

Max Melick Recognized for 75 Year SAF Membership

By Willard Kiefer, Historian, Wisconsin Society of American Foresters, April 2008

Max Melick was presented a Special Recognition Award by the Wisconsin Society of American Foresters on March 19, 2008 for 75 years of membership in the Society of American Foresters at the spring conference banquet in Waukesha, Wisconsin. His career in the Forest Service spanned 38 years of service in forestry in Region 9 – Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, Indiana and Ohio.



Figure 1. Wisconsin SAF Chair Jim Kerkman (r) presents the 75 -year SAF Award to Max Melick, accompanied by his daughter Gail Melick Gibson.

Max was born in Nebraska and raised in Rochester, Michigan. Max attended the University of Michigan, receiving a Bachelor and Masters Degree in Forestry. In March, 1934, Max and Betty (his wife) moved to Loretta, Wisconsin (30 miles west of Park Falls) where Max was assigned to the Loretta CCC camp. At that time, Max was recognized as one of the youngest foresters responsible for the forestry activities of a CCC camp. His forestry activities included planning and directing timber stand improvement, tree planting, other general forestry improvement projects and forestry training activities.

In 1934, Max transferred to a land acquisition assignment. From 1935 to 1937, Max was assigned as an administrative assistant in land acquisition in the Region 9 Office in Milwaukee in the Division of Recreation and Lands. Max participated in the acquisition

of land that eventually ended up as the Mark Twain NF in Missouri, the Hoosier NF in Indiana, and the Wayne NF in Ohio. As administrative assistant, Max helped initiate purchase projects, checked land exams reports, collect data, reviewed and negotiated options, train personnel and basically oversee the field operations of the acquisition process.

November 1937, Max was moved into management of the national forests when he was assigned as District Ranger, Watersmeet Ranger District, Ottawa National Forest. This lasted into the early 40's when he was transferred to the Iron River Ranger District of the Ottawa as District Ranger. In 1954, Max was transferred to the Medford Ranger District as District Ranger on the Chequamegon National Forest in Wisconsin. Max remained at Medford until 1965 when was transferred back to the Lands Division, Region 9 Office in Milwaukee, from which he retired in 1972.

Max is a very quiet, unassuming, and hard working individual. When asked about his activities and anything special he did in his career, his answer was simply; "I did my job – nothing special." His major forestry activities as District Ranger was in forest improvement work; timber stand improvement, tree planting, forest fire control and the other administrative jobs of the District Ranger.

Max should be justifiably proud of his career with the Forest Service. Being involved in the acquisition process and then the early management on the Ottawa and the Chequamegon National Forests, Max was one of those who set the standards for the management on our Midwestern National Forests that we are all so proud of today.

A Few Words about My Father
By Gail Melick Gibson

Life of the party, happy-go lucky, loved his beer, short-tempered - this description definitely does not fit my father, Max Melick. In fact, Max was unassuming, quiet, ever courteous, hard-working, very dependable and scrupulously honest and fair. Of course children usually admire their fathers, and for my forester brother Ross and me he was a very positive role model. I assume some of these qualities were noted early in his career because I've been told that when he came to Loretta, Wisconsin in the early 1930s he was the youngest person to ever be in charge of a CCC camp. Now, at the age of 98, he insists that throughout his career with the Forest Service he never did anything special, that he just did his job as well as he could and that it was "nothing out of the ordinary."

Max was happiest when he was out in the field. He did his office work conscientiously, but he declined promotions and preferred to stay a ranger because he enjoyed being in the woods. A really good day for him would be to see a mature, healthy stand of trees. And for people who had gone through the Great Depression, as my parents had, having a regular government pay check was invaluable - they felt very fortunate and appreciative.

As children, Ross and I were forbidden to open drawers in our father's bedroom dresser because in one of them he kept the government-issued pistol and holster for shooting porcupines.

Sometimes when Dad was fighting fires or out alone and late on a severely cold or snowy day, my mother would become quite anxious, but he always made it home. And he always had a very supportive, stay-at-home wife.

In 1966 Max was transferred to the office in Milwaukee to work on land acquisition, something he had done before becoming a ranger. My mother was pleased to come down to the many cultural advantages of the city, but my father certainly missed going out in the field as part of his work. They bought a house being sold by a retiring forester and when I saw it I understood why. It was an old farmhouse with several beautiful mature elms in the yard. Those elms are still there today.

After they retired, Max and Betty traveled a lot and he helped care for his neighbors' trees and shrubs as well as those at their church. Max was still successfully hunting geese north of Milwaukee when he was 87 and driving a car at 92.

Although he didn't talk about it, I know it was a great source of pride to my father that his son, Ross, followed him into the field of forestry and, like him, got his master's degree at the University of Michigan. Ross retired just a few years ago after being a geneticist and silviculturist on the Mark Twain, in Missouri.

I myself could never live in a desert environment - I need trees, and am proud of the large white pine and tamarack towering over shrubs and other trees in our suburban backyard. Foresters do have a long-lasting, positive influence!

Gail Melick Gibson, March 2008

Article submitted by Julie Peltier, Wisconsin SAF State Treasurer and SE Wisconsin Chapter member