

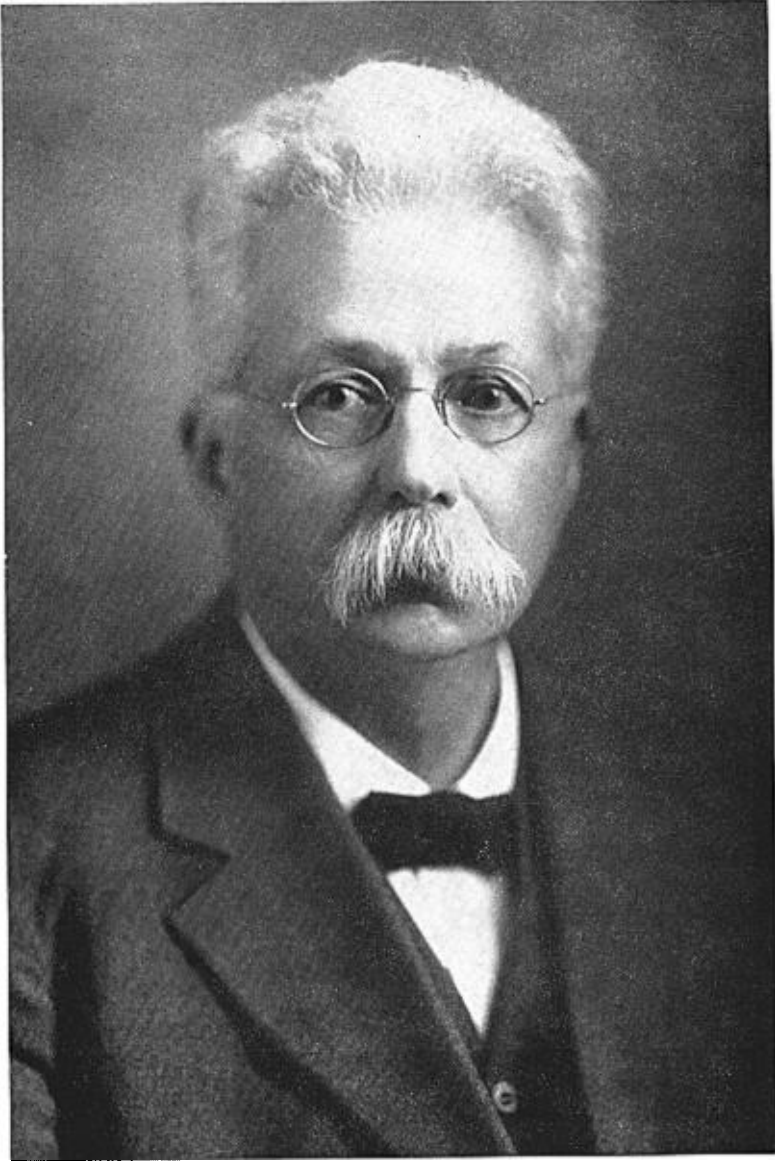
## IN MEMORIAM: CLINTON HART MERRIAM

BY T. S. PALMER

CLINTON HART MERRIAM, son of Clinton Levi and Mary Hart Merriam, a Founder, Secretary, Treasurer, Councillor, past President, and Patron of the American Ornithologists' Union, died in Berkeley, California, March 19, 1942, at the age of 86. Twenty years of his life were spent in education and preparation for his life work, 4 in the practice of medicine, 25 in public service, and nearly 32 in retirement. Although well past fourscore years, he constantly lamented that life was too short. He was, in fact, a human dynamo of energy and progressed rapidly from one field to another in his knowledge and interests.

He was the eldest of a family of three children and was born in New York City, December 5, 1855, was educated by private tutors, and in 1872 was appointed naturalist of the Hayden Survey of Yellowstone Park. He was a student at the Sheffield Scientific School at Yale and graduated from the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York in 1879. Among his classmates were A. K. Fisher, who soon gave up medicine for ornithology, and E. A. Mearns, the only one of the group who as an Army surgeon continued in the practice of his profession. While still a medical student he joined with others in founding the Linnaean Society of New York and was elected its first president. During the next few years he practiced medicine in Locust Grove, N. Y., and later made a trip to the Newfoundland sealing grounds as surgeon on the U. S. Fish Commission Steamer "Proteus."

In 1883 when the American Ornithologists' Union was organized, Dr. Merriam took an active part, was elected secretary and treasurer and appointed chairman of the committee on Geographic Distribution and Economic Ornithology. With characteristic energy he laid out the work of these committees on such a comprehensive scale that it was entirely beyond the resources of the Union. His father, with the assistance of the Senator from New York and Prof. S. F. Baird, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, secured an appropriation of \$10,000 for this work in charge of an ornithologist as chief of a section of the Division of Entomology in the U. S. Department of Agriculture, under Prof. C. V. Riley. In the following year the section was made a separate Division of Economic Ornithology and Mammalogy, and in 1910 the status of a Bureau under the title of Bureau of Biological Survey. Thirty years later the Biological Survey was transferred to the Department of the Interior and com-



*Harris and Ewing*

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bined with the U. S. Fish Commission as the Fish and Wildlife Service.

When the appropriation for an ornithologist was first passed by Congress, the Commissioner of Agriculture, Norman J. Coleman, invited the American Ornithologists' Union to nominate a candidate for the position. Dr. J. A. Allen, President of the Union, called a meeting of the Council in the office of Prof. S. F. Baird, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. Five members were present: J. A. Allen, S. F. Baird, Elliott Coues, H. W. Henshaw, and C. Hart Merriam. Dr. Allen called the council to order and stated the purpose of the meeting. Henshaw immediately nominated Merriam and the motion was seconded by Baird. On the vote Merriam was declared the nominee and Coues, who confidently expected to receive the nomination, did not receive a single vote.

In 1884, at the time of the meeting of the International Ornithological Congress, Dr. Merriam made his first and only trip to Europe, during which he met several eminent ornithologists, including Rudolph and William Blasius.

On October 15, 1886, Dr. Merriam married Virginia Elizabeth Gosnell, his secretary. They had two daughters, Dorothy, Mrs. Henry Abbot of Washington, D. C., and Zenaida, Mrs. M. W. Talbot of Berkeley, Calif. Their home at 1919 Sixteenth Street, N. W., was usually the meeting place of the Council when the A.O.U. convened in Washington. The house, a three-story brick structure, had the third floor given up to one large room adapted to the arrangement of his collection of mammals. Later on, when the mammal collection had been transferred to the U. S. National Museum, the space was cut up into several bedrooms. Still later, after his retirement the parlor on the first floor was transformed into an office.

Dr. Merriam took great delight in organizing field expeditions. During the decade following his first visit to California he organized six notable expeditions: San Francisco Mountain, August 1889; Southern Idaho, 1890; Death Valley, California, 1891; the transcontinental trip of the A.O.U. in 1902; Mount Shasta, California, 1898; and the Harriman Expedition to Alaska in 1899. He also directed the Nelson-Goldman Expedition to Mexico, which continued from 1890 to 1905. Of these the Harriman Expedition was the most important and had far reaching results.

In 1899 Mrs. E. H. Harriman, wife of the President of the Union Pacific Railroad, arranged with Dr. Merriam to outline a vacation trip for Mr. Harriman, whose physician had ordered him to take an extended rest from financial activities. A sea trip to Alaska for

several weeks was decided on, and the steamer "George W. Elder" of the Oregon Steam Navigation Company, a subsidiary of the Union Pacific Railroad, was detailed for the trip. Radio and television had not been invented and the vessel at sea was cut off from communication with New York and other financial centers. In order to keep Mr. Harriman occupied about a dozen eminent men, each a specialist in his subject, were invited to join the party which included Dr. W. H. Dall, an authority on Alaska; John Muir; Dr. W. E. Ritter of the University of California; Robert Ridgway, curator of birds in the U. S. National Museum; Dr. A. K. Fisher of the Biological Survey; Charles A. Keeler, the California poet; and others.

Mr. Harriman was much interested in hunting the big bears on the Kodiak Peninsula and in investigating the salmon fisheries and other resources of the Territory. As usual the plan of the expedition was greatly expanded, and at Mr. Harriman's request a detailed report of the various subjects was duly prepared. Dr. Merriam was asked to edit these reports; and to enable him to devote his entire time to this work and to the study of mammals, the so-called Harriman Fund was provided by Mrs. Harriman and a series of volumes on Alaska was prepared for publication. It may be noted in passing that as a result of this work the only report on mammals that Dr. Merriam published was a revision of the grizzly bears issued as *North American Fauna*, No. 41.

In 1890, when the Board on Geographic Names was established to determine the proper designation of places and fix the official spelling, Henry Gannett was made chairman and Dr. Merriam was appointed one of the members and after Mr. Gannett's retirement served as chairman for several years. During this time the controversy over the name of Mount Rainier versus Mount Tacoma was fully considered and finally decided in favor of Mount Rainier. Dr. Merriam was succeeded by Frank Bond, Chief Clerk of the General Land Office, who continued in that position until the Board was made a division of the Department of the Interior and reported to the Secretary of the Interior instead of to the President.

As a result of his trip to the Newfoundland sealing grounds, Dr. Merriam was always much interested in seals. In 1891 he was appointed, together with Dr. T. C. Mendenhall, Superintendent of the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, to serve on the Arbitration Commission on fur seals. In July the commissioners proceeded to the Pribilof Islands in Bering Sea to study the situation on the ground. Poaching on the high seas and in Bering Sea had reduced the fur seal herd to a dangerously low point. The following winter, Dr. J. A.

Allen, of New York, an authority on the Pinnipedia of North America, came to Washington for the purpose of preparing an exhaustive report on the history of fur seals. This history was the basis of the Report of the International Arbitration Commission in several volumes. The Commission decided against the contention of the United States that Bering Sea was a *mare clausum*, and as a result poaching continued until finally terminated by the Treaty of 1910 between the United States, Canada, and Japan.

In 1891 when the National Zoological Park was established in Washington, under the Superintendency of Dr. Frank Baker, Dr. Merriam was much interested in the collection and in fair weather spent nearly every Sunday morning with Dr. Baker in the park looking over the animals and birds. At that time the Zoo had several notable exhibits, including a number of bears, a cage containing eight or nine kea parrots from New Zealand, and a coon tree in which a family of raccoons lived and finally succeeded in denuding the branches and killing the tree. To most persons Dr. Merriam was known chiefly as a mammalogist. His principal publications, including 'Mammals of the Adirondacks,' and monographs of various groups were on mammals. He revolutionized the technique of making study specimens of small mammals, and he emphasized the importance of a uniform system of measurements. In his technique of making skins, he inserted a small copper wire wrapped with cotton in the tail of each specimen to prevent it from being broken off, and he used wooden toothpicks wrapped with cotton in the limbs. The fore feet were pointed straight ahead and the hind feet straight back. The fur was carefully brushed with a toothbrush to bring out the pattern of marking in such forms as chipmunks and spermophiles.

He always signed his name C. Hart Merriam to distinguish his signature from that of his father, Clinton L. Merriam. To members of his family and his intimate friends he was known as 'Hart,' and to his office associates as 'C.H.'

I first became acquainted with Dr. Merriam through correspondence as an observer of bird migration and met him personally in Berkeley, California, in 1888, when he made his first visit to California in company with H. W. Henshaw. When I received an appointment in the Biological Survey and arrived in Washington in November 1889, I found Dr. Merriam interested in four projects: (1) A revision of the meadow mice of the genus *Microtus*, (2) a list of the mammals of North America, (3) a bibliography of mammals, and (4) an index of the generic names of mammals. The revision of meadow mice was completed by Vernon Bailey, the list of mammals of North America

by Gerrit S. Miller appeared in several bulletins of the U. S. National Museum, the publication of generic names was entrusted to me and appeared as North American Fauna No. 23, Index Generum Mammalium, but the bibliography of mammals was never completed.

Dr. Merriam was not an easy writer. He spent hour after hour writing, polishing, and changing sentences in order to convey just the meaning he desired. As an author, he was moderately prolific. His bibliography, as published by Mrs. Joseph Grinnell in the 'Journal of Mammalogy' for November 1943, contains more than 400 titles. For nearly 60 years from 1873 to 1934 a steady stream of notes, descriptions of new species, articles on distribution, and in later years notes on the Indian tribes of California poured from his pen. The greatest number in any one year was 45 in 1897, but there were none in 1911 or 1933. Although he was never a student of the classics or of modern languages, he spent much time in collecting vocabularies of Indian tribes that were on the verge of extinction. His principal works were: 'Birds of Connecticut,' 1877; 'Mammals of the Adirondacks,' 1884; 'Life Zones of San Francisco Mountain, Arizona,' 1890; 'Results of a Biological Reconnaissance of South Central Idaho,' 1891; 'Life Zones of North America,' 1891; 'Monographic Revision of the Pocket Gopher Family Geomyidae,' 1895; 'Results of a Biological Survey of Mount Shasta, Northern California,' 1899; 'Revision of the Grizzly Bears,' 1918; and 'An-nik-a-del, the History of the Universe as told by the Mo-dea-se Indians of California,' 1928. His publications ceased in 1934, and nothing was issued during the last eight years of his life.

Shortly after the new series of 'Science' was started, he contributed comments, notes, and reviews for several years. He never contributed any memorials to 'The Auk' but published elsewhere several rather extended biographies of his friends, including W. H. Dall, G. K. Gilbert, and John Muir.

As an editor he was prone to take his duties too seriously and if he disagreed with the author, to inject his own ideas or explain why he disagreed. This characteristic attracted the attention of Alfred Newton, the English ornithologist, who commented on it in his 'Dictionary of Birds' in a reference to Cooke's 'Bulletin on Bird Migration in the Mississippi Valley.' In preparing the 'Bulletin on the English Sparrow' for the press this characteristic aroused the antipathy of the author, W. B. Barrows. As a reviewer, he was apt to dwell on what the author might, could, or should have done, rather than on what he actually did.

Although he disclaimed any interest in politics, and appearing at hearings before Congressional Committees was somewhat of an ordeal, politics did much for him. It was through politics that provision was made for placing the work on geographic distribution and bird migration on a firm basis in the Department of Agriculture. When an effort was made to eliminate the Biological Survey in 1907, he had the support of the strongest lobby in Washington and under the leadership of John F. Lacey in the House secured the restoration of the Biological Survey and its appropriation. It was through the League of American Sportsmen that the provision for regulating the importation of foreign birds and mammals was enacted into law in the Lacey Act of 1900 and the Biological Survey raised to the status of a Bureau in 1910 through the powerful support of Senator Boies Penrose, of Pennsylvania, one of the leaders in the Senate.

His long friendship with President Theodore Roosevelt was at times somewhat of an embarrassment. In his first message to Congress Roosevelt mentioned Merriam by name. This proved to be a liability rather than an asset, as it aroused the animosity of other officials of the Department of Agriculture. When the President was preparing for his trip to Africa, he summoned Dr. Merriam to the White House and asked him to find a diagram showing the vulnerable spot in an elephant's skull. Because of its density the skull can be penetrated by a bullet only at a point behind the ear. Returning to the office in hot haste, Dr. Merriam asked, "Did you ever see such a thing?" "Yes," I replied, "we have a book with such a diagram." "Give it to me quick," he said, and rushed it up to the White House. The President had the diagram copied on a large scale and set up a target in the basement where he practiced shooting elephants as a preparation for his African trip. During his long and eventful career Dr. Merriam was the recipient of many honors. He was one of the founders of the Linnaean Society of New York, the American Ornithologists' Union, the National Geographic Society, the American Society of Mammalogists, and the Washington Academy of Sciences. He was elected a member of the National Academy of Sciences, the American Philosophical Society, a corresponding member of the Zoological Society of London, and a member of the English Society for the Preservation of the Fauna of the Empire. He served as president of the American Society of Naturalists, Anthropological Society, Biological Society of Washington, Linnaean Society of New York, and American Society of Mammalogists.

Before his death he had the satisfaction of seeing the disposition of his collections and legislation enacted to carry out two of his early

projects. Regulation of the importation of foreign animals was provided by the Lacey Act of 1900, and the Biological Survey given bureau status in 1910. His collection of birds was acquired by the British Museum, his collection of mammals was donated to the U. S. National Museum, his library to the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology of the University of California, and his linguistic studies of California Indians to the Bureau of American Ethnology.

*1939 Biltmore St., N. W., Washington, D. C., October 30, 1953.*