IN MEMORIAM: CHARLES FOSTER BATCHELDER

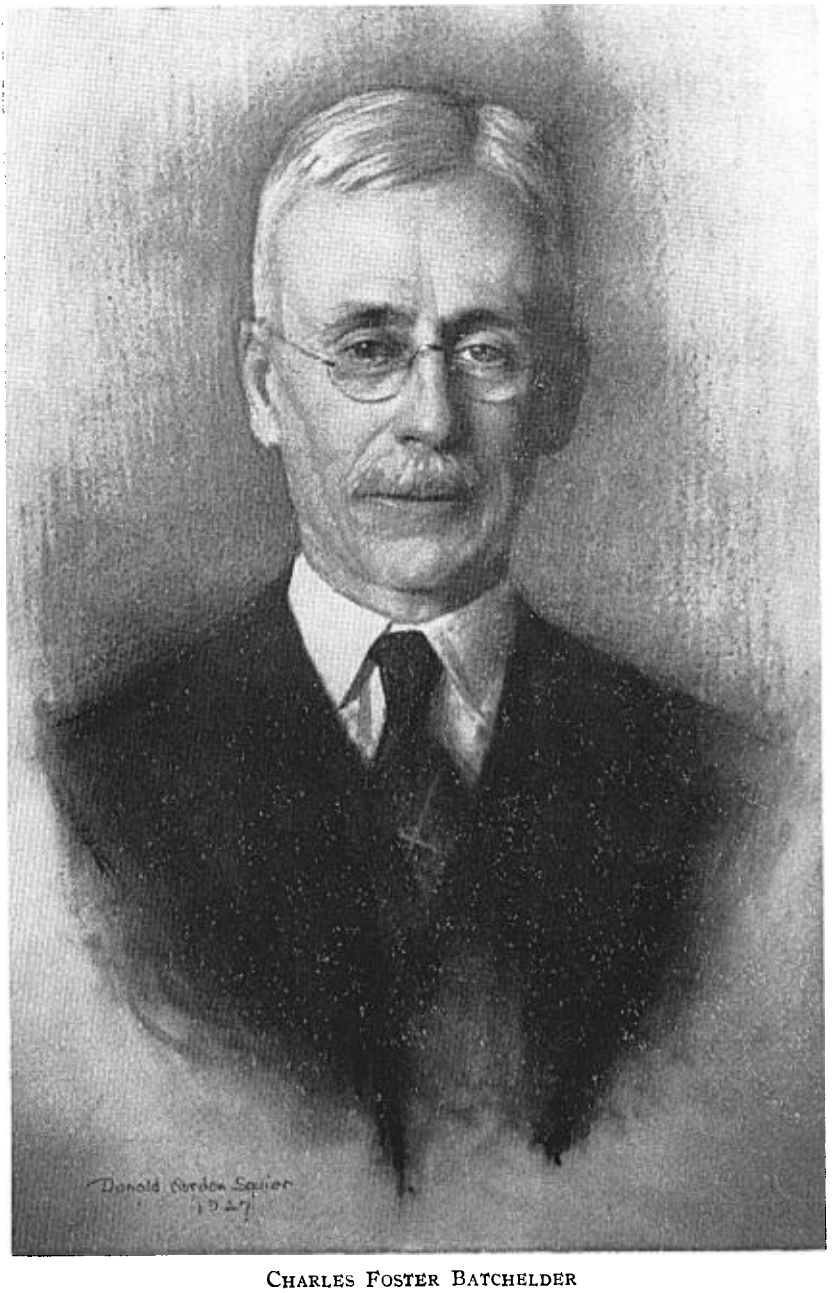
BY WENDELL TABER

CHARLES FOSTER BATCHELDER, last of the Founders of the American Ornithologists' Union and its eighth President (1905–1908), died at the age of 98 in his home in Peterborough, New Hampshire, on November 7, 1954. He had never taken out life insurance. Drily, he would remark he had figured he could beat the game. He failed, though, to achieve a minor goal, a life span of one hundred years. He had attained, easily, his major aim, the title of Senior Graduate of Harvard College. In 1953, when Nathan M. Pusey was celebrating his own "25th." and in process of being installed as President of Harvard University, Batchelder might well have led the parade of graduates at Commencement—in a wheel chair—celebrating his "Diamond Reunion"—alone! He refused. "Merely an object of curiosity." was his comment.

His parents, Francis Lowell Batchelder and Susan Cabot Foster Batchelder, had acquired a country estate at 7 Kirkland Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Here, directly opposite the back side of Holworthy Hall in the Harvard Yard, Batchelder was born, grew up, and resided for some months in winter for the rest of his life. Here, for about thirty years following the death of William Brewster, met the Nuttall Ornithological Club.

Batchelder, born July 20, 1856, hardly knew his father, who died when Batchelder was barely eighteen months of age. Ever an out-door lad as he grew up, he often wandered over the four miles or so to the little hamlet of Arlington, riding in due time one of those huge wheels with baby trailer-wheel which preceded the bicycle as we know it today. Of this period he has written, "Cambridge in the 'sixties was hardly more than a group of villages, and it was immediately bordered, especially on the west and north, by unspoiled country,—open fields and shady lanes, with old apple orchards and woodland, and well watered with ponds and marshes and streams. Beyond, stretched woods, meadows and old farms, farther than boys' feet or imaginations could carry them." Through this country had been strolling those boyhood pals, William Brewster and Henry Wetherbee Henshaw, Batchelder's seniors by five or six years. Association with an older group, E. A. Samuels, Henry Augustus Purdie, C. J. Maynard, and Ruthven Deane, quickly intensified the interest of the younger group in birds. Soon a newcomer to Cambridge joined the group, W. E. D. Scott. A childish interest became serious and ripened into devotion.

During this period F. L. Batchelder's widow, unable in her restricted financial condition even to afford a horse, had devoted herself to the



CHARLES FOSTER BATCHELDER

raising and education of a youth, delicate but tough, and a girl, who died about the time when, after completing his studies at the Cambridge public high school, Batchelder entered college. The proximity of residence and college enabled him to live modestly at home. He lacked those close contacts with his classmates arising out of dormitory life. In college he already had a nucleus of like-thinking outdoor friends, and he compensated for the lack of college life by a wise choice of friends on the Harvard faculty. He came in close contact with Alexander Agassiz, Curator of the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Theodore Lyman, Assistant in Zoology, Joel Asaph Allen, Assistant in Ornithology, Walter Faxon, Assistant in the Zoological Laboratory and Instructor in Zoology, and Asa Gray, Trustee of the Peabody Museum and Professor of Natural History. Particularly did he admire Nathaniel S. Shaler, Professor of Paleontology, and Henry L. Eustis, Dean of the Lawrence Scientific School and Professor of Engineering. Illness compelled him to withdraw, temporarily, from graduate work in this latter school. He returned in the autumn of 1880 and graduated in 1882 with the degree of M.E.S. (Now C.E.)

Leader of the local group of youngsters interested in natural history during the 'sixties, many still in their "teens", was William Brewster. Henshaw it was, though, who instilled in Brewster the idea that the two meet once a week to read aloud "Audubon" and to discuss it in the light of their own experiences. The others soon straggled in. Discussions widened. Without realization, the group became a "club" as it met in the attic of the Brewsters' house. Humorously true—and ever since a truth in fact—was Ruthven Deane's slip of the pen inviting Ernest Ingersoll to attend a meeting in the evening of November 24, 1873, "relative to forming an ornitholocal society." Not until March 5, 1877, did Batchelder, not yet twenty-one years of age, and a junior in college, become a member of the Nuttall Ornithological Club. By December 1, 1879, he was Vice President. He relinquished this position to become Treasurer on December 20, 1880,—and such he remained for the next half-century.

Through with his post-graduate work in 1882, he spent nearly a year collecting intensively in Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona and California. Travel, in those days, was an undertaking. Trains of a sort did exist. The horse ruled supreme. In constant communication with Brewster about the Bulletin of the Nuttall Ornithological Club which Batchelder had edited temporarily in 1882 during the absence of J. A. Allen, his duties as Treasurer, and other Club affairs, he tinted letters with remarks such as, "Didn't get a shot at a California Condor!" and "I must stop a moment to use a few California adjectives about this pen." Returning

home he followed his vocation during 1884 and 1885—his entire career in the business world. His frail constitution succumbed to the zest with which he tackled his profession. In April, 1886, he traveled widely in Europe where his ill health continued or renewed. Not until July, 1887, three months before returning to this country, was his health restored.

Confined much of the time to his quarters while in Europe, he concentrated on mental tasks. He outlined the information for labels, such as the date and place collected, the collector, and other pertinent data. He developed a type of check-list adapted to recording daily, a month at a time, the number of each and every species seen. The distant perspective of America brought forth the comment, "I have come to look upon the spring migration as one of the worst—instead of the best times for collecting."

Another trip to California in the spring of 1887 brought to a close Batchelder's ornithological expeditions far afield. Minor trips were to the Fort Fairfield region of Maine in 1879, North Carolina for about a month in the winter of 1885–1886, and the Catskill mountains in New York State in the summer of 1889.

Not until February 19, 1895, when he was approaching 39 years of age, did he marry. Laura Poor Stone Batchelder was not too many years younger. She survived her husband by less than two years. Of the four sons, the two younger, Charles Foster Batchelder, Jr., and Laurence Batchelder survive.

In June, 1899, the family moved into a newly constructed summer home at Seal Harbor in Maine where, hardly settled, they awaited the arrival of Edward Rand and the Ruthven Deanes. Due to the recurrent illnesses of the children, attributed to drinking water, the family moved from this home after a few years. Shortly after the turn of the century they acquired at Peterborough, New Hampshire, a large, almost pretentious estate where what "once was nearly an abandoned farm has afforded me almost unlimited opportunities for experiment. My efforts in developing it have not led towards intensive cultivation or other paths to wealth. More ambitiously, I have tried to lend nature a helping hand in showing how she can make its woods and waters more interesting and beautiful. Sometimes she is responsive, but happily there is no danger of my undertakings reaching such complete fruition that I shall be left with idle hands at the end."

In the 1930s, when the children were grown, the Batchelders toured Ireland, especially, where they visited in a thatched cottage with dirt floor the parents of their servant. On the same trip, they toured England. During this period, too, the Batchelders would head south in winter at times, visiting places such as Biloxi in Mississippi and Mexico City.

On one occasion, not too distant from Peterborough, a new chauffer tipped over the automobile. Batchelder, the only other occupant of the car, scrambled out unhurt.

Increasingly, in this final third of a century, the Peterborough home became known for its comfortable, yet unassuming open hospitality. The offhand caller could be assured of an invitation for lunch or dinner. Smiling "with his eyes" as one child put it, Batchelder would merely remark, "The servants like company."

Friends of many years' standing found excuses to drive to Peterborough on a summer Sunday. In one instance, Robert Walcott and Laurence B. Fletcher arrived to find Batchelder "pounding away on his typewriter" and surrounded by card catalogues. At the same time he was keeping a minute account of the daily schedule of "hedgehogs" (subsequently published, 1948) that lived under his barn and moved up on a tree outside his window for their evening meal. About a year before he died he bought a brand new typewriter.

Batchelder had a remarkable ability to ask questions in a way that did not antagonize. Rather, the questions led on the person to elaborate on his statement. Batchelder was well aware of his own possession of a penetrating ability to analyze his fellow humans with a skill that increased with the passing years and the background of experience. He delighted in the application of this talent. He could dissect with equal skill, favorably or unfavorably, a contemporary, or some ornithologist out of the dim, distant past. He had a subtle, dry humor of the British type. He took impish delight in telling a caller how his great grandfather arrived "a little late" at the battle of Lexington. Off guard with intimate friends, he had a habit of thinking outloud. Abruptly changing the line of conversation one day, he quietly remarked, "You know, I think —— is beginning to get old [85 years of age]. I was very much tempted to give him a piece of my mind, but, under the circumstances, I think perhaps the best thing to do is to let matters slide." Batchelder was a mere 95!

The formerly widespread impression that the Nuttall Ornithological Club had founded the American Ornithologists' Union was a constant source of distress to Batchelder, always a stickler for accuracy. Ultimately, 1937, he published the setting and background of this historic event. The originating Founders did not consult the Nuttall Club. In fact, they sent invitations only to a mere three or four of its members, and the members of the club as a whole were, initially, utterly unaware of the undertaking. The Nuttall Ornithological Club "felt no great enthusiasm for the new-born Union, especially when it was asked—and by pressure of circumstances rather unwillingly compelled—to give up publishing the 'Bulletin', in order not to interfere with the Union's

plans for a similar publication of its own." Helping to perpetuate the erroneous impression was the fact that "the Union took over all it could of the Bulletin—the Editor, the arrangement of contents, style of topography and of paper. It even was clearly suggested that it might willingly take the contents of the Club's Treasury."

Batchelder served as Associate Editor of 'The Auk' from 1888 to 1893. Prior to becoming President of the A. O. U. he had acted as Vice President for the period 1900–1905.

Down through the generations continued the Nuttall Ornithological Club as it had been—a close-knit, compact, friendly for the most part, group of ornithologists functioning not as a club, but on their own—sharpening their intellects by intellectual intercourse. Except for the year, 1875–1876, when Purdie was President, Brewster held the Chair until his death in 1919. Associated with this era in addition to members already mentioned were Francis H. Allen, Outram Bangs, Thomas Barbour, Arthur Cleveland Bent, Henry Bryant Bigelow, Charles Barney Cory, the three Deane brothers, George C., Ruthven and Walter, Jonathan Dwight, Walter Faxon, Joseph A. Hagar, F. Seymour Hersey, Ralph Hoffman, William A. Jeffries, Frederic H. Kennard, John B. May, C. J. Maynard (resigned 1876), Gerrit S. Miller, Albert P. Morse, John Murdoch, John T. Nichols, James Lee Peters, John C. Phillips, Theodore Roosevelt, John Eliot Thayer, Charles Wendell Townsend, Winsor M. Tyler, Robert Walcott, and Francis Beach White. In a later generation came Josselyn Van Tyne, with whom a life friendship developed.

Who wouldn't have a host of marvellous memories! Batchelder had taken Jim Peters into his own home during a two weeks' illness before the first World War and long before Peters married. White, a faithful attendant at meetings and coming from Concord, New Hampshire, was as regular an overnight guest. Hoffman originally was "not careful" in his work, but then the quality improved. Batchelder "blew cold", but with versatility changed his opinion and "blew hot." Of the two Harvard undergraduates who dropped in to meetings together, Henry D. Minot and Theodore Roosevelt, he wrote, "I am afraid some of us looked on the two a little askance. We recognized their ability, but both seemed a bit too cocksure and lacking in the self-criticism that, in our eyes, went with a truly scientific spirit. But they were young—and so were we!"

Glover M. Allen succeeded Brewster as president of the Nuttall; Jim Peters took over after Glover's death. The era of binoculars and telescopes commenced. Batchelder wisely wrote, "rules may help chiefly in visualizing the question, but it must be remembered that the difficulty often lies not in testing the observed facts but in dealing with the observer's mind."

As far back as 1895 Batchelder had written Brewster offering the use of his Cambridge house for Nuttall meetings in the event Brewster's museum should be closed, even temporarily. It was only natural, therefore, that Batchelder should take over upon Brewster's death. Never in front, ever the power behind the scenes—not that one was needed in that congenial atmosphere—Batchelder refused in 1942 to accept even a courtesy election as President, designed to inscribe his name on the roster; without opposition, he could have been the active President.

Once a month through the winter period the inner group of the Nuttall met for dinner, rotating from one member's home to another. The membership comprised Outram Bangs, Thomas Barbour, Batchelder, William Brewster, Walter Deane, Joseph L. Goodale, William A. Jeffries, Frederic H. Kennard, Edward Rand, Henry M. Spelman, Charles W. Townsend, and possibly others. Arthur Cleveland Bent belonged for a time, but found the difficulties of transportation to his home in Taunton rendered the trip impracticable—and it may be doubted that the other members were particularly desirous of the inevitable rotation taking them so far afield.

Almost certainly, it was 'Batch' who originated the New Year's Celebration, the first meeting of the Nuttall Club in each calendar year, which became an institution in its own right. Such an occasion has been recorded for all time in 'The Auk' for 1955, vol. 72, opposite page 64. Answering a question from Harold Bowditch as to why he called the punch "Fires of Spring", Batchelder countered in a flash, "Why? Well, you know how you build a bonfire in the spring. You rake up the yard, dead grass, twigs from the trees, perhaps a shingle or two that have blown off the house, and scraps of all kinds. That is how I made the punch. I went into the cellar, where I found a little of this and a little of that and put them all together, and that made the punch. Fires of Spring."

Eagerly anticipated, too, were the gala, festive gatherings to honor some member, William A. Jeffries, for example, upon completion of fifty years of membership. Attributed to Roger Tory Peterson just elected a member, was the remark, as he noted four men standing at a table, engaged in deep discussion, "Just look, Glover Allen, Cleveland Bent, Francis Allen, Charles Townsend—and you could cover them all with a blanket." The blanket was proffered.

Inevitably, the composition of the Nuttall Club membership changed. Cambridge failed to provide a flow of talent to replace bygone generations. Increasingly, the accent shifted from the approach of the Brewster era to concentration on the migrations or winter bird life, as exemplified in popular field trips. Ultimately, after having politely sat through

many meetings unable to hear more than an occasional word of what was going on, due to increasing deafness, and having difficulty in recognizing members as his eyesight failed, Batchelder was happy to have me take over the housing of meetings after that of April 18, 1949. The death of Jim Peters on April 19, 1952 marked, he feared, the end of the club as he had known it.

An individual, whose more than casual contact did not commence until Batchelder was in his seventies, defined him as "hard to know, incurably suspicious of strangers, but generous and hospitable to a fault once his liking and approval had been given. Further, he was thought a snob, as he would not know or bother to remember younger birders—until they had become persons of some importance. He took the A.O.U. and the Nuttall, which in later years he saw in a golden haze of imaginary glory, with almost preposterous seriousness. Although a marvellous editor, he required ample time and unlimited money."

Certainly, there was little more than a "slight modicum" of truth in this writer's remarks. One has to discount, heavily, the first two sentences of the criticism if he takes into consideration severe deafness on top of extreme age. The writer also lacked the background of history in the A.O.U. and in the Nuttall. Just what *is* a man between 70 and 98 years of age expected to concentrate on? And Batchelder was even more handicapped when, in August, 1943, due to poor eyesight, he stepped into a depression in the ground on his lawn in Peterborough, fell, and broke his hip. For the next 11 years he used crutches.

As an editor, he had been gifted with the ability to obtain whatever funds he found necessary—an ability to be envied. He had, himself, recognized the time-defect. As far back as June 28, 1906, he wrote Brewster from Falmouth, Massachusetts, "physical limitations to the amount of work that I could do at a stretch have often made the work of printing move much more slowly than it might have done."

Batchelder was one of the Founders of the New England Zoological Club in 1899. The details and list of members are available in Volume X of the 'Proceedings', 1929. Summarizing the record, Thomas Barbour wrote, "An enterprise of this nature sinks or swims, depending upon its editor. It may either become slipshod and amateurish or offend equally by an attempt at preciosity or elaboration, if its editor is not—not devoted alone—but competent. Charles Foster Batchelder during these thirty years has built a modest but enduring monument in this neat series of volumes not only wholly satisfactory to see and feel but astonishingly faultless in all details of language, citation and form." Further, he placed the 'Proceedings' in the mail on the actual date of publication!

Batchelder was, perhaps, a bit short-sighted. If the standing of the

club were to be maintained, younger generations should have been brought along. Objecting to the publication of papers by non-members, he wrote Bangs in 1901, making the point that established mammalogists already had access to outlets for publication. "Only the younger, unknown group would use" the 'Proceedings'.

Yet another facet of this broad-minded, versatile scientist was his interest in botany. Richard J. Eaton has written that, although Batchelder had taken elementary and advanced courses in this subject in college under Professors Goodale and Farlow, "It was not until December, 1905, that he accepted election to resident membership in the New England Botanical Club and thus afforded himself a stimulating contact with active botanists, both professional and amateur. During the next thirty years he rarely missed its monthly meetings and was a frequent contributor to discussions of the paper of the evening. The flora of southern New Hampshire was not well represented in any herbarium, so it seemed appropriate to concentrate on the southern tier of counties readily accessible by carriage and motor car from his home in Peterborough. He systematically pursued this undertaking for the next thirty years, generally with Mrs. Batchelder as coachman, chauffeur, and companion. The Club Accessions Book records a total of 5,776 sheets received from Mr. Batchelder during the years 1914 through 1939. It is suspected that this figure is an understatement of his contributions to the Club. He appears to have regarded his scientific attainments in botany with extreme skepticism. I can find but a single published article on the subject over his signature, viz.: 'Two Grasses New to New Hampshire', Rhodora, 14:175 (1912)."

In the year 1933–34 he became officially connected with the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard as Associate in Mammalogy. He was at that time only some 77 years old. From 1934 to 1942 he was Associate in Mammalogy and Ornithology and from 1942 to 1948 Research Fellow in Mammalogy and Ornithology. Beginning, finally, to get old, he reverted during the period, 1948 to 1954 to the position of Associate in Mammalogy and Ornithology.

He was a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and of the American Association Advancement of Science and at one time or another belonged to the Boston Society of Natural History, the Washington Academy of Sciences, and the Biological Society of Washington.

Strong was his dislike of C. J. Maynard, joint Editor with H. A. Purdie of the intial issue of the 'Bulletin of the Nuttall Ornithological Club', six days late in appearing. Maynard, disregarding further responsibility, departed on a collecting trip from which he returned in

July. He had been replaced by J. A. Allen. Time softens feelings. One has to believe Batchelder in the last few years of his life felt he had been unduly severe on Maynard. In atonement, Batchelder slowly and laboriously compiled a "Bibliography of Charles Johnson Maynard", a fitting finale in 1951 to his own lengthy bibliography. Maynard's papers were many, frequently short items in out of the way publications. Batchelder was terribly perturbed, later, to discover he had overlooked an item. Batchelder prepared his own meticulous bibliography, here appended.

Consistent with a life-long practice, he went yet once again to the hospital, in Boston in 1954. Returning to Peterborough, he failed rapidly. As I rose to leave one afternoon shortly before his death, his eyes grew suddenly large and clear with an undescribable mischievous sparkle. In a strong, ringing voice, utterly unlike his conversational intonations of the previous half hour, he called,

"Glad to have known you."

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