



Cedric A. Vig
1912-

“I write with a philosophy of trying
to be a teacher, and I try to teach
readers about the outdoors.”

—Cedric A. Vig

The simple philosophy embodied in the quote from Ced Vig on page one of this biography tells a lot about the man.

Vig, an institution in the north woods, has penned an outdoors column in the Rhinelander Daily News for 44 years. At this writing, Vig, 92, continues to tap out the weekly "Wisconsin Woodsmoke" column on a Royal typewriter. He delivers the column to the newspaper office, where it is set in type and delivered to readers every Sunday. He missed two columns in 42 years. These days, his column also runs in the New Richmond News and Phillips Bee.

He got the idea for a column at an Audubon Society camp back when he was still superintendent of schools in Rhinelander. That might be called Vig's earlier career, as a school administrator from 1934 to 1977. He cherished the work as an educational administrator, and never really gave up educating. In addition to his column, Vig teaches nature courses at for the Nicolet College Institute of Retired Learners at Nicolet College in Rhinelander. He had a class of 100 in the spring 2004 semester. He has also conducted classes for Trees for Tomorrow educational camp in Eagle River and contributes a column to the camp's newsletter. He has been active with Treehaven, the UW-Stevens Point outdoors field station near Tomahawk, where he has served on the foundation and led educational programs.

He continues to make presentations to a variety of adult and youth groups in the Rhinelander area. Vig also had a weekly five-minute radio show on the outdoors, carried by WOVT Radio in Rhinelander.

The outdoors and education are the themes of Vig's work. He spends about 10 hours a week researching, reading, checking out his subjects where they live. His newspaper work was comprised into two books, according to Meredyth Albright, managing editor of the Rhinelander Daily News. The 1999 book, "Wisconsin Woodsmoke," was a joint effort between Vig and the Daily News, celebrating 40 years of his columns. "Over 5,000 copies sold," said Albright.

The book follows the calendar, with several columns for each month. Vig's earthy style is entertaining and as well as educational. Here's an example, from April. "Two of the first plants to push through the ground in the spring, along with the skunk cabbage, are wild leek and wild garlic. A woodsman will eat handfuls of their tender leaves, which

is satisfactory if he stays in the woods, away from people.” In typical Vig style, he goes on to explain where the plants grow and how to identify them. He notes that cows will devour the plants, but the result is tainted milk and butter. “The plant was a favorite food for early hunters and trappers. The pioneers had leek parties featuring leek soup,” he adds. Thousands of similar bits and pieces of outdoors wisdom grace Vig’s columns. People want more, too. “My phone is ringing all the time, and that’s what I really like,” he said.

“I try to write about what’s happening out in nature at the particular time, so that people driving along the road will look and see things. I think people are becoming more interested in the outdoors. Birding and birds have attracted many people. In my classes, I’ll say ‘What are you interested in?’ and they’ll say birds are number one and wildflowers are number two.”

A Daily News publisher gave Vig a camera shortly after he began writing his column, and the result was hundreds of photos taken by him to illustrate his columns.

“Four Seasons in the North Country,” a collection of 40 years of Vig’s photos, was published as a book in 2000. It was popular across the north woods, Managing Editor Albright said. The photos combine with narratives to tell the story of the north woods as it changes from season to season. Vig notes in the book, “Having taken many slides in the world of nature around me has provided me the opportunity to share these wonders and experiences with school children, community groups and Elderhostels.”

It all began as a result of an Audubon Society camp in Sarona. “I thought, ‘No one was writing a nature column. Plenty of people were writing hunting and fishing columns, but no one was writing about flowers, birds or silent sports.’” He had a strong interest in outdoor education while working as a school administrator, so the column was a natural extension of that interest.

Vig was born in Hawkins, Wisconsin, on April 14, 1912, a son of Gustav and Dagny Vig, where he fell in love at a young age with the Flambeau River. He swam, skated, hunted, fished and trapped along the river. After high school, he went on to Central State Teacher’s College (now the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point), where he earned a teaching degree. While at Stevens Point, he served as an assistant to conservation department professor Fred Schmeeckle. “He helped me through school in

many ways," Vig recalled. He returned to Hawkins, where he served as high school principal from 1934-39. In that time, he also obtained a master's degree at the University of Minnesota. Also during that period he was married to Marvel Christman, to whom he dedicated his "Wisconsin Woodsmoke" book in this manner, "To Marvel, my wife and best friend, who has been a most helpful critic of my column during the past 40 years."

From Hawkins, it was on to stints as principal at high schools in Ashland and Rhinelander in the 1930s and 1940s. He served as superintendent of schools in New Richmond from 1948-54, then moved on to Rhinelander, where he served as superintendent until his retirement.

By the time he retired, he was so well-known as an ardent outdoors enthusiast that the school board named an 80-acre parcel of woods in his honor. The "Cedric A. Vig Outdoor Classroom" is an environmental resource center for area kindergarten through 12th grade students.

A 1987 Wausau Daily Herald story by Kathy Berigan noted that Vig's interest in the outdoors was heightened in the 1960s. "While serving on the State Conservation Curriculum Committee, Vig became more aware of the need to educate the public about protecting the environment he and others had always taken for granted." Berigan also captured Vig's beliefs about the benefits of education for the outdoors: "If we are to conserve our natural resources, the more people know, the more they will try to conserve it as a priceless heritage."

He relishes the feedback he gets from the column. Albright noted that his audience can't get enough. "He'll sit on a bench in front of the local grocery store, and people will flock around him with questions."

The solid research that backs his column adds another dimension, that of trusted authority on subjects relating to nature. That research often changes folklore to fact.

Vig has been active throughout his life in educational associations, community and church groups. He has held leadership posts on the local and state level, including a stint as assistant state director of the American Association of Retired Persons. He has also been active in the school of arts at Rhinelander and the Northern Arts Council.

For many years, he and his wife took most of their leisure in the outdoors, canoe-camping, biking and bird-watching. They own a cottage on Sugar Camp Lake, and spend

their time there and at their Rhinelander home, where, to this day, Ced Vig can be found researching nature topics, or pecking away on the Royal typewriter.

CEDRIC A. VIG

1912-

BIRTH: April 14, 1912, son of Gustav and Dagny Vig.

EDUCATION: Undergraduate degree, Central State Teachers College, Stevens Point, 1933.

Master's Degree, University of Minnesota, 1939.

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Principal, Hawkins High School, 1934-39.
Principal, Odoaagon High School, Ashland, 1939-46.
Principal, Rhinelander High School, 1946-48.
Superintendent of Schools, New Richmond, 1948-54.
Superintendent of Schools, Rhinelander, 1954-1977.
Instructor, Nicolet College Institute for Retired Learners, Rhinelander.
Columnist, Rhinelander Daily News, Phillips Bee, New Richmond News.

ORGANIZATIONS, ACTIVITIES

Member, Treehaven Board of Directors.
Member, Kiwanis, Rotary, Toastmasters clubs.
Member, Oneida Wildlife.
Member-director, Wisconsin Association of School Administrators.
Curator, Wisconsin Historical Society.
Member, Wisconsin Conservation Curriculum Committee.
President, Headwaters Educators, 1960-61.
Member, board of control, Wisconsin Association of School Administrators.
Member-treasurer, Northern Arts Council.
Member, Trout Unlimited.

AUTHOR/EDITOR

Author, "Wisconsin Woodsmoke," a collection of 40 years of newspaper columns, 1999.

Author, "Four Seasons in the North Country," a collection of 40 years of photographs with narratives, 2000.

AWARDS, HONORS

Rhineland Chamber of Commerce, Senior Award, 1959.

Rhineland School District "Cedric A. Vig Outdoor Classroom" named in his honor.

"Friend of Extension" award, Oneida County University of Wisconsin-Extension, 1987.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

We are indebted to the Rhineland Daily News and Managing Editor Meredyth Albright for providing background information for this story. Included are newspaper clippings, biographical sketches, copies of Ced Vig's published books and other information from Daily News files.

Copies of newspaper articles cited in this biography, including articles in the Green Bay Press-Gazette, Wausau Daily Herald and Rhineland Daily News are in possession of the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame.

An interview with Rhineland Daily News Managing Editor Meredyth Albright was conducted for the Hall of Fame in May 2004.

An interview with Ced Vig was conducted for the Hall of Fame in July 2004.

July 2004
Bill Berry