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WILLIAM SPREADBOROUGH—COLLECTOR 1856-1931

By P. A. TAVERNER

NO ONE who has followed Canadian ornithology can fail to be impressed with the importance of the work done by William Spreadborough. If the foundation of Canadian ornithology was not laid by him, at least the framework of the superstructure was made possible largely by his efforts. Not that he was a scientific naturalist or ever wrote a line for print under his own name, but the collections and observations he made, while associated with John and James M. Macoun, were largely the foundation of the *Catalogue of Canadian Birds*, the real beginnings of our national systematic collections and the basis of many scientific papers by specialists. He did not confine his attention to birds; mammals were only slightly secondary in his interest; reptiles, fish and marine invertebrates were also industriously collected for what is now known as the National Museum of Canada and his practical assistance to the Macouns in their botanical researches was beyond measure. Withal, he was practically unknown to all but a few intimates, the Macouns and such officers of survey parties as he accompanied in the field. It is not proper that such a man should pass from the scene without some record being made of his life and character in the annals of the science he advanced so materially. So much did he live away from the current of scientific events that it was only lately that we, who handle his specimens daily and realize the value of his work, heard of his death at his home in Victoria, British Columbia. Though all who were intimately associated with Spreadborough's natural history work have passed away, the outlines of his connection with the National Museum are here, in the files; but it has taken some effort to uncover the earlier and later events of his life, before and after his association with the institution. Notes of early history have been supplied by his niece, Miss Ellen Spreadborough, of Bracebridge, Ontario; and, through the friendly offices of Mr. W. A. Newcombe, of Victoria, British Columbia, the later scenes of his life have been obtained.

William Spreadborough was born at Farnham, England, November 12th, 1856, the oldest son of William and Ellen Lovell Spreadborough who were married in St. George's Church, Hanover Square, London. Shortly after William's birth his father emigrated to Canada and located on land near Bracebridge, Ontario, a mile below the south falls on the south branch of the Muskoka River. In 1861, the mother and her two sons, William, aged five, and Walter, aged three, joined the father and all lived in the little back-woods log cabin where there were eventually five children. The boys attended school in Bracebridge first and later in a little log school at South Falls, going in to the village of Bracebridge to the Anglican Church and Sunday School.

His early life was probably very similar to that of the usual boy of the pioneer families in the eastern woodlands. Farming a little between the stumps of rough clearings, breaking new fields from the stubborn forest, lumbering and teaming for the big camps, peeling tan-bark or splitting rails for self or on contract. The whole family probably worked together, each to the limit of physical ability, as soon as old enough to wield an axe or guide an ox team. We know the conditions of the country at the time and can imagine the picture. Even at this date it seems that William had the urgings of a naturalist within him, and we are informed that in the interim of pioneering his attention was constantly directed towards birds and beasts and that he always had an interest, other than that of the trapper and hunter, in where animals fed or laid up, where the fish spawned or how the birds sang. Not that it can be supposed that he knew their formal names either in official vernacular or scientific nomenclature, but his later life proved that, while young and impressionable, he had absorbed much lore that stood him in good stead in after life. Not only did he know the common wild life about him, but his experience with cant-hook and paddle had taught him the tricks of fast and still water; he knew how to lay his axe edge where

it would cut the cleanest, and developed self-reliance and resourcefulness in the bush. In time he married Jessie Allen from a nearby settlement but his wife did not live long and, with her child, died at childbirth. Evidently William, after reaching man's estate, like most young bushmen, wandered far from home, with lumber camp and survey parties.

The first record we have of William Spreadborough in connection with the Museum is in the autobiography of John Macoun. James Macoun in 1888 accompanying, as Naturalist, a Dominion Land Survey party under Thomas Fawcett from Lesser Slave Lake to Lake Winnipeg via the historic Methye Portage and the Churchill River, reports that the cook of the party showed a great interest in birds and would be a valuable man in future botanical and natural history surveys. James has told of the incident that first directed his attention to Spreadborough. In casual camp discussion, Spreadborough mentioned that he had heard a Scarlet Tanager about camp. He probably called it a "Firebird" or some such popular name. Incredulous, James lent him his gun to verify his statement. Much to Spreadborough's chagrin, but to Macoun's surprise, the bird proved to be a Western Tanager, not the scarlet bird he had expected. This specimen, from Lesser Slave Lake, is still in the Museum and is the first of the very many specimens that Spreadborough afterwards collected. However, such nature knowledge in a camp cook was not to be disregarded and, as he proved to be a willing and apt pupil, Macoun soon taught him how to skin and prepare bird skins, an accomplishment in which he soon out-distanced his teacher. Henceforth, in all his subsequent association with the Macouns, while they botanized it was Spreadborough's part to collect and prepare birds, mammals and other such material that came his way.

From then on, Spreadborough was always a member of the Macoun expeditions or under their direction either alone or with other parties and so he collected assiduously season after season all along the international boundary from Vancouver Island to the Manitoba line. Several times Spreadborough was attached to other parties of the Geological Survey, here, there or elsewhere, collecting and observing and always he acquitted himself well. In 1896 he accompanied A. P. Low to Hudson Bay and across Ungava Peninsula from Richmond Gulf to Fort Chimo. In 1898 he was with J. McEvoy from Edmonton, through the Yellowhead Pass to the Fraser River, and in 1904 with Owen O'Sullivan up the east

coast of James Bay to Cape Henrietta Maria. In 1910 he collected on the Queen Charlotte Islands. The practical results of all these travels and investigations will be found accredited to him in the *Catalogue of Canadian Birds*, 1900-1904, and in the second edition, 1909, as well as in his collections, which are still a reservoir of information on Canadian zoology.

Up to 1901 Spreadborough seems to have made Bracebridge his headquarters and home but in this year he writes, from Victoria, that he was not going back to Bracebridge this year but would stay in Victoria for the winter. Thereafter all his correspondence is dated from that place and he seems to have taken it for his permanent home from that date. On March 4th, 1914, he there married Jessie Dumbreck who still survives him.

In 1912, Prof. John Macoun was forced by failing health to retire from active field work and from then on Spreadborough was closely associated with James Macoun working along the old Grand Trunk Pacific Railway from Prince Rupert to Jasper Park. It was in the latter area that the writer of these notes made his only actual contact with William in the field, where he showed to supreme advantage. For several weeks he was in camp with him at the foot of the little glacial lake below the peak of Mount Edith Cavell. Sprinklings of snow fell and the nights were chilly but if ever a man knew how to make camp comfortable it was Spreadborough. The tents were pitched in a spot sheltered from the strong cold draught that fell from the adjoining glacier, with the finest of water immediately available. The softest of evergreen boughs made our beds. A workable table and comfortable seats were constructed with his axe, and his fires always burned to the best advantage and were plentifully supplied with wood just dry enough for the passing purpose. His bannocks and baked beans were things long to be remembered and the slices off the carcass of a newly described caribou that hung near, and which the Whiskey Jacks were endeavouring to despoil us of, were delicious after William's inspired cookery. By day he was afield investigating the most hidden recesses of the mountains or skinning specimens, distributing the by-products of his operations to the Whiskey Jacks momentarily lured from the caribou. In the dark of the evenings it was pleasant to sit with back against a shielding rock or sheltering trunk, feet extending towards the grateful camp fire, listening to William "reminiscing" from his inexhaustible store of memories of travel and ex-

ploration by field and stream. He could go on and on and, being a natural story teller with a photographic memory that forgot no detail, interest was always sustained. His energy was inexhaustible and no mountain was too steep or way too rough for him to face if a desirable specimen were the objective. His memory, not only for events but for scientific names and specific details, was remarkable. Though he never had an opportunity of studying his specimens after they were shipped from the field to the Museum, once a specimen had passed through his hands and its characters were noted, it remained with him and was his thereafter. A number of times we have found it advisable to consult with him over some specimen he had collected long before, and he always had the answer ready, the details of its taking and all about it. James Macoun tells of asking him to stop over a train to or from the field at some little station where he had once collected, obtain a specimen from a certain tree that stood on a particular hillside. Though it had been ten years since the original specimen was collected, the material was produced in the most matter-of-fact way. He was always on the alert to obtain valuable specimens. At one camp in the mountains, James had gone to the post office for mail and supplies, returning through the bush late at night. Next morning William remarked to him, "You had a companion on your way back last night." James asked, "What do you mean?" "Nothing, but a cougar followed you most of the way." "How do you know?" "Oh, I was following the cougar."

Through years of association in the closest and most trying manner that men can associate,—in camp, through good weather and bad, William and the Macouns, especially James in the later days, grew very close together. Whatever he was doing at the time, when the proposal of field

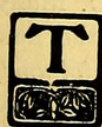
work came, he was always ready to drop higher wages or other inducements to accompany his old friends to new fields and fresh discoveries. But age began to tell and though he was always ready to accompany James, he felt that the days of strenuous endeavour were waning. When "Jim" died, his heart for field work failed him and he refused to continue his life-long work under new auspices with new associates. His last field work and that of his friend James Macoun, was in the summer of 1919. After that he retired to his home at Esquimalt near Victoria and worked permanently for the municipality in various outside capacities, for William was never a man to be confined between walls. He had a little garden that he cultivated assiduously and was never idle. Not to be busy from daylight to dark made him unhappy. A Victoria neighbour confirms our experience of him in the field, that he lived to eat, sleep and work, but the greatest of these was work.

Though he withdrew from all association with other naturalists, he was never a recluse and was always ready to lend a neighbour or friend a hand either by advice or making or mending a tool or device. One of the last acts of his life was to pass a repaired pruning hook through the fence where a neighbour would find it. But when he had reached the age of retirement and was permanently laid off the municipal staff, his heart was taken out of him and undoubtedly the feeling that he was no longer useful to the day's work preyed heavily upon his mind and materially hastened his end. He passed away March 30th, 1931, in the little workshop at his home and was buried in Royal Oak Burial Park, Saanich, nearby. He leaves a widow in Victoria, and a memory that will long remain green in the annals of Canadian ornithology.

NOTES ON THE MAMMALS OF THE INTERIOR OF WESTERN NOVA SCOTIA

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THE FOLLOWING notes were made during July and August, 1928, and from August 28 to September 10, 1931, about the headwaters of the Liverpool chain of lakes whose waters flow down through the big game and trout regions of Lakes Kejimikujik and Rossignol. Most of the collecting was done about Fisher's Lake, some sixteen miles south of Ann-

apolis Royal. In 1928, while I was with the Annapolis Royal Camp for Boys, Mr. G. A. Boggs, the director, greatly facilitated my work and also generously allowed me the use of the camp in 1931. Mr. Walter Hubley, a local resident and guide at the camp, also gave me assistance.

The country is in a granite area, probably of paleozoic age, and has been heavily glaciated. It



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