

Of A Feather

The Story of
Two Inspirational Ministers and Birders of
Westport Point, Massachusetts



Smith Owen Dexter 1872-1936



Basil Douglas Hall 1888-1979

A Documentary

Compiled by

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Introduction

Scott Weidensaul, a well-known writer about birds and birding, published a book in 2007 entitled *Of A Feather: A Brief History of American Birding*. It covered famous authors and artists who had contributed to the literature on birds in North America from a first “bird book” produced by Mark Catesbury in 1726 to the famous recent author/artists such as David Sibley. Although he cites hundreds of birding authors, Weidensaul does not mention two Westport birders who made significant contributions to birding in the first half of the 20th Century – Smith Owen Dexter and Basil Douglas Hall. Both these men were Protestant Ministers, had residences within a mile of each other at Westport Point, were very close friends, collaborated on compiling records of local bird sightings, and had powerful influences on very disparate parts of the contemporary American birding community.

This document introduces them, describes their birding contributions, and provides evidence of their important activities in the appendices.

Smith Owen Dexter (1872-1936)

Smith Dexter was born in Barrington, RI, the son of a textile manufacturer. Although he was expected by his family to follow in his father’s footsteps, he was instead attracted to the ministry and pursued that career, being ordained in 1900, at the age of 28, and assigned to a church in New Bedford, MA. He remained at that church for four years, long enough to meet and marry a local woman, Helen Denison in 1902. After a posting as a missionary in Washington State he was assigned to the Episcopal Church in Concord, MA in 1907 where he remained for 25 years. Soon after moving to Concord, they purchased a house at Westport Point, an area that Helen had probably visited many times in her youth and to which he had become attracted while serving as a minister in New Bedford.

While he appears to have had an early interest in nature and birding, these were greatly stimulated by some of his parishioners in Concord and his neighbors and surroundings in Westport. His strongest connection in Concord was with neighbor William Brewster, the leading ornithologist of his time, who had co-founded the American Ornithologists Union, the Nuttall Ornithological Club, and was first president of the Massachusetts Audubon Society for 17 years. After Brewster died in 1919, Smith Owen Dexter edited two books of Brewster’s birding field notes entitled, *Concord River* and *October Farm*, published by Harvard University Press in 1936 and 1937 respectively.

In 1906, the year before Smith Owen Dexter arrived in Concord, William Brewster had published a major work entitled, *The Birds of the Cambridge Region of Massachusetts*, which provided detailed information collected by many members of the Nuttall Club on their bird sightings in a region comprising the towns

of Cambridge, Watertown, Belmont, Lexington, Arlington and parts of Waltham, an area of about 50 square miles.¹

One cannot help but wonder whether this widely heralded document might have inspired Smith Owen Dexter to undertake a similar compilation of *The Birds of Westport*, a somewhat similar area of 64 square miles, of which 50 were land and 14 were estuary. Whatever the inspiration, Dexter did set out to compile a record “of those birds seen within the limits of the Township or directly off our shores.” His explanation of the choice of this area was as follows:

“Few places in New England are more suited to the study of wild birds than the township of Westport. This is true for two reasons: first that the diversity of land and water attracts many kinds of birds; and then that the favorable climate holds them here at all seasons of the year. Nearly every condition of sea and land invites the birds. The birds, moreover, can be studied at every season of the year.

In the introduction to *The Birds of Westport*, Dexter acknowledges his “debt to others for my material” as follows:

“The fishermen and gunners of the Village have greatly helped me, and especially William S. Head, who for many years has collected and observed the ocean birds. The accurate notes which Laurence Brooks of New Bedford and A. C. Bent of Taunton have kindly placed at my disposal have been of the utmost value. And the observations of Basil D. Hall have added many to the list of land birds.”

This is the only mention of Basil D. Hall in the notebooks, but it is recognition of a collaboration that had been evolving over several years. While all of the pages dealing with individual species in Book I have a small penciled “D” in the lower right hand corner, indicating they were entered by Smith Owen Dexter, in Book II covering Song Birds, 85 of the pages have a “D” and 33 have an “H” indicating that the entry was made by Basil D. Hall.

Also, the two notebooks were kept at the residence of Basil Hall at least for some of the years after Smith Dexter died. For some other years they may have been kept at the Westport Point Library on the property of Katherine Hall, Basil Hall’s sister. They were finally transferred to the Westport Free Public Library in 1967 by Basil Hall, as indicated in the Appendices, p. 18.

Basil Douglas Hall (1888-1979)

Basil Douglas Hall was born in New York City on January 1st, 1888, the son of Charles Cuthbert Hall (1852-1908) and Jeannie Stewart Boyd Hall (1857-1942). He was home schooled by a tutor and in 1902-03 he accompanied his parents, other family members and a tutor on a journey around the world during which his father delivered lectures on Christianity in India and East Asia.

¹ This publication represents an early example of what Joseph Hickey would later describe as “Regional Bird Studies.” See, Hickey, Joseph J. *A Guide to Bird Watching*, Oxford University Press, 1943, pp. 158 ff.

In the summer of 1888, the year Basil was born, his parents, were invited by parishioners of his First Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn, NY, Lucius and Harriet Sheldon, to visit them at Westport Point, and fell in love with the area. The following year, they built Sinton, a splendid house on the crest of Eldridge Heights, with an unobstructed view out across open fields and the Westport River to the ocean. In 1890, the family began their annual pilgrimages, via the Fall River Line, from Manhattan to Fall River and on to Sinton, by one means or another, for the next century.

Not only was Basil Hall raised in an environment of natural and intellectual abundance, but his mother, captivated by her surroundings in Westport, became an ardent botanist who compiled two notebooks entitled “Partial List of the Flora of Westport for the Westport Point Memorial Library” and dated 1918. These notebooks are very similar to the two compiled by Smith Dexter (and her son Basil) on “The Birds of Westport” also dated 1918, except that her notebooks often displayed pressed plants rather than cutout images and descriptions of birds.

There is clear evidence that Basil had become very interested in birds well before Smith Dexter appeared in Westport. On April 28th, 1903, he began entering records of bird sightings and descriptions in a notebook entitled “BIRDS” belonging to Basil Douglas Hall, 46 East 70th Street, New York, N. Y. Some samples of these entries are found in Appendix 3. The entries demonstrate that, at the age of 15, he was already a skilled observer of both the songs, the physical features, and the habitat of the different species, perhaps influenced by the similar skills that his mother applied to flora. The entries also show the dates each year when the locus of observations shifted from New York City to Westport and back to New York.

Flocking Together

There are no entries in Basil’s “Birds” notebook for 1904-05. Then there are some entries in 1907 of birds seen on a trip to England, Scotland and Ireland, followed by another gap until 1912. During this latter gap, Basil attended Harvard, earning Bachelors and Masters Degree there in 1909 and then in 1912 theology degrees from Edinburgh and Union Theological Seminary in New York which his father had lead until his death in 1908.

One entry by Basil Hall in his “Birds” notebook on August 22, 1912, is of special interest because it describes a day of birding in Westport with Mr. Dexter, the first and only mention of him in this notebook:

- Joined Mr. Dexter just after breakfast. Took the automobile to the Let. There got on boat and cut across to Gooseberry Neck. A clear, warm day with light S.W. wind. On the upland first stirred a Meadowlark. Then a Savannah Sparrow. This bird is yellower than the Song Sparrow, especially around the head. Also has slower actions. Along the west shore saw several Ring Plovers, quantities of Spotted Sandpipers, a Herring Gull, a flock of Laughing Gulls, some Semipalmated Sandpipers.

- As we came back we raised a flock of five birds like large Sandpipers. At a distance of about a hundred feet we watched two of them resting on a rock. The black on the breast and throat was very marked. Also the reddish brown tone on the back. As we moved they flew up the coast and we stalked up through the grass. Had a fine view of them again close at hand. They were Turnstones in good plumage.
- As we came to our boat on the East shore two Red Breasted Mergansers (Sheldrakes) slunked down into the water and swam out into the bay. They are reddish brown on head and breast with white wing patches. More Laughing Gulls flew over. While waiting in a pine grove near the let saw and heard a Red-breasted Nuthatch. Later saw eleven Wild Ducks fly over the West River. (All these observations are on a one-day trip with Mr. Dexter, i.e. Smith Owen Dexter.)

As noted previously, Smith Dexter, who had purchased the house in Westport in 1910, was probably already engaged in compiling his record of *The Birds of Westport*, modeled on his neighbor – William Bradford’s *Birds of the Cambridge Region*. Basil Hall, who had continued to spend most of his summers in Westport when not traveling abroad, was, by 1912, going birding in Westport with Smith Dexter. Basil was a newly-minted Minister, who had spent most of his previous summers amongst the birds of Westport. Smith, who had recently begun spending his summers in Westport, was a more seasoned Minister who, in his Concord parish and academic and avian world of Cambridge was surrounded by the leading ornithologists of the day. In Westport, they forged a bond that lasted for nearly three decades until Smith Dexter died.

A third ministerial birder from this era was introduced to us in the enchanting book by Janet Wicks Gillespie – *A Joyful Noise* – relating the stories of her childhood growing up at Westport Point. Her father, Robert Russell Wicks, had married Basil Hall’s sister, Eleanor, and earned his spot on Eldridge Heights where they built a cottage called Snowden, on the western slope overlooking the West Branch of the Westport River.

Robert Wicks, referred to as “Pops” by daughter Janet, was a frequent birding companion of brother-in-law, Basil Hall, and neighbor, Smith Owen Dexter. Janet knew them as “Uncle Basil” – a real uncle, and “Uncle Smith” – an honorific uncle. Some of Janet’s stories about Uncle Smith, and particularly her recounting of how she made it into his notebooks, *Birds of Westport*, are recorded in Appendix 2.

Spreading the Birding Gospel

Following their collaboration on *The Birds of Westport*, Smith Dexter and Basil Hall reached out in very different directions to extend their linkages into the “Birding Community.” As mentioned previously, Smith Dexter devoted significant parts of his remaining years to editing and publishing the field notes of his close friend and neighbor, William Brewster, who had passed away in 1919. These efforts led to publication by the Harvard University Press of the two books, *October Farm*, in 1936 and *Concord River*, in 1937. A review in the journal, *Auk*, proclaimed that *October Farm* “should stand on one’s library shelf beside Thoreau’s ‘Journals’ as another Concord classic.”

Basil Hall moved in a very different direction - motivating young men to take an interest in birding and devote their lives to “spreading the birding gospel.” Basil was appointed pastor of the Hunts Point

Presbyterian Church in the Bronx from 1914 to 1921 and of the Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church in Brooklyn from 1921 to 1926. At both these churches he also served as Scoutmaster of the Boy Scout Troops that were connected to the churches. Obviously one of the key components of the programs that he promoted for those Scout Troops was appreciation and identification of birds.

This initiative paid off at the Bronx church in a big way. On November 29, 1924, a group of nine teenage boys from that Boy Scout Troop decided to form the Bronx County Bird Club.² The members of the Club committed to set up several bird-feeding stations in public parks in the Bronx and to report their bird-sightings to the club secretary, Joseph Hickey, who was to keep them as the official records of the Club.

Just over two years later, in January 1927, a tall, quiet 18-year-old arrived in New York City from the small town of Jamestown in western New York to study at the Art Students League. His name was Roger Tory Peterson. Although he was not living in the Bronx, he was admitted to the BCBC because he was such a “good” birder. Peterson, Hickey and a third member of the BCBC, Allan Cruickshank, went on to become leading birders and bird educators in the middle years of the 20th Century. Hickey was a Professor of Wildlife Management at the University of Wisconsin and succeeded Aldo Leopold as the head of that department.

Joe Hickey repeatedly acknowledged his debt to Basil Hall. In his book, *A Guide to Bird Watching*, published in 1943, he stated, p. 16, “Our beloved scoutmaster, the Reverend Basil Hall, had given us a helping hand,” and, when he gave a copy of the book *Birds in Our Lives*, published in 1970 by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, in which both Hickey and Roger Tory Peterson had chapters, Hickey wrote a note as follows: “For Basil D. Hall, Minister and Scoutmaster, with fond recollection of his encouragement back in 1919. Joseph J. Hickey, Christmas, 1970.”

Joe Hickey also arranged for a visit, together with Roger Tory Peterson and their wives, to the residence of Basil and Loraine Hall in Westerly, Rhode Island in 1978 when the following picture was taken.



Petersons on left, Halls in center, Hickeys on right

² Information about the Bronx County Bird Club and its founding members is in Appendix 4. It is also mentioned in Weidensaul, *Of A Feather*, pp. 185-6.

Smith Owen Dexter, building on the support and inspiration of his Concord parishioners and friends as well as the favorable surroundings of Westport, added to the recording of bird observations as conveyed in the two notebooks he compiled with Basil Hall on Westport's birds and also the two books of bird observations by his friend William Brewster that he brought to completion.

Basil Douglas Hall, building on the support and encouragement of his parents as well as his inherited and inherent skills as an observer and teacher, stimulated the already burgeoning talents of a group of exceptional young men to broaden public awareness and appreciation of the natural world around them.

The shared experiences of these two men, in the favorable physical and seasonal environment of Westport, reaped a bountiful harvest.

One further note: both these ministers, plus Basil's father, Charles Cuthbert Hall, conducted services in the church at Westport Point. Basil Hall was the presiding pastor throughout 1959-1960. Charles Hall was an occasional guest minister who reportedly always attracted overflow worshipers. Smith Dexter conducted a memorial service for President Warren G. Harding, who was assassinated in 1923.

Appendix 1. Excerpts from "Birds of Westport" by Smith Owen Dexter.

BK-281
vol. 1

BIRDS OF WESTPORT.

by

Smith Owen Dexter

BOOK I

WATER BIRDS.

GAME BIRDS..

104 in this Volume
110 " Volume II
214 " all

April 27 1922

Original manuscript of these two volumes is in the Library of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard College, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

WESTPORT POINT LIBRARY.

1918.

THE BIRDS OF WESTPORT.

Few places in New England are more suited to the study of wild birds than the township of Westport. This is true for two reasons: first that the diversity of land and water attracts many kinds of birds; and then that the favorable climate holds them here at all seasons of the year.

Nearly every condition of sea and land invites the birds. On the ocean the fishermen find the Haglets and the Mother Cary's Chickens, the Wamps and the Kittiwakes which seldom come near the land. Certain shore birds prefer the outer rocks and beaches. Again, the river and the marshes are the haunts of many ducks and waders. While on the land, the dunes, the marshes and meadows, the grassy slopes and the stretches of woodland, and even our gardens, are each the favorite shelter of certain birds which are scarcely found on any other kind of ground.

The birds, moreover, can be studied at

every season of the year. In most regions, mid-summer and mid-winter find the woods and fields somewhat deserted. The birds are either through with their nesting or have gone far south. But at Westport, by early July, the shore and ocean birds from the north begin to return in ever increasing numbers; and from August on there is a steady stream of migrants along the beaches and the marshes. Again, in mid-winter, when the ponds and rivers of inland places are frozen over, and the woods are bare, here we have the ocean and the beaches, the open stretches of the river, the fields about the village, and Gooseberry Neck to attract the birds in great variety and numbers.

So, both the hardiest gunner who lies in wait on the Hen and Chickens Reef in winter, and the quietest stay-at-home who looks out on her garden, can find adventure enough and constant interest in the study of the wild birds at Westport.

In collecting these notes I have kept

rigidly to records of those birds seen within the limits of the Township or directly off our shores. Only a glance, moreover, through these pages will show how much I am indebted to others for my material. As far as possible, I have quoted the name of each observer. I have also kept to the good old 'Point' custom of using the simple Christian name and surname.

The fishermen and gunners of the Village have greatly helped me, and especially William S. Head, who for many years has collected and observed the ocean birds. The accurate notes which Laurence Brooks of New Bedford and A. C. Bent of Taunton have kindly placed at my disposal have been of the utmost value. And the observations of Basil D. Hall have added many to the list of land birds. I am indebted for the illustrations and printed descriptions to the little Bird Guide of Chester A. Reed, and for frequent quotations to Ralph Hoffmann's Guide to the Birds of Eastern New York and New England.

But unquestionably there are many varieties

of birds to be found in Westport which are not recorded here. And I hope that others who love them will add their observations, until we have at last a Cooperative Book of all the Westport Birds.

Smith O. Dexter

Westport Point.

August 18, 1918.

AMERICAN OSPREY; FISH HAWK364. *Pandion haliaetus carolinensis*. 23 in.

Real old birds have the head whiter, and less white edging to the back feathers, than do the young. Feet very strong, and very hard and rough, perfectly adapted to grasping slippery fish; outer toe can be used equally as well, either in front or behind, when perching or grasping their prey. Their food is entirely of fish, which they catch themselves, by plunging after it, hovering in the air a few seconds while watching the fish, preparatory to diving upon it. They are always found about water and are very numerous on the seacoasts, where twenty or more may frequently be seen at a time. They are protected by law in some states, and by public sentiment in most others.

Notes.—A loud, tremulous, piercing whistle.

Nest.—Usually in trees; large and bulky, of sticks; sometimes on the ground, telegraph poles, chimneys, etc. Eggs creamy buff, blotched with rich brown. (2.40 x 1.80).

Range.—Breeds from the Gulf to Labrador and Alaska; winters in the southern half of the U. S.



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The Fish Hawk is one of the most familiar sights in summer, as it hovers over the river and suddenly plunges for its prey. It is more often seen about the West River, where it probably breeds, than about the East River.

In my boyhood on Narragansett Bay, I remember getting a dinner from a Fish Hawk. The bird was flying low overhead with a large and lively tautog, which he could scarcely carry. I shouted so loud that the startled bird dropped the fish almost at my feet, and we

brought it home and cooked it for our dinner.

D.



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BOBOLINK.494. *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*. 7¼ inches.

Bobolinks are to be found in rich grass meadows, from whence their sweet, wild music is often borne to us by the breeze. While his mate is feeding in the grass or attending to their domestic affairs, Mr. Bobolink is usually to be found perched on the tip of a tree, weed stalk, or even on a tall blade of grass, if no other spot of vantage is available, singing while he stands guard to see that no enemies approach. He is a good watchman and it is a difficult matter to flush his mate from the nest, for she leaves at his first warning.

Song.—A wild, sweet, rippling repetition of his name with many additional trills and notes. Alarm note a harsh "chah" like that of the Blackbird.

Nest.—Of grasses in a hollow on the ground, in meadows. They lay four to six eggs with a white ground color, heavily spotted, clouded and blotched with brown (.85 x .62).

Range.—N. A. east of the Rockies, breeding from New Jersey and Kansas north to Manitoba and New Brunswick; winters in South America.

At one time a common summer resident, nesting in the meadows on Southards' point and East of the village, the Bobolink has become much less numerous (1920).

H

PIPING PLOVER

277. *Ægialitis meloda*. 7 in.

Very pale above; no black in front of eye; black patch on each side of breast. Young similar, but the black replaced by grayish, as is the case with the last species. This species, apparently, never could be classed as abundant and of late years, it is becoming rather rare along our Atlantic coast; this is probably more due to the building of summer resorts and homes along their former breeding grounds than to hunters. They are rather more shy than the last species, but will usually attempt to escape by running along the beach or by hiding, rather than by flight. Owing to their light colors it is very difficult to see them at any distance.

Notes.—A two-syllabled piping whistle.

Nest.—On the ground; eggs buff with fine black specks.

Range.—Breeds on the coast from Va. to Newfoundland and in the Mississippi Valley.



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The Piping Plover might easily be taken for a pale Ring-neck. In fact, the most noticeable difference is in the color of the back, which is the shade of the dry beach sand in the Piping Plover, while the Ring-neck has that of the wet beach sand. The ring, also, extends only part way round the neck.

It is likely that this bird nests within the limits of Westport, since it is known to breed nearby, on Martha's Vineyard.

SAW-WHET OWL; ACADIAN OWL.

372. *Cryptoglaux acadica*. 8 in.

Smallest of our eastern Owls; no ear tufts. General color brownish above and white below with the sides streaked with brown. No markings on wing coverts, but scapulars spotted with white. It is chiefly nocturnal in its habits and, consequently, is not often seen even if they are abundant.

Range.—Breeds from northern U. S. northward; winters in northern United States.



A little Saw-Whet Owl was discovered by Janet Wicks on December 28, 1926, sitting in one of the low trees on Eldredge Heights. This is, so far as I know, the only record for Westport.

D.



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SNOWY OWL

376. *Nyctea nyctea*. 25 in.

No ear tufts. Plumage white, more or less heavily spotted with black, the female usually being quite strongly barred on the back. They are locally abundant in the far north, preferring low, mossy lands to the more timbered districts. Here they find an abundance of food during the summer months, living upon hares, lemmings, ptarmigan and ducks. They are about the equal of the Horned Owl in strength, and usually will weigh a few ounces more; they will frequently kill animals or birds as heavy, or heavier, than themselves. They also catch a great many fish; these they get in shallow water among the rock-weed covered stones, by reaching down quickly and seizing their prey in their strong claws.

Nest.—On the ground in dry portions of marshes; the 2 to 8 eggs are pure white.

Range.—Breeds from Labrador and Hudson Bay, northward, and possibly farther south; winters casually to the Middle States, and commonly to Minnesota and Maine.

Snowy Owls frequently spend the winter on Gooseberry Neck where the moles and mice offer a tempting fare. About the winter of 1893 five of these owls were killed by William S. Head on the Neck.

In 1909 I made the following notes on one of these great birds which eluded all the gunners: "The Snowy Owl has spent the winter on the Neck where moles and mice are plentiful, and where the weather has been open and the ground free of snow. When seen he is generally

sitting on a commanding rock, and will allow no one within gun shot. Each time as I approached, he flew off to another rock, in a leisurely fashion", but always safely out of reach. He was as large and almost as white as a Herring Gull. But the short neck and large head made the difference between the two birds conspicuous.

During the great southern migration of hawks and owls in November and December, 1926, at least ten Snowy Owls were shot in Westport. On Noman's Land, Ralph Wood, the caretaker shot or trapped thirty-eight of these birds during the same period. He caught them by placing a steel trap on a post near the hen yard where the owls lit to watch for their prey. They were decimating the chickens, ducks and pheasants on the Island.

D.

GREAT HORNED OWL.

GREAT HORNED OWL

375. *Bubo virginianus*. 23 in.

Has ear tufts, thus distinguishing it from any other of our large, powerfully built owls. These large birds are the fiercest, most active and most destructive of the family. Their size and strength allows them to kill skunks and woodchucks, as well as poultry, grouse and small mammals and birds. They seem to be especially fond of skunks, and nearly all of them that I have seen or handled, have given unmistakable evidence of their recent and close association with these animals.

Notes.—A deep, dismal "who-who," and a loud unearthly shriek.

Nest.—Usually in deserted hawk or crow nests, and also in hollow trees; eggs white. (2.25 x 1.85). Feb., March.

Range.—Breeds and resident from the Gulf to Labrador. 375a. Western Horned Owl (*pallelescens*) is paler colored; found in the plains and Rockies north to Manitoba. 375b. Arctic Horned Owl (*subarcticus*), is chiefly black and white; found in Arctic America, wintering south to northern border of United States.



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On October 27, 1928 in the marsh by the bridge at the lower end of Robbin's Tract at the west of the village we saw a Great Horned Owl. He flew up from the ground and up into a sumach tree. When he flew he went very slowly and silently looking all about him. He seemed to have been under the little foot bridge until our approach startled him. We noticed that he flattened down his ears when he flew, but when he lighted he erected them. When frightened he put back his ears, glared around with his big

yellow eyes and flapped his wings. It was about 11.00 o'clock in the morning when we saw him.

JANET WICKS
DAVID WICKS.

Appendix 2. Documents relating to "Birds of Westport" and Smith Owen Dexter

Letter from Basil D. Hall transmitting "The Birds of Westport," compiled by Smith Owen Dexter and "The Flora of Westport," compiled by his mother, Jeanie Stewart Hall.

Place on File

1878 Main Road,
Westport Point, Mass.
November 9, 1967.

Mrs. Borden C. Tripp,
Librarian,
Town of Westport,
Massachusetts.

Dear Mrs. Tripp,

In accordance with our recent conversation, I am now turning over to the Westport Free Public Library four volumes which have been in my keeping since the closing of the Westport Point Memorial Library. Two of these volumes are entitled "The Birds of Westport" and were prepared by the late Rev. Smith Owen Dexter who for many years was a summer resident of Westport Point, a man greatly respected and beloved. The original manuscript for these volumes is in the Library of the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard College, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Acknowledgment for the volumes herewith presented should go to Mr. Dexter's two surviving children: Mrs. R.T. Loring, 43 Glen Road, Brookline, Massachusetts, 02146, and Dr. Lewis Dexter, Peter Bent Brigham Hospital, 721 Huntington Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts, 02115, both of whom heartily desire this disposition of their father's book.

The other two volumes, "The Flora of Westport", were prepared by my mother Jeanie Stewart Hall (Mrs. Charles Cuthbert Hall). Do not trouble to send me an acknowledgment, but I would appreciate it if you would do so to my sisters, Miss Katharine S. Hall of Scotch Pine Lane, Westport Point, and Mrs. Robert R. Wicks, Colonial Heights, Exeter, New Hampshire.

We all feel, as you did, that these books should be reference works, not put into circulation.

Many thanks for your interest in this matter.

Cordially,
Basil D. Hall

Excerpt from statement by Samuel Eliot Morrison on the 1st Anniversary of the death of Smith Owen Dexter, May 2, 1937, Trinity Episcopal Church, Concord, Massachusetts.

-4-

His interest in nature was always lively. Smith Dexter was the Concord successor to Henry Thoreau, in more ways than one. He was always the person to hear the first robin, to find the first spring flowers, to know where the rare fringed gentian bloomed. With William Brewster, his dear friend, Smith spent many happy hours listening and observing in the Brewster bird sanctuary down river. We have a permanent memorial to this friendship in "October Farm", extracts from Mr. Brewster's journal that Smith Dexter edited, and which appeared shortly after his death. This love of nature was not a thing separate from Smith's love of God, it was part of the same love; in nature he saw the wonderful works of God. The children who grew up in this parish will remember his vivid description, at the Easter children's service, of some process in nature analogous to the Resurrection. With boys he was an especial favorite, for he loved boating, sailing, and other manly sports -- he made our parish the local centre for boy scouts, and himself led a troop and taught them woodcraft.

Smith Dexter was singularly blessed in his family life. Mrs. Dexter was not only his wife but his best friend; she followed his interests with sympathy, tempered by a certain humorous detachment; and she kept watch over his health. There is a good deal of quiet heroism in being wife to a saint like Smith. His children were devoted to him, as he to them; he had the satisfaction of seeing them all through college, the daughter married to a priest of the Church, and the sons well advanced in the ministry of healing.

Yet there was a larger family than his own, and a wider parish than Concord, to which Smith gave eagerly of himself: the working people, and the down-trodden. Although a gentleman born, a learned minister by training, he never forgot that he had been a factory-

LEWIS DEXTER, M. D.
PETER BENT BRIGHAM HOSPITAL
721 HUNTINGTON AVENUE
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02115

November 17, 1967

Mrs. Borden Tripp
The Westport Free Public Library
Central Village
Westport, Massachusetts

Dear Mrs. Tripp:

I am so happy that the Westport Free Public Library has the two volumes of my father's "The Birds of Westport". As you probably know, the originals are in the Harvard University Library, and before he died, he wanted the copy you have in the Westport Library, Westport being far closer to his heart than anywhere else in the world, and so many of the birds he observed throughout his adult life being in Westport.

Mr. Hall tells me that these volumes will not be allowed out of the library, but will be used within the library as reference books, and this meets with my enthusiastic approval. I know only too well how books disappear.

I am very grateful to you and the Board of Trustees for including these volumes in your library.

Sincerely yours,

Lewis Dexter

Lewis Dexter, M. D.

LD:AMS

43 Glen Road
Brookline MA 02445-770
Oct 18, 2002

Westport Public Library
Westport MA 02770

To whom it may concern:

The attached two books relate to birds, specifically those observed in Westport by my grandfather Smith Owen Dexter from 1904-1932. You have some other notebooks of his.

These come from the estate of Cassandra Kinsman Dexter Coburn, who died July 17, 2002. Her first husband was Lewis Dexter MD, son of Smith Owen Dexter; he was also my uncle, and we all summered in Westport Point since about 1904.

The portraits of New England Birds was presented to Smith Owen Dexter by his wife, Helen Derison Dexter, in February 1933.

I hope you can add these books to the library's collection.

Yours sincerely

(Rev.) Richard T. Loring

Co-executor, Estate of Cassandra Kinsman Dexter Coburn

Summer residence 2004 Main Rd

A document, written by Samuel A. Eliot Jr. and published in the Mass Audubon Bulletin, Nov. 1948, included in Dexter Notebooks. First and last pages only included here.

BIRDS AT WESTPORT POINT

About thirty years ago, the late Rev. Smith O. Dexter of Concord, a summer resident at Westport Point, began a "Birds of Westport" which in typewritten form is now kept in the summer home of Rev. Basil D. Hall of Westerly, R.I., who contributed important records to it from as far back as 1902. The last additions Dexter made were three Egrets in late August, 1930; a Lark Sparrow at the bird-bath of Elizabeth W. Lawson on May 20, 1928; and a few Stilt Sandpipers and a Gallinule (thought Purple) in the southeast corner of the township (or possibly over the line at Allen's Pond, Dartmouth) on Aug. 12, 1928 -- also by Miss Lawson. Practically all the 214 birds included were found in the southern third of the township, or still farther south, out at sea, like the flock of big, all-white slow-flapping ^{birds} flushed at sunrise of Nov. 14, 1915, by fishermen W.S. Head and W.H. Hand, Jr., which Dexter guessed were Snow Geese but which to me strongly suggest Swans. These are but instances of the thrilling records buried in the unpublished typescript.

In many respects the last twenty years have altered the status of Westport birds, and since I had the privilege of birding at and near Westport Point from July 3 to August 16, 1948, I have comparative notes that may be of interest. The village at the Point is on a ridge, with a brook on either side. I was located on the west side, close to the brook and near the salt-marsh and mud-flats of the harbor. The thickets in the brook-valley were impenetrable, but there was ample "edge". Oven-birds and Wood Thrushes were the only birds that always kept out of sight in the dense cover. The Thrushes continued singing till much later in August than I have found normal in Northampton: two sang regularly after sunset through Aug. 11, and one was heard again on Aug. 14 and (four phrases only) Aug. 15! In the catbirds lurked a brood of Carolina Wrens, already a-wing on

as very irregular but which bred commonly on each side of the Point in 1919, - not any Henslow's, which he had noted in the summers of 1916 and '19, - nor any Swamp Sparrow, which apparently bred in 1905. The Mourning Dove was rare, says Dexter, until 1919; I found it fairly common. The Yellow-billed Cuckoo was also rare when he wrote: 1948 was a very poor year for this species throughout Massachusetts, but one was in Westport Point Aug. 8-11. The White-breasted Nuthatch was "decidedly uncommon" but the Bakers and I are sure we heard one, unfindable, on Aug. 15. We also had transient Oriole and Tanager that day, and a very surprising Blue-headed Vireo Aug. 16. Aug. 16 was the date prefixed for my departure, just as migration seemed about to bring in a lot more "new stuff" to swell my six weeks' list of 112.

Published in Massachusetts Audubon Bulletin, November, 1948
Written by Samuel A. Eliot Jr.

MUSEUM OF COMPARATIVE ZOÖLOGY
AT HARVARD COLLEGE
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

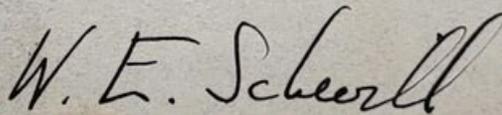
September 28, 1937.

Librarian,
Westport Point Library,
Westport Point, Mass.

Dear Sir:

As requested, we hereby inform you that the two volumes of the manuscript copy of the Reverend Smith O. Dexter's "Birds of Westport" have been deposited in this library, where they will be available for study to "accredited students of Westport birds" as requested by the Reverend Mr. Dexter.

Very truly yours,



William E. Schevill
Librarian

WES:EG

Excerpts from *A Joyful Noise* by Janet Gillespie³

“Uncle Smith Dexter was Pop’s favorite bird friend at the Point and one of our favorite people. We loved the way he looked – brown as an Indian with a cap of snow-white hair.

Like Pop, Uncle Smith was a minister and one of the saints of the earth. We believed he had no faults and I really don’t think he had any...

Uncle Smith kept his eye on the bird. He was making a census of the birds of Westport, so when he was out on a field trip he didn’t allow life to get in the way of ornithology. You had to be a really good birder to go out with Uncle Smith, and one of my dreams was to see my name in his notebooks where the Westport bird records were kept. These notebooks were filled with local names, as many sightings had been reported by gunners, fishermen, and year-round residents. Uncle Basil and Pop were both mentioned in the notebooks and so was our hill, under its real and dull name of Eldridge Heights.

Uncle Smith very kindly consented to take me along on a projected trip to a marsh to see some snowy egrets which had come up from the South for their summer vacation. He even allowed me to look through his binoculars; I could hardly believe my eyes and drew back alarmed when the egret turned his dagger beak in my direction.

After this revelation I let it be known that the only thing I wanted for Christmas was a pair of good binoculars.”

Janet did get her new Zeiss binoculars for Christmas and goes on to describe an exciting event that occurred while she and Pop were testing them out that morning.

“After the tree we walked down the lane to do some more testing. Once when Pop had the glasses I suddenly saw what looked like a small snowball on the lower branch of a Scotch pine.

‘Hey look!’ I croaked, for Pop had hauled up on the leather strap (around her neck). ‘There’s a bird right in front of me.’

We went over and saw that it was a little owl with its head under its wing. Its breast was streaked with cinnamon and the feathers on its back and wings were russet and white, the colors of dead leaves in the snow.

‘By cracky,’ said Pop, ‘it’s a saw-whet owl. The smallest owl in the East.’

The branch was so low that I was able to stroke the owl’s back with my finger and he woke up like a kitten, unafraid and round-eyed. For a moment he gave us a golden stare, then slowly sank into a doze.

‘Well, now, I think that’s a record,’ said Pop proudly. ‘We must report this to Smith Dexter.’

³ Gillespie, Janet. *A Joyful Noise*. Woodstock, Vt. Countryman Press, Inc. 1992. Pp 107-110.

Uncle Smith, who was staying in the village for the Christmas bird count, came up to hear our story and said mine was the only sighting of this little owl in Westport. He would put me in his book. I had made it."

THE BIRDS OF WESTPORT POINT

By Jan Grindley

Somewhere in the Westport Library is a loose-leaf notebook entitled "The Birds of Westport Point" by the Reverend Smith O. Dexter. Mr. Dexter was a close friend of my father, Dean Wicks and these two great gentlemen were aboard at all seasons observing the birds of the area. Trailing behind them was often a small figure in pigtailed and bloomers — me. The Point is a paradise for bird-watchers as well as birds as it contains an enormous variety of habitats. There are the beaches where the sandpipers run in starry flocks and gulls congregate to eat clams and crabs. There are the two tidal rivers with their rich eelgrass jungles and saltmarshes, feeding grounds for the great flocks of geese and ducks that winter here and fishing grounds for herons, terns, and ospreys, as well as shorebirds and several kinds of gulls. On the banks of the rivers are the oak woods where the wood warblers, the vireos, thrushes, and chickadees live and the fields and hedgerows, the farms and gardens where these birds come who love to be near people: robins, song sparrows, orioles, swallows, wrens, and catbirds whose voices are as familiar as the voices of friends.

The Sun, Westport Point, Massachusetts, Summer 1985 19

In those far-off days of the twenties there were more open fields along the river banks and I used to hear the bobolinks babbling and the meadowlarks whistling where now there are houses or scrub growth. There was Parula warblers then, nesting in the moss on the old junipers but they vanished with the moss. However, we have gained the mockingbirds, cardinals, titmice, and egrets, southerners all, who finally made it across the mountains. The great flotillas of swans are also a recent phenomenon. To me these new arrivals are not authentic Westporters, more like summer people who have become year-rounders (like me).

To the non-birder, the dominant Westport bird is the herring gull, whose nostalgic yodelling is the voice of the Point. The Westport ospreys have achieved a press and film coverage, thanks to Jo and Gil Fernandes, and every beach walker knows the sandpipers that flare up ahead of you all the way up Horseneck. No winter person could miss the great flocks of Canada geese whose noisy chevrons fly overhead and settle in hugh rafts on the river.

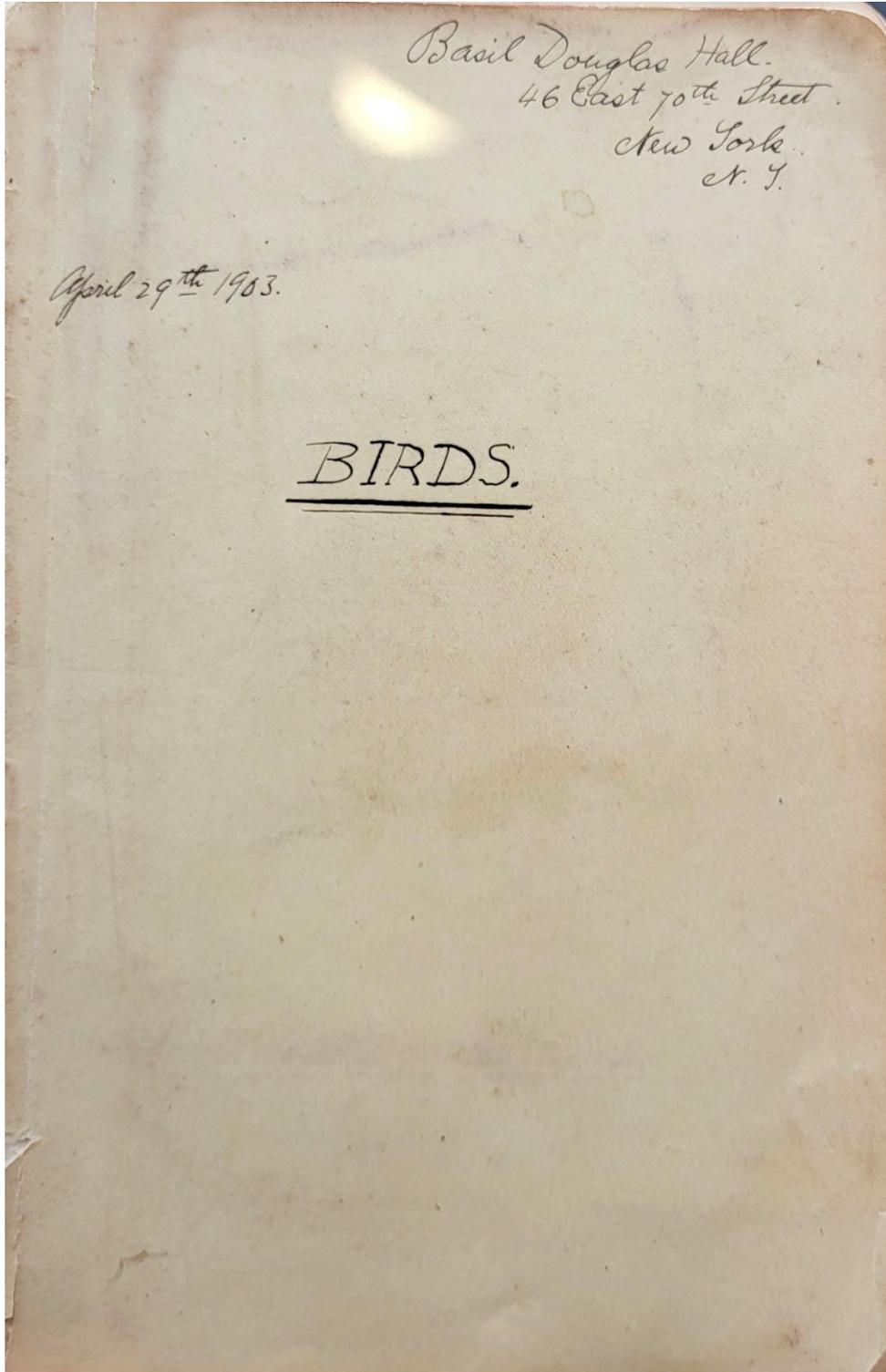
To me, though, most beloved are the old friends I knew as a child: the kingfisher who always nests by our cove, the blue herons who stalk the flats, the hummingbirds probing the honeysuckle, trumpets and the vireos who preach all day long in the woods by the river. I love the calls of bob-whites from the fields, the chirring of terns diving for minnows in the channels, the chewinks singing "drink-your-tea" at evening.

One of the happiest anniversaries is the barn swallows arrival at the Shannon's barn and the sight at the end of the summer flocking tree swallows lined up along the telephone wires.

Oddly enough, the same bird friends are in exactly the same places that they were when I was a child: the kingfisher who nests by our cove, the night heron who fishes from the same rock, the osprey who hovers over the grass flats. Now I live in the village just above the marsh by Hulda's cove where Dave and I saw a Great Horned Owl in 1928. That owl's heirs sit on our chimney on moonlit nights and hoot like a tuba until I get up and scare them away.

Appendix 3. Documents Relating to Basil D. Hall.

1. Notebook of Basil D. Hall for recording bird sightings beginning on April 29th 1903.



1-

April 28th 1903. Cardinal - bird. Central Park, New York.

This year there seem to be several Cardinals in the park and their clear whistles and other beautiful notes can be heard quite frequently. The Cardinal usually sings from the top of a high tree.

Song - a clear whistle *mm...mm...*

May 4th. A lady told me that in the park at 104th Street a pair of Cardinals are this year building a nest. Two ladies discovered it and themselves guard it a great part of the time, while, by reporting it to the superintendent of the park, they have had an extra man put on to watch it.

May 6th. Heard a Cardinal singing.

May 16th. Saw a female Cardinal by the little stream at the entrance to the Ramble.

May 21st. Watched a pair of Cardinals (male and female) up by the cave. May 23rd. Again near the cave I found the same pair and this time a little fluffy young one was flying around calling for food all the time. His colorings were like those of the female but he was much smaller and had a little stumpy red tail.

Aug. 8th. Saw three Great Blue Herons up in our bay.
Also on the sand-bar saw one Least Tern. It was noticeably
smaller than the usual Terns - about the size of a large
Sandpiper. Its call note was quite different. Watched it
resting on the bar just ahead of us - and flying near the
boat.

Aug. 9th. Near Cape Bird saw the Sabine's or Pied-billed
Gulls. There appears to be but the one bird in the river -
General appearance rusty brown, on head, back, wings and
throat. Beneath ashy white - conspicuous white patches on
the wings.

Aug. 10th. Saw four Sparrow Hawks in our grove.
There is quite a flock of Herring Gulls in the river already.
On the 8th saw a Ring-necked Plover.

Aug. 11th. Owls have begun to whistle in the trees S.E.
of the house.

Aug. 21st Counted 44 Laughing Gulls in river.

Aug. 14th Watched three Least Terns in our cove. Their note
has the ring of the Common Tern but is more of a
trill, suggesting rather a Sandpiper. They frequently
hover. Wings lower more dark and white.

Aug. 22nd Joined Mr. Dexter just after breakfast. Took the
automobile to the Let. There got road-bark and cut across
to Goosebury Neck. A clear, warm day with light
S.W. wind. On the return first started a
Meadowlark. Then a Savannah Sparrow.

This bird is yellower than the Song Sparrow, especially around the head. Also has slower actions. Along the West shore saw several Ring Plovers, quantities of Spotted Sandpipers, a Herring Gull, a flock of Laughing Gulls, and Semipalmated Sandpipers. As we came back we raised a flock of five birds like large Sandpipers. At a distance of about a hundred feet we watched two of them resting on a rock. The black on the breast and throat was very marked - also the reddish brown tones on the back. As we moved they flew up the coast and we stalked up through the grass. Had a fine view of them again close at hand. They were Turnstones in good plumage. As we came to our boat on the East shore two Red-breasted Mergansers (Sheldrakes) slithered down into the water and swam out into the bay. They are reddish brown on head and breast - with white wing patches. More Laughing Gulls flew over. While waiting in a pine grove near the lot saw and heard a Red-breasted Nuthatch.

Later saw eleven Wild Ducks fly over the West River.

2. Letter from Joseph Hickey, charter member of the Bronx County Bird Club to his Scout Master and lifelong friend Rev. Basil D. Hall in Dec. 1926, at age of 19.

839 Hunt's Point Avenue
The Bronx, New York
December 31st, 1926.

Dear Mr. Hall,

A very busy month has prevented me from answering your welcome letter sooner. Local bird men are now experiencing a real honest-to-goodness flight of rare Northern birds. Snowy Owls and Goshawks are really common, and in some places where snow is protected this species is positively abundant. Out on Fisher's Island, I understand, there are something like 32 birds. Northern Shrikes and Brunnich's Murre are almost common and we have had a fine male Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker for over a month up in the Hemlocks in the Botanical Gardens.

The Christmas Census Boom started in The Bronx at the end of October, and by November 1st the Bronx Co. Bird Club's intensive pre-census campaign was well under way. Weekly trips to the Botanic Gardens showed the Cat-bird and Dove Sparrow would linger around the Club's feeding station, and that the old Arctic was a sure bet. Keesoy, Herbert and I went up to Mamaroneck and Rye every Sunday and so made sure of Killdeers, and a Green-winged Teal which arrived in a duck pond in Rye Park on Nov. 20th and has been there ^{ever} since. Cruickshank's regular trips to Van Cortland Swamp netted him a Rusty, some Cowbirds and some Flickers. The Kuerzi located a string of Goshawks at Pelham and Clason Point, and it was with great astonishment that they found an American Bittern in a swamp at Clason on December 25th.

John slept at my house Christmas night as he and I were to cover Pelham together on the morrow. When we got up at five, it was pouring rain; at six o'clock it was only hailing and at seven it began to snow. I had begun to give up hopes of getting a big census when the snow ceased at noon and the ^{sun} came out. At three o'clock not a cloud was in the sky and the day was saved. John and I had a normal day, seeing 35 species in all. Twenty Ring-billed Gulls, and a vesper sparrow were our best birds while Black-backed Gull, Old-squaw, Golden-crown Kinglet and a colony of Night Herons were some species no other party recorded.

In addition to all the various stragglers mentioned in the second paragraph above, the Van Cortland Park party composed of Allan Cruickshank and Fred Ruff, observed two species which are very rare in winter. The first was a King Rail, our second winter record, (last year Kuerzi picked up a dead bird at Hunt's Point). This bird was subsequently seen on Tuesday by the Kuerzi brothers. Cruickshank also discovered the Sora; he was able to corner it in a bush, call Ruff over from the opposite side of the swamp; and between the two they nearly captured it alive. Although the phenomenal total of the census was 83 species and 7500 individuals, we missed several "almost sure" things, - Holboell's Grebe, Horned Grebe, Common Loon, Surf Scoter, Bald Eagle, Snow Bunting and Hermit Thrush. A Brunnich's Murre was shot off Throgg's back on the 24th, our first record for the Bronx Region.

You might be interested in the list we obtained, so here goes:..

Red th'd loon 1	Pheasant 15	Rusty blackbird 1
Glaucous Gull 1	Mourning Dove 2	Bronzed (?) Grackle 14
Island Gull 2	Marsh Hawk 1	Purple Finch 7
Black-backed 2	Sharpshin 1	Goldfinch 100
Herring Gull 2500	Goshawk 3	Pine Siskin 6
Ring billed Gull 20	Red-tailed H. 6	Vesper Sparrow 2
Am. Merganser 30	Red shouldered 4	Savannah Sp. 2
Red. br. Merganser 50	Rough-legged 2	Sharp-tailed Spar 1
Mallard 11	Duck Hawk 4	White-throated 14
Black duck 450	Sparrow H. 4	Tree Sparrow 1000
Green wing Teal	Barn Owl 1	Field Sparrow 8
Cintail	Long eared 10	Junco 75
Red head 4	Short eared 1	Song Sparrow 100
Canvas-back 40	Barred Owl 1	Swamp Sparrow 13
Scarp 320	Screech Owl 2	Fox Sparrow 1
Golden-eye 300	Snowy Owl 4	Northern Shrike 2
Buffle head 10	Kingfisher 2	Myrtle Warblers 23
Old-squaw 1	Hairy W. 10	Cat bird 1
American Scoter	Downey W. 24	Carolina Wren 2
White wing Scoter 250	Arctic W. 1	Winter Wren 2
American Bittern 1	Flicker 4	Brown Creeper 9
Great Blue Heron 2	Horned Lark 8	White br. Nuthatch 22
Black Crown Night H. 150	Blue Jay 12	Red br Nuthatch 4
King Rail 1	Am Crow 40	Cheerleader 75
Sora 1	Starling 7000	Golden crown Kinglet
Wilson's Snipe	Cowbird	Robin 11
Killdeer 1	Redwinged 60	Blue bird 6
Bob-white 29	Meadow Lark 40	Horse Sparrows - thick

The nearest census so far is Barnegat with 63.

On Dec. 23rd. Cruickshank and I did our census stuff on Staten Island. We worked the Moravian Cemetery and Oakwood Beach for 33 species, missing such easy ones as Song Sparrow, Hairy, Long-eared Owl and the Cardinal (permanent res. there) but seeing a Snowy, Goshawk, Myrtle Warbler (our 1st winter record there) and Vesper Sparrow.

John is working with his father during the holidays. When he gets the chance he is going to write you.

With best wishes that you and your family may have a successful and happy time in 1927,

Sincerely

Joe Hickey

For Basil D. Hall

Minister and scoutmaster
with fond recollections of his
encouragement back in 1919

Joseph J. Hickey

Christmas, 1970

A note on the inside of *Birds in Our Lives*, Alfred Stefferud, Ed. US Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 1966. With articles by Roger Tory Peterson, "What Are Birds For?", Allan D. Cruickshank, "To See; To Record," and Joseph J. Hickey, "Birds and Pesticides." BCBC Members

Appendix 4. The Origins of the Bronx County Bird Club

The Bronx County Bird Club: Memories of Ten Boys and an Era That Shaped American Birding

by John Farrand, Jr.

This story is based in large part on conversations with surviving members, Joseph Hickey and Roger Tory Peterson and honorary member Helen Cruickshank -- Editor.

ON SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 1924, nine teenagers were sitting that evening in the attic of the house at 978 Woodycrest Avenue in the High Bridge section of the Bronx. It was well after sundown on a day that had begun with rain and ended with clear skies. The nine boys, the oldest 17, were gathered to form what they had already decided to call the Bronx County Bird Club - the "BCBC."

According to the minutes of that first meeting, it "was judged that two officers were sufficient to conduct the business of the Club." "The chairman was to preside at all meetings and in his absence the secretary was to appoint a temporary chairman." "The secretary was to maintain the minutes of the proceedings at the meetings. He is also to collect all official records of observations made by members of the Club." The chairman they elected was John F. Kuerzi, whose brother Richard was another of the nine members of the fledgling BCBC. Their parents had offered their attic as a place for the boys to meet. The secretary was Joseph J. Hickey, who lived across town in the Hunts Point section of the Bronx. With these formalities out of the way, and with winter just around the corner, the boys decided to set up several bird-feeding stations. It was decided that Alan D. Cruickshank, who lived in Kingsbridge Heights, and Frederick J. Ruff, from the Fordham section, would maintain two stations in Van Cortlandt Park. Four stations would be kept at the Bronx Botanical Gardens by the Kuerzis, and two more would be run at Hunts Point by Joe Hickey and three other Hunts Point residents -- Richard A. Herbert, Irving Kasso, and John E. Matuszewski. The ninth member, Philip Kessler, came from the East Tremont section, just south of the Bronx Zoo.

EARLY BIRDERS All nine boys had been birding for some time before they formed the BCBC. In fact, Dick Herbert and Joe Hickey lived in the same neighborhood, and had known each other since the second grade. They and Matty Matuszewski attended St. Athanasius Parochial School, where they were taught by the Sisters of Charity. On snowy winter days Joe and the others raced their sleds down Seneca Avenue towards the Bronx River.

In 1918, Matty's older brother Charlie, a member of Boy Scout Troop 149, bought a copy of Chester A. Reed's checkbook-sized Bird Guide: Land Birds East of the Rockies, in order to work on his Bird Study Merit Badge. "We got a hold of that," remembers Joe, 73 years later. Then he, Matty, and Dick started looking for birds. They soon discovered the Hunts Point Dump, just a few blocks away and in those days a prime locality for Snowy Owls and rare gulls. They also discovered Irving Kasso, a young immigrant from Russia, who had been out birding on his own. Before long the four birders were calling themselves the "Hunts Dumpers," and Irv was calling Joe "Yost" (Yiddish for Joseph) and Joe was Irv, "Izzy."

One day in February 1921, while Joe and Dick were birding in Bronx Park, they came upon a man watching two chickadees. "He was a most distinguished looking man," Joe remembers. "He had a gold-headed cane, and a Vandyke beard like Charles Evans Hughes. He wore a derby and spoke with a British accent." In Joe's pocket were the boys' field references: Reed's Bird Guide and an envelope containing pictures cut out of a copy of Volume I of Elon Howard Eaton's Birds of New York that Joe had found in a trash can. The boys struck up an acquaintance, and as the man quizzed them about birds -- including the chickadees (Black-capped, they said) - Joe was glancing at these pictures and quizzing the man in return, asking questions like: "Have you ever seen a Ross' Gull?"

The man was Charles M. Johnston, who worked for the Encyclopedia Britannica. He had never seen a Ross Gull, but he was impressed by the boys' knowledge of birds. A member of the Linnaean Society of New York, he suggested that they begin attending its meetings, held on the second and fourth Tuesdays of every month, at the American Museum of Natural History, in the room that now houses the Museum Shop. It was mainly through the Linnaean Society that the Hunts Dumpers met the other Bronx County boys. Joe, Jack Kuerzi, and Matty Matuszewski had been elected members of the Society just a month before the BCBC was founded.

THE FIRST MEETING OF THE BCBC, November 29, 1924.

Name, Neighborhood, Nickname, Position.

John F. Kuerzi, High Bridge, Jack, Chairman; Joseph J. Hickey, Hunt's Point, Joe, Secretary; Allan D. Cruickshank, Kingsbridge Heights, Cruiky, Member; Richard A. Herbert, Hunt's Point, Dick, Member; Irving Kassoy, Hunt's Point, Irv or Izzy, Member; Philip Kessler, East Tremont, Phil, Member; Richard G. Kuerzi, High Bridge, Dick, Member; John Matuszewski, Hunt's Point, Matty, Member.

Alan Cruickshank or, "Cruicky," was born in the Virgin Islands, but his family soon moved to New York, and he spent his early years living on West Twenty-third Street in Manhattan. One morning, as he trudged east toward Eighth Avenue to buy his mother a newspaper, he spotted a screech-owl in a willow tree. This discovery, remarkable even then, sparked his interest in birds. Before long he was visiting Central Park. In 1919, when he was 12 years old, his family moved to Kingsbridge Heights in the Bronx, where Cruicky began to haunt Van Cortlandt Park and the Jerome Reservoir.

In October 1922, Jack and Dick found a mockingbird at Hunts Point, and their note on it, the first venture into print by any of the Bronx boys, appeared the following month in Bird-Lore, the ancestor of both Audubon and American Birds. The Kuerzis had been encouraged in their interest in birds by their father, who joined them on the Christmas Census of December 23, 1922. This census, the first ever conducted in the Bronx by future members of the BCBC, covered Pelham Bay, Van Cortlandt, and Bronx parks. It netted 35 species, including six towhee's "seen in damp, low woods off Allerton Avenue." On their second census in 1923, Jack and Dick found 26 species, among them a Short-eared Owl flushed at the mouth of the Bronx River. The mockingbird note and the two censuses were not the Kuerzis' only publications in the years before the founding of the BCBC. On October 14, 1923, a female Black-backed Woodpecker, then called the "Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker", turned up among the hemlocks in Bronx Park.

Using a pair of 8X binoculars, the boys even saw the bird's three toes. Four days later a male appeared. They reported these unusual northern visitors in Bird-Lore in 1924. A male, almost certainly the same one, appeared off and on for the next few years, and long before it was last seen on November 4, 1927, it had acquired the name "Old Faithful." In the July-August issue for 1924, the boys reported an Orange-crowned Warbler at the Moravian Cemetery on Staten Island. A few months after that report, when the BCBC was founded, the annual Christmas Census was close at hand. The BCBC had plans to make. At their second meeting on December 6, a new strategy for Christmas Censuses was born. The group would divide into teams, with each team responsible for a specific territory. Thus, each area would be covered in greater detail than if everyone had traveled together. Members would scout the territory beforehand and stake out any rarities. Cruicky and Fred would take Jerome Reservoir, Van Cortlandt, and Riverdale. The Kuerzi's were assigned Bronx Park and Saw Mill Lane. Phil and Matty would cover Pelham Bay Park and the Baychester marshes, while Dick, Irv, and Joe worked Hunts Point and Clason Point.

The big day was Sunday, December 28. The boys were in the field from before dawn until after dark. At eight-fifteen that night, they met back in the Kuerzi's attic to tally their results. "When the mark of thirty-five was reached," read the minutes, "the excitement attained a high pitch; and when the grand total was found to be forty-nine everyone was amazed and [at] the same time overjoyed." The stake-out idea had paid off. At Hunts Point, Joe found the drake Redhead first seen on December 4 and Irv produced his two "Wilson's" Snipe. Cruicky found the flock of Common Mergansers at Jerome Reservoir. The secretary wrote: "Everyone felt satisfied that the long list of birds recorded clearly brought out the results that could be obtained by cooperation." Cooperation obtained even better results in 1925, when five teams recorded 67 species. The total rose to 83 in 1926, to 87 in 1927, and to 93 in 1929. But long before this, the BCBC's census totals had elicited the words "most remarkable" from the Linnaean Society. Everyone began to pay attention to these young birders working New York City's northernmost borough and census-takers in other areas adopted their "divide and conquer" approach. In 1935, on the BCBC's twelfth census, the figure passed the century mark: 107 species, more than twice the number found in 1924. If you were young and interested in birds, the Bronx was the right place to be in the mid-1920s.

In January 1927, a tall, quiet 18-year old arrived in New York City from a small town in western New York to study at the Art Students League on West Fifty-seventh Street. His name was Roger Tory Peterson. It was not his first visit to the city. In November 1925, he had come to a meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union. On an A.O.U. field trip to Long Beach, he had logged 13 life birds, including a "Brunnich's" Murre. At this A.O.U. meeting Peterson had just brief encounters with Joe and Cruicky, both of whom were in school and could not come to the American Museum during the day. But he formed a close friendship with Bernard Nathan, one of the leading young birders in Brooklyn. In 1927, when he came to stay, Bernie's mother invited him to live in their home. Bernie was already a member of the Linnaean Society, and the two quickly began to attend meetings together. Peterson became a Linnaean member that same year, and the Society's records for 1927 contain several reports by Peterson and Nathan (or Nathan and Peterson) from Dyker Heights in Brooklyn: Greater Scaup, Bufflehead, Turkey

Vulture, Black-legged Kittiwake, Olive-sided Flycatcher, and Savannah Sparrow. Also among these 1927 records is a report of Sharp-tailed and Seaside sparrows seen at Long Beach on April 3 by Peterson and Hickey.

Through the Linnaean Society, Peterson had established contact with the Bronx County birders. The BCBC had two unwritten membership requirements: you had to live in the Bronx, and you had to be good. Before long, Roger Peterson, a gifted "foreigner" who clearly failed the first requirement, was accepted because he scored so well on the second. He became the first full member who didn't live in the Bronx. The BCBC now numbered ten. Once he was a member Peterson received nicknames just as Cruicky, Izzy, and Matty had. Cruicky sometimes called him the "Big Swede." Because he referred so often to his experiences back in Jamestown, New York, Joe took to calling him "Roger Tory Jamestown Peterson." In late May and early June of 1927, "Roger," as he was more usually known, made a trip that would be as memorable now as it was then. With money he earned decorating furniture, he took a Clyde Line steamer down the coast to South Carolina and spent a few days with Arthur T. Wayne, the dean of South Carolina ornithologists. With Alexander Sprunt, Jr., and Burnham Chamberlain, two Charleston ornithologists, he visited Cape Romain. When he returned, he was full of stories about Royal boroughs of New York City, northern New Jersey, Long Island, southwestern Connecticut, and as far up the Hudson River as Putnam County.

Many were the adventures of the BCBC in these years, among them the famous Bromo-Seltzer bottle that was mistaken for a bluebird on a sand dune at Long Beach, an encounter later mentioned in print both by Hickey and Peterson. The Terns, Black Skimmers, Brown Pelicans, and Arthur T. Wayne. Joe was soon calling him "Roger Tory Wayne Jamestown Peterson." Joe, Dick Herbert, and Irv soon made a trip of their own to Cape Charles in Virginia, where they saw many of the birds Roger had seen in South Carolina. By the late 1920s, the BCBCs' sphere of activities - the "Greater Bronx" - extended over all five most adventuresome BCBC member seems to have been Alan Cruickshank. In 1926, Cruicky found a Brown Creeper's nest in Van Cortlandt Park, a discovery important enough to merit an article in Bird-Lore. He made local history when he published his discovery of a King Rail's nest in Van Cortlandt Park on May 26, 1927. Van Cortlandt's cattail marsh was much larger then; Cruicky also found Least Bitterns, Soras, Virginia Rails, and a Common Moorhen nesting there. What must be termed a misadventure occurred one day when Cruicky came across a bird blind on a mud flat on Staten Island. In front of the blind were scores of shorebirds, and Cruicky, determined that no hunter was going to get a shot at them, sprinted down the beach and scared them away. Out of the blind, camera in hand, stepped an irate James P. Chapin, President of the Linnaean Society, Curator of Birds at the American Museum, and a renowned authority on African ornithology. He was not amused! A celebrated BCBC adventure involving Cruicky and Joe took place on the afternoon of April 30, 1928. Both were now students at New York University. During a baseball game between the N.Y.U. freshmen and George Washington High School, at Ohio Field, Cruicky and Joe glanced up into the gray sky. There, coming over the right-field fence, was an American Swallow-tailed Kite, only the seventh ever seen or collected in the Greater New York area and the first found within the city limits. It is likely that no one else even noticed the bird. And it is just as likely that two excited fans in the bleachers forgot the final score. For the record, N.Y.U. won, 12 - 0. On June 19, 1928, T. Donald Carter, a mammalogist at

the American Museum, and Philip DuMont, a well-known field observer, confirmed the identification of a Purple Gallinule on Harlem Mere at the north end of Central Park. It happened to be the second Tuesday of the month and a meeting of the Linnaean Society was scheduled for that very night. After leaving the meeting, it was nearly 11 p.m. when the BCBC raced off to find the gallinule. There it was, pumping its head as it swam, silhouetted against the reflected lights of Harlem. The BCBC usually met in the Kuerzis' attic, though they sometimes gathered at Joe's house or Irv's house. But perhaps the most memorable meeting of all was held at the home of T. Donald Carter just two months before he confirmed the Purple Gallinule on Harlem Mere. Carter, who had just returned from Mount Roraima in Venezuela, described his trip with the help of lantern slides. The minutes record that "Mrs. Carter served sandwiches and refreshments in such profusion as to make the meeting seem almost a banquet." But what really stole the show were the blow gun and bow and arrow Carter had brought back with him. "These were received with acclaim and practice (was) immediately instituted on Mrs. Carter's pillows and other things.

Gatherings of the BCBC were always stimulating, but it was at meetings of the Linnaean Society that the boys' skills were truly sharpened and tested. In the mid-1920s Linnaean meetings were dominated by Ludlow Griscom, an assistant curator of birds at the American Museum and the acknowledged leader in field identification. Peterson later wrote that Griscom was "a bit austere in keeping us in line when we dared report anything as unlikely as a Hoary Redpoll or a Sabine's Gull. We were cross-examined ruthlessly." But, he added, Griscom "was our God and his Birds of the New York City Region, published in 1923, became our Bible." Jack Kuerzi went so far as to part his hair in the middle, like Griscom, and several BCBC members adopted his slight lisp in such words as "unprecedented" (which Griscom pronounced "unprethedented" and "common summer resident" ("common thummer rethident." Griscom's figures of speech became part of the language of the BCBC: "That record isn't worth a cheesy damn...Now someone find a bird with some zip in it...I don't like the look of that bird..That's just a weed bird."

Ludlow Griscom moved from the American Museum to Harvard University in 1927, but he left behind a valuable legacy. Edwin Way Teale once asked Griscom how he distinguished difficult species so quickly and easily. He replied: "It is largely a matter of having a perfect mental image of each bird." This idea, novel and even scorned during the shotgun era, is still the basic premise of field identification. A few years later, the idea bore unexpected fruit. Griscom's influence on Roger Tory Peterson is a debt Roger has never failed to acknowledge. As early as 1930, he was planning a field guide, with his own paintings and text, incorporating what he had taught himself and what he had learned from Griscom and from his fellow members of the BCBC and the Linnaean Society. While he was "putting it all down," as he has described assembling this first field guide, he received constant encouragement from William Vogt, then assistant editor for the New York Academy of Sciences, later editor of Bird-Lore, and ultimately national director of Planned Parenthood. According to Joe, Vogt "was much interested in young people-the BCBC and R.T.P." Vogt played a critical role in the publication of the first edition of a Field Guide to the Birds. Peterson dedicated the guide to Vogt (and to Clarence E. Allen), a dedication that still stands after three revisions and five decades. When the Field Guide appeared in 1934, Charles A. Urner, another of the BCBCs' guiding lights, stood up at a Linnaean meeting to say what a

remarkable book it was and to propose that a letter of congratulations be sent to Roger.

As the BCBC moved through the 1920s and into the 1930s, there were important changes. Matty Matuszewski and Fred Ruff went off to Syracuse University to study forestry and were seldom around except for Christmas Censuses. Joe Hickey, Alan Cruickshank, and Phil Kessler enrolled at New York University, where Hickey and Cruickshank were both on the track team and where Hickey was president of the senior class in the same year that Cruicky was president of the junior class. In 1931 Roger Peterson left New York to teach at the Rivers Country Day School near Boston, where he continued to work on the field guide. Prohibition ended on December 5, 1933. The BCBC shifted its Christmas Census tallies from the attic to "Unter den Linden," a beer garden near the end of the Pelham Bay line. "None of the Bronx boys drank hard liquor then," recalls Joe. "We couldn't afford it." The major event for those who stayed in New York was the arrival of Ernst Mayr in 1931. Mayr, who had received his doctorate at the University of Berlin, became a research associate in ornithology at the American Museum at the age of 27. He was eager to learn about American birds, and the Bronx boys were just as eager to teach him. So "Ernie," who would one day be this century's leading evolutionary theorist, was soon out in the field with the BCBC. He went on several Christmas Censuses, including the one in 1935 that logged 107 species. The BCBC introduced Ernst Mayr to American birds, and he repaid them by introducing them to scientific ornithology. Several members attended Mayr's monthly seminars for amateurs, where together they reviewed the ornithological literature -- chiefly German, Joe recalls. "Everyone should have a problem," Mayr was fond of saying by which he meant a research topic. Before long, Dick Herbert was studying Peregrines on the Palisades and Irv Kassoy was spending nights with the Barn Owls in the old Huntington Mansion at Pelham Bay. Joe Hickey, who says "the greatest influence on me as an adult was Uncle Ernst," finally gave up his job at Con Edison and left New York to work with Aldo Leopold at the University of Wisconsin. That was in 1941, the year "Christmas Census" was changed to "Christmas Count," and just one week before Pearl Harbor. In 1943, Hickey published his classic *A Guide to Bird Watching*, which explained the many research opportunities open to amateurs. In time, Joe Hickey carried out landmark research of his own on bird mortality and on the effects of DDT, giving definitive answers to many of the questions raised by Rachel Carson. He became President of the American Ornithologists' Union, a founder of The Nature Conservancy, and Professor (now Emeritus) of Wildlife Ecology at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, where he still lives, half a century after he arrived.

As the war came and the years passed, the ranks of the BCBC dwindled. Jack Kuerzi, whom Peterson says was "the brilliant one," and who had shown so much promise that Frank M. Chapman offered him a job at the American Museum, died in the 1930s. Matty Matuszewski, by then a successful nurseryman on Long Island, died in the mid-1940s. Phil Kessler was lost in World War II. Dick Kuerzi, whom Peterson describes as the sharpest birder in the BCBC, moved to Georgia, where he remained active in birding and conducted research on Tree Swallows. Roger Peterson and Joe Hickey had also moved away, although both came back for Christmas counts. Before the war, Allan Cruickshank developed into a leading bird photographer. His first bird pictures, taken with his father's camera, had been of the nesting King Rails in Van Cortlandt Park. By the time he graduated from high school, his goal was to capture on film every species in North America. He became "as good a black-and-

white photographer as any that existed in this country," says Roger, and eventually amassed a collection of 40,000 negatives representing more than 400 species. He joined the staff of the National Audubon Society in 1935, and with an interruption during the war, served for 37 years as lecturer, official photographer, and bird instructor at the Audubon Camp of Maine. In 1939 he married Helen Gere of Rye, New York, a skillful bird photographer in her own right. In 1942 he published *Birds Around New York City*, the successor to Griscom's book of 1923. Alan and Helen Cruickshank moved to Rockledge, Florida, in 1953. From 1954 until 1971, he was editor of the Christmas Bird Count, and gave reports of rarities the same "ruthless" grilling he himself had received from Griscom years before. In his last year as editor he presided over 963 counts with 18,798 participants.

Roger Peterson was also a member of the Audubon staff, serving as its education director in New York from 1934 to 1943, and as an Audubon screen tour lecturer from 1946 to 1972. His classic *Birds Over America*, illustrated with his own superb photographs, appeared in 1947. The Field Guide had gone into a third edition, and there was also a Field Guide to Western Birds. In the 1950s he moved from the Washington, D.C. area to Old Lyme, Connecticut, where he still resides.

Irving Kassoy became a jeweler and dealer in jeweler's supplies. He continued to study Barn Owls and go on Bronx Christmas Counts until he moved to Columbus, Ohio, in 1950. The firm he founded is still on West Forty-seventh Street off Fifth Avenue. .I Kassoy, Inc., is a name that is known and respected worldwide.

Dick Herbert, a banker who lived in the same house on Fox Street in Hunts Point well into the 1950s, was the last of the original BCBC members to take part in a Christmas Bird Count on the old territory. On December 23, 1956, he contributed a boldfaced Black-legged Kittiwake to the total. "Excellent details for all unusual birds," noted the exacting CBC editor in Rockledge. The following year, Dick and his wife moved to Delaware. He died in 1960. Five years later, the results of his lifetime study of the Peregrine Falcon appeared in a 33-page paper in *The Auk*, published by Mrs. Herbert with the assistance of Joe Hickey.

On October 11, 1974, Allan Cruickshank died in Gainesville at the age of 67, while hard at work on "The Birds of Brevard County Florida." John Devlin, writing in the next day's New York Times, called him "a modern Audubon with a camera." His lectures had been heard by nearly three million people, and his photographs had appeared in more than 175 books, including Helen Cruickshank's *Flight Into Sunshine*, winner of the John Burroughs Medal in 1949. Another BCBC member had passed from the scene, an energetic leader both in birding and in conservation, and remembered today as a great teacher with an unfailing sense of humor and a conviction that no bird is a "weed bird."

Over the years, Joe Hickey has kept in touch with almost everyone who has crossed his path. He is still remembered with affection at his grade school, St. Athanasius, even though the sisters who taught him died long ago. Roger Peterson, speaking as a member of the Club, calls him "our organizer," and it was

Joe who organized the BBC's "Fiftieth Reunion." In 1977, when he learned that Irv Kassoy was terminally ill with cancer, he called a special meeting of the BCBC. Nine people gathered on January 30, 1978, at a motel in Fort Myers, Florida, not far from where Irv was living. At five surviving Bronx boys were there: Irving Kassoy, Joseph J. Hickey, Richard G. Kuerzi, Roger Tory Peterson, and Frederick J. Ruf. Joe came down from Madison, Wisconsin. Roger arrived from Antarctica with his wife, Virginia Marie Peterson. Helen Gere Cruickshank came over from Rockledge. Allen M. Thomas, a longtime friend of the BCBC who started going on Bronx counts in 1933, was there with his wife. This meeting was even busier than the first. Roger was unanimously elected Permanent President, Joe was made Permanent Secretary, and Helen Cruickshank, who had gone on her first Bronx count in 1937, was made an Honorary Member, the first woman elected to the BCBC. There were field trips to Corkscrew and the Ding Darling Sanctuary, and there was a lengthy program. Irv talked about his Barn Owls. Dick discussed his Tree Swallows. The Permanent President showed slides of penguins, the Permanent Secretary talked about his trip to the Pribilofs, and the new Honorary Member presented slides of her recent trip to Africa. The last meeting of the BCBC adjourned after three days. Within a few months, both Irv Kassoy and Dick Kuerzi died. Irv's notes on the Barn Owl, said to be even more voluminous than Dick Herbert's data on the Peregrine, have never been published.

ONE OF A KIND Unlike other bird clubs, the BCBC collected no dues and had no newsletter, constitution, bylaws, committees, or permanent meeting place. Its membership never reached a dozen. Why then did this little group, started by a bunch of city-dwellers in their teens, accomplish so much? The Club was influenced by the Linnaean Society, with its older and more experienced bird men, and by the American Museum of Natural History, with its unrivaled collections and eminent curators. And they lived in New York City. If you can make it there, goes the song, you'll make it anywhere. No doubt all three of these reasons played a part, but the real answer lies with the boys themselves. The BCBC could not have been anything less than what it was because of Allan Cruickshank, Dick Herbert, Joe Hickey, Irving Kassoy, Philip Kessler, John Kuerzi, Dick Kuerzi, John Matuszewski, Roger Peterson, and Fred Ruf. Thinking of these old friends, Peterson says quite simply, "I couldn't have done the Field Guide without them." But after all, to be a member of the Bronx County Bird Club you had to be good. And they were. Every one of them.

"When it came to a shining and forthright personality, none was more effective in the meetings and on the outside than Allan Cruickshank. A javelin tosser in college, he had a tall athletic build, and looked like the All-American Boy, grown to manhood. All of his physical and mental prowess he poured into bird watching, and he became an unsurpassed tracker of birds, and a most entertaining speaker. He had an eyesight that was peerless, an ear for the faintest sibilance, and an aptitude to imitate any bird sound. He was a natural leader and the younger people flocked to his talks and lectures. On a field trip he was full of stories, jokes, and songs that made the dullest excursion gay.

Among the members from the Bronx County Bird Club who later shed great influence was Joseph Hickey, intercollegiate mile champion and theorizer on avian matters. With his Irish humor and wit, as well as his deep thoughtful mind, he gave dignity and life to bird reports that

might have been flat and uninteresting.

His ever-present smile and bantering moods intimately enlivened the meetings, when with irony and fact he demolished some wild and far-out conjectures. But in spite of his light tones he was a serious person whose concern for the Society and for ornithology surfaced often. He spoke in a scholarly manner and had a more unified conception of bird biology than most of us realized.

A self-effacing person was Irving Kassoy, a short, slim, bald, 'bespectacled bird watcher who had a passion for owls. He was all solemnity in bird watching as well as at the meetings, but so caught up with the study of owls that he became our authority on that group of birds. His enthusiasm led him to spend long hours investigating the life history of the Barn Owl. While he was a friendly fellow, he tended to be abstract, cautious, and careful in his statements, and was far from the fluent ways that most of the Bronx County Boys seemed to glory in. When giving a talk, his quiet demeanor gave the impression that he had a great deal to tell, but was reluctant to reveal too much at that particular time. In many of his ways, Kassoy was the antithesis of the maverick friends of the Bronx County Bird Club who enjoyed their bird and social life with gusto and dash.

In the 1920's the Linnaean Society was dominated by Ludlow Griscom, present or absent. We Bronxites had of course memorized Griscom's book, *Birds of the New York City Region*. We quoted passages from it, and our guru, Jack Kuerzi, could talk exactly like him. A favorite expression of ours, taken from the Great Man, about a faunal record of doubtful authenticity, was "It's not worth a cheesy damn!" The only intellectual horizon evident to us boys was breaking arrival and late dates published by Griscom for the Bronx.

The Linnaean Society, starting at least in the 1920's, was invaded by a series of young boys. In the '20's these came from the Bronx. Each wave had to have its own identity. We were 9 at the start, but we added newcomers like R.T. Peterson (a student in an art school) who was always talking about the birds in Jamestown, N.Y. (We called him Roger Tory Jamestown Peterson). Mayr was our age and invited on all our (Griscom-type) field trips. The heckling of this German foreigner was tremendous, but he gave tit-for-tat and any modern picture of Dr. E. Mayr as a very formal person does not square with my memory of the 1930's! He held his own! The Bronxite version of Mayr in this era was: "Everybody should have a problem."



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