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100 YEARS AGO IN THE AOU

100 Years Ago in the American Ornithologists' Union

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The 32nd meeting of the AOU was held in May of 1915 in San Francisco to coincide with the Panama-Pacific International Exposition, a world's fair that celebrated the completion of the Panama Canal and the recovery of San Francisco from the earthquake of 1906. The business meeting was conducted at the California Academy of Sciences and the 3 days of public sessions were held at the Exposition grounds in the auditorium of the Young Women's Christian Association and that of the Eiler Music Company in the Palace of Liberal Arts.

The business meeting was called to order by President Albert K. Fisher on Monday evening, May 17th, and 11 Fellows were present. All the officers of the AOU were re-elected, with John H. Sage continuing as Secretary for the 26th year and Jonathan Dwight, Jr., continuing as Treasurer for the 12th year. The society had 1,156 members in the following categories: 50 Fellows, 3 Retired Fellows, 13 Honorary Fellows, 56 Corresponding Fellows, 79 Members, and 955 Associates. In the preceding year, 9 Members had died, 18 had resigned, and 27 were dropped for not paying their dues.

The deceased included a Retired Fellow, an Honorary Fellow, a Corresponding Fellow and 6 Associates. Dr. Theodore Nicholas Gill (1837–1914) was referred to as the “Master of Taxonomy” and was equally at home “in biography or biology, etymology or entomology, and among mollusks or mammals” (The Auk 32:391). Rarely leaving the confines of Washington, D. C., he nonetheless published more than 500 papers on vertebrate biology of organisms (mostly fishes) from all over the world. He had a long association with Columbian College (now George Washington University) where he received 4 honorary degrees. He was elected an Active Member of the AOU at its first meeting in 1883, and transferred to the newly created Retired Fellow in 1913, thus becoming the first deceased Retired Fellow. Graf Hans Hermann Carl Ludwig von Berlepsch (1850–1915) was one of the original Corresponding Fellows in the AOU, becoming an Honorary Fellow in 1890. Independently wealthy, he sponsored several collectors in South America and was generally considered an authority on birds from there. His collection of 55,000 specimens was sold to the Senckenberg Naturmuseum in Frankfurt upon his death. Otto Herman (1835–1914) was a Corresponding Fellow and was known as the “Hungarian Renaissance man.” Associated

with the Hungarian National Museum before going into politics, he hosted the 2nd International Ornithological Congress in Budapest in 1891, started the journal *Aquila* in 1894, and may be best remembered for his 3-volume *The Spider Fauna of Hungary*. Of the 6 deceased Associates, one was Lewis Lindsay Dyche (1857–1915), for whom the building housing the Natural History Museum at the University of Kansas is named.

Emilia Snethlage (1868–1929) was elected as a Corresponding Fellow from Brazil. At the time, she was associated with the Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi at Belém, having succeeded Goeldi as the head of the zoology section. Raised in Germany, she was generally described as an explorer, traveling to places in the Amazon “never before visited by a white person.” She died of heart failure while on an expedition. Edwin R. Kalmbach (1884–1972) was elected as a Member (and then a Fellow in 1927). At the time, he was working for the Biological Survey and he would eventually become the first head of the Denver Wildlife Research Laboratory in 1940. As a wildlife artist, he was instrumental in starting the federal duck stamp act. He was awarded the prestigious Aldo Leopold Memorial Award from The Wildlife Society in 1958. The other Member was the Honorable George Shiras, III (or as he preferred to call himself, “3D”) (1859–1942), a politician from Pennsylvania who became one of the leading wildlife photographers. The son of a Supreme Court justice, while in Congress he worked hard on legislation for conservation of birds. His photography won first prize at the World's Fair in St. Louis in 1904 and an entire issue of *National Geographic* featured his work in July of 1906. That prompted President Teddy Roosevelt to write 3D a letter, encouraging him to produce a book of his works, which he did 30 years later (Shiras 1936). He was one of the first to employ the new technology of using a flash when taking pictures (Figure 1).

A total of 68 people were elected as Associates. Most notable among those was 14 year-old Maurice Graham Brooks (1900–1993) from French Creek, West Virginia. He was the consummate natural historian of the Appalachian Mountains and was elected as a Fellow in the AOU in 1950. Mary Thatcher Cook (1885–1963) also was elected, the daughter of W. W. Cook, the pioneer in bird migration studies. She would shortly join the United States Biological

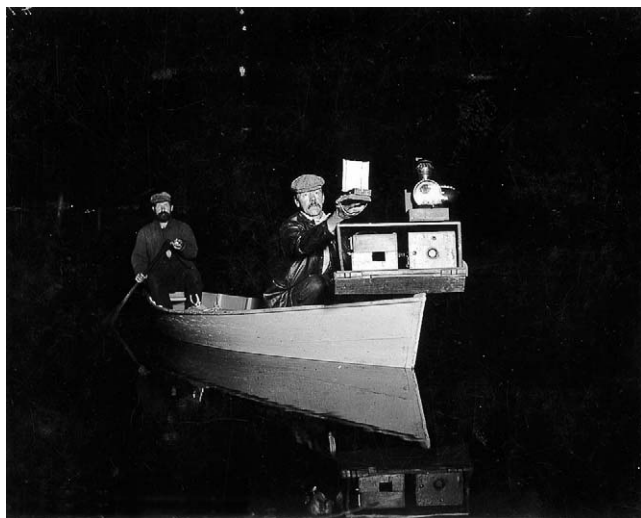


FIGURE 1. Honorable George Shiras, III (3D), one of the first photographers to use a flash and a canoe to photograph wildlife.

Survey and continue to champion her father's work on migration and banding, retiring in 1947 from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Two other important issues occurred during the business meeting. A new committee was formed, the Committee on Biography and Bibliography, chaired by T. S. Palmer. Palmer had recently sent a letter to *The Auk* (32:133–134) lamenting the number of obituaries that had not been written and the incompleteness of many that had appeared. Editor Stone replied that the Council should appoint “some competent member of the Union, such as Dr. Palmer, as a permanent committee on History and Biography . . .” Secondly, a major change in the bylaws was adopted such that “Members will hereafter share with Fellows the business of the Union and the election of Officers, Members, and Associates.”

The following day, the first day of public sessions was called to order by President Fisher, the second day by Vice-President Stone, and the third day by President Fisher. Many papers in all three sessions dealt with birds found in the western United States. The evening after the first session, 50 people gathered for dinner at the newly opened Clift Hotel, which is still one of the fine hotels in San Francisco today. During the second session, members repaired to the Chop Suey Restaurant for lunch, one of the main attractions in The Palace of Food Products, a division of the Palace of Agriculture at the Exposition. “Plain chop suey cost twenty-five cents, chop suey with pork forty cents and mushroom chop suey fifty cents. One could also buy Chinese cakes, sweetmeats, or (questionably authentic) plain ham sandwiches for ten cents, as well as Chinese style squab for only sixty cents, teas at various prices depending on quality, and “Mandarin dinners” for a dollar fifty cents apiece” (Todd 1921:379). Although several stories attribute the

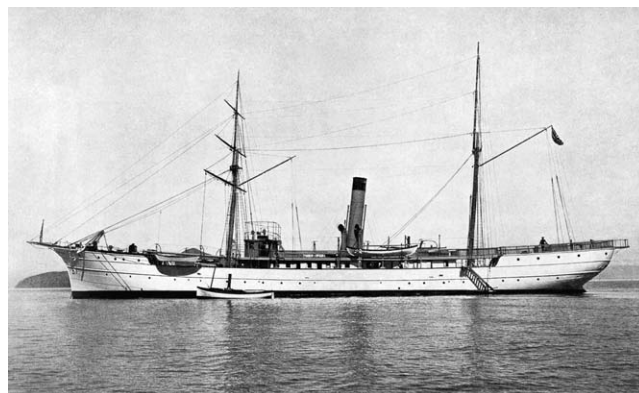


FIGURE 2. USFC *Albatross*.

origin of chop suey to San Francisco, they apparently are not true (Yu 1987).

At the time, the Cooper Ornithological Club had two divisions: a southern one centered on Los Angeles and a northern one centered on the Bay Area. A resolution was passed by the AOU thanking the Southern Division for hospitality when AOU members were in Los Angeles and thanking the Northern Division for hospitality while they were in San Francisco.

On Friday, 75 AOU and Cooper Club members toured San Francisco Bay aboard the U. S. Bureau of Fisheries steamer *Albatross* (Figure 2). Launched in 1882, the *Albatross* is believed to be the first vessel built specifically for marine research. It was used for research in the Atlantic Ocean until sailing to the Pacific Ocean in 1887, arriving in San Francisco in May of 1888. During World War I, it was a Navy vessel stationed in Florida, returning to marine research in 1919, only to be decommissioned 2 years later at Woods Hole on Cape Cod.

The trip around the bay was hosted by the famous ichthyologist and Director of the California Academy of Sciences Barton W. Evermann (1853–1932). Other members hiked in the Muir Woods north of San Francisco or visited Mount Tamalpais. Those members who lingered were invited later in the month to the summer home of the C. Hart Merriams at Lagunitas, among the redwoods north of San Francisco.

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