

JOURNAL OF THE LEPIDOPTERISTS' SOCIETY

Volume 42

1988

Number 3

Journal of the Lepidopterists' Society
42(3), 1988, 155-163

CYRIL FRANKLIN DOS PASSOS (1887-1986)

RONALD S. WILKINSON

228 Ninth Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002

Cyril Franklin dos Passos, eminent student of Nearctic Rhopalocera, and a Charter and Honorary Life Member of the Lepidopterists' Society, died on 29 October 1986, only a few months before he would have celebrated his 100th birthday.

Many who are aware of Cyril's entomological contributions may not know that during an extraordinarily long and full life he had two quite distinct and successive careers. The second is of more concern to us, but as Cyril did not begin his work on butterflies until he was past the age of 40, something must be said of the first.

Cyril was always aware of the Portuguese heritage of his family, a fact that this writer recalls most vividly because of the excellent Madeiran wines served at the dos Passos table. Cyril's paternal grandfather Manoel (later Manuel) dos Passos emigrated to the United States from Ponta do Sol, Madeira, in 1830, becoming a cobbler and later a shoemaker, and finally settling in Philadelphia where he married Lucinda Cattell. There were six children, including Cyril's father Benjamin Franklin Dos Passos (the American family had capitalized the Portuguese lower case d) and an older brother, John Randolph, who would also be of considerable importance in Cyril's life.

John Randolph studied law and became an eminent and affluent New York City attorney, specializing in brokerage and corporation law. He defended trusts, opposed regulation of business by government, and wrote extensively on these and other subjects. He took Benjamin Franklin into his law firm, which became Dos Passos Brothers. Cyril, an only child, was born in New York on 7 February 1887. His mother, Isabel Kirker Strong, was of English descent. His father died in 1898 when Cyril was eleven.

By his own account of his education, Cyril attended several private

schools, finally spending eight years at Cutler School in New York City, and graduating in 1905. He read law for two years at Dos Passos Brothers, and entered New York Law School in 1907. Cyril attended classes while working half days in his uncle's Broad Street offices. After receiving his LL. B. *cum laude* in 1909, he was admitted to the New York bar and began to practice in the family firm, becoming a partner.

John Randolph Dos Passos represented railroad interests, and played a large part in the reorganization of various lines. His protégé Cyril eventually entered the railroad business, becoming president and a director of the Kansas, Oklahoma & Gulf Railway Company, which ran from Joplin, Missouri, to Denison, Texas. When a competing line forced Cyril's company into receivership, he incorporated and became secretary, treasurer, and later president of a brokerage firm, the New York and Hanseatic Corporation. During these business activities Cyril maintained his place in the law firm. When John Randolph died in 1917, Cyril inherited the "good will, name and business of Dos Passos Brothers" and his uncle's extensive law library. He was, however, Cyril *dos* Passos, because his mother had encouraged him to use the Portuguese form. (Despite an interest in his own Portuguese heritage, John Randolph's son and Cyril's cousin, the well-known literary figure John Roderigo Dos Passos, chose to retain the Americanized capitalization.)

On 3 August 1927 Cyril married Viola Harriet Van Hise, who would direct his interests toward entomology. She was the youngest daughter of Anthony H. Van Hise and Harriet Louise Archer, and was born at Newark, New Jersey, on 24 November 1891. Having earned a comfortable fortune, Cyril was able in 1928 to retire from law and business, and devote his time to leisure pursuits. The couple lived in Ridgewood, New Jersey, for several years, and enjoyed their summers at the Rangeley, Maine "camp" which Cyril had built before the marriage for hunting, fishing, and other recreation. Their son Manuel, who survives him, was born on 4 February 1929.

Thus was the stage set for Cyril dos Passos' second career. In later life he enjoyed telling the story of his discussions with Viola about taking up an instructive and useful pursuit. Cyril suggested art. Viola, who had been reading copies of W. J. Holland's butterfly and moth books, voted for entomology. She won the day. They decided that she would collect and study Nearctic moths, and he would devote his attention to butterflies.

Collecting began in earnest at the Rangeley camp in 1929. The two set out a sugaring trail, a line of Rummel bait traps, and eventually had a large light trap constructed. A neighbor suggested that Cyril visit the Department of Entomology of the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), and he did so, making the friendship of Frank E.



Cyril F. dos Passos and friend at Quimby Pond Camps, Rangeley, Maine, 1973

Watson, who helped identify his and Viola's captures. Cyril assisted Watson in disinfecting and otherwise caring for the AMNH collection, and was soon an unofficial "regular," enjoying the encouragement of the department curator, Frank E. Lutz.

Meanwhile, planning was under way for the magnificent French Provincial house which would become well known to Cyril's scientific friends. He had always been partial to things French; his mother (who spoke French fluently and had a French maid) had taken him to France a number of times. Ideas for the house and grounds were assembled

from books on minor chateaux and turned over to an architect. Construction began in spring 1931 on ninety partially wooded acres in Mendham, New Jersey. Cyril and Viola wished to move in at the earliest opportunity, and were able to do so by winter.

At the Mendham "chateau" part of the second story was devoted to specimen storage and a rapidly growing entomological library. Viola placed her moths in traditional cabinets, separated by a partition from Cyril's collection. He adopted the use of Watson-Comstock store boxes, designed by his AMNH friends Watson and William P. Comstock, and constructed at Cyril's expense by the museum carpenter. Cyril described the box in his 1957 obituary of Comstock as "quite an ingenious, light and inexpensive affair with top and bottom of heavy cardboard and sides of wood. The bottom is lined with pressed cork." As the collections grew, Viola's moths were moved to another spacious room, and Cyril's specimens filled the original area.

His earliest entomological publications were undertaken with a young correspondent and collecting companion, L. Paul Grey, who has contributed a memoir of his own to this *Journal* issue. The 1934 dos Passos-Grey annotated list of Maine butterflies and its supplement were natural beginnings for the initially Maine-oriented pair who would later revise the Nearctic "argynnids." Cyril gradually became a respected taxonomist, but during his career also published investigations of life histories of imperfectly known butterflies. He was an avid field collector, and because of his financial resources was able to augment his own efforts greatly by hiring collectors to work for him in some remote areas. For example, the first of his many papers with descriptions of new subspecies was based on material sent to him from Newfoundland by Hugh McIsaac.

In 1936 Cyril was appointed Research Associate in the Department of Entomology, AMNH, through Lutz's recommendation. The appointment was regularly renewed until the year before Cyril's death, so that he served a full half-century on the scientific staff. He was instrumental in acquiring the first really large collection of North American butterflies to be added to the AMNH's then relatively modest holdings, being a substantial contributor to the purchase of Jeane D. Gunder's 27,000 specimens in 1937. Cyril later published a catalogue of the Gunder types; he also obtained Gunder's library and added it to his own. As time passed, Cyril was able to buy a number of established collections of significance and integrate them into his previous holdings. One of his purchases was the Alberta and Illinois material of Thomas E. Bean, a correspondent of William Henry Edwards who supplied considerable data used in the third volume of *The Butterflies of North America*; among others were the collections of Max Rothke, E. H. Blackmore, R. F. Sternitzky, Owen Bryant and Louis Doerfel. Types went to AMNH,

although Cyril retained most paratypes. When his purchases included moths, these were placed in Viola's cabinets.

Cyril's concern about the significance of types led him to devise an improved method of photographing type specimens and their labels. An apparatus for the purpose had been described by Gunder in 1930, but it had defects, which Cyril remedied. His folding device, utilizing a Leica Model F camera and adjustable floodlights, could adequately record the insect and the many labels often found on types, and could be placed in a suitcase for travel. Cyril visited American and European museums with his camera, and although he restricted his activities chiefly to recording types of North American Rhopalocera, he hoped that through cooperation all remaining type specimens of Lepidoptera could be photographed; while many types might be lost to science over the years, Cyril argued that photographs would create a record that could last indefinitely. By 1945, when he published a description of his apparatus, he had recorded as many as 1200 types. The project was continued, and Cyril's photographs are now in AMNH. Some have been reproduced in his own papers and those of other workers. His original idea still has merit.

Cyril's early taxonomic work chiefly concerned Lycaenidae and Satyridae, although he also published on nymphalids. His first synonymic catalogue, which appeared in 1939, was of the North American Satyridae, part of a proposed but ill-fated catalogue with references to original descriptions of all Rhopalocera north of the Mexican border, edited by F. Martin Brown and R. W. L. Potts, which failed from lack of funding.

During World War II Cyril suffered a great loss. Viola, who had continued to collect moths, had a heart attack in 1939, and her activities were restricted. She died at Rangeley on 29 August 1944. Later in that year Cyril donated her collection, which included over 12,000 specimens, to AMNH.

The collaboration with L. Paul Grey on the Argynninae, discussed in the accompanying memoir, began to bear fruit during the war years. Their first three joint papers appeared in 1942 and 1945; the third was one of three independent genitalic studies (the others by B. C. S. Warren and F. A. T. Reuss) which led to a new scheme of classification of the subfamily, restricting the genera *Argynnis* and *Brenthis* to the Palearctic region, leaving *Boloria* as Holarctic, and *Speyeria* and *Euptoieta* as Nearctic genera. The dos Passos-Grey systematic catalogue of *Speyeria* was published in 1947. They concluded that although 109 published names attributable to *Speyeria* were valid, only 13 species were involved.

Reviewing the revision in *The Lepidopterists' News*, Charles L.

Remington noted that before the work of dos Passos and Grey, "different authors accepted a widely varying number of distinct species in the group, many supposed affinities were entirely wrong, and uncorrelated new 'races' continued to be described. The challenge of ordering the chaos was grasped at that time by L. Paul Grey, who disposed of his excellent collection of North American Lepidoptera to devote all his time and space to the 'Args.' He was fortunate to be joined by C. F. dos Passos, who had the means, the equipment, and the methodical mind to scour the scattered literature, visit a number of museums to examine carefully the types, and study the numerous nomenclatorial problems." The 1947 paper has recently been mentioned by Scott in *The Butterflies of North America* (1986) as helping to turn the trend of "splitting" into the more sophisticated concept of species we have today.

When the Lepidopterists' Society was formally constituted in May 1947, Cyril was a charter member. He served on the very early Board of Specialists (which identified specimens for Society members) for the family Satyridae. For the first two and a half years of its existence the Society operated under "articles of organization," published in the first issue of *The Lepidopterists' News*. In 1950 editor Remington asked Cyril to prepare a formal constitution and by-laws. He did so, and served as chairman of an international committee to study and approve the draft, which was ratified by members at the first annual meeting. Cyril's committee appointed temporary officers to serve the Society until the first election by the membership, and it was due to the dos Passos committee's good judgment that the Society's first president was a lepidopterist of the very highest reputation, Cyril's friend James H. McDunnough, whom he had met while photographing types at the Canadian National Collection in the 1930's. Cyril served on the Karl Jordan Medal Awards Committee, and was elected an Honorary Life Member in 1973.

He attended the International Congresses of Zoology at Paris (1948), Copenhagen (1953), and London (1958), participating in the prior colloquia, sections, and other activities devoted to nomenclature. He read papers on nomenclature at Copenhagen and London, and frequently during the decade (as well as occasionally afterwards) contributed to the *Bulletin of Zoological Nomenclature*, proposing and commenting on decisions of the International Commission, and discussing and suggesting amendments to the *Règles Internationales*, later the *International Code of Zoological Nomenclature*. He also traveled to a number of International Congresses of Entomology, and during these and other journeys out of the country, he made many scientific friendships and

added considerable material to his entomological holdings. He especially enjoyed collecting in Europe, and did so widely.

During this active period, Cyril was appointed Research Associate by the Carnegie Museum (1952). He continued to publish on Satyridae and on topics as diverse as the eye colors of *Colias* and the ethics of scientific criticism. On 3 September 1959, Cyril married Maria Amália Pita Pestana Reis, who survives him. She is the daughter of Maria Pita de Macedo and Miguel Pestana dos Reis and was born in Ponta do Sol, the birthplace of Cyril's paternal grandfather. Maria Amália brought Cyril much happiness, and the great success of his second marriage was evident to his friends.

The result of a project of some years' length appeared in 1964 as *A Synonymic List of the Nearctic Rhopalocera*, this Society's Memoir No. 1 and, with its supplements, Cyril's most significant and useful contribution as single author. Much of his time in later years was devoted to the full catalogue of Nearctic butterflies announced as forthcoming in the introduction to his 1964 checklist. The typescript eventually grew to seven volumes, but the work was discontinued due to the impending appearance of Miller and Brown's *A Catalogue/Checklist of the Butterflies of America North of Mexico* (1981).

Work on such tasks as the checklist and catalogue was made easier because Cyril had built one of the most extensive private entomological libraries in America. When he wished to search the literature he seldom had to leave his home, for most of the works in which North American butterflies were described, from the 18th century onward, were there, not only monographs but runs of journals. For an historian and bibliographer of entomology, the most exciting part of a visit to the dos Passos chateau was the time spent in the library. One example will suffice; during research on John Abbot, I was examining varying watermarks in copies of Smith and Abbot's *The Natural History of the Rarer Lepidopterous Insects of Georgia* (1797) to determine the length of its publishing history. Cyril was able to show me not one copy but two, the second being a volume of the plates issued later with a publisher's imprint I have never seen elsewhere than in the great library which was donated to Wittenberg University, Springfield, Ohio, during Cyril's last years.

His concern with books and libraries, and his devotion to AMNH led Cyril to give considerable assistance to the Museum's library. He published a number of bibliographical papers and (with William D. Field and John H. Masters) a very useful volume, *A Bibliography of the Catalogs, Lists, Faunal and Other Papers on the Butterflies of North America North of Mexico Arranged by State and Province* (1974).

Some of Cyril's bibliographical writings dealt with the actual dates of publication of literature containing descriptions of insects, which of course are important in determining priority. Cyril's frequent work with descriptions quite naturally led to an interest in the history of entomology, to which his major contribution was his edition of William Henry Edwards' entomological reminiscences (1951); the manuscript was loaned to him for the purpose by Edwards' granddaughter.

Among Cyril's later publications were two substantial studies (and models for emulation) co-authored with Alexander B. Klots. The first (1969) concerned the pierid *Anthocharis midea* (Hübner). As explained in their introduction, for many years they had recognized the need for a detailed investigation of *midea* to clarify such problems as geographic variation and nomenclature, and had been accumulating data and specimens toward that end. The resulting paper, which also treated life history, foodplants, and parasites, was an exemplary discussion of a species and its subspecies. They had also been gathering data about the lycaenid *Erora laeta* (W. H. Edwards), and had jointly and severally conducted field studies between 1934 and 1968. Their thorough paper on the genus *Erora* (1982) examined early stages, ethology, ecology, and geographic distribution of *laeta* and *E. quaderna sanfordi* dos Passos, and provided synonymies. An extensive taxonomic study of the satyrids *Lethe portlandia* (Fabricius) and *L. anthedon* (Clark) was published by J. Richard Heitzman and Cyril (1974); incidentally, these three papers provide excellent examples of the use of Cyril's photographs of type specimens. On his own, Cyril produced his usual variety of publications nearly to the end, although his last appearance in print was as co-author with Clifford D. Ferris, James A. Ebner, and J. Donald Lafontaine of an annotated list of Yukon butterflies (1983). It was appropriate that Cyril's final paper concerned the far-northern fauna he loved.

Cyril donated his entomological collection to AMNH in 1980. At that time the butterflies were contained in over 1250 store boxes. Announcing the event in the *Journal*, curator Frederick H. Rindge stated that the collection was undoubtedly "the single largest and most complete one of North American butterflies ever made by one individual." He noted that the gift included over 65,000 specimens; of those which were mounted and identified, 57,870 were North American and 6182 were European. There were 464 paratypes (Cyril had consistently deposited holotypes and allotypes in AMNH) and 617 slides, chiefly of genitalia but also of venation. Cyril intended that his correspondence and other manuscript materials should go to AMNH, and the transfer was made by Maria Amália in 1987.

Cyril was a member of a number of scientific societies, and a Fellow

of the Royal Entomological Society of London (1950–). He was also a Fellow of the Linnean Society of London (1977–), where many years previously he had photographed Linnaeus' types of North American butterflies. Wittenberg University awarded him an honorary D.Sc. in 1965, and McDunnough named the copper *Lycaena epixanthe dospassosi* after him in 1940.

Those who knew Cyril were aware that his interests were by no means limited to entomology. They ranged over the entire field of natural history, including ornithology, geology and paleontology, and extended to archaeology. He assembled extensive and valuable holdings of classic postage stamps and covers of the United States, including proofs, and also acquired the stamps of Nepal, Tibet, Heligoland, the British Commonwealth, and France. He was a contributor to philatelic journals.

Cyril was a man of many parts. He gave to entomology an unrivaled private collection of Nearctic Rhopalocera, many examples of financial generosity, and 50 years of publications of high professional quality. Much has been written by historians about the professionalization of science, a relatively recent transition from a past in which scientific foundations were laid by workers educated in other areas. In some cases the process has led to too rigid a distinction between professional and amateur. It is still possible to make important and lasting contributions to entomology without earning a graduate degree in the subject or a related discipline; witness Cyril F. dos Passos, an amateur who made our science his profession and served it very well.