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EMMA TOFT

1891-1982

City: Baileys Harbor

County: Door

Emma Toft is known as “Wisconsin’s First Lady of Conservation” for her efforts to save an ancient forest in Door County from being destroyed by logging and commercial development.

Before Toft’s birth in 1891 in Baileys Harbor, her father had purchased more than 300 acres of ancient forest that today make up Toft’s Point. She grew up hiking on this family land and developed an understanding of the importance of nature to the well-being of the earth. Toft attended Oshkosh Normal School to become an English teacher and briefly studied nursing in Chicago. When her father died in 1919, she started a summer resort on the Toft’s Point land with her mother, brothers, and sisters. Over the next 50 years, guests from all over the country came to enjoy the natural beauty, simple living, and delicious food at Toft’s Point Resort.

Toft, affectionately referred to as “Miss Emma,” spent her life fighting to protect Toft’s Point from developers who wanted to use the land’s natural resources or turn it into an expensive, exclusive resort. Because of her work, the ancient forest at Toft’s Point remains nearly unchanged today from what it was a thousand years ago. Toft also had a lifelong friendship with fellow conservationist and famous landscape architect Jens Jensen, because of their shared goal to preserve The Ridges Sanctuary, also located in Bailey’s Harbor. In 1967, the Toft estate sold Toft’s Point to the Wisconsin Nature Conservancy, which then turned it over to the University of Wisconsin System. The UW Green Bay now cares for the area, and students go there to conduct research.

To learn more, visit womeninwisconsin.org/profile/emma-toft