

The American Eagle



By J. L. WIGGINS

There is a vital connection between the Bald Eagle and American idealism. I think perhaps our pioneer forefathers who hewed this great country out of a wilderness and came into closer contact with eagles than we today, gathered some of their inspiration and love of liberty from this noble bird.

As an evidence of this fact, on July 4th of 1778 the Continental Congress appointed a committee to decide on a Great Seal for the new country. It took Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and others six years to agree that the American Bald Eagle was the appropriate symbol, Franklin objected, preferring the turkey but Franklin was over-ruled and the Eagle won.

Since that time artists and craftsmen have carved, molded, painted and printed the Eagle in many designs. The Eagle in some form runs through every phase of our National life and is viewed daily by more Americans than any other picture or emblem.

If the average person would dip into their pockets or bill-folds, they would probably find half of the coins or bills in their possession emblazoned with its heroic figure.

Our National emblem is the king of all birds as it embodies and represents the spirit of liberty and freedom which has made our country great.

The American Bald Eagle builds a rough flat nest with sticks at the bottom, grass and soft fiber inside. They lay from two to three dull white eggs about three inches long. The grown Eagles weigh from 15 to 20 pounds and some of them standing are three feet tall. The head, neck and tail are white and the rest of the feathers and plumage are of a brownish color. Eagles live to be as much as 100 years old.

They nest in the springtime in the tallest tree available, as a rule surrounded by water. Each year after the young Eaglets are hatched and the parent birds think they are old enough to fly, they tear the old nest apart to make the young birds learn to fly, and if sometimes they cannot do so, the old birds swoop down underneath the Eaglets, allowing them to light on their backs and prevent them from falling to the ground. When the young Eaglets are old enough to care for themselves, they go off and find a location of their own.

Eagles are birds of prey and gather their food from both land and water.

They feed mostly on fish and small game, but are not true fishermen themselves. They sit on an observation post in a tree or broken snag and wait until an Osprey or fish hawk catches a fish, then they go for the real fisherman and when they crowd him too hard, the other bird drops the fish and the Eagle swoops down and catches the prize before it strikes the water.

On one occasion I witnessed a desperate effort on the part of a large Eagle as a hunter for his food. While out hunting with a friend on the shores of Albemarle Sound, we saw a wood-duck sitting on the bank screened by Myrtle bushes. On our approach it took alarm and flew out in the sound for a distance of about 300 yards. At the same time we saw a large Eagle swooping down on the duck just before making contact, the duck dived emerging from the water about twenty feet distant. The Eagle, in the meantime, had alighted on a pound net stake nearby and went for the duck again, both pursuing the same process as before. They continued for a half hour or more until the Eagle became exhausted and flew away in disgust missing a good meal.

The Bald Eagles of John's Island

There is a swampy wilderness area near Edenton, N. C., consisting of 2,000 acres bounded on the North by Federal Highway No. 17, on the East by Edenton Bay, on the South by Albemarle Sound and on the West by Chowan River. This area is known as John's Island and is heavily timbered with pine poplar, cypress, gum and juniper. In the center of this swamp, and overlooking the three waterways mentioned above, stands a huge cypress tree which is perhaps 300 or more years old. For the past fifty years, and perhaps running back many, many years before, two large Bald Eagles have annually nested in this tree and reared their young.

Early each spring, these Eagles can be seen in a field near the swamp gathering dried grass and straw to rebuild their nest, carrying off loads of grass as large as a pillow with their feet. I have seen these Eagles at a very close range when they were standing and also in flight, and their wing spread I would judge to measure from four to five feet.

I can imagine that Eagles and their offspring have been nesting and rearing their young on John's Island since the first large tree grew there and

the whole of America was a wilderness.

In connection with this article I want to relate an episode that happened on John's Island which occurred in the year 1907 and could be entitled, "Henry Ferrand and the Bald Eagle." Henry, a Negro, was a very comical and amusing character, both in manners of speech and actions. He was also a logger by trade, and at this time was cutting logs on the west side of Edenton Bay. The large trees he cut into 16-foot lengths and rolled the logs out of the swamp on skids to the water, sometimes for a distance leading into the swamp of 500 yards. This system of logging is called bull-hunching. While at work Henry saw a large Bald Eagle sitting on his observation post near the water waiting for an Osprey to catch a fish. He conceived the idea that he wanted to capture a real live Eagle, as he liked to do things out of the ordinary, so he set a steel trap on the top of the Eagle's perch and caught a large eagle by the toes of one foot. The late John C. Bond and I learned from a small boy that Henry Ferrand was down at the County dock with a large live Bald Eagle that he had caught on John's Island. Major Bond and I were both interested in Eagles, so we immediately went down to the dock and found Henry with the Eagle, bound wings and feet with a stout rope. Henry was as proud of his catch as one of the Gladiators of old was after returning from battle, but he had dearly bought the victory over the Eagle, for he showed the marks of battle all over his head, face, hands and body and his clothing was torn into shreds and tatters. The Eagle had put up a brave fight, with his wings and good foot before being subdued. Although Henry was bleeding profusely, he was prouder of his victory over the Eagle than Washington was at Yorktown and said he was going to put him in a cage and exhibit him to show his valor in subduing an Eagle. Major Bond and I pled with Henry to release the noble bird, but

he would not consent until we gave him four dollars.

We then cut the ropes that bound the Eagle; he looked at us and sat still for a moment, then winged his way straight to his habitat on John's Island.

This happened forty-three years ago and since then both Major Bond and Henry have passed on, but I hope that that Eagle, is one of those I have seen many times since, out in the fields gathering grass for a nest.

In after years Major Bond and I often discussed this episode, and we were happy to know that we were the means of giving back to an American Eagle his freedom.

March 1 Is Deadline For War Prisoner Pay

World War II veterans who were prisoners of war, or their widows, children, or parents must file claim by March 1, 1951, for the \$1.00 per day ration money due them while interned in enemy prison camps. The final date, March 1st, was fixed by law and cannot be changed by the War Claims Commission. If you or a member of your family were held as a prisoner of war during World War II, you may be entitled to these POW benefits.

Official military records list more than 133,000 members of the U. S. Armed Forces as prisoners of war. The War Claims Commission estimates that there are over 30,000 legitimate claims which have not been filed. It is most urgent that these claimants be informed of their rights and file claim without delay.

Official claim forms and assistance in filing the claim can be secured at the Chowan County Veterans Service

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CHRISTIAN CHURCH SERVICES
Services at the First Christian Church have been announced as follows by the pastor, the Rev. E. C. Alexander:
Bible School, Sunday morning at 10 o'clock; morning service at 11 o'clock; young people's meeting at 6:30 P. M.; evening service at 7:30 o'clock. Wednesday Evening Bible Class meets at 7:30 o'clock. Everyone is welcome to all services.

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