

NORTH COUNTRY NOTEBOOK/George Vukelich

Walter's Legacy

I dropped in the other night on the first charter meeting of the Walter E. Scott Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America.

Izaak Walton, as everyone knows, was born in Stafford, England, and wrote the fishing classic *The Compleat Angler* over 300 years ago.

Walter E. Scott, as not everyone knows, was born in Milwaukee, Wis., in 1911 and worked for the Department of Natural Resources—and its predecessor, the old Conservation Department—for 40 years as a conservation warden, game manager, editor and assistant to the secretary.

"Walter Scott," said Harold (Bud) Jordahl, "was simply the conscience of the department." Jordahl, now a professor of urban and regional planning at UW-Madison, served with Scott in the old Conservation Department and the DNR.

"Walter was a gadfly," Jordahl said. "A critic, a teacher. He got his ideas out into the public because he wrote speeches for everybody—including two directors, Ernie Swift and Les Voigt—and it never bothered him who got the credit for his words."



Albert Forrest, the temporary secretary-treasurer of the local chapter of the Izaak Walton League, said the group started with 13 members last March and now has a total of 27 who have paid their dues. There was never any doubt about whose name the chapter would use.

"The Ikes have a lot of respect for Walter," Albert said, "and we named the chapter after him because he did so much for the environment in Wisconsin. He fought for clean water in the state way back in the old days."

Jordahl thinks it was a mutual admiration society.

"Walter was a big supporter of the Izaak Walton League 30, 35 years ago," he recalled. "That was because of the league's support of clean water."

The league has a natural preoccupation with water. Over 300 years ago its hallowed namesake put into the mouth of his main character, Piscator, such praises of water as to make a Perrier salesperson blush:

"Source of all fruitfulness, home of the Creatures most beneficial to man, as even Moses proclaimed; there are the glories of Rome, most noble to view, and the pious monuments of Zion and Jerusalem: only consider, were it not for the element of water, all these had been lost to the inhabitants of this poor island."

"I don't think Walter ever fished," Bud Jordahl said. "And I don't think he ever hunted either. He just smoked his pipe and read his books in the old state office building, and a lot of the macho boys over there could never figure him out."

Scott and Jordahl were prime movers in creating an environmental library for the department. Every time you stopped in, Walter knew not only what you were doing, but also what you should be reading. He would press a bundle of books on you to take home and return "only when you're done with them."

I still keep stumbling upon the books Walter gave me that I never returned, and the twinge of guilt I feel is made bearable only by the knowledge that I am not alone.

The woods are full of folks whose shelves are full of Walter's books.

Jordahl doesn't even blush about it.

"I got more stuff from Walter than I ever realized I got," he admitted. "He was always sending things that I 'should be reading.' For my job and all that."

"Well, the other day a professor told me that one of his students was looking for a report that John Nolen had made to the Wisconsin legislature back in the early 1900s, and the student couldn't find it anywhere. The Steenbock Library didn't have it.

"Sure enough, I had it. 'John Nolen's

1907 Report to the State Legislature,' subtitled 'A State Park Plan for Wisconsin.' I got it from Walter about 35 years ago."

Jordahl said he loaned it to the professor to help out the student.

"I told him not to worry about getting it back," he said. "I'm going to give it to the Steenbock Library."

Albert Forrest said he doesn't have any books borrowed from Walter.

"I remember reading one though," he recalled. "He wrote this book called *The Warden*. It covers his experiences while he was a supervisor for DNR. He mentions the Izaak Walton League quite a bit in there."

Walter Scott had served as an assistant to Tony Earl when the governor was secretary of the DNR. Upon Walter's death in June 1983, Gov. Earl said:



"Walter Scott realized the importance of the natural resources of Wisconsin and the nation long before it was popular. We in Wisconsin will continue to receive the many benefits of Walter's knowledge and dedication." (Especially, Steady Eddy is quick to

mention, those of us who never got around to returning Walter's books.)

Walter was generous to a fault, but it wasn't just with his books.

"He was generous with everything he had," Jordahl said. "When we were building our house, Marilyn and I went over to see Walter. He and his wife, Trudi, had over 100 species of trees and shrubs at their home, Hickory Hill. He grabbed a shovel and dug us up a lilac and a maple that we took home. They're still growing. The maple started little seedlings, and I gave our neighbor (an old department fish manager) a tree. 'Take care of it,' I told him. 'That's a Walter Scott tree.'" ■