

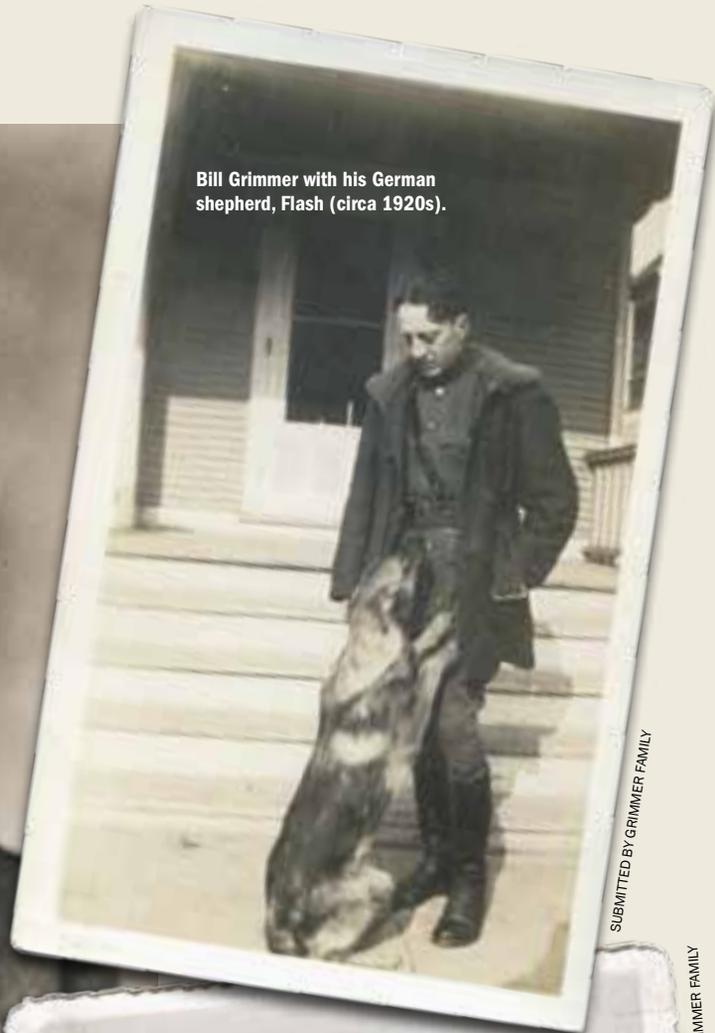
Lt. William F. Grimmer, St. John's Military Academy, Delafield (circa early 1920s).



A portrait of a giant in wildlife management

SUBMITTED BY GRIMMER FAMILY

Bill Grimmer with his German shepherd, Flash (circa 1920s).



SUBMITTED BY GRIMMER FAMILY

WILLIAM F. GRIMMER DEFINED A PROFESSION THAT IS A CORNERSTONE TO WISCONSIN'S NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT.

David Gjestson

Complemented by his quiet, military-like appearance, William F. Grimmer had a natural ability to find compromise in the face of controversy. Today, the State Game Farm and wildlife management program are testimony to that gift of arbitration.

In fact, throughout his illustrious career as the longest-serving head of wildlife management at the Department of Natural Resources (formerly the Wisconsin Conservation Department), Grimmer initiated many management and research innovations in the early years of the wildlife profession that left an indelible mark on the profession.

Grimmer was the state's superintendent of the Game Division for 25 years until his death of a heart attack on May 25, 1955. He was just 55.

Among his accomplishments were wildlife research and the public hunting grounds system, a policy on public hunting grounds and shooting preserves tied into a general



SUBMITTED BY GRIMMER FAMILY

Bill Grimmer with friends, ice fishing on Lake Mendota (circa 1930s).

refuge and sanctuary plan, formal projects for wildlife cover establishment and statewide winter feeding of deer and game birds, and a publicity program to develop public consciousness of game management problems for the purpose of obtaining public support for game programs.

The state also initiated a pheasant rearing and release program under his leadership, arguably the finest of its kind in the United States through the 1930s and 1940s.

Grimmer acted in concert with Aldo Leopold and WCD Director Harley MacKenzie to create "game committees"

in each county of the state, an organization which later became the Wisconsin Conservation Congress.

And he developed a distinct waterfowl management plan for marsh and lake restoration projects and protective sanctuaries, along with creating a formal fur-bearing animal program and annual furbearer surveys emphasizing muskrats and beaver.

The early years

William F. Grimmer was born on March 31, 1900 in Mauston. His father, William A. Grimmer, owned and operated a drug store in town, and his mother, Cora Mae, took care of the household. Siblings Merton and Bess completed the family.

While growing up, Grimmer received his formal training through St. John's Military Academy in Delafield where he was sent by his parents, likely to shape him up. Little else is known about his early life except that he also loved hunting quail, pheasants, ducks and geese.

Grimmer's hunting interest most likely influenced his game management career choice.

Grimmer attended Marquette University for some time, but did not graduate. Instead, he became an assistant commandant at St. John's and served in that capacity for 10 years while teaching at that facility.

During that time at St. John's, he married Marguerite "Madge" Neilsen from

Milwaukee and they had two daughters: Elizabeth (Libby) in 1933 and Catherine (Katy) in 1937. Their first born, William (Billy) Frederick II was born in 1929 but died of spinal meningitis when he was just 7 months old.

As a young father, Grimmer took up experimenting with game farming at a time when little was known about the practice. He raised pheasants, wild turkeys, bobwhite quail and Hungarian partridge. At home, he constructed large wooden and clear plastic cages to raise finches that his daughters fondly recalled later. The girls especially liked strawberry and society finches.

A career is born

Grimmer's game bird raising expertise no doubt was a valuable credential when he applied for the Game Division superintendent position offered by the Wisconsin Conservation Department. He was hired August 1, 1930 to replace the departing superintendent, Wallace Grange.

Though a hard worker, Grimmer also looked forward to time at home and on the lake fishing with his family. Perch fishing on Lake Mendota in Madison was a special treat for Libby and Katy.

When interviewed earlier this year, both daughters agreed that their father had a great sense of humor and that he was very family oriented.

Libby recalls fishing with her dad as a girl and says, "In the 1940s, you could

dangle a worm on a drop-line in front of the jumbo perch you could see below... the lake was that clear. Catching your limit was no problem."

Ice fishing with friends was an occasional winter pastime for Grimmer.

Libby also recalls that her dad enjoyed puttering in the garden and proudly raised beautiful tuberous begonias.

The Grimmer sisters note that at times their dad combined work and family time and that they often traveled with their father to Poynette when he had meetings there. They enjoyed visiting the wild animal exhibit and the conservation museum, as well as marveling at all the pheasants being raised on the grounds.

They remember spending time in summers at a log building located at the Wisconsin Conservation Department's Trout Lake Forestry Headquarters where great breakfasts were enjoyed in lumberjack style for many years.

Libby tells a story of going to Outer Island in the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore chain with her parents to view the infamous capercaillie (also known as wood grouse) release program firsthand. She remembers that the trip out across churning waters was very exciting and they were eager to see how the newly released birds were doing.

During his career, Grimmer developed into a solid administrator. His accomplishments as a leader included expanding the State Game Farm at Fish Lake in Door County. He took a personal interest in experimenting with more varieties of potential game birds including Reeves, golden, black and Mongolian pheasants as well as Hungarian partridge, ruffed grouse, wild turkeys and chukar partridge. Ultimately, he moved the entire State Game Farm operation to Poynette in 1934.

Grimmer's long-term service to the department and his exemplary record led to the establishment of the annual W. F. Grimmer Award program (later entitled Wildlife Biologist of the Year Award), the first of which was given to Harold Shine in 1956.



EUGENE SANBORN

Grimmer often took his daughters along when attending meetings at the State Game Farm in Poynette. Here he is flanked by Harley W. MacKenzie (WCD director), left, and Game Farm Superintendent H.B. Kellogg, Jr., in December 1936.

David Gjestson retired from the Department of Natural Resources in 1999 after more than 30 years of service. Most of his career was in game/wildlife management. He also was a policy and planning analyst including coordinating the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway from 1989 to 1996. His book, "The Gamekeepers: Wisconsin Wildlife Conservation History from WCD to CWD," documents the rich history of wildlife conservation in Wisconsin and how game management evolved in the state.