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Steve Chitty, Michael and Karen Yates

## In Memory of James Nelson Rice — by Al Nye

This past September 7, 1989, American falconry lost one of its pioneer founders when my close and oldest falconry friend, James Nelson Rice—Jim Rice as he affectionately was known—passed away at the age of 76 years. To say that he was an ardent falconer would be an understatement. He practiced the sport with a devotion equaled only by his love for the peregrine falcon. I doubt that Jim was ever without a peregrine since taking his first one from a Susquehanna River cliff in 1937. I recall the first time we met. It was a wintry evening in February, 1935 in Philadelphia. The occasion was a meeting of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club at the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences where I had just given a talk on American falconry. Black Mistress, an *eyas anatum* peregrine, was on the fist as a handsome guy came up, introduced himself, and said he was eager to get started in falconry. From the look in his eyes, Jim Rice was in love with peregrines from then on. Then and there began our friendship that spanned over half a century. Even though in later years we lived in cities miles apart, there was never a month that went by that we were not in touch with one another. This continued right up to the time of his passing.

Jim Rice was first and foremost a gentleman. He was kind, considerate, and soft-spoken. His friendliness and enthusiasm were boundless. Brian McDonald, who spent many trapping seasons with Jim on the beach at Assateague Island, summed it up beautifully when he wrote recently, “Jim was always the social creature— I can’t begin to convey the graciousness, kindness and friendly spirit he radiated For all the years we trapped the same beach together, either in the same vehicle or separate, Jim was the one person who I was personally most glad to see.”



Jim and Ruth Rice 1937

Jim was a pioneer of American falconry. With Doc Stabler and myself, he was a founding member of the Peregrine Club of Philadelphia in the thirties. As a lifelong resident of that area, he was the hub around which many present day Pennsylvania falconers evolved. Bob Berry refers to him as “my mentor”. Countless falconers learned the sport from Jim.

As a conservationist, Jim was always in the forefront in defense of the birds of prey. In the early days, he took an active role in campaigning against the hawk shooting that was going on at Hawk Mountain, Pennsylvania. He also was among the first to urge that all haggard falcons trapped on the beach in the fall be banded and released. Jim’s normal year with wild peregrines began with the spring check-out and banding visits to all the peregrine eyries in Pennsylvania, followed by many trapping and banding expeditions to Assateague Island in the fall.

Jim’s affection for the peregrine was such that he had no time for flying other raptors. He was particularly interested in the bird’s welfare in the wild also. From 1939 to 1960, he monitored the plight of the eastern *anatum* peregrine, and banded more *anatum* and *tundra* peregrines during that period than any other man. His data and records were a major contribution to the J.J. Hickey’s Peregrine Conference Meeting in 1969.

Aside from his falconry, Jim was a most versatile sportsman and naturalist. He loved fall upland game bird shooting over English setters that he had bred and trained. He was a knowledgeable ornithologist and birder. He was also a gardener of note, taking great pride in the produce from his garden each year. But one of his most unusual interests was the summertime hobby of breeding large moths in captivity and then releasing their offspring to the wild. *Cecropia*, *Luna*, and *Regalis* were his favorites. He would tie captive females out on trees in the evenings to breed with wild males. Then he would put the females



Ruth Rice (1913-1987)



Philco Television. Studio scene during Telecast over Station WPTZ in Philadelphia

back in cages to lay eggs, and ultimately produce young. When the latter became adults, he would release them to the wild. Jim, as a Quaker, was a believer in the Bible and the existence of a realm beyond the current one. He shared that belief, and often talked about it. So with that assurance, I am comforted with the thought that Jim is again with his beloved Ruth Rice, his life’s partner of forty-nine years. And if perchance there are peregrines in heaven, then it is a sure bet that Jim will be out flying one at dawn each day.

### ADDENDUM

Several years ago, The Peregrine Fund, with the blessing of NAFA, created the Archives of American Falconry at the World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise, Idaho, where the history and records of American falconry could be stored and maintained. To house all of the Archives documents and records that have poured in, the World Center plans to include a special room in a new wing now under construction, and most appropriately plans to dedicate this wing to the memory of Jim. It will be known as the James N. Rice Wing. I think it would be a great tribute to Jim if all falconers contributed to this splendid project.

— NAFA Journal, 1990



Jim with Cooper’s Hawk, late 1930s. Photo by R.M. Stabler







Jim with noosed passage peregrine on Assateague, Oct. 1973. Photo by Bob Berry



Jim and Al Nye, banding, 1938



Dr. Stabler with Miss Bonnie and Lady Mary, Jim Rice with Lady Lacy Belle, Dan Mannix with Tara, Mrs. Stabler with a Cooper's Hawk belonging to Mannix. ca. late 1930s.



Jim with a Haggard female on Assateague. Photo by Bob Berry



Jim with passage and intermewed female Peregrines and his beloved dogs, "Lady" and "Scuffles" (and one unknown) - 1951. Photo by Ruth Rice.



Jim and Lou Woyce, beach trapping



Jim and Al Nye attended the first national falconry meet at Media, PA 1938. This photo taken at 50th anniversary.



Jim cleaning beak of his last peregrine. Summer 1980. Jim flew his birds all year long. Photo by Patricia Sanbourn



The Rice camp on one of the last years trapping was legal on Assateague Island.



Jim with Pete Clark, trapping on Assateague Island. 1959. Photo by Ruth Rice

