# IN MEMORIAM: FRANCIS HENRY ALLEN

BY WENDELL TABER

FRANCIS HENRY ALLEN, a Fellow of the American Ornithologists' Union, died at his home on 9 Francis Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts, on October 24, 1953, while the Annual Meeting of that organization was in progress in Los Angeles. Born on August 3, 1866, in Jamaica Plain, now part of Boston, the son of Henry Clay Allen and Emma Frances Briggs Allen, he attended the famous Roxbury Latin School, graduating in 1884. He received five honors in his entrance examinations for Harvard College. Financial necessity, however, compelled him to enter the business world where, over the years, he continued to acquire an education far superior to that of the average college graduate. He shortly became associated with the publishing firm of Houghton, Mifflin and Co., now Houghton Mifflin Co., Inc. By 1894 he was on the editorial staff, and an Editor he continued to be until his retirement from that well known Boston firm in 1934. The nature of his work aided him in becoming familiar with the various standard masterpieces of literature, and a retentive memory, which he retained to the end, enabled him to quote from them at will.

His first major work was the compilation in 1897 of "Nature's Diary." In 1916, he edited John Muir's "Stickeen," in 1927 the four volumes of "The Letters of Robert Burns," and in 1931 "A Boston Portrait-Painter Visits Italy—The Journal of Amasa Hewins (1803–33)." Particularly appealing to him, though, were the rugged individuality, the arresting style, and the challenging philosophy of Thoreau. Allen became an authority on this writer. This quickly became apparent in the joint editorship with Bradford Torrey in 1906 of the 14 volumes of "The Journal of Henry David Thoreau." Continuing alone Allen compiled in 1908 "A Bibliography of Henry David Thoreau" and in 1910 "Notes on New England Birds from the journal of Henry D. Thoreau," and also "Thoreau's Walden." More recently, in 1936, Allen edited "Men of Concord, as Portrayed in the Journal of Henry D. Thoreau." Interestingly, Thoreau's rather primitive knowledge of birds did not seem to disturb Allen.

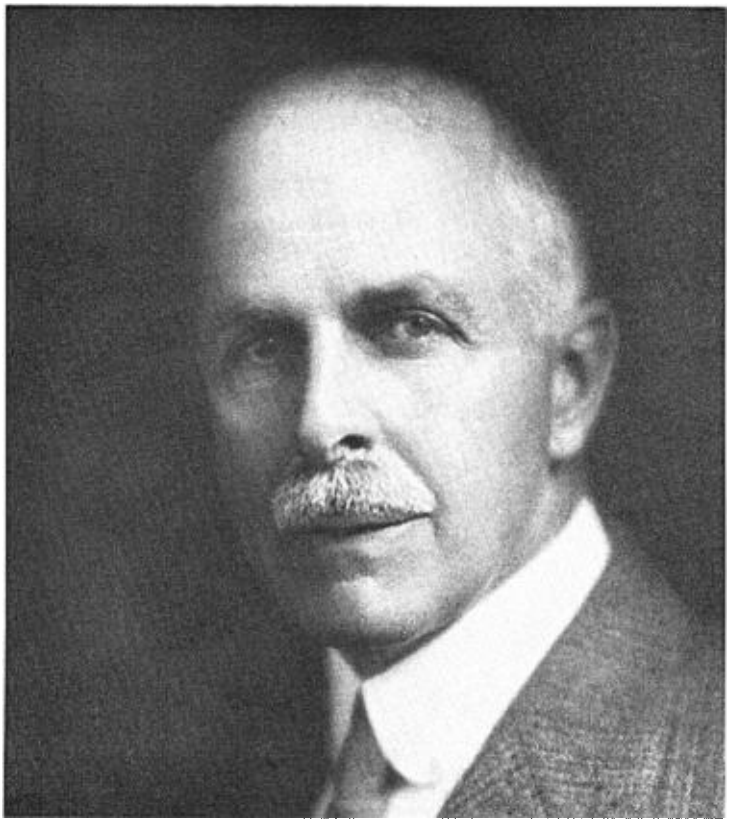
On October 16, 1895, he married Margaret Hewins, who probably played a far greater part than one can now record in the success of her husband. She died on Christmas Day, 1947, after an illness of several years. During this protracted period she failed much of the time even to recognize her husband. His devotion and uncomplaining acceptance of a great trial set a standard for us all. Through-

out most, if not all their married life, the Allens lived at 215 La Grange Street in West Roxbury, now also a part of Boston, a location from which access to his childhood haunts was easily and frequently maintained. After his wife's death, with residential development pushing in and his own movements restricted by heart complications he moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he shared a home first with his daughter, Lucy, and later with his oldest daughter, Elizabeth M. Allen (Mrs. William H. Thompson) and her family. Yet another two children, a son and daughter, also survive. Although not a member of any church he had been a pew-holder in and attended the Episcopal churches in West Roxbury and Dedham all his married life.

Of no known relationship to any of the other Allens of ornithological fame, Francis Henry Allen came directly from old Puritan stock on his father's side. His mother's ancestry included names historical in the colonial history of Massachusetts—Alden, Brewster, and Warren among others. A great-grandfather served as captain on General Washington's staff. While Allen's parents did enjoy an out-of-doors life, knew their local flowers, and introduced them to him in his early youth, there seems no evident explanation for his subsequent development.

In school, Allen was always, according to a schoolmate, well prepared in his lessons. In those days West Roxbury, to which his family had moved in his early childhood, was barely beginning the transition from farming country to suburb. Within easy access were great tracts of field and woodland and the meandering Charles River which, after wandering some five or six miles, returned to within not much over a half-mile of itself. Even today one can visualize from the marshes and other lands reserved for the Newton Water Works, and from the marshes and lowlands near Dedham, the ornithological appeal which must have existed in Allen's youth as he explored the then wild, charming and varied waterways, by canoe in summer—skates in winter.

On many of his boyhood trips he had the companionship of a cousin and another boy. A gift of eggs from one of the boys initiated the amassing of a youthful, but excellent, egg collection. He soon abandoned this field. He skinned a few birds but his first effort, a Myrtle Warbler, proved the best and he soon lost interest. He never became a real collector of specimens. Rather, the approach came through observations or thoughts which aroused his intellectual curiosity. He would acquire facts, ponder on them, turn them over and over in his mind, discuss them with other persons—then publish.



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The sloppy inexactness of some of our more gorgeous and glamorous contemporary writers of nature articles was anathema to his truth-loving mind. At an early stage his unusually acute hearing and retentive memory for sounds led him into taking particular interest in bird-songs and call-notes. His forte in these two important fields appears at its best in the numerous comments scattered throughout Bent's "Life Histories of North American Birds." Bent was unsuccessful, however, in attempts to persuade him to write even one Life History. The assembling and consolidation of the investigations of other ornithologists offered less appeal than the pursuit of his own researches, a somewhat curious contrast with the intensity with which he had delved into the life of Thoreau.

Consistent with his business training he established for himself the standard of attempting to obtain the ultimo, first in the recording of accurate field observations, then—of more importance than is indicated in much of the writing today—in the presentation of his notes in perfect English. He even published a short paper on the importance in scientific papers of this presentation. He has said that he was always looked on a little askance by ornithologists on account of his literary leanings, and by literary persons on account of his predilection for the hard facts of science. Even during the last week of his life, still pleasant and interesting with his friends in spite of his weakness, he frequently called attention to errors of fact or expression in a book one of his daughters was reading aloud.

In the field he enjoyed the more old-fashioned approach of walking and studying a limited area rather than dashing hither and yon in an attempt to amass a record list of species. For many years he accompanied Dr. Winsor M. Tyler and Laurence B. Fletcher tabulating a Christmas Census of the south shore region of Boston near Cohasset, an area not popular among the great group of younger field observers. Another favorite annual spring trip, in which A. C. Bent also participated for many years, was a census of Osprey nests in southeastern Massachusetts and the adjoining Rhode Island territory. He looked forward, too, to numerous visits to the summer home of Dr. C. W. Townsend in Ipswich and the ensuing long walks on the beach. Accompanied by Dr. Townsend's young son, they traversed a large portion of the "Long Trail" over the Green Mountains of Vermont in 1917. At one time or another Allen climbed widely throughout the White Mountains of New Hampshire, and Katahdin in Maine. He also made a number of coastal trips in that latter state, and in 1929 visited Grand Manan. On field trips as well as at other times he was personally meticulous and well dressed. Of handsome mien,

slender in form and graceful in movement, and possessing a low voice with a contagious chuckle of appreciation, he made an entertaining companion.

In 1888 he became an Associate Member of the "A.O.U." He was elected a "Member" (now "Elective Member") in 1901 and a Fellow in 1947. As a quiet young man, almost too modest, he was elected to membership in the Nuttall Ornithological Club in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on December 18, 1893. Within a few months he introduced there a new subject of study—the waking hours of the earlier birds. He quickly aroused a broad interest, even among those members whose own habits made them only too willing to accept the facts at second hand. His regular attendance at meetings, his many interesting papers and careful field notes, his self-sacrificing services as Secretary, as Councillor, and for many long years as a most gracious and efficient Vice President have afforded an example without parallel in that Club. He withdrew from active official capacity in 1939 after forty-five continuous years of leadership worthy of the two presidents under whom he served, William Brewster and Glover Morrill Allen. Following a happy custom in the Club a celebration was held at a later date in honor of his 50 years of membership. His services in the leadership of the Club commenced on December 3, 1894, when he became a Member of the Council. There followed, commencing a year later, a year as Secretary, another 17 months as Councillor, and the Vice Presidency from May, 1898 until December, 1912. After 14 more years on the Council he added another 13 years as Vice President. As was quite natural he became a frequent dinner guest of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Foster Batchelder before Club meetings which, after William Brewster's death, were held for many years at the Batchelders' home.

Even more impressive was his association with the Massachusetts Audubon Society. At the Annual Meeting of that organization in January, 1951, he received an engrossed certificate for 52 years of service as a Member of the Board of Directors, and as Chairman of the Board for 30 years. He resigned as Chairman the following month but remained on the directorate until his death. For many years he contributed articles to the bulletin of that society, in recent years largely in the form of book reviews. His always friendly and definitely constructive criticism of bulletin material was a valued source of help to the editors of that publication. His interests focussed increasingly on this society during the last 15 years of his life. The association with an organization of popular rather than scientific nature may be due in part to his particular choice of friends, in part

to closely allied interests, such as the Massachusetts Conservation Council—it may in part be analogous to his ability to accept Thoreau's standard of ornithology.

Association with Ralph Hoffman, also a member of the Nuttall Ornithological Club at the time of Allen's election, developed his interest in protection, and he became much absorbed in this field, one so closely associated with Audubon work. He took an active part with Abbot H. Thayer in the controversy with Theodore Roosevelt on the question of color-patterns and their possible uses by birds and animals, display and concealment. Allen served as President of the Northeastern Bird Banding Association, 1926–1927, was a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and a member of the National Audubon Society.

His published papers probably total well over 200, characteristically short, but showing breadth. They cover not only birds but muskrats, moles, woodchucks, and porcupines. At one extreme is a paper on the joys of sleeping outdoors, at the other one on the mathematical analysis of flight in cross-winds. While the quality of his papers runs high the papers themselves tend to be fragmentary and ephemeral. His greatest published contributions to ornithology are the so frequent notes on "Voice" and "Behavior" in Bent's Life Histories.

In the summer of 1953 Allen visited Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. Although he had for many years been careful not to overexert himself with long walks over rough ground to avoid straining his heart, his enthusiasm in observing and making notes on the nesting of Wilson's Snipe, coupled with his advanced age, may well have led to the immediate and sudden recurrence of heart difficulties. His condition became rapidly and progressively worse. Hours, if not minutes, before he died he smiled gently at Laurence B. Fletcher's mention of recuperation in Fletcher's home in Cohasset and answered in a low, gentle voice, "In the sweet bye and bye."

*3 Mercer Circle, Cambridge, Massachusetts, November 7, 1954.*