

CONSERVATION HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES FOR 2008

By Milo Harpstead

Melville (Mel) Cohee- 1909-2001

In 2001 the SWCS noted that “Cohee was the last living pioneer conservationist of the seven who started the conservation movement in 1933. This led to the establishment of the Soil Conservation Service, and in 1941, to the founding of what is now the Soil and Water Conservation Society by Dr Hugh Hammond Bennett and 15 other leaders.” At that time there was no executive vice president or a planning committee. Mel Cohee did it all.

Mel grew up on a crop and livestock farm in Indiana and got a BS degree from Purdue University. During his Ph.D. work at the UW-Madison in Agricultural Economics, he became involved with the establishment of the Coon Creek Watershed Demonstration Project in Coon Valley, Wisconsin. This was followed by travel throughout the U.S. establishing and supervising other demonstration projects. In 1937, as a Junior Consultant at Harvard, Cohee prepared for his forthcoming research study in seven countries in Central Europe. He returned to the U.S. in the spring of 1939 (the winds of war?) to continue his work with the SCS until his retirement in 1965. In 1970 he was a senior consultant for the FAO of the United Nations and his work took him to Iran, Italy, and Russia.

Until the time of his death he maintained his interest in the Wisconsin Chapter of the SWCS, and the university student chapters that he helped to organize. He set up scholarships for deserving students to help them continue their studies in Soils. Mel Cohee is widely recognized as a true pioneer in soil conservation and is well deserving of a spot in the Conservation Hall of Fame.

Paul Oscar Husting- 1866-1917

Husting is best remembered as a “Defender of the Public Waters Trust”. He was born in Fond du Lac. His forbearers included his maternal grandfather, Soloman Juneau, the founder of Milwaukee in 1818, and his Menominee grandmother.

After stints as a clerk in the general store in Mayville and as a mail clerk at the Wisconsin state prison in Waupun, he was said to have approached Gov. Peck asking for a job in Madison that would allow him to attend the University Law School. He passed the bar exam in 1895. He was elected to the Wisconsin State Senate in 1906 and served there for 8 years. His main effort was to establish legal precedents for the rights of citizens to use navigable waters that were being used for hydropower and similar purposes. He is best remembered as the vindicated defendant in the 1914 state supreme court case brought by the Diana Shooting Club. The 1911 case resulted from Husting poling his skiff to hunt waterfowl in the widening Rock River as it flows into Horicon Marsh. He was arrested by a watchman for the Diana Club. The supreme court ruled that the riparian has ownership of the stream bottom, but the public has fishing and hunting rights up to the ordinary high water mark.

Husting died tragically and prematurely during a hunting excursion at Rush Lake when he was accidentally shot by his brother on October 21, 1917. He was eulogized and widely praised on the floor of the United States Senate and House of Representatives as well as in his home state.

Carroll D. “Buzz” Besadny- 1929-1999

Buzz Besadny was born in Kewaunee, WI in 1929. He was educated in wildlife biology and earned an M.S. in wildlife management at the UW-Madison. He devoted his entire 42-year career to conservation in Wisconsin. For the last 12 years he was the DNR secretary.

Besadny’s work was directed primarily toward the management of wildlife and gained the support of three governors, Dreyfus, Earl and Thompson. Progress was made in deer management, turkey reintroduction and pheasant management. He was responsible of the implementation of the federal Clean Water Act, making Wisconsin the first state to meet nationwide “fishable and swimmable “ standards. He championed the protection and purchase of land for outdoor recreation opportunities using both public and private funds.

As a biologist, Besadny emphasized using science as a key component in natural resource policies and decisions. His tenure was marked by initiatives in groundwater protection, soil erosion control, toxic substance control, recycling, and multiple use forestry.

Buzz Besadny remained a humble man who lived in the same modest ranch home for years and who brought liver sausage sandwiches for lunch in his DNR office.