

THE AUK

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF

ORNITHOLOGY

VOL. 61

JULY, 1944

No. 3

MEMORIES OF
WILLIAM EDWIN SAUNDERS

1861-1943

BY P. A. TAVERNER

Plate 13

WITH the passing of W. E. Saunders on June 28, 1943, the American Ornithologists' Union lost one of its oldest Fellows, ornithology an outstanding field man, Canada a most picturesque and interesting character, and we a loved and valued friend. He was buried in Mt. Pleasant cemetery in his home city of London, Ontario. May he rest in peace beneath the flowers and birds that he loved and knew so well.

Will Saunders ("W. E." to many of us) was born in London, Ontario, August 16, 1861, a member of a rather notable family. His father, William Saunders, came to London from Devonshire, England, in 1849, when twelve years old. With limited academic training, he entered employment in a pharmacy, learned the profession the old-fashioned practical way and, when eighteen, set up in the drug business for himself, a business that, under son William, has persisted to date. He married Sarah Agnes Robinson, the daughter of a Methodist minister and also of English extraction. Probably as a result of the old-time pharmacist's close interest in the plants and herbs from which he made his own tinctures and extracts, he grew deeply interested in botany, plant growing and experimental agriculture, and became active in their economic development. He soon won an outstanding place in local and Dominion affairs. He was a Founder of the Entomological Society of Ontario and of the Ontario College of Pharmacy, Professor of Materia Medica at the University of Western Ontario, served as 1906 President of the Royal Society of



W. E. Saunders.

Canada, and was honored by the King with a C.M.G. It was largely through his initiative and insistence that the first Federal Experimental Farm in America was established at Ottawa in 1886 with himself as Director. With such a father it is not surprising that the family should be capable of important accomplishment. There were five sons and one daughter and all the boys subsequently achieved success in various lines of artistic and scientific endeavor: Henry S. Frederick A., Arthur P., who survive him, and the late Charles E. (afterwards Sir Charles)—all have won important posts in science and art. Charles achieved world-wide fame in carrying to success plant-breeding experiments initiated by his father, particularly in developing Marquis Wheat, a superior strain of grain that extended wheat-growing possibilities far northward, an achievement of incalculable value to Canada and to the rest of a hungry world, and definitely postponing the Malthusian catastrophe.

While the rest of the family carved their individual ways, it remained for William, the eldest son, to take charge of the family pharmacy and manufacturing chemical business which he continued in able active management to the day of his death and built up into a substantial institution. He attended London, Dundas, and Trinity College schools, graduating with honors from the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy. He became Professor of Practical Chemistry at the London Medical School, then affiliated with the University of Western Ontario. In 1936 that University, for "outstanding contributions to society," conferred upon him an honorary LL.D. But he, no more than the rest of the family, dug into narrow grooves. All were catholic in their tastes and, as long as they remained in close contact, each assisted the other in botany, entomology, plant-breeding, nature-study and in music. After the father passed in 1914, as a rallying center biennial family meetings were held in turn in the scattered residences when music was the serious feature. Each had some skill to contribute and could form part of a chamber group or small orchestra. Parts were previously sent around for study and practice and the meetings consisted of several days of serious ensemble music as well as of family reassociation. Such is the background that produced the interesting and distinctly lovable character of William E. In 1885 he married Emma Lee, also of English descent, who survived him less than seven weeks to August 13, and by her had one daughter, Mrs. Muriel Fetherstone, now a widow still occupying the family house in London. He had previously donated much of his collection to the National Museum at Ottawa and to the University of Western

Ontario. The remainder he left to the Royal Ontario Museum of Zoology of Toronto.

William, in his early days, dabbled slightly in entomology and botany but finally settled upon ornithology and mammalogy as his favorite interests. We, as ornithologists, know him more for his bird work, but it should not be overlooked that his interest in mammals was only secondary to that in birds, and he seldom strayed far from home without a pocketful of traps that he conscientiously set in every new or promising locality. He was among the seven Active Members (now known as 'Fellows') elected at the first regular meeting of the A.O.U. and he and T. S. Roberts were the only surviving Fellows of that vintage; in fact, only two Founders, A. K. Fisher and C. H. Batchelder, to date exceed him in length of service to the Union. He was a constant and rather prominent attendant at annual meetings where he was known to all, and often took a trenchant part in discussions, especially in life-history and conservational subjects, though he rarely read a formal paper before the society.

He was an ardent field worker and took many long walking, bicycle, or other trips, alone or in company with congenial spirits, lodging as he could or even bivouacking where night found him. In this way he covered many miles in out-of-the-way parts of his province. Incidentally, he traveled rather widely on this continent, three times to the Canadian Pacific coast, several times to Alberta, and to Florida, Louisiana, Tennessee, and once to England, always with eyes and ears open to birds and with a bunch of traps for small mammals.

He was a constant writer of short notes and articles in 'The Auk' and other current nature periodicals and took care that his important findings were placed on permanent record; his bibliography in birds runs to over 163 titles. In 1882, in collaboration with J. A. Morden, he produced a 'List of the Birds of Western Ontario' in the 'Canadian Sportsman and Naturalist' as his first serious contribution to ornithological literature. In 1901, on an investigational expedition with his father, he visited Sable Island, off the Nova Scotian coast, and gave one of the first accounts of that, until then, practically unknown American Heligoland of waifs and strays in 'The Ottawa Field Naturalist,' 16: 15-31, 1902. He also wrote considerably on its particularly interesting species, the Ipswich Sparrow, known to nest nowhere else. For a number of years he ran a popular nature series in his local press under the title of 'Nature Week by Week' that won widespread interest, but probably his most important contribution to ornithological literature was in association with the late E. M. S. Dale in

'The History and List of the Birds of Middlesex County, Ontario, 1933,' wherein he finally embodied all the experience of his years of observations in southern Ontario.

This writer first came into close personal association with Saunders in March, 1905, when, with B. H. Swales and A. B. Klugh then of Guelph, Ontario, he visited him at London and spent a week-end in furious bird talk and in reviewing his quite considerable private collection of study specimens. Will told us of the remarkable faunal and floral aspects of Point Pelee, that long sandbar from the southernmost point of the Canadian mainland stretching toward the island steppingstone across western Lake Erie, that he had visited and first discovered in 1882. A trip to the locality was planned and, the following May, Swales, Saunders, and the writer drove to the base of the point and worked across the marsh at its base and out the east shore. We bivouacked in the red cedars near the tip in the rain. This was our introduction to Will's irrepressible optimism and enthusiasm. Under a continuous misty rain, his clothes under a bit of waterproof oilcloth at his side, and naked as when born, before a spluttering campfire on which a 'billie' simmered, he skinned the birds of his day's take, and persisted that there was no such thing as "bad weather," only our "lack of appreciation of it." The following day continued much the same, only more so towards the end. We supped on frogs' legs collected on the way and cooked over an open fire and, as we plodded the nine tired miles through the dark drizzle towards a warm, dry hotel with bath and bed, through clay roads that loaded each foot with growing pounds of sticky mud, he still proclaimed his thesis. Through the day I had lost my pipe, a calamity any confirmed smoker can appreciate; Will, a non-smoker, non-drinker, but a puckish humorist, punctuated proceedings with a reiterated, "Come now, let's have a smoke."

The contact thus initiated was continued and further developed. Pelee was visited many times—at one time for a week in the fall by a slightly larger and better equipped party. This time rain was not the disturbing element, but we ran into a particularly vicious and, for the season, unusual brood of nocturnal mosquitoes. Smudge smoke only maddened them, and the tent without mosquito-bar but confined and concentrated them to more deadly attack. The kindness of modern fly sprays to the camper was unknown in those days. But with eyes red with smoke and face bloated with bites, Will still affirmed his "lack of appreciation" theme. It was not until the discovery was made that there are no mosquitoes in the haymow and

we took nightly refuge in an adjoining friendly barn, finding welcome surcease from the pests, did he admit that "it was pretty stiff." On another visit, Saunders acquired a basket of peaches from a local orchard to take home with him. On the long drive in behind the faithful dobbins of those days, he dipped and re-dipped into the basket at his feet. Arriving at Leamington and his homeward train there was only a peach or two left in the basket. "But, you know," he said, "those last peaches were hardly worth eating."

From these field meetings grew what we called the "Great Lakes Ornithological Club," a loose correspondence association that finally resulted in the building of the "Shack" as a clubhouse at the Point, details of which are recorded by Fleming in "The Wilson Bulletin," 51: 42-43, 1939. However, it was largely through Will's engaging personality and influence that we became *persona grata* on the Point and received the many great and small tokens of friendship from local inhabitants that made our continued presence there possible and pleasant. From then on, meetings and common field experiences were numerous and few holidays or convenient week-ends in season but saw some of us at the Point. The more we saw of Saunders in the field, the greater was our appreciation of him. He had the sharpest of eyes, the keenest of ears, the best of memories for bird sounds, and little escaped him. One day we were sitting in the Shack intent on skinning our trophies; a wren, just outside, was inconspicuously reiterating some of its less familiar phrases muffled and blended with a chorus of other bird medleys. Saunders paused, listened, dropped his scalpel, and was gone. A moment later we heard his gun speak and he returned, laying a Bewick's Wren on the table before us, a second record for Canada. The surprised expletive that greeted this specimen was afterwards an oft-repeated jibe at us, always accompanied by a good-natured smile and a slightly triumphant laugh.

Many were the pleasant and profitable meetings at the Point that continued until shortly after the group began to break up. Swales removed to Washington, I to Ottawa; Fleming was too far removed for many casual or extemporaneous visits. Saunders came less frequently, bringing some of his lately aroused London ornithological friends with him and, when the Point was made a National Park, intensive systematic work there practically ceased. It is regrettable that the preservation of notable scenes and the making of them available to a wider public should so often diminish their usefulness to the more serious students who are often their discoverers and advocates. Some day we will want sanctuaries for the protection of the working naturalist with other interests barred.

With the break-up of the group, Saunders's active but conscientious collecting grew progressively less and his participation in popular education and active conservation increased. His field glasses remained in intensive use but his gun was partially retired. He had the precious ability of making friends with the most unpromising material. He could be fellow to the lowly as to the great without compromise of character. The most unconventional of men and without self-consciousness, he could open up his skinning tools in the corner of a railroad car and skin his birds and mice on his knees, soon having half the car hanging over his shoulders listening with interest to his running commentaries. He once said that he first met one of his best friends in this way.

At home he built up a following among the young and old. Youth recognized in him a congenial spirit; age acknowledged his values. He introduced many to new interests until London became a center of many observers with him as the clearing house and energizer. A word to him on the telephone, and his car was out gathering the elect, and off to verify or observe some new discovery—it might be a Scarlet Ibis reported at Point Pelee or a Least Bittern at the Pond. Nor did his influence remain within city bounds. He visited camps, schools, and nature and social service clubs, lecturing and dropping seeds of wisdom and his own philosophy by the way. He was in early touch with Jack Miner, and undoubtedly some of the latter's first enthusiasm stemmed largely from the Saunders influence. His platform manner was informal, intimate and conversational, and his material largely unprepared, but he had the faculty, with his quiet sincerity and common sense, of capturing the sympathetic interest of his audience without arousing opposition.

Another of his keen interests was horticulture. He was an ardent gardener, particularly of the rarer and more interesting forms of plants, and was a specialist in irises. Sometimes he combined his hobbies as when he covered the berry clusters of the mountain ash in front of his house with paper bags to preserve the fruits from the devouring fall Robins for the benefit of winter visitors. He was unusually generous with his plant treasures and seldom went far abroad without a few rare bulbs or roots for appreciative friends.

With all this he did not neglect more homely civic duties. He served his city on the local Park and Water Commissions, was a member of Rotary, took a lively interest in Y.M.C.A. and his church, and at his death was Honorary President to his local chapter of the Canadian Club of which he was a founder. He filled every moment

with constructive interest, and it does not seem that anyone ever got more out of life or scattered his influence more generously than Will Saunders. Though advancing years slowed his physical activity, they touched him but lightly and he retained his youthful energy and enthusiasms in a remarkable degree. His mental alertness never flagged and he remained a veritable Peter Pan with a kindly humor and sincerity of purpose that never grew old. He leaves a place in ornithology, especially in that of his own country, that it is difficult to fill, and he will long be missed by his intimate friends, casual associates, and others.

Ottawa
Ontario

BIRDS OF THE KATMAI REGION, ALASKA

BY VICTOR H. CAHALANE

INTRODUCTION

IN September, 1940, I was detailed by the Fish and Wildlife Service, by which I was then employed, to make an inspection of the Katmai National Monument on the Alaska Peninsula. The National Park Service, which supplied funds for my travel, has administrative responsibility for the area, and needed general information on natural features, as well as possible illegal occupancy, poaching, and any other violations of regulations. My opportunities for observations of the bird life were therefore limited to those afforded by official travel and the necessity for covering many other subjects. Although it was not possible to make collections of specimens, the sight records and other observations seem worth recording. The area is extremely isolated, and previous observations are few and were usually made earlier in the season when danger of storms is less. I have also tried to include previous records from the region since the original publications are now generally difficult to obtain.

Facilities for my travel in that part of the Monument area west of the Aleutian Range were made possible through arrangements by Dr. Ira N. Gabrielson and Charles E. Jackson, Director and Assistant Director, respectively, of the Fish and Wildlife Service, and Fred R. Lucas, in charge of the Service's Marine Ways at Naknek. Mr. Lucas did everything possible to facilitate the work, and accompanied us during the first few days of our journey in the Monument. He assigned to us the best available boat and an engineer-pilot, Charles Sullivan, whose willing help was much appreciated.