

Wisconsin Forestry Hall of Fame

1985 Induction Ceremony

September 27, 1985

TREEHAVEN, Tomahawk, WI

It is a privilege and special honor to be asked to introduce a Wisconsin Forestry Hall of Fame candidate to you. This man was my personal friend, associate and mentor for 16 formative years of my life. Let me tell you who he is and briefly highlight some of his many accomplishments.

Fred Benjamin Trenk was named the second Extension Forester at the University of Wisconsin in 1931, following Fred Wilson who was the first. He was a pioneer forestry specialist in the nation having served in that capacity at the University of Maryland for six years following the passage in 1924 of the federal enabling legislation, the Clark-McNary Act, which expanded the nation-wide Extension effort to include forestry. He was a faculty member of the Wisconsin land-grant University for 30 years prior to his retirement in 1961.

Fred was born in Dubuque, Iowa and received his Bachelors degree in Forestry from Iowa State College in 1923. Two years later he received a Masters degree in Botany from the same institution.

Fred Trenk came to Wisconsin in 1931 when its forest lands were still nearly prostrate from the logging and devastating fires of an earlier era. This was also near the beginning of a period of cruel drought, crop failures and human suffering. He recognized the fact that the plow did not necessarily follow the ax in the state and that there was an urgent need for land use planning to rebuild the forest resource base and alleviate human suffering. From 1932 to 1936, one of his major activities, in cooperation with Professors Walter Rowlands and George Wehrwein, was

educational and advisory work with citizens, town and county board officials (some 200 public meetings) which resulted in the adoption of the first county rural zoning ordinances in the nation, recognizing forestry and recreation as alternate land uses. During this period, 23 counties enacted rural zoning ordinances under which some 5 million acres were closed to future settlement.

From 1935 to 1945 Fred provided leadership for an intensive Wisconsin shelterbelt planting project in the central sandy plains area of the state to check rampant wind erosion. This project was begun at the time of ruinous sand and dust storms and concurrent with the Federal Central Plains Shelterbelt Project. Planting stock and trucking was guaranteed by the Wisconsin Conservation Department for the ten year period. The result was the hand establishment of some 3000 miles of farm shelterbelts containing over 48 million trees in a five county area. I winch today when I see the indiscriminant removal of protective pine shelterbelts in this region to accomodate the 160-acre irrigation sweeps on the "golden sands". Alas, memories are so short!

In 1942, along with University Agricultural Engineer H.D. Bruhn and the Wisconsin Conservation Department, Fred promoted the design and development of the first mechanical tree planter. He made the rounds of junk dealers and farm implement dealers to find plow chasses which were fashioned into the early prototypes. Sixteen machines were in use by 1944 to relieve the serious manpower shortage for tree planting during World War II. and effectively reduce the surplus tree inventories in state nurseries. Within 15 years about 300 machines were operating in Wisconsin alone. The new planter sparked nation-wide interest, for one machine in one season could plant as many trees as the entire labor force of the standard CCC camps of the 1930's.

From his first year at the University he was a strong proponent of school and community forests as an educational tool in shaping the lives of young and old. Fred actively encouraged the establishment and management of 80 community forests (some 40,000 acres) owned by towns, villages, cities and counties. Together with Ranger Mac McNeel, Assistant State 4-H Leader, some 350 school forests, comprising 26,000 acres were established throughout the state by 1961. I remember a slogan - as appropriate today as then in working with youth - "for as a twig is bent, so grows the tree".

The Wisconsin Forest Products Price Review was initiated in 1933 as a forest prices supplement to the College of Agriculture publication "Economic Information For Wisconsin Farmers". The cash income from forest products, in 1931, was equal to one-sixth of the total income received from the sale of farm crops. This price report was directed to owners of merchantable timber interested in finding a profitable market for timber stumpage and products. The Price Review is the oldest state price report series in the nation.

In large part, Fred Trenk was instrumental in establishing ten publicly owned or controlled demonstration forests throughout the state, representative of Wisconsin farm woodlands. This project involved the cooperation of the Lake States Forest Experiment Station and the Wisconsin Conservation Department. Detailed records were maintained on tree growth, timber harvest yields and harvesting costs and returns. The "timber harvest field day" was used by Fred to demonstrate sound forest management methods and the returns to farm income under sustained yield forest management.

Fred recognized the potential of alternative forest crops associated with woodlands. He initiated three special projects and fostered organizations among interested landowners, including the Wisconsin Christmas Tree Producers Association in 1954, the Wisconsin Maple Syrup Producers Council in 1957 and, yes, even a Wisconsin Sphagnum Moss Producers Council. His educational meetings and tours promoted improved management methods, the use of modern equipment, higher product quality and better marketing.

An active member of the Society of American Foresters since 1924, Fred was honored by being elected by his peers to the grade of Fellow in 1963.

In 1949 Fred Trenk received the Superior Service Award of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. He was honored for "exceptional ability and ingenuity in conducting effective educational programs in connection with farm forestry and related land use problems". In congratulating Fred, Associate Director Warren Clark, University Agricultural Extension Service, praised the entire conservation movement in Wisconsin. "Your award is a tribute to your own efforts and also to those of your co-workers -- foresters in the state conservation department, county agents, other College of Agriculture staff members and all leaders of conservation in the state." Indeed, Fred had uncommonly keen vision of what was needed to be done and the ability to inspire and marshal people to collectively help themselves. In retrospect, I understand clearly now his reason for asking the question of me during the interview for my Extension job: "Are you more interested in working with people or with things?"

The legacy which Fred Trenk left Wisconsin remains -- greener, more productive forests, stronger communities and, most importantly, enlightened citizens (young and old). In the presence of family members and friends, we honor Fred Trenk today by naming him to the Wisconsin Forestry Hall of Fame.

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