

## PROFILES

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### THE JOHN T. MASON COLLECTION AT THE DENVER MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

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**ABSTRACT.** John T. Mason (1853-1928) was an amateur lepidopterist who amassed a large collection of butterflies and moths, most of which is now housed in the Denver Museum of Natural History in Colorado. The collection was made by Mason's own field collecting as well as by purchases from other well-known collectors and dealers including William Barnes, Otto Staudinger, and others. The majority of the material is from Europe and Jalapa, Veracruz, Mexico. At least eight patronyms of Lepidoptera honor Mason. Six primary type specimens of Lepidoptera have been located in Mason's collection, and the Museum also has three additional butterfly type specimens added in more recent years.

**Additional key words:** type specimens, biography, patronyms, Colorado, Mexico.

John T. Mason worked with the founders of the Colorado [now Denver] Museum of Natural History (incorporated in 1900), served as Curator during the Museum's formative years, and was in charge of operations until the first Director, Jesse D. Figgins, was appointed in 1910. Born in Lincolnshire, England, in 1853, Mason joined the ranks of avid natural history collectors as a boy of twelve. By the age of fifteen, Jack had amassed a fine collection of birds, bird eggs, and butterflies. When schoolmates traveled to Australia and sent home specimens of birds, the young naturalist mounted them, and kept one specimen of each species for his private collection.

Mason came to the United States in 1872 and lived for short periods in New York, Mississippi, and Galveston, Texas, then eventually settled in Houston, Texas. There he married a Miss Schaffter of Galveston in 1877 and opened a large department store, accumulating a fortune in the mercantile business from 1880 to 1892. Mason moved to Denver, Colorado, in 1895. By the time he retired from business, his zeal for collecting had grown into a scientific avocation. He was sent to Mexico by the United States as government collector of butterflies. In 1928, he died in Pasadena, California, eight years after moving there from Colorado. The John T. Mason Park in Houston is located on land donated in 1930 by his second wife. The house where Mason resided in Denver was restored and opened in 1989 as a bed and breakfast inn (Castle Marne, 1572 Race Street). Fig. 1 is a portrait of Mason given to us by Edward D. White, a great-nephew of John Mason.



FIG. 1. Portrait of John T. Mason.

### The Mason Lepidoptera Collection

Mason donated his worldwide collection of over 20,000 butterflies and moths to the Museum in 1918. This forms the basis for the Museum's Lepidoptera collection. Many of the specimens in the Mason Collection were obtained in the field by Mason, others through purchase and exchange with renowned collectors such as the Grand Duke Michael of Russia, the great collectors for the Natural History Museum in London (formerly British Museum (Natural History)), and William Schaus of New York. It is surmised that Mason did his own collecting in Jalapa, Veracruz; Harris County, Texas; and Glenwood Springs, Colorado. Smaller collections have been added in recent years from staff fieldwork and donations. Mason's collection is particularly strong in all families of butterflies from North America, Mexico, and Europe, with occasional specimens from India, Africa, Japan, New Guinea, and Cuba. The moth families best represented are Sphingidae, Arctiidae, and Geometridae, although there are modest series of Noctuidae, Pyralidae, Notodontidae, and Saturniidae. The Microlepidoptera (except Pyralidae and Cossidae)

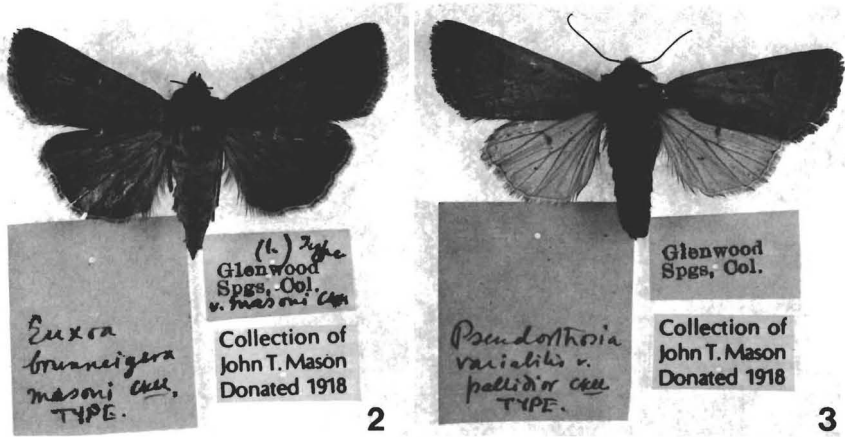


FIG. 2. Holotype of *Euxoa brunneigera masoni* Cockerell.

FIG. 3. Holotype of *Pseudorthostia variabilis pallidior* Cockerell.

are weakly represented. The genus *Catocala* is well represented, filling several drawers.

Mason's second wife, Dora Porter Mason, assisted him in building the collection and was a patron of the Museum. Selected specimens from the Mason Collection first went on exhibit from 1929 to 1938, when they were temporarily withdrawn to design a more contemporary exhibit. The Colorado Butterflies and Moths Exhibit, which opened in 1940, was funded by Mrs. Mason and named the Dora Porter Mason Butterfly Hall. The exhibit closed in 1986 when the wing in which it was housed was demolished to make room for Museum expansion. Because of the historical significance of the Mason Collection, specimens will remain in storage in the Zoology Department research collection and will be available for study. In 1990, a new exhibit on Colorado butterflies and moths was installed, for which the primary consultant was Dr. Ray Stanford who selected and identified all of the butterflies.

There is evidence that Mr. Frank Howland, Curator of Geology and Mineralogy, was caretaker for the collection from the late 1920s through 1935. Mr. Frank Clay Cross, Honorary Curator of Entomology, began curating the collection in 1936 (Cross 1937). Under Cross' direction, Robert Potts and Charles W. Dawson reorganized the collection. During the reorganization, several types and paratypes of moths and butterflies came to light which were to have been published by Cross, but apparently this was not done. Some of these were rediscovered by R. S. Peigler and Andrew D. Warren in 1987-89 during the most recent reorganization of the collection. The purpose of this paper is to make the existence of the collection known to the scientific community and

to cite the primary type material that it contains. We provide illustrations of two holotypes that have not been figured previously.

### Patronyms

Patronyms honoring Mason, aside from those listed below under the section on type material, include the following which were all described from Jalapa, Veracruz, Mexico:

- Plusia masoni* Schaus, Noctuidae. See Schaus (1894).  
*Eacles masoni* Schaus, Saturniidae. See Oiticica (1956) and Lemaire (1988).  
*Halysidota masoni* (Schaus), Arctiidae. See Watson (1980).  
*Psychonoctua masoni* (Schaus), Cossidae. See Blanchard and Knudson (1985).  
*Charadra masoni* Schaus, Noctuidae. See Schaus (1894).

### Type Specimens

**Noctuidae:** *Rhododipsa masoni* J. B. Smith (1896). Paralectotype male, figured by Byers (1989). Now known as *Schinia masoni*. We have "Type 2" from the series of four syntypes bearing labels written by Smith. Todd (1982) reported this specimen as lost and selected Type 1 as lectotype among the remaining three syntypes in the National Museum of Natural History.

*Euxoa brunneigera masoni* Cockerell (1905). Holotype female (Fig. 2). A junior synonym of *Euxoa comosa comosa* (Morrison) according to Lafontaine (1987), who reported that the holotype of *masoni* had not been located. The specimen agrees fairly well with Lafontaine's color figures 2 and 3 on Plate 5, and we therefore agree with the synonymy. The holotype of *masoni* is from Glenwood Springs, Colorado, and bears a type label in Cockerell's handwriting.

*Pseudorthosia variabilis pallidior* Cockerell (1906). Holotype female (Fig. 3). This specimen is from Glenwood Springs, Colorado, and also has a type label written by Cockerell.

**Arctiidae:** *Eupseudosoma floridum* Grote (1882). Syntype male. Now considered a subspecies of the Neotropical *E. involutum* (Sepp). The type label is in Grote's handwriting (Horn & Kahle 1935-37). Grote routinely labeled every specimen in a type series with the word "Type" (Todd 1982: 1).

**Zygaenidae:** *Triprocris martenii* French (1883). Syntype female. Now known as *Pyromorpha martenii* (see Hodges et al. 1983: 66). The specimen bears the following three labels: Ariz./Type/Aglaope Ariz. French. The latter is in Mason's handwriting.

**Satyridae:** *Cercyonis masoni* Cross (1937). Holotype male figured in original description. Now considered to be a subspecies of *C. sthenele* (Boisduval) (see Miller & Brown 1981: 196).

**Nymphalidae:** *Chlosyne definita* (E. M. Aaron). This syntype is probably the individual specimen intended by Aaron to be the type (Roy O. Kendall, pers. comm.).

**Lycaenidae:** *Satyrium behrii crossi* (Field). Paratype number 14 of *Callipsyche behrii crossi*.

*Incisalia polia obscura* Ferris & Fisher. Paratype number 163.

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