

PROCEEDINGS
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ENTOMOLOGICAL SOCIETY
OF
WASHINGTON

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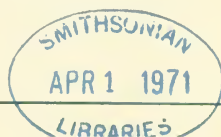
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OF WASHINGTON

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EDWARD ALBERT CHAPIN
1894-1969

Edward Albert Chapin was born on January 4, 1894, in Springfield, Mass. His father was a surgeon and practicing physician there, and that was in a day when one could make a good living practicing medicine and still have ample leisure time. So Ed grew up learning about nature, and especially about botany, in long walks over the countryside around Springfield with his father. Ed's father was an enthusiastic amateur botanist and knew all the plants of the vicinity. They also had as a near neighbor the well known, but somewhat eccentric, entomologist George Dimmock. Ed learned many things about insects from him. As a boy Ed was already strongly influenced toward a career in biology, although at the time, as he said afterwards, he thought he would be an engineer.

While he was a very young child he contracted polio, from which he seemed to recover completely. But as a result of the infection some foot surgery was required for him to be able to walk comfortably. Later on, when he was just grown, his feet caused him to be rejected for military service in World War I (the Army doctors said he could not march). Many years later, when he was an old man, subtle but serious damage to the nerves in his legs became apparent. This very

likely was due to the childhood infection. This nerve damage caused him very great difficulty in walking and standing, and at the last, led to his death. While he was young and vigorous it caused him no trouble at all. He grew up a healthy boy and handsome young man, with a tall, straight body, wavy black hair, and flashing black eyes.

After he finished grade school in Springfield he went to Yale, taking his bachelor's degree in the class of 1916. The following year he took a M. Sc. from Massachusetts State, at Amherst. Then, turned down for military service, he came to Washington and began service in the old Bureau of the Biological Survey. He was associated there with L. L. Buchanan and Alexander Wetmore, men with whom he formed life friendships.

In 1918 he married Clara Cutler, a former newspaper woman, and they set up housekeeping amid wartime shortages and high prices. As they said afterwards, they managed somehow, with some improvisation and many makeshifts. Later, after the war, Ed bought land in Virginia and, undaunted, built his own house. He did not contract it, he built it, hiring only the excavation of the basement. The house still stands today.

In 1920 he transferred to the Bureau of Animal Industry, and in 1926 he joined the Bureau of Entomology as a taxonomist in Coleoptera. With this assignment he began working in the U.S. National Museum. In 1934, J. M. Aldrich, Curator of Insects for the National Museum, died and Ed was appointed to fill the vacancy. He remained Curator for 20 years, retiring in 1954, with 36 years of government service.

During all the years he was Curator on the National Museum staff, he had to work with the staff of the Division of Insect Identification, USDA, most members of which also worked in the National Museum. During his tenure a most cordial harmony was maintained between those two organizations. When difficulties arose, as naturally they did, Ed, with his ready wit and keen intelligence, was ready to adjust matters. He was a past master of the gentle but penetrating remark that calms anger, although he could very effectively use the same sort of observation to deflate an overblown self importance.

During his time as Curator he made three trips to South America. In 1942 he went to Colombia, in 1945 to Chile, and in 1946 to Colombia again. On the last trip to Colombia the Colombian government gave him an honorary title of Entomologist. He also received honorary memberships in both the Entomological Society of Chile and the Colombian Academy of Exact Sciences. On his trips to South America he was accompanied by his wife, whose facile Spanish was most helpful. Ed himself was an indifferent linguist.

He also made two collecting trips to Jamaica, in 1937 and 1941, and he made a quick trip to Europe in 1948 as a delegate to the International Entomological Congress in Stockholm and the International Zoological Congress in Paris. Throughout he kept up with his Smithsonian paper work and carried on research on the classification of scarabaeid, coccinellid and clerid beetles. He also kept abreast of the identification work in his groups for the USDA.

He was a wonderful companion on a hike, a collecting trip, or a camping trip. He collected almost everything—insects, of course, but also plants (especially ferns), snails, minerals. The botany he had learned as a boy stood him in good stead as long as he stayed inside the territory of Gray's Manual, essentially New England south to Virginia. His memory was quick and accurate.

Politically his attitudes were somewhat left of center. To some of his conservative associates he seemed a Radical, but a fairer assessment would be Uncommitted Liberal. He was quite capable of despising both the Republican and Democratic parties in an election and throwing away his vote on some splinter party that had no chance at all of winning. While he was a resident of Virginia he naturally found the Poll Tax contemptible. During his later years he lived in the District of Columbia, which in effect disenfranchised him.

Two years before his retirement he bought a fine old house on five acres of ground in West Medway, Mass. This house was in good repair and had been somewhat modernized, but he spent a considerable sum remodeling it to make it suitable for his home after retirement. Then, when he reached the age of 60, he retired and moved from Washington to West Medway.

The next 10 years were, in many ways, the best of his life. His health was good, and he could do as he pleased. He became an Associate at the Museum of Comparative Zoology, Harvard, and drove in to Cambridge about once a week to work there on coccinellid taxonomy. He had a microscope and excellent reprint file in West Medway and also worked there on his research. He likewise kept up the identification work in coccinellids for the USDA—Washington continued to send material to him for naming up to the time of his death.

As Clara said, "We did all sorts of things." They participated in community affairs of West Medway. Ed was even induced to take parts in some local amateur theatrical presentations. He took camping trips. He gardened.

There were no financial problems. His government salary at no time had been high, but they had always lived modestly. By the continual exercise of New England thrift, Ed and Clara accumulated a quite respectable principal during their 36 years in the Washington area. Clara inherited some sound securities from her father. Ed, rather to his surprise, inherited a large block of valuable stock from his mother's family, as residuary legatee.

After he was 70, Ed began to be troubled by the failure of the nerves in his lower extremities. There seemed to be no effective treatment. He had to restrict his activities because he often would fall suddenly and find himself virtually helpless. Yet, he kept on with many activities, especially his research on Coccinellidae. One thing he always wished to do was to take a walk around the borders of his property every day that the weather permitted him to get out. He wanted to see how things looked. As he grew older, this took longer and longer, because he had to walk slowly to avoid falling.

By the time he was 75 he needed an hour to make the circuit. On May 13, 1969, he set out to make the rounds of his boundaries. When he had not returned in well over an hour, Clara became worried. She went to look for him, and she found him where he had fallen in a spot where he had been caught in a grass fire. He had fallen and had been unable to rise. He was badly burned and unconscious. She summoned help and Ed was taken to Boston, the nearest place where there were facilities for emergency treatment of massive burns. He died without regaining consciousness.

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