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Author: Smith, Kimberly G

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100 YEARS AGO IN THE AOU

100 Years Ago in the American Ornithologists' Union

Kimberly G. Smith

Department of Biological Sciences, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas, USA

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In 1918, T. S. ("Tomb Stone") Palmer expressed the feeling that "never before has death taken such a heavy toll" as it did in 1916. Four Fellows passed away, including two founding members, causing the number of founding Fellows to drop below 50% of the total number of Fellows for the first time. The number of Fellows was restricted to 50 individuals, and Palmer pointed out that rarely were there actually 50. The first time was in 1889, with the election of Dr. Arthur Patterson Chadbourne (1862–1936), a Boston physician and ornithologist; but 16 months later, a vacancy occurred through the death of Col. Nathaniel Stickney Goss (1826–1891), who was known as the "Kansas Audubon" for his ornithological work in that state. The limit would be reached again 22 years later, with the election of three Fellows at the annual meeting in 1913: Waldo Lee McAtee (1883–1962), Joseph Mailliard (1857–1945), and Waldron DeWitt Miller (1879–1929). Therefore, no new Fellows were elected at the 1914 and 1915 annual meetings. Daniel Giraud Elliott (1835–1915), the second president of the AOU, died in December 1915, creating the first opening, and then three other Fellows died before the 1916 meeting in November: Welles Woodbridge Cooke (1858–1916), Foster Ellenborough Lascelles Beal (1840–1916), and Edgar Alexander Mearns (1856–1916). At that meeting, three people were elected as Fellows—James H. Fleming (1872–1940), Harry S. Swarth (1878–1935), and W. E. Clyde Todd (1874–1969)—bringing the number of Fellows to 49. Election of Percy A. Taverner to Fellow at the 1917 meeting restored the number to 50, so that no Fellows were elected at the 1918 meeting.

Alice Hall Walter (1869–1953) penned a piece in *Bird-Lore* lamenting the number of unqualified people who lectured about ornithology, which editor Witmer Stone reprinted in part, adding his own commentary (*The Auk* 34:117–118). Walter stated that

> Ornithology is fortunate in being, for some reason or other, better adapted to popular study than any other science, and for that very reason, the greatest care should be taken to prevent its degeneration into a mere temporary fad or to be made ridiculous at the hands of exponents who are unfitted for their task. The writer has always maintained that a lecture or an article can be scientific without being tiresome or unintelligible to a popular audience. In other words scientific facts can be presented in popular language without losing any of their force, but the man who does this must know, in the first place, what he is talking about.

Stone responded to this as follows:

> The desire to have a lecturer at every club meeting and the natural necessity of cutting down expenses leads to accepting those who are only too anxious to appear on the lecture platform for little or no compensation and whose stock in trade consists of mere anecdotes and time worn facts. Better by far have one good speaker a year who is capable of speaking from personal experience and research and devote the other meetings to discussion of local observations under the direction of one who appreciates the difference between painstaking scientific field work and careless superficial observation.

Alice Walter, along with her husband, Herbert Eugene Walter (1867–1945), a famous zoologist and geneticist at Brown University, were best known for their early field guides. The first edition was published in 1902 as *Wild Birds in City Parks; being hints on identifying 100 birds, prepared primarily for the spring migration in Lincoln Park, Chicago*. By 1910, it had expanded to *Wild Birds in City Parks; being hints on identifying 200 birds, prepared primarily for the spring migration in Lincoln Park, Chicago, but adapted to other localities*. Many more editions followed, into the 1920s. Alice also wrote a memoir about Hermon Carey Bumpus (Walter 1943; Figure 1), the researcher of the famous House Sparrow (*Passer domes-*

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FIGURE 1. Portrait of Hermon Carey Bumpus, one of the founders of the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole on Cape Cod, director of the American Museum of Natural History, and fifth president of Tufts College. He was associated with Brown University throughout his career, and this portrait, painted in 1937 by Will Samuel Taylor, hangs in the Science Library there. Brown University Portrait Collection, BP141.

ticus) dataset collected during a snowstorm (Bumpus 1899; see Johnston et al. 1972).

The AOU took pause at its annual meeting to reflect for an hour on the year 1917. The panel consisted of A. A. Allen, Frank M. Chapman, H. K. Job, H. C. Oberholser, T. Gilbert Pearson, and T. S. Palmer (35:107–112). While acknowledging the problems associated with conducting research because of World War I, the topics that were discussed included field studies, mostly in the Americas; economic ornithology; important publications, of which there were many; education, where it was reported that 261,654 students in the United States and Canada had received training in birds; and legislation, over 250 state laws having been passed to protect game and nongame birds.

It was announced that Reuben Myron Strong (1872–1964) would again be teaching the bird course at the University of Michigan Biological Station at Douglas Lake. He had taught it the summer before as "The Natural History of Birds," but in 1917 it was called "Ornithology" (Nelson 1956), making it one of the earliest ornithology courses in North America. (Lynds Jones [1865–1951] is generally acknowledged as offering the first university or college course in ornithology in 1895 at Oberlin College.) At the time, Strong was a professor of anatomy at Vanderbilt University. In 1918, he took a position at the School of Medicine at Loyola University in Chicago, where he stayed until his retirement in 1946. Strong produced a four-volume publication, *A Bibliography of Birds*, which was considered an amazing tour de force at the time. The first two volumes appeared in 1939 and contained citations listed by authors' names in many languages, from A to J and from K to Z, respectively. The third volume was the subject index, and it appeared in 1947; the fourth, another index, appeared about 10 years later. While at Douglas Lake in 1917, Strong thought that Herring Gulls (*Larus argentatus*) could be trained to detect submarines during the war (Strong 1923). He also weighed in on the "how to describe bird song" controversy of the time, calling bird songs "voices" (Strong 1918). Strong joined the AOU in 1889 and was elected as a Fellow on the basis of the *Bibliography* in 1949, surely one of the longest intervals between joining and becoming a Fellow (60 years).

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