

# WGS and the State Fossil: The Trilobite

**An interview with WGS member Margaret Pearson:**

By Sue Eyre

Margaret Pearson became a member of the Wisconsin Geological Society in September, 1973. One of her proudest accomplishments as a member of our organization, was getting the Trilobite (*Calymene celebra*) named as the Wisconsin State Fossil. But Margaret contributed many things to make WGS what it is today.

First, the story of the Trilobite. In October, 2022, I met Margaret at Tudor Oaks Senior Living Center, where she now lives. She told me about the three attempts -- all by members of WGS -- to get the Trilobite its status as Wisconsin's State Fossil.

In the early 1980's, a young geology student and member of WGS, Mark Shurilla, made the first attempt at a bill to name a generic 'trilobite' to the status of state fossil. Legislators were not enthused and Mark soon lost interest in the project and geology in general. He went on to pursue other endeavors.

In 1984, WGS was set to host a joint Rock and Mineral Show at State Fair Park with the Midwest Federation (MWF). Lloyd Brown was the Show Chairman and was anxious to get the Trilobite Bill passed prior to this show. Lloyd and his wife Ellen, spearheaded this attempt, but the political committee in charge was disinterested and gaveled the bill dead behind our members' backs, while the WGS delegates took a lunch break at a Madison, WI hearing.

The WGS Board of Directors asked then WGS president, Margaret Pearson to try once again in 1985, to get the Trilobite Bill passed. She acted as the chief lobbyist and even went to Washington D.C. to have lunch with then Wisconsin Senator William Proxmire to advance her case.

On April 2, 1986, then governor Anthony Earl signed the Trilobite Bill into law. Margaret Pearson and a delegation of WGS members including Harold and Luella Jeske, Sister Hosana Wilson, a Dominican nun and science teacher, along with State Representative Jeannette Bell, were present for the bill signing. They presented the governor with a trilobite specimen to mark the occasion.

Bell, who was then in her second term as a Legislator in the State Assembly, sponsored the bill at the request of her parents, the Jeske's. Bell served seven terms in the Legislature and resigned to become Mayor of West Allis in 1996. She served in this capacity for 12 years, retiring in 2008.

Margaret's other contributions to WGS are many. Here are just a few:

- President in 1983, '84, '85, '92, '93 & '94. Vice-president in 1991
- Editor of *The Trilobite* 1974 through 1984 and 1995 through the early 2000s
- Sponsored the MWF Show/Convention in West Allis in 1984

- Instrumental in forming the WGS Scholarship Fund, now the UWM Endowment Fund
- Currently serves as the club's business agent

In August, 2001, the Membership Committee of WGS named Margaret Pearson to be an Honorary Member of our organization. She maintains her regular membership status, she can vote on all matters, and may hold office, but no longer has to pay annual dues.

Thank you Margaret, for all your hard work!



Margaret Pearson in October, 2022, reading one of her historical letters regarding the Trilobite Bill



Governor Anthony Earl admires his Trilobite specimen while Margaret Pearson looks on following the Trilobite Bill signing April 2, 1986