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Sketches of Little Known Iowa Ornithologists¹

By JAMES HODGES

It is not a rare event when one is making a detailed study of ornithology to come upon the names of older students of the subject that are apparently unknown to the ornithological public. Their only contribution to the subject may have been a regional or local list published in some obscure periodical or a set of unpublished journals kept over a period of years. It is my purpose to make an attempt to fill in some of these "unknowns" in our knowledge of historical ornithology. This paper contains three biographies.

J. H. PAARMANN

One can not think of the name of Professor J. H. Paarmann without thinking in the same instant of the old Davenport Academy of Natural Sciences (now the Davenport Public Museum) as both are associated with each other.

J. H. Paarmann was born in Davenport, Iowa, on September 2, 1870, the son of Mr. and Mrs. H. J. Paarmann. The ancestry is German, both parents coming from Ditmarshen, Schleswig-Holstein. He was educated in the public schools of Davenport until he was thirteen years old. He then attended Davenport Business College during the evenings. For a short period of time he followed the printer's trade, working for the Davenport *Daily Gazette* as a compositor. In 1884 he left his work at the Gazette and went into the upholstering business for seven years, and then he went to Cedar Falls to enter the Iowa State Teacher's College. Between 1892 and 1896 he taught school at Blue Grass, Iowa, and then served for a period as principal of the Walcott, Iowa, High School, both schools are located in Scott County. In 1901 he graduated from the University of Iowa with a B. S. degree where he also completed a year of graduate work in zoology and received his M.S. degree. While teaching and acting in the capacity of principal of the Walcott High School he met Dorothea Schreiber to whom he was married in Walcott on March 5th, 1898. The result of this union was one daughter. In 1897 he came to assume his duties at the Davenport Academy of Science, where he labored for a period of twenty-five years until his passing on July 14th, 1927, at Davenport.

When Prof. Paarmann took charge of the Davenport Academy

¹Contributions to the Ornithology of the Upper Mississippi Valley, Part IV.

of Science in 1897 he built it into the most potent cultural center in the Tri-city region, which includes cities both in Iowa and Illinois. Anything concerned with civic improvement or knowledge, he could always be counted upon to be an active supporter. He brought the Museum to the public and kept it before the public for a quarter of a century. His private scrapbook, now housed in the archives of the Museum, indicated that he was a very prolific and lucid writer for the newspapers. In looking through these clippings it becomes obvious that his prime concern was the children of the city and in turn getting them interested in the out-of-doors. He conducted field trips to various localities for all age groups, and according to newspaper accounts, they were very well attended. He also started an annual spring affair known as the May Dawn Bird Concert. For the past twenty-five years about 150 individuals have met at 4:00 a.m. on Credit Island to look for birds.

Although he was trained as a scientist, he also had a great interest in the promotion of natural beauty. He started a successful campaign to beautify the city of Davenport. At the St. Louis exposition the Davenport Academy of Science exhibit arranged by Curator J. H. Paarmann was awarded a silver medal. This was in 1904.

All through the years he spent his time giving his knowledge to those who desired it and perpetuated the name and reputation of the Davenport Academy of Science. However, today he is just a name to the present generation, but to the older residents he is remembered as a dynamic personality who still speak of him as "the friendly bird man."

HUGO H. SCHRODER

It is probably safe to say that less than a dozen Iowa ornithologist's know the name of Hugo H. Schroder. But to those who make it a point of following the artists in the field of natural history photography he will of course be recognized immediately. However, although they do not realize it, they have been enjoying the work of a former Iowa student of bird life.

The most recent article of Mr. Schroder's may be found in the January 1950, issue of *Natural History*. Mr. Schroder became interested in bird life about 1911. He made no notes at that time, but along in 1914 he became more interested in birds and started to photograph some of the more common ones. Since 1916 he has been actively interested in bird photography and filmed most of the birds in the Davenport, Iowa, area. Many of these pictures

can still be seen in the archives of the Davenport Public Museum. In 1918 he left Davenport for Florida where he remained for nine months. He has been a resident of Florida since 1926 except for a period of two years that he returned to Iowa. In 1934 he began to commercialize the collection of bird and nature pictures that he had made during the previous twenty years, his first real success coming upon publication of four diving pelican photos which appeared in the *National Geographic Magazine* in March, 1934. He had had material published in about one-hundred and fifty publications in the United States and Canada and in more than a dozen of the major European countries and in South America. In reply to my question of how many negatives he has on file he wrote, "How many photos in my files? Thousands! How many? Too numerous to count! And I've just bought a collection of Fla. pix, mostly of birds and a few animals and snakes, to add to my stock. These are all 4x5, some are very fine pix and of things which I hadn't shot myself."

Besides the Christmas bird counts published in *Bird Lore* Mr. Schroder had an article, among others, published in the October 19, 1919, issue of the *Davenport Democrat* entitled, "Birds of Scott County—Residents and Migrants—How many do you Know?" This was the only known published list on the birds of the Davenport area since 1906. After publication it evidently remained unknown to local students of the subject until several years ago when it was brought to my attention as a yellowed newspaper clipping serving as a book mark in an old bird book. A total of 153 species were listed, records of particular interest now such as "Black Tern, common migrant and possible summer resident"; Scaup Duck, "possible summer resident"; Sora Rail, "summer resident"; Upland Plover, "rather rare summer resident"; Orchard Oriole, "common summer resident"; Vesper Sparrow, "summer resident"; Grasshopper Sparrow, "rare summer resident"; Scarlet Tanager, "rare summer resident"; Brewster's Warbler, "rare migrant"; yellow-breasted Chat, "rare summer resident."

It is hoped that this introduction to Mr. Schroeder will cause Iowa ornithologists' to examine closely the bird pictures appearing in *Audubon Magazine*, *Natural History*, *Travel*, and so many others, to see reproductions of the skill of a former Iowa student of birds, Hugo H. Schroder.

BURTIS H. WILSON

Burtis H. Wilson published the first paper on the ornithology of the Scott County, Iowa area as well as the only published record of the nesting of the Brown Creeper in Iowa.

Burtis Harris Wilson was born at Shavertown, New York, Delaware County on October 11th, 1872. He was born in a small rural community and while very young moved to Davenport, Iowa. While growing up in Davenport he spent all of his spare time in quest of local bird life and kept accurate records of his observations for many years. On May 1, 1896 he married Lucy May Baker of Rock Island, Illinois and as a result of that union, three children were born. Mr. Wilson went into the lecturing business on a small scale and was in much demand in that capacity. He was one of the first to use lantern slides to illustrate his lectures which added to their popularity. For many years he annually led a class of bird students on a New Year's day walk each year, regardless of the weather.

Just before the start of World War I he left Davenport and moved to Peoria and later to Joliet, Illinois and finally to Chicago where he lived until his death on September 10th, 1940. His entire collection of journals and library was left to the Davenport Public Museum. With this collection of journals plus his published list we have an excellent idea of the avifauna of this area before the turn of the century. To Burtis H. Wilson, the students of this region owe a great deal.

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