

Former Milford Man Heads Wildlife Education Division in North Carolina

The following story appeared in a Raleigh North Carolina newspaper, *The News and Observer*, on Sunday morning, October 16. Rod Amundson is a former Milford man and is the son of Mrs. Tilda Amundson of Milford and the brother of Vaughn Amundson, also of Milford, who lives on a farm west of town. We quote from the *News and Observer*:

During a study hour, the teacher of the eighth grade began asking the various pupils what they wanted to do in life.

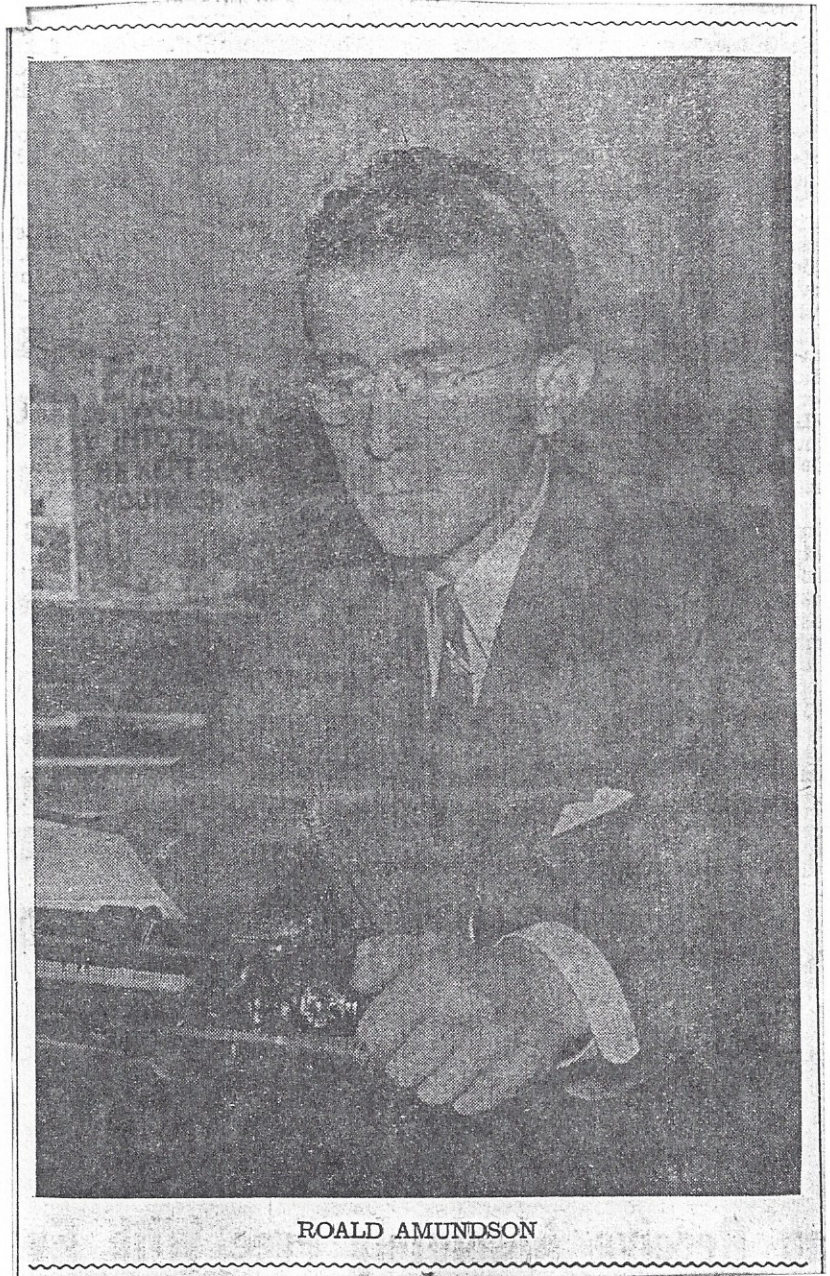
It was a rural school, and a lot of them said they supposed they'd stay on the farm. Some wanted to be teachers.

At last, one boy said he thought he'd like to be a zoologist.

After the surprise at hearing such a big word had worn off a bit, most of the pupils laughed a lot.

"I think they all laughed because they didn't think I knew what a zoologist was," Rod Amundson says now with a typical grin, "and maybe I wasn't too sure then what a zoologist really was. But, I did know it had something to do with birds and animals, and I did know that I wanted to study them."

In the years since, Rod Amundson has become something of a zoologist, and he does know now exactly what the word means. And, he's still in the bird and animal business and loves it more every day.



And, his particular end of the bird and animal business now is that of education. He is, and has been since 1948, chief of the education division of the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. In that job, he has traveled his adopted state from one end to the other, and has become known to countless Tar Heels through his Wildlife magazine, his newspaper writings, radio appearances and TV appearances.

Roald Amundson – he has no middle name and “Rod” is a nickname – came by his love of wildlife through his farm background.

He was born on January 29, 1913, on a farm near Milford, Iowa, one of 9 children of John Amundson and Tilda Matheson Amundson. His father is dead, but his mother still lives in Milford.

His brothers and sisters are Geno, Mrs. Harold Hobbs, Mrs. James Bruce, Alton and John, all of Prineville, Oregon; Justin of Portland, Oregon; Mrs. A.F. Smith of Manning, Iowa; and Vaughn of Milford, Iowa.

Young Rod Amundson grew up on a farm that had been in his family since his maternal grandfather homesteaded it. It is a corn and hog farm of 160 acres, and is now farmed by a brother.

Amundson remembers well and with gratitude his days as a boy on the farm. “We had a big family, and we had a lot of fun,” he says, “having a lot of good times together.” The farm included 50 acres of wooded land, with a river running through it, and he learned there to love fishing and hunting.

He helped with the farm work, too, and remembers that his first job was that of bringing in firewood.

Amundson got a good grammar and high school education in a consolidated school a mile and a half from home. He picked up his nickname there too, because he played the part of the villain in a class play, and Rod was the villain’s nickname.

His mother was – and is – quite a bird watcher, and Amundson feels that she is the one who really got him interested in wildlife.

Amundson finished high school in 1930. Farm prices being what they were in that and succeeding depression years, he didn’t get to go to college right away, even though he never gave up the idea of getting a college education.

Actually, it was six year after high school graduation before he could enter college.

During those six years, he took any work he could find, and tried to have something for college. He did farm labor at a dollar a day plus room, board and laundry. He worked for an oil company. And, he worked on the home farm.

Finally, in January of 1936, he entered Iowa State College at Ames. He worked his way through by such jobs as baby sitting, washing dishes, cutting grass, doing NYA work, etc. His oldest brother, Geno, was with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service then and kept encouraging Rod to keep up with his zoology studies.

During the summers, Amundson worked on the Fish and Wildlife game refuge with his brother.

He had to drop out of college for one year, but in 1941 got his degree of B.S. in wildlife management.

In May of 1941, Amundson went to work with the Nebraska Game, Forestation and Parks Commission as a field biologist on a habitat restoration, kept up his bird watching, and built a bird project. He had charge of an eight-county area to develop for pheasants, planting brush areas for food and winter cover. From that post, he went into the Commission's main office in Lincoln, Nebraska, to set up an education division.

In March of 1943, he was drafted into the army, and was assigned to a dog training outfit because of his previous experience with dogs. He found the duty very interesting.

Amundson was in a detachment which was sent to North Africa with dogs to be tried for work in mine detection.

"They found out the dog idea wouldn't work," Amundson says with a smile, "so they took away the dogs and gave us ex-dog handlers prods and we wound up in the mine fields instead of the dogs."

That amounted to an instant transfer to the combat engineers and he spent the next two years in that branch of the service in North Africa and Italy. He was a technical sergeant when he got out of the army in January of 1946.

Once out of the service, Amundson headed back to his education division job with the Nebraska Commission, finishing the task of setting up the division. He was the only man in it, incidentally.

In 1948, Clyde P. Patton, head of the then-new North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, was seeking key men for the new agency. He asked a friend in Pennsylvania if he knew of a good man for the education division. The friend knew of Amundson, and gave his address to Patton, who sent him an application blank.

Amundson filled it in, and got the surprise of his life when he was hired sight unseen.

He came to North Carolina on April 1, 1948, during the early days of the Commission, and has been with it every since. His enthusiasm for North Carolina, and for this state's current game and fish resources and for its prospects for the future has grown continually since he came to this state.

In his message on wildlife conservation, Amundson points out that hunting and fishing are worth a hundred million dollars a year to the state, a figure that is increasing as more and more people become interested in hunting and fishing.

His job entails a lot of traveling and a lot of talks. He also does a free rod and gun column for Tar Heel newspapers.

Amundson was married on June 4, 1938, to Miss Helen Witmer of Tipton, Iowa, and they have one son, David Allen. Mrs. Amundson is organist at Fairmont Methodist church, here, and Amundson is a member of the church's board of stewards. He is a member of the Sertoma Club, the State Outdoor Writers Association, the Sportsmans Club of America, and the Southport Charter Boatman's Association.

One of his hobbies is playing "barrel house" piano, by ear. He likes yard work, and has built a terrace in the yard of their home here. He has feeders in his yard.

He likes fishing and hunting, but finds his job keeps him from getting in as much of that as he'd like. He prefers duck and goose hunting and has promised himself that he'll get to do some of that this year.

Amundson classes himself as a "pretty good shot, generally able to get the limit, but sometimes way, way off."

And, he says with a grin, that he has quit dove hunting.

"I went just once," he explains. "Got four birds in five shots and decided to quit while I was ahead."

ROALD AMUNDSON

An article from *The Raleigh Times* – Tuesday, September 27, 1955

Wild Side of Life

By Bette Elliott

ROD AMUNDSON, the Iowa farm boy who grew up to be one of North Carolina's top field and stream experts, is luckier than most people – he's always found a job to match his talents.

As editor of the Wildlife Commission's monthly magazine, Amundson brings with him a lifetime of proximity with nature and her creatures.

"I hunted with a rifle at an age that most boys were still carrying BB guns", he said. He spent his youth training hunting dogs, roaming through the lush-game-abundant fields of his home, and fishing in Lake Okoboji, a famed Northern Iowa summer resort.

He was also a versatile writer, and entertained the local newspaper readers with tales of his hunting adventures. His greatest ambition was to be a sports columnist.

After winning a degree in Conservation Journalism at Iowa State, Amundson went with the state's Fish and Game Commission. Then came "Greetings" from the President.

Now, the biggest gripe among GI's is the Army's strange habit of assigning civilian cooks to the Infantry and truck drivers to the kitchen.

Amundson was one of the Army's successes – he was assigned to the highly specialized Canine Corps.

He was in his element, training the remarkable dogs to be mine detectors, sentries and "suicide troops", an experiment in sabotage that was probably not used in combat. The dogs were taught to carry about 100 pounds of TNT on their backs. They were supposed to be used in the Pacific Islands to blow up Japanese bunkers, thus saving many soldiers' lives.

ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO, one of Amundson's pupils, a border collie named "Jigger" was honored with a military funeral in Durham.

Amundson came to the Wildlife Commission in 1948. That year the circulation of the magazine was 1,600. Under his editorship, the circulation has grown to just under 50,000. In 1952, the magazine won an award for typography and layout.

Even though the magazine takes up most of his time, the editor has realized his boyhood dream of being a sports columnist – his "Rod and Gun" appears in *The Raleigh Times* and a dozen other papers.