

NOTES ON THE LIFE HISTORY OF THE
ENTOMOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF
BRITISH COLUMBIA

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About a year ago I was presented with three portfolios containing a quantity of old letters, etc., belonging to our Society. They had been resurrected from the vault of the Plant Inspection Office in Vancouver, and had not been dusted that morning, nor I think on any morning since the date that the covers bore, viz., 1914. I took them, purely out of a sense of duty and got my hands very dirty in consequence.

In my spare time since then, I have read all this correspondence and obtained much information and pleasure from these early records of the Society. In the hope that some of them may appeal to you in the same manner, I have ventured to extract certain items from this mass of dust-laden records.

The earliest history of our Society, which as you will remember was founded in 1901, has been set down by Mr. G. O. Day in his Presidential Address published in No. 4 of our Proceedings.

This address covered the period from inception in 1901 until early 1914. It is with the period immediately subsequent to this that these records deal.

As you know, although the Society was founded in 1901 and for some years led a useful if not very robust life, by 1909 it was practically dormant. No metabolism was evident, and it was not until 1911 that any signs of metamorphosis were apparent. This metamorphosis was holo-metabolic, and the Society emerged in the period from 1911 to 1914, from a small but keen coterie of lepidopterists mostly, to one of the most important scientific bodies in the Province.

The stimulating factor in this metamorphosis was the new secretary, Mr. Treherne, and the hundreds of letters in these musty files are irrefutable evidence of the amount of time spent by Mr. Treherne on the Society's affairs and I feel that I have been very negligent in comparison.

The first evidence of the resumption of metabolistic activity in the dormant Society is evidenced by correspondence with the late Rev. C. J. S. Bethune, of the Ontario Society, regarding by-laws and constitutions, and in our archives are a dozen or so folders of printed constitutions of various societies ranging from the rules of the Vancouver Horticultural Society to a 15-page booklet of the American Poultry Association.

In the original draft for a new constitution prepared by Mr. Treherne is a clause reading as follows:

“(4) To identify for, and render aid and assistance, to the best of its ability, or cause the same to be done, to fruit growers, farmers, gardeners and private individuals, either through the knowledge or advice of individual members in their respective localities or through the medium of the Society, its members and its publications, on all subjects relating to insect life, economically affecting the household, farm crops, fruit or livestock, or any other pertaining branch of agriculture.”

This most ambitious clause was not adopted; and in a letter from the then president, Mr. Day, in 1913 he says:

“Article 4 appears to me to be outside the scope of our Society. We should be usurping the functions of the Provincial Entomologist, and moreover, would be putting too great a tax on our Secretary.”

The subject of this clause is a most interesting one in the life history of our Society, and as it crops up in various forms in later correspondence I will refer to it again then.

Before this constitution was drawn up in 1913 the Society apparently was guided by some rules adopted at the spring quarterly meeting in April, 1902. In these rules Clause 9 calls for comment. It reads:

“9. Candidates for membership may be proposed and seconded at any meeting, and elected at the next meeting. Voting to be by ballot, and one black ball in three to exclude.”

They were evidently very particular in those days, or else the general run of entomologists were more parasitically inclined than at present.

These rules are in the beautiful handwriting of Mr. Harvey, who was killed in the Great War. I also have the original manuscript of “A Preliminary List of the Macro-Lepidoptera of B.C.” prepared in 1902, in the same beautiful script. I have brought it to show you as it shows how much the author was in love with his work and what care he lavished on its preparation.

Referring back for a minute we find several letters regarding affiliation with the parent body—the Entomological Society of Ontario—and a letter from the late Dr. Hewitt, then Dominion Entomologist, is interesting. He says:

“As you know, when the Society was formed it was the Entomological Society of Canada until it sold itself for a mess of pottage, which was indeed most necessary.”

It was evidently Mr. Treherne’s wish to have, and belong to, a National Society, but Dr. Hewitt found it quite out of the question for the Dominion to make a grant towards this, hence the Ontario Society.

One phase in the life history of this Society struck me most forcibly. That was the enthusiasm of the members. These archives are

studded with letters from members asking when the next meeting is to be held and where, and what papers were going to be presented.

Members apparently travelled all over the Province to attend in those days; but possibly it is not altogether lack of enthusiasm which limits the migrations of our members these times.

Another indication of active metabolism is indicated by a letter from Mr. Hanham in April, 1913. The Society was evidently not too flush in those days prior to the establishment of provincial grants, and he suggests members buy extra copies of Proceedings—and sends \$2.00 for eight copies. He also wants to know “why Marmont and Dashwood Jones have fallen by the wayside.”

Just before this episode the 1912 balance sheet showed a deficit of \$6.50, and a whip around seems to have been made. This produced an anonymous donation of \$20.00 from one member; and \$5.00 each from Messrs. Sherman, Marmont, Lyne, Bush, and Wilson.

In 1913 Mr. Blackmore wrote:

“As regards offering anything for the programme, I don't think I would care to, as it appears to me that the majority (and a large one) of the members attending are all economic entomologists, and systematic entomology seems left out in the cold.”

I believe this to be the original seed of dissension for this idea, which has periodically cropped up in the last 20 years of the Society's life. It appears to me similar to an inhibiting factor in the life history of an insect, not exactly parasitic, but more like a mild attack of polyhedral disease in tent caterpillars. Fortunately, the physical condition of our Society has been strong, and this natural control factor has never become epidemic, and proved fatal. It has often been ameliorated by timely application of soothing remarks in presidential addresses at various times in the past, but I would like to devise methods here and now to entirely exterminate this distorted and disturbing factor in the life history of this Society. In our archives are many letters from Mr. Treherne to the then powers in provincial matters—W. E. Scott, Price Ellison, etc.—regarding grants. The original grant was \$250.00, but in 1914 Mr. Treherne, by means of strong economic arguments, obtained \$350.00, and for some years after that the Society still obtained \$250.00 to do what it liked with, while at the same time the provincial authorities printed our economic matter free.

The President, Mr. Day, in November, 1914, writes to Mr. Treherne in part, thus:

“You have indeed managed most cleverly and the result is indeed most creditable. You are a marvel of diplomacy and persistence. Your account of the negotiations for printing the Proceedings is most in-

teresting and I laughed as I read it. We are fortunate in having such an energetic Secretary."

Unfortunately, the account referred to above is not in our archives, but some indication of Mr. Treherne's difficulties and arguments are obtainable from the voluminous correspondence with the powers at Victoria. At one time a Mr. Ernest McGaffey suggested eliminating all the papers included in Proceedings No. 4, as many were too verbose. Treherne, however, stuck to his guns and by emphasizing the great scientific and economic value of the papers, got the whole lot printed.

I would like to point out and emphasize here that it has been this argument, and this only, that has obtained for our Society the annual grants that we have received in the past. We would never have received these sums for purely systematic work, and it has been only by forming a perfect emulsion of systematic and economic matter that the systematic writings of our amateur and professional entomologists have been published at all.

If any of our members still feel that systematic work is being squeezed out I would like them to remember this obligation to economic work—to remember that many systematic papers are submitted every year by professional economic entomologists who love that type of work far more than they do mixing up messy sprays—and to remember to produce papers themselves more abundantly.

Only thus can our Society throw off the polyhedral disease and live as a healthy symbiotic unit.

Leaving that subject now, I would like to turn to one or two other phases of our life history.

The first reference to the Great War is in a letter from G. R. Venables. It states that Mr. Venables will not be able to be present at the annual meeting as he is at the front, but suggests that he might be able to present a paper on Insects affecting Germans, though it might be censored!

In the agenda for the 1915 meeting is an expression of regret for the death of a Dr. de Verteuil, who went down in the "Good Hope" off the coast of Chile.

In this same agenda the election of the Rev. Canon Hinchliffe is proposed, and I found that earlier our present mayor, L. D. Taylor, was once a member.

At the January, 1914, meeting, several resolutions were passed and copies of the letters conveying these to the Hon. Premier, then Richard McBride, and the Minister of Agriculture are on file. The subjects covered were:

An investigation to confirm or refute the carrying of fire blight by hive bees.

The appointment of an entomologist to fill the position lately occupied by Dr. Brittain, and the suggestion that the position of Entomologist and Plant Pathologist be separated.

The prevention of the importation of bees on account of foul brood.

And lastly—Regarding the desirability of preventing insect collections being sold outside the Province to *foreigners*.

With regard to this last resolution I find one member commenting thus:

"I guess that resolution was framed on account of Mr. C's collection being in the market. His price is away too high, quite double what it should be."

Even entomologists are human and have their petty jealousies.

There are many more interesting items to be culled from a close study of these life history notes, but time will not allow for many more. However, in December, 1914, the Society nearly went to jail as the Secretary received a threatening letter from a collection agency for the account of a firm, amounting to \$2.30. The only notation about this is a terse one in the Secretary's writing, "Paid."

I have one or two interesting relics—a faded photo of a collection of insects by one J. A. Hamilton, of which he was doubtless very proud at the time—hence the photo, full plate. And another in this un-redeemed postal note covering the subscription of a member. The Society is \$1.00 poorer by this omission of the Secretary, but as the endorsee is dead and the sender passed away under tragic circumstances it is perhaps of more value as a souvenir or relic than in cold cash.

The records show very few lapses like this, but rather reflect the untiring energy and enthusiasm to further entomology that embued poor Treherne.

If some of the data presented herewith has interested you and enabled you to better understand the life history of our Society—its early struggles, its adaptation to natural conditions, its manner of life and increase, and its natural enemies—my labours in hunting through these life history notes of bygone years will have been of use.