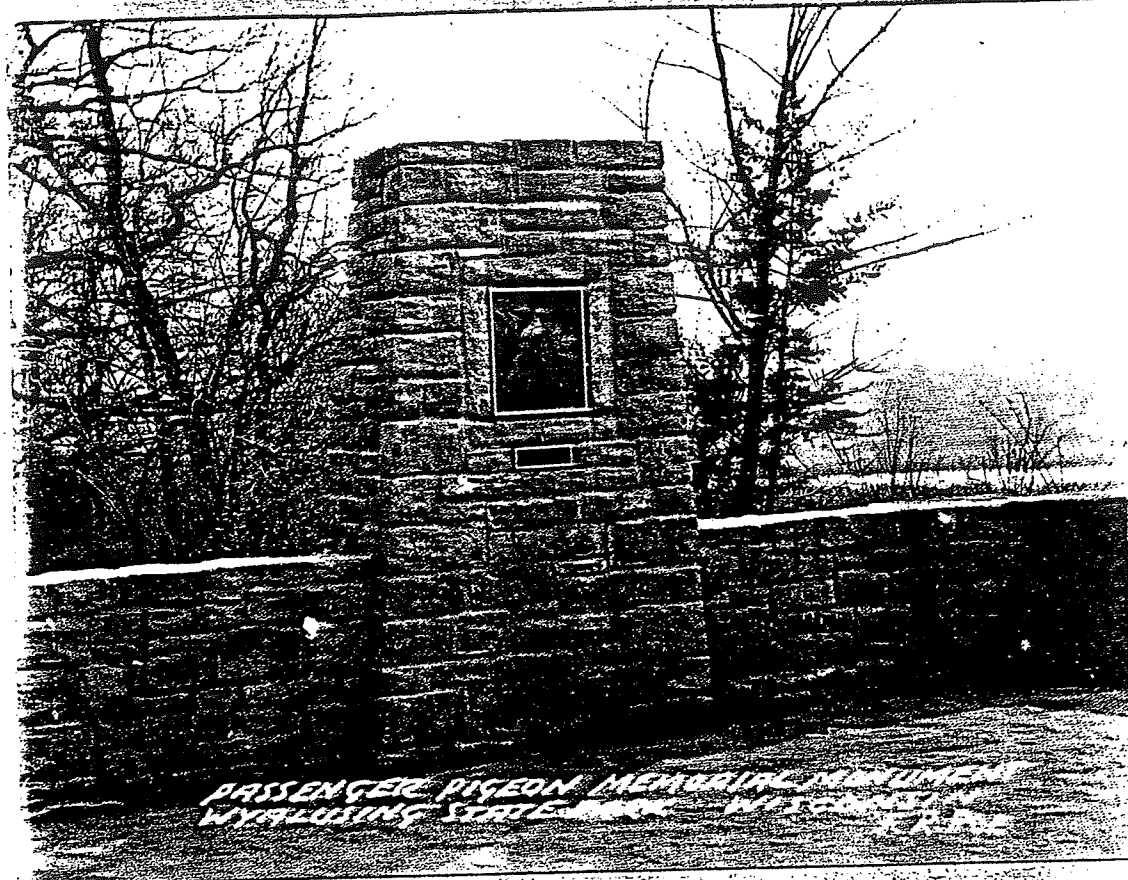


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The Passenger Pigeon

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MONUMENT RECOLLECTIONS

By
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This Paper pertains to the building of the WSO Passenger Pigeon Monument at Wyalusing Park in 1941. "I thought the story would recharge the Memory of those living to recall old friends of the past years - as well as tell the story to new members of this W.S.O. project!"

A leisure midsummer vacation led me South on Highway 35 along the Great River Road. The scenic bluffs, with rocky cathedral formations, seem to guard the river that flows thru ages of transformation.

The majestic expanse of the big Mississippi is a glorious sight - with colorful boats - sunlight and shadows on the bluffs - green trees and foliage - and the wildlife refuges with birdlife that kept my binoculars focusing on the many river birds.

A stop at Prairie Du Chien, to visit Historical Sites, made me realize I was close to the Wyalusing State Park and a good opportunity to revisit the Passenger Pigeon Monument.



Photo taken from cover of *Passenger Pigeon*, January, 1947

Arriving at the Park, I walked along the high bluff to again gaze upon the confluence of the Wisconsin and Mississippi Rivers, a scenic, breath-taking view. Then South along the trail to the monument. . . what a thrill to see it again after thirty years!

Sitting on the stone wall, I could not help but search my memory for the events that lead to the erection of this stone landmark, made possible by members of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology.

Looking back, I remember that William Ozburn, the conservation warden for the Wisconsin Conservation Department, mentioned that a group of bird watchers were having a state meeting at Racine. Since I was only about eleven miles away, I drove there to attend the third annual convention of W.S.O. held April 5 & 6, 1941 at the Racine Hotel. There I met President Alvin Throne, Dr. B. L. von Jarchow, Wallace Grange, Ed Prins, Harwood Evans, Walter Scott, Owen Gromme and many other bird enthusiasts.

An afternoon meeting was adjourned to a nearby church, where papers were read, art works of birds were on display and the society business meeting was held. During the meeting, Owen Gromme suggested that a fitting monument with an inscription be sponsored by the society as a reminder of the lack of conservation that led to the great loss of this fine bird.

Returning home that evening I thought of Gromme's idea and sketched three or four plans for a possible monument. The next day I returned to the Racine meeting and showed the sketches to Owen Gromme and Wallace Grange. The sketches showed a field stone pedestal and plaque with a proposed site at Babcock. Grange told me that field stone may be a problem in an unglaciated area, but other local rock could be utilized. After a group discussion it was felt that Babcock would not get the traffic and not enough people would see the monument. Another suggestion was to place it at the Madison University Campus, but there was some concern of vandalism. Later C. L. Harrington, Superintendent of Forests and Parks, suggested that the monument could be placed in Wyalusing State Park. This park overlooks the Mississippi River, formerly a well defined flyway for the migrating pigeons.

A Monument Committee was then appointed by President Murl Deusing (1941-42) to work out the details. On that committee were Owen Gromme, Chairman, Clarence S. Jung, Miss Elizabeth Ochlenschlaeger, and I to work out a suitable plaque design and select a site. We had several meetings in Milwaukee to determine plaque size and other details. Walter Scott acted as the liaison member, constantly checking for a progress report - this kept the project moving.

Since the Milwaukee Museum had mounted pigeons and skins, I asked Owen Gromme to help with a full size sketch of the bird. On November 4, 1941, I received several sketches of a tom pigeon, one of which I incorporated into the final layout.

A. W. Schorger, an authority on birds and animals of Wisconsin prepared the following legend:

DEDICATED
TO THE LAST WISCONSIN
PASSENGER PIGEON
SHOT AT BABCOCK, SEPT. 1899
THIS SPECIES BECAME EXTINCT
THROUGH THE AVARICE AND
THOUGHTLESSNESS OF MAN

ERECTED BY
THE WISCONSIN SOCIETY FOR ORNITHOLOGY

While in Madison, I had an opportunity to visit with Aldo Leopold and showed him the finalized sketch. He was quite pleased and made one correction in the wording in the last line, from of to for Ornithology.

The plaque design and wording was now resolved and it was time for the committee to select a site at Wyalusing Park. In May 1942, Gromme, Jung, Gus the photographer, and I met in Milwaukee and drove to Prairie DuSac. Here we stayed in a little old fashioned motel. Next day we visited a friend of Gromme's, Bert Law, who had a farm on the Wisconsin River. Gromme told us, near here he did his early hawk studies. Then on to Wyalusing, stopping now and then for some birding.

Arriving at the park, we were met by Paul A. Lawrence, Supt. of the park. We hiked the various areas and found a perfect site on the cliff edge of Sentinel Ridge. This spot overlooked the lowland, with miles of tree tops . . . The Great River . . . and beyond, the misty bluffs of Iowa. South along the ridge is a series of ancient Indian mounds, reminder that early people also selected the same impressive area as a memorial.

Earl G. Wright, President (1942-43), offered to sculpture the plaster model for the bronze casting and his artistry brought out each feature of the bird and oak branch it perched on.

During those years, bronze was difficult to obtain because of the European Conflict. Later, thru the effort of Mr. & Mrs. Louis R. Taylor, bronze became available and the casting was made.

With my prepared sketch of the stone shaft and wing, Paul Lawrence proceeded with having the limestone blocks cut at the park quarry. The stone masons erected the foundation, wing and monument with pride and craftsmanship that seemed to blend with the environment.

Meanwhile, Walter E. Scott prepared and edited a memorial booklet entitled, "Silent Wings" containing papers by Aldo Leopold, A. W. Schorger, Hartley H. T. Jackson, and rare photos of the Passenger Pigeon. Many W.S.O. members and friends made cash contributions to defray expenses for the erection of the monument and publishing the booklet. Everything was now put together, so the committee reported all was in readiness for the dedication ceremony.

The seventh annual W.S.O. Convention was held at the Great Hall, Memorial Union, University of Wisconsin at Madison, on May 10, 1947. Program Chairman, Walter Scott and his committee arranged and programed an excellent slate of ornithologists with outstanding presentations.

Professor Aldo Leopold welcomed the gathering with a response by President Clarence S. Jung. During his remarks, he announced the dedication of the monument would take place Sunday afternoon, May 11 at Wyalusing Park. Robert A. McCabe showed slides of bird trapping and others made slide presentations of bird studies. Owen J. Gromme gave his progress report on his illustrated book, "Birds of Wisconsin".

The afternoon session of movies featured Cleveland Grand and Murl Deusing showing bird life studies. W. F. Kubichek of the Fish and Wildlife Service, Chicago, showed a movie of the wildlife of Lower Souris Refuge. All slides and movies were pleasing and exciting to view.

At the evening banquet, the keynote speaker was introduced by Professor Aldo Leopold, who presented Herbert L. Stoddard, Thomasville, Georgia, who spoke on his "Reminiscences of Wisconsin Birding". Stoddard told of his early bird work at Delevan Lake, Prairie Du Sac and other areas of his Wisconsin studies. He believed Wisconsin was the most interesting state he had worked.

Sunday Morning, Harold G. Kruse and I teamed up at Madison and drove to Wyalusing, birding on the way; and at the park we hiked and explored the trails and caves along the park bluff. Upon approaching the completed stone work, I was pleased and happy that the W.S.O. project had finally materialized. As we sat on the wing and rested, Paul Lawrence came by and I had a chance to compliment him for his assistance.

On that beautiful day, early arrivals enjoyed field trips and an opportunity to observe the park bird life. In the afternoon, at Sentinal Ridge, members, guests and park visitors gathered for the dedication and unveiling of the monument.

J. Harwood Evans, Master of Ceremonies, introduced the designers and builders of the monument. As a speaker, I was rather unprepared, but told of our experiences at committee meetings, making the sketches and choosing a site. Earl G. Wright, Green Bay, sculpturer of the plaque, said completion of the plaque and monument was one of the highlights of his career. Miss Elizabeth Ochenschlaeger, Milwaukee, represented the family of Louis R. Taylor, donor of the bronze plaque, and Paul A. Lawrence who supervised the construction of the monument.

Dr. A. W. Schorger, Madison, National Authority on the Passenger Pigeon and author of the plaque wording, introduced the speaker for the dedication, Dr. H. H. T. Jackson of Washington, D.C., whose topic was "Attitude in Conservation". He said;

"We have today unveiled our monument dedicated to the last Wisconsin Passenger Pigeon, the only one erected to the memory of an extinct species. Let us not look upon this beautiful work of art as a token to the dead and the past, but rather as a symbol to the living and the future that never again will we permit through our ignorance or our indolence a native species to vanish from our midst.

After the unveiling, President Evans, in behalf of the W.S.O. presented the plaque and monument to the state of Wisconsin. It was accepted in behalf of the people of the state by Conservation Commissioner, William J. P. Aberg, Madison.

The ceremony was truly an inspiring event, and many members and friends expressed a joy for the society to sponsor such a worthy project. To me it was a warm satisfaction to see a rough sketch become a permanent reminder of Wisconsin's last pigeon, with the impressive simple wording by Schorger, hoping that all who read the plaque will heed the important conservation message it presents.

Mr. and Mrs. William Ozburn, Poynette, drove me back to Madison where I had parked my car. We had an interesting trip back recalling many pleasant memories while they lived in Kenosha. As I returned home from Madison, I could not help but recall the willing support and advice of many people that brought the monument to completion, and that the landmark will represent a strong ecological symbol of what will happen when man is heedless to his heritage.

My recollections would not be complete without telling the story of a sister monument in the East.

Our W.S.O. project was carried by a number of newspapers in Wisconsin and the Mid-West. The Milwaukee Journal had a story and picture of the bronze plaque. The Chicago Tribune carried a sketch of the monument in "Believe It Or Not" by Robert Ripley.

In the East, The Baltimore Sun printed the story, and on Dec. 5, 1946, The Hanover Evening Sun, in Pennsylvania, carried a release of how the W.S.O. project had caught the eye of William Anthony, local historian and publisher.

He was of the opinion that the nearby area three and a half miles North of Hanover called "Pigeon Hills" was named by the early settlers of this region for the now extinct bird, which gathered there in dense flocks. He felt this would be the most suitable site in Pennsylvania for a memorial to the species known scientifically as *Ectopistes Migratorius*.

Anthony conferred with friends and business acquaintances as to the feasibility of his idea. They all approved his project. A committee was formed, and Ervin S. Mummert was consulted as to a plan for a suitable monument. Other businessmen were contacted as well as citizens, and all agreed to provide funds for a stone shaft, tablet and inscription.

Edward H. Blettner was appointed Memorial Committee Chairman, and proceeded with the exciting program. Wording was prepared by Anthony and read as follows:

"In the interest of the preservation of wildlife, we have dedicated this memorial to the ill-fated Passenger Pigeon which from earliest pioneer days until the 1880's flocked to these Pigeon Hills. This migratory bird, now extinct, was once so plentiful its numbers darkened the skies".

Research indicated that the last authentic record of the Passenger Pigeon in York County was in September 1888, when a flock of 150 to 175 birds was observed near the city of York.

A figure of the pigeon was carved by Isaiah M. Myers. He also designed the shaft, built of native stone, Mummert and Dixon prepared a pattern to serve as a mould for casting the pigeon in brass. This plaque was attached to the shaft above the granite plaque.

The program on Sunday, October 12, 1947, was sponsored by the Boy Scouts of Conewago District, York Area Council No. 544. They were in charge of unveiling the monument. Preceding the program, fifty homing pigeons were released.

Some 1500 persons from the area witnessed the unveiling and dedication ceremonies of the monument at Pigeon Hills Reservoir Park. Dr. Herbert H. Beck, Director of Franklin and Marshall Museum, Lancaster, told the audience that passenger pigeons numbered in the neighborhood of 2,000,000,000 used to fly over Pennsylvania. He also read letters from the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Committee, Department of Interior, Washington, D. C. and from John H. Baker, National Audubon Society.

In a letter by Allen M. Day, Director of the U.S. Department of Interior Wildlife Service, Mr. Day said, "The Passenger Pigeon was a victim of human greed. This memorial will stand as a constant reminder that man ruthlessly exterminated a beautiful bird that at one time outnumbered any other species in America. I hope that it will also serve as a symbol of the danger that even now threatens other bird species which can be saved the fate of the Passenger Pigeon only by concerted effort of such public-spirited and conservation-minded groups as yours."

In compiling my recollections that occurred three decades ago, it was refreshing to recall the associations of members and friends of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology. Also, I vision the many visitors at Wyalusing State Park, Wisconsin and Pigeon Hills, Pennsylvania who view the monuments, pause, and read the last tribute to a vanished American.

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