

Gordon MacQuarrie— an old pro who knew how to communicate in the wild, and out of it

The Gordon MacQuarrie Award, now presented annually by the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, is named after one of the most respected "environmental communicators" to come out of this state—the late, beloved outdoor editor of the *Milwaukee Journal*.

For an outdoor writer to receive an Award in MacQuarrie's name must be akin, I think, to a baseball pitcher receiving the award named after pitcher Cy Young, or a football lineman receiving the trophy named after lineman Vince Lombardi.

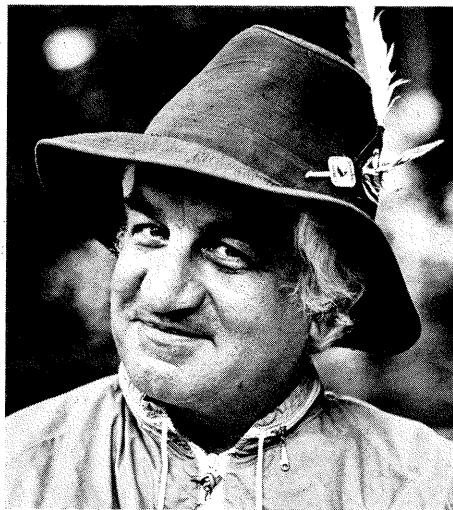
It was MacQuarrie's fictitious organization, *The Old Duck Hunters Association, Inc.*—the *Inc.* stood for incorrigible—that first brought him to national prominence in the pages of *Sports Afield*, and that still lives in the anthology *Stories of The Old Duck Hunters & Other Drivel*, compiled and edited by Zack Taylor, MacQuarrie's "friend and fan."

In the preface to the collection, published by *Stackpole Books* of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Zack Taylor tells about his idol—and mine.

Gordon MacQuarrie was born in Superior, Wisconsin, July 3, 1900. He died November 10, 1956, in Milwaukee, of a heart attack, his first real illness.

He was the son of William MacQuarrie and Mary Elizabeth Stevenson MacQuarrie. Both the Stevenson and MacQuarrie

EDITOR'S NOTE: George Vukelich, who writes a regular outdoor column for Madison magazine, is this year's recipient of the Gordon MacQuarrie Award.



George Vukelich

families were Scottish in origin and had come to the United States by way of Canada.

He graduated from Superior Central High School and attended the Superior State Teachers College for two years before attending the University of Wisconsin, where he received a degree in Journalism in 1923. He earned his way through college as a drummer with a dance band which played in the northern Wisconsin-Minnesota-Michigan area and around the university at Madison.

Upon graduation, MacQuarrie joined the *Superior Evening Telegram* as a reporter. After two years, he became city editor and in 1927, managing editor.

He left Superior in April, 1936, to become outdoor editor for the *Milwaukee Journal*. He had been a guest columnist for the *Journal* and was widely known

through stories in the leading sporting magazines. He would continue with the *Journal* for twenty years, a popular and prominent figure.

MacQuarrie was married to Helen Peck in 1927. She was the daughter of Al Peck, a Superior automobile dealer, who became the model for the first "Mister President" of The Old Duck Hunters Association, Inc. Helen Peck and MacQuarrie had one daughter. Helen died in 1952.

After the death of Al Peck, The Old Duck Hunters series was discontinued for several years until a close attachment was formed with Harry Nohr, postmaster of Mineral Point. Harry Nohr became the second "Mister President," and the Old Duck Hunters series resumed and continued until 1956.

During his years with the *Milwaukee Journal*, MacQuarrie traveled an estimated 40,000 miles a year covering his special field. He developed an immense personal following with his unique blend of information and entertainment.

Northwest Wisconsin remained his favorite area and the scene of most of the Old Duck Hunter stories.

It was there, on the Eau Claire chain of lakes, that his father, a carpenter for the Superior school system, built a log cabin while MacQuarrie was still in his teens. In the early days, it was a sixteen-mile walk to the cabin from the nearest railroad stop. That cabin became his lifelong retreat, figuring in many of his stories.

In 1953, MacQuarrie married Ellen Gibson, then a reporter for the *Milwaukee Journal*.

"Physically," Zack Taylor concludes, "he was a wiry, red-headed man with a

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down-to-earth attitude and a quick, salty wit. He entered the field of outdoor writing when it was at a low point; most stories were poorly written, with little or no imagination. With his light humor, careful character delineation, story sense and descriptive ability, he helped raise the level of the entire field. He was a pioneer, and a dedicated conservationist when it was neither fashionable nor politic to be one."

In *Stories of The Old Duck Hunters*, Gordon MacQuarrie's voice is still heard, like that of a respected Tribal Elder at the magical campfire:

- *Some people ask why men go hunting. They must be the kind of people who seldom get far from highways. What do they know of the tryst a hunter keeps with the wind and the trees and the sky? Hunting? The means are greater than the end and every deer hunter knows it.*

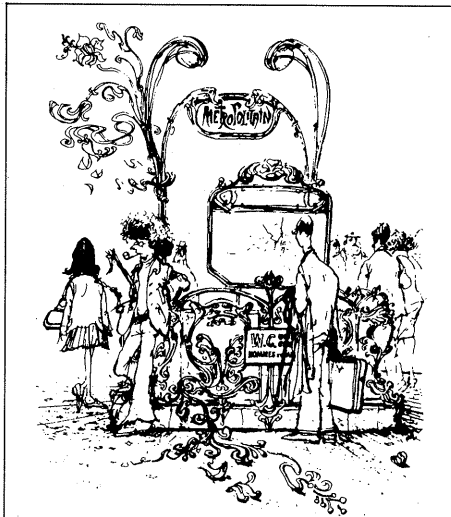
- *Trout waters are very personal places. The best trout streams are the ones you grow up with and then grow old*

with. Eventually they become like a familiar shotgun or a faithful old setter or a comfortable pair of shoes. You develop a profound affection for them and you think maybe before you die, you will even understand a little bit about them.

- *You cannot shoot a pine knot or eat it, but it is a lovely thing and makes a fire that will burn the bottom out of a stove if you are not careful. Burning pine knots smell as fine as the South's pungent light-wood. Once I gave an artist a sack of pine knots and he refused to burn them and rubbed and polished them into wondrous bird-like forms and many called them Art. Me, I just pick them up and burn them.*

Gordon MacQuarrie and *The Old Duck Hunters Association, Inc.* still walk the Wisconsin countryside and a lot of us consider ourselves honorary members.

We follow along in Gordon MacQuarrie's track, triumphant, rejoicing, downright giddy in the knowledge that his boots will never be filled, because he never took them off. ■



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