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Papa Lyman Remembers

Ornithologists I Have Known

by Lyman Newlin (Book Trade Counsellor) <broadwater@agis.ag.net>

My plans for this issue of *ATG* were to paint some thumbnail sketches of eminent publishers I have known. I will continue that project as far as space in this issue allows after I write about some great ornithologists, authors, and bird painters I have known. This is by way of my paying tribute to **Roger Tory Peterson**, who died July 28 and for whom a memorial service was held October 12 in Jamestown, NY, his birthplace and boyhood hometown. He accepted Jamestown as home and made frequent visits, especially before and after he founded **Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History** in 1986. On August 29, 1993, it was our family's privilege to attend the dedication of the Institute's newly completed building on its own grounds near the **Jamestown Community College** campus. In his remarks on that occasion, Roger pointed to the nearby wooded surroundings and attributed his interest in nature to his boyhood wanderings in them as he studied birds, butterflies, and foliage.

My interest in birds goes back to a youth in which I spent much time out of doors in my several midwestern home states. The matter of identifying and learning more about

birds I encountered was no easy matter. There was a little pocket-sized book with flexible cover which I cannot seem to locate by searching **Wilson's Cumulative Index, 1928-1981**. My memory says the book was entitled something like *Guide to Water and Land Birds*. Whatever its name was, it wasn't much good. I was raised in the land of dickcissel (*spiza americana*) whose Latin name indicates that it is the American sparrow, but I didn't know its name until years later when I purchased *A Field Guide to the Birds* by **Roger Tory Peterson** soon after I began in the book business. A Kansas boy in the city had no time (or money) for hunting. Golf was never for me so I took up bird watching in the Chicago parks and perhaps a couple of field trips to the Illinois or Indiana sand dunes. On an early field trip to the Indiana dunes, I saw and heard this "tiny meadow lark" which sat on fences or phone wires and sang or whistled his name over and over. I opened my new *Field Guide* and learned the name and essential facts about the dickcissel. Before that, I, like millions of Americans, admired most of the birds we saw, but never knew what they were named. Not until **Roger Tory Peterson's Field Guide**

was published by **Houghton Mifflin** in 1934 did we have a workable guide for identification. Nor did we have anything to teach us that we had been wantonly destroying many useful birds by gun or trap or nest robbing.

All of the above is by way of gratefully acknowledging the life and work of a man whose heritage was to leave the publishing industry and the library profession with a greatly enlarged and enriched addition to their "Q" classification holdings. When I first began using the *Field Guide* the user had some difficulty connecting Peterson's very unique color illustrations to corresponding text. Houghton Mifflin and the author needed very little prodding by me and a couple of staff members of **Chicago's Field Museum** to correct this situation so that by the end of the nineteen forties the color plates contained corresponding page number alongside each figure. As I write this, I have received word from **Harry Foster**, his editor, that the combined sales of *Peterson Guides* have exceeded 18 million.

I had several opportunities to visit with RTP — the last of which was at the dedication of the Institute building. About the only

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error I ever found in any of his writing was that in an introduction to a book about **Francis Lee Jaques**, he wrote that Lee and his wife, Florence, had retired to Wisconsin instead of Minnesota.

"**Francis Lee Jaques** was the first bird artist I ever knew," writes **Roger Tory Peterson** in his forward to *Francis Lee Jaques, Artist-Naturalist* by **Luce and Andrews**, U. Minnesota Press, 1982. I can say the same thing. I met Lee and **Florence Jaques** in 1944 when I first arrived in Minneapolis. During my managership of **Follett's Minnesota Bookstore**, we staged two one-man exhibits from which several sales were made. One of his canvases on the Canada goose which sold for \$500 at our store has recently fetched over \$30,000 at auction! Lee (as he was known by friends and associates) and I had several things in common besides birds: we were born in adjoining Illinois counties; his birthday was 8 months after my father's in 1887; we both spent a goodly part of our youth in Kansas; we both migrated to Minnesota. I founded **Broadwater Books** in the county adjacent to the one in which Lee began seriously to practice drawing and painting but earned his living as a taxidermist. Another early job he had was as a railroad fireman and he was a train buff (especially inter-urban trains) all his life. Lee seriously took up painting as a career after informally studying art in Duluth with **Clarence Rosenkranz**, whom he acknowledged as his most influential teacher. It is probable that Rosenkranz was responsible for Lee's mastery of the diorama background, many of which may be seen in the **American Museum of Natural History**, New York; the **University of Minnesota Natural History Museum**, Minneapolis; and other museums of natural history. For my business, he made seven scratchboard etchings for our Christmas cards. One of these, "common and black terns" is used, in reduced format, as my logo. I have been trying to get a figure on the number of books Lee Jaques illustrated and it's been hard to compile. Luce and Andrews list forty-four, but I know of at least two books they missed. I'm sure that a complete list would comprise at least seventy-five. His illustrations often appeared in *Outdoor Life* and other similar magazines. **Florence Page Jaques**, Lee's wife, wrote several books, mostly about the North country, between 1938 and 1957. All of them were illustrated by Lee. Lee Jaques' illustrations were included in one of the early state bird books, *The Birds of Minnesota* by **Thomas S. Roberts**, MD, 2 vols. U. of Minnesota Press, 1932, revised 1936. Dr. Roberts was the physician to several prominent Minneapolis families and strongly prescribed nature walks and study of the flora and fauna as a most healthful pastime for busy industrialists. He also is reported to have been influential in persuading several wealthy people to invest in a permanent museum of

natural history. By the time I met the doctor, he had retired from his medical practice but was still an avid birder and spent considerable time studying bird habits and writing about them. Robert's *Birds of Minnesota* is now out of print and a collector's item, but it is a certainty that contemporary authors contemplating a state bird book use Roberts as a benchmark. **University of Minnesota Press** kept a paperbound edition of Roberts' *Bird Portraits in Color* in print until just a few years ago. This quarto-sized book of 92 full color plates included several of Jaques contributions to *Birds of Minnesota*.

Another eminent Minnesota ornithologist, author, and artist is **Walter John Breckenridge** who in his long career has taught and inspired hundreds of university students of ornithology, written several books, and is a bird portrait artist of considerable merit. He has been curator and director of the **University of Minnesota Museum of Natural History**. Fourteen of his paintings are reproduced in *Bird Portraits in Color*. I shall always be grateful for the many field trips I made with Walter. I learned more from him about nature than from anyone I have ever known. He still lives on the banks of the Minnesota River and still is involved in the outdoors. I might add that Walter has me beat by a handful of years.

Another great midwestern ornithologist and author whom I got to know rather late in his career was **Owen J. Gromme**, of the **Milwaukee Public Museum**. Here is how I came to know him. Early in 1963 **Oscar Shoenfeld**, whose new book I have mentioned elsewhere in this issue of *ATG* (see page 12), sat in my **Kroch's and Brentano's** office selling me the fall list of the **University of Wisconsin Press**. I noticed that he flipped past a page on which I glimpsed a bird picture. I said something like "Whoa, Oscar, didn't I just see a bird?" "Yes," he replied, "but this book is about Wisconsin birds." I quickly reminded him that birds were ignorant of state lines and didn't know if they were in Illinois or Wisconsin. Whereupon he backpacked to Gromme's book and we bought a hundred copies of his forthcoming book, *Birds of Wisconsin*, Madison, 1963. I tell this on Oscar with his permission as I do not intend to ridicule one of the best book peddlers I've ever known. **Owen Gromme** frequently visited K&B's main store and we had many good discussions of his work. He wrote a generous note with his autograph in my copy of his book and then wrote warm autographs for my two nieces who lived in Wisconsin. Another great ornithologist/author who visited Kroch's & Brentano's on several occasions was **H. Albert Hochbaum**, Director of **Delta Waterfowl Research Station**, Manitoba. His book *Canvasback on a Prairie Marsh*, Washington, 1944, is a classic and a milestone in waterfowl individual species monographs. His 1955 *Travels and Traditions of Waterfowl*, U. of Minnesota Press is a very important contribution to the ongoing study of wildfowl migration. It is profusely illustrated

with the author's scratchboard etchings reminiscent of the work of F.L. Jaques. Here I want to mention working with **Charles Scribner III** and **Jacek Galaska** (when Scribner was Scribner and not Macmillan or Simon & Schuster) to whom I made some suggestions for reprinting some of Scribner's best bird books. Some of my suggestions were followed and in 1978 they reprinted *The Bobwhite Quail* by **Herbert L. Stoddard**, the first (1931) edition of which had become a collector's item (and now, even the 1978 is becoming scarce). Scribner also reprinted at my suggestion in the late seventies *New England Grouse Shooting* by **William Harnden Foster** (1942). I don't know why the publisher was coy in displaying reprint data. Their code on title page verso is B-3.71 (MZ). I don't know where in Simon & Schuster I could find what that means.

I had intended to include additional publisher sketches in this article, but the birds kept on flying and I could see no reason to stop since this article will be published in Charleston, South Carolina, where **John James Audubon** spent much time in the home of the **Reverend John Bachman** (pronounced in Charleston "Backman") pastor of St. John's Lutheran Church (where I worship when I'm in the city) during the middle of the nineteenth century. Audubon's two sons married Dr. Bachman's two daughters. I've never thought to inquire as to existence of heirs — a project for my next visit to St. John's. Other well-known early ornithologists spent time in South Carolina, including **Alexander Wilson**, the "father" of American ornithology, **Mark Catesby** (called the "Colonial Audubon" by some writers) and **William Brewster**. So now you know why the birds got out of hand herein. 🐦

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