

IN MEMORIAM: THEODORE SHERMAN PALMER

BY W. L. MCATEE

ADMITTED to the American Ornithologists' Union at its fifth meeting, in 1888, and elected Fellow in 1901, Doctor Palmer was member or chairman of the Committee on Biography from 1915, and Secretary of the Union for twenty years (1917-1937).

He was born at Oakland, California, January 26, 1868, his father being Henry Austin, and his mother Jane Olivia Day, Palmer. In 1886 they moved to Pomona, California, where the father started a bank. He desired that his firstborn follow a business career, which Theodore did in vacations and immediately after graduation from college, but other interests soon prevailed.

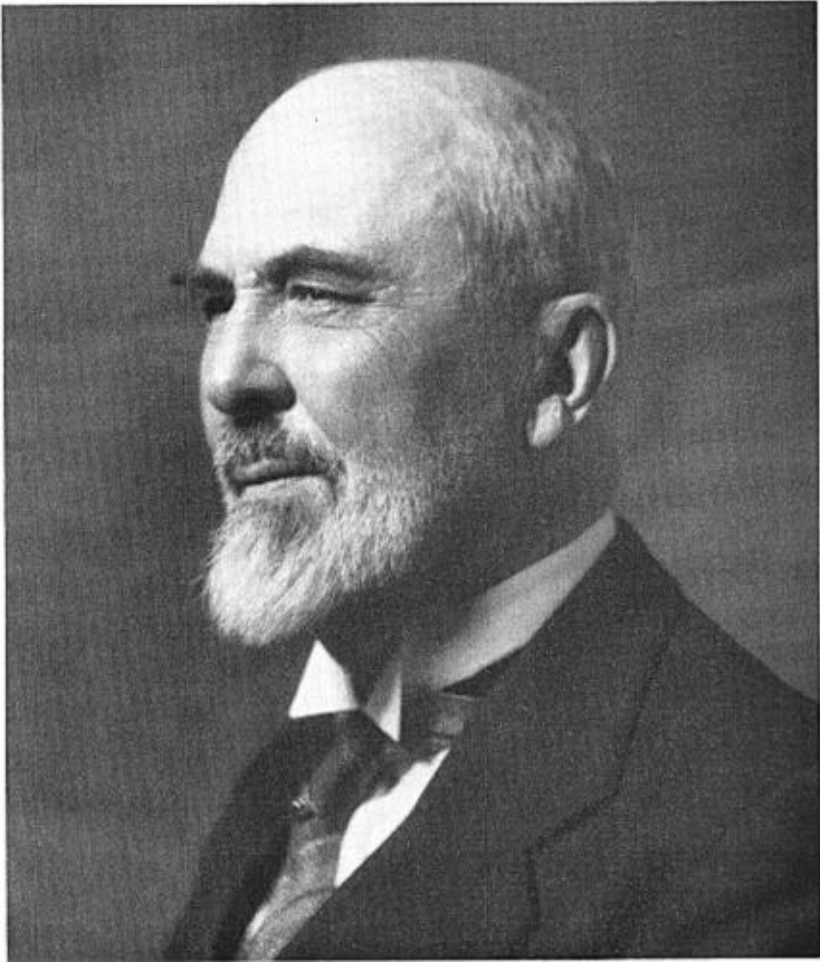
Among boyhood hobbies were the collecting of stamps and of the eggs and skins of birds. His natural history collections, upon his departure from the state, went to the California Academy of Sciences, where they were destroyed in the catastrophe of 1906. Stamp collecting was continued throughout life and his accumulations of 54,000 varieties, with duplicates and associated materials, were presented to the United States National Museum.

Considerable time was given by Palmer, as a youth, to an organization for reading to the blind, but on the whole he paid little attention to social life, or to sports, either before or after entering the University of California, from which he graduated in 1888.

In college days he became interested in the altitudinal distribution of the flora and fauna of California mountains. As this was exactly in the field of investigation then being exploited by C. Hart Merriam, Chief of the Division of Ornithology and Mammalogy of the United States Department of Agriculture, it is not surprising that the two men came together and that the recent baccalaureate was appointed Field Agent of that organization in 1889.

The fate that shapes men's ends was soon at work. Doctor Merriam had planned an expedition to study the biology of Death Valley and adjacent territory in southern California, and, though he took part in its early phases, he left in response to an invitation from President Benjamin Harrison to act as one of a Bering Sea Commission to study the fur seals and make recommendations for their management. Thus, instead of spending the field season of 1891 in torrid Death Valley, Doctor Merriam went to the frigid Pribilof Islands and left Palmer, one of the younger men of the group, as its leader.

While an aura of romance, possibly due to its name, surrounds the Death Valley Expedition, and the participants looked back upon it



Blackstone Studios
54 West 57th Street
New York

THEODORE SHERMAN PALMER

as their great adventure, reporting upon it was disjointed and was never completed. Four of eight authors of chapters in the main published report (North American Fauna, No. 7, 1893) were not on the Expedition; the botany was treated in a Contribution from the National Herbarium; and no general account of the mammals has ever appeared. The Fauna referred to is labelled Part II; and Part I, postponed indefinitely, apparently is represented only by two papers privately printed at Washington by Doctor Palmer in 1952. These are: "Place Names of the Death Valley Region in California and Nevada" (80 pp.), and "Chronology of the Death Valley Region in California, 1849-1949" (25 pp.). These were edited by Doctor Palmer from material supplied by himself, by two historians in the Library of Congress, and by three employes of the Death Valley National Monument. Through the years he collected everything he could find relating to Death Valley—books, maps, manuscripts—doubtless the most complete assemblage of its kind, and this he bequeathed to the Henry E. Huntington Library at San Marino, California.

Doctor Palmer was a lifelong, and an ardent, book collector and got together a fine library, particularly rich in sets of scientific periodicals, that filled to overflowing three rooms in his residence. This was willed to the University of California, with transportation paid from Washington to Berkeley. He not only collected variously but in the end it proved to very good purposes.

But to get back to his career: by the year 1892, the reports of the Death Valley Expedition, so far as they were written at the time, had to be done. The World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago was coming on and the Department of Agriculture prepared exhibits for it on a lavish scale. Most of these were returned after the Fair and housed in a vast, barn-like structure on the Department of Agriculture grounds. Every branch of the Department was represented; the exhibits must be prepared, sent to Chicago, and installed; then after their period of publicity, returned and re-displayed in Washington. The administrative detail necessary to accomplish all this was not to the taste of Chief Merriam and we may be sure that Palmer was assigned a full share of the supervision, thus leading up to his periods of service as Assistant Chief (1896-1902 and 1910-1914).

Despite other activities, the early years at Washington gave Palmer opportunity for further education, of which he took advantage to the extent of winning an M.D. degree at Georgetown University. Possibly this was in emulation of Doctors Merriam and Fisher, the entire original scientific staff of the organization, both of them graduates

of the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City. However that may be, Palmer never practiced medicine and apparently had no idea of doing so.

There was pressure on the nascent Biological Survey to make everything look "economic" and Palmer's share in the response was a bulletin on a group of injurious mammals, "The Jack Rabbits of the United States" (1896; revised 1897). By "economic" is meant in relation to agriculture and the word was in the title of the organization from the beginning in 1885 until its designation as the Division of Biological Survey in 1896.

Palmer dipped into scientific phases of the work, describing, with E. W. Nelson, five new birds from Mexico in 1894, and contributing some short notes on bird nomenclature and distribution to 'The Auk.' To the most technical series of the Survey's publications—the North American Faunas—he contributed its bulkiest number (23), of almost a thousand pages. This was the "Index Generum Mammalium," which appeared in 1904. The beginning of it was a collection of 250 names turned over to him by Doctor Merriam in 1889. This he increased until in 1902 it numbered around 4,500. Palmer records the great assistance in the work of Miss Thora Stejneger who made three trips to enlarge and verify the compendium in European libraries. It does no harm to draw renewed attention to that collaboration here and to point out that Miss Stejneger, an accomplished linguist, was the sister of Leonhard Stejneger of the National Museum. In my earliest Survey days, I saw her busied with the final stages of the "Index," answering if anyone ever did to what is conceived as a typical maiden lady—and as unobtrusive and quiet as a nun.

However, Doctor Palmer's tastes led him away from established lines of the Survey's program, and he specialized in the field of legislation affecting wildlife; developed a branch of the organization to handle it, of which he was leader (1902–1910 and 1914–1916); and with which he was in some way associated during the remainder of his career in the Civil Service.

His flair was for compiling and summarizing basic information, and he prepared a number of publications that have never been superseded, as: "Extermination of noxious animals by bounties" (1897); "The danger of introducing noxious animals and birds" (1899); "Hunting licenses: Their history, objects, and limitations" (1904); "Private game preserves and their future in the United States" (1910); and "Chronology and index of the more important events in American game protection, 1776–1911" (1912).

Related publications of this fruitful period were: "Bird day in the

schools" (1896); "Legislation for the protection of birds other than game birds" (1900); "Laws regulating the transportation and sale of game" (with Henry Oldys, 1900); "A review of economic ornithology in the United States" (1900); "Some benefits the farmer may derive from game protection" (1905); and "Game as a national resource" (1922).

Some of these were trail-blazers, the 1899 paper on introductions leading to the Lacey Act of 1900, regulating the importation of noxious animals and prohibiting the transportation in interstate commerce of game killed in violation of local laws. "Bird day in the schools" was a precursor of Audubon Society activities; and directories of officials and organizations concerned with wildlife protection, and digests of game laws, begun in 1901 and done wholly, or participated in, by Doctor Palmer until 1915, are features of Federal conservation work that are continued to this day.

Under Doctor Palmer's direction, but at first by his own hand, a comprehensive collection of information on wildlife conservation was assembled in card catalog form, upon which Henry Oldys and R. W. Williams of his Division based valuable publications, and which can still be mined with profit by conservationists who are bibliographically inclined.

Administration kept pace with the definition of programs and under Doctor Palmer the work grew until it included inspectors at principal ports of entry and roving agents to aid in enforcing the importation and interstate commerce clauses of the Lacey Act. In this memorial in 'The Auk,' let it not be forgotten that the Biological Survey, as a whole, and specifically its work on the distribution, migration, and economic value of birds, as well as on bird protection, grew out of Committee activities of the American Ornithologists' Union.

Quoting now from T. Gilbert Pearson's chapter on "Bird Protection" in "Fifty Years' Progress of American Ornithology 1883-1933," published by the Union in 1933, we learn that:

"During the period from 1895 to 1905 the A.O.U. Committee was very active. Five of these years Witmer Stone was the Chairman, the other five William Dutcher occupied this position. During that decade the [A.O.U.] Model Law [for the protection of non-game birds] was adopted by 32 states. Efforts for its enactment were carried on with the constant advice and close cooperation of Theodore S. Palmer. . . . Mr. Dutcher, on more than one occasion, wrote: 'I do nothing without first consulting Palmer.'" (p. 201).

This campaign among the state legislatures required a great deal of travel at first by Dutcher and Palmer and later by Palmer and Pearson. Not only were songbird protection and the organization

of local Audubon societies advanced, but efforts were made to build machinery to enforce protective laws, as by encouraging the establishment of state warden systems, game commissions, and conservation departments.

Doctor Palmer was the leading authority in this field, witness the publications previously noted, and his advice was weighty with legislative committees. Some of this work is outlined in Pearson's book, "Adventures in Bird Protection" (1937). With Pearson, Doctor Palmer revived the National Association of State Game and Fish Wardens in 1914, and it has continued in active existence ever since, now being international in scope in the Americas.

Through the American Ornithologists' Union, Dr. Palmer became acquainted with George Bird Grinnell who founded an Audubon Society which lived only from 1886 to 1889; and with William Dutcher, main instigator of the Association which later became the National Audubon Society. The first meeting of the Board of Directors of Dutcher's project was held January 30, 1905, and Doctor Palmer was elected Second Vice-President. In 1908 he was advanced to the First Vice-Presidency, in which capacity he served until 1936. He was elected a member of the Board of Directors in 1907, his term to begin in 1908, and he continued on the Board also until 1936—a period of 28 years.

At the same time he did not neglect his home area, helping to found the Audubon Society of the District of Columbia in 1897, and serving as its President, 1924–1941. Upon his retirement from that office, he was named President Emeritus and so remained throughout life. This Association conducted bird classes for teachers in the District of Columbia schools and organized spring bird trips for all interested—activities into which employes of the Biological Survey (including the writer) were regularly drafted. Doctor Palmer directed the indoor, and Professor W. W. Cooke the outdoor, programs. Mr. Irston R. Barnes, now President of the Audubon Society of the District of Columbia, informs me that Doctor Palmer's records pertaining to the Society have been placed in the Washington Public Library.

Doctor Palmer summarized in print "Laws for the protection of birds and game in the District of Columbia" in 1901. He followed all District and National conservation legislation, promoting it in public hearings and by personal interviews with Senators and Representatives. [Congress then, and still, is the legislative body for the District of Columbia.] It is safe to say that he influenced all such legislation from 1900 to 1924 and in some instances was the principal factor. He wrote the preliminary draft of the treaty for

protection of birds migrating between Canada and the United States (1916); and was Chairman of the Committee [other members: A. K. Fisher; W. W. Cooke] which prepared the first regulations under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (1918). He relished such activities and even after retirement he often visited congressional offices in support of measures in which he was interested.

This memorial has already made free use of the flashback and another is now necessary to bring the bird sanctuary movement into focus. In 1900 the A.O.U. Bird Protection Committee, at the suggestion of, and by means of funds provided by, Abbott H. Thayer, began the guarding of colonies of gulls and terns. This led to the sanctuary program of the National Audubon Society and to that of the Federal government through the Biological Survey and its successor the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Pelican Island, Florida, where the birds had been slaughtered by fishermen, was first of the Federal sanctuaries—a consummation of efforts by Frank M. Chapman, William Dutcher, and T. S. Palmer, with essential aid from C. L. Du Bois and Frank Bond of the United States General Land Office. The facts being submitted to President Theodore Roosevelt, he issued an Executive Order (March 14, 1903) setting apart the island “for the use of the Department of Agriculture as a preserve and breeding-grounds for native birds.”

That established a precedent. Frank M. Miller recommended similar treatment for Louisiana breeding colonies of sea birds. Through Bond's cooperation, it was learned that some of the islands involved were government property; President Roosevelt was again appealed to; and he responded, creating by decree the Breton Island Reservation (October 4, 1904). Bond, a lifelong ornithologist, being Chief Clerk of the General Land Office, was in good position to collaborate in the refuge program; Doctor Palmer threw in the resources of the Biological Survey; and William Dutcher those of the National Audubon Society; and by 1909, fifteen additional reservations for the protection of birds were made by Executive Order. Some question arose as to the legality of the method but Congressional approval was given by a law passed in 1906.

The Hawaiian Islands Bird Reservation, several large areas of lake and marsh in the public domain, as well as the reservoirs of irrigation projects in western states, were made sanctuaries in the same manner. Whatever happened later, that was the very substantial beginning of the Federal Wildlife Refuge Program, and Doctor Palmer was in the thick of it. He was a man who never seemed hurried, hence with so large an accomplishment, he must have been highly efficient.

Great as were his interests in the matters thus far discussed, that in the American Ornithologists' Union was greater. As noted in our introductory sentence, he was elected to the Class of Fellows in 1901, but he had already been engaged in business of the Union, serving on the committee which, under the Chairmanship of Dr. Jonathan Dwight, Jr., prepared the "Index to the Bulletin of the Nuttall Ornithological Club . . . 1876-1883 and to . . . The Auk . . . 1884-1900." Acknowledgment to Doctor Palmer for assistance in obtaining full names of authors reveals the biographical interest in people that was manifested by him all his life.

He was Chairman of the Committee for continuation of the Index through two decades: 1901-1910 (published 1915) and 1911-1920 (published 1929). The amount of detail required from workers on such indexes (known only to those who have been through the mill) is justified by the usefulness of their products. Doctor Palmer had individual ideas for increasing that utility by providing complete names of authors and by accompanying each of these decennial publications with a Biographical Index, containing references to obituaries printed in 'The Auk' and giving place and date of birth and death of the deceased. When no longer on the Index Committee, Doctor Palmer was largely instrumental in the continuation of the biographical sections and for completing the names of authors. Such assistance is specifically acknowledged in the Indexes for 1921-1930 (H. S. Swarth, 1934) and 1931-1940 (George Willett, 1941).

Doctor Palmer was ever interested in keeping up to date the list of deceased members of the A.O.U. and summarizes its history in the "Biographical index and list of deceased members of the American Ornithologists' Union" as follows:

"The first list of members of the American Ornithologists' Union appeared in 'The Auk' for 1886 and contained the name of one deceased member. During the next five years names of deceased members were marked merely by an asterisk but in 1892 they were first brought together in a separate list with the dates of death. This arrangement was followed until 1920 and since then the list has been published only at intervals of five years. In 1930, a further change was made by including references to obituary notices thus converting the list into a biographical index.

"The last complete list, which appeared in July 1940, contained more than 750 names and references to biographies of about 550 individuals. In 1945 the list included only additions subsequent to 1940. The present list contains 1055 names and references to biographies of 839 individuals."

This index is dated 1950 and appears to have been privately printed by Doctor Palmer. It is paged v-xxiii and was distributed with the following note: "Recipients are requested to remove the covers and insert the List in 'The Auk' for 1950, immediately after the intro-

ductory pages following the title page." As Secretary, he was for frequent issue of the list of members and would have had it annually except for the objections of Editors of 'The Auk' to so much being spent in that, to their minds, barren direction. However, the list of members is a very useful thing, and in this writer's opinion should be published at no longer than five-year intervals. From his experience as Treasurer (1920-1938) he knows that the overturn in addresses can be theoretically complete in a lustrum, the annual rate of change being about 20 to 25 per cent.

It was characteristic of Doctor Palmer to wait until he was in control of a job, then to pitch into it intensively and shape it as his own. So it was with the two Index Chairmanships and with the Committee on Biography and Bibliography; and so it was with the Secretaryship of the Union. He loved the ritual of the position at the annual meetings; the precise order of business, the calling of the roll; and, as well, the opportunity to take part in discussion of papers, motions, and resolutions; and to comment on the history of a situation, in a sonorous voice of some oratorical power.

He studied the classes of membership, doubtless to educate himself for the job, but he gave the results in short articles in 'The Auk.' He wrote also on the geographical distribution of members, on the Check-Lists, on indexes to ornithological literature, full names of authors, and attendance at meetings; and from time to time presented lists of all meetings of the Union. Probably his banker's training led him to take special interest in the permanent funds of the Union and to push the development of a Board of Investing Trustees to handle them. He was especially keen on the establishment of funds for research and was active in promoting free membership for promising students and for those in the Armed Forces in wartime. He worked hard to increase the number of complete sets of 'The Auk' in libraries and reported the results in four different papers in 'The Auk' (1920, 1924, 1929, and 1930).

Perhaps the culmination of his secretarial service was stimulation of the project, enlistment of its contributors, and editing of the resulting volume on "Fifty Years' Progress of American Ornithology 1883-1933," published by the Union in the latter year. I believe I do no injustice in stating that of the Committee for this work: Frank M. Chapman and T. S. Palmer, the former's service was more or less nominal and that Doctor Palmer is the one who conceived the venture and pushed it through. Further, his opening chapter on the history of the Union, and the closing chronology by him are among the most informative parts of the work.

The publication of obituaries of ornithologists was encouraged by the first two Editors of 'The Auk' (J. A. Allen, 1884-1912; Witmer Stone, 1912-1936) and Doctor Palmer more than kept up the tradition. He was on a Committee on Biography from 1915 and on that for Biography and Bibliography from 1919, and he wrote more biographical sketches than did any one else. At his own expense he reprinted all obituaries (except the longer memorials of Fellows) from 'The Auk,' 1884-1954 (Washington, D. C., 1954). This compilation is said to have cost the Doctor twenty dollars per volume. Many copies were distributed gratis and the remainder were turned over to the Union for sale for the benefit of the publication fund. From a letter of August 15, 1954, it is evident that Doctor Palmer intended to supplement this work, as he wrote: "I have under way, partly written, a list of the 80 or more A.O.U. memorials, giving authors, references, etc."; and, he added, "Memorials by the way are in a bad condition. Twelve are still unpublished."

Doctor Palmer sought out and recorded the place of burial of ornithologists, made pilgrimages to them, and in one case, I know of, had the tombstone (that of J. K. Townsend in Oak Hill Cemetery, D. C.) reset at his own expense (or as he said by an anonymous donor). His devotion to necrology brought some jibing, as to the effect that he would make a good sexton, and that living members had better watch out as the Doctor was not satisfied until he had *both* of the terminal dates of a prospect. But, jests aside, his activities in these directions were praiseworthy, and he set a fine example in his prolific biographical writings. Further, I would add that the worth of a Society can well be judged from the respect it pays to its deceased members; and from that point of view, T. S. Palmer contributed more than any other person toward maintaining the prestige and honor of the American Ornithologists' Union. As a further value, be it remembered, that all history, including that of our Union, is in no small part written in the biographies of individuals.

Doctor Palmer, by nature, was greatly interested in the collection of portraits of ornithologists—a hobby of our late, lamented Fellow, Ruthven Deane (1851-1934). This collection, in the making for more than half a century, through the intercession of Doctor Palmer, was presented to the Library of Congress by Deane shortly before his death. There Palmer and Frank Bond, employed by him, carefully arranged and labelled the collection, and provided it with a card index, which lists the name, dates and places of birth and death, professional position, publications, and biographical references for each individual. Here we see scope for the respective abilities of

Palmer and Bond. For the latter's expert calligraphy, see page 24 in O. W. Knight's "Birds of Wyoming" (1902). Bond made all of the illustrations for that work, which are fair as bird paintings now go, but increased his proficiency in later years, especially in portraying birds with metallic coloration. The team work here noted resulted also in an index of bird artists of the world and an indexing of the minutes of the A.O.U. Council Meetings, which Doctor Palmer persuaded the Council to deposit in the Library of Congress.

One of the most useful of Doctor Palmer's writings is: "Notes on persons whose names appear in the nomenclature of California birds, a contribution to the history of West Coast ornithology" (*Condor*, 30: 261-307, 1928). This consists mainly of brief, biographical sketches of persons for whom birds of Upper and Lower California had been named either in technical or vernacular nomenclature—about 180 in all. It is illustrated by portraits of six of them and includes an index of published portraits of 115. The introduction shows that the Doctor fully appreciated the "romance" of the subject, which was, indeed, near to his heart. This paper was enlarged and completed while he was on leave for the benefit of his health at Berkeley, California, in 1927. Too bad we do not have a compendium like it covering all of the birds in the Check-List that are named for persons.

In a work on "Ornithologists of the United States Army Medical Corps" (1942), the author, Colonel Edgar E. Hume, acknowledges much assistance from Doctor Palmer, especially in lists of species named by, or for, biographees, and toward a roster of ornithologists in the Medical Department during the First World War. About a third of the older, and half of the newer, group were affiliated with the American Ornithologists' Union.

Doctor Palmer had a great interest in longevity of scientists and an ambition to excel in that respect himself. He did better than average, reaching almost 87½ years. One of his "heroes" was Professor Joseph Beal Steere of the University of Michigan, author of "Fifty new species of Philippine Birds," whose life span was from 1842 to 1940. I have several times heard the Doctor refer to Steere as a good example. Doctor Palmer was confined to the house as a result of a broken hip the last 2½ years of his life, and died July 24, 1955. He is survived by his widow whom he married as Bertha M. Ellis, November 21, 1911; and by a ten-year younger brother, Dr. Harold K. Palmer of Los Angeles, California.

Doctor Palmer was a member of about 25 North American and 4 foreign scientific or conservation organizations. (For details, see

'Who's Who in America.')

Significant features of these memberships, not already mentioned, are that as a leading Californian ornithologist, he was made an Honorary Member of the Cooper Ornithological Society; he was President of the Biological Society of Washington 1909-1910; Vice-President of the American Society of Mammalogists 1928-1934; one of the honorary scientific brotherhood, Sigma Xi; and member of the Cosmos Club of Washington for sixty years.

For contributions of material relating to Doctor Palmer, I am indebted to Joseph S. Wade, John K. Terres, and Harold H. Bailey; and the Library of Congress; and for information as to the source of the portrait to Mrs. Bertha M. Ellis Palmer. It was taken in 1942.

Publications not referred to in the preceding text that contain biographical data on our late Fellow and long-time Secretary are: American Men of Science; National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, Vol. A, 1930, p. 474; Annual Report of the Library of Congress for the Fiscal Year 1934, p. 139; Guide to Special Collections of Prints and Photographs in the Library of Congress, 1955, p. 46; Atlantic Naturalist, 1955, 11 (1): 2. [A short appreciation by John W. Aldrich.]; and Cosmos Club Bulletin, 9 (5): 2-4, March, 1956. [Obituary by Joseph S. Wade and Paul H. Oehser.]

3 Davie Circle, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, April 20, 1956.