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ROSALIE EDGE AND THE MODERN ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree Bachelor of Arts  
with Mahurin Honors College Graduate Distinction  
at Western Kentucky University

By

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines and follows the actions of an understudied activist in the environmentalist movement: Rosalie Edge. This thesis relies and encourages a combination of conservation, environmentalism, and historical women's history in America. Rosalie Edge's work as an environmentalist created a new and effective way for environmentalists to advocate for the environment around them. She created a pamphlet medium that invited scientists and other conservationists to publish writings and opinions that went against what the Audubon Society, the Biological Survey, and legislators were doing and publishing. The research for this project combines analysis from other professionals in the field with new analysis from primary sources. By examining the writings of Rosalie Edge, and the other writers she provided a platform for, a type of call-to-action activism comes to life.

Corrupt or wayward leaders were pushed out of their positions, unethical practices were brought to the light instead of ignored, and the wildlife that Rosalie fought so hard for could flourish. Rosalie's efforts in the field of conservation are strung together by a larger picture, where others in the field are placed by ulterior motives—this means that Rosalie was able to understand and see that the smallest changes in an ecosystem could be detrimental to the balance of an environment. Instead of relying on something to be gained to push for environmental protection, she recognized the importance for the protection simply because it was how the Earth's ecosystems should operate.

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Kyle and Crytal Coleman, who have encouraged, challenged, and believed in me since the beginning. I would also like to thank my friends who have listened to me ramble about this project for months on end, and helped challenge me to new questions and perspectives.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not be completed or even thought of without the encouragement of Dr. Olson—who is a mentor, and a friend. I am so grateful for the flexibility of my readers, and the Mahurin Honor's College for the support to complete this thesis. I would also like to extend the upmost gratitude to Dr. Jennifer Hanley who helped me to gather my thoughts and curiosities about this topic and helped me keep my composure under the stress of the semester.

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## INTRODUCTION

Rosalie Edge was born a socialite in the elite part of New York City, she spent much of her youth with her father in Central Park.<sup>1</sup> The grounds had only been finished for a year when she was born. During her life, Central Park would become a pinnacle of urban recreation parks as well as a refuge for wildlife—specifically birds.<sup>2</sup> These formative experiences left a lasting impression on Rosalie, who would go on to become a powerful voice for conservation. When she married Charles Noel Edge, Rosalie travelled around the world, living briefly in England before moving back to New York. When she returned, she was almost 40 years old, had two children, and had met one of the major influential people in her life, Lady Rhondda, who introduced Rosalie to the ideas and efforts of the suffrage movement of England. In New York, Rosalie joined the suffrage movement against Charles' wishes. Rosalie Edge would become a prominent speaker, a leader, and a writer—first developing these skills for the suffrage movement and ultimately becoming one of the nation's foremost conservation activists. Rosalie's age

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the information about the beginnings of Rosalie's life contained in this paper come from Dyana Z. Furmansky, *Rosalie Edge, Hawk of Mercy: The Activist Who Saved Nature from the Conservationists* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), limited archival documents (like boarding passes, census records, and passport documents), and Madelyn Holmes, *American Women Conservationists: Twelve Profiles* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004). This is because of a lack of access to her early letters, which are not included within her correspondence letters in the Denver Public Library. Furmansky's biography of Edge took over a decade to complete and offer detailed stories of a woman who has been overlooked for decades. Peter Edge, Rosalie's son, also offered a valuable addition to her story through a speech and essay he wrote about his mother that he presented at Hawk Mountain sanctuary. Peter Edge also gave Furmansky an entire suitcase's worth of personal letters that belonged to Rosalie and are not accessible to the public. Peter Edge, "A Most Determined Lady," *Founder's Day Lecture* (July 1998), <https://www.hawkmountain.org/download/?id=5359>.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Blackmar and Roy Rosenzweig, "History of Central Park," Central Park, March 9, 2020, <https://centralpark.org/history-of-central-park/>.

and financial stability put her in a unique position to be completely devoted to her work as an environmentalist.

Men in environmentalism such as Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir have extensive research and scholarship completed on their work as conservationists and as political activists. The research for this thesis proved to be a battle to find scholarship about an individual woman—many of the books, biographies, and analysis found were a combination of the works of many women.<sup>3</sup> This thesis will add to the scholarship and study on women as individuals in their realms of interest and at their intersections by focusing only on Rosalie. Rosalie Edge’s career in grassroots activism included joining the fight for women’s suffrage and creating her own Committee to battle injustices within the conservation movement. Her efforts as an unforgiving woman in conservation provide a unique example to women’s history in the early twentieth century by offering a different example of women’s conservation activism.

A few prominent women who were active in the movement in this time: Mardy Murie, Marjory Stoneman Douglas, Mabel Osgood Wright—fit within women’s roles in their fields. This is not a negative aspect of their work, by any means, but it does lead to a practice that has been dubbed “add women and stir,” where the women of a particular time frame are not necessarily analyzed, but are included and showcased to balance out the acting figures. Glenda Faha, an International Historian on the early 1900s, argues that while the “add women and stir” approach may not be the best analysis tool, it has the

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<sup>3</sup> “12 biographies”, “thesis about douglas edge and murie”, websites that list “8 prominent women in conservation”

ability to, “shift our perspective on what is important in the past, as well as to illuminate the role of historians in silencing women, their actions, and their ideas.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Glenda Sluga. “Add Women and Stir: Gender and History of International Politics”, *Humanities Australia*, volume 5, pg. 65-72.

## THE START FOR ROSALIE EDGE

Rosalie’s strong will, determined nature, and of her emotional conviction and belief in the justice of environmental and biological protection was introduced and encouraged in her by Dr. Willard Van Name. When Rosalie Edge and Charles Edge split up in the 1920’s, she moved back to Manhattan from their estate outside of the city. She picked up a hobby of birdwatching at the country estate, and carried it back to the park she used to enjoy as a child—where she met Dr. Van Name.<sup>5</sup> Rosalie credited Van Name as her most impactful mentor, and she attributes the shift of her life and ambition to him.<sup>6</sup> He was the writer of the pamphlet, “A Crisis in Conservation,” that lead Rosalie to environmental activism almost a decade later in 1929.<sup>7</sup> This pamphlet put forth an intense criticism of the Audubon Society, detailing the danger presented to birds and the unethical practices of sportsmen.<sup>8</sup>

Van Name personally sent this pamphlet to Rosalie Edge, who read it several times over, charged with a disposition to help change the dangers and misdeeds laid out by Van Name and his coauthor. Rosalie got in touch with Van Name, realized the need for what he was doing, and created the organization called the “Emergency Conservation Committee” (ECC). Rosalie started to spread and distribute the pamphlets, as well as

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<sup>5</sup> Furmansky, pg. 75-83

<sup>6</sup> Rosalie Edge. “*Good Companions in Conservation: Annals of an Implacable Widow*”, unpublished.

<sup>7</sup> Rebekah Smith, “Heroes of Hawk Mountain: Female Founders,” Hawk Mountain Sanctuary (Rebekah Smith, Science-Education Outreach Coordinator, March 31, 2021), <https://www.hawkmountain.org/blog/heroes-of-hawk-mountain/heroes-of-hawk-mountain-female-founders>.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Edge, “A Most Determined Lady.” Pg. 3

write and showcase other conservation-centered pieces in the new pamphlets created by the ECC.<sup>9</sup> These pamphlets usually had “Mrs. Charles Noel Edge” listed as the author.<sup>10</sup>

Rosalie Edge’s grave is marked by few words aimed towards her life, it simply reads: “Mabel Rosalie Edge, 1877-1962, Daughter of John Wylie Barrow and Harriet Bowen Barrow, Widow of Charles Noel Edge.”<sup>11</sup> No mention of her path in life, or her children—it lacks environmental scenery or even a bird to show her passion for either. To pass by this grave would arouse no suspicion to an uninformed eye, but to know who she is and see this sparks a question: why is she so overlooked? Rosalie’s writings were distributed to thousands of people, she headlined and forced her way into dozens and dozens of meetings and stirred the proverbial pot for conservationists in every direction she could. How does a woman, so lovingly described as a “hellcat” by her cowrite VanName decide to use only the titles “daughter” and “widow” on her gravestone?<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> ECC pamphlet with Rosalie’s name on it as well as the crisis pamphlet, Folder 32, Box 1, Rosalie Edge Papers, Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>10</sup> The ECC pamphlets were written by Van-Name, \_\_\_ Brant, and Mrs. Edge herself, however, they were usually signed as “Mrs. Charles Noel Edge.” The term ghost-writer could be used for Dr. Van-Name, but the relationship was structured to benefit Van-Name rather than the usual result of a ghost writer. This may seem to be a stretch, because Rosalie was thrust into the front-lines of conservation, with millions of copies of these pamphlets being sent out—which made her a public figure to some degree. However, Dr. Van-Name could have lost his job or position in the American Natural History Museum if he continued to write against the Audubon Society and other leaders in the movement under his own name.

<sup>11</sup> “Rosalie Barrow Edge (1877-1962) - Find a Grave...,” Find a Grave, accessed April 17, 2023, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/160944990/rosalie-edge>.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Edge wrote/told Furmanský while she was interviewing him about his mom that this was instructed to him to put on the gravestone, nothing else.

## THE CONTEXT

Many different groups in the history of conservation have been defined or described as conservationists: hunters, preservationists, or even the common citizen could have been aware of and supportive of conservation practices. For this thesis, the term conservation is defined as the use of resources in a productive manner and not waste or overuse any one particular resource. Rosalie Edge, however, would fall closer into the definition of an environmentalist. Environmentalism is defined as: “a theory that views environment rather than heredity as the important factor in the development and especially the cultural and intellectual development of an individual or group and advocacy of the preservation, restoration, or improvement of the natural environment.”<sup>13</sup> While today’s understanding of these two concepts could be similar, the differences are what create rifts in understanding and in analysis.

Conservation, in the time frame of this analysis, was primarily used by hunters, whereas environmentalism was for the writers, the painters, the “municipal mothers” of the Federation of Women’s Clubs, and for people like Rosalie Edge. There is a different understanding of why protecting, improving, and conserving the environment is important to these groups. Conservation is economically based in its origin, to think of the earth’s resources as only a good to be sold or used is inherently capitalist and in an almost opposition to environmentalism. The value of the environment does not come

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<sup>13</sup> “Environment Definition & Meaning,” Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster), accessed April 17, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/environment>.

from the dollar sign attached, but rather from the intrinsic benefit of that environment being healthy and humans adding to the longevity of an ecosystem rather than doom it to obsolescence. While the inclusion of development in individuals or groups may seem like an odd decision in environmentalism's definition, the idea that the environment supports healthy development and healthy people is not a separate from their advocacy. In fact, these two parts of environmentalism historically fold into each other.

In the United States the study of nature's role in history has continued to grow and develop. Natural historian Ted Steinberg, the history of the United States is a natural history; from city drainage systems, fence post regulations, and crop rotation to racism, dumpsites, and McDonalds.<sup>14</sup> The interesting part of natural history lies within nature's role in the creation of cultural practices or changes, as well as political ones. What Rosalie Edge brings into the story is nature's role in an individual type of group that ended up changing cultural and political structures. Rosalie is not the first woman to advocate for the environment, several women's groups and mothers were advocating for the inclusion and preservation of nature over a decade before Rosalie came into the scene. The General Federation of Women's Clubs would often use their strength in the "private" life of citizenry to elevate and give credibility to their cause.<sup>15</sup>

For example, Lydia Addams-Williams, member of the Women's National Press Association and served as the Forestry Chairman of the General Federation of Women's Clubs in 1905, wrote:

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<sup>14</sup> Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), xi-xiv

<sup>15</sup> Carolyn Merchant, *Women of the Progressive Conservation Movement: 1900-1916*, *Environmental Review: ER*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Special Issue: Women and Environmental History (Spring 1984) pp. 72. Forest History Society and American Society for Environmental History.

“Man has been too busy building railroads, construction ships, engineering great projects, and exploiting vast commercial and financial enterprises, to take the time necessary to consider the problems which concern the welfare of the home and the future. That has been left for women, and it is conclusively a field where her care and love and devotion to all that makes for the betterment of humanity will find ample scope for work. . . The General Federation of Women's Clubs, with its 800,000 workers and hundreds of state and local branches, has for several years made a specialty of work for preserving the forests, upon which the proper conservation of all other natural resources depends. It is conceded that the almost universal sentiment in favor of preserving forests is due to the interest taken in the subject by the women's clubs and the work done for them.”<sup>16</sup>

The women involved in these clubs saw the natural environment as an extension of the home, thus it was under their domain to advocate and care for it.

A few years before the General Federation of Women’s Clubs was able to make its way into the public realm, the emotional connection between humans and the environment was encouraged through writers, painters, and other artists. Henry David Thoreau for example, when writing *Walden*, consistently refers to becoming one with nature as learning to live deliberately. To fulfill life’s most supreme simplicity within nature was the closest place to peace.<sup>17</sup> Thoreau is one of the many male figures mentioned and discussed in the general history of conservation and environmentalism.

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<sup>16</sup> Document 8: Lydia Adams-Willimas, “conservation- Woman’s Work,” *Forestry and Irrigation, 14 (1908): 350-51*, by Lydia P. Adams-Williams. Included in *How Did the General Federation of Women’s Clubs Shape Women’s Involvement in the Conservation Movement, 1900-1930*, by Kimberly A. Jarvis. (Binghamton, NY: State University of New York at Binghamton, 12005)

<sup>17</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Selections from Walden* (New York, NY : Avenel Books, 1973). pg. 63



Others are typically John Muir, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt, James Audubon.<sup>18</sup>

Of these men, a common theme is an understanding of the importance of nature in the betterment of the human spirit. One of the most recognized conservationists, Theodore Roosevelt, even wrote himself, "while my interest in natural history has added very little to my sum of achievement, it has added immeasurably to my sum of enjoyment in life."<sup>19</sup> There is credit given to an artist of creating an inspiration of the "western frontier" to the American people in the mid 1800s, Thomas Moran. He painted a piece in the American Sublime, "The Grand Canyon of Yellowstone," that was persuasive enough in its beauty to compel people into understanding and respect of the natural wonder that Yellowstone National Park was created.<sup>20</sup> National Parks offered an entirely new type of revenue, reserve space, and place for the public to witness some of the United States most scenic landscapes and environmental staples.

The men mentioned, and the women of this time frame hold similar beliefs about the value of nature. One of their profound differences lies within the intentions behind their work, when reading the words of women in the late 1800's there is a sense of reclamation—that they are creating the space for their opinion to hold weight. When reading the words of the men above, the themes surround an esoteric view of the world

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<sup>18</sup> "Conservation Hall of Fame," National Wildlife Federation (National Wildlife Federation), accessed March 7, 2023, <https://nwf.org/About-Us/History/Conservation-Hall-of-Fame>.

<sup>19</sup> Theodore Roosevelt. "My Life as a Naturalist," *Natural History Magazine*, May 1918. <https://www.naturalhistorymag.com/picks-from-the-past/12449/my-life-as-a-naturalist>

<sup>20</sup> "Report of the Superintendent of the Yellowstone National Park to the Secretary of the Interior for the year 1872", 1872, F722 .U72, Documentary Chronology of Selected Events in the Development of the American Conservation Movement, 1847-1920. [https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/consrvbib:@FIELD\(NUMBER\(vg44\)\)](https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/consrvbib:@FIELD(NUMBER(vg44)))

rather than what the country or club can do to preserve it. The identity of a man within nature is to exist alone in it, or to exist a higher level of understanding.

These observations do not mean that any of the men have not written about the value in protecting land for a community—in fact, many of the prominent men mentioned relied heavily on the value of nature for all civilization. Yet, the experiences and ideas in books like *Walden*, revolve and center around an individual benefit. In the writings of the women in the club, there is thought for others or for the value to the environment itself for it to remain protected rather than destroyed. Rosalie’s advocacy writing is an earnest combination of these ideas, which is where the definition of environmentalism becomes evident through her work.

When studying American women’s history, the multiple layers that unravel between class, race, status, age, or even regional differences are daunting to try to interpret. This has much to do with an only recent delve in the women’s realm of historical analysis; the cultural and political worlds of women may have coexisted with men, though most often were forced to be separate. This “separate spheres” theory of society is what could have created the strength in the argument of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, but it is also what halted progress towards Rosalie’s and other women being included and listened to in their fields. They, as women, were being purposefully left out so that they would stay within their own political and social realms.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Paula, Baker. “The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920.” *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (1984): 620–47. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1856119>. Paula Baker, writings on the change and shift from separate spheres theory that the definition of politics should be expanded to include women’s activities. This was because the clubs that existed during the time were meant to change or effect the actions of others in the country, making them political.

However, as discussed by Susan Ware, writing even biographies for women becomes a task of playing comparison.<sup>22</sup> In transparency, that almost became what this writing was about either—a comparison of a woman in conservation history to a man in conservation history. What formed instead was rather an understanding of the importance in individuality in women’s history in both the content and scholarship. Rosalie Edge’s efforts are not given importance because they resemble another’s efforts, they are important because she created a new methodology within the movement. Her actions and writings were not to create an economic profit, or to maintain the sustainability of a pastime, she understood and had the conviction of the bigger picture of environmentalism in the United States.

Rosalie Edge had been writing pamphlets for change and for awareness for years before she became an environmentalist. She wrote pamphlets and distributed them for the Empire State suffrage movement and fell naturally into a practice of standing up for her beliefs and for being militant.<sup>23</sup> A decade later, she picked up the pen and began to write for the protection of birds, lands, animals, and for organizational corrections. In letters addressed to Rosalie, her actions are described as incredible, and her ability to speak at meetings and convey important information as magnificent.<sup>24</sup> Rosalie’s partnership with Van Name brought the Audubon society back into her attention after the decades of time

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<sup>22</sup> Sara Alpern and Susan Ware, in *The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing The Lives of Modern American Women* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 63.

<sup>23</sup> Rebekah Smith, “Heroes of Hawk Mountain: Female Founders,” Hawk Mountain Sanctuary (Rebekah Smith, Science-Education Outreach Coordinator, March 31, 2021), <https://www.hawkmountain.org/blog/heroes-of-hawk-mountain/heroes-of-hawk-mountain-female-founders>.

<sup>24</sup> Letter from Harey R. Carey to Rosalie Edge, Oct. 30, 1930. Box , Folder 1, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver, Colorado.

in between her donation after her daughter was born and the mailing of the “Crisis in Conservation pamphlet” to her while she was on a summer stay in Europe.

## WHO IS THE AUDUBON?

The Audubon Society was formed in 1896 by two women in Massachusetts to advocate against the killing of birds for women's fashion. These two women convinced several ladies in Boston to stop wearing feathers in their accessories, the movement sprawled out from Boston to several states surrounding Massachusetts.<sup>25</sup> There were enough state-level societies in 1905, that a national head organization was founded to help lobby for the conservation of North America's bird populations and create a national wildlife refuge. By the 1920's, the loose head of the Audubon Societies was formally called the National Association of Audubon Societies (NAAS) and were the leading figure for smaller branches in terms of directing influence and member dues towards their cause.<sup>26</sup> The NAAS supported the protection and conservation of water birds, and often shared goals with similar organizations like the National Ornithologists Union—who study and make efforts towards bird conservation.<sup>27</sup>

The NAAS continued to grow, with state and local branches popping up all over the country—this included even junior member programs for children in some states. The NAAS was made up of people from different backgrounds and opinions—the state

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<sup>25</sup> Baker, Paula. Pg. 72.

<sup>26</sup> “The History of Audubon,” Audubon (National Audubon Society , December 22, 2022), <https://www.audubon.org/about/history-audubon-and-waterbird-conservation#:~:text=1896%20Harriet%20Hemenway%20and%20Minna,of%20the%20Massachusetts%20Audubon%20Society>.

<sup>27</sup> “History - American Ornithological Society (AOS),” American Ornithological Society (American Ornithological Society , October 21, 2020), <https://americanornithology.org/about/history/>.

branches differed even more so. Conservationists, preservationists, and hunters existed within the same group both in the national committee and the small local divisions. Members of the Audubon societies also consider themselves to be members of these groups—often multiple at the same time—Henry O. Havemeyer for example, called himself both a naturalist and an ornithologist, and an active member of the Audubon society.<sup>28</sup> William Dutcher, the Audubon Society’s first president, was an avid hunter and student of the North American birds—who also staunchly fought for their protection from extinction.<sup>29</sup> These divisions and disciplines within the same community and group can allow for a wide range of knowledge, activism, and efforts.

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<sup>28</sup> Img 7070 and 7071. No date listed. Henry o Havenmeyer to officers, directors, and other members of the Audubon society.

<sup>29</sup> T. S. Palmer, “In Memoriam: William Dutcher. Born January 20, 1846-Died July 1, 1920,” *The Auk* 38, no. 4 (October 1921): pp. 501-513, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4073622>.

## WHO IS THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION COMMITTEE?

The Emergency Conservation Committee (ECC) was a group of activists who wrote pamphlets, letters, visited and bought important habitats to protect them, and cause questioning of the leadership of the National Association of Audubon Societies. Their activism was wide spread in that it touched on many of the sanctuaries founded within the United States—pelican island, Rainey Sanctuary, Great Salt Lake, and Hawk Mountain Sanctuary were topics in most of the pamphlets.<sup>30</sup> The ECC started in 1929-30 and did not disband until Rosalie Edge's death in 1962. This group were self-appointed in the need for revision of the U.S.'s conservation efforts and organization—many in the Audubon society saw them as unprofessional and unnecessary.

ECC's self-appointed committee was largely made up of Rosalie Edge, Irving Brant, and Dr. Van Name, though there were several others who would switch places and add to the board as time went on.<sup>31</sup> These three people were the power behind an intense spread of informational pamphlets that were sent out to thousands of Audubon society members in the country.<sup>32</sup> Rosalie Edge was the organizer and messenger for the group, she handled personal letters, donations, the office was in her house for quite some time. On top of these clerical tasks, she was also a prolific writer, speaker, and liaison for the

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<sup>30</sup> ECC pamphlet reprints, 1930-1934, Box 2, folders 32 & 34, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver Colorado

<sup>31</sup> Front of two pamphlets that have different names listed for same position, Emergency Conservation Committee publications, 1930 & 1932, Box 1, Folders 30 and 32, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver, Colorado

<sup>32</sup> Court proceedings and documentation: Rosalie Edge vs. Audubon, Box 1, Folder 28, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver, Colorado.

organization; these skills carried over well from her time as a suffragist. Irving Brant was also a key writer for the ECC, and contributed to many of their pamphlets. Dr. Willard Van Name was a major critic of the NAAS and its leadership—he was an author of the pamphlet “A Crisis in Conservation” which Rosalie read and decided to act upon. Rosalie was very attached to the plight of the bald eagle and read this pamphlet numerous times on her way back home from stay in Europe.<sup>33</sup>

The ECC’s observed misalignment and malpractice within the Audubon Society was built upon Dr. Van Name mailing Rosalie “A Crisis in Conservation.” The pamphlet detailed the misuse of funds in the NAAS, the negligence towards bird species they were meant to protect—like the bald eagle—and called out the NAAS for shuffling its feet when it came to activism. When Rosalie made it back to New York, she met with Dr. Van Name, and determined that there was a need for “management”<sup>34</sup>, she became a conduit for the writings of Van Name.<sup>35</sup> He was employed at the American Museum of Natural History, but after publishing this pamphlet he was threatened with termination—so Mrs. Edge became the headperson of the ECC. She mailed ECC pamphlets out to the list of NAAS members, often ridiculing the board of directors as well as the sanctuary wardens. They were also full of important information and research completed by dozens of biologists and other scientists in the field. <sup>36</sup>

The ECC and the NAAS were at odds for decades, it started with the pamphlet mentioned earlier, and divulged into further mistrust and misalignment. Rosalie and Dr.

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<sup>33</sup> Peter Edge, pg. 2

<sup>34</sup> Furmansky, pg. and Edge

<sup>35</sup> Furmansky pg. 89

<sup>36</sup> ECC pamphlet back page, “Board of Consulting Biologists and Conservationists”, 1934, Box 1, Folder 34, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver, Colorado.



Van Name discovered that the NAAS was permitting the trapping and hunting of birds of prey as well as small mammals on their sanctuaries. Their discovery of these acts led to Rosalie issuing a series of letters, pamphlets, and opening Audubon meeting floor discussions to these issues. Annual Audubon meetings were open to the public and to guests, but were a means of entertainment and learning, not discussion and debate. At the first meeting Rosalie attended, she asked what the association had to say in response to the pamphlet VanName had written. She was dismissed.<sup>37</sup>

The insolence of the Board and the members present at this meeting drove Rosalie to further action. She wrote to President T. Gilbert Pearson to answer the questions she raised—what did the Audubon Society board have to say about the questions and accusations in Dr. Van Name’s pamphlet? Pearson let Rosalie know that the reason the board did not reply to the pamphlet was that it did not want to draw any more publicity to the misleading and untruthful writing—a fact that Rosalie understood as a fear. As the ECC grew its literature, it expanded further and further upon the inaction of the NAAS, originally, the letters started from Rosalie, in an attempt to build trust of the NAAS again as well as help the society to flourish. She signed her letters, “with every good wish for the Audubon Society.”<sup>38</sup>

Along with the inactivity of the NAAS, President Pearson was accused of taking money from a gun and ammunition company to support a larger bag limit and a longer hunting season—these claims were denied heavily. Pearson was also accused of hiding or withholding fund procurement and spending—essentially, the ECC was making sure to

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<sup>37</sup> Letter from Rosalie Edge to G.T. Pearson, Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> 1929, Box 1, Folder 9, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>38</sup> Letter from Rosalie Edge to G.T. Pearson, Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> 1929, Box 1, Folder 9, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver, Colorado.

point out his deceitful behavior. Several NAAS members believed the ECC to be unfounded, angry, deceitful, and self-serving, however, those who were neither members of the Audubon Society or the ECC (which did not have a membership) called truth to what the ECC was claiming about Pearson. In one instance, a man in Kansas wrote to her “ I encourage you to feel that you have only made a fine beginning and that you will gain the end sought. . .Be patient, deliberate, grim and strong for you are right.”<sup>39</sup> Rosalie’s actions were that of a noble woman with a cause, she was to fight the long fight.

Rosalie created her own way of activism in the conservation world, it was quite different than that of conservation groups of the past. The differences are what set her apart, made them more successful, and in her own words, “The objects and the work of our Committee are quite different from those of the Audubon Association: - We work for the protection and extension of the National Parks and forests, for which work the Association is not incorporated. We work for the preservation for mammal: for this the Association is incorporated, but entirely neglects this field. WE educate for bird, mammal and forest conservation: the Association educated for bird identification.”<sup>40</sup> Rosalie and the ECC saw their organization as a more effective active organization—they were not weighed down with job fragility or with large overhead costs or riches. To her, conservation was meant to be for anyone and everyone to pick up, not left to those in charge of a National Association who have to accommodate the opinions of all groups involved in the Association.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Letter from Thos M. Galey to Rosalie Edge, Nov 1<sup>st</sup> 1931, Box 1, Folder 12, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>40</sup> Edge to Elliot, 25<sup>th</sup> march, 1936. Box 1, Folder 12, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver Public Library.

<sup>41</sup> Edge to Elliot (1936) and Edge to Kuth (1932), Folder 12, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver Public Library.

Rosalie, and the ECC, fought with the NAAS in a very upfront, and headstrong manner—this was not encouraged by everyone who supported her efforts, and she was often encouraged to calm her arguments and just actions. The reasons for doing so were simply that if she were to be more friendly with the association rather than appearing as though there is animosity, she could get the association to be rendered “soft-soaped,”<sup>42</sup> and more would be accomplished. Several letters commend her for her brave and courageous militant actions while also condemning them.

The fighting spirit that Rosalie, and the ECC, carried was a main concern and conflict between the two organizations. Rosalie, Van Name, and their allies saw that the Audubon Association and those around it were doing almost nothing to fight for the protection of wild birds—they cared about the education and identification of song and game birds, but rarely of birds of prey or mammals like they supposedly intended. This militant attitude brought people from the Audubon’s list to Rosalie—and even if they did not join the ECC’s fight, they still withdrew their annual donations—which was devastating to the NAAS.

The mistrust of the NAAS was not a new issue, but it does seem that Rosalie stirred the largest rally against them in 1930. When they were shunned and ridiculed at the annual meeting—after which she realized there would be no amicable resolution and rejoining. Several scientists and researchers reached out to her after she stood to ask and raise questions at the 1930 meeting—most of whom remained supporters and educators to Rosalie, because she could print and sign the things they were unable to.<sup>43</sup> These

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<sup>42</sup> John Kuerzi to Edge, Nov 5<sup>th</sup>, 1932, Box 1, Folder 12, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver Public Library.

<sup>43</sup> Letter from h. .deforest to Rosalie october 29, 1930, Box 1, Folder 2, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver, Colorado.

NAAS doubters had found a voice that was unafraid to point out the misuse of trust that members held and donated to the association.

Rosalie Edge's storm against the Audubon largely had to deal with a misuse of funding, or of a sneaky deal in the board of directors. Most of all, she was distrustful of G.T. Pearson, who had been in the position as president of the Association since 1920. His earlier dealing in the conservation world made her weary of his motives and of his actions. G.T. Pearson had apparently started out like many men in the conservation world, as an avid hunter/collector of bird specimen.<sup>44</sup> He also accepted a donation from Winchester Repeating Arms company of \$125,000 that was to the NAAS in exchange for Pearson's work in a game-protection association. Not only are these opposing forces, to have a major donor who can sway a vote have special interest in only a particular kind of animal being protected, but also now Pearson's salary was being fed from this donation as well. Pearson's salary doubled after he makes this deal.

Rosalie starts to publicly question Pearson's leadership and guidance after their encounter in 1929, and was met with both encouragement and opposition. In her letter to a Mrs. Walker in 1932, she both calls out inconsistency in the treasurer reports—which she states have a discreet fur-business operation out of Rainey Sanctuary labelled as “rentals.”<sup>45</sup> The ECC wanted the members of the Audubon Association to see what was happening with their dues and make an effort to change the way the organization worked. She has members addressing the Audubon Directors with similar questions about

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<sup>44</sup> R. J. Ohara, “T. Gilbert Pearson (1873–1943),” T. Gilbert Pearson (1873-1943) and Peabody Park at UNCG, accessed April 17, 2023, <http://rjohara.net/peabody/pearson>.

<sup>45</sup> Edge to Mrs. Walker for appeal for proxies, Oct. 14<sup>th</sup> 1932, Box 1, Folder 8, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver, Colorado.

their spending habits. Yet she also has opposition from members like E.W. Nelson who claim her fight is unfounded and full of fallacies and malice.<sup>46</sup>

Rosalie also makes a very important distinction, although Pearson may have been at the forefront of misused funds, the ECC does not wish to dismantle the NAAS. The ECC intends to help fix the NAAS towards a conservation minded future. In the same letter to Mrs. Walker as mentioned earlier, called the association a “wonderful organization,” an “efficient body,” and says that the association did used to have a good name for itself. Rosalie did not question of challenge the good the Audubon Society could do, her qualms come from the lack of doing anything by the association.<sup>47</sup> By 1932, Pearson’s commission from donations had been halted—a relief and a cleanup job according to Rosalie.<sup>48</sup> She saw this change as means of bringing the good name of the association back.

Rosalie’s letters often relied on the good conscious and effort of the ECC rather than the bonds or relationships between other people.<sup>49</sup> In a letter to a Mr. Carroll, Rosalie tries to reason that while he may be an Audubon sympathizer, how can he support so diligently an association that has so many changes needed to it for it to be efficient? She told Mr. Carrol, just as she did to Mrs. Walker, that the ECC is looking for

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<sup>46</sup> H.W. DeForest to Palmer on December 10<sup>th</sup> 1930 , and E.W. Nelson to “Fred”, October 24, 1932. Box 1, Folders 5 and 8, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>47</sup> Edge to Mrs. Walker, Oct. 14<sup>th</sup> 1932, Box 1, Folder 8, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>48</sup> Edge to Mr. Carrol, January 29<sup>th</sup>, 1932, Box 1, Folder 8, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>49</sup> N.A. to Edge, n.d. letter detailing the reasons and experiences of the good work of the ECC, and the lack thereof from the NAAS. Box 1, Folder 8, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver, Colorado.

reform, not dismemberment.<sup>50</sup> The fact that the ECC is strictly working towards reformation instead of breakdown may be a reason why the ECC never had any members to begin with, they believed themselves to be members of the Audubon association and wished to change it from within.<sup>51</sup>

The members and directors of the NAAS had very mixed reactions to Rosalie Edge's activism and to her, Brant's, and Van Name's writings. Many of the issues that the ECC brought to the association were about those in charge of it. Pearson was a slow-poke, who shuffled his feet when it came time to answer questions or to rally members for a cause. The Directors were enabling and encouraging this kind of behavior by needing a vote or forcing a vote for most everything to happen, by deciding everything at an annual meeting, and by having conflicting ties to outside organizations. There are two kinds of reactions to the ECC that are present in the archives and letters, the first is admiration and encouragement to the ECC, the second is complete disrespect and a disdain for the ECC—sometimes Rosalie Edge specifically, not just the ECC.

Thousands of people were members of the National Association of Audubon Societies—in their reactions to Rosalie, there were generally three different actions they would take. Some people would drop their membership to the NAAS and some would both drop their NAAS membership and start donating to the ECC. The kind of actions came up in the form of letters, memos, or even the pamphlets sent out by the Audubon

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<sup>50</sup> Edge to Mrs. Carrol, January 29<sup>th</sup>, 1932, Box 1, Folder 8, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>51</sup> Edge to Mr. Wiley, letter about misconceptions and proxies, about how to change the Audubon society from the inside. Oct 13<sup>th</sup>, 1932, Box 1, Folder 16, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver, Colorado.

Society itself. In the first kind of reaction style, one name stood out in the letters, that of Henry Carey.

Henry Carey wrote to Rosalie in 1930, after her first meeting with the Audubon demanding answers to the pamphlet Dr. Van Name wrote and the ECC was formed. His opening line detailed pride and trust in Rosalie, “The goodness you—fearless you—are on the job!”<sup>52</sup> He offered Rosalie advice in his next letter on the following day, on how to demand a resignation from the Directors and from Pearson—he adds in a more democratic method of having members sign a formal piece of writing.<sup>53</sup> Mr. Carey’s letters often contain mention of more “diplomatic” approaches to the Audubon fight, how to overcome as many holes in their plan as possible, as well as sort through how to go about obtaining legal help. He also helps build the case against Mr. Pearson and Mr. Chapman—both of whom hold positions of power in the NAAS.

A magazine printed during this time called “Bird Lore” would regularly print interviews or writings from those on the NAAS board. Carey points out a discrepancy that Rosalie and Van Name had been writing about. This was in a letter to Rosalie from Carey:

“The current Bird-Lore shows the lack of policy among the officers of the Association. On one page Chapman states (in a review of *The Cardinal*) that the interests of the sportsmen and the Nature-lover are unalterably opposed—that they cannot see eye to eye. He also seems to imply that the Nature lovers must more or less surrender. On a later page an account not

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<sup>52</sup>Henry Carey to Edge, Oct. 6, 1932, Box 1, Folder 1, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver, Colorado

<sup>53</sup> Carey to Edge, Oct. 17<sup>th</sup>, 1932, Box 1, Folder 1, Rosalie Edge papers, DPL, Denver, Colorado.

signed, but surely written by Pearson, states that the National Association has been working in harmony with the sportsmen (National Committee for Wild-Life Legislation). It would seem that “harmony” means surrender. Much could be made of this at the Meeting. One of the chief charges against Pearson is that he has not been honest enough to see that these two points of view cannot be reconciled. Mr. Chapman is right and Mr. Pearson is wrong. Why, then does Mr. Chapman allow Mr. Pearson to continue to “harmonize”?”<sup>54</sup>

Within the reaction type of complete disdain and , a Mr. J. Wiley falls into the category flawlessly. In the recorded communication between Rosalie and Mr. J. Allen Wiley, the first letter in the folder is from Rosalie in reply to a former letter of his—she asked him to explain and state exactly what he meant in a previous letter. She said “I realize. . .not gentlemen would write as you do unless he is both willing and able to state with the most specific clearness exactly what is meant and give full information to the source of his information.”<sup>55</sup> At first, this could be assumed to be about a type of conservation miscommunication, but the snippet from his letter that she includes is a shady reference to the fact that Rosalie and her husband Charles are not living together, but she still uses his name. “Naturally the other side looks up the personal record and

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<sup>54</sup> Carey to Edge, Oct 21<sup>st</sup>, 1930. Box 1, Folder 1, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>55</sup> Edge to Allen pg. 1, March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1933, Box 1, Folder 16, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver, Colorado.



even the domestic life of the assailer and that is what the strong adherents of the management have done regarding yourself.”<sup>56</sup>

These letters between Wiley and Rosalie also give an incredible number on how many people were reading and siding with the ECC on the debate of the Audubon Society. Almost 3000 NAAS members withdrew from the association because of what the ECC was pointing out. Wiley saw the connection between these two as a disgrace to the committee, that if Rosalie and the ECC cared for the Audubon Society as much as they said they did, then they should be helping to grow the organization. What Rosalie had been trying to do through her activism was to call out the inconsistencies of the NAAS leaders—why would she mourn when members realized the misuse of money they were sending in? There is such an interesting line here for Rosalie, on one hand, Wiley makes a point that the defamation of the association should not be a win for the ECC, but Rosalie’s activism was making a difference. To her, the only way to get at the Audubon Association was through the money. So, this exodus of members should be one of their telling and formidable accomplishments.

Of the ECC’s accomplishments and interactions, there are a few that stand out more than others. For Rosalie, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary became her largest legacy—it still serves to protect and ward hawks in Pennsylvania today. Hawk Mountain was a hunting ground on “Kittattiny Ridge” that was supposed to be bought by the NAAS in 1933-34, but had still been unbought in the spring of the following year. Rosalie had finally trusted that the NAAS would do the best things for these hawks, and establish the world’s first sanctuary for birds of prey, but they had failed her hopes expectations once

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<sup>56</sup>Edge to Allen pg. 2, March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1933, Box 1, Folder 16, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver, Colorado.

again. Instead, thousands of hawks continued to die every year during the hunting season, with hunters coming in droves and shooting at anything that moved in the sky.

However, Rosalie Edge, upon learning that the NAAS had not yet purchased it, went and procured a lease for the mountain which she then was to buy at 2.50 an acre.<sup>57</sup> Again, Dr. Van Name paid for the initial cost of the property on the basis of a loan—one that would remain completely anonymous.<sup>58</sup> After this initial payment, she still had a couple thousand dollars left to pay off to own the mountain. She initially reached out to the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club (DVOC), the NAAS, and other wealthy Pennsylvanians to secure the funds. The DVOC met and did not allocate a single dollar to the ECC in the final procurement of Hawk Mountain, but rather they gave the money to Mr. Baker of the NAAS in the desire that the NAAS would take over hawk mountain instead of the ECC.<sup>59</sup>

Only a few years before this, Rosalie and VanName were made aware of the use of steel traps in one of the sanctuaries under the NAAS's supervision, Rainey Sanctuary. Rosalie, "had not the least intention in the world of handing Hawk Mountain over to an association which steel-traps on its chief sanctuary,"<sup>60</sup> in reference Rainey sanctuary. Mr. Baker had taken over as executive director of the NAAS and his first action was to send a letter to the ECC detailing their thanks and commendation to the committee for purchasing Hawk Mountain.<sup>61</sup> His second action to the ECC was to sweep the sanctuary into the NAAS's control. Rosalie let no such thing occur, and wrote out to anyone that

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<sup>57</sup> Furmansky, pg. 168.

<sup>58</sup> Furmansky pg. 168.

<sup>59</sup> Hawk Mountain Correspondence 1934, Box 1, Folder 6, Rosalie Edge Papers, DPL, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>60</sup> Letter from RE to MB nov 10, 1934, jhma- hawk mountain sanctuary archive.

<sup>61</sup> Letter from john h baker to Rosalie. nov 9, 1934. In hawk mountain sanctuary archive.

would listen, and she slowly built up a donation base for the sanctuary. Dr. Van Name changed his \$500 loan into a donation, the NAAS gave her a \$1200 donation that was agreed upon before Mr. Baker stole her donors, and letters from people in the nation far and wide came in with donations and words of encouragement.

## HER LEGACY

Hawk Mountain became a solid ground for Rosalie to stand upon in her conservation work. Thousands of students came to witness the migration of the hawks, to count the number of birds and species overhead, and to witness the effort of the ECC. The charge of 15 cents for admission was enough to cover the taxes on the property, as well as the living expenses of the two wardens of the sanctuary: the Brouns. Hawk Mountain's sanctuary became a place of encouragement and inspiration for the next generation of conservationists. Lead by the Broun couple through the sanctuary and to the ridge to see the birds in action, many of those who went away with a sense of wonder.<sup>62</sup>

Rosalie Edge fought with diligence and ferocity. She did not earn a salary from her work, and did not take credit for these accomplishments after she was through. Her work spanned the entire country, both as a conservationist within the Audubon Society and an environmentalist with the ECC. Her work through the ECC started reform in the Audubon Society through a change in leadership, type of activism, and in how it spent its time and money. While she stayed on a defensive streak with the Audubon Society for close to 30 years, she did eventually make peace with the Association. She attended a banquet at the near-end of her life, and she received a standing ovation for her work from the attendees.

She believed in the need for the natural world to be as close to what it was like before man meddled with it, that the hawks as well as the doves deserved a space to live.

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<sup>62</sup> Furnmansky, pg 187.

Rosalie Edge took the money and the economics out of conservation, she earned nothing for her work—and insisted that volunteering and acting freely were the best way to make change. “In her memoir, she had commended volunteerism as the most meaningful way to bring about change. ‘I beg each one to keep conservation as his hobby, to keep his independence, his freedom to speak his mind,’ she had written years before. She had seen too many professionals become jaded or fall captive to special interests. She, on the other hand, had spoken freely. There would always be a need for those who could do that, she warned.”<sup>63</sup> This attitude and ability to make a lasting impression without the slightest bit of recognition is what led to Van Name crowning her as “the only honest, unselfish, indomitable hellcat in the history of conservation.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> N.A., “Rosalie Edge, Conservation Hero,” *Conservation Sense and Nonsense*, September 12, 2014, <https://milliontrees.me/2014/09/12/rosalie-edge-conservation-hero/>.

<sup>64</sup> Van Name’s description of Edge appeared in Robert Lewis Taylor, “Oh, Hawk of Mercy!” *The New Yorker*, April 9, 1948.

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