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MEMBER BIOGRAPHIES

JAY NORWOOD "DING" DARLING

OCTOBER 21, 1876 – FEBRUARY 12, 1962

I've found great enjoyment in researching past members of the Boone and Crockett Club and the ways they contributed to conservation through all its phases. One such particular character is Jay "Ding" Darling, a noted cartoonist and conservationist who brought enthusiasm, humor, and common sense to all his endeavors.



Jay Darling was a talented illustrator and acquired his nickname 'Ding' from the way he signed his drawings (above).

Jay Darling, born in Norwood, Michigan, to Marcellus, a minister, and Clara, a homemaker, began life in inauspicious beginnings, but his contributions to conservation are still felt today. He began college in 1894 at Yankton College in South Dakota but transferred to Beloit College in Wisconsin in 1895. As art editor of the college yearbook, he signed drawings with "D'ing"—thus, creating his nickname.

After college he worked at various newspapers in the Midwest such as *Sioux City Journal* and *Des Moines Register and Leader*. In 1906, he married Genevieve Pendleton. During World War I, he began work for the *New York Globe* and finally settled at the *New York Herald Tribune*

where he worked as a contributing cartoonist until 1949. During his time at the *Tribune*, he won two Pulitzer Prizes for editorial cartooning in 1924 and 1943.

Before gaining notice from President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Darling had served on the Iowa Game and Fish Commission but had no other experience as a government administrator. Known to draw a "barbed pan with acid ink," Darling's fame had been built upon cartoons aimed at FDR. His greatest criticisms of FDR came from the wildlife programs under the New Deal. Even though known as a Hoover Republican, Darling was a close friend of Henry Wallace, FDR's Secretary of Agriculture. FDR appointed Darling to a committee for Wildlife Restoration on January 8, 1934. Along with Darling, Aldo Leopold and Thomas Beck were on the special committee to study the migration of waterfowl.

The committee initiated the Federal Duck Stamp program and Darling designed its first stamp. The

Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act became law on March 16, 1934. From there FDR appointed Darling as the head of the U.S. Biological Society, a forerunner to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, on March 1, 1934. When accepting the appointment from FDR, he demanded that he receive a free hand in administering without political interference. Darling was an unusual choice for a government appointment; he owed no political debt; his integrity was unimpeachable, and he possessed boundless imagination.

When he assumed office, the Biological Survey staff numbered 24. Darling brought an enthusiasm and vigor not normally seen in a government employee. His first move was to quietly organize federal agents into highly mobile striking forces near trouble spots such as California and the eastern shore of Maryland for duck bootleggers. Ever since the passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, hunters in Missouri and Illinois river bottoms had shot ducks in spring in defiance of federal law. The "phantom squad" along with



local sportsmen and law enforcement officers commissioned as deputy federal agents in a three-day raid in Illinois collected 49 convictions on poachers. Spring duck shooting rapidly lost its popularity in the Midwest—as did market hunters in California and Maryland—due to these efforts. Darling enacted the tightest hunting restrictions to that point in history. Open season was cut down to 30 days. Bag limits were cut back to 10 ducks and 4 geese. Bait and live decoys were outlawed. Magazine shotguns capable of holding more than three shots became illegal.

Even though Congress had not appropriated funds to implement the Migratory Bird Conservation Act, Darling began planning a series of refuges along the Mississippi Valley from the Canadian border to the Gulf of Mexico. Congress and the FDR administration diverted duck-stamp funds amounting to \$635,000 in their first year of collection to unrelated purposes. When Darling asked FDR for the funds, FDR would laugh and write an “IOU \$1,000,000 FDR” and tell Darling to see Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes or Henry Wallace. The three things still in Darling’s favor were the overwhelming support for the waterfowl restoration program inspired by the Beck-Darling-Leopold committee, FDR’s promise of funds for the waterfowl refuge program had been widely publicized, and Darling was not reticent about letting the public know about the Administration’s heel-dragging. Lastly, Senator Peter Norbeck, R-SD, co-author of the Norbeck-Anderson Migratory Bird Conservation Act, was a widely popular senator. Norbeck was dying of cancer, and his final request for funds ended up being \$6 million to start the Duck Stamp fund. Darling

said, “[without] Peter Norbeck’s request, the whole Duck Restoration Program would have completely collapsed.”

In 1931, Darling, along with a group of organized Iowa sportsmen pushed through a state law that removed the conservation department from political influence. The first task that the new non-partisan commission undertook was a survey of the recreational and wildlife resources of the state with a view toward establishing a 25-year program. One member of the survey team was Aldo Leopold, who suggested that a training school in fish and wildlife management be established at Iowa State College in Ames. Darling accepted the proposal and offered to pay one-third of the cost from his own income if the state fish and wildlife commission and the college would share the balance of the expenses in funds and services. From this successful endeavor, Darling expanded his vision in Washington. His proposal for a national program involved nine land-grant colleges with a combined budget of \$234,000 for three years. A fortuitous meeting with a group of industrialists (DuPont Company, Hercules Powder Company, and Remington Arms Company) on April 24, 1934, agreed to underwrite the wildlife training courses and any other future Darling proposals that the colleges and state agencies did not cover. Out of that meeting emerged the Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit Program, American Wildlife Institute, North American Wildlife Foundation, National Wildlife Federation, and the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference. With this financial backing, Darling and Sen. Frederic Walcott, R-CT, called a larger meeting and founded the American Wildlife Institute to carry on the expanded public

activities of the American Game Protective and Propagation Association. The Institute was made official on August 20, 1935, with Thomas Beck as president, who was later succeeded by former Senator Walcott in 1936.

It is also important to note that Darling was also elected as an Associate member (now called Professional Member) of Boone and Crockett at the Club’s December 13, 1934, annual meeting.

Darling realized that there was a need for a federation of all the local, county, and state organizations dedicated to wildlife conservation to make all their efforts coordinated on a national scene. This was one of the first assigned tasks of the newly organized American Wildlife Institute.

Darling retired as chief of the Bureau of Biological Survey in November 1935 to become the first president of the National Wildlife Federation. To finance the National Wildlife Federation programs, Darling suggested an annual series of wildlife stamps

offered for sale to the public, which is still used.

After World War II, Darling continued creating cartoons until 1949 and leading the charge on conservation education. He suffered a stroke in 1961 that paralyzed his dominant left hand. He also had diminished eyesight, hearing and breathing capacity. He passed away on February 12, 1962.

It is fascinating how people utilize their talents. Darling’s creativity initially gave voice to his passion for conservation, which then enabled him to work directly in the government to enact policy.

We hope you enjoyed this quick look at Ding Darling. Our next article will be another look at a past Boone and Crockett Club member. ■

Kendall Hessey Ogle

