



ARLIE WILLIAM SCHORGER, 1884–1972

(Photograph taken about 1956)

IN MEMORIAM: ARLIE WILLIAM SCHORGER

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THE death of A. William Schorger on 26 May 1972 brought to a close the successive and successful careers of a chemist, inventor, and businessman who carried his hobbies of ornithology, natural history, and history to new highs of scholarship and perceptiveness.

Schorger, known as Bill among his friends, was born 6 September 1884 at Republic, Ohio, the son of John Valentine Schorger and Cora Ellen Myers. His grandfather had come to the United States from northern Baden where a Schorger was mentioned in records of that region as early as 1384, the word meaning "shoemaker" in an extinct German dialect.

Schorger spent his entire boyhood in Republic, going on to Wooster College from which he received the Ph.B. after specializing in chemistry. Prof. W. Z. Bennett said to him in his senior year: "Schorger, you are good in chemistry, and I would advise you to continue in it." With the help of an assistantship at Ohio State University, Schorger obtained his M.A. degree there in 1908. That spring he became an assistant chemist at the Bureau of Standards in Washington, D.C., where he performed routine chemical analyses of products purchased by government agencies wishing to see that manufacturers adhered to specifications. It was unimaginative work which Schorger detested. In 1909, after brief employment as an assistant chemist with the Bureau of Internal Revenue, he transferred to the newly formed Forest Products Laboratory of the U.S. Forest Service in Madison, Wisconsin. In his position as research chemist there, Schorger spent much of his time analyzing the wood of various species of U.S. trees. He also studied the rust-inducing property of teak, and the possibility of making a baking powder from western larch. During this period, he continued his graduate work at the University of Wisconsin, obtaining his Ph.D. in 1916 with a thesis on the oils of coniferous trees.

In 1917 Schorger joined the C. F. Burgess Laboratories in Madison as Director of Chemical Research. He remained active in the laboratory in search of new products or improved processes. His patent work increased and included ideas on waterproofing, methods of utilizing resinous woods, roofing felt, the production of mucic acid, and gelatinizing wood. In 1931 he became President of Burgess Cellulose Co., with a factory in Freeport, Illinois, offices in Madison, and about 100 employees at the start. His patents now included methods of preparing lignin, moldable lignocellulose materials, and stereotype mats. The latter

found a ready market in the printing of newspapers. Schorger retired from business in 1950. In his career as a chemist, he had written one book, "The chemistry of cellulose and wood" (1926), and some 34 papers, and had obtained 34 patents. The library of the Forest Products Laboratory also lists 48 separate research reports of his in its files. He was now ready to turn his avocations into another full-scale career.

Schorger's interest in birds and natural history began before he entered elementary school, but he did not secure his first bird book, Chapman's "Handbook of the birds of eastern North America," until 6 August 1905. Before that time, he had been an avid hunter of quail, doves, and especially squirrels and rabbits. At Wooster he made many field trips with Albert I. Good, a classmate who introduced him to formal ornithology and its literature. Good went on to become a missionary of the American Presbyterian Mission and the author in 1952-53 of the 472-page monograph on "The birds of the French Cameroon." The two men remained in contact with each other for over 65 years.

Schorger's formal field notes are preserved in five well-filled notebooks covering 1,465 pages from 4 May 1912 to 15 May 1971. His Sunday field trips, invariably taken alone in his later years, were a "must," and he persisted in them even after he retired from business. His early ornithological interests were faunal and local. He joined the American Ornithologists' Union as an associate in 1913, sent his first general note to *The Auk* in 1914, and published his first major ornithological paper, "The birds of Dane County, Wisconsin," in 1929-31. Over a 58-year period his contributions to *The Auk* included 53 notes (most of them faunal and published while he was a chemist), 3 papers, 91 obituaries, 4 reviews, and 1 memorial. He was made an Elective Member of the A.O.U. in 1940, a Fellow in 1951, and a member of the Council in 1959-62. From 1949 to 1957 he also served the Union as Chairman of its Committee on Biography and from 1955 to 1970 as one of its Investing Trustees.

Schorger's interest in mammalogy was rather late. His general notes in the *Journal of Mammalogy* started in 1937 and numbered 18. A manuscript on "The mammals of Dane County, Wisconsin," was completed in the fall of 1971. Always a systematic collector of rare birds, he was in his later years an avid collector of mammals. His collections, consisting of 453 bird and 274 mammal skins, were confined mostly to Dane County and were turned over to the Zoology Museum of the University of Wisconsin shortly before his death. He also collected Indian arrowheads and the bog-buried bones of elk. Press publicity of his elk study once brought him an enormous box of bones allegedly

taken from a depth of 9 feet. The bones proved to be a very recent vertebra of a large whale (which undoubtedly had reached Wisconsin by rail) and much of the skeleton of an old horse. This was unquestionably the low point in Schorger's collecting career. What was worse, the package had been sent collect.

His pursuit of the only Wisconsin specimen of a cougar ever to be preserved was more rewarding. This aged animal was killed near Appleton on 22 November 1857, mounted, and presented to Lawrence College. Aware of its existence through his patient scanning of 19th-century Wisconsin newspapers, Schorger was appalled to learn in 1948 that the specimen had been discarded. It had, however, been retrieved, apparently from an ash heap, by a tavern-keeper who was now exhibiting the moth-eaten creature in his establishment on the Michigan-Wisconsin line. Although this turn of events notably visualized for the tavern's customers the environmental dangers facing *them* unless they stayed right *there*, Schorger felt that this scarcely constituted a dignified and permanent storage facility for the state's only existing specimen of the cougar. For a sum of money on the order of \$50, the puma was separated from its place of refuge, made into a flat skin, and subsequently became the type specimen of *Felis concolor schorgeri* Jackson in recognition of Schorger's "talent in salvaging specimens and historical records of extinct and vanishing species, collecting the material, and making it available in publications." The moral of this story is, we suppose, that visits to a tavern should always be undertaken in a scientific spirit: you never know where you'll find a new subspecies.

As a faunalist, Schorger belonged to the now nearly extirpated school of collectors who repudiated sight records of rarities. His conservative thinking also reflected his extreme thoroughness. His collecting a Brown Pelican on Lake Mendota in 1943 was a shock from which the Madison Audubon Society did not recover for years.

Schorger began to build a personal library in the fields of ornithology and mammalogy in 1912. This grew to over 600 volumes, 135 bulletins and monographs, complete runs of 11 journals, and 1,338 reprints. As a bibliophile, Schorger tended to concentrate on Americana. His purchases were usually conservative, but he took great pleasure in acquiring Vieillot's "Histoire naturelle des oiseaux de l'Amerique Septentrionale" (1807), and he possessed volume 1 of the Transactions of the Chicago Academy of Sciences (1867), so many copies of which were lost in the Chicago fire of 1871. He gave his natural history library in 1971 to the Department of Wildlife Ecology at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, and willed the department a handsome bequest for its upkeep.

Schorger's major contribution to knowledge came from his work as

a historian. While still a businessman, he set out to scan for wildlife news every page of every newspaper published in Wisconsin before 1900. This project started around 1930 and apparently took close to two decades to complete. Every afternoon on his way home from the office, Schorger turned up at the State Historical Society library to have a go at "the literature." A librarian there once remarked to him in a tone of utter despair: "I have moved more tons of papers for you than for any other ten persons in Wisconsin!" She did not soften when Schorger countered with the remark that, owing to the accumulation of library dust, his laundry bill was excessive!

As a bibliographer and scholar, Schorger was extremely tenacious in his search for historical accuracy. He often spent days tracking down a single fact. His typed notes on wildlife accounts in Wisconsin newspapers filled 796 pages; 35 closely written notebooks covered Passenger Pigeons (7 volumes), Wild Turkeys (6 volumes), quail, Prairie Chickens, mast, traps, wild rice, and the fur trade. The scholarly synthesis of this enormous searching began in 1941 with the appearance of a short paper on "The crow and the raven in early Wisconsin." A series of 13 other "early Wisconsin" papers followed on the Wild Turkey, Prairie Chicken, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Bobwhite, Ruffed Grouse, black bear, squirrels, white-tailed deer, elk, moose, beaver, wild honeybee, rattlesnakes, otter, and Norway rat, the last appearing in 1971.

Schorger's notable contributions on the national scene were the publication of his "The Passenger Pigeon: its natural history and extinction" in 1955 and "The Wild Turkey: its history and domestication" in 1966. The scholarship behind each volume was prodigious: about 2,200 references were cited for the pigeon, another 2,600 for the turkey. "The Passenger Pigeon" earned for its author the Brewster Award of the A.O.U. in 1958. There is no question about this being the final and definitive monograph on the species. It perhaps can be argued that Schorger's final estimate of the total pigeon population (3 billion) was much too high, but Schorger labeled it "a guess," and in matters like this he certainly was a conservative.

Schorger's turkey book was never reviewed in *The Auk*, and it received a distinctly cool review from W. C. Hanson in *The Journal of Wildlife Management*. Hanson, who complained that so many references of questionable value made for slow reading, hoped for a distillation that would result in "a smooth, readable book." Schorger was far too much of a scholar to favor readability at the expense of bibliography. References of questionable value he would quote and criticize bluntly. His writing was terse and to the point. One of the fascinating editorial episodes of the 1940s developed when J. Van Tyne made a number of

editorial changes and suggestions on two manuscripts Schorger had submitted to *The Wilson Bulletin*. It was the proverbial case of the Irresistible Force (JVT) meeting the Immovable Body (AWS). After a lengthy correspondence, Schorger's MSS were published unchanged.

In the preface to "The Passenger Pigeon," R. A. McCabe and I were amused to see each of us thanked for having read the manuscript. That's all we really did. Every suggestion we had was vigorously argued down by our colleague. If Van Tyne could not change a Schorger sentence, what chance had McCabe and Hickey? We were not invited to read any part of "The Wild Turkey"!

As president of Burgess Cellulose Co., Schorger made a trip nearly every week to the company's factory at Freeport, Illinois. From 8 June 1932 through 27 March 1950 he made 693 trips on which he watched for birds killed along the highway. In the 97,020 miles of driving, 4,939 dead birds divided among 64 species were recorded. Among these were 2,784 House Sparrows, 389 Red-headed Woodpeckers, 310 Robins, 271 Ring-necked Pheasants, 235 Screech Owls, and 230 Flickers.

Schorger's marriage in 1912 to Margaret F. Davison of Fox Lake, Wisconsin, was a happy one. Margaret was as much an extrovert as her husband was an introvert. She joked about the specimens of birds and mammals that weekly turned up in her refrigerator; she put up patiently with his long visits to the library, helped him with his numerous proofs, enjoyed their annual trips to A.O.U. meetings, maintained a lively interest in Italian art, and for years took an active interest in the Republican Party. Margaret was perhaps the only person from whom Bill could accept literary criticism. Her sudden death in 1962 was a tragic blow to her husband. In his will, he left a bequest to the University of Wisconsin for a Margaret Davison Schorger Scholarship in Italian art. The pigeon book was dedicated "to my wife, whose patience surmounted extinction."

On 10 November 1951 Schorger became Professor of Wildlife Management at the University of Wisconsin. Here he shared in teaching a course on game mammals until he reached emeritus rank in 1955. Until his health began to fail in 1971, he was generally the first staff man to arrive in the morning and the last to leave. It was a happy arrangement and a happy period that for over 20 years included the patient typing of all his manuscripts by the departmental secretary, Patricia Murrish Schleicher.

I can remember when he first joined the department staff and student weekly luncheon in the attic of our then-decrepit office. Watching him open his bright new lunch bucket, I said: "Bill, I wonder what your friends at the Madison Club would say if they could see you reduced

to this." Schorger grinned happily and, looking at the ceiling, exclaimed: "A working man at last!"

It was during this period that Schorger summarized the food-habits literature for volumes 1 and 2 of Palmer's "Handbook of North American birds." His notes for this project filled 5 notebooks and involved about 1,800 reference cards. From 1953 to 1959 he served on the Wisconsin State Conservation Commission, from 1955 to 1956 on the Executive Council of the Wilson Ornithological Society, from 1956 to 1959 on the Board of Directors of the National Audubon Society, and from 1958 to 1959 as President of the Friends of the University of Wisconsin Library.

In addition to his membership in these organizations, Schorger also belonged to the A.A.A.S., the Cooper Ornithological Society, the American Chemical Society, the American Society of Mammalogists, the Wildlife Society, the Nature Conservancy, the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club, the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology, the Wisconsin Archaeological Society, and the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters. As president of the latter in 1942-43, he took pride in helping to inaugurate the Junior Wisconsin Academy. He was also a member of Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Xi, and Delta Upsilon. He was given an honorary D.Sc. by Lawrence University in 1955 and by the University of Wisconsin in 1961. He received a Service Award from the Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation in November 1955 and a certificate of commendation from the Wisconsin Natural Resources Foundation in May 1972.

As a person—in the three decades that I knew him—Schorger could be quite animated in conversation and constantly bubbled over with all sorts of interesting facts. He had been figuratively up and down the Missouri with Lewis and Clark about four times. He had read and reread Audubon and Wilson and had carefully gone through Prescott's "History of the conquest of Mexico" and the 72 volumes of "The Jesuit relations and allied documents." He was a walking encyclopedia of knowledge of the past, and—with an extraordinary memory—remained so until his death. I rked to be questioned on some point about which he had forgotten, he would relentlessly recheck the point in a library and—no matter how trivial—report the answer a day or two later.

Once after an architect questioned me about pigeons on a particular window of a newly erected convent, I asked Schorger if he thought a board with sharp protruding nails would act as a pigeon deterrent. His reply was that the idea had been used successfully with bronze spikes when the temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt by Herod the Great. Two days later he produced the citation.

Schorger seemed to know Daniel Boone better than he did his own father. His lecture on "Wildlife in early Kentucky" was replete with human and wildlife ecology. To most of us it was absolutely fascinating.

As a human being, Schorger tended to be gruff in his greetings and terse in his correspondence. He expected others to have a good memory, and he was impatient with stupidity. Beneath all this was a dry sense of humor that his close friends relished. When *The Wisconsin State Journal* reviewed one of his books favorably, he thanked his friend D. W. Anderson, the editor, by writing: "Having read your review of the book on the wild turkey, I have decided to buy a copy."

The last year of Schorger's life was a difficult one. With sight restricted to one eye by glaucoma, he sustained in May 1971 a retinal hemorrhage that reduced his vision by about 90% and abruptly cut off his reading and writing. He soon was found to have an inoperable cancer of the bladder. A broken arm in January added to his problems. In his last two weeks his strength failed rapidly, his mind faltered but slightly, and he passed away on 26 May 1972. He is survived by two sons, Prof. William Davison Schorger, an anthropologist at the University of Michigan, and Prof. John Rodger Schorger, a writer at Minnesota Metropolitan State College; by five grandchildren, to whom his turkey book was dedicated: Eric, William R., and Margaret Schorger in Ann Arbor, and John R. Schorger, Jr., and Abigail Popham Schiller in Minnesota; and by one great grandson, John David Schiller.

Much of Schorger's scholarly productivity must be traced not only to his intellectual curiosity and drive but also to his magnificent health. His first overnight stay in a hospital came when he was nearly 87. His pigeon book appeared when he was 71, the turkey book when he was 82. Another book, "Prairie, marsh, and grove: the natural history of a midwestern county" was accepted for publication by the University of Wisconsin Press in 1971 when he was nearly 87. Three other research projects were not written up: the calcified tendons of gallinaceous birds, iron on the teeth of rodents, and early living conditions in Dane County, Wisconsin. By this narrow margin, Schorger nearly succeeded in publishing everything he set out to. Ornithology is the richer for his unique contributions to its literature; his friends, for having known his extraordinary erudition and his wonderful humor.

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