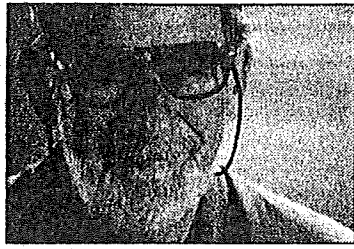


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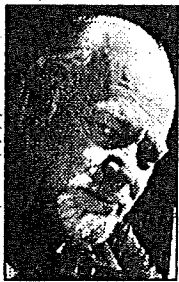
JAY REED

# Peterburs' legacy won't be forgotten

The Wisconsin conservation community, especially that part of it concerned with waterfowl, does not yet realize how much it lost when William Peterburs Jr., of Mequon, died recently.

That realization will come later, in 1996, the first time a strong voice of reason is needed in the development of duck and goose hunting regulations.

Peterburs died Nov. 30. His obituary was in the paper. His funeral was held. Eulogies were delivered. Heavy hitters from the state and various conservation organizations turned out for the burial.



Peterburs

But anyone who thinks the Peterburs era in waterfowl management and propagation is over should think again.

It is not over now, nor will it ever be. It will continue long after his name and yours and mine are forgotten. Waterfowl hunting may be discontinued someday in the distant future. But as long as there are wild ducks and geese to view, the Peterburs era will be a part of it.

We should talk about that. Once more. But never again.

There was a vigil service going on when I went to the funeral home in Thiensville on a Sunday night for a visitation with my friend Bill Peterburs.

So I slipped quietly into a back row and listened as a priest, and others, sought eternal life for the man who had done more than anyone else for the national survival of waterfowl.

When it was over, I stood in line waiting to pay my respects. And, at last, I did.

They invited me to a family and friends get-together afterward, but I gave them my thanks and regrets and stopped, instead, at a small, dark place of comfort.

Over one pop, and then two, plus a lot of cigarettes, I thought about Bill Peterburs, the hunts we had together, the dinners we shared and the deep disputes that had divided us over the years.

It came to me then that Bill Peterburs obtained a lock on eternal life the day he won the steel shot war.

He had fought that fight alone at first. He took the shots. He took the raps. But he did it. He had help, for certain. A number of good people also joined the fight.

But it is Peterburs, more than any other, who will be remembered for it.

The eternal life he gained at that triumph is not the kind that priests and preachers seek for us. Not at all.

You see, all of us in this business of conservation fight many battles. We win some. We lose some. Mostly, though, those battles have something to do with gaining "an edge" in our pursuit of wild things.

Not so with Peterburs. He recognized before any of the rest of us did that the use of traditional lead shot was killing, and wasting, a ton of waterfowl.

The birds were eating the stuff and dying because of it. He turned the tide, eventually, but at a personal cost of significant proportion.

In any case, non-toxic, or steel, shot was mandated for waterfowl hunting in the land and Bill Peterburs, rightly, was honored time and time again for that.

Trouble was, you can't be in that kind of a fight without making enemies, and Peterburs developed a full cadre of them. There are people in Wisconsin and elsewhere who, upon reading these words, will scoff. They will curse Peterburs and they will curse me. No matter.

I did not believe the Peterburs line of thought at first about the need for steel shot. Neither did I agree with his opposition to the half-hour-before-sunrise shooting hour for ducks.

What I know is that Peterburs abhorred waste. He wanted every duck killed to count for something. He did not want to deprive hunters of opportunity. But he would if opportunity translated to waste of the resource.

Which is why, I believe, Peterburs gained special eternal life even before he died.

His heart will beat, you see, in the breast of every migrating bird that would have died or never have been born had he not won the steel shot war.

Every time the public views flights of migrating ducks and geese; every time hunters are given liberal seasons and bag limits; every time there is another increase in the north American duck population, the spirit of Bill Peterburs will be there.

And that, I submit, is the eternal life he wanted.