

Guido Rahr

“Conservationist Guido Rahr dies.”

So reported the Herald Times Reporter of Manitowoc and Two Rivers atop page one of its Saturday, September 28, 1985, edition.

The newspaper of record in Manitowoc, Rahr’s city of birth, could have proclaimed him philanthropist, or business executive or civic leader, but it chose instead to use “conservationist” to describe the man.

He would have liked that, said his son and grandson, both named after him and both dedicated conservationists themselves.

“He was a conservationist before it was popular, a Teddy Roosevelt kind of conservationist,” recalled grandson Guido Rahr III in a Conservation Hall of Fame interview in June 2004. Rahr III is president of the Wild Salmon Center in Portland, Oregon.

Conservation and a love of things wild were imbued in Guido Rahr at a young age. He was born March 25, 1902, in Manitowoc, son of the Reinhardt and Clara Roch Rahr. The family had owned Rahr Malting Co. since it was started by his grandfather, William Rahr, in 1947. Guido would graduate from Culver Military Academy and Yale University before joining the company and spending much of his life at its helm.

But while he was being groomed for these duties, young Guido Rahr was also being prepared for his work as a conservationist.

“Reinhardt and Clara built a log house in Vilas County,” recalled Rahr’s son, Guido Jr., in a June 2004 Conservation Hall of Fame interview. “Dad went up to northern Wisconsin with his parents as a little boy. He spent the summer in Vilas County. In those days, it took a couple of days to get in, and the only way to get around was by canoe. We have untold pictures of him doing this as a little boy, and this love for the outdoors went through his lifetime.”

(Guido Jr. died May 5, 2005. The Minneapolis Star Tribune noted in a May 5, 2005, obituary. “Guido was a committed sportsman and conservationist throughout his life.” The newspaper added that he was on the board of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and The Yellowstone Association, and was a founder of the Pacific Crest Outward Bound School and served as president of the Voyageur Outward Bound School.

He was also a member of the American Alpine Club and the Boone & Crocket Club. "Among Guido's great passions were mountaineering, hunting, poetry, and art," the newspaper said.)

Graduation from Yale sent Guido Rahr Sr. back home to Manitowoc, where he took up with the family business in 1925. Eight years later, he would become president and treasurer, a position he held until 1962, when the Manitowoc malt house was sold to Anheuser Busch Inc. of St. Louis, Mo. Rahr Malting Co. was reorganized with the general office located in Minneapolis, Minn. Rahr served as chairman of the board and chief executive officer.

He held positions of leadership on several related companies in the Manitowoc area, and various civic leadership positions inherent to his station in life.

But his interest in the outdoors did not wane, and he often took his young family to the family property in northern Wisconsin while also pursuing a hobby of international wild game hunting. "Those days were almost as important as my schooling," recalled Guido Rahr Jr. of family outdoors experiences.

Conservation began to emerge as Rahr's avocation in the early 1950s. Gov. Walter Kohler appointed him to the State Conservation Commission in 1951. He would serve for 23 years in the years between then and 1968, including eight years as chairman and six as secretary. He is credited with helping to operate the commission, which had a heavy oversight role for the operations of the Conservation Department, as an efficient, business-like body. Four governors appointed him to the commission.

Also in the 1950s, his conservation spirit found an outlet in the two foundations he headed, leading to donations of many thousands of dollars to conservation causes, in addition to similar donations to civic and community organizations. The Rahr Foundation and Guido R. Rahr Foundation were the vehicles for his philanthropy.

The citizen-conservationist-philanthropist from Manitowoc had emerged in the body of a man in middle age, and he would not let up on his conservation work for the rest of his life.

"He was instrumental in the development of the Conservation Education workshop program for teaches in the early 1950s, and had a role in the acquisition of the Collins Marsh area," reported the Herald-Times-Report. Conservation Education Inc.,

formed in 1954 under his leadership, celebrated its 50th year at the Collins Marsh Nature Center in 2004. "Conservation Education Inc. sponsors workshops to immerse new teachers into forest and terrestrial ecology, aquatic communities and soil and land use," Herald Times Reporter Neil Rhines wrote. The group also manages the Collins Marsh Nature Study Center with a resident naturalist. Many school groups visit the site annually at the 4,200-acre marsh owned by the state.

In 1955, Rahr bought wooded land adjacent to the Point Beach State Forest and gave it to the Manitowoc Board of Education for development as a school forest education project. About \$15,000 of Rahr money was used for land acquisition. He also provided ongoing assistance for construction of a shelter, acquisition of additional acreage, construction of a dormitory lodge and utility buildings, a roofed outdoor class area, a gun safety and target area, and a pond. The Rahr Memorial School Forest has benefited thousands of school children over the past 50 years.

Rahr's work on the Conservation Commission put him at the center of activities guiding operation of the Conservation Department. He was appointed to terms by four consecutive governors. "Under his chairmanship, the commission introduced a committee study system, honed sound business procedures and consolidated fish and wildlife game regulations," the Herald Times Reporter story on his death noted.

Rahr was named National Conservationist of the Year by the National Wildlife Federation in 1967. A NWF biographical sketch of Rahr underscores the importance of his role at the helm of the Conservation Commission.

"His service as chairman spans a longer period than any other person in history..." the NWF said. "He was personally responsible for many of the profession policies and programs that have made the Wisconsin Conservation Department one of the outstanding wildlife agencies in the nation."

It added, "When conservation became big business in Wisconsin, Commissioner Rahr was able to inject his business management experience into public administration of natural resources." NWF credited Rahr with reorganizing the commission to operate like a corporate board of directors, separating administration from policy-making and permitting the development of the Conservation Department "into one of the most efficient agencies in state government. The move enabled part-time commission members

to handle large programs, involving large sums of money, on a business-like basis through a committee system." The biographical sketch added, "Rahr was an early proponent of management based on facts, developed through sound scientific research studies."

Rahr was also credited with providing leadership on a variety of resource gains in the state. "Under his leadership, the Commission has made sustainable yield operations a standard in Wisconsin, gained public acceptance of scientific deer herd management, nearly doubled the size of the state park system, guided recreation development and land purchases on a business-like basis, and instituted many other programs."

His work on state conservation business put him in touch regularly with other conservation leaders. "He knew and corresponded with Aldo Leopold," said his son, who shook hands with Leopold when the professor visited the 3,200-acre Rahr property in northern Wisconsin where Rahr carried out conservation projects.

The NWF report added, "Since 1946, Rahr has taken a deep personal interest in conservation education. For nine years, he contributed \$1,000 annually to an education radio series which reached youngsters in hundreds of schools across the state." He was also credited with providing \$1,500 annually to teachers for scholarships at conservation workshops and training courses. Financial contributions to groups that included Trees for Tomorrow, Wisconsin Audubon Camp, the "Ranger Mac" school conservation program, school forests, Boy Scouts, YMCA outdoor recreation activities all furthered the cause of conservation across the state of Wisconsin.

Back home in Manitowoc, he maintained a large demonstration farm, open to the public, to promote good forestry and wildlife management practices in connection with agriculture. Thousands of visitors used the facilities annually, including many school and youth groups.

Rahr sponsored and accompanied expeditions to India in 1964 and Africa in 1965 to collect museum specimens for diorama exhibits at the Milwaukee Museum. Countries visited were Chad, India, Kenya, Angola, Uganda, Mozambique and Botswana. The dioramas are still used in public displays at the museum. He was long associated with the museum, where he held the position of research associate in conservation. He was also associated with the Milwaukee County Zoological Society.

In addition to his NWF honor, he was named Wisconsin Conservationist of the Year in 1966 by the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation. He also received the Silver Beaver Award from the Waumegasako Boy Scout Council in 1952 for his support of its Camp Sinawa near Valders.

Rahr also held membership in numerous conservation groups, including the Izaak Walton League. He established a fund in 1954 allowing the Manitowoc Chapter of the Ikes to recognize persons who made outstanding conservation contributions in the Manitowoc area. Gold, diamond-studded pins were presented annually by Manitowoc Chapter.

He supported and was a member of groups that included the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, Ducks Unlimited, the National Audubon Society and Society of Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus. The Rahr Conservation Award Fund sponsored teacher scholarships to Trees for Tomorrow.

Lester Voigt, director of the Wisconsin Conservation Department during the time Rahr served on the Conservation Commission, recalled Rahr's work and strong support of conservation causes in a three-page letter in 1967. "Innumerable hours of precious time have been taken from his important business affairs to assist the Conservation Commission's work during these years, which also have been productive of many significant conservation projects and new programs."

He added, "Commissioner Rahr's contribution to the conservation movement in Wisconsin always has gone beyond the boundaries of Commission matters. He has used his private properties and his money wisely to assist, through personal example, those conservation projects and programs which were of special value and in need of support."

Rahr's grandson put it succinctly in this manner. "Grandfather was a great conservationist."

Guido R. Rahr

1902-1985

BIRTH: March 25, 1902, Manitowoc, Wisconsin, son of Reinhardt and Clara Roch Rahr.

DEATH: September 27, 1985, in Manitowoc.

EDUCATION: Graduate of Culver Military Academy and Yale University.

BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY

PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

Joined Rahr Malting Company of Manitowoc in 1925. Served as president and treasurer from 1933 to 1962. Named chairman of the board and chief executive officer of the reorganized Rahr Malting Company in Minnesota after barley malting facilities in Manitowoc were sold to Anheuser-Busch in 1962. Also served in an executive capacity in several allied businesses.

Director emeritus of Associated Manitowoc Bank.

Director of Manitowoc Co. Inc.

ORGANIZATIONS

Appointed to Wisconsin Conservation Commission in 1951. Served 23 years between his appointment and 1968, when he retired.

Served as chairman for eight years. Served six years as secretary. Served 12 years as chairman of Business Committee.

Research Associate in Conservation, Milwaukee Public Museum.

Appointed life member by Friends of Milwaukee Public Museum.

Life member, Zoological Society of Milwaukee County (Milwaukee County Zoo).

Honorary Director, Zoological Society of Milwaukee County.

Member, of numerous conservation organizations, including Ducks Unlimited, Izaak Walton League of America, National Audubon Society and Society of Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus.

Member of Milwaukee Club, University Club of Milwaukee, Explorers Club of New York, NY, Chicago Athletic Club, BPOE Elks Club, Mill Reef Club of Antigua, West Indies, Wisconsin Academy of Arts and Letters and Wisconsin State Historical Society.

ACTIVITIES

Philanthropic activities include serving as president of Guido R. Rahr Foundation and Rahr Foundation.

Led efforts in 1955 to acquire property that became Rahr Memorial School Forest. Provided ongoing assistance for construction of shelter, acquisition of additional acreage, construction of a dormitory lodge and utility buildings, roofed outdoor class area, gun safety and target area, and pond.

Initiated substantial support through Rahr Foundation and Guido Rahr Foundation for Rahr-West Civic Center, Silver Lake College of the Holy Family, Holiday House, Lakelake College, Boy Scouts of America, Manitowoc Memorial Hospital, Holy Family Hospital, Manitowoc-Two Rivers YMCA, Trees for Tomorrow, Wisconsin Audubon Camps, Ranger Mac school conservation program and Wisconsin Conservation Department and University of Wisconsin research projects.

Through his personal foundation, sponsored and accompanied expeditions to India, Chad, Kenya, Angola, Uganda, Mozambique and Botswana on behalf of the Milwaukee Public Museum.

Instrumental in development of conservation education workshop program for teachers in early 1950s.

Involved in efforts to acquire land in Collins Marsh area.

Established fund in 1954 for recognizing persons who made outstanding conservation contributions in the Manitowoc area. Gold, diamond-studded pins were presented annually by Manitowoc Chapter of the Izaak Walton League.

AWARDS

Wisconsin Conservationist of the Year, 1966.

National Wildlife Federation Conservationist of the Year, 1967.

Wisconsin Legislature Citation for conservation efforts, 1969.

Silver Beaver Award, Boys Scouts of America, Wamegesako Council, 1952.

Also recognized for his conservation work by Wisconsin Garden Clubs Federation, Milwaukee Sentinel Sports Show and Wisconsin Association of Future Farmers of America.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Telephone interviews with Guido Rahr Jr. and Guido Rahr III were conducted in May and June 2004.

Historical and background information on Mr. Rahr was provided by Joann Weyenberg, Manitowoc, Mr. Rahr's longtime personal secretary.

A newspaper story and obituary information from the September 28, 1985, Herald Times Reporter of Manitowoc-Two Rivers, provided background information. Also providing information was a May 23, 2004, news article in the same paper by Neil Rhines, "Conservation group celebrates 50 years."

Several news releases and fact sheets from the National Wildlife Federation provided invaluable information on Mr. Rahr's years with the Wisconsin Conservation Commission.

A letter written by Wisconsin Conservation Director Lester Voigt documented Mr. Rahr's work on the Conservation Commission.

Bill Berry
August 2005