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Minnesota Falconers Association, Wisconsin Falconers Association

1998 NAFA Journal

Dr. Frances Hamerstrom 1907-1998

—By Alan Beske

Honorary NAFA member Fran Hamerstrom died on August 29, 1998. She was 90 years young. Born Frances Carnes Flint December 17, 1907 in Needham, Massachusetts to a wealthy and cultured Boston family, she was tutored for a life in high society. But Fran chose another path. Early in life Fran was possessed by an insatiable curiosity and intense wonder about the natural world. She followed that passion throughout her life.

She married Frederick (Hammy) Nathan Hamerstrom in 1931. They shared adventures together for 59 years until Hammy's death in 1990.

Both Hamerstroms studied at the Game Conservation Institute of Clinton, New Jersey and then at Iowa State College, Ames, Iowa where Fran received her B.S. degree under Paul Errington in 1935. From there, the Hamerstroms studied under Aldo Leopold at the University of Wisconsin-Madison where Fran, Leopold's only female graduate student, received her M.S. degree in 1940. She was awarded an honorary doctorate of science by Carroll College, Waukesha, WI in 1961.

Fran flew her first bird, a kestrel, when she was



The house shortly after we moved in.
Note: no lilacs – very Spartan around the house.

12. Ultimately she hawked with, and was visited by, falconers from around the world. She appears on the first lists of falconers published by the Falconers' Assn. Of North America in 1942, the Falconry Club of America in 1954, and NAFA in 1962. In 1984, she was the first woman and first American elected to honorary membership in the Deutscher Falkenorden. By the '60s she was flying golden eagles and attempting to breed them. Many of her eagle experiences are described in "An Eagle to the Sky," (Iowa State Univ Press, 1970). Fran was an expert raptor trapper and her book "Birding with a Purpose, Of Raptors, Gabbons, and Other Creatures" (Iowa State Univ Press, 1984) contains many tips on trapping. Her books were often illustrated by falconer/NAFA members such as Deann De La Ronde, Robert Katona, Jack Oar and Jonathan Wilde.

Fran spent decades studying what many falconers consider the ultimate quarry and which she considered the wildest creature, the prairie chicken. On the same study area near Plainfield, Wisconsin she became curious about a mostly unexplored potential falconry bird, the harrier, and investigated its natural history for decades. Her books "Strictly for the Chickens" (Iowa State Univ. Press, 1980) and "Harrier, Hawk of the Marshes, the Hawk that is Ruled by a Mouse" (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1986) document her insights into these fascinating birds. Her long term kestrel study is still ongoing.

The Hamerstroms participated in the International Peregrine Conference in Madison in 1965 that led to the banning of DOT and at which the possibility of captive breeding to save the peregrine from extinction was first discussed. Formation of the Raptor Research Foundation in 1966, of which both Hamerstroms were very active members, was also an outgrowth of the Peregrine Conference.

Fran served as Chairman of NAFA's Legal Committee in the '60s and was instrumental in the efforts to get falconry recognized as a legal



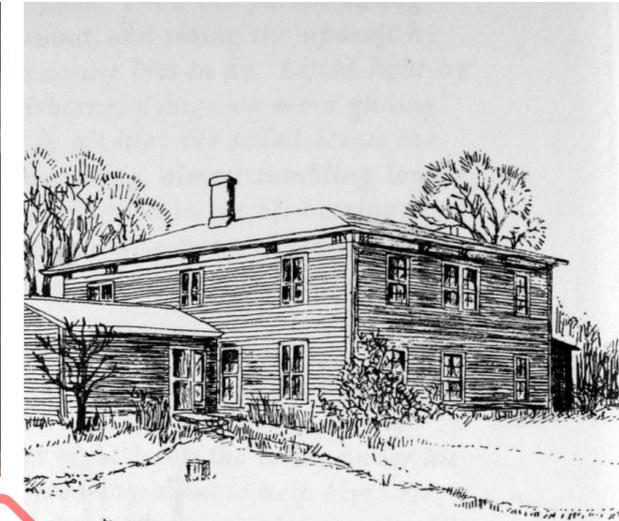
Fran at College of DuPage County, Illinois. Fran was keynote lecturer at wild bird symposium. ca. 1989



hunting sport on the federal level. She gave up flying for 5 years during this period to devote her energy to the legalization effort. Fortunately, Fran lived to see the culmination of those efforts with the legalization of falconry in all 49 of the continental states this year.

Shortly before her death, Fran was awarded falconry's most prestigious award, the joint NAFA/Archives of American Falconry North American Falconry Heritage Award.

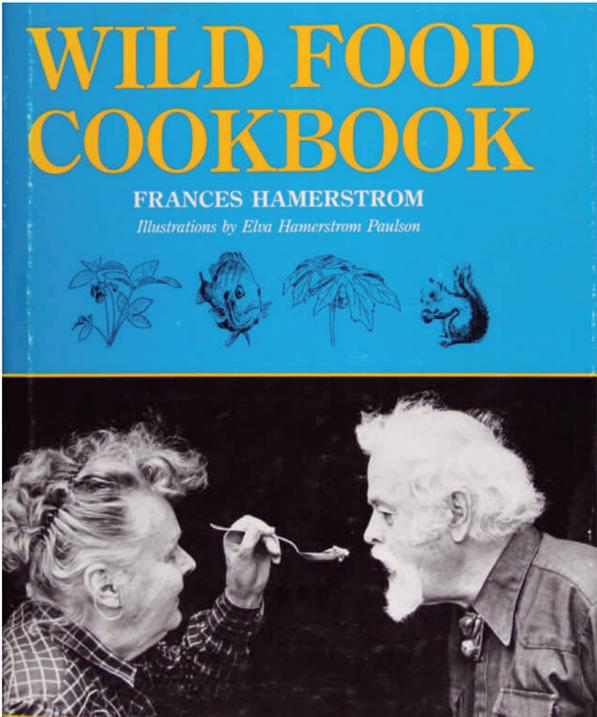
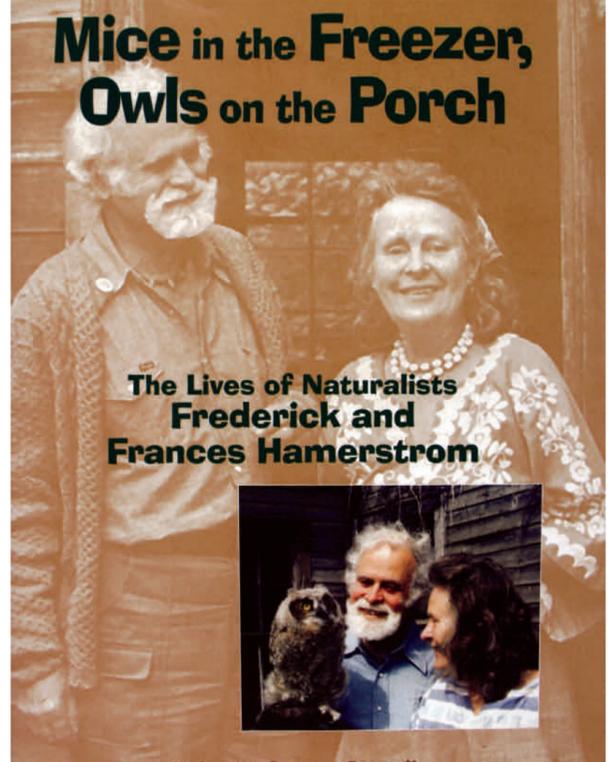
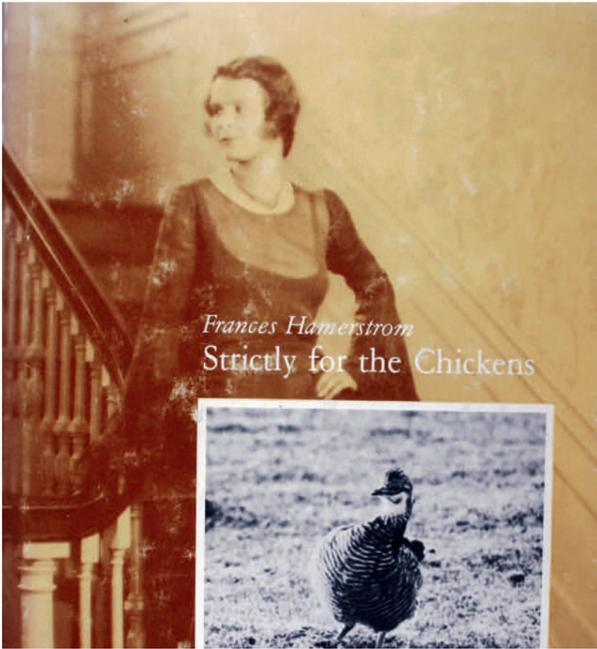
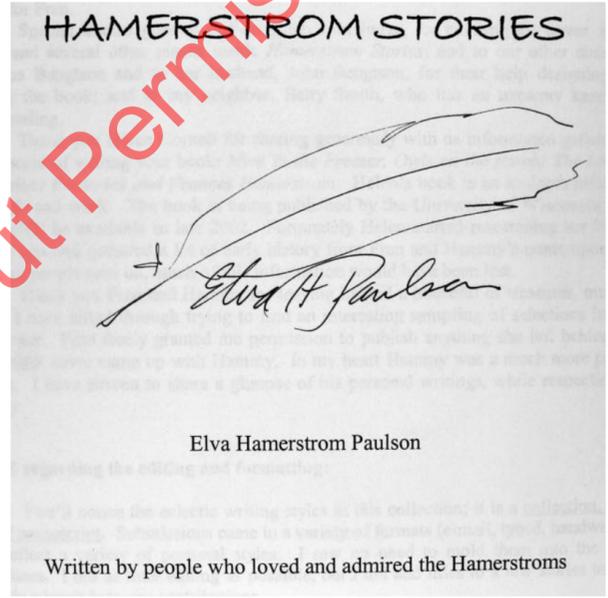
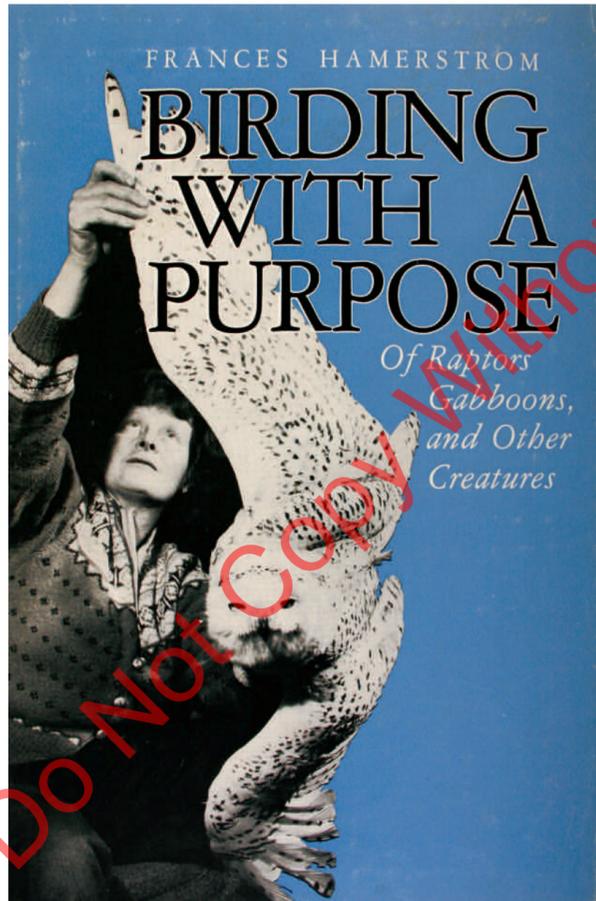
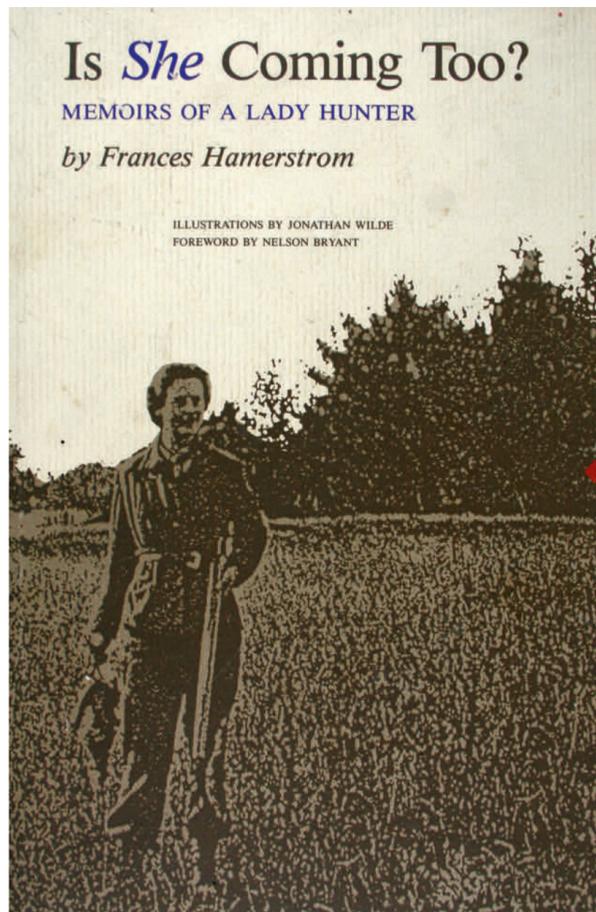
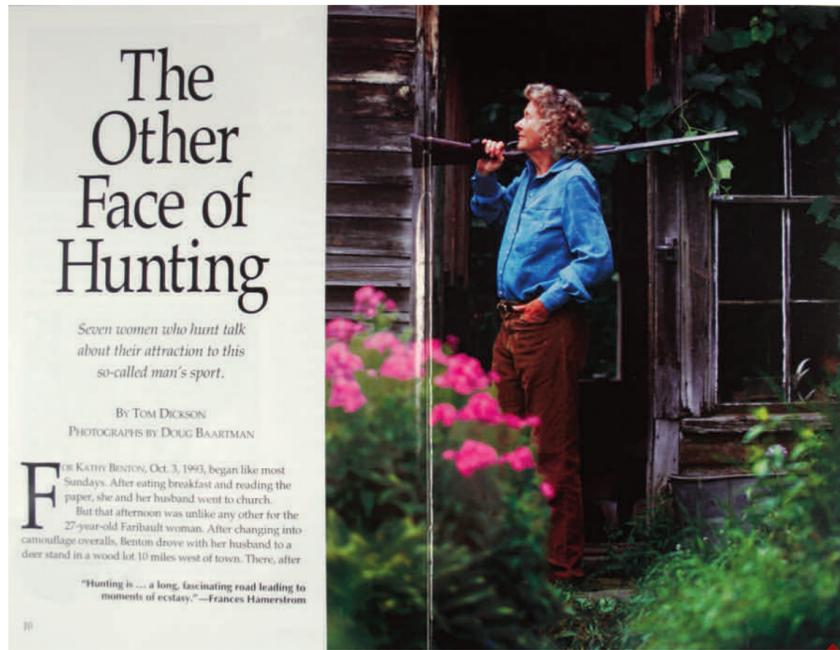
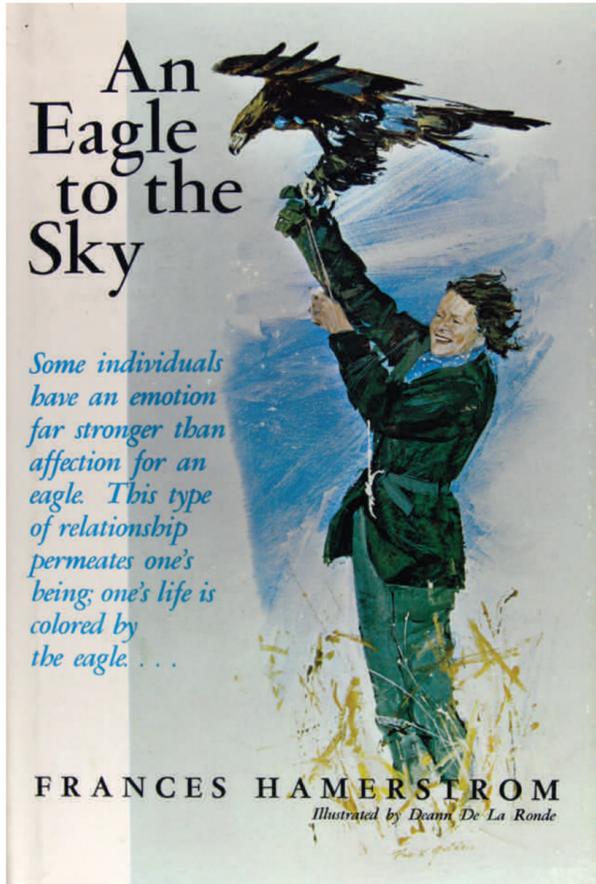
Fran is survived by her children, Alan of Arnold, MD and Elva Paulson of Roseburg, OR, one brother, Putnam Flint, Weston, MA and two grandchildren, Lita Judge and Rebecca Bengtson, as well as scores of gabbons, biologists, falconers, artists and friends who were mentored and inspired by the Hamerstrom spirit.



The Plainfield home in the late 1950s. The lawns, manicured by Hammy, the stately elms, and the woodpiles ready for the coming winter bespeak their pleasure and pride in their home.

Jonathan Wilde's 1978 watercolor, "Out Back", depicting a Sharp-shinned Hawk near Fran Hamerstrom's house in Plainfield, Wisconsin. Wilde housesat for the Hamerstroms for twelve years while "Fran and Hammy went to Texas and Mexico, partly to escape the winter and of course to work with birds -- Harris Hawks in Texas and Osprey along the Baja Gulf in western Mexico." The house is depicted in many of her books and the view would be familiar to any male guest who had to use the outhouse "out back."





L-R: Frederick and Frances Hamerstrom, Jack and Connie Oar at Oar's farm ca. 1988