

MARYLAND BIRDLIFE

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Send Field Notes and other material to your local Staff Member, or direct to Editor Chandler S. Robbins, Patuxent Research Refuge, Laurel, Md.

SPECIAL ARTICLES

EUROPEAN TEAL IN MARYLAND

On February 18, 1950 while watching ducks and geese on a large artificial pond on the estate of Mr. H. W. Heine, near Berlin, Maryland, with other members of the Maryland Ornithological Society, I decided to search the groups of numerous Green-winged Teal, Anas carolinense, for a possible European Teal, Anas crecca. After a few minutes of checking individual males one by one I was both surprised and pleased to find a typical European Teal. It looked like a Green-winged but had the horizontal white stripe on the side instead of the vertical white stripe of the Green-winged. The identification was verified by Paul Springer and other members of our group. The observation was made through a twenty power telescope at a distance of approximately 200 yards.

On February 26, Chandler S. Robbins, with members of the Audubon Society of the District of Columbia, knowing of our find, located a European Teal on the same pond after much searching and thus again verified the presence of a European Teal in Maryland.

Henry Marshall of Laurel, Maryland, shot a European Teal at an unspecified locality on the Potomac River near Washington in April, 1885, and presented the specimen to the National Museum (Auk 3:139-140). There is no assurance, however, that this bird was taken in Maryland, and no other record is known for our State.

The European Teal breeds from southern Greenland, Iceland, Scandinavia, northern Russia, northern Siberia, and the Aleutian Islands south to Spain, Italy, southern Russia, southern Siberia, and northwestern China. It winters south to central Africa and southern Asia and also on the Aleutian Islands. An occasional visitor to eastern North America, the European Teal has been recorded in two Canadian provinces, ten states, and the District of Columbia, from Labrador to South Carolina and as far inland as Ohio. The earliest record in the files at Patuxent Research Refuge is of a specimen collected in Nova Scotia in September, 1854. The European Teal has been recorded in the eastern United States during all seasons of the year except summer, but most often during the months of February, March, and April.

Clark G. Webster

THE SEASON

March and April, 1950

The months of March and April brought an abrupt reversal to the temperature trend which had produced above-normal warmth for 15 of the past 16 months. Snowfall, however, continued very light, and in much of the State the winter's snow was the lightest on record. Most vegetation remained dormant through March; and the combination of cool weather and only half the normal rainfall in April retarded spring growth throughout the period. Bird migration, which had begun prematurely in January and February, slowed down conspicuously during March. There were brief bursts of migratory movement during warm spells on Mar. 28, Apr. 3-4 and Apr. 17-19, but since this migration occurred on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays it was missed by many observers. Many stations reported their highest April temperatures on the 4th, when the mercury soared to the low 80's. From the 20th on, however, the temperature did not reach 80° anywhere in the State, and the hordes of insectivorous migrants which were expected momentarily failed to make an appearance. A mild influx of southerly air on Apr. 26-28 brought with it a rush of belated migrants, but a score of species which normally reach Maryland during April either did not turn up at all during this month, or were found by only one observer.

During prolonged periods of retarded plant growth and unfavorable weather for migration, one may expect to find winter residents and early spring transients lingering beyond their normal departure dates. Thus the most interesting discoveries on many an April hike this year were not the scattered new arrivals from the south, but rather the continued presence of such species as the two kinglets, Winter Wren, and Hermit Thrush which remained to unprecedented dates in several localities.

Loons and Grebes. Maurice Brooks visited Deep Creek Lake in Garrett County on Apr. 8 and found 3 Common Loons and 2 Holboell's Grebes; no other report of the latter species was received in spite of the fact that this two-month period embraces almost the whole spring migration period of the Holboell's Grebe. At Gibson Island, Horned Grebes reached a peak of 100 on Apr. 2 (Mrs. Vera Henderson).

Hérons. Brooke Meanley, Robert Stewart and Clark Webster saw the first American Egrets along the Pocomoke River at Willards on Apr. 1; a more interesting observation, because it was made north of the breeding grounds of this species, was a bird seen at Pennyfield Locks near Seneca on Apr. 2 by Charles N. Mason and Philip A. DuMont. An early Little Blue Heron was found at Ocean City on Mar. 26 (Enoch and Sylvia Johnson). Like many other species, the Green Heron was

late in arriving in normal numbers, although one early bird appeared at Middle River on Apr. 14 (Edwin Willis). The American Bittern, which often arrives in March, was found during this month only in Frederick County, where Rod Smith found one on the 29th; next arrivals were at Cumberland on Apr. 1 (Alleghany County Bird Club trip) and at Strawberry Point on Apr. 7 (Willis).

Waterfowl. The first northward movement of Whistling Swans was noticed at Middle River on Mar. 11 (Willis), and a great exodus took place on the 26th; another contingent departed on the 30th, and by the last day of March only 100 could be seen from Perry Point. Three large flights which passed Gibson Island on the 3rd of April (Mrs. Henderson) completed the departure of Whistling Swans right on schedule. The peak flight of Canada Geese evidently occurred on Mar. 25, when the Enoch Johnsons observed 2,400 from the Claiborne Ferry, and an estimated 1,000 birds over Frederick made headlines in The News. A single Snow Goose was discovered at Ferry Point on Mar. 11 by Ted Hake and the York County Bird Club; it was still present on the following day (Baltimore Club trip). A Blue Goose which appeared at Buckeystown on Apr. 23 and remained through the end of the month (Stewart) is believed to be the first record for Frederick Co.

With such a mass of observations at hand for arrival and departure dates of the various species of ducks, as well as dates of peak concentrations and inland records of local interest, it is necessary to select only those notes which are believed to be of most general interest. Peak counts (although mostly obtained on weekends) will give a good indication of localities and approximate dates when the various species may profitably be watched for in future years: 14 Gadwalls at Blackwater Refuge on Mar. 25 (Enoch Johnsons); 3,000 Baldpate and 2,000 Pintail at Otter Creek on Mar. 5 (Baltimore Club trip); 75 Blue-winged Teal at Seneca on Apr. 15 (Robert J. Beaton, John W. Taylor); 55 Shovellers at Blackwater Refuge on Mar. 25 (Johnsons); a flock of 47 Wood Ducks at Pennyfield (Seneca) on Apr. 2 (Frank Cross); 250 Redheads at Bengies Point on Mar. 5 (Baltimore Club trip); 112 Ring-necked Ducks at Seneca on Mar. 26 (Taylor); 2,000 Canvas-backs at Perry Point on Mar. 5 (Baltimore Club); and 7,000 Ruddy Ducks at Elliott Island on Apr. 2 (Stewart).

Other particularly interesting occurrence records include a Gadwall on Deep Creek Lake on Apr. 8 (Brooks); a European Widgeon at the Choptank River bridge on Mar. 5 (Beaton and Taylor) and another at Perry Point on Mar. 26 (Jackson M. Abbott); 3 White-winged Scoters at Druid Lake in Baltimore, Mar. 4-19 (Pearl Heaps), and 1 at Pennyfield, Apr. 2-28 (Mason, DuMont and others).

Shorebirds. Wilson's Snipe concentrations were recorded over a five-week period, with peak counts of 26 at Allens Fresh (head of the Wicomico River) on Mar. 25 (Taylor), 13 at Middle River on Mar. 28 (Willis), and 50 in Frederick County on Apr. 30 (Meanley). Stewart found the Upland Plover at 6 locations in the vicinity of Buckeystown on Apr. 23, but no reports were received from the Coastal Plain during the two-month period. Thomas Donnelly saw a Spotted Sandpiper on Apr. 1 at the Choptank River bridge, where he had studied one on

Dec. 27; there is no assurance, however, that the bird had wintered there, and we still have no mid-winter record for the State. More normal arrival dates for the Spotted Sandpiper were received from other parts of Maryland: Apr. 16 at Port Tobacco (Catherine Crone and others), Apr. 20 at Patuxent Refuge, Apr. 22 at Middle River (Willis), and Apr. 26 at Frederick (Smith). A Greater Yellow-legs seen in Laurel on Mar. 20 by Paul Springer is the earliest date on which this species has been recorded away from tidewater, and may reflect the more northward wintering of this species during the mild winter. There were also a relatively large number of early reports of the Lesser Yellow-legs; one was seen on Kent Island on Mar. 18 (John W. Aldrich), 8 at Ocean City on Mar. 25 (Enoch Johnsons), and 16 at Sandy Point on Apr. 16 (Commander Berry and Arthur Wright).

Gulls and Terns. To Ted Hake and the York County Bird Club go the honors for first recording the Great Black-backed Gull at the head of Chesapeake Bay; they found a single bird at Northeast on Mar. 11. Edward LaFleur found an early Caspian Tern at the south end of the Hanover Street bridge in Baltimore on Apr. 15, and on the next day he and Richard Cole saw 3 there. Also on the 16th, Miss Crone and party observed 2 at Chapel Point on the Port Tobacco River. One was present from Apr. 28 at Gibson Island (Mrs. Henderson and Mrs. Vinup). An early record of the Black Tern was obtained at Patuxent Refuge on Apr. 29 by Stewart.

Snowy Owl, Chimney Swift. No new Snowy Owls were discovered during the present period, but Robert Beaton learned through Captain Lofton that the 3 birds which had wintered on the latter's property at Mills Point on the Wicomico River left on Mar. 21. Except for a very early Chimney Swift at Frederick on Apr. 4 (Rod Smith) and a flock of 8 at Brookmont on Apr. 9 (S.S. Baker), this species was notably late in putting in an appearance; it was first seen at Port Tobacco (Crone) and Oxon Hill (Beaton) on the 16th, Annapolis on the 18th (Arthur Wright), Patuxent Refuge on the 19th, Woodside on the 22nd (Fales), and Middle River, White Marsh, Westminster and Hagerstown on the 23rd.

Flycatchers, Swallows. Single early arrivals of the Phoebe were noted at Baltimore on Mar. 6 (Miss Heaps), at Glen Echo on Mar. 11 (Clara Schoenbauer and Ada Moyer Smith), and at Cape St. Clair in Anne Arundel County on Mar. 12 (Berry, Wright). The Wicomico area was the only additional locality reporting this species on the following weekend (Beaton and Mason). By the 25th, however, the Phoebe had finally arrived at White Marsh (Douglas Hackman) and middle River (Willis), and on the next day it had reached McDonogh (Jack Weaver) and was common at Seneca (Taylor). The first one in Allegany County was noted at Oldtown on Apr. 1 on a Junior Club trip. The only other flycatchers reported in April were the Eastern Kingbird and the Crested Flycatcher. The Kingbird first appeared at Beltsville on the 26th (Fales), and by the 28th had reached Middle River (Willis) and Seneca (Beaton). The Crested Flycatcher was first observed at Patuxent Refuge and Seneca on the 28th, and on the following day was recorded north to White Marsh and Middle River. A lone Tree Swallow seen at Damascus on Mar. 25 by Low and Robbins

represents an early arrival for the Piedmont section of the State. There were numerous reports of the Rough-winged Swallow, the first at Seneca on Mar. 26 and Middle River on Mar. 29; but only one Bank Swallow was recorded in the entire period. A Barn Swallow at White Marsh on Mar. 26 was very early for that far north; 2 birds seen at Patuxent Refuge on Mar. 28 (Oscar Warbach) were the only others reported in the next ten days. Cliff Swallows were spotted as far east as Gibson Island (Apr. 27, Mrs. Vinup) and White Marsh (Apr. 23, Hackman). The first Purple Martin arrived at Virgil Turner's large colony in Federalsburg on Mar. 23; two days later the first "scout" reached the colony of Thomas Israel in Laurel; other arrivals were: Mar. 26 at Allens Fresh (Taylor), Mar. 27 at Chalk Point (E. John and Adele Besson) and Middle River (Willis), and Mar. 28 at Frederick (Rod Smith).

Raven, Creeper. Ravens are now of fairly regular occurrence on Backbone Mountain in the vicinity of Roth Rock, but according to local residents they do not spend the winter there; neither has any evidence of nesting been obtained in Maryland since 1904. Ravens seen by Maurice Brooks on Apr. 8 may have been wanderers from West Virginia nesting sites, but observers should be on the alert for the possible nesting of this interesting species in our state. Brown Creepers were among the song birds which remained with us later than usual under the influence of continued cool weather through April. Three individuals were noted both at Silver Spring on Apr. 22 (Cross) and on Apr. 29 at Woodside (Fales); single birds were seen at Middle River on the 27th and at Patuxent Refuge on the 28th.

Wrens, Catbird and Thrasher. A House Wren seen at Potomac in Montgomery County by DuMont on the exceedingly early date of Mar. 26 raises suspicion as to whether the bird might have survived the winter nearby. No other was recorded until 4 weeks later when the first arrivals were noted at Woodside (Apr. 23, Fales), Patuxent Refuge (Apr. 24, Springer), and White Marsh (Apr. 24, Hackman). The Winter Wren broke all records for late departures, with several records extending into the next period; Robbins counted 11 individuals at Patuxent as late as Apr. 27. Catbirds were late in arriving; even the first individuals did not appear in most localities until the last three days of April. The only exception was in southern Maryland where Lawrence Kilham and Donnelly recorded 2 on Apr. 22. The Bessons found the first Brown Thrasher at Chalk Point on the migration wave of Mar. 28. The next reports were from Patuxent Refuge on Apr. 2 (Lois Horn), Middle River on Apr. 4 (Willis), and Frederick on Apr. 7 (Rod Smith).

Gnatcatcher and Kinglets. The Gnatcatcher arrived about on schedule, appearing first on the Eastern Shore, then along Chesapeake Bay, and finally at inland localities: Apr. 1 at Willards (Stewart), Apr. 3 at Middle River (Willis), Apr. 5 at Gibson Island (Mrs. Vera Henderson), and Apr. 7 at Greenbelt (Springer) and Beltsville (R.J. Hedquist). The Golden-crowned Kinglet seldom remains into the last week of April, but this year one was seen as late as Apr. 26 at Middle River (Willis), and 2 on Apr. 29 at Woodside. The Ruby-crowned Kinglet, which stays about two weeks later than its relative, was

still common at the close of April; Stewart and Robbins counted 21 at Patuxent Refuge on Apr. 28.

Vireos. First arrivals of this group at Patuxent averaged 3 days later than normal, the Blue-headed appearing on Apr. 24, the White-eyed and Yellow-throated on the 27th, and the Red-eyed on the 28th. Earlier arrivals of the Blue-head were noted on the 18th at Baltimore and Lake Roland (Miss Heaps, Mrs. Kaestner), and on the 22nd at Frederick (Rod Smith) and Glen Echo (Mary and Sallie Van Meter). Donnelly saw 2 early White-eyes at Allens Fresh on Apr. 22.

Warblers. After getting off to a premature start on Mar. 28, when a severe midwest storm brought the first Louisiana Water-thrush to Patuxent Refuge on unseasonably warm southwest winds, the migration of warblers stayed virtually at a standstill for 30 days. Scattered individuals of the early species (Black and White and Yellow Palm) began to appear 8 or 9 days after they were due, but no other species (except the Pine which had arrived on Mar. 25) were noted at Patuxent until Apr. 27. On the latter date, under the influence of warm, southerly winds and high temperatures in Maryland, Virginia and the Carolinas, the first Nashville Warbler, Parulas (27), Black-throated Greens (2), Prairies (6), Yellow-throat, Hoodeds (4), and Redstarts (13) appeared (Stewart, Robbins, Webster). At once, bird migration gained a lost week, and for the remainder of April it ran right on schedule. By the end of the month, 27 species of warblers had been recorded in Maryland.

One of the most interesting records was the observation of a Cape May Warbler at Frederick on Mar. 12 by Rod Smith. Possibly it is just a coincidence that this first winter record for Maryland was obtained in a year when wintering individuals were also found in Virginia, West Virginia and Pennsylvania (Audubon Field Notes 4: 196, 201). Another record of equal interest was furnished by the Orange-crowned Warbler which visited the Towson feeding station of the Richard Coles daily from Nov. 26 to Apr. 25; only 5 previous Maryland occurrences of this species are known (3 in fall and one each in winter and spring).

Finches. James Stevenson reported that up to a dozen Evening Grosbeaks were present at Fort Washington as late as Mar. 15. A northward movement was in evidence in the latter half of April; Dr. F. J. Hermann saw a small flock at Berwyn on the 16th, and on the 23rd 11 birds arrived at the home of DeWitt Donaldson in Laurel. The Laurel flock was seen daily through Apr. 29, and reached a peak of 19 individuals on the 27th. There were only scattered reports of Pine Siskins. The usual heavy flight of Purple Finches was noted, however, with flocks of 100 or more being reported on the last three weekends of April. An early Blue Grosbeak was discovered at Gibson Island on Apr. 23 by Mrs. Vinup, and another near Buckeystown on Apr. 30 by Meanley. Frank Cross found a lone Rose-breasted Grosbeak at Forest Glen on Apr. 22--the only one of the period. The first Towhee arrivals were noted at Chalk Point (Bessons), Beltsville (Fales) and Patuxent Refuge (Helen Webster) on the Mar. 28 wave. By the 31st this species had reached Lake Roland (Mrs. Kaestner), and

on the following day it was observed at Gibson Island (Mrs. Vinup) and Middle River (Willis). The ensuing cold weather delayed its arrival in the Piedmont sections until Apr. 15, when it was noted at Forest Glen (Cross) and Frederick (Rod Smith).

Sparrows. Rod Smith had an exciting experience at Frederick on Mar. 25. He startled a hawk which was carrying a dead sparrow, and was able to recover the victim which he found to be a Grasshopper Sparrow. Since this species normally does not arrive until the latter half of April, and since there are a scattering of winter records from the Coastal Plain, it is reasonable to assume that Smith's specimen was a wintering bird. The first spring arrivals were noted at Patuxent Refuge (Robbins) and Seneca (Beaton) on Apr. 28. Henslow's Sparrows were late in arriving; the first 2 were heard at Berwyn on Apr. 16 (Neil Hotchkiss and Ellis Miller), and the next at Buckeystown on the 23rd (Meanley and Stewart). The Vesper Sparrow appeared first at Patuxent (Mar. 26, A. C. Martin), where it became common on the Mar. 28 migration wave. It was found at Middle River (Willis) and Frederick (Rod Smith) on Mar. 29, and at Frostburg on Apr. 1 (Myra Taylor, Esther Carter and Beall Elementary School children). Three Chipping Sparrows were seen at Patuxent Refuge on the unprecedented date of Mar. 8 by Paul Springer; the next arrivals were noted on the 26th at Seneca (Taylor). White-crowned Sparrows were still at a wintering area near Buckeystown on Apr. 30, and 2 (possibly transients) were seen at Seneca on the 16th (Lawrence Kilham). Fox Sparrows, which usually leave in early April, remained at Middle River through Apr. 25 (Willis). A straggler at Patuxent on Apr. 28 (Robbins) was 18 days later than the latest previous Refuge record.

Chandler S. Robbins

PRESERVATION OF BIRD HABITATS, SANDY POINT STATE PARK

The following letter from Mr. Kaylor, Director of the Md. Department of State Forests & Parks, will be of interest. It relates the efforts of Mr. Richard D. Cole, our Conservation Chairman, to have certain areas omitted from picnic ground development.

Dear Mr. Cole:

I appreciate very much your letter of April 21 regarding Sandy Point State Park.

We have been approached by Admiral Neill Phillips regarding the preservation of parts of this area in its natural state. I have advised Senator John B. Funk, Director of the Department of Public Improvements, and members of his staff that there is a great deal of interest being shown in retaining Area "A", which you have indicated as a high priority in wild bird study. Senator Funk's assistants have been advised that both the water area and the upland, which is considerably higher than the remaining terrain, should be left as a natural area.

I can assure you that we will continue in our efforts to have this part of the State Park set aside, so that all such groups of conservationists will find some natural attraction within it. Please keep in touch with me.

Sincerely, Joseph F. Kaylor, Director.

ALLEGANY ACTIVITIES

BEAN'S COVE FIELD TRIP, MARCH 19. The Allegany County Bird Club, led by Mr. and Mrs. T. M. Andrews, had a bird walk from 2 to 5 p.m. The group met at Riverside Park, Cumberland, and then drove out the Baltimore Pike about 8 miles to Bean's Cove. Twelve species were observed, including Ruffed Grouse and Bob-white. The trip ended with a buffet supper at the rustic home of Mr. and Mrs. Karl Perry. Twelve members participated.

Nan Livingstone

CONSTITUTION PARK JUNIOR TRIP, APRIL 1. The Junior Club members of the Cumberland Elementary Schools held their first spring bird walk on Saturday, April 1, at Constitution Park, at 8:30 a.m. It was a cloudy day and we had some excellent close-ups of the following birds: Mallard, Flicker, Downy Woodpecker, Carolina Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Wren, Mockingbird, Robin, Bluebird, Starling, Purple Grackle, Goldfinch, Junco, Chipping Sparrow, and Song Sparrow.

Nan Livingstone, leader.

OLDTOWN JUNIOR TRIP, APRIL 1. On Saturday, April 1, some of the boys and girls of the Oldtown school went on a bird walk down the canal at Oldtown. There were eleven people on the bird walk and there were just enough so that there wouldn't be much noise made to scare the birds. We saw a large number of birds. They were: Goldfinch, English Sparrow, Starling, Song Sparrow, Nuthatch, Kingfisher, Red-winged Blackbird, Cardinal, Robin, Meadowlark, Phoebe, Killdeer, Junco, Carolina Chickadee, Grackle, Crow, Flicker, and some wild ducks. There were boys and girls from the fifth, sixth, and seventh grades. We were walking along and we saw a Nuthatch and we watched it, and it just kept going around and around a tree.

Yvonne Tascherberg

C. & O. CANAL, APRIL 16. Fifteen members of the Allegany County Bird Club, under the leadership of Mrs. Gilbert Miller, met at Riverside Park at 2 p.m. and drove to the old C. & O. Canal a few miles from Mexico Farms. The list of 24 species included several American Bitterns and quite a number of Blue-winged Teal. Later Miss Genevieve McCoy was hostess to the group in her apartment and served a spaghetti supper.

Adele E. Malcolm

ANNUAL "WATERFOWL ROUND-UP" - MARCH 5, 1950

On March fifth, 17 members met at Middle River bridge to study the migrating waterfowl on Middle, Bird and Gunpowder Rivers and Seneca Creek. After a week of cold weather, we found ice on most water for several hundred feet out, but the day itself was ideal - clear, little or no wind, and a temperature that rose during the day from freezing to around 50 degrees.

The total species identified were 47, ranging from a lone Kingfisher to several thousand Coots. At Bowley's Bar we found 6 Song Sparrows singing on their territories at 9 a.m., with the temperature just above freezing.

At Bowley's Quarter we had our first luck. Near shore was a flock of 2000 Baldpate, 600 Canvas-back, 150 Redheads, with a few Ruddies and Ring-necks. Feeding individually were a few American Mergansers and a Golden-eye. A large number of Coots, estimated at 2000, were off Battery Point, and far out by Carroll Island were 5000 birds too far away to be identified. With the telescope we found 500 to 600 Whistling Swans on an ice bar.

As we walked out to Bengies Point, we saw a Bald Eagle in flight. There were small rafts, 400 to 500, of waterfowl scattered out on the water, but a muddy trip out to a blind at the end of the marsh to the left was the treat of the day. Here was a small flock of waterfowl within eye range, and with the help of glasses and the scope, it was as if they were barnyard fowl. Here were Whistling Swan, Mallard, Black Duck, 29 Gadwall, Baldpate, Green-winged Teal, Red-head, Ring-necked Duck, Canvas-back, 6 Greater Scaup, 5 Ruddies, 1 Hooded and 4 American Mergansers, and the inevitable Coot. At this point we were joined by a dozen members of the Audubon Society of the District of Columbia, who agreed with us that this small flock was more rewarding than the great rafts where the individual bird was lost. A wounded Baldpate was captured and admired.

We ate lunch at the ever hospitable Crowder Cabin, and later went on to Oliver Beach and Graces Quarter, where we saw more large congregations of waterfowl at uncomfortably long distances. On the beach, we found the remains of a Coot with the foot in perfect condition. It was most interesting to see the scaly, lobed toes that help trace the evolution of birds from reptiles. In the fields behind the shore, we found many old nests suggesting that here would be an ideal spot to study nesting habits of sparrows, Indigo Buntings and Goldfinches.

William and Margaret Royal

FREDERICK CLUB ELECTS OFFICERS

The Frederick County Branch of the Society leads off in each year's round of Local Unit annual meetings. This year, at their meeting in the Frederick Y.M.C.A. on March 14, Mrs. Wm. R. Slemmer was elected President for the coming year, with Rodgers Tull Smith as Vice President, Miss A. B. DeLashmutt as Secretary-Treasurer, and Miss Sarah Quinn as State Board Member.