
IN MEMORIAM

RALPH D. CARSON, 1938-2007

C. STUART HOUSTON, 863 University Drive, Saskatoon SK, S7N 0J8, and
ROBERT W. NERO, 546 Coventry Road, Winnipeg, MB, R3R 1B6.



Figure 1. Ralph Carson with mounted Golden Eagle, courtesy PMA

Ralph Dale Carson was born to Mike and Sasha Ostoforoff on January 2, 1938 and raised on their farm in the Swan River valley, just four miles west of the Manitoba boundary, near Arran, SK. Ralph began drawing at age four and learned taxidermy at age 11. The family moved to Kamsack, SK in 1953. When Robert Nero gave a lecture at the Kamsack High School, the principal, Fred Reusch, insisted on Nero's meeting an Ostoforoff lad who showed an interest in wildlife and unusual talent in drawing birds and mammals. Not long afterwards, Fred Bard, the museum's director, offered him summer employment.

From 1959 to 1963 (by then having changed his surname to Carson), Ralph was a full-time museum preparator and illustrator at the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History (now the Royal Saskatchewan Museum) in Regina. In 1960, he received the Cliff Shaw Award for four pages of imaginative sketches entitled "Impressions of a Boreal Owl" (*Blue Jay* 18:57-60, 1960). (This was the only occasion when Cliff's surviving brother, Larry, presented the Cliff Shaw award; *Blue Jay* 18:194). Ralph also wrote about and illustrated unique and previously undescribed courtship behavior of the Short-eared Owl (*Blue*

Jay 20:2). He also wrote about the destruction of a colonial bird colony by fishermen at Suggi Lake, including two of his photographs (*Blue Jay* 24:96-97). He assisted Nero in his ornithological investigations of Lake Athabasca, June 29 to July 28, 1960, and again for three weeks in July, 1961. He contributed the sketches that embellish Nero's *Birds of the Lake Athabasca Region* (1963) and the Harris's Sparrow on the cover of Nero's *Birds of Northeastern Saskatchewan* (1967).

For two winters in the early 1960s, the SMNH seconded Ralph to the National Museum of Canada where he prepared bird specimens for three of that museum's bird habitat groups: seabirds, arctic geese, and a prairie marsh. In 1965 he joined the Provincial Museum of Alberta as Assistant Curator of Natural History, where he

created three-dimensional dioramas and others that toured the province (Figure 2, on the inside back cover, bottom). He wrote and illustrated various "Museum and Archives Notes" published by the Provincial Museum of Alberta.

Ralph was a delightful if somewhat eccentric personality. RWN remembers Ralph walking down the street in Regina, dressed as a cowboy and carrying his live pet boa constrictor around his shoulder. He died in Edmonton on 3 July 2007 after a lengthy respiratory illness. Ralph is survived by his daughter, Donna, of Saskatoon, and his brothers, James Carson, a wildlife artist in Winnipeg, and Walter Ostin of Cobble Hill, BC. We are grateful to James Carson for providing photographs and pertinent information.



TURNAROUND

One cold day in September
and we were already thinking winter
listing chores to perform in readiness
for the long cold days and nights,
but now it's November and we're
still enjoying autumn sun
with not a bit of snow to see;
so we affect the good days
worrying about the future
though I am glad the work is done.

- Bob Nero