

OBITUARY

ABNER ALEXANDER TOWERS (1916-1987): A Tribute

The Lepidopterists' Society lost one of its charter members with the passing of Abner A. Towers, who was well-known to collectors in the Southeast and to participants in the first of the collecting expeditions to Ecuador organized by Thomas C. Emmel and Giovanna Holbrook.



Abner Alexander Towers

Born in Gadsden, Alabama, 28 January 1916, Abner Towers developed an interest in wildlife as a boy, particularly his lifelong fascination with butterflies and moths, birds, and other flying creatures. He grew up in Gadsden, completing his primary schooling there, then attended the Kent School, in Kent, Connecticut, during which time he began to collect and study Lepidoptera seriously. At the age of eighteen, in 1934, he took his first trip to the Florida Keys expressly to observe and collect butterflies and moths. He attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as a general science major, and, after earning the Bachelor of Science in 1939, served as an officer in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. He spent most of World War II in the Aleutian and Philippine Islands. Following the war he settled in Georgia, the state he would call home for the rest of his life. Abner Towers married, raised a family, and built a career as an engineer and chemist, and was often described in both capacities by co-workers and peers as "brilliant." In August 1972, he cofounded A-Jay Chemical Company, in Powder Springs, Georgia, an industrial chemical firm he continued to administer until his terminal illness.

In the 1950's Abner resumed his study of the Lepidoptera of the region, focusing his attention almost entirely on the butterflies of Georgia and Florida, and he steadily built an impressive collection containing substantial series of virtually all the species recorded from the two states. He established a strong friendship with Lucien Harris Jr., and his contributions to Harris's *The Butterflies of Georgia* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1972) were significant, and included numerous state records and field observations. Abner's

persistent and dedicated collecting subsequently added several species to the Georgia butterfly fauna, including *Mitoura hesseli* Rawson & Ziegler, and, in 1981, he participated in the discovery of a new geometrid, described as *Narraga georgiana* Covell, Finkelstein & Towers (J. Res. Lepid. 23:161–168, 1984). Occasionally, when his other responsibilities allowed, Abner traveled and collected outside the country; most notable were his collecting trips to Ecuador in 1980 and Jamaica in 1982.

Abner Towers died 18 March 1987, after a bravely fought three-year battle with leukemia. He is survived by his wife, Margaret Le Craw Towers, his children John A. Towers, Marsha Towers Endictor, and Andrea Towers Rohaly, and his sister Harriet Towers Bjelouvucic. His friends and co-workers remember him as “a man of warmth . . . who always took time to inquire of people’s families, discuss their hobbies, jobs or personal interests and give advice, if asked, with a sincerity derived from a love of people. He was totally unselfish with his time, his knowledge and his abilities.” (From a eulogy by Alan Shipp and Polly Buford.)

His collection was donated to the University of Florida in 1985 and deposited in the Florida State Collection of Arthropods, Gainesville. In addition to the Lepidopterists’ Society, Abner was a charter member of the Southern Lepidopterists, a group he served since its founding in 1978 as Georgia zone coordinator.

“Abner Towers was a gentle man, and a gentleman. He will be missed.” (Shipp and Buford.)

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