

IN DAYS OF YORE

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[Author's note: This is the main part of the after-dinner address at the Centennial Banquet of the Entomological Society of Washington, March 12, 1984. In the delivery, occasional sentences or details were overlooked, or compressed, or rearranged, but the full text has been given here for the record.]

I cannot imagine a worse situation for a speaker, after an evening of drinking and feasting, than to have to step forward and give a talk on history. Perhaps if it were a history of pornography or of presidential peccadillos, it could be lively and interesting. But the history of an entomological society? Well, this is my assignment, and I might as well get on with it.

There are different kinds of history, one of dates and events, of facts and figures, of when and where and what. But history is also composed of people: of some who stand out from the crowd for what they were and what they did; of many who belonged and worked and served; of the long line that made the Entomological Society of Washington, which we honor here tonight. I shall try to do some justice to both kinds of history, to give you some facts and to tell you of some people, showing pictures of some, and reminiscing about some within my own memory. I first came to Washington, studying at the Museum, in 1935—almost a half century ago as I realize with a bit of shock—and many old timers were still working. But I am really a Johnny-come-lately on the history of the Society. I know of nine or ten histories, the most recent and one of the best by Ashley Gurney in 1976 at the time of the International Congress of Entomology here in Washington. I freely acknowledge my indebtedness to these. In particular, we are all indebted to Dr. L. O. Howard for four of these histories, in 1894, 1909, and 1934 on our 10th, 25th, and 50th birthdays, and in 1931. These are especially significant because Dr. Howard was one of the founders of the Society, and his memory of the birthpains and adolescence of the Society is the chief source of information about those early years.

Tonight, as we celebrate the 100th birthday, we should realize that we are not the oldest entomological society by any means, not even in the United States. The oldest continuous entomological society in North America is the American Entomological Society at Philadelphia, which celebrated its 125th anniversary a month ago, on February 15th. Representatives of that Society are here tonight. There are also two other older societies in this country. But our own Society, founded in 1884, is at least one of the oldest, and certainly one of the most active and successful of the entomological societies in America.

According to Howard, the idea for the Society was C. V. Riley's. In 1881, Comstock had returned to Cornell, leaving Riley, Howard and E. A. Schwarz as lonely entomologists in the Philosophical Society of Washington and the Biological

Society of Washington. Howard has written: "We were lonely, we wanted to talk with people who understood us." So these three put out a circular call for anyone interested in insects. The initial group met in Riley's home at 1700 Thirteenth St. NW, on February 29, 1884. That was a leap year, too, but luckily they did not formally organize until a later meeting; otherwise, we would be celebrating only our 25th! Howard himself, in his first three histories, said variously that there were 9, or 10, or 11 persons present. Take a number. Suffice it to say that he actually *named* ten in his first history, so that is my choice. Those first interested parties wasted no time. By March 12th, when 16 were present, they had a constitution and formally adopted it, and we date the birth of the Society from that meeting. These 16 are the real founding fathers, although some signed soon after and are counted among the 25 charter members.

Meetings.—After three preliminary meetings, all in Professor Riley's house, the regular meetings began in the Council Room of the old National Museum of the Smithsonian. Successive meetings for years were held in the homes of members, including one in Baltimore at the home of the amateur hemipterist, Dr. Phillip Uhler, Librarian at the Peabody Institute. Home meetings worked very well as long as the Society was small. In his first history, Howard recalled that the average attendance was 11, varying from 4—probably a snowy night!—to 27 when the speaker was a famous entomologist from Oxford, England. You will have noted the early association with the National Museum, which has continued to the present time. For many years, the Society met in old Room 43, off the foyer of the Natural History Building, or on special occasions even in the Auditorium of that building. When I came in 1946, the headquarters of the USDA entomologists was in the South Building of Agriculture, and Room 43 was well filled at almost every meeting, often including the top brass, now very rarely seen. Long before that time, and before the present Natural History Building was built, the Society held its meetings in rented halls, entertained by individual entomologists assisted by an "Entertainment Fund." Many such meetings were held in the old Saengerbund Hall at 314 C Street NW. Some were held at the Cosmos Club and other places. Finally, about 1920, the meetings were moved to the new Natural History Building, at a nominal rental for guard service, and later even this charge was dropped. At the early meetings, there was a program for about an hour, followed by an hour or more of conversation and refreshment, which apparently consisted of beer in quantity. I recall a memorial meeting at which this was mentioned, and Dr. Blake, botanist from Beltsville and husband of coleopterist Doris Blake, remarked that it is said of many people that their names were writ in water but of those old entomologists it could be said that their names were writ in beer. There is some evidence that the custom has been revived, or perhaps it never really died out.

May I quote a passage from Howard's 1909 history, both for the flavor of the meetings in the early days and the flavor of the writings and speeches of L. O. Howard. After saying that "In those early days entomology and beer went together," he pointed out the number of Germans in the Society, with names like Schwarz, Marx, Ulke, Heidemann, and others. And then this:

"The after meetings of the Entomological Society were interesting: the conversation was good; the refreshments were unlimited in quantity but limited in

kind; you could have light beer or dark beer, and that was about the extent of the variation. It was my custom to order two cases of beer, each of 24 bottles, for an average attendance of 7 or 8, and I always made the arrangement with the grocer to return those bottles which were not empty, as well as the empty ones, but it soon became a standing joke between us that it was unnecessary to make any provision concerning the unempty bottles. I am not sure that this custom, which no longer holds, was a good one. I am not sure that it was a very bad one. So far as I know, it never seriously affected the health of any of the members, but on the whole perhaps it was unfortunate and I am inclined to believe that the present method is the best. I should dislike to see some of the younger members of the Society drink as much beer as some of us did at their ages, and, while I would not vote the prohibition ticket as Banks does, I believe that Banks was about right when the Society met at his house for the first time and he gave us hot lemonade and cold lemonade and some very excellent raisin cake. It is true that a few glasses of beer will make a stupid remark sound witty, but there was no necessity for any such stimulus to the imagination in the old days, because all of the remarks were witty."

There was another characteristic of the old-time meetings. The dipterist J. M. Aldrich described a Society meeting in someone's apartment as "so full of tobacco smoke that at the conclusion of the meeting I was compelled to seek fresh air, without sharing the social air which was then an outstanding feature."

Officers.—A word about the officers. We are 100 years old, but there have been only 82 presidents, counting one who had been transferred—redeployed seems to be the currently popular word—to Florida and who came back and served for five minutes and then resigned. He did appoint a committee, which is about all some presidents accomplish anyway. For the first forty years, presidents usually served two terms, probably a tradition borrowed from the national scene. C. V. Riley served the first two years, declining a third term, although he did serve another two years after Howard, Schwarz, and George Marx (arachnologist) had their turns in office. Other than Riley, there have been no repeaters except when L. O. Howard was again honored in 1923, 36 years after his previous tour of duty. In the January issue of the Proceedings, Manya Stoetzel has gathered together pictures of all the presidents, a real effort, together with lists of the officers who served with them. I note that four women have been president, two of them, Louise Russell and Helen Sollers-Riedel, long before there was a campaign for ERA. Thirty-three of our 82 presidents are still alive; the earliest of these, Carl Muesebeck, was president in 1940. It would be easy to think of the Entomological Society of Washington as favoring taxonomists, especially because the Proceedings contain so many taxonomic papers. So I was interested to find that of the 74 presidents since 1900 there were 32 taxonomists and 42 non-taxonomists, i.e., economic entomologists, physiologists, information specialists, regulatory entomologists.

Riley and Howard loom large in the early history of the Society, but Howard has quoted with approbation a remark of one of the members that "The principal reason for the existence of the Entomological Society is E. A. Schwarz." Schwarz was a German, a coleopterist, and an early member of USDA's Division of Entomology as assistant to Riley. Howard said this of him: "There are volumes

upon volumes of entomological knowledge packed away in his brain, and with tables of contents and elaborate indices prepared for instant use.” And apparently used with a most kindly spirit and delightful sense of humor. Perhaps to many of you the name means little, but I would remind you that he is responsible for that famous biological generalization called “Schwarz’s Law.” During a survey of a crop plant—I believe it was on insects affecting corn—so many insects of no relevance whatever to corn were turned in for identification that Schwarz remarked in exasperation (underlined by his German accent) “Vell, they have to zit zome-where!” And thus Schwarz’s Law was born. Schwarz, who died in 1928 aged 84, served in USDA from 1878 to 1926, when he was retired for age and pensioned at the age of 82! Senator Pepper would have loved that.

Membership.—I have mentioned that the Society started out with ten interested people, or 16 founding fathers, or 25 charter members, take whichever number you choose. At the close of the 100th year, there were 629 members. We are a mighty healthy centenarian.

Proceedings.—There have been only 85 volumes, because early volumes covered several years each. In these 85 volumes, over 27,000 pages have been published—27,361 if you insist on details (if you don’t insist, you get them anyway). For most of the time, the volumes were less than 250 pages. Our first 300-page volume was in 1945. In 1969, a special number for Carl Muesebeck had 600 pages, and after that 400- and 500-page volumes were regular. But listen to this: The last three volumes, 1981–83, have averaged 860 pages each, in spite of higher costs of printing.

Let me read a few titles to give you the flavor of the early years:

Sleeping trees of Hymenoptera (by Schwarz, coleopterist)

Some insects which brave the dangers of the pitcher plant

The insect-catching grass of Cuba

Some insects from the top of Pike’s Peak, found on snow

How *Lysiphlebus* fastens its aphid host to the plant

Luminous Collembola (by coleopterist H. S. Barber)

Mosquitoes attacking a frog

Migrating armies of myriapods (again by H. S. Barber)

Dung-bearing weevil larvae (by Frederick Knab, a dipterist)

Notes on the respiration of entomologists [Smoke-filled rooms in the old days]

Remember that most of these were presented at the meetings, so it tells you the variety of papers and the keen observations by specialists of insects not in their specialty. And one can imagine the lively discussion that would follow. As I have looked through the pages of our Proceedings—and I would recommend this to anyone—I have been impressed by the amount of solid contributions, the impressive list of authoritative publications, by Snodgrass and Crampton on morphology, by Clausen and Harry Parker on biological control, by Dyar and Shannon on mosquitoes, and the outpouring of work on mosquitoes during and after World War II by Stone and Knight and Komp and many others, by Böving on coleopterous larvae, and on and on. Our journal has indeed made an impressive contribution to the literature of entomology.

In the early days, the Proceedings were handled by a Publications Committee of from 3 to 7 members, but in the 71 years and 71 volumes since the first elected

Editor, there have been only 14 editors, thanks to the dedication and durability of many of them, most notably W. R. Walton, who served for 16 years from 1927 through 1942. We who merely belong owe much to those who have served in this important but laborious office.

If some of you wish fascinating reading, try the Editorials, which were published from 1923 through 1926, often but not always by the Editor. A sample:

Walton, noting that C. H. T. Townsend had developed a system of abbreviations for the numerous bristles and areas of muscoid flies, commented that "Nothing [Dr. Townsend] has hitherto perpetrated on a long suffering scientific fraternity begins to approach in absurdity his most recent lapsus calami It amounts practically to a new, synthetic language which his prospective readers will be compelled to learn before they may be able to translate his recent paroxysms of taxonomy into the 'king's English.' . . . Dr. Townsend could not have adopted better means to limit his reading public had he written in the Eskimo language."

But the prize exchange was this one. In the December 1925 issue, editor Carl Heinrich commented on a paper on Lepidoptera that had appeared in the English journal, *The Entomologists' Record and Journal of Variation*, as follows: "With the freedom of an emancipated mind this author soars beyond the commonplace of facts, mounting from assumption to conclusion through the magic circles of hypothesis unto the dizzy empyrean of fiction pure and undefiled whence he views with clairvoyant eye the evolution of species, and reveals to us the meaning and the methods of their evolving. . . . From the illicit union of assumption and conclusion he litters a mongrel progeny of subspecies, races, varieties, forms and hybrids which he must needs legitimize by nomenclatorial baptism, thus overburdening more an already overburdened synonymy. We can only wish that one who seems so susceptible to modern vagaries would suffer that last infirmity of scientific minds—eugenics—and practice a little birth control."

If you think that was strong, even though deftly worded, here was the reply of the editor of the English journal:

"One stands aghast at the apparent colossal ignorance of this American scientist. . . . Our critic (sic) does not criticise, he vituperates, he absolutely ignores the latest discoveries. . . . We are astonished that a worthy society allows its pages to be used to utter the low down scum of frothy journalism."

I can find no reply by Heinrich. What I did find is that he wrote no more editorials! In fact the practice of editorials ended suddenly that year, with a scattered exception or two.

Being a taxonomist, I could not close this first part of my talk without commenting on the many new genera and new species published in the Proceedings down through the years. I wonder how many there were? But who on earth would go through 85 volumes of Proceedings and count them? Well, an old taxonomist needing material for an after-dinner speech, that's who! Totals: 6071 new species and subspecies, and 724 new genera and subgenera, plus assorted new families, new tribes, new varieties, new combinations galore, and keys and classifications, and, as the King of Siam said in a famous old movie, "Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera." Then he died, and it's a good place for me to stop.

[The second part of the talk consisted of slides, with personal reminiscences of some of the entomologists shown.]



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