

**WILLIAM THOMPSON DAVIS—1862—1945**

On January 22, 1945, the New York Entomological Society lost by death its honorary president, William T. Davis, who was one of its oldest and most distinguished members. Mr. Davis died in the Staten Island Hospital after a long illness following an operation in July, 1944. He was in his eighty-third year. Mr. Davis was born in New Brighton, Staten Island, October 12, 1862. His parents were George B. and Elizabeth (Thompson) Davis, and his forebears, at various times, took leading parts in the civic progress of the Island. After an education in private schools on the Island he became a clerk in a New York mercantile house. Shortly afterward he entered the New York Produce Exchange of lower Manhattan, in the Gratuity Fund Department, where he stayed for over 26 years, having complete charge of that department during the three years previous to his resignation in 1909. His work in the Exchange was tedious and exacting, involving, as it did, the keeping in order of more than 3,000 individual accounts of the members of the Exchange.

Long interested in natural history, Mr. Davis, Mr. Charles W. Leng and others formed the Natural Sciences Association of Staten Island at a meeting on November 12, 1881, held in the home of his maternal grandfather, John C. Thompson, in St. Mark's Place at the corner of Hyatt Street. Mr. Davis was only nineteen years old at the time and Mr. Leng was twenty-one. The Association was incorporated February 19, 1885, and in May, 1905, the name was changed to the Association of Arts and Sciences. Its present name, Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences was adopted May 18, 1918. Mr. Davis was vice-president from 1905 to 1929, president from 1930 to 1934, and president emeritus from 1934 until his death.

After his retirement from business Mr. Davis occupied himself exclusively with natural history and other interests close to his heart. Entomology was one of these and probably the most important. Certainly, it occupied his attention continuously throughout most of his long life. Mr. Davis was one of the very few, good, general naturalists in addition to his specialization in



entomology. Over the years he thoroughly explored the fauna and flora of Staten Island and he was capable, at the same time, of identifying much of his material. Most of his life was spent on Staten Island, interrupted occasionally by collecting trips to Long Island, Gardiner's Island, up along the Hudson River in New York, to the Pine Barrens and southern counties of New Jersey, and to California, Arizona, Texas, Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas and Virginia. In "A List of the Insects of New York," edited by Dr. M. D. Leonard and published by the Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station in 1928, will be found most of his Staten Island and New York records. His New Jersey records were used by Dr. John B. Smith in "Insects of New Jersey," Trenton, 1909, wherein his ability and thoroughness were recognized. And his observations and descriptions of new species of dragonflies were utilized in Dr. James G. Needham's "Handbook of the Dragonflies of North America," Baltimore, 1929.

In the prefaces to many works on North American insects will be found statements of the authors acknowledging their indebtedness to Mr. Davis for his large fund of entomological knowledge and for his help in supplying specimens. Examples of rare species were either loaned or given to students as well as notes on distribution and habits. In the introduction to "Orthoptera of Northeastern America," Indianapolis, 1920, Dr. W. S. Blatchley said, "Mr. Davis, who is not only a student of Orthoptera, but also a naturalist of high rank and interested in all forms of living things, has aided me greatly in many ways." The same author, in his "Heteroptera or True Bugs of Eastern North America," Indianapolis, 1926, wrote—"As in my works on Coleoptera and Orthoptera, so in this instance, my friend and fellow naturalist, William T. Davis, of Staten Island, N. Y., has been of great service. Anything I wanted which he could furnish in the way of specimens or literature, he gladly sent, and he also furnished many notes on distribution and habits." Such happenings were a daily part of Mr. Davis's life.

In addition to helping others Mr. Davis wrote extensively upon entomological topics. Although most of his contributions appeared in the pages of the Bulletin of the Brooklyn Entomological Society and the JOURNAL OF THE NEW YORK ENTOMOLOGICAL



SOCIETY, other technical journals carried some of his articles. In the bibliography of the "Alphabetical Index to North American Orthoptera," by Samuel H. Scudder (Bost. Soc. Nat. Hist., 1901), there are eight references to early papers by Mr. Davis on the Locustidæ. These appeared from 1886 to 1896 in the Canadian Entomologist, Proceedings of the Entomological Society of Ontario, American Naturalist, Entomologica Americana and the Proceedings of the Natural Sciences Association of Staten Island.

In the 52 volumes of the JOURNAL OF THE NEW YORK ENTOMOLOGICAL SOCIETY, from 1893 to 1944, there are 132 titles by Mr. Davis. His first paper in Volume I, 1893, was a "Catalogue of the Butterflies of Staten Island," and his last paper in Volume LII, 1944, was "The Remarkable Distribution of an American Cicada: A New Genus and Other Cicada Notes." Between the publications of these two papers, 130 notes and lengthy articles appeared on cicadas, water beetles, dragonflies, butterflies, crickets, local lists of insects, ants, tiger beetles, pink katydids, aphids, roaches, biographies of entomologists, collecting notes, book reviews, etc., and in addition the printed Proceedings of the Society abound with notes and observations by Mr. Davis.

Most of his lengthy papers in the JOURNAL, of which there are about 35, are concerned with descriptions of new species and varieties of cicadas from western and southwestern states and from Mexico, Porto Rico and the West Indies. About 155 new species and varieties of cicadas were described in the pages of the JOURNAL together with notes on their songs, distribution and habits. Other papers, that I know of, on cicadas appeared between 1891 and 1928 in the Canadian Entomologist, Proceedings of the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences, American Naturalist, Entomological News, Bulletin of the Brooklyn Entomological Society and the Proceedings of the Staten Island Natural Sciences Association. In addition Mr. Davis prepared the lists of Cicadidæ that appear in W. E. Britton's "Guide to the Insects of Connecticut, Part IV, Hemiptera (Conn. State Geol. & Nat. Hist. Survey Bull. 34, 1922) and in M. D. Leonard's "A List of the Insects of New York (Cornell Univ. Agric. Exp. Sta. Mem. 101, 1928), and he also wrote a bulletin on "The Cicadas



or Harvest Flies of New Jersey" (Circ. 97, N. J. Dept. Agric., 1926).

Mr. Davis was the leading authority on the cicadas of North America and numerous friends and correspondents all over the country sent him specimens and notes. Without attempting to mention all, some of these included S. J. Hunter of Kansas; T. D. A. Cockerell of Colorado; Harry H. Knight and Joseph Bequaert, who were members of the Cornell University Biological Expedition, organized by J. Chester Bradley in 1917, which extended from New York to California; Colonel Wirt Robinson of West Point and Wingina, Va.; Louise Knobel of Arkansas; E. D. Ball of Arizona; Douglas K. Duncan and O. C. Poling who sent specimens from Arizona; R. W. Harned of Mississippi; W. S. Wright of California; R. H. Beamer, who supplied specimens from New Mexico and Oklahoma; Alonzo C. Davis of California; J. W. Sugden of Utah; F. F. Bibby of Texas; Ernest L. Bell, who sent cicadas from Nevada; and H. Garman of Kentucky. Mr. Geo. P. Engelhardt during his travels supplied cicadas from Texas and other places. Howard H. Cleaves also, during his various travels, collected many specimens for Mr. Davis, his lifelong friend. Mr. Davis corresponded with W. E. China of the British Museum and extensively with E. P. Van Duzee, especially during the early part of the period in which he was describing new species. M. D. Leonard sent him specimens from Spain in 1924. J. N. Knull supplied specimens from Texas, Arizona and California during the course of his travels. And in 1922, Joseph Bequaert took specimens for Mr. Davis to the British Museum for comparison with Walker's types. Such activities and exchange of correspondence took place continually between Mr. Davis and his friends and such occurrences as I have noted could be extended over several pages.

In "Insect Singers, a Natural History of the Cicadas," London, 1929, by J. G. Myers, wherein many of Mr. Davis's observations are recorded and which contains a bibliography of his cicada papers from 1891 to 1906, there is the following statement on page 82. "That happy walking hand-in-hand of ethology and taxonomy which has made myrmecology a model for systematic entomology was never achieved in any degree in tettigology till



Wm. T. Davis brought to bear his very wide field experience." In the Staten Island Museum there is Mr. Davis's extensive collection of Cicadidæ and other insects as well as large series of Coleoptera collected by Charles W. Leng and Mr. Davis.

Edwin Way Teale in his book "Near Horizons, The Story of an Insect Garden," New York, 1942, has a chapter entitled "Cicada Man," which is an appreciative account of Mr. Davis and his interest in cicadas interwoven with personal anecdotes about Mr. Davis, his collecting paraphernalia and habits, his workshop in the "attic" of the Staten Island Museum with its rattlesnake skins, Indian skull, boxes of insects, notes, clippings, etc., his kindness, his dry humor, and entertaining remarks, his encouragement and help to young naturalists all written when Mr. Davis was close to 80 years of age.

The October, 1942, issue of the Bulletin of the Brooklyn Entomological Society was dedicated to Mr. Davis upon his eightieth birthday and contains articles by J. R. de la Torre-Bueno, Edwin Way Teale, Howard Cleaves, and J. Bequaert, all dealing with different phases of Mr. Davis's life activities, and personality and illustrated by early and late photographs of Mr. Davis in action as an entomologist. It is a temptation to quote extensively from this publication and only its comparatively recent appearance prevents this. From these articles one gets a very good idea of William T. Davis himself, his quiet unassuming manner, his kindness and consideration of others, his philosophy, his placidity, his admiring friends, his wide knowledge of plants and animals, his close association with lifelong friends, his material generosity to individuals and to natural history institutions, his field trips, his absorbing interest in Staten Island history and the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences, his versatility, the endless contents of his pockets and his energy, for a small man who was, as he said of himself "so poorly put together."

My own friendship with Mr. Davis extended over a period of 25 years. It was the custom of many years for Mr. Davis and Mr. Leng to arrive at the American Museum of Natural History late in the afternoon, preceding the evening meeting of the New York Entomological Society and to gather in Mr. A. J. Mutchler's



office for a discussion of entomological matters. Here I used to enjoy their reminiscences and conversations about old-time entomologists, whom I knew only by reputation. Mr. Davis was frequently burdened by large packages of boxes of cicadas which he brought along to illustrate his frequently scheduled talks before the Society and he could always be depended upon for a talk when the program committee ran short of speakers. My collecting experiences with Mr. Davis involved only a few trips to Lakehurst, N. J., at which time he was interested particularly in Orthoptera. I recall several pleasant visits to his home on Stuyvesant Place and to the Staten Island Museum while it was growing up and where I was entertained by Mr. Davis in the "attic" where he held forth. After the close of the meetings of the New York Entomological Society I frequently rode downtown partway on the subway with Mr. Davis and I used to marvel at his agility when he was close to 80 and at his continued energy and varied interests. During my editorship of the JOURNAL Mr. Davis published many cicada papers therein, all written carefully in longhand, all requiring little or no editing and all legible to the printer. His papers were frequently accompanied by checks for substantial sums to help toward the cost of printing.

At the age of 30, Mr. Davis wrote "Days Afield on Staten Island" (Published under auspices of the Staten Island Historical Society, 1892) and a second edition appeared in 1937. This is a series of records of rambles, over Staten Island made in company with Charles W. Leng, or Louis P. Gratacap or, that Mr. Davis made by himself. They are really prose essays dealing with such subjects as spring in the Clove Valley, South Beach, a deserted farm house, native brooks, etc., interwoven with observations on natural history, trees, insects, plants, picturesque people, bits of local history, associations, and the author's own thoughts. Mostly the book is about the activity of nature that goes on outdoors, of which so many persons are unaware. Mr. Davis happily discovered at an early age the pleasure that may be derived from making discoveries in natural history and the fact that more joy may be extracted from such activities than from an exclusive interest in the acquisition of material possessions. The book is as pleasing to read now as when it was first written and in it is firmly



embedded the personality of Mr. Davis which never changed during his lifetime. More than any other of his writings this book reflects the man himself. Mr. Davis occasionally put his thoughts into verse and several of his poems are printed in this book.

Mr. Davis served the New York Entomological Society long and faithfully in many capacities. He was treasurer from 1904 to 1928, president during 1929 and 1930 and honorary president from 1940 until his death. The same can be said of the Brooklyn Entomological Society of which he was president from 1912 to 1916 and again from 1920 until his death. He was a fellow of the Entomological Society of America, of the New York Academy of Sciences, and a fellow and life member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The Staten Island Bird Club, in which he was deeply interested, elected him president from 1919 to 1930. He was also president of the Staten Island Historical Society for many years and his offices in the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences have already been noted. In addition he was a member of the New York Historical Society, the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, the Boston Society of Natural History, the American Museum of Natural History, the New York Zoological Society, the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, and other societies. In 1941 the Park Association of New York City awarded him a citation for his interest and assistance in the development of parks and nature recreation centers on Staten Island.

Furthermore, Mr. Davis was actively interested in Staten Island history. He was the author of "Homestead Graves," "Staten Island Names, Ye Olde Names and Nicknames," 1896, "Legends, Stories and Folklore of Old Staten Island; the North Shore" (Charles G. Hine, co-author), and "History of the Staten Island Historical Society 1936." In 1925, there was published under the auspices of the Staten Island Historical Society, by Mr. Davis, a work by William T. Davis, Charles W. Leng and Royden Woodward Vosburgh, entitled "The Church of St. Andrew, Richmond, Staten Island, Its History, Vital Records and Gravestone Inscriptions." And the following year, 1926, under the same auspices and publisher there appeared a book on "The Conference or Billopp House, Staten Island, New York" by William T.



Davis, Chairman Committee on History, Conference House Association. This is the house where representatives of American and British governments met on September 11, 1776, to discuss the war of the Revolution.

For several years Mr. Leng and Mr. Davis devoted much time and effort to the huge task of producing a history of Staten Island and in 1930 the Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., of New York City brought out the results of their labors in a monumental work of four volumes entitled, "Staten Island and Its People, A History 1609-1929," by Charles W. Leng and William T. Davis. This work was favorably received and a fifth volume was published in 1933. Volume three contains biographical accounts of Mr. Davis and Mr. Leng. A bibliography of all Mr. Davis's papers would, I am sure, reveal other works outside the field of entomology and would indicate more fully the breadth of his activities.

On November 7, 1900, Mr. Davis married Bertha Mary Fillingham, daughter of William and Elizabeth (Brook) Fillingham at Livingston, Staten Island. Her death occurred a little over a year later on December 17, 1901. Mr. Davis's father died March 4, 1899, and his mother who lived to be 86 years, and with whom he made his home at 146 Stuyvesant Place, St. George, S. I., died on April 9, 1928. No one could know Mr. Davis for any length of time without being impressed by his innate goodness, his quiet, cheerful disposition and his abiding interest in natural history. He was admired by many and by them he will be missed and remembered. One of his poems "A Day Afield on Staten Island" is printed below.—HARRY B. WEISS.

#### A DAY AFIELD ON STATEN ISLAND

BY WILLIAM T. DAVIS

The glorious sun is setting  
In the far and distant west,  
And the clouds all golden laden  
Seem sinking down to rest.

The day was one of glory and  
The sun did brightly shine,  
No heart in all the wild-wood  
Has been so glad as mine.



I went where fancy led me,  
For fancy is broad and wild;  
I stayed where beauty kept me,  
For beauty is soft and mild.

But the glorious sun is setting,  
And the day is no longer mine;  
Could I but turn the hour-glass  
And hold the sands of time.





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