

THE ORIOLE

A Quarterly Journal of Georgia Ornithology; Official Organ of the
Georgia Ornithological Society



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EUGENE EDMUND MURPHEY

By W. L. McATEE

His wholesome look and friendly manner could not be missed, but with the least acquaintance there became evident the charming conversational power which was, perhaps, Doctor Murphey's greatest distinction. Not big words to impress, but the exact terms to convey his meaning, words new or old, strange or rare, all seemed ever at his command and made talk with him a stimulating experience.

This achievement was personal; no education could provide it. He nourished his vocabulary by broad, perceptive reading, and he always had at hand worth-while books of the day as well as the classics. With a retentive memory, native wit, and a gift for impersonation, he was an excellent storyteller and came into demand as a toastmaster and as speaker on memorable occasions. All of this did not prevent him from being a good listener. He sat through stuffy meetings, that he could have enlivened, having no tendency to seek the center of the stage, and in small talk he always gave others full attention.

Need we say, indeed, can we say, how each person makes distinctive use of the materials afforded by our very uniform educational system? The young Eugene attended the public schools of Augusta, Georgia, and that counterpart of a high school, the Academy of Richmond County, from which he graduated in 1891. He entered the University of Georgia at Athens, but by the time of his junior year had found what he wanted to do and left to study medicine in the office of Doctor Eugene Foster. Soon he was taking a formal course in the School of Medicine in Augusta, and, returning to the University, was graduated from its Medical Department in 1898.

He had decided well and was launched on his career by an internship at Lamar Hospital in his home town. After a year of that, he passed another in postgraduate study of public health at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. His scholastic record must have been commendable, for on his return to Augusta he was appointed Physician for Infectious Diseases, in which position he served from 1900 to 1904. Apparently the



next four years were devoted entirely to private practice, but in 1908 he was recalled to part-time public service as President of the Board of Health and Commissioner of Health for the county and so continued until 1933. The latter date was two years past the time of a serious illness of his own, after which he never returned to full practice. Recognition of his civic work came in the form of appointment as Commissioner Emeritus in 1936.

These are landmarks; what of the travel between? A physician is proverbially a busy man, but Doctor Murphey found time for much teaching as well as for his practice and public service. He was on the faculty of the Medical Department of the University of Georgia, successively as instructor in pathology, instructor in physical diagnosis, professor of materia medica and therapeutics, and professor of clinical medicine.

Doctor V. P. Sydenstricker (1952) wrote of him: "As clinical Professor of Medicine his talents reached their heights. His great knowledge and his skill in imparting that knowledge made his teaching rounds and lectures the high point of every student's week. Also he was generous in consultation; no question asked by any physician was too trivial to be discussed searchingly in his own inimitable way. He always had time for the other fellow and somehow was able to bring out the best in everyone."

In recognition of his contributions to medical education, the structure on the Medical College campus, which houses the departments of Pathology and Microbiology, and Public Health, has been named the Murphey Building. His public service included a long term of duty with the United States Army. Long before World War I, in 1912, he was a First Lieutenant in the Medical Reserve Corps. He was a member of the Council of National Defence, was commissioned a Major in April, 1917, and was one of a board of three to organize the Medical Reserve in Georgia. He was called to active duty in August, 1917, and was made Chief of the Medical Service of the Base Hospital at Camp Gordon, Atlanta, Georgia, in which capacity he continued until his honorable discharge in February, 1919. A patriotic and busy record, the wonder how he found time for it all.

Naturally such a man belonged to the principal medical societies, both local and national, and he was President of the Georgia State Medical Association, 1917-1918. He read papers before professional societies, but most of them were of a philosophical, rather than scientific, nature. He felt that the journals were cluttered with publicity-seeking articles and did not wish to compete in that direction.

Above all, he was a great physician. Doctor Irvine Phinizy, who knew him long and attended him in his decline, said (1952): "His skill and diagnostic acumen were widely recognized. In the days when formal consultations were fashionable there were few of his colleagues who cared to dif-

fer with an expressed opinion of Dr. Murphey. In an era when mechanical diagnostic aids were offering tempting short cuts, he insisted on the use of eyes and ears and fingers and was at his best at those bedside clinics on patients who could not give a history of their illness. His skillful assembling of physical signs leading to a diagnosis is well remembered."

During the years of his active practice, he was known and admired by many grateful patients. It is characteristic of him that he regarded them as friends; witness an extract from one of his poems, "Wings at Dusk":

"I have fought Death through many weary nights
Striving with all I had of heart or brain
To bar him from the threshold of a friend."

Not only was he a public health commissioner and Army medical chief, but he was also an old-fashioned family physician whose patients were his first interest, and to whom, more than doctor, he was a friend.

Eugene Edmund Murphey was Augustan, born and bred, heart and soul. He was a lineal descendant of Nicholas Murphey who was a member of the troop of rangers who came to Georgia with Governor Oglethorpe on his second journey in 1735 and was stationed at Fort Augusta as a unit of the garrison at the time of the founding of the city. Nicholas Murphey's son served in the continental forces in the American Revolution and was rewarded with a grant of land near what is now Hepzibah in Richmond County, of which Augusta is the county seat. That place remained in the family and was managed by Murphey's father.

The boy, however, was moved in infancy, with his parents to the stately mansion in Augusta, which was home for the remainder of his life. The house had been used for commonwealth purposes when Augusta was capital of the state (1779-1780 and 1783-1795). It was a solid, dignified home and the sill of its gateway had been worn quite through by the brushing of innumerable feet—visual proof of long-continued usefulness and hospitality.

One of several Christmas cards, bearing original verse, referred to this stone, the first sight of which gave me a thrill I wished I might have embodied in poetry. Doctor Murphey's lines (written in 1937) follow:

Upon the tawny bank of Mother Nile
Two monstrous Mennons wait the rising sun
And at his coming when the night was done
And he had warned them with his golden smile
One was supposed to sing. Where we abide
By our old gate there stand two granite posts
The stone between them hollowed by the hosts

Of friends whose welcome feet have stepped inside.
Now that sweet Christmas time is here again
And good folk cease from all their laboring
Whether the skies be bright or grey with rain
We pray it brings you every joyous thing
Were you with us—the vision is not vain—
We think the stone would smile, the granite sing.

The dignity and charm of this noble home was maintained by the Murpheys, best remembered by their friends as cultured, genial hosts. Mrs. Murphey was Willie Roney, daughter of Judge Roney of the Superior Court. The marriage took place November 14, 1900; there were no children; and to the great regret of many loyal friends, "Miss Willie" died March 27, 1953.

It is thought that visits to the family plantation with his father inspired Eugene's interest in nature, later expressed chiefly in devotion to ornithology. J. Fred Denton (1952) records of him, "We know that from earliest boyhood he showed an abiding interest in birds and an insatiable curiosity regarding their habits and life histories . . . He was a charter member and faithful supporter of the Georgia Ornithological Society."

The fruits of nearly fifty years of study were gathered in a booklet, "Observations on the Bird Life of the Middle Savannah Valley, 1890-1937", which was published by the Charleston Museum, at which he was Honorary Curator of Birds. A preliminary edition was distributed at the meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union at Charleston in November, 1937, and a corrected version somewhat later. It is a work of solid and critical value, of which E. Milby Burton, director of the Charleston Museum, rightly says that the region described is no longer a dark spot, so far as its bird lore is concerned, but "glows with the light of accurate, painstaking knowledge."

Other ornithological writings by Doctor Murphey include a letter about the Audubon movement in Georgia (*Auk*, 1904: 133), some local notes in *The Oriole*, and the account of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker in A. C. Bent's "Life Histories of North American Woodpeckers" (Bul. 174, U. S. National Museum, 1939: 72-79). He was author also of the "Historical Narrative" accompanying the "Birds of Georgia" (Greene, E. R., et al., Univ. Georgia Press, 1945, pp. 13-25).

He did more than local field work, for a summary of which we are indebted to J. Fred Denton. "A great interest in waterfowl and coastal birds was developed which led to much active work in the Bull's Bay region, Prichard's Island, Bay Point, Beaufort, Edisto, and other South Carolina points, as well as localities on the Georgia coast. On three oc-

casions some time was spent at Rodanthe, North Carolina, and on one at Accomac, Virginia, studying birds. Mrs. extended trips included a visit to South Dakota and two trips to the Gaspé Peninsula." (1952).

Doctor Murphey maintained a private collection of bird skins, not only those collected by himself but also others obtained by purchase or exchange. This collection has been divided between the Charleston, South Carolina, and Augusta, Georgia, museums. More than 1,100 skins went to the former and nearly 800 to the latter institution. They included specimens of some rare forms, as the Ivory-billed Woodpecker and Bachman's Warbler, and of extinct birds as the Heath Hen, Passenger Pigeon, and Carolina Paroquet.

He attended fairly early meetings of the American Ornithologists' Union, some perhaps at the time of his college years (one was in 1904). In conversation, he mentioned getting acquainted with Leonhard Stejneger, Albert K. Fisher, Louis B. Bishop, A. C. Bent, Charles W. Richmond, and Witmer Stone. These men are recalled by present oldsters as of an earlier generation of the Union. However, they were then in their prime and had extra energy to spend in doing something like those of the late coterie known as the Appleton Club. Murphey was attracted to these convivial gatherings and gained impressions of some of the old-timers in their gayer moments that were denied to his younger friends.

Later the demands of his professional career kept him from making the week-long trips required for attending the meetings and he did not resume until physical disability forced his retirement. From then on he came as often as he could and he was on his way to a New York meeting in 1943 when illness compelled him to turn about and go home.

It was at these later gatherings that Doctor Murphey came to know, and to be known by, many regular attenders. His gifts as a conversationalist had not yet waned and the riches of his vocabulary were a marvel to all who shared his company. He was an accomplished raconteur, a gift that made him welcome at once to sessions of the Appleton Club, to which he sometimes appointed himself host, bringing potables and eatables that made his hotel apartment a happy meeting place for those who could enjoy the lighter side of life.

If apology were needed (which it is not) for being human in the best sense, Doctor Eugene has worked it eloquently into his poem on the bullbat, or nighthawk—or as he dubbed it "an appetite with wings."

"When I shall have attained my final stage
Of bread-and-milk beside my inglenook
I shall be well content if you, my friends,
Who knew me best would say,

'We knew he had his appetites
But we believe
He tried to give them
Wings'."

Wings at Dusk (1939), p. 9.

That such a master of language should try his hand in literary form was inevitable. He chose verse and he was often invited to grace important celebrations with pieces pertinent to the occasion. One of these was the Augusta Bicentennial of 1936, when his offering was a round-hundred-line ode, "Always the River."

But this and the lesser poems that came from his heart would have remained largely unknown to his friends had he not published in 1939 a collection of them entitled, "Wings at Dusk."

Probably the fancy embodied in that phrase was that he was trying his wings at what he conceived to be the evening of his life. However, the poems mostly do refer to birds, but often only as the beginnings of trains of thought, freighted with his keen insights as a man and a physician, and leading to eloquently stated principles or universals of human experience. Some are humorous, some sentimental, but all tell us of the depths of Doctor Murphey's character and of the richness of his experience.

Though he chose to write mostly in what is called free verse, a rather modern usage departing from traditional canons and meters, the flashes of inspiration and the often beautiful turns of expression, leave no doubt that he was a true poet. Dr. Irvine Phinizy has kindly allowed me to read eighteen manuscript poems, half of which allude to birds in the vein of "Wings at Dusk."

From that book, the poem on the "rest-time bird" refers to his early attention to birds and to his affection for them always. It is:

The Wood Thrush

"My Father and I, riding the rim of the hillside
Heard from the bottom below us
Shaded by sweetgum and poplar
Where a spring gushed out and meandered
Through thickets starry with laurel
The marvellous song of the Wood Thrush.
Said he, "When my brothers and I
Were ploughing these very same acres
There came to us always at noon-time
That exquisite bird-note.
And also at eve when the heads of our horses

Were turned to the welcoming farm-house
 Again it echoed, speaking of coolness.
 We did not know birds
 But boy-like we named it
 The rest-time bird!
 The name has stayed with me.
 I ask you what could be better
 When one is a-weary and ready
 To turn from life's heat and its ploughing
 To enter the ultimate coolness
 Than some day, softly at sundown
 To hear through fading senses
 The comforting cadence of thrushes
 To feel with the sureness of boyhood
 The rest-time bird
 Calling, calling
 Me.

Wings of Dusk, (1939), p. 54.

Natural to such a master of expression was painting, and he was more than a gifted amateur for he made many prized portraits. Birds were, of course, favorite subjects; a large screen in the lower hall of the old Augusta home depicted a flight of wood ibises over the Everglades; there were also pictures, head and full-length, of wild ducks; and a water-color of Perce Rock, in yellow, washed by a blue sea.

There were still other facets of this talented man. He was affiliated with the Baptist church, belong to a number of fraternal organizations, and was a member of the Georgia Historical Society. Business also had claims on his time, and from 1940 he served as president of the Herald Publishing Company of Augusta. He was a great follower of sports, going by train to witness football games at Athens, seat of his Alma Mater.

He was born in Augusta, Georgia, November 1, 1875, and died there April 13, 1952. As a physician, he was familiar with death, and in his own experience he records:

"Three times he came and peered into my face,
 Each time I said, 'Old man, not yet, not yet!'"

In the same poem, he continued:

"But worst of all is to see him come
 In unrelenting slow processional
 The while his conscious, cowering victim waits
 Like one who listens for the hangman's tread.
 So, now, it is my prayer for those I love

That he may come as might some monstrous bird
 Sudden and swift and sure—a flash of wings
 Against the dusk. Then stillness and the night."

Wings of Dusk, (1939), p. 1

His best wish for those he loved failed in his own case. Repeated thrombosis following typhoid fever made necessary the amputation of a leg in 1931. He remained bravely active both in practice and teaching for another decade, but in September, 1941, had the first of a tragic series of cerebral accidents. He first lost the power to paint, then his speech and at length the capacity either to communicate or receive information—the gradual extinguishing of a brilliant light.

Despite this prolonged decline, his was a fully rounded and useful life, and greatest of rewards, he enjoyed it. He extended friendship and had it returned in full measure. Doctor Murphey had preeminently the art of expression—in speech, in poetry, and in painting. He was also, one strongly felt, a firm dependence in time of trouble and one whose handclasp at the last would be of infinite comfort.

Great is a weighty tribute but it can not be withheld from Eugene Edmund Murphey. He was a great man and what is more, he was greatly beloved.

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 Also letters, material, and assistance from Dr. Irvine Phinizy; letters from Dr. and Mrs. Murphey, Alexander Sprunt, Jr., and E. Milby Burton and Albert Schwartz, of the Charleston Museum.
 3 *Davie Circle, Chapel Hill, North Carolina*. July 27, 1958.

GENERAL NOTES

RED-NECKED GREBE AT ROME.—On November 22, 1957, a Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*) was on the campus lake at Darlington School, Rome, Georgia. It remained in the water until about 10:50 a. m., recess time for the students, when the increased activity on the campus caused it to leave. I was interested to observe that it was fully as skilled at swimming under water as the common Pied-billed Grebe, but that it seemed to be much more capable in taking wing from the water, at which time the white areas in the wings were nicely displayed. This species does not seem to be at all common in Georgia, and the last recorded instance of which I am aware was a bird seen by Griffin and Sciple in Atlanta on December 27, 1937. Furthermore, I can find no previous record of its occurrence in Northwest Georgia.—GEORGE A. DORSEY, *Darlington School, Rome, Georgia. December 2, 1957.*

A SPECIMEN OF THE BALD EAGLE FROM SCREVEN COUNTY.—Whereas there are numerous sight records of the Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) from the coast and interior of Georgia, there are few extant specimens due to the protection of the bird by law. Furthermore, the records from the interior are principally of migratory birds. It seems justifiable, therefore, to place on record the occurrence of a subadult Bald Eagle which was shot four miles south of Sylvania, Screven County, Georgia, in June, 1957. Dr. Rabun Brantley, the Vice-president of Mercer University, kindly brought me the remains of the bird which had been hanging from a fence wire. The remains, principally osteological (skull, humerus, femur, sternum, etc.), have been identified by Dr. Alexander Wetmore, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C.—DAVID W. JOHNSTON, *Department of Biology, Mercer University, Macon, Georgia. October 30, 1957.*

THE RUDDY TURNSTONE AND BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER AT CLARK HILL RESERVOIR IN GEORGIA.—As I approached the Little River bridge on Georgia Highway 47 from the Columbia County side on May 13, 1958, I noticed four gulls resting on a rocky mud bar near the left side of the road. I stopped the car for a better view and noted that the group consisted of three adult Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) and one Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) in second-year plumage. While studying the gulls I discovered that there was also a Killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*), a Least Sandpiper (*Erolia minutilla*), two Black-bellied Plovers (*Squatrola*) and two Ruddy Turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*) on the bar. Both the plovers and turnstones were in bright spring plumage. They were very tame and allowed me to approach within 30 feet of them on foot.

Soft mud prevented my getting any closer so I threw a stone to flush them in order to observe them in flight. When I passed the area again later in the day the gulls were back on the mud bar but the plovers and turnstones had not returned. Although the Black-bellied Plover has been observed several times at Atlanta, this seems to be the first record of the occurrence of the Ruddy Turnstone in the interior of the state.—J. FRED DENTON, *1510 Pendleton Rd., Augusta, Georgia. June 17, 1958.*

NEWS AND COMMENTS

MINUTES OF THE SPRING MEETING, 1958.—The thirty-eighth semi-annual meeting of the Georgia Ornithological Society was held at the Okefenokee Swamp and Waycross, Georgia on April 18, 19, and 20, 1958, with headquarters in the Ware Hotel. Registration began Friday evening, April 18, with 107 persons in attendance. During the registration period an informal get-together was held and an introduction to the swamp was given by Eugene Cypert. The discussion was illustrated with slides.

Saturday morning members drove to Fargo and on to Jone's Island within the swamp, members embarked in boats for trips up Billy's Lake, by boat trail to Minnie's Lake. After an entire day of field work, the group retreated to Waycross for the evening. The banquet was held at eight o'clock in the dining room of the Ware Hotel. After the banquet, President Ben Maulsby called together a brief business meeting. First, greetings from Raymond Wolfe of Atlanta and Earle Greene of Los Angeles were read. Thanks were extended to all who took part in the planning and executing of the swamp meeting. Special thanks were extended to the Waycross group for acting as host to the meeting and to Mr. Joe Morton and Mr. Roy Moore for serving as boat pilots.

Ed Collum read the minutes of the last meeting held at Rock Eagle Park. The minutes were approved as read. President Maulsby called for brief standing reports from the regional vice-presidents. Those vice-presidents present gave short summaries of the activities of their respective regions.

A discussion was held concerning the distribution of Burleigh's "Georgia Birds." Forms had been prepared and distributed to those present for the purpose of ordering the book directly from the University of Oklahoma Press at the prepublication price of \$9.95.

Following the business meeting, Mr. Roy Moore, president of the Okefenokee Bird Club provided the program. The program consisted of an informative discussion illustrated with Mr. Moore's slides of the origin of the swamp, its natural resources and means of conserving these re-

sources. The activities of the Wildlife Refuge personnel in combating the recent extensive fires in the swamp and in the planning of preventive action to prevent future fires were particularly well illustrated.

On Sunday morning the group gathered at the Okefenokee Swamp Park at the invitation of the park management. Members were taken on boats into the park trails and were given ample opportunity to examine the wildlife in the area. At noon the group assembled in the Park where the bird count was tabulated. A total of 83 species was recorded during the two day period. Charles E. Collum, Secretary.

BLACK DUCK REPORT.—According to a recent compilation by Robert Stewart ("Distribution of the Black Duck," U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Circular 51, 1958) there was an average of 5,000 Black Ducks in Georgia yearly from 1952-1956. This number has fallen from a high of 10,000 in 1952 to 1,000 in 1956, with the birds being mostly concentrated in coastal localities.

EDITORIAL COMMENT.—Although an earlier issue of the *Oriole* carried an excellent article by Dr. J. Fred Denton on the life of Dr. Eugene Edmund Murphey, we think it fitting at this time to publish additional material concerning Dr. Murphey. The author, Dr. W. L. McAttee, through his long years of personal contact with Dr. Murphey is certainly well qualified for this presentation, and has generously offered to assist in underwriting the cost of publication.

Dr. Robert A. Norris who has served in several official and unofficial capacities in the G.O.S. has accepted a position at Tulane University, but will continue in his present capacity on the Editorial Committee of the G.O.S. We wish him well in these endeavors.

FROM THE FIELD

A banded Herring Gull was found dead in Macon by T. P. Haines on January 12, 1958. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service later informed him that the bird had been banded by P. B. Hofslund on Knife Island, Lake County, Minnesota on June 8, 1957. During the winter and spring of 1958 in the Augusta area, J. Fred Denton made the following interesting observations: Redhead (February 23), Common Gallinule (March 2), Grasshopper Sparrow (January 12), Lesser Scaup (May 3), and Vesper Sparrow (April 25). A flock of 34 Sandhill Cranes was noted on March 23, 1958, near Dawsonville by Phil Kahl. He also reported Swainson's Warbles on April 19, 1958, along Georgia Highway 41 in Marion County between Buena Vista and Geneva and on April 30 southwest of Atlanta near the Chattahoochee River.