

In Memoriam

William Thomas Shaw

1873-1948

William T. Shaw, professor emeritus of zoology at Fresno State College, was a naturalist who began an intimate association with the out-of-doors when he was a small boy in southern Ontario, Canada, and who continued to find in nature an all-absorbing interest until the end of his 75 years.

Only a few professional biologists today can be called naturalists. William T. Shaw was outstanding in this select group because of the completeness with which he devoted his life to the study of nature. He never married. During the 20 years of his residence in Fresno he owned no local property, and the time that men generally devote to their families, gardens, and golf he gave to biology.

Most of his waking hours were spent in teaching, writing, photography, and taxidermy, in the interests of his beloved Fresno Natural History Society, and in preparing a unique series of habitat cases (*Scientific Monthly*, Feb. 1945, pp. 97-107) which reproduce typical scenes across the middle of California. Even though he was always occupied with some job in biology, he was never too busy to mount, with rare skill, a bedraggled specimen brought in by a Boy Scout, or to welcome a shy little girl who wanted to see his pet kangaroo rats.

Time and again I urged him to write the story of his 65 years as a student of nature. It would have made good reading—his 100-mile voyage down the Mississippi River in a birch-bark canoe ('95); his work as an undergraduate in Minnesota under the entomologist, Otto Lugger, at 10 cents an hour ('94-'98); his field trips, many of them with distinguished companions; the successful careers of his students; his collecting for the Museum at Oregon State College; his bird-collecting adventures in Alaska ('07 and '08) and experiences in exhibiting the collection at the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition ('09); his long service as curator of the Connor Museum at Pullman, Washington; his work at the New York State Museum ('27), mountain climbing, and ranching in Saskatchewan. Well, he would say, he might write the story someday, but right now there was too much to be done that was more important. There was that long manuscript on the birds of Washington (by Walter P. Taylor, William T. Shaw, Stanley G.

Jewett, and John W. Aldrich) to read over again, and his monograph on the Columbian ground squirrel must be completed. My insistence got me nowhere except to a surer realization that it was no use trying to influence the plans of William Thomas Shaw.

Nearly all of his life he had college loyalties: to the Ontario Agricultural College, where his father, Professor Thomas Shaw, was a teacher of agricultural subjects; to three institutions where he earned degrees—the University of Minnesota (B.Agr. '98, B.S. '99), Michigan State College (M.S. '00), and Stanford University (Ph.D. '26); and to Iowa State College, Oregon State College, the State College of Washington, the University of Redlands, and Fresno State College, where he taught. His teaching included zoology, ornithology, entomology, museum management, taxidermy, bacteriology, and botany.

All who knew William T. Shaw admired his determination. A slender, fairly tall man, he was forced to walk with a cane because of a leg crippled by infantile paralysis when he was less than a year old. In spite of this handicap he climbed mountains, explored marshes and tide pools, and trapped along rugged streams, all with never a complaint. His halting gait was slow but persistent, and as often as not he was among the first in the party to reach the summit of a climb.

Dr. Shaw's boyhood in Woodburn and Guelph, Ontario, was spent in the same region where Ernest Thompson Seton lived during his early years as a farm boy. Seton, John Muir, John Burroughs, and Donald Culross Peattie were his favorite authors. At its best his own prose was of high quality. His last letter to me, written during the final summer in Saskatchewan, contained the following paragraph:

Last week it was reported that the Cree Indians were celebrating their Sun Dance, which takes place near here. On invitation I went over, little suspecting to come suddenly upon a very memorable sight. It was evening, and, as we came to the crest of a hill, beyond and below us was a sight to remember. In a great circle lay over a hundred and sixty tipis and tents, with a great ceremonial space within. To one side lay a distant coulee tinted with evening glow, and from the camps and tipis rose grey, vertical columns of smoke. To us there arose the chant of the dancers and, what seemed best of all, the treble voices of children all over the huge circle. What a farewell to day! As dusk closed in there came distantly the call of a lark singing.

PEREZ SIMMONS

Fresno, California