

## JOHN MAYNARD WHEATON

BY MRS. H. J. TAYLOR

John Maynard Wheaton, valued citizen; trusted and beloved physician; naturalist and pioneer ornithologist; was born in Columbus, Ohio, May 18, 1840. He died of tuberculosis, January 28, 1887, leaving a wife and a son eight years old. He is buried in Green Lawn Cemetery in Columbus, Ohio.\* His years, though few, bore rich and lasting fruit.

Sketches of early ornithologists are written not alone for the history of ornithology but also to present in brief and tangible form the most valiant, picturesque, and outstanding representatives in this field of natural history at a time when birds and butterflies were not in the curriculum, and entomologists and ornithologists were delicious subjects for the cartoonist. Such a contribution was made to Ohio ornithology by John Maynard Wheaton.

He was educated in the public schools of Columbus. On completion of the high school course in 1857 he entered Denison University, a Baptist school at Granville, Ohio, graduating with a B. A. degree in 1860. The school at Granville was undoubtedly selected because of the devotion of his parents to the Baptist Church and the prominent part his father took in uniting the Welsh and English Baptists in 1835 into the First Baptist Church of Columbus. Dr. Wheaton was a loyal member and supporter of this church throughout his life.

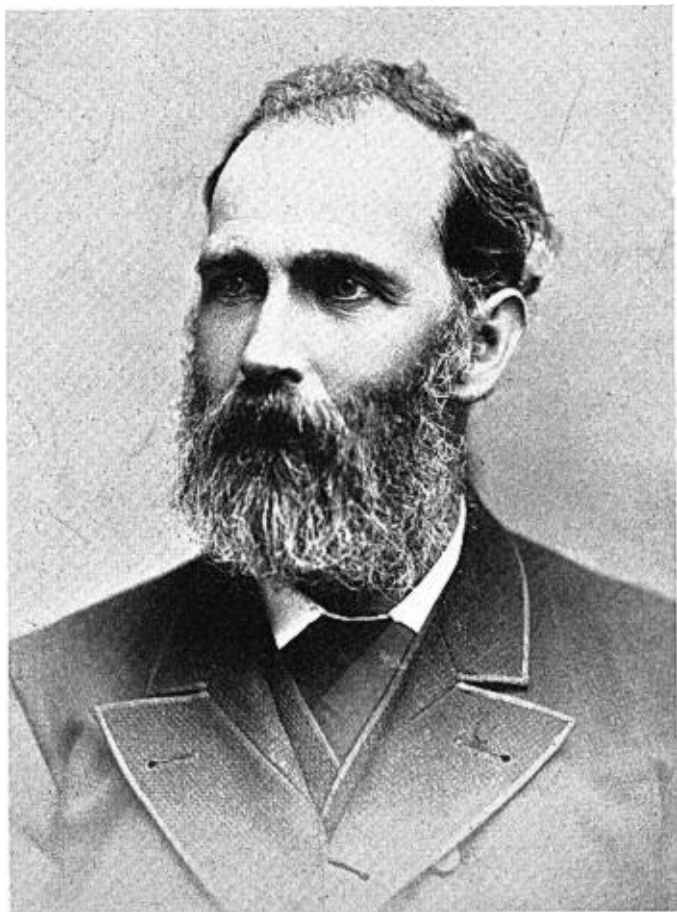
On graduating from Denison University in 1860 he entered the office of Dr. Starling Loving, taking the course offered in the Starling Medical College. The Civil War broke out and immediately upon finishing his course Wheaton enlisted as assistant surgeon in the 138th Ohio Volunteer Infantry. At the close of the war he returned to Columbus and began the practice of medicine.

He fitted up an office in the old family home on Fourth Street where he was born and where his father died. Here, too, his mother died in 1884. He reserved a room for bird cases, another was set aside for butterflies, beetles, snakes, and other natural history objects.

John Wheaton was a thorough, painstaking student in all he did. In 1867 he was made Professor of Anatomy in Starling Medical College which position he held until his death. He was a rare teacher greatly beloved by his students. In his time the "Family Physician"

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\*Data for this sketch were obtained from Mr. Robert J. Wheaton, son of Dr. J. M. Wheaton, and from such persons as had known Dr. Wheaton as physician, friend, or naturalist. Similar information is contained in "An Ohio Ornithologist", by Osman C. Hooper, in *The Honey Jar*, Columbus, Ohio, Vol. XVII, No. 2, p. 17.



JOHN MAYNARD WHEATON, 1840-1887

was a distinct figure in the community and held an abiding place in the hearts of grateful families. There are more than a few even today who recall him as the beloved doctor of their childhood days. His ability, sincerity, and friendly personality endeared him alike to adults and children. Professor W. H. Siebert (June, 1936) writes: "My grandfather who often went bird hunting with Wheaton would have only Dr. Wheaton to attend his family in sickness. He frequently took me with him to the Doctor's office where I saw his numerous specimens, not only of birds, but butterflies, beetles, snakes, and other objects. He was a spare man above medium height, kindly, considerate, and lovable with a pleasing voice. He was charming and entertaining in conversation. My grandfather thought the Doctor's interest in ornithology was probably due to a tendency to tuberculosis and the necessity for an out-door life." The truth is Wheaton's interest in the woods and living things found there dates from earliest childhood. After the father's death his mother often administered rebukes to her son in written form. A letter dated July 30, 1853, now in the possession of Dr. Wheaton's son, Robert, says: "John, I told you yesterday morning to do some work and you said it was too wet and asked to go into the woods. I gave you leave with the promise that you would return soon and stay in the house in the afternoon and read. You did not come home till three o'clock. Is this the way to obey and comfort your mother? If you do not become a good boy you will not go to heaven and see your father." This is but one of many rebukes given for roaming the woods and meadows. The love and call of tangible, glorious woods; trees topped with birds bursting forth in song; butterflies and bees flying and droning about; unweeded gardens at his feet were inviting realities with which an unknown heaven could not compete. It is well that youth does not take too seriously the concern of elders.

Dr. Loving paid tribute to the skill and confidence he had in his student by calling Dr. Wheaton to attend Mrs. Loving during a long and serious illness. The service rendered was one of love. Dr. Loving expressed his appreciation of this service by presenting Dr. Wheaton with a fine Kentucky riding horse to aid him in his service to others. Until then Dr. Wheaton had made all his calls on foot or street car.

Excellent physician that Dr. Wheaton was, it was as an ornithologist that he obtained lasting fame. It is not easy to understand how a man so conscientious and successful in a profession, also found time for serious scientific work the result of which is of such quality and value that his name stands foremost as a pioneer in Ohio orni-

thology. Splendid work had been done by Professor Jared P. Kirtland (1793-1877), who in 1838 prepared a catalogue of Ohio birds naming 222 species. He was widely known as a naturalist, as a horticulturist, and florist. By profession he was an excellent and beloved physician.

Wheaton's catalogue of Birds of Ohio (Agricultural Report for 1860, published in 1861, pp. 359-380) was prepared with the assistance of Messrs. John Kirkpatrick, R. W. Winslow, and Dr. J. P. Kirtland. In this catalogue of 271 birds the classification of Professor Baird, in Birds of North America, is adopted. Of this catalogue Wheaton says: "In the year 1838 Prof. Kirtland, then State Zoologist and Botanist, prepared a catalogue of Ohio Birds which was considered very nearly complete. Since then . . . new species have been discovered and others added to our fauna. Some which were then rare are now common. Many then common have now retired from our limits or are very rare." He also states that due to the physical features of Ohio the state has a larger proportion of resident birds than the surrounding states. In referring to the game law passed by the Ohio Legislature in 1857 he says: "The quail has become as numerous as ever." The legislature of 1860 wished to extend the law to protect more species. The discussion regarding such extension is enlightening and interesting. I quote the following: "The passenger pigeon needs no protection." "The yellow-hammer or flicker may be included and receive protection though its eatable qualities certainly do not rank very high." "The meadow-lark . . . though not strictly a game bird, is yet quite eatable."

Of Wheaton's "The Food of Birds as Related to Agriculture" (Twenty-ninth Ann. Rep. Ohio State Board of Agric. for 1874, 1875, pp. 561-578) Elliott Coues (Birds of Colorado Valley, 1878, p. 716) says: "This is, in effect, a corrected and completed list of the birds of Ohio, briefly annotated, and with general food-regimen of each family given; being a well conceived essay of much practical utility."

Wheaton's principal and most valued work is a Report on the Birds of Ohio, published in 1882 (Geological Survey of Ohio, Vol. 4, Zoology and Botany, pp. 187-628). This work is reviewed by that peerless critic, Elliott Coues, whose words place upon a writing a stamp that makes it current and unquestionable as to quality. Dr. Coues says: "This long-deferred work reaches us at length in the form of a treatise on the ornithology of the State so extensive and so systematic that the time [six years] its preparation has occupied seems justified if not absolutely required. . . . Dr. Wheaton's report must at once take place at the head of State Faunas, so far as ornithology is con-

cerned. It represents a large amount of original research, extending over nearly a decade, . . . applied to the construction of a systematic treatise which possesses the necessary qualities of a good working handbook of the subject. . . . Ohioans have here . . . a correct history and description of their 300 birds, systematically arranged and classified . . . a work of that useful kind called 'a manual' and bearing the weight of competent authority. Since the death of Dr. Kirtland, we doubt that any one is better entitled to speak of Ohioan birds than Dr. Wheaton, who appears to have himself collected, in the vicinity of Columbus, more than two-thirds of the species he treats, and to have admitted none that he has not personally identified, except on unimpeachable authority." Quoting directly from Wheaton, Coues continues: "The descriptions of species are almost without exception or alteration from Dr. Elliott Coues' Key to North American Birds. . . . The nomenclature adopted is that of Dr. Coues in his Check List of North American Birds (1874) with such modifications as changes, made since its publication, require. . . . Following the description I give, as briefly as possible, an account of its general and breeding habits, together with such biographical observations as seem to me interesting or valuable . . . making a total of 298 species and varieties. . . . In the appendix I have inserted a list of birds, with the dates of their appearance and disappearance, as observed by me in this vicinity. . . . A list of [101] birds identified by me in my garden in this [Columbus] city." Dr. Coues continues his review: ". . . This volume of some 450 pages is no slight nor uncertain addition to our ornithological literature. It is easily first in its special field, and takes its permanent place among the more comprehensive treatises on North American birds . . . [since] the text is well written, and possesses the attraction of being mostly new and original. . . . Dr. Wheaton is one of the pioneers in Ohio ornithology, his publications upon the subject extending over a period of more than twenty years." (The Bull. Nutt. Ornith. Club, VIII, 1883, 110-112).

It is more than fifty years since *The Birds of Ohio* was published. A letter from his son, Robert Wheaton (August, 1936), says: "My father's ornithological collection has been in the Ohio State Museum since a year or two after his death. The collection consists entirely of bird skins, there being no mounted specimens among them. What is left of his butterfly collection is in our home. His collection of shells is also in the museum. Not long ago the curator of Natural History in the Ohio State Museum advised me that the Smithsonian Institution in Washington still considers my father's work their standard reference."

E. S. Thomas, Curator of Natural History, Ohio State Museum states [October 6, 1936]: "Dr. J. M. Wheaton collection shows 606 museum skins of birds."

The Wheaton Club of Columbus was organized at the Ohio State University in his honor in 1921. Some interesting contributions to ornithology have come from this organization.

John Maynard Wheaton was one of the founders of the American Ornithologists Union and his death was the first among its active members. He was an occasional contributor to current ornithological literature. Dr. C. Hart Merriam, who knew Wheaton in his profession, in his scientific work, and as a friend, in a letter received in February, 1937, says: "Dr. J. M. Wheaton, of Columbus, Ohio, was not only one of my dearest friends, but an ornithologist of high standing, whose loss was a severe blow to American ornithology. In 1874 when I was in charge of the American Ornithologists' Union's Committee on Bird Migration, Dr. Wheaton served as Superintendent of the Middle-Eastern District, including Ohio. Dr. Wheaton was an unusually competent observer, possessed of a bright eye and a keen brain, a man whose death was a great loss to ornithology as well as to his many patients and other friends."

He lived his entire life in Columbus, Ohio, where he was an esteemed citizen. The death of this beloved physician was deeply mourned by those who called him "our doctor". Friends who had talked and walked with him through woods and meadows, by lakes and streams, keenly felt the loss of his presence. The essence of his life has enriched the science of natural history and in the field of ornithology he lives for his valued contribution.

#### WRITINGS OF J. M. WHEATON

1861. Wheaton, J. M. Bird Notes. Field Notes [Agricultural Newspaper, Columbus, Ohio]. I, 1861, 65.  
Note on the distribution of the distribution of the Pileated Woodpecker, Whip-poor-will, Nighthawk, and Shore Lark.
1861. Wheaton, J. M. Rare Birds. Field Notes. I, 1861, 153.  
Notes on the capture at Columbus, in May, of *Porzana carolina*, *Rallus virginianus*, *Guiraca ludoviciana*, *Ardetta exilis*, *Gallinula galeata*, and *Chondestes grammaca*. New species, 1.
1861. Wheaton, J. M. Ornithological Inquiries. Field Notes. I, 1861, 152.  
Suggestions as to the proper identification of *L. occidentalis*, with interesting notes upon the breeding habits of the Florida Gallinule, and upon *Ardetta exilis*, and *Botaurus lentiginosus*.

1861. Wheaton, J. M. Catalogue of Birds of Ohio. Ohio Agricultural Report for 1860 (1861). Pp. 359-380. Prepared with the assistance of Messrs. John Kirkpatrick, R. K. Winslow, and Dr. J. P. Kirtland.  
Two hundred and eighty-five species are given with annotations.
1861. Wheaton, J. M. Catalogue of the Birds of Ohio. Reprinted from the Ohio Agricultural Report for 1860. Pp. 1-21.  
A reprint of the preceding title, repaged, and with its addenda distributed in place. Three species are added to the list of probabilities.
1874. Wheaton, J. M. Notes Found in Coues' Birds of the Northwest, 1874, pp. 233-234.  
In these notes credited to Dr. Wheaton are annotations on the Olive-backed Thrush, Blue Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Cedar Bird, Brotherly-Love Vireo, Loggerhead Shrike, Song Sparrow, Lark Finch, Nighthawk, and Chimney Swift.
1875. Wheaton, J. M. The Food of Birds as Related to Agriculture. Ohio Agricultural Report for 1874 (1875). Pp. 561-578. (September, 1875). Also a reprint, repaged but otherwise unchanged. "This is in effect a corrected and completed list of the birds of Ohio, briefly annotated, and with the general food regimen of each family given; being a well-conceived essay of much practical utility." From Coues, Bibliographical Appendix, Birds of the Colorado Valley, 1878. This edition contains 288 species with six additional varieties.
1877. Wheaton, J. M. The Ruff and Purple Gallinule in Ohio. Bull. Nutt. Ornith. Club, II, 1877, p. 83.  
First authentic record of the Ruff and Purple Gallinule in Ohio.
1879. Wheaton, J. M. Kirtland's Warbler again in Ohio. Bull. Nutt. Ornith. Club, IV, 1879, p. 58.  
A male and female *D. kirtlandi* taken at Rockport, Cuyahoga County, Ohio, in 1878.
1879. Wheaton, J. M. Occurrence of Birds Rare to the Vicinity of Columbus, O. Bull. Nutt. Ornith. Club, IV, 1879, p. 62.  
Reports the Red Crossbill (in June), Swallow-tailed Kite, Barn Owl, and Pinnated Grouse.
1881. Wheaton, J. M. The Ruff. Cinc. Soc. Nat. Hist., Vol. 4, 1881, p. 341.
1882. Wheaton, J. M. Report on the Birds of Ohio. Report. Geol. Survey, Ohio, Vol. IV, Part I, 1882, pp. 189-628.  
This list includes 298 species.

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