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THE BRODIE CLUB

Minutes of the 853rd Meeting

Date of Meeting : Tuesday 21 November 1989.

Place of Meeting : Academy of Medicine, Toronto

Speaker : Mrs. Louise Herzberg, Historian and Free
Lance Writer

Subject : A Pocketful of Galls : A Biography of
Dr. William Brodie

Chairman : Bruce Falls

Recording Secretary : Boissoneau

The meeting was called to order at 8.20 p.m. 12 members were present and eight guests : Jack and Margret Cranmer-Byng and Martin McNicholl were guests of Bruce Falls, Yvonne Bendell guest of Jim Bendell, Ross Goudie guest of Auger, and Drs. Jack and Anne Dale and Dr. Norman Levine were guests of Savage. The Club extended a welcome to the members of the Faculty of Dentistry. The minutes of the previous meeting were read. With one amendment, their adoption was moved by Riley, and seconded by Anne Falls.

Announcements : Savage and James paid tribute to the late Dr. Randolph (Pete) Peterson, the Curator of Mammalogy at the R. O. M. from 1946 to 1985. A moment of silence was observed by those present.

Carrick reported on the completely uncooperative nature of the elements in freezing Lake Scugog to a depth of 8 cms. on the night prior to the planned initiation of his "Swan Escort Service" (see minutes of the preceding meeting).

Speaker of the Evening : Savage introduced Louise Herzberg. She graduated in Honour Arts at the University of Sydney and obtained a Masters Degree in Education from the same institution. She subsequently worked in the field of Education of persons with learning disabilities. Since coming to Canada, she has developed a penchant for local Canadian history. Serendipitous discoveries in the Archives of the Royal Canadian Institute provided her with key source material for "A Pocketful of Galls". Other sources include articles, notes, cataloguing and collections of press clippings of Brodie's colleagues -- J. H. Fleming, A. P. Coleman, J. L. Baillie, R. B. Thomson and George Edmond.

The R. O. M. has Brodie's vasculum and microscope (the latter exhibited), his Natural History records for the period 1880 to 1906, and material contained in their "Biographical Information on Naturalists". From "old material in boxes" at the R. C. I., Louise discovered the minutes of a meeting held at Wm. Brodie's home (325 Parliament Street). The purpose of this meeting was to form a Toronto Entomology Club. This discovery led to further discoveries of Brodie memorabilia from the Newmarket Museum and from Norah and Bill Armstrong of Saskatchewan.

Minutes of the 853rd Meeting (Cont'd)

Our member "Steve" Brodie edited and compiled from a manuscript written by Alex Brodie "on the cheapest and most perishable paper". This memoir entitled "Craigieburn Farm" contains an account of the Brodies' passage to Canada, a letter of introduction to Wm. Lyon Mackenzie, glimpses of life in the backwoods of Whitchurch Township and innumerable vignettes of life in rural Ontario (snow sifting softly thro' gaps in the logs of their cabin, and closely observed mud wasps residing in the loft bedroom of the young Brodies, to cite but two examples). The latter vignette was doubtless the seminal impetus for Wm. Brodie's subsequent paper - Signs of Intelligence in Insects - Mind in Insects.

Wm. Brodie married Anna McPherson. Their first child William was referred to as Sweet William (Phlox maculata). Their subsequent daughters all bore botanical Christian names. After graduation from Normal School, Wm. Brodie began his career in teaching in schools of Whitchurch Township. Later, in 1870, Dr. Brodie was the 207th dentist licensed to practise in Ontario. He was the first to use chloroform. Dr. Brodie predicted that the use of X-ray photography would "revolutionize everything". Prof. Edmund Walker's advice to Dr. Brodie was to stop this insect nonsense and focus all his efforts on his practice of dentistry.

The Brodies lived a rich cultural life. Naturalists, musicians, poets and scholars met at Brodie's home to discuss "everything under the sun". Flying squirrels inhabited the attic and often "accidentally" escaped to the drawing room to terrify the ladies assembled therein. Snakes (rattlesnakes were particularly favoured) slithered about their garden, and were sometimes inserted between the sheets of the beds of late rising young men visitors. Fergus, the Brodie's ^{son} knocked on their door to obtain access to the Brodie domicile. Snakes in the surgery probably provided more entertainment for patients than to-day's Musak.

Young Willie followed in his father's footsteps. Although primarily interested in Ornithology, Willie shared his father's generalist interest in Natural History. Willie accompanied Seton on a field trip to Manitoba where Seton's brother was homesteading. In the course of a subsequent jaunt with Seton's neighbour Fred Calvert, Willie was drowned in the Kamsack River. It was reported that "a light went out of Dr. Brodie's life" when he eventually heard the news of his son's death, but he carried on "flexing" his enquiring mind to the end.

A two day saunter from Toronto to Muskoka was no problem for Dr. Brodie. Sunday rambles began at 7 a.m. and continued until 3 p.m. Dr. Brodie was the first to realize the significance of the Don Valley glacial and interglacial beds. His sketches of recent cuts through these beds were useful to A. P. Coleman. His list of Pleistocene mollusks was used by Coleman in his report on the Don Valley beds. Mr. Cosens said of Dr. Brodie "It was impossible to associate old age with him". Dr. Brodie died on the 6th of August 1909, and was buried in an unmarked grave in the Acropolis Cemetery. An honest epitaph might have been "He made a poor living as a dentist but his real interest was Natural History".

Minutes of the 853rd Meeting (Cont'd)

Members' Questions

Speakman : Were there any women members of Natural History Societies of this period ? Answer : Yes, but they were a minority.

Hollingworth : Noted women naturalists in the photographs which were displayed sported birds' wings on their hats!

Bruce Falls : Was Dr. Brodie an evolutionist ? Answer : Yes. He considered Darwin's Theory to be the greatest scientific postulation of his time. In the 1880's, he lectured Presbyterian congregations on this subject.

The Speaker was thanked by Norm Martin.

Members' Notes and Observations : These were postponed to the December meetings, because of the lateness of the hour.