

Ralph Swanson

Compiled by Jacinda Marquis, UWSP, 2024

[Click here for digital Ralph Swanson records from the Forest History Association of Wisconsin Biographical Files at the UWSP Nelis R. Kampenga University Archives, Collection 104A.](#)

Biographical Summary

Ralph Swanson

(May 24, 1920-August 5, 2020)

Ralph was born on May 24, 1920, in Iron Mountain Michigan. He graduated from high school there in 1938 and attended Michigan Tech University, graduating in 1942 with a degree in forest production. He served in the U.S. Army during World War II and was sent to England, North Africa and Italy. After returning home he met a former war nurse named Harriet Nelson and they were married September 21st, 1946. After deciding to reside in Ashland Wisconsin, Ralph then began his lifelong career in forestry.

Swanson spent his early career working for Consolidated Papers Inc. supervising the pulpwood rafting and loading operations. He then became the Central Wisconsin District Superintendent, Assistant Manager of the Timberlands Division, and in 1974 became the Manager. He spent a total of 39 years working with Consolidated Papers and retired in February of 1985.

Ralph served in many positions including, the American Pulpwood Association, the Wisconsin Paper Council, Society of American Foresters, and the Governor's Council on Forestry Productivity, Forest Industries Development Committee, Michigan-Wisconsin Timber Producers Association, Minnesota Timber Producers Association, Wisconsin Forestry Plan Advisory Committee, the Forest History Association of Wisconsin, and the advisory committee for the Institute of Wood Research at Michigan Tech University. Over the course of his career, Ralph spent countless hours contributing and leading many local, regional, and national committees addressing and influencing policy and legislation affecting the forestry community and industry. His commitment to his previous role in forest management continued into his retirement where he settled on West Birch Lake in Winchester. The 45-acre site became an annual operation for making maple syrup, and many students were invited to visit the Swansons land to learn how it was made.

Ralph received many recognitions, including:

- Fellow Distinction of the Society of American Foresters
- Lumberjack of the Round Table
- the Award of Merit from the MI-WI Timber Producers Association
- Wisconsin Society of American Foresters
- John Macon Award
- American Pulpwood Association-50 Years of Service Award
- Inducted into the Wisconsin Forestry Hall of Fame in August 2020.

<https://www.wisaf.org/wisconsin-forestry-hall-of-fame/2020-ralph-g-swanson/>

UWSP Archives

The Nelis R. Kampenga University Archives and Area Research Center at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point holds a portion of Ralph Swanson's personal and business records, which is described in the folder list below.

For access to the collection please contact the archives at 715-346-2586 or email archives@uwsp.edu.

Collection 104A - Forest History Association of Wisconsin – Biographical Files

Documents in Binder 1 Folder 1:

- Private Forestry and Suggestions for It's Advancement in the Lake States
- Written interviews with Ralph Swanson (2002)
- Photographs of logging
- Monthly Review: Pulp and paper in the upper lakes region (1956)
- Hoisting Pulpwood (1872-1972)
- Maps for all locations providing logs for consolidated rafts (1923-1972)
- Consolidated News: First Crop from Pulpwood Plantations Forrest County (1968)
- Proceedings of Seventeenth Annual Meeting of Forest History Association (1992)

Documents in Binder 1 Folder 2:

- Timber Producer publication (1993)
- Wisconsin's Water Transportation of Timber
- History of Pulpwood Rafting by Ralph Swanson (1978)
- News Releases by the Consolidated Papers (1971)
- Documents and articles about rafting on Lake Superior
- Photographs and Memories
- Timber Bulletin: End of the Rafting Era

Documents in Binder 1 Folder 3:

- Pulpwood Rafting Operation Ending (1972)
- Last of pulpwood unloaded.
- Publication from Minnesota World Port
- Historical Reflections
- Family participation in the rafting operation
- Photographs and post cards
- Voyages of the Butterfield (1994)
- The Near Sinking of the John Roen III

Documents in Binder 2 Folder 2:

- A copy of the Wisconsin Forestry Hall of Fame

- The Daily Press: days of pulpwood rafting are remembered
- News Chips: Logging Tools Given to Historical Museum
- Timberland Division manager retires: Swanson witnessed many changes
- Sugarloaf Cove Guide: restoration, ecology, ecosystem, cultural history
- Publication of the Sugarloaf Interpretive Center Association
- Awards received by Ralph Swanson

Documents in Binder 2 Folder 2:

- The Washburn Times (1886)
- Consolidated Papers News Release (1968)
- Pulpwood Production and Saw Mill Logging (1963)
- Proceedings of the Twenty-ninth Annual Meeting of the Forrest History Association (2004)
- Star Lake: From Boom Town to Ghost Town
- Wisconsin-Upper Michigan State Boundary Surveys
- Releases from the Pulpwood Passage