

ROBERT B. ROCKWELL: 1883-1941

By EDWARD R. WARREN

Probably a good many of the younger generation of Cooper Club members never heard of Robert Rockwell, but between 1907 and 1912 he was a frequent contributor to the Condor and he served as one of the Associate Editors from January of 1908 through 1911. Up to the beginning of his last illness he was active in natural history work, especially with birds.

Rockwell was born on June 19, 1883, in Grand Junction, Colorado, where his father was a cattleman. When he was about six years old, his life in Denver began, but only for the school months. His summers were spent on the ranch, where he could see and observe wildlife. It was here that he made the studies on "The Woodhouse Jay in Western Colorado," published in the Condor in 1907—his first published paper.

I became acquainted with Rockwell in the winter of 1906-1907, at meetings of the Colorado Biological Society. Our acquaintance soon ripened into an intimate friendship, and we always got together whenever I came to Denver from Colorado Springs.

Bob attended the University of Colorado at Boulder for a year, but the death of his father left the latter's financial affairs in such shape that the son felt it obligatory to give up college and seek employment, which he did with various real estate firms. He was successful in this work, and finally established his own business, the Rockwell Investment Company, of which he was the head at the time of his death.

In 1906 and 1907 the Colorado Museum of Natural History was making a good start. It had the building which is now the nucleus of the present group of buildings, and it exhibited several fine groups of animals. The collection of Edwin Carter of Breckenridge had been purchased. Rockwell gave many of his evenings to helping with this collection, and especially to arranging the notes pertaining to Carter's specimens, which had been kept in such a way as to make this a difficult task.

Beside giving a great deal of time to the Museum, Rockwell was in the field as much as possible, with some friend, and I suppose sometimes alone. In the spring of 1909 there came to the Museum, as taxidermist, a young man named Wetmore. He and Bob soon became fast friends and spent as much time together as possible, often out in the field. Wetmore was an ardent collector, even then with a good knowledge of birds. I suspect that my readers have guessed I refer to Dr. Alexander Wetmore, Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, in charge of the National Museum, and especially an authority on fossil birds.

Rockwell was much interested in the eggs and nests of birds, and he acquired a considerable collection which he eventually sold to W. C. Bradbury for the Colorado Museum.

I think it must have been about 1910 that he became well acquainted with L. J. Hersey, who was then serving as curator of birds at the Museum. Hersey was a member of the Barr Lake Gun Club, which controlled some reservoirs several miles east of Denver. It was a famous place for ducks and other water birds. Rockwell made studies of various of the species of birds found there, and these studies finally resulted in the publication of the "Annotated List of the Birds of the Barr Lake District," in collaboration with Hersey.

I never pretended to keep track of all of Bob's activities. He used to tell me about what he was doing, but intervals between our meetings were often long. One great interest he had was duck hunting, and he was a member of the Mile High Duck Club

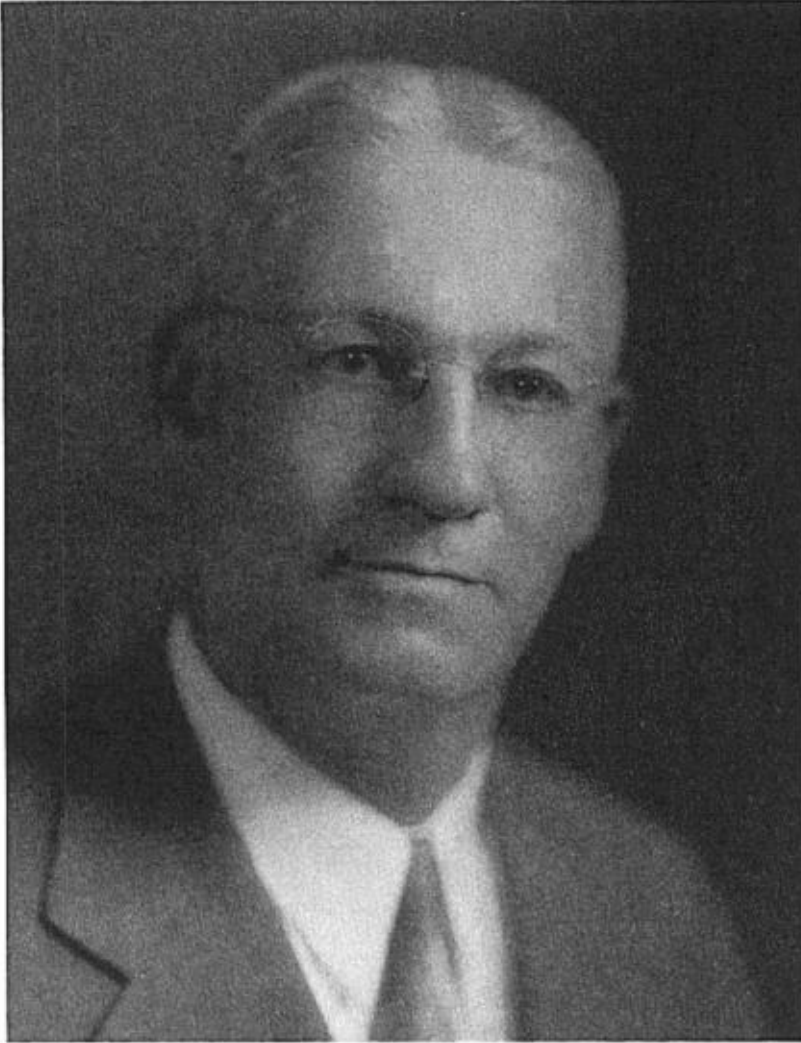


Fig. 16. Robert B. Rockwell: 1883-1941.

situated several miles east of Denver. Here he spent his spare time in the open season, and I suspect was often there at other times to study the birds frequenting the place.

On December 18, 1906, the Colorado Biological Society was organized, with Rockwell as one of the ten charter members. Early in 1907 Joseph Grinnell wrote to him for information regarding both the Society and the Colorado Museum. Rockwell's enthusiastic reply led to further correspondence and to his consenting to become an associate editor of the *Condor*. Until the increasing pressure of business forced his resignation, Rockwell contributed many well-illustrated articles to the *Condor* and interested other Colorado naturalists to contribute also.

In addition to the articles in the *Condor*, Rockwell contributed to the *Auk*, the *Oologist*, and the *Denver Sunday Post*. With Clark Blickensderfer, he published in *Natural History* (21, 1921:628-638) "Glimpses of the home life of the Saw-whet Owl,"

with eighteen fine photographs. We were associated in a couple of articles, one of which he wrote, both published in the *Journal of Animal Behavior* (2, 1912:218-221). They concerned the peculiar behavior of a striped ground squirrel. Rockwell told me about it and I urged him to write it up. In 1940 the Colorado Museum of Natural History published "The Birds of Denver and Mountain Parks," by Niedrach and Rockwell in collaboration. That was his last publication. He and Robert Niedrach, the curator of birds at the Museum, were very friendly, and often made Sunday trips for bird photography. I have omitted to mention that Rockwell, almost from the beginning of our friendship, very likely before, was an enthusiastic photographer, especially of nature subjects, as the many excellent pictures in his Condor papers attest. How much of this sort of work he did in the past few years I do not know.

In 1940 he was made a trustee of the Colorado Museum of Natural History, a well deserved recognition of his work for the Museum.

In the late spring or early summer of 1940 he was taken ill with heart trouble, but apparently recovered, and he returned to business. Later in the summer he was taken ill again and was obliged to stay in a hospital. Subsequently he was able to be removed to his home, where he passed away on the eleventh of August, 1941. Besides his widow he left a daughter and three sons.

His was a fine character and all his friends must miss him, but none, I think, more than I do.

TITLES OF ARTICLES BY ROBERT B[LANCHARD] ROCKWELL
APPEARING IN THE CONDOR

- The Woodhouse jay in western Colorado; 9, May, 1907:81-84, 1 ill.
Some Colorado notes on the Rocky Mountain screech owl; 9, September, 1907:140-145, 5 ills.
A new breeding bird for Colorado: the Cassin Sparrow (*Peucaea cassini*) nesting near Denver [L. J. Hersey and R. B. Rockwell]; 9, November, 1907:191-194, 2 ills.
Nesting of the western horned owl in Colorado; 10, January, 1908:14-17, 2 ills.
Some hints on the preparation of an oological collection; 10, March, 1908:86-90, 4 ills.
The red-winged blackbirds of Colorado; 10, March, 1908:93.
An annotated list of the birds of Mesa County, Colorado; 10, July, 1908:152-180, 11 ills.
A one-legged red-winged blackbird; 10, July, 1908:182.
A striking example of protective coloration; 10, September, 1908:207, 1 ill.
A plan for co-operative ornithology; 10, September, 1908:208.
The history of Colorado ornithology; 11, January, 1909:24-32, 2 ills.
Correction of errors; 11, 1909:33.
Oological; 11, January, 1909:34.
That cooperative scheme; 11, March, 1909:69-70.
The use of magpies' nests by other birds; 11, May, 1909:90-92, 1 ill.
Correspondence [on certain Colorado records]; 11, May, 1909:106.
An annotated list of the birds of Barr Lake district, Adams County, Colorado [L. J. Hersey and R. B. Rockwell]; 11, July, 1909:109-122, 6 ills.
[Review of] An annotated list of the birds of Boulder County, Colorado, by Junius Henderson; 11, July, 1909:144.
An albino magpie; 12, January, 1910:45, 1 ill.
Some Colorado night heron notes; 12, July, 1910:113-121, 9 ills.
Nesting of the gray-headed junco; 12, September, 1910:164-165, 1 ill.
Nesting notes on the American eared grebe and pied-billed grebe; 12, November, 1910:188-193, 5 ills.
Notes on the nesting of the Forster and black terns in Colorado; 13, March, 1911:57-63, 7 ills.
Nesting notes on the ducks of the Barr Lake region, Colorado. Part 1; 13, July, 1911:121-128, 4 ills.
Nesting notes on the ducks of the Barr Lake region, Colorado. Part 2; 13, November, 1911:186-195, 10 ills.
Notes on the wading birds of the Barr Lake region, Colorado; 14, July, 1912:117-131, 13 ills.

Colorado Springs, Colorado, January 9, 1942.