

# R. J. FITCH, 1886-1961

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One of seven brothers, Richard John Fitch was born in 1886. The son of Edward A. Fitch, who at one time served as President of the British Entomological Society, "Dick" began collecting British Lepidoptera as a young boy. After finishing his schooling, he worked for Lloyd's of London. The west soon began to lure him, however, and in 1905, at the age of 20, he left Malden, Essex for Canada.

He homesteaded 16 miles south and two miles west of the town of Lloydminster. His first Alberta home was a shack. The home quarter, with Blackfoot Coulee and a large gully running through it, was a prime location for collecting but Dick was so busy proving up the land and making the farm a going economic unit that he was forced to forget his hobby interest until later in life.

In 1917, Dick married Dorothy Isobel Atkinson. "Dolly", who was 14 years younger than her husband, came out from Ripley, Derbyshire, England with her parents in 1912. Her first Alberta home was a sod house.

Dick was a big man and physically active. He won a number of prizes for his prowess at swimming and he played soccer and cricket. He even built a tennis court on the farm. Work in the early days was physically demanding and it was some time before he was able to supplant horse power by tractor power. He had a large stamp collection and was frequently called upon to act as an auditor.

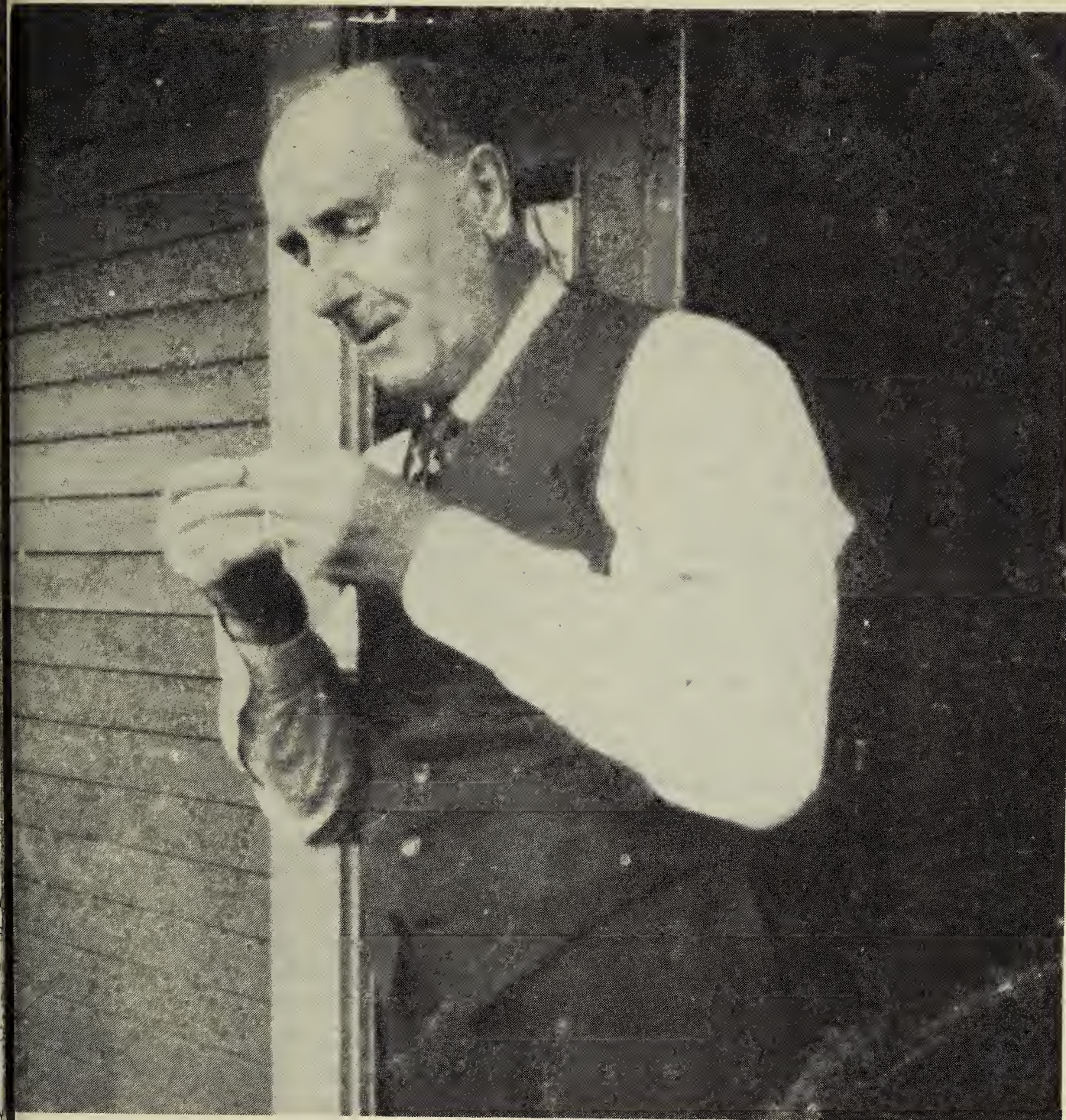
Dick started collecting again in 1921. His wife made him a net out of a slender willow, an old broom handle and a piece of cheese cloth. A local druggist helped by making him a

cyanide bottle. Farm activities kept him close to home but that did not stop him from collecting. He regularly took his net and bottle to the fields. Butterflies were more numerous in the early days as there were still many areas of native prairie.

By 1930 he was collecting in earnest, often helped by his wife and children, and this activity continued until he retired from the farm. He began to correspond with people in the field and by 1940 was in touch with many museums and individuals in North America and England. He developed a small business in which he sold specimens, often for a dollar each, sometimes even for more. From 1940 to 1956 he distributed a hand-copied list entitled "List of Arctic species Lepidoptera caught by R. J. Fitch, Lloydminster, Saskatchewan, Canada". Although his main interest was in butterflies, he also collected and sold moths which he captured at night with the aid of a light and using sugared bait.

Specimens for sale or exchange were placed in paper triangles folded from magazine pages and were then stored or mailed in ½ pound tobacco cans. To begin with he simply put the specimen name, "Fitch", the date of collection and "Lloydminster" on the package. This created some confusion as it was not clear from which province the insects had originated. J. H. Masterson, for example, in his paper "R. J. Fitch's List of Saskatchewan Butterflies" which appeared in 1968 in the *Blue Jay* (26:194-199) states "there is no evidence that Fitch collected to any extent in Alberta".

Correspondence with Fitch's wife and other members of his family



J. Fitch

However, records reveal that the original homestead was on the southwest quarter of section 14, township 47, range 1, west of the fourth meridian. Since the fourth meridian is the 110th parallel of longitude and also forms the Alberta-Saskatchewan boundary, the farm was between 1½ and 2 miles inside Alberta. Although the town of Lloydminster is partly in Alberta and partly in Saskatchewan, literally straddling the boundary, the Lloydminster post office is in Saskatchewan. Although Fitch got his mail in the

hamlet of Rivercourse two miles west of the boundary, the address was not given as Rivercourse, Alberta, but as Rivercourse via Lloydminster, Saskatchewan. No wonder that confusion resulted!

The family report that most of Fitch's material was collected on or close to his farm, two miles north of Rivercourse, Alberta. A few collections were also made in the Blackfoot hills, a few miles to the northwest of the farm and slightly further into Alberta,

and along the Battle River, about 13 miles south of the farm, reached by a road one mile west of the boundary. These Alberta collections were in the Aspen Parkland and here he captured insects typical of the prairies and aspen groves.

The only area in Saskatchewan where he collected was on the Fifield farm near Harlan, a rural post office 25 miles north and 3 miles east of the boundary. This area is in the Boreal Forest and his material from there is characteristic of coniferous forest, muskeg, and bogs.

Fitch gave up farming in 1942, bought a house in Vancouver, and moved there with his wife. For a number of years he spent the winter at the coast and the summers back on the farm where he was able to continue his collecting activities. He died in 1961 at the age of 78 and was buried at Vancouver. His personal collection, stored in a number of boxes, was divided among his family after his death.

R. J. Fitch was survived by his wife at Lloydminster; sons Ted, on the original farm near Rivercourse, and Tom, of Edmonton; daughters Eva, Isobel and Cicely of McLaughlin, the next hamlet southwest of Rivercourse, Alberta, and Peggy of Lloydminster; 15 grandchildren and 20 great-grandchildren.

## A TRIBUTE TO "CORKY" JONES OF EASTEND

The death of "Corky" Jones on March 27, 1978 at the age of 97 terminated a remarkably fruitful association with southwestern Saskatchewan. In the CBC "Neighborly News from the Prairies" programme on May 28, Fred McGuiness of Brandon used the *Eastend Enterprise's* editorial salute to the memory of H. S. Jones

and his unusual contribution to the development of the Western Plains. With Mr. McGuiness' permission, we quote the tribute.

"Corky" Jones to me is an example of one of those Prairie pioneers who in spirit and in deed built the West and gave the West its flavor. While his father was a physician to Queen Victoria, Corky had no such aspirations: he wanted to see the New World. For many years he was a cowboy and then a rancher around Maple Creek. From the Metis families nearby he learned of their history, and human history led him into archaeology as a highly talented amateur. Retired from ranching he ran a livery stable, then the first electric light plant, but no matter what his job he was collecting archaeological specimens which he developed into a museum, now located in Eastend High School.

In his book *Wolf Willow*, which should be read by every Prairie resident, Wallace Stegner says: "If a community is really a pile of kindling inert and heatless until some accident of heat or some man touches it with fire, then Corky in his humble and unpretentious way is a sort of lightning bringer." When Corky Jones was town night watchman, ringing the curfew each night at nine, he was making discoveries which set the world of archaeology a-buzzing. One of his discoveries, the skull of the dinosaur called ceratopsian is unique: no similar one has been found in this world.

Corky Jones died at the age of 97 and the *Eastend Enterprise* described him as a man who had been an educator *without salary* for the greater part of his life. This tribute is written by Elsie Bock, and with a name like that, she just has to be a kin to Bill Bock, author, poet, composer, philosopher, one-time member of Parliament for that colorful short grass rangeland.