

2025 INDUCTEE

THOMAS “HOBNAIL TOM” ALBIN EDWARDS

1899-1975



With his high level of education and artistic bent, Thomas Albin “Hobnail Tom” Edwards wasn’t your typical backcountry outfitter in the mid-20th century. But it made him a powerful advocate for wilderness when the idea of saving wilderness was still new.

Born at the dawn of the 20th century in the newly established state of Washington, Tom spent his formative years in Montana after his family moved to Choteau when he was 15. The Blackfoot Valley made an impression on young Tom as his family rode through on their way to their new homestead. He grew to love the wild lands of Montana’s Rocky Mountain Front, but he left them for Illinois to attend Millikin University.

After earning a teaching degree with an emphasis in biology and fine art, he attended Stanford University but returned to Illinois to work as a school superintendent from 1933 to 1944. But Montana always beckoned, and he returned each summer to fish and ride the backcountry. In 1936, he bought land in the Blackfoot Valley near Ovando he christened the White Tail Ranch. After spending summers building his outfitting operation there, he moved the family to Helena in 1944. He taught science and art for another 10 years before retiring to run the dude ranch and big-game hunting operation full-time.

With his love and knowledge of nature, Tom took it upon himself to educate both his students

and his White Tail Ranch guests about the creatures and history of the backcountry. Then he’d send them a yearly newsletter, *The White Tail Tattler*, where he’d reinforce those important lessons using folksy stories and whimsical hand-drawn cartoons. Tom’s ability to interpret the natural environment and make his guests feel the “hush of the land” led them not only to return time after time, but also to speak up when he needed their support.

The need for support reared its head in 1960. Lincoln locals noticed posts and flagging leading off the newly paved Highway 20—now Highway 200—and learned the Forest Service intended to build a road into the Lincoln backcountry. It was to be the first of many Forest Service roads that threatened to destroy the hush of the land. Cecil Garland, William Mayger, and Tom formed the Lincoln Backcountry Protective Association first to oppose the roads and later to lobby for the creation of the Scapegoat Wilderness. During the 12-year effort, Tom repeatedly appealed to his clients across the nation and traveled to Washington, D.C., several times to testify in favor of the Scapegoat Wilderness.

According to Tom’s son, Pen, “It can be said that without Cecil Garland, the Scapegoat Wilderness would not have happened, and without Tom Edwards, it would not have happened.”

