

IN MEMORIAM—EDWIN CARTER<sup>1</sup>

WITH TWO ILLUSTRATIONS

By FREDERICK C. LINCOLN

The death at Galveston, Texas, on February 2, 1900, of Edwin Carter, of Breckenridge, Colorado, probably attracted little attention from the majority of American ornithologists. It meant, however, the passing of a pioneer in the field of Rocky Mountain natural history, one whose early efforts to preserve specimens of the fauna of that great region have since borne fruit in the building of an institution that is acquiring a world-wide reputation for the value, beauty, and excellence of its exhibits—The Colorado Museum of Natural History, at Denver. The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance rendered by Mr. J. D. Figgins, Director of the Colorado Museum of Natural History, in the preparation of this paper.

It was in the few years immediately before and after the admission of Colorado Territory to statehood that the foundation of its structure of biological science was laid. Prior to this the zoological results obtained through the Pacific Railroad surveys had been studied and published upon by Professor Baird and his assistants. Other earlier expeditions dating back to that of Lieutenant Zebulon M. Pike in 1807 had made passing mention of some species of animal life that were encountered. Dr. J. A. Allen published in 1872 the first "local list" on the birds of Colorado (Bull. Mus. Comp. Zool., 3, 1872, pp. 113-183), and from then on, biological, sporting, and other journals contained many notes and some more lengthy accounts of the fauna of the region. Some of the data thus accumulated were obtained by naturalists who, attracted by the unknown in the equation of the Great West, journeyed thither, collected their material, and then returned to their homes in the East, there to arrange, publish, and discuss before learned bodies, their new-found knowledge. Others, held by the primeval "call of the wild," remained to study and observe more closely the creatures they found about them. In this category belongs Edwin Carter.

Carter was born in New York state about June 1, 1830,<sup>2</sup> the son of Thomas and Ann Carter. His early life was spent in Durham, where he received the limited education provided by the public schools. During this formative period he became skilled in taxidermy under the guidance of an old Highland game keeper, a knowledge that was destined to become the ruling influence of his later life.

He left New York state when he was about eighteen years of age, and went to Council Bluffs, Iowa, where for several years he was employed as a clerk in a dry goods house. At that time (the late forties) Council Bluffs was one of the outfitting points for the wagon trains that wound westward in an almost endless procession, steadily pushing back the frontiers of the nation. It was not, however, until 1858, the year of the Pike's Peak gold rush, that Carter became imbued with the spirit, and, with a companion by the name of Charles Page, attached himself to one of the caravans. Page remained his partner and business associate for several

<sup>1</sup> Presented at the 39th stated meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union, at Philadelphia, on November 8, 1921.

<sup>2</sup> There is much uncertainty concerning the exact date and place of his birth. His niece, Miss Martha C. Carter of Oneida, N. Y., writes me that he was born in East Durham, Greene County, in 1828; the records of Breckenridge Lodge, No. 47, A. F. & A. M. (probably furnished by Carter himself) give the place and date as Auburn, N. Y., March 11, 1837; while data obtained from the Clerk and Recorder of Summit County, Colorado, give Auburn, N. Y., June 1, 1830. Efforts to clear this situation by correspondence with county officials in New York have been unavailing for the reason that such vital statistics were not kept prior to 1881. Accordingly, the selection of June 1, 1830, is purely arbitrary, and is subject to correction in case more authentic information is ever obtained.—F.C.L.

years but was apparently not interested in his natural-history activities. Despite the fact that during these early days wagon trains were frequently completely annihilated by the Indians, Carter's trip across the plains was uneventful. Shortly after his arrival in the Territory of Colorado, he and Page endeavored to develop a mine in Russell Gulch. In 1860 he headed a prospecting party to California Gulch, the present site of the city of Leadville.

During the next few years, while it was necessary to suspend mining operations on the approach of winter, Carter would take up his abode in Breckenridge

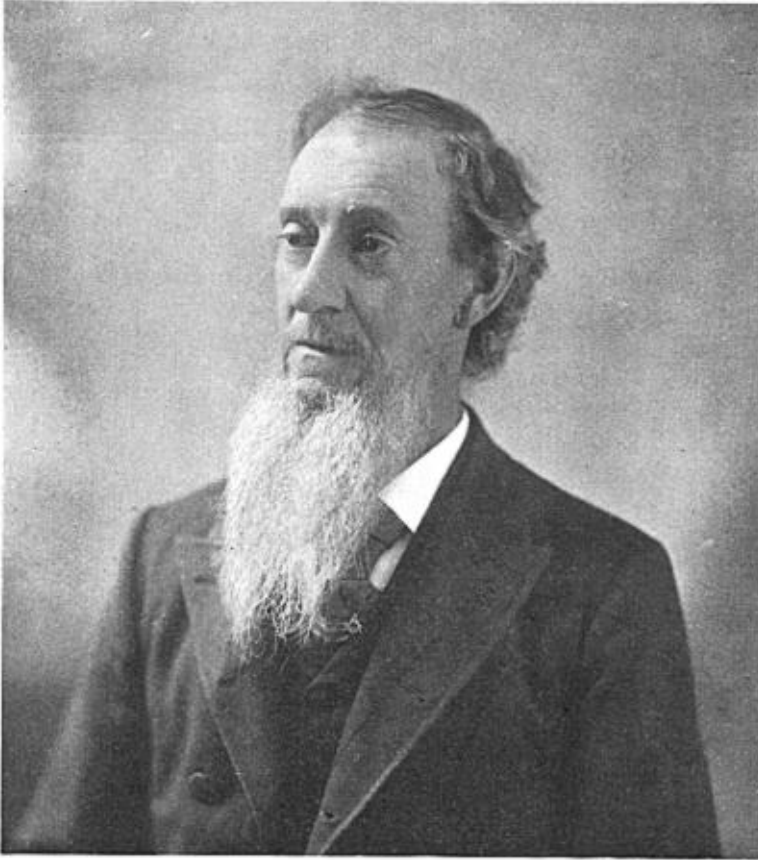


Fig. 63. PORTRAIT OF EDWIN CARTER.

and engage in the manufacture of buckskin clothing. Deer skins were obtained by trading with the Utes, but these he always retanned and, to use the enthusiastic words of one "old-timer", "his garments were always A-1." This work reawakened his love of nature, and as his second mining venture was practically a failure, he finally withdrew from all such activities and devoted his life to the collection of Rocky Mountain animals. For this purpose he took long trips, frequently on snowshoes in the dead of winter, at times with no other companion than his dog "Bismark," which drew a light sled loaded with the food and blankets that they shared together. Birds and mammals were collected indiscriminately and it was not un-

common for him to catalogue a bison or grizzly bear between a pine squirrel and a chickadee.

By 1870 the collection was well advanced despite the fact that Carter was frequently obliged to eke out his living by the sale of specimens. He was not, however, a commercial taxidermist and to him the sale of specimens was merely to provide the means for better work. He was imbued with the spirit of the true naturalist and on many trips into the deeper vastnesses he would not carry a gun, his sole purpose being to observe and study the animals that he tried to preserve in substantial form. Plans were then in progress for the Centennial Exposition to be held in Philadelphia, and it was his ambition to have his collection exhibited there. A year or so prior to the fair, however, he received an offer for a large number of mounted birds and mammals from a banker of Georgetown, Colorado, that was too attractive to be refused and although he labored diligently, the time was too short to replace the specimens for the exposition. The collection of Mrs. Maxwell was accordingly exhibited instead and this drew forth considerable comment; the birds, in particular, were the subject of a paper by Robert Ridgway (*Maxwell's Colorado Museum. Field and Forest*, 2, 1876-1877, pp. 195-208). This collection, however, lacked the scientific accuracy that characterized the work of Carter and was responsible for many errors in the State bird list that have been difficult to rectify.

The great care with which Carter preserved data is, in fact, one of the outstanding features of his work. Measurements, often complete sets, were taken in the flesh, and anything at all questionable was so indicated. Each specimen was carefully labeled, the numbers corresponding to the data slips which constituted his catalogue. At this point it is proper to acknowledge the work done by Robert B. Rockwell, of Denver, through whose interest and appreciation of its value, this catalogue has been preserved. When the collection was placed in storage, the data slips, invariably written with lead pencil, frequently on coarse wrapping paper, and threaded on baling wire, were crammed into burlap sacks, where they remained for several years. Coming to Mr. Rockwell's attention, they were carefully ironed out, sorted and arranged in numerical sequence, and pasted in large scrap books, from which a beautifully written catalogue in more usable form was prepared. Both the original and Mr. Rockwell's copy are preserved in the Colorado Museum of Natural History.

In addition to his care in the preservation of data, record should be made of the excellent character of Carter's preparations. The mounting was not what today would be considered artistic, but considering the facilities at his command it was excellent. Dried grass was a usual filling both for skins and mounts, while baling wire was called upon to serve a multitude of uses. But even today, after the lapse of fifty years, many birds and mammals prepared by him may be relaxed and reworked more readily than a great many of the skins sent in by present day collectors. The writer has worked on his skins on several occasions and has never ceased to marvel at their perfect condition.

In the winter of 1899 Carter's health began to fail, and thinking that he might be benefited by a lower altitude he went to Galveston, Texas, where he died February 2, 1900. His remains were returned to Denver, and on February 8 they lay in state at the capitol building, the first time such honor had been accorded to a private citizen in Colorado. He was buried in Valley Brook Cemetery, at Breckenridge, on February 11, 1900, the funeral services being conducted by Breckenridge Lodge No. 47, A. F. & A. M., of which he had been a member.

To protect his constantly growing collection, a large log-house extension had been added to his one-room cabin at Breckenridge, this being the original "Carter Museum" (fig. 64). In 1921, when the investigations were made that are embodied in this paper, this building was still standing, being the property of Mrs. M. E. Walker, who, with her husband, was closely associated with Mr. Carter in the early days.

In 1898, feeling that he was getting too old to continue the work, Carter offered his collection for sale. Some effort was made in Denver to organize an association for this purpose; but little progress was made until December, 1900, when a number



Fig. 64. THE ORIGINAL CARTER MUSEUM, AT BRECKENRIDGE, COLORADO.

of prominent citizens pledged \$1,000 each, and organized a perpetual association which they named "The Colorado Museum of Natural History." Having purchased the Carter collection, the association entered into a contract with the City of Denver for a museum building.

While awaiting permanent housing, the collection was placed in storage, and either through ignorance, indifference, or carelessness, many specimens were ruined, including some of those of special scientific significance. Enough remained, however, to enable the association to have prepared and installed a few important habitat groups, while the skins and eggs formed the basis of the present research collections in the Colorado Museum.

In concluding this paper it seems proper to summarize the notable contributions to ornithology that are based on Carter's collection. The original report was made by Prof. Wells W. Cooke in his second appendix to "The Birds of Colorado", Bull.

56 (Tech. Ser. No. 5), Agri. Exper. Sta., Agri. Coll. of Col., pp. 177-239, May, 1900. It is believed, however, that possibly because of poor light in the old log museum building, Professor Cooke made a few errors in identification. In the case of a few, no catalogue entry has been found, and the specimens apparently are no longer in existence. The status of each species is as follows:

*Gavia pacifica*. Pacific Loon. Recorded by the present writer (Condor, xxi, 1919, pp. 237-238). Taken by Carter near Breckenridge, Colorado, November 15, 1887. The first and only record for Colorado. The specimen is preserved in the Colorado Museum of Natural History as number 7003.

*Larus californicus*. California Gull. Recorded by Cooke (*op. cit.*, p. 192) as represented by two specimens in the Carter collection. Upon reexamination by the writer, one of these was found to be an immature Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*). No Colorado specimens of *californicus* are known to be in existence, and the species is withdrawn from the State list. (Cf. Lincoln, *op. cit.*, p. 238).

*Glaucionetta islandica*. Barrow Golden-eye. The first nest and eggs of this duck collected in the United States were obtained by Carter in 1876, and reported by Brewer (Bull. Nutt. Ornith. Club, 4, 1879, pp. 145-152). The collection contained other sets of eggs of this species, some of which are now incorporated in the W. C. Bradbury collection at the Museum.

*Cryptoglaux funerea richardsoni*. Richardson Owl. The second record of this species for Colorado was reported by Cooke (*op. cit.*, p. 205), based on a specimen "taken by Mr. Carter at Breckenridge, December 28, 1882, and now (1900) in his collection." This specimen has not been found and the catalogue does not contain an entry showing its collection.

*Stellula calliope*. Calliope Hummingbird. According to Cooke (*op. cit.*, p. 208) Carter's collection contained a fine specimen of this species, "taken near Breckenridge, June 30, 1882, at an altitude of about 9,500 feet." This is the second record for Colorado, but the specimen is no longer in existence, nor has there been found any catalogue entry showing its collection.

*Passerherbulus lecontei*. Leconte Sparrow. The first and only record of the Leconte Sparrow is based upon a specimen recorded by Cooke (*op. cit.*, p. 214) and taken by Carter, at Breckenridge, October 24, 1886. This specimen, unfortunately, has disappeared; but its former existence is substantiated by the following quotation from a letter to the author by Robert B. Rockwell who, as previously stated, was responsible for the preservation of the valuable Carter catalogue: "While I was working on the data covering the Carter collection, I saw the specimen of Leconte's sparrow. It was a poorly mounted specimen and was in one of the big packing boxes with a large number of small mounted birds."

*Biological Survey, Washington, D. C., July 11, 1929.*