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IN MEMORIAM: WILLIAM HARRY BERGTOLD¹

Born October 28, 1865—died March 19, 1936

BY ALBERT KENRICK FISHER

Plate 1

THOSE who have the desire, and are blessed with the opportunity, find Nature an overflowing spring that pours forth innumerable things of absorbing interest which give zest to life and inspiration for thought. Where a man's business also is a hobby, he is doubly blessed, because the trials of life are more easily carried with a mind at ease. All this was brought vividly to mind, when over fifty years ago at the founding of our Union, the writer was thrown among a group whom we might consider the close followers of the American pioneer ornithologists. In the informal talks among members when at ease between the organizing sessions, were heard interesting tales of their experiences and of their meetings with the still earlier ornithologists, with comment regarding their impressions of some of the more noted ones. As one of the younger founders all this was listened to with almost awed attention, and duly absorbed for future delectation. Almost immediately after the close of the A. O. U. session, its committees on migration and on the English Sparrow began collecting material. Through correspondence and advertisements in various periodicals, bird lovers were requested to cooperate by sending data relating to these two subjects in areas familiar to them. Many of the now prominent ornithologists stepped into the breach and started on the upward trend. As a district leader to receive communications, I came in contact through correspondence with many a pleasing personality who later developed into a lifelong friend. In this way I became acquainted with the subject of this paper, William Harry Bergtold, whose death on March 19, 1936, took from us a valuable

¹ Read before the American Ornithologists' Union, at Pittsburgh, Oct. 21, 1936.

The portrait accompanying this paper is from a photograph taken by Mrs. Bergtold, October, 1934.

and talented fellow member. Our close and endearing friendship commenced with correspondence relating to his migration reports sent from Buffalo, New York. In the archives of the Biological Survey we find his commendable reports dating back to 1886 on migration, breeding, and distribution of birds and the status of the English Sparrow as relating to western New York.

Our correspondence, as it went on, included more and more personal matter, so that when we later met in Denver, we had the easy feeling of being acquainted. As time passed, our friendship deepened, so that the yearly visit to Denver was looked forward to by both of us with keen anticipation. The visitor was dined, taken on automobile rides into the country to see birds, and entertained in long talks on subjects of mutual interest. Ornithology and related biological subjects and medicine, especially as it relates to the normal function of the body, were our important hobbies. As I had had intense physiological training under the renowned physiologist, John C. Dalton, I was in position to discuss rationally various points with my friend. Psychology, the intangible mystery, also was approached on occasions. We also discussed Nature's methods of solving problems, but always hesitated to criticize, knowing full well that we were seeing a few moments only of the million years in which she was framing the destinies of our world.

Through the kindness of his widow and daughter, I have had the privilege and good fortune to examine his autobiography, which he prepared especially for his daughter and two granddaughters. It is a document of two hundred typewritten pages and it should be published to give people an opportunity to read the details of an interesting life that went forward regardless of obstacles. The way his autobiography shows how nicely obstacles may be overcome and good things secured through effort when for the moment they appear hopeless, should be a stimulating example for youth to follow toward an enviable future. It always was a real satisfaction to the Doctor to reflect that no spell of religious fervor influenced his emotions and during emotionally unstable times, he was always able to keep his feet firmly on the ground. I have drawn on the autobiography for considerable material for the present paper.

The Bergtolds came originally from Bern, Switzerland. A direct ancestor settled at Groutweiller, Alsace, France, and his son, Jacob, was Doctor Bergtold's great-great-grandfather. A grandfather came to Buffalo, New York, about 1830, and the father was born there on May 28, 1835. During the Civil War he served in the Army of the Potomac and as first-lieutenant was honorably discharged at the end of two years' service.

His mother was one of those fine personalities whose greatest pleasure is in assisting their children's advancement. She gave him among other things

the greatest encouragement in the study of birds, flowers, and trees, and she was happy when she found that natural history was more than a passing hobby and was becoming a life study.

In his boyhood days, a big Newfoundland dog (a breed now seldom seen) was his constant companion, entering into sports with as much joy and zeal as his master. He strongly advised that, when possible, every boy should have a dog and thus experience the pleasure of having an uncomplaining companion and true friend. Living in a region of well-marked seasons, Bergtold and his associates had grand times in the summer, boating and swimming; and in winter, skating, playing shinney, and bob-sleighting, a combination of exercise that develops strength and endurance in the coming man or woman. When about fifteen years old, Bergtold became very much engrossed in the study of electricity. Across the street a chum, equally interested, with him put up a telegraph line between their houses, and both soon became fairly good operators. This line from time to time was extended to the homes of other interested boys and finally reached a total length of fifteen miles. In later years some of them became commercial operators, and two finally rose to high positions in a large company. From this experience, Bergtold was able to send messages until the close of his career, but in later years he was unable to translate by the sound of the incoming messages. About the same time the two chums went into photography with wet plates.

He spent the summer of 1883 in Leadville, Colorado, and made frequent trips to the surrounding mountains to study alpine plants and birds. In October he returned to Buffalo and on the 21st entered the medical department of the University of Buffalo, the youngest member of the class. Although this medical school may have lacked some prestige as compared with some larger, better-known ones, it nevertheless produced such men as Dalton in physiology, the elder Flint in medicine, Withans in chemistry, Mann in gynecology, and Roswill Park in surgery. Bergtold made good in using this school as the basis of his life work, as he rose high in bacteriology and other branches of his profession and eventually became a prominent diagnostician. On my numerous western trips I often heard him spoken of as having been called in consultation in special and obscure cases far away from Denver.

His teacher in biology in high school was Charles Linden, who guided his studies in the right direction and became a loyal friend. Linden was a German whose real name was Karl Pfitzner and who early in life ran away to sea and spent years as a sailor before the mast. His name was so confusing that he very soon changed it to Linden. His knowledge and interest in natural history finally led him to Buffalo as a teacher. He was founder and leader of the Buffalo Naturalists' Field Club, which was active for a long period and whose field excursions gave members and high-school

scholars a fine opportunity to study the local fauna, flora, and geology. These trips led to a warm and lasting friendship between Linden and Bergtold. Linden taught the young man how to skin and mount birds and took him often on special trips. Linden was an associate member of the A. O. U. and insisted that Bergtold join, which he did in 1889.

During vacation time in July 1884, he and a young friend went as guests of Mr. Linden to Cape Henry, Virginia, on a collecting trip. They stayed with the lighthouse keeper, as at that time there were no settlements within eight miles of the lighthouse. The month spent in this wild region was most enjoyable, and much of the time was devoted to shooting and skinning birds for Mr. Linden, who was studying the plumage changes of young gulls and terns. Surf bathing and visiting fishermen's shanties, where wonderful sea-food meals were served, were among the joys of the trip, and the period spent at Cape Henry was numbered among the most enjoyable events of his life. It put him in fine physical condition for the hard work of the coming winter and gave him a broader view of life.

In February 1886, he was graduated from the medical department of the Buffalo University. It was a huge satisfaction to him to be graduated at the head of his class, some of the forty-four members of which were more than double his age. He spent eighteen months in Buffalo General Hospital as intern, leaving on August 31, 1887. In 1888, when he took up pathological work in the laboratory of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, New York, he was with Dr. Prudden, a man under whom I had worked ten years earlier. After Bergtold had been in this laboratory about a month, he was made unofficial assistant in histology. While in New York, along the line of recreation beside the theatre, opera, and baseball, Bergtold began and nearly completed his "List of the Birds of Buffalo and Vicinity." The years 1891 and 1892 were busy times in his medical life, and maybe overworked him physically, for in the spring of 1893 his health was below par and an examination found tubercular baccilli to be the cause. Through the advice of his older colleagues, he went in October to Saranac Lake in the Adirondacks with Dr. Edward Trudeau. As there was little improvement in his physical condition during the next six months, he left Saranac in May 1894, and within a short time went to Denver to live and get well. This move was a fortunate one, for in about eighteen months, he wholly recovered his physical strength and was able to enter actively into professional work.

On June 20, 1898, he married Adele Darling Smith, who was born in New York City on June 5, 1868. She was the daughter of James Baker Smith, an architect and builder, who among other things did considerable construction work for the British Government on the Bermuda Islands. Two daughters were born to the Bergtolds. The elder died shortly after

birth; the younger, Louise Harriet, was his great joy, and as she developed into girlhood, became his constant companion in outdoor rambles. Her love for nature made it a recreation for him to teach her the birds and plants of Colorado.

His interest in birds began many years ago; in fact, over half a century has passed since he was electrified for the first time by the sight of a brilliantly colored bird. His first ornithological experience, which duly thrilled him, was watching a Robin in a maple tree near his window, building and shaping its nest. This avocation proved to be a perennial delight and an unbroken source of recreation. When he was about ten years old, one of his companions, somewhat his senior, frequently took him into the woods, where he shot Ruffed Grouse, Woodcock, rabbits, and occasionally a fox. On one of these hunting trips, he found a dead Blue Jay, its beautiful color amazing him so much that he took it home to his mother, who was fully as charmed as he over its lovely blue, white and gray plumage. That Blue Jay fixed the study of birds as one of his greatest and most absorbing avocations. It would seem that cases are not rare where a certain bird at an opportune time has acted as a spark in the youthful mind, to kindle the flame of interest in ornithology. In my experience a Kentucky Warbler was the guilty party that pushed me onward and upward.

When Bergtold moved to a new home on Delaware Avenue in 1877, an opportunity was given him to see more of bird life and nature in general, which he accepted with alacrity. The ten-acre yard was supplied with a well-apportioned assortment of fruit and shade trees, as were those of the other suburban neighborhoods, which furnished a wonderful rendezvous for nesting and migratory birds. This was the more enjoyable and fascinating because his good mother shared his enthusiasm in each newly found bird. Very early in this period, his father gave him Studer's book on North American birds, its chief value being that it was illustrated with colored pictures of all the birds of the eastern United States. It, together with diligent field observations, soon made him familiar with all the common birds of western New York. His progress would not have been so rapid had he not about this time learned to prepare and "make" a bird skin. It now became more and more apparent that his bird work was not a passing fancy, so his father gave him a single-barrel breech-loading shotgun with which to start making a collection of local avifauna. With the aid and encouragement of his friend and teacher, Charles Linden, he became established as an amateur ornithologist. In December 1883, Linden insisted on his becoming a member of the Buffalo Naturalists' Field Club, which brought him into a zoological and botanical atmosphere and stimulated the feeling he always had toward Nature. By 1888 he had accumulated enough data of his own and of friends to compile and write his first extensive bird

paper, "The Birds of Buffalo and Vicinity," the first list of birds of this region ever published. It was gotten out as one of the Field Club's Bulletins and also as a separate. It now is very rare and hard to obtain, even from second-hand dealers. Other papers were written to be read before the Field Club, the first being one on the English Sparrow, read in October 1887. In time he became better known and was requested to give talks to local groups of people on the birds of the region.

He became an associate member of the American Ornithologists' Union in 1889 and was raised to the rank of Member in 1913, and in 1921 to the grade of Fellow, the last being in his estimation one of the highest of any honors within his reach. He believed that this last distinction was conferred on account of his work, "The Incubation Period of Birds," a résumé of which was read at the Philadelphia meeting of the A. O. U. in 1916; the book was published a year later. The Philadelphia meeting was the first one he was able to attend, and that in Washington in 1927 was the last.

In 1896 when it became known locally that he had settled in Denver, several Colorado ornithologists called on him and made him feel welcome to their ranks as a student of Colorado birds. His first contribution to Colorado ornithology was a small list of birds recorded by him in the State since his recent arrival, and later it was incorporated in Cooke's list of Colorado birds. In January 1899, chiefly through the initiative of A. H. Felger, a group of Denver bird lovers organized the Colorado Ornithological Association, holding its first meeting at Mr. Felger's home. For some years this association met regularly in Bergtold's office on Fourteenth Street and he served as its president for two or three years.

People who really have something of importance to do often are bothered and delayed by those who feel their nonsensical dilly-dallying should be attended to first. Doctor Bergtold met a case of this kind in a proper manner. A women's club asked him to give a lecture on Colorado birds at one of its meetings. To do this he had to skip his afternoon office hours and was careful to be on time at the Club. This, however, availed nothing, for these women held a long business session, over which they had an interminable wrangle before they were ready for his talk. He had waited more than an hour beyond the appointed time and his patience was exhausted, so when the chair-woman finally introduced him to the meeting, he arose and begged leave to be excused because he had set aside a definite period of time for this talk, a period long since passed, and he then had duties elsewhere, and bowed himself out. He never heard anything of this incident afterward.

The years of a beginning and developing medical practice as in Bergtold's case always are fully occupied, so that he was able to spend little time in the field to observe birds and collect original data. This, however, did not

dampen his ardor and zest for ornithology which was carried along other lines in his study at home. One way in which this was done was to make a study of birds presented through Shakespeare's eyes. Every available bit of his writings was carefully read in search for references to birds and their habits. This material was extensive, and on it he wrote a paper called "Shakespeare's Birds," given as an address at the University of Denver. A few years later he learned that J. E. Harting had written similarly and he was glad to have the volume in his library.

His ornithological activities brought to him many pleasant associations and friendships, and his memberships in the A. O. U. and Bird-Lore Council gave him many enjoyable hours with members of the different classes. During the annual dinner held in 1916 at the Philadelphia meeting, Dr. Chapman in a talk to the gathering, reminisced over his friends who were at the banquet. As he went mentally around the table, he related many very interesting things which had occurred with these friends. When he got to the Doctor, he said, "And I see my friend Doctor Bergtold of Denver, who published the first list of the birds of western New York, who launched me on my mountain experience when I was in Colorado by sending me to Estes Park, and gave me my first automobile ride." Bergtold thought it was great that a New Yorker had to go to Denver for his first ride in an automobile.

It may be of interest, especially to those who are historically inclined, to know that Bergtold had his first ride in a "steamer" or locomobile, as it was called, in December 1900. We little dreamt at that time that this new invention would develop so rapidly into a powerful machine that in thirty-five years would change the topography and many social and economic conditions of the country, would kill and maim more people each year than did the World War, and would destroy many of the charms of Nature.

In 1917 there was an invasion of innumerable flocks of Bohemian Waxwings, especially in the West. Bergtold was able to trap a goodly number to be sent to the aviary of Bronx Park and to collect specimens for friends. His first regional report relating to Denver birds appeared in *Bird-Lore* in August 1917, and except on one occasion, a report was sent and published in every issue of that magazine for a long period of time. These regional reports put him in touch with many pleasant people throughout the State, people interested in birds, who generously sent in notes on the birds of their several areas, helping to make the reports both valuable and interesting. He was pleased to find that some of his contributions to ornithology were used far more than he expected, and his annotated list of the Birds of Denver (1918) was recommended for use in the schools of Denver. He had learned from friends that his work on incubation of birds was a most useful book and had made for him a national reputation. The one important and

original idea embodied in his incubation study regarding the factor determining the length of incubation, never has been disputed, though a considerable period has elapsed since the issuance of the book.

One of his great regrets was his inability to attend regularly the A. O. U. meetings. He attended only three of these annual meetings since 1889. After the close of his third meeting (1927), he remembered with real satisfaction the meeting with Gregory Mathews, who stopped off at Denver to call on him, as he was headed for New York and his home in England. He thought him a delightful companion on their brief auto trip into the country to see birds, a feeling shared by many of us.

In 1923, he gave his bird collection to the museum of the University of Colorado, where it now rests and where it will be available to students. He induced his friend Dr. Leonard Freeman to give his fine collection of birds gathered years ago in and about Cincinnati to the same institution. Their two collections added materially to the Museum collection that was in need of specimens of eastern birds.

Ornithologists at times have amusing experiences which are worth recording. During Bergtold's first trip to Old Mexico (1903) his guide was an illiterate American who lived in El Paso, wandering about Old Mexico and New Mexico, making a precarious living in guiding and doing odd jobs. He soon learned of the Doctor's interest in birds and one day after they were well in the Sierra Madre, asked him, "Did you ever see or get a 'peteralis'?" He had the Doctor guessing, for what he meant by "peteralis" was difficult to solve. By careful cross-examination it came out that this peculiar thing was a large black and white bird with a big white bill and a red head-spot, very obviously a woodpecker. One noon while they were in camp, Bergtold heard a loud call exactly like the spoken word "mamma." The guide also heard it and shouted, "That's it!" After a careful stalk, the bird was shot, and it proved to be an Imperial Woodpecker, the largest of its tribe in the world. But the guide's name of the creature was still a mystery. Later conversations with him brought out the fact that he previously had been employed by two professional ornithologists on a trip into Old Mexico, and according to his understanding that was the name they gave to the bird. Then it flashed into Bergtold's mind that the bird's scientific name, *Campephilus imperialis*, which the guide recalled as it was repeated to him, was the basis of his "peteralis."

In 1905, Bergtold began to gather material for a textbook on the birds of Colorado, hoping to have it in print within a few years, but the exigencies of a physician's life and more pressing work, delayed it from year to year until the summer of 1928, when the book appeared as "A Guide to the Birds of Colorado." He received some gratifying letters about it from ornithologists both within and without the State. With the publication of

this book, he had finished every planned work on ornithology except one, a piece of research, which concerns the origin of birds so far as the group phylogeny goes. The way he had in mind of attacking this problem never had been considered by anyone so far as he knew. It would be highly original work, take lots of time to plan and complete the study. It is understood that he planned to leave an outline of it among his papers which could be turned over to some competent worker in ornithology to study.

I often have heard him raise the question of the value of an avocation. He felt that it is fair to ask of what use it has been to spend so much time over an avocation. Putting aside all questions of pleasure and outdoor benefits, which are of no mean consideration, he believed he truthfully could say that his ornithological activities helped the growth and keenness of his powers of observation as nothing else could have done in so marked a degree. Nothing is more useful in medicine than a combination of swift, sharp, and accurate observation and logical deduction therefrom, and bird work promotes and accentuates all these, making one in every way a better clinician.

Although birds always were his chief zoological interest, mammals from the standpoint of a sportsman were eagerly sought when an opportunity to go afield presented itself. His first real hunting was in the Nippissing region of Canada in 1889, before he left Buffalo. Here when he was unsuccessful in securing game, he at least learned a lot about wood- and canoe-craft from the Indians, which made the outing a satisfactory one. The first autumn after he arrived in Denver, he went with acquaintances to Routt County, Colorado, where he spent three months in hunting and attempting to build up his physical strength. Here there were plenty of deer and antelope for sport, but strenuous exercise at this altitude did not improve his health. In this region where they were camping, they ran across Walahan, who was one of the first, if not the first, to photograph big game in America. He went about his photography quietly and as he did little or no advertising, his pioneer work was unknown outside of Colorado. I have seen a number of his photographs, which even at this day would be considered excellent. A perfect photograph of a mountain lion, taken in mid-air, as it jumped from a tree, is as fine as could be wished for.

On various hunting trips to the mountains when horses were used for both riding and carrying the outfit, Bergtold took interest in and became familiar with packing methods. He soon learned to use swing packs, to throw the two- or one-man 'diamond hitch,' the squaw hitch, and the bed pack. Those who have gone through similar experiences well know the contented feeling he must have had carrying a knowledge without which the pack always was a continual worry. When game became scarce in Colorado or

when there was a desire to see other game regions, he made trips to Montana, New Mexico, Arizona, and Old Mexico. In all these places he enjoyed the Indians, ruins, and whatever of interest came to view, as much as he did the game hunting, the major project. He was a good shot, so that the average camp was rarely without meat. He had a fondness for both shotgun and rifle, but cared little for the fishing-rod except to secure food that was to his liking. Doctor Bergtold was very handy with tools and was able to make almost anything he desired. The first radio I ever listened to, was made by him. We listened at his home in Denver to a fine music broadcast from Salt Lake City, and the instrument was as clear as any I have since heard.

It was very natural that Bergtold should have taken interest in military affairs, since both his father and grandfather were officers in military organizations. He was a commissioned officer for more than sixteen years and thoroughly enjoyed the experiences, even though some were very trying. Before he left Buffalo for Denver, he held a commission as assistant surgeon of the 74th regiment of the National Guards of New York, and served from May 21, 1890, to June 24, 1894, when he resigned to go West. In the World War early in 1918, Bergtold was asked if he would prefer to be commanding officer or Chief of the Medical Service in the new army hospital for tubercular patients, then to be constructed at Aurora, Colorado. It was the largest hospital for tuberculars in the world, and was called the U. S. General Hospital No. 21. He very wisely chose to be Chief of the Medical Service, for it carried with it great opportunities for clinical, bacterial, and other lines of familiar work. He was appointed Major in the Medical Corps September 13, when he stopped private work and spent all his time at the growing hospital. The building, establishing, and managing of this huge hospital was a colossal task. The first patient was admitted in October 1918, before a single room in the hospital was completed. In 1919, six months later, the institution housed seventeen hundred patients. Bergtold, as director of the medical side, knowing by experience that men will stand for almost anything except empty stomachs or poor food, made supreme effort to have the kitchen function properly.

During the War Bergtold took no real vacation, but for a change and rest he would spend a week in a cottage in the hills, staying alone, but had many birds, mammals, and books as companions. These cottage trips were interspersed with motor trips to Berthoud Pass, where camp would be made at the edge of snow at timberline for a few days or a week. Here boreal plants and such birds as Rosy Finches and Ptarmigans gave a variety of no small note and greater zest to the combined experiences.

In July 1919, about a month after leaving active service, he was made commissioned Lieutenant Colonel in the Officers' Reserve Corps and in 1925 was advanced to full colonelcy. I used to joke with him by saying

that when his voice was tense while talking over the telephone, he should be addressed as Colonel, but when it was of milder tone, the term Doctor would be more appropriate. This always would bring a laugh from him. As many of our experiences through life from early childhood were very similar, our likes and dislikes much the same, and our contempt for hypocrisy and unreality of life mutual, we were given plenty to discuss and entertain one another with through our correspondence or when good fortune brought us together. As time went on our friendship deepened, and now that he has gone beyond, I know from my own feelings what the loss of his presence must mean to many others.