



Prairie Preservation Society of Ogle County

PPSOC's Beginning (Tim's Story)

[DOUGLAS E. WADE, THE "ECOLOGY MAN"](#)

Occasionally big things get done because big groups of people have big goals and dreams. But sometimes, big notions become reality because one man has a passion that sparks a larger fire. That was the little-known beginning of the Prairie Preservation Society of Ogle County, a beginning that started with a random aerial map and a coincidental meeting at a prairie conference.

From 1968 to 1970 Tim Keller worked for the Soil Conservation Service in DeKalb County, taking soil borings with which to make a survey of the soil types of the area. Tim's work involved doing the soil borings for the land that was to become Fermi Lab in the future. The survey also included DuPage, Kane and north Cook counties.

When DeKalb was completed, Tim and his family moved to Sterling in 1971 to finish the survey of Rock Island County. The following year, he began work in Ogle County. One day, from a stack of aerial maps in the office, he selected one to survey that included an eight-acre tract of land north of Stillman Valley. When he went out to do the borings, he realized there were a number of unusual prairie plants on the land. He readily admitted to not being a botanist, but after working with Dr. Bob Betz, he knew enough to know that this piece of land was special. Tim wanted to confer with someone about this land, but at this time did not know anyone who would share his excitement and concern. He had already been informed that discovering native prairie remnants was "not part of his job description!"

A chance meeting at the Third Midwest Prairie Conference at Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas, in September, 1972, brought about a major

change. It was the first time Tim Keller met Doug and Dot Wade of Oregon, IL, three people who would form an alliance to make Ogle County history. They had heard of each other since they all worked or lived in Ogle County, but had never met. On a field trip to the Konza Prairie, Dot came over to Tim and introduced herself. Being kindred spirits, Tim told the Wades about the prairie plants he had found in that eight-acre tract north of Stillman Valley.

The goal to save this remnant of native prairie became a driving force. Tim had seen first-hand in his work in the collar counties, how quickly development was destroying the last bits of native prairie. It was not a question of "if" but "when". Tim and Doug met with the Ogle County Bicentennial Commission that had been recently organized. A field trip was suggested to familiarize the group with the idea of prairie. Here was Ogle County history at their feet. Of particular interest was the Hill's Thistle that happened to be blooming at this time. Lewis Pierce, a man with a livestock background in the eastern part of the county, made the comment, "Never in my life did I think I would be looking at a rare thistle, let alone being asked to save it!"

Time was of the essence. The property was for sale. Its destruction by development was imminent. What to do and how to do it were questions that needed answers. It was perhaps Mrs. Lucy Pierce who suggested an organizational meeting be held. Members of the Bicentennial Commission and others were asked to attend. The Prairie Preservation Society of Ogle County (PPSOC) was born with Mrs. Pierce as its first president. Money from the sale of the *History of Ogle County, 1976*, was used to purchase the tract of land then known as the Peterson Tract, after the owners. In honor of Doug Wade, the area would later also be named the Doug Wade Prairie.

When reminiscing about their chance meeting, Dot Wade always said, "We had to go out of state to meet our neighbor!" How fortunate for that eight-acre tract of native prairie that the Keller-Wade meeting occurred and the PPSOC was organized to do the very important task of saving it and further native areas for future generations to visit and enjoy.

DOUGLAS E. WADE,
THE "ECOLOGY MAN "
Illinois History
Regional Research Paper

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Two roads diverged in a wood, and I --
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.¹

Doug Wade, Illinois teacher, author, and naturalist, took the less traveled road in life, yet he felt that he made no great contribution to the world.² His accomplishments and his far-reaching influence show otherwise.

Douglas E. Wade was born September 11, 1909, the second of three sons born to Mr. and Mrs. Harry J. Wade. Mr. Harry Wade, a cabinet-maker, had emigrated from Bristol, England, to Beloit, Wisconsin, just two years earlier. Doug Wade's love of nature and reading were instilled at an early age. His father was one of the first official Scout Masters in America, and Doug Wade accompanied his father on many Boy Scout outings and family camping trips. As a young boy, Mr. Wade enjoyed books, especially historical novels. He always went with his mother to the library. Miss McAlphin, the public librarian, proved also to be an early influence on the young Wade. Every spring she would place a single pasque flower on her desk to announce the arrival of the spring season. This simple gesture stayed with Mr. Wade all his life.³

Mr. Wade's zest for life was demonstrated at an early age. In junior high and high school, he participated in orchestra, oratory, track, and swimming, while at the same time working in a stationery store before and after school every day and on Saturdays. Because of this busy

work schedule, he had to train on his own⁴. Swimming proved to be a valuable resource many times in his life.

Mr. Wade graduated from high school in 1927. His struggle to get a college education is an example of the determination with which he faced challenges. His many jobs required to support his education varied from being a waiter, painter, hotel elevator operator, gas station attendant, field laborer, forest fire fighter, janitor, chauffeur, carpenter of Hollywood sets, horse trainer, swim coach, lifeguard, trainer of a future Olympic freestyler star, actor, and lab assistant. Each experience was a story in itself and took him from Wisconsin to Florida, Wyoming, Washington, New Hampshire, South Carolina, California, and back to Wisconsin. His transportation need during this time of the Depression was met by hopping freight trains.⁵ To be able to afford tuition and books at Beloit College, Mr. Wade persuaded the college president to hire him to clean the swimming pool, to teach swimming to all the college men, and to coach the swim teams at the college.⁶

Mr. Wade majored in Science at Beloit where his interest in nature was further encouraged by his professors there. He studied prairie, learned bird identification, and learned bird banding. He graduated with a degree in Biology and Education in 1935. He moved on to the University of Wisconsin where he won a fellowship under Aldo Leopold, author of A Sand County Almanac. Mr. Wade served as a working fellow under Aldo Leopold from 1935 to 1938, earning a Master's degree in Wildlife Management. His philosophies about the environment were greatly influenced by Leopold, who is now recognized as the leader of wildlife management in America and the father of our national forest wilderness system.⁷ Of his association with Leopold, Mr. Wade said, "We can only guess at the importance of these student/professor tradings, but surely they were significant."⁸

At the University of Wisconsin, Mr. Wade met Dorothy Richman from Woodstown, New Jersey. She was a student of botany and landscape architecture. They were married in 1936. The environment gained an invaluable team. The Wades had two children, a daughter, Lilla, in 1937, and a son, Alan, in 1947.

Upon graduating from the University of Wisconsin, Mr. Wade's experiences continued to be rich in variety. He worked as a fur researcher for the Pennsylvania Game Commission, an

instructor in wildlife management at the University of Missouri, and editor of Wildlife News. In 1943, Mr. Wade became the “Naturalist-in-Residence” at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire. It was here that he interacted with Robert Frost, who was “Poet- in-Residence” at the same time. Of Frost, Mr. Wade said,

He's a poet--and a good one, too; his lines of communication back to the people and the earth are strong. I'm a naturalist. We have much in common. He addresses me as “the ecology man,” perhaps because I told him he has a lot of excellent ecology and wilderness sense in his poetry.⁹

Mr. Wade and Robert Frost seemed a natural combination. A Frost biographer wrote, “Frost visualizes man always cradled , within nature, total immersed in environment .”¹⁰ Mr. Wade, the “ecology man,” may well have influenced Robert Frost in his feelings about man and man's relation to nature.

While at Dartmouth, Mr. Wade organized the first ecology club in the nation.¹¹ The group met weekly with guest speakers such as Robert Frost, Archibald MacLeish, and Secretary of State, Dean Acheson.

During World War II, Mr. Wade served as a Civilian Instructor for navy and marine troops based at Dartmouth. Again, his swimming skill was utilized as he taught survival swimming, as well as map reading and interpretation of aerial photography.¹²

In 1949, Mr. Wade spoke before the United Nations on the protection of nature. Mrs. Wade recalls that they were so short of cash at the time that they slept in their car and ate peanut butter sandwiches.¹³

When the resident program at Dartmouth was discontinued due to lack of funding, the Wades moved on to New Jersey. Mr. Wade became Director of the New Jersey State School of Conservation. Then, in 1951, he taught at Clemson College in South Carolina. From 1956 to 1960, Mr. Wade was editor of the Journal of Soil and Water Conservation in Iowa. From Iowa, the Wades went on to Saskatchewan, Canada. For the next four years, Mr. Wade worked in the Department of Natural Resources, establishing canoe routes and nature trails, promoting

outdoor education, and contributing greatly to the growth of environmental concepts in Saskatchewan. The Wades, however, were beginning to miss the states and began to look for an opportunity to return.

The Wades came to Illinois in 1964 when Mr. Wade joined the faculty at Northern Illinois University. They built their home overlooking the Rock River near Oregon, Illinois. The idea for their home, built in harmony with the natural landscape, came from an earlier visit by the Wades to Frank Lloyd Wright's house Taliesin.¹⁴ They hired Mr. Solberg to build their house, a beautiful, limestone structure with large windows providing an impressive view of the Rock River. A porch balcony bordered the entire front of the house and one side, nestled in the tree branches. The Downy Woodpeckers and Black-capped Chickadees must have seemed to be right in the living room with Mr. Wade as he worked at his typewriter in the corner window. He did much of the finishing work on the house himself. He built the railing for their porch with wood that had been discarded at a dump. He hated to see anything wasted and would bring home and use many things that he salvaged from the dump.

At Northern Illinois University, Mr. Wade was an Assistant Professor in the Outdoor Education Department at Lorado Taft Campus in Oregon. There his feelings and ideas about the environment reached a great number of individuals. Sixth grade classes came with their teachers for week-long stays at Lorado Taft to observe and learn about the environment. Mr. Wade was a firm believer in direct, "hands-on" experience. He also had in-service programs for teachers and supervised junior and senior student teachers. About five thousand students, teachers, and visitors from many states and countries came to Lorado Taft annually.¹⁵ Mr. Wade put Leopold's teaching objective into action. Leopold believed that the "objective is to teach the student to see the land, to understand what he sees, and enjoy what he understands."¹⁶ To this statement, Mr. Wade added his personal comment, "And perhaps to feel great sorrow when he sees misuse."¹⁷

Mr. Wade was "...an idealist, a sincere heart if there ever was one, and an able writer in the cause of conservation."¹⁸ He wrote or contributed to seven books and was the author of over five hundred articles published in state, national, and international periodicals. He was very conscientious about his writing, sometimes rewriting material eight or nine times.¹⁹ He actively

participated in many professional groups at all levels, devoting much time and energy to the concerns of the environment. He developed conservation camps, environmental programs and workshops throughout the nation.

Mr. Wade's interest in prairie covered a span of many years, perhaps first sparked when Miss McAlphin brought in that first pasque flower to the library. A major concern to Mr. Wade was the preservation of the last few prairie remnants in Illinois. He cared for the Pine Rock Prairie Nature Preserve, a fifty-seven acre area owned by Northern Illinois University. It contained twenty-five acres of dry-sand prairie and marsh.²⁰ He restored two prairie plots at the Taft Field Campus and a two-acre plot at his own home. Mr. Wade assisted his wife in the prairie nursery which she started in 1970. They successfully propagated more than three hundred species of native plants.²¹

In 1972, the Wades became acquainted with my family through my father, Tim Keller, a fellow prairie enthusiast. It was ironic that although the Wades lived just several miles north of us along the Rock River, the Wades met my father at the Third Midwest Prairie Conference in Manhattan, Kansas. Their meeting was the beginning of a lasting friendship and a new, combined effort in the interest of Illinois prairie. Each served as reinforcement to the other in the battle to save the native vegetation of Illinois. We never knew Mr. Wade without Mrs. Wade. They worked as a unit, each supporting the other in their common goals.

The Wades were instrumental in saving the Nachusa Grasslands, a potential prairie area due to be subdivided into five-acre building lots. Mr. Wade was the first to find the rare and endangered Prairie Bush Clover on this site. Although the area did not look very promising at the time, Mr. Wade and my father put up fences in 1974 and 1975 to keep the cattle from grazing in test areas. They also burned these areas in the spring and were delighted when many native plants reappeared. Largely due to their continued efforts, the six hundred twelve acre Nachusa Grasslands was saved in 1987, when it was purchased by The Nature Conservancy. This was a significant step in saving a valuable sample of native Illinois prairie for future generations.

In 1975, Mr. Wade teamed up with my father to speak to the Ogle County Bicentennial Commission about Illinois prairies. Their ideas were well-received by the Commission members

and resulted in the formation of the Ogle County Prairie Preservation Society, a group that remains very active today.

Mr. Wade was one of the first to alert the state of Illinois to the dangers of the plant, Purple Loosestrife.²² This alien plant brought from Europe into this country by nurserymen and seedsmen was fast becoming a pest plant, taking over wet areas and crowding out native plants. Mr. Wade vigorously publicized the danger of Purple Loosestrife to our native vegetation.

My father saw Mr. Wade as "...a determined man, not afraid to speak his mind, committed to his beliefs."²³ To me, as a child, Mr. Wade was fun to be with, had a great sense of humor, and never passed up an opportunity to bring things to my attention. Although he retired from Northern Illinois University in 1978, he never stopped teaching. As another side of Mr. Wade, "Teaching is his forte."²⁴

The efforts of Mr. Wade and his dedication to the environment did not go unnoticed. Among his many awards were the National Wildlife Week Award in 1957, the Saskatchewan Annual Conservation Award, the Public Service Award from the Illinois Chapter of the Izaak Walton League in 1973, and the Distinguished Service Citation for outstanding leadership in Conservation Education from Beloit College in 1975. In 1986, Mr. and Mrs. Wade received the Land Stewardship Award from the Northwest Illinois Audubon Society. In 1987, they received the Cyrus Mark Award from the Illinois Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. After Mr. Wade's death on September 15, 1987, the Bicentennial Prairie, owned by the Ogle County Prairie Preservation Society, was renamed the "Douglas E. Wade Prairie" and dedicated in his memory on July 3, 1988.

Mr. Wade's greatest concerns were that the world was getting worse because of pollution, the loss of open space, and the continued growth of population.²⁵ Dr. Nero, of Saskatchewan, said of Mr. Wade, "If Doug has a failing, it his desire to try to do too much. He feels so strongly about the values he perceives, and which he has been taught to follow, he is unable to stop struggling with a world that in many ways refuses to be changed."²⁶ Mr. Wade never gave up the struggle. He said, "You get a little mad when others won't see your point, then you've got to try again."²⁷ Perhaps because Mr. Wade could see that the problems of

the environment were continually getting worse, he felt a personal failing, that “deep sorrow” that he referred to in his speech before the United Nations so many years earlier. What he perhaps failed to see were the many lives he touched, inspiring them with his dedication and his lively spirit, instilling in them many of his values through his enthusiastic example. Mr. Wade did travel the road less taken, and he definitely made a difference.

ENDNOTES

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3. Marcia Cervi, "Career and Contributions of Douglas E. Wade (1909 -)," Taft Campus Occasional Paper #27. (Oregon: Northern Illinois University at Taft Campus, 1976), p. 1.
4. Cervi, p. 3.
5. Cervi, p. 4.
6. Cervi, p. 4.
7. Thomas Tanner, ed., Aldo Leopold, The Man and His Legacy (Iowa: Soil Conservation Society of America, 1987), p. 3.
8. Douglas E. Wade, "Aldo Leopold and Prairie, 'In an Illimitable Garden of Forgotten Blooms,'" Nature Study, 1987 p. 3.
9. Douglas E. Wade, "...You Have to Carry the Rope," Invitational Paper, Education Sessions, Proceedings and Papers, International Technical Conference on the Protection of Nature (Lake Success: 1949), p. 287.
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11. Interview with Mrs. Wade.

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14. Interview with Mrs. Wade.
15. Douglas E. Wade, "Small Show Prairie Extends Education," Proceedings of the Second Midwest prairie Conference (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1972), p. 199.
16. Douglas E. Wade, "...You Have to Carry the Rope," p. 287-288.
17. Douglas E. Wade, "...You Have to Carry the Rope," p. 288.
18. Interview with Mrs. Wade.
19. Douglas E. Wade, "Small Show Prairie Extends Education," p. 199.
20. Douglas E. Wade, "Small Show Prairie Extends Education," p. 200.
21. Robert W. Nero, "Douglas E. Wade (1909-1987)," Blue Jay, June, 1988, p. 68.
22. Interview with Tim Keller, Sterling, Illinois, January 11, 1989.
23. Interview with Tim Keller.
24. Fraser F. Darling, Pelican in the Wilderness (New York: Random House, Inc., n.d.), p. 266.
25. Interview with Mrs. Wade.
26. Interview with Mrs. Wade, collection of responses to Cervi questionnaire.
27. Douglas E. Wade, "...You have to Carry the Rope," p. 287.

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