

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

WHO WERE HARRY R. PAINTON, A. BRAZIER HOWELL AND FRANCES F. ROBERTS?

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The above title is a question often asked at Cooper Ornithological Society meetings. The reason this occurs so commonly is that these three past members of the Society have cash awards named after them, so their names are read at every meeting. As a result of these repeated inquiries, I was asked to present some historical facts concerning these people, their association with the Cooper Ornithological Society, and how the awards were established.

To deal with the first benefactor, it is essential to look back to the founding of the Cooper Ornithological Club. The Club was the forerunner of our Society and was organized a few years (winter of 1890-1891) before the date we recognize as our founding year (1893). This group was named in honor of Dr. James Graham Cooper, a devoted ornithologist. The organizers were John Van Denburgh, Harry R. Painton, Fred A. Schneider, and a few others whose names have been lost in the passage of time. All were students at the College of the Pacific in Santa Clara, California. Soon thereafter, Stanford University was established at nearby Palo Alto, California, so Painton, Van Denburgh, and some others transferred there and the embryonic bird club "died in the nest."

On 22 June 1893, Chester Barlow, Wilford H. Osgood, Harry Painton, and Fred Schneider attended an organizational meeting to form a new bird club. The meeting was called by Barlow, who was a dominant spirit throughout the early history of the society. A few others attended this first meeting but a record of their names is no longer available. By September, 1893, the club membership included, in addition to the "founding fathers," V. A. Benson, Louis W. Brokaw, Uriah L. Hertz and A. M. Shields. Later in the same year, Ralph Arnold, George D. Chamberlin, Corydon Chamberlin, Ulysses S. Clark, Horace Gaylord, Harvey Hall, R. C. McGregor, Oscar P. Silliman, and Harry Taylor joined the group. All who joined in 1893 were considered as "Charter Members." From the beginning, Harry R. Taylor's magazine, *The Nidologist*, was the "official organ" of the club. A southern division of the C.O.C. also had its beginning in the fall of 1893 as the Southern California Natural History Society, but that is only indirectly related to the present topic.

Bear in mind that these young people who founded the C.O.C. were not then professional ornithologists, but college or university students. All were bird egg collectors, and were deprecated by some professional scientists as being no better than stamp collectors. But this criticism was badly amiss, as stamp collectors are students of their field of philately and the egg collectors were diligent students of oology, nidology, and ornithology. The greatest part of our knowledge about the nesting, breeding habits, and behavior of birds originated with the observations and records of these amateurs and semi-professional ornithologists. Only a few of the original, or charter, members of the C.O.C. became truly professional ornithologists. The remainder earned their living in more lucrative professions and maintained their interest in the study of birds, their nests and eggs, from a purely semi-professional, or if you prefer, a hobby, viewpoint.

Harry R. Painton served as Vice President of the Northern Division in 1893 and as Treasurer in 1895. Upon graduation from Stanford University and entrance into the medical school there, he stopped active participation in the bird club, but maintained his interest in birds' nests and eggs and collected specimens as opportunity afforded.

After a life-time of active practice in medicine, Dr. Painton resumed his ornithological interests in 1936, serving as President of the Northern Division in 1940 and 1941, and thereafter was President of the Board of Governors until 1946. He was elected to Honorary Membership in 1947. After a long illness, Dr. Painton died in 1955.

In his years of service to the C.O.C., he became aware of the great advantages of stable finances to assure for all time the continued support of ornithological research and publication by the Society. The Business Managers at that time, W. Lee Chambers and C. V. Duff, were committed to a sound fiscal policy of fund use and investment. They were aided in this endeavor by their investment counselors, J. R. Pemberton, W. J. Sheffler, and Ed N. Harrison. Dr. Painton resolved to contribute in a major way to this sound fiscal program through his will. His will provided his estate to be awarded to Stanford University, with the proviso that 20 percent of its value be placed in the permanent Endowment Fund of the Cooper Ornithological Society. After nearly four years of court litigation, instigated by his step-grandchildren, C. V. Duff reported that on 20 August 1959, he received cash and securities in the amount of \$61,128.07 from the Harry R. Painton Estate. These monies were deposited in our permanent Endowment Fund. The members of the Society were deeply grateful to Dr. Painton and the business managers, through the Board of Governors, proposed to establish a Harry R. Painton Award of \$500 for the best scientific paper published in *The Condor* in a two-year period. The evaluating committee consisted of the journal editor, one member appointed by the Board of Governors and a third by the Board of Directors.

* Deceased. Dr. von Bloeker was a member of the Cooper Ornithological Society from 1927 until his death in 1991.

In his boyhood days, **Alfred Brazier Howell** became interested in birds and collected their nests and eggs. As a Christmas present in 1900, his mother gave him a book titled "Bird Studies" by William E. D. Scott, inscribed "A. Brazier Howell from Mother"; this may have caused him to drop "Alfred" from his name as nearly all his publications are by-lined "A. Brazier Howell."

Howell spent four years of preparatory school at Hill. Here he was fleet of foot and broke several school records. Upon graduation in 1905 he spent one year at Yale University, and that concluded his college career as a student. He joined the C.O.C. in 1908 and he and his mother moved to Pasadena in 1910. In 1915 he became a Life member of the Club and in 1955 he was elected an Honorary member of the C.O.S.

Soon after his arrival in California he began a compilation of all available information on the offshore Channel Islands and Los Coronados Islands of northern Baja California. This project began strictly for his own pleasure, but Dr. Joseph Grinnell prevailed upon him to prepare it for publication. Various members of the society made available their notes and specimens, and W. Lee Chambers extended the use of his voluminous library. The paper was ready for publication in 1915, but the society lacked adequate funds to publish it. Finally, in 1917, "Birds of the Islands off the Coast of Southern California" was published as Pacific Coast Avifauna No. 12. This 127-page monograph was Howell's first paper of length.

A. Brazier Howell had an active interest in the affairs of the C.O.C., aiding W. Lee Chambers as Assistant Business Manager and in 1910 became the society's first Endowment Secretary. In this position he began building the endowments through wise investments that placed our society in a position to help defray costs of publishing *The Condor* and *Pacific Coast Avifauna* (the predecessor of *Studies in Avian Biology*).

Howell had the financial means that allowed him to spend much time in the field collecting birds and mammals. His interests in biology were many and varied. In 1910, he spent two months on Los Coronados Islands supervising 12 Yaqui Indian fishermen for the International Fisheries Company of Baja California. While there, he studied the Xantus Murrelet. California sea lions and harbor seals drew his attention for further studies and his observations on these animals over several years were published in the *Journal of Mammalogy* in 1922. In 1911 he purchased a 14-acre orange grove in Covina, 20 miles from Pasadena. The dwelling there was large enough to house his increasing collections and library as well as provide living quarters. In 1914 he married Margaret Gray Sherk, a member of an early Pasadena family. This in no way interfered with his field work, as his wife enjoyed camping. Three daughters and a son resulted from this marriage.

In May, 1918, under the supervision of Dr. E. W. Nelson, Howell, with Luther Little as assistant, collected birds and mammals in Arizona between the Southern Pacific Railroad and the Mexican border. The report of their trip was to be published in the *North American Fauna* series, but it never appeared.

At times, when Howell wearied from collecting and scientific studies, he would experiment with new ventures. One was purchasing used cars, reconditioning

them, and then reselling them—a venture in which he was very successful. Next he became interested in collecting U.S. postage stamps. Much later in life, when he lived in Baltimore, Maryland, a conservatory was built to house aquaria for tropical fish. He sold these fish to various dealers, but soon found that selling snails to be used as scavengers in aquaria was more profitable. Still later, after moving to Maine, he and Ms. Howell spent much time on buying trips throughout New England to acquire antiques for re-sale.

In 1919, he became intensely interested in collecting bats and, in 1921, he and Luther Little conducted the second bat-banding experiment on record. Their results were published in 1924. In 1922 the Howells moved to Washington, D.C. where he served as a "dollar-a-year-man" Scientific Assistant in the Bureau of Biological Survey, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under the direction of E. W. Nelson. Between 1922 and 1928, he published a total of 48 scientific papers, including his well-known "Anatomy of the Wood Rat" in 1926.

In 1928 he moved to Baltimore to accept a position under Lewis Weed in the Department of Anatomy at Johns Hopkins Medical School. In addition to being a keen, intelligent observer, he also possessed unusual skills as a dissector. He undoubtedly was one of the outstanding comparative anatomists of his day and an excellent teacher of gross human anatomy, even though he never attended a formal course in either subject.

In February, 1928, Dr. Weed appointed A. Brazier Howell and Remington Kellogg as members of a party including four other employees of Johns Hopkins Department of Anatomy to study bottlenose dolphins captured at the whaling shore station at Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. As an outgrowth of this study, Howell organized the Council for the Conservation of Whales and other Marine Mammals in 1929. This council was under the auspices of the American Society of Mammalogists, with an advisory board of 24 distinguished scientists and scholars. He continued to teach anatomy at Johns Hopkins Medical School until he retired in 1943.

Between 1910 and 1943, A. Brazier Howell published a total of 153 papers, mostly on birds and mammals, including nine full-length illustrated books. His last two published observations include one in *The Auk* in 1945, and the final one in the *Journal of Mammalogy* in 1960.

Late in 1959, A. Brazier Howell established a special endowment fund for the purpose of providing an award of \$150 each year to the member of the Cooper Ornithological Society who presented the most meritorious paper at the annual meeting, and he did the same for the American Society of Mammalogy. Howell had little use for the prestige presumably acquired through the long process of earning a Ph.D., which most often took up to 10 years in those days. Bear in mind that he, with but one year of undergraduate study at Yale University, attained outstanding recognition in ornithology and mammalogy and eventually served as a Professor of Vertebrate Anatomy at Johns Hopkins Medical School from 1928 to 1943. Because he felt so strongly about what he considered a needless waste of time and effort to obtain a Ph.D., he specified that the Howell Awards must be limited to persons without a

doctorate in the biological sciences. This unique feature was a particular inducement and aid to independent and beginning scholars. The awards were specified to be made upon recommendation of a committee comprising the editor of *The Condor*, the president of the Board of Governors, and a member of the local committee in charge of the scientific program of the annual meeting. The first award was made in 1960.

On 23 December 1961, A. Brazier Howell at the age of 75 died peacefully in his sleep in Bangor, Maine. The published results of his research and observations will remain as a monument to his memory and will long be appreciated by vertebrate zoologists. (For a more complete biography see *The Journal of Mammalogy*, 1968, Vol. 49, p. 732-742.)

Mrs. Frances F. Roberts was an active member of the C.O.C. and later the C.O.S., from 1942 until her death in 1971. She became a Life Member of the Society in 1949.

Mrs. Roberts was a retired school teacher who began her involvement with ornithology in 1930 when she became Ed N. Harrison's private tutor. In due time, Ed and Mrs. Roberts formed a film-producing company, known as Harrison-Roberts Wildlife Films, and

they spent many years together photographing wildlife, especially birds. They presented many of their films at meetings of the Southern Division and C.O.S. annual meetings. In 1963 and 1964, Mrs. Roberts served as a Vice President of the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology, and from 1965 to 1971 she was the Executive Vice President of that institution.

An avid field biologist herself, Mrs. Roberts always made her residence a rest stop for ornithological students. In the early years of the California Condor studies, Karl Koford and Ed Harrison spent many hours under her roof, recuperating from their strenuous field work in the mountains of eastern Ventura County, California.

Mrs. Robert's love for her students carried over to her activities within the Cooper Ornithological Society. It was this concern that led her to establish the Frances F. Roberts Award of \$100 annually. She always believed there were usually at least two student papers given at the annual meeting that were worthy of reward for excellence. The first Frances F. Roberts Award was made at the 35th annual meeting in 1964, at San Diego, California, to Alan H. Brush for his paper on "Energetics and Cardiac Responses in the California Quail".