



## WVU Day Spotlights Outdoorsman

A walk in woods was never just “nice” for George Bird Evans. He would instead draw from a vast palate of colorful words and phrases so his readers could vividly experience the rolling landscape, the warm Indian summer breeze, and the rustling sounds playing throughout the woods.

“George’s writing stood out from other sportsmen’s,” said LeJay Graffious, a trustee of the Old Hemlock Foundation. “His writing had a different quality. He elevated it.”

Evans excelled in both quality and quantity. In addition to meticulously recording the results of more than 65 hunting seasons, spent primarily in West Virginia’s Allegheny Mountains, Evans authored more than two dozen books and 100 magazine articles about the sport that was his vocation and avocation.

He also found time to breed a line of English setters whose descendants are treasured today by bird dog enthusiasts throughout America.

“George Bird Evans was a giant in the field of upland game bird hunting literature,” said John Cuthbert, Curator of the West Virginia and Regional History Collection. “His eloquence and philosophical bent earned him an avid following among hunting literature enthusiasts across the nation and beyond.”

The West Virginia Collection focused on Evans and his work during its annual celebration of the state’s founding on June 20.

Evans, a native of Uniontown, Pa., began his professional life in the late 1920s working as an illustrator for *Cosmopolitan* magazine and other clients in New York City and quickly earned a reputation as a gifted artist. The metropolis, though, lacked the wildness and wilderness he dearly loved since childhood. So, in 1939, he talked his bosses at *Cosmopolitan* into allowing him to relocate and to submit his work through the mail. Evans and his wife, Kay, then bought an old farm house and permanently settled near Bruceton Mills in Preston County.

Their home, which Evans called Old Hemlock, became well known to sporting literature enthusiasts throughout the country during the late twentieth century. His writings were largely based upon his experiences at Old Hemlock and in the nearby hills and mountains.

Although he began documenting his forays into the woods in a “shooting journal” begun in 1932, it was not until the 1950s that he began professionally writing about his passion for birds, dogs, and the West Virginia mountains.

Evans began his literary career by collaborating with his wife to write a mystery series under the pseudonyms Brandon Bird and Harris Evans. The five novels earned them a modest amount of fame and fortune and helped hone their writing skills for the more significant work that lay ahead.

In 1956, Evans began writing magazine articles about hunting and the outdoors. Most of his articles appeared in *Field & Stream* or *Pennsylvania Game News*.

In 1971, he published *The Upland Shooting Life*, which told about the sport and his life at Old Hemlock. The book became an instant classic and gained Evans a loyal following to this day.



Shooting Notes, Oct. 20, 1945.



George Bird Evans poses with Blue and Dawn, ca. 1940.

“George came to writing from an artistic background,” said Graffious, a long-time friend who gained an insider’s view as to how Evans wrote.

For one, he discovered that Evans kept a notebook filled with phrases and comments that he wanted to incorporate into future writings. Also, the Evanses were both well-read, and they developed a habit of reading aloud to each other, especially during dinner. It could be anything from the *New Yorker* to *Newsweek* to books they were reading. And Kay often read George’s work back to him.

“George always told me that the test of any good writing is if it could be read aloud,” Graffious said. George and Kay passed away in 1998 and 2007, respectively.

The trustees plan to maintain Old Hemlock the way it was when the Evanses were in their prime and keep it


open to the public. There are also discussions about scheduling events for private groups and developing some educational tours on topics such as the life and times of George Bird Evans, writing and art, dog training, and the flora and fauna of the area.

“Our goal as trustees is to keep his name and his writing in front of people,” Graffious said.

The WVU Libraries share that desire.

Evans’ extensive collection, now housed in the WVRHC, includes personal papers, manuscripts, books and other materials by and about Evans and his wife, co-author, and editor, Kay Harris Evans.

An exhibit focusing on the Evans Collection and other sporting collections and memorabilia in the West Virginia Collection will remain on display throughout the fall semester in the J. Horner Davis Family Galleries on the sixth floor of the Wise Library.



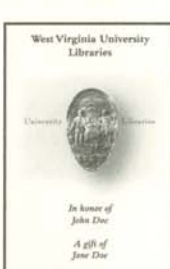
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