

VIOLA HARRIET DOS PASSOS AND HER NORTH AMERICAN MOTHS

There is romance in the making of a collection. As Milton said in *Lycidas*, "To-morrow to fresh woods, and pastures new." The joy of a fine day in the field, a discovery, an observation, always carried in precious memory, such, I think, was the pleasure of Mrs. dos Passos in her collection. Much of it was of her own collecting, and her orderly cabinets testify to her care, skill and patience in the preparation and arrangement of her specimens. The collection has personality, her personality reflected in it.

In the spring of 1931, at Rangeley, Maine, the collection had its beginning, a joint undertaking, for her husband Cyril F. dos Passos, was equally interested. Their first reference literature was "The Butterfly Book" and "The Moth Book" by Dr. Holland. It was soon decided that Mrs. dos Passos would make the North American moths her specialty and that Mr. dos Passos would devote his energies to the collection and study of the North American butterflies.

Collecting at Rangeley, season after season, was productive of many rare and interesting species. Collecting methods were improved and a very large light trap was devised and constructed. Added to this, through a beautiful white birch grove, was a trap line, with about a dozen "Rummel type" bait traps, always providing an exhilarating morning walk, filled with surprises as each trap revealed its content of *Catocala*, lesser noctuids, perhaps a fine sphingid or two and many smaller beauties of the woods. Then there was the sugaring trail for an exciting evening and it is easy to understand why Rangeley Camp meant so much to Viola and Cyril dos Passos.

Mrs. dos Passos spent some winters in Florida where she collected many butterflies and some moths, as at Key West where she captured a fine *Cocytius antaeus* resting on a wall. In Florida, she made the acquaintance of many local collectors, among them Marguerite S. Forsyth from whom she obtained a number of Florida's rarities.

Early in the winter of 1931 the dos Passos moved to Mendham,

New Jersey, and there one summer was spent collecting with Dr. and Mrs. George H. H. Tate who lived nearby. A sugaring trail, along the wooded skirts of a swamp, gave a good sample of the local fauna and the variety was augmented by contributions from the Tate collection.

The home at Mendham, in ample acres, built on a southerly sloping hillside overlooking a brook which is the headwaters of the Passaic River, is ideally located for those who enjoy the beauties of nature. Virginia deer browse at evening in the upper reaches of the swamp, birds of passage and of residence are at home there, even the purple martin, and Viola dos Passos knew and loved the birds. The west wing of the house provided a conservatory with cages for tropical birds and, at the end of the second story, a study for the butterfly and moth collections and library. As the collections grew, this space was entirely given over to the butterflies, Cyril dos Passos' preserve, and another large room in the central wing of the house gave ample space for Mrs. dos Passos' collection of moths.

Two extensive collections of Lepidoptera, one of considerable historic interest, were acquired by Mr. dos Passos and the moths from these collections were placed in the collection of Mrs. dos Passos. One was the collection of Max Rothke, made for the most part at Scranton, Pennsylvania, and the other, that of Thomas E. Bean, containing material taken at Galena, Illinois, and the rich collection made at Laggan, Alberta, in the seventies and eighties of the last century.

Mrs. dos Passos suffered a heart attack, early in the year 1939, which restricted her physical activities. This affliction resulted in her death at Rangeley, Maine, on August 29, 1944. She was the youngest daughter of Anthony H. Van Hise and Harriet Louise Acker and was born at Newark, New Jersey, on November 24, 1891. She is survived by her husband, Cyril F. dos Passos, and their son, Manuel dos Passos.

The collection of North American moths, consisting of over 12,000 specimens, and the library relating to the Heterocera were presented to The American Museum of Natural History by Mr. dos Passos late in the year 1944.—WILLIAM P. COMSTOCK.



Comstock, William Phillips, d. 1956. 1945. "Viola Harriet Dos Passos and Her North American Moths." *Journal of the New York Entomological Society* 53, 47–48.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/206071>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/179360>

Holding Institution

Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

Sponsored by

Biodiversity Heritage Library

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: In Copyright. Digitized with the permission of the rights holder

Rights Holder: New York Entomological Society

License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>

Rights: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/permissions/>

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.