
IN MEMORIUM

HORACE HEDLEY MITCHELL (1868-1953)

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Horace Hedley Mitchell, a landmark figure in the history of ornithology in Saskatchewan, was employed as a taxidermist in the Provincial Museum in Regina in 1913, wrote the 18-page “Catalogue of the Birds of Saskatchewan” in 1924, and retired in 1933. Had he been trained in England? Where and when did he die? We set out to solve these mysteries.

Horace Hedley Mitchell, usually known as Hedley Mitchell, was born in Exeter, Devon, on 20 March 1868, the son of William and Kitty Mitchell, who were married on 31 May 1857 in Colyton, about 20 miles east of Exeter. Hedley’s father, originally a tailor in Colyton, served in the Devon Constabulary in Exeter, Barnstaple and Tavistock, rising to the rank of Superintendent.¹ Hedley emigrated to Ontario prior to 1891, the year the Canadian census showed “Henry” (undoubtedly an enumerator’s mistake for Hedley) Mitchell, a photographer, as a lodger in the Onondaga Drive home of Walter Schofield, a carpenter, his wife

Priscilla, and three daughters, the eldest, Annie, a teacher. Hedley, age 24, married Annie Schofield, aged 20, on 18 January 1893, in Hamilton, Wentworth County. The 1901 Canadian census listed Annie and Hedley, again listed as a photographer, still living in the Schofield home²; his father-in-law Walter Schofield’s birth date was now available, 20 August 1840; Priscilla’s 27 March 1840, Annie’s 16 July 1871, and Annie and Hedley’s daughter Dorothy Mitchell, now nearly 3 years old, 29 June 1898.

Early in the next century, Hedley learned the art and science of taxidermy, and became employed by Oliver Spanner, the “dean of Canadian taxidermists, “an ‘able tutor’ in teaching others taxidermy skills,” and the “recipient of a gold medal.”³

The Saskatchewan census of 1916 listed Horace Mitchell (age 46, taxidermist) with his wife Priscilla (40) and daughter Dorothy (17), living at Angus Crescent, Regina.⁴

Hedley Mitchell was hired as a taxidermist by Fred Bradshaw in 1913, and served until 20 March 1933⁵ when he retired with the designation Provincial Naturalist. He collected birds and birds' eggs during field camps as follows:

In 1917, at Willowbunch Lake in late April, at Valeport on 9 May, at Frenchman River valley near Eastend in late May, and at Kutawagan Lake in early June (Mitchell in Bradshaw 1918:39-41).

In 1918, at Moose Mountain in June and the north end of Last Mountain Lake in early July (Mitchell in Bradshaw 1919:73-74).

In 1919, at Valeport in late May, west of Eastend on 9 to at least 18 June, at Carievale, 4-6 July, at Birch Hills, 15 to at least 21 July (Mitchell in Bradshaw 1920:41-43).

In 1920, Mitchell camped where the Arm River joined Last Mountain lake, two miles west of Regina Beach, from 6 May to 2 June, and again, with C.H. Young, of the National Museum of Canada (NMC), from 18 June to the first week in September. Mitchell also visited Kutawagan Lake with P.A. Taverner and C.H. Young from 10-17 June (Mitchell in Bradshaw 1921:128-130).

In 1921, Cypress Hills, 12 May to 22 July; north shore of Old Wives Lake, 26 July to 3 September

(Mitchell in Bradshaw 1922:381-382).

In 1922, Big River, 18 May to 24 June; Valeport and Craven, early July; St. Victor and Fife Lake, 10-20 July; Gainsborough, 9 Aug to 7 September (Mitchell in Bradshaw 1923:48-51).

In 1923, near Hudson Bay [Junction], 15 - 21 May on the Red Deer River, then on the Fir River to 21 June (Mitchell in Bradshaw 1924:330-331).

In 1924, Imperial Beach, Last Mountain Lake, 22 May to 5 June; Moose Mountain, 11 to about 30 June.

In 1925, Fairwell Creek, west of Ravenscrag, 15 May - ? Assisted by Fred G. Bard.

In 1926, Duck Mountain Provincial Park, 6 May - June 19. Assisted by Fred G. Bard.

In 1927, Roddick Lake, 21 May - 22 June (Barton, *Blue Jay* 62(2): 2004:66-70). Assisted by Fred G. Bard. Short trips to Old Wives Lake, Gull Lake and Regina Beach/Kedleston.

In 1928, Rush Lake, "spring migration and nesting season".

In 1929, Mitchell worked in the museum, assembling a group of fishes for display.

In 1929, Frenchman River, 12 miles NW of Val Marie, May and June.

In 1930, Old Wives Lake, 21 June.

A preliminary list of Saskatchewan species, without annotations, was compiled in 1918 and printed in Bradshaw's annual report (1919:57-60). Mitchell's "Catalogue of the Birds of Saskatchewan," occupied a full issue of the *Canadian Field-Naturalist* (volume 38, No. 6) in May 1924, and contained 47 taxa added since the 1918/1919 list, with annotations. One species was extinct (the Passenger Pigeon) and two had been introduced (Gray Partridge and House Sparrow). R.D. Symons (1966) wrote about his friend Mitchell as follows: "A man of great charm, much humility and wide knowledge ... always ready to encourage, to share information, and with a tremendous capacity for living, this good-natured and humorous man was also a good preparator and a keen observer."⁶

A death notice in the *Vancouver Sun*, 27 January 1953, read: MITCHELL, -- Horace Hedley Mitchell, late of 1275 Burris St., South Burnaby, passed away Jan. 24, 1953, at the age 84 years. He is survived by 1 daughter, Mrs. J.C. Hackney, S. Burnaby; 1 brother, Wallace R.⁷, Ontario; 1 sister, Mrs. E. Barrett, Cornwall, England. Funeral service will be held in the Columbia Funeral Chapel, New Westminster, Wednesday, Jan. 28, at 1 p.m., Rev. D.W. Elstead

officiating. Interment Forest Lawn Memorial Park.

1 England census returns for 1861 (Colyton), 1871 (St Sidwell, Exeter) and 1881 (Tavistock) available on www.findmypast.co.uk (accessed 27 September 2014: GBC-1861-1373-00540A.jpg, GBC-1871-2061-0038.jpg and GBC-1881-4315015-00706.jpg, respectively). See also <http://www.devon-mitchells.co.uk/getperson.p?personID=I151&tree=Colyton2> (accessed 27 September 2014).

2. Fourth census of Canada 1901 (z000068571.pdf accessed 29 September 2014).

3. Martin K. McNicholl, 1964, "Appendix 1: Brief Biographies," in Martin K. McNicholl and J.L. Cranmer-Byng, *Ornithology in Ontario. Spec. Publ. No. 1*, Ontario Field Ornithologists Hawk Owl Publishing. Toronto, ON.

Oliver Spanner, son of Walter and Caroline Spanner, was born in Newport, Isle of Wight, on 22 December 1857. The Spanner family emigrated to Canada in 1868 and in the 1881 census, Oliver was listed as a carpenter. By 1895 the Oliver Spanner and Co. taxidermy shop at 358 Yonge Street, Toronto, had become a meeting place for Toronto birders

and according to the 1911 census was the residence of Hedley, Annie and Dorothy Mitchell. In this shop the world's foremost bird-study skin collector, John Henry Fleming, first met P.A. Taverner. Spanner died in Toronto on 20 January 1939.

4. Census of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta 1916 (31228_4363972-00300.pdf, accessed 13 October 2014).

5. Fred Bradshaw, "Report of the Provincial Museum of Natural History, for the year ended April 30, 1933". Roland S. Garrett, King's Printer, Regina.

6. R.D. Symons, "Personal

recollections of some early Saskatchewan naturalists," *Blue Jay* 24(1):2-6.

7. Wallace Reginald Mitchell, Hedley's youngest brother, was born in Barnstaple, Devon, and was 12 years old in 1891; he was then living in Tavistock with his parents and three of his older siblings (English census returns for 1891 (Tavistock, see note 1; GBC-1891-1749-0130.jpg; accessed 28 September 2014). Later, Wallace emigrated to Canada, and married Bessie Florence Mitylene Schofield, sister of Hedley's wife, Annie (for this information we are grateful to Ian Mitchell, email to ECN, 29 September 2014).

