

An address given by Christine L. Thomas on the occasion of the Induction of Wilhelmine LaBudde into the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame, April 28, 1990. The comments were accompanied by a slide presentation.

"We may continue indefinitely to spend huge sums for reforestation, fish hatcheries, game refuges and deputies, but unless the masses are taught the reasons for these expenditures and the need for conserving and perpetuating our resources, both from a material and spiritual standpoint, the rank and file will go merrily on, blind to the need of beauty in their lives and dead to the love of nature that surrounds them on all sides." These words were written in 1929 to Governor Kohler. The writer was Wilhelmine Labudde, a Wisconsin Woman in Natural resources. She was advocating the establishment of a special educator position at the Department of Natural Resources, that she hoped would be staffed by a woman, whose job it would be to work with the schools to educate children about conservation.

She was born Wilhelmine Diefenthaeler on October 1, 1880, at Elkhart Lake, WI. She was the daughter of Margaret and George Diefenthaeler. As a child, Minnie, as she was called by those close to her, enjoyed wildflowers and birds with her father and her love affair with Pine Point on Elkhart Lake was to last a life time.

Minnie grew up in a house in Elkhart Lake. As a child, she developed a friendship with her neighbor Edward LaBudde. As they reached adulthood, Minnie went to College in Fond du Lac, where she graduated from Grafton Hall. She had a magnetic personality and many friends, including gentleman friends. However, her old childhood sweetheart prevailed. According to his sister, Edward never had another sweetheart. If he picked flowers, he might bring them home to show, but he always took them next door to give to Minnie. Eventually, they married. The LaBuddes who owned a feed and grain business lived in

Milwaukee but Minnie lived every summer at the lake.

The early days of married life were busy with raising her three children, George, Margaret and Alice. As the two oldest went off to college, Mrs. LaBudde started to put her efforts into the Conservation movement. By the 1930's, she was into it with a vengeance. Her initial involvement was through the Women's Fortnightly Club. This led to activity through the Federated Women's clubs at both the state and Federal levels. Women in the 1930's were into social reform and they often did it through their clubs. These women were strong allies and Wilhelmine was able to harness their political strength for a variety of conservation activities. Her list of accomplishments is impressive.

She was a political ally to Louis Curley Radke and the Izaak Walton League in the fight to save the Horicon Marsh and eventually, an Izaak Walton League chapter was named

after her. Early in that effort, in 1928, she wrote these words in a letter to an opponent of the Marsh, "We need this particular swamp as a swamp, with all its potential natural beauties left in tact. Mere man cannot improve upon God's handiwork. There are none so blind as those who won't see and I am afraid that you are one of them. However, I haven't given up hope of making a convert of you yet. She signed it "Your friendly Enemy.

And that was the secret of her success. She never gave up. She has over 10,000 letters on file at the state historical Society. She was involved in virtually every imaginable conservation issue during the three decades from 1925-1955. The first time that she spoke in front of the state legislature the legislators laughed at her. Women weren't supposed to speak out on issues before the legislature. Eventually, they stopped laughing. She rallied the political support of the club women and in

addition to them many conservation minded men, including Owen Gromme and Aldo Leopold were often in the fray on her side.

She had a way of charming her opponents. It wasn't just flattery, but common sense. She was good at casting oil on troubled waters, but did not back down from her ideals. She did not let the political battles become personal, but made an effort to maintain friendly personal relationships with her political opponents. Her techniques paid off.

The following are a few of her accomplishments:

She got legislation passed that required environmental education in the schools. This was the first law in the evolution of legislation that recently resulted in Governor Thompson signing a law that will establish a state Environmental Education Center in the College of Natural Resources. Mrs. LaBudde started something that has reached into EarthWeek 1990 and will stretch into the next century.

She was involved in the establishment of the school forest system in Wisconsin. Today, This wonderful resource is the center of environmental education activities in many school districts around the state.

She served as U.S. Forest Service liaison to the Women's Clubs and was a major force in raising the money to plant the 640 acre George Washington Bicentennial Forest near Argonne in the Nicolet National Forest. In those days, it cost \$2.00/acre to plant. This was during the depression and it took quite a bit of effort to raise that kind of money.

While Charles Broughton is credited with saving the Sheboygan Marsh and in fact, it is named after him, Mrs. LaBudde may have planted the seeds that resulted in his efforts, She wrote this in a letter to him, in 1927:
"This marsh is so beautiful that it should be set aside for all time as a sanctuary for wildlife in all its

Probably one of the most telling tributes tenacious attitude and political power was her election in 1937 to the Conservation Congress. Not all of the Milwaukee constituents were enthused as evidenced by a scathing letter to the Director of the Conservation Department by a sportsman who was complaining that he thought that a bunch of old women wearing war paint had no right to be involved in the process.

Mrs. LaBudde passed away on November 28, 1955, but her accomplishments live on. It occurred to me when I was practicing this yesterday, that hitting the highpoints of a person's involvement somehow demeans what they have done. It makes it all sound too easy. It wasn't. Mrs. LaBudde worked hard at this task for thirty years. She was a smart politician and she believed in what she was doing. Her accomplishments live on.

Mrs. LaBudde, Mrs. Conservation, as she was called, wrote

various phases. I am hoping that you'll investigate a bit; then give the matter a little publicity in your paper. And he did!

She was on the first Board of Directors of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation. She was not an angler or hunter, but she had no particular quarrel with these activities, at least publicly, except where she felt that a species was over exploited, and she had no patience at all for management of species for hunting, to the exclusion of other species.

She was Vice President of the American Forestry Association and as such was a major political force in the fight to keep the Forest Service from being shifted from the Department of Agriculture to the Interior Department.

As Part of her effort to educate the women of Wisconsin, she organized numerous forest tours in the Northern Part of the state. She worked for soil conservation and highway beautification.

this Creed for the Women's Clubs:

We know that providence showered this continent with an overabundance of all things necessary for a rich and full life.

Therefore, we pledge ourselves to express our gratitude to the Creator, the source of all good, by doing everything we can to help conserve and perpetuate His handiwork.

We know that in the past, and up to the present day, ruthless exploitation and waste have devastated. and in some instances, annihilated certain valuable Natural Resources.

Therefore, we will raise our voices in protest whenever danger threatens so these remaining treasures may be used with care and discretion, because upon their perpetuation

depends the Life of a free and untrampled America.

We know that we owe certain obligations to posterity and

to those who will come after us.

Therefore, we will consistently preach the Gospel of

Conservation. We will hold aloft the Torch of Good

Precepts and finally hand it down to the next generation

with the admonition that the Light must never be allowed

to fail in order that each succeeding generation- even

those who will live in the far off, dim and distant

future- may be assured of some of the blessings which we

of this generation are enjoying now.

Thank you.