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## The Brookville Society of Natural History

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Following the decline of Robert Owen's experimental society at New Harmony, the state of Indiana was void of organizations devoted to scientific study and research. Several associations were attempted throughout the state, but their influence was entirely local. None of them attained reputation, prominence, or accomplishment comparable to that of the Brookville Society of Natural History, organized in 1881 by Amos W. Butler.

The founding of the society was inspired by Rufus Haymond, the first productive zoologist in Indiana after Thomas Say, "Father of American Zoology," who died at New Harmony in 1834.<sup>1</sup> Haymond was born near Clarksburg, Virginia, on June 5, 1805, and completed his training for the medical profession at the Philadelphia Medical College. During the summer of 1826, the young doctor journeyed to Brookville to visit a distant relative and decided to start his practice there. His motive for staying is not easily understood since the settlement of Brookville was suffering a severe economic depression at that time. The most probable explanation is that he had a keen interest in nature and found the region an ideal locality for the exercise of this interest.

During the years of his residence at Brookville, Haymond recorded his observations on nature in two publications. The first of these was a treatise on ornithology, titled "Birds of Southeastern Indiana." It was published in the *Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia* in 1856. The second was published in the *First Annual Report of the Geological Survey of Indiana* in 1869, when Haymond was selected as assistant to Edward T. Cox, State Geologist. Hay-

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<sup>1</sup> Will E. Edington, "There Were Giants in Those Days," *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science* (Indianapolis, Indiana, 1891- ), XLIV (1935), 27; Barton Warren Evermann, "A Century of Zoology in Indiana, 1816-1916," *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science*, 1916 (1917), 189-224.

mond reported on the physical geography of Franklin County and included a list of its mammals and birds.

Haymond's publications were valuable, they brought him deserved attention as a scientist, but his contribution as an inspiration to others of the community was of more lasting worth. That he recognized the significance which his influence might have was indicated in the introduction of the speech he presented before the Franklin Lyceum at Brookville about 1850. He said,

If I should be so fortunate in the remarks I shall make this evening as to persuade a single individual among you to turn his attention to the study and investigation of natural history or the operations of Nature displayed in her works which surround us at every step we take upon the earth, I shall feel myself well repaid for the small amount of time and labor required in the preparation of this address.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, Haymond did inspire many. One of the persons most influenced by him was Amos W. Butler, born at Brookville on October 1, 1860. As a youth, Butler became very much interested in nature and before he was sixteen, he was specializing in zoology. He wrote many years later, "Books were scarce. I soon learned of the interest in Natural History of Dr. Rufus Haymond. He was very helpful to me in acquiring a knowledge of the more common animals."<sup>3</sup> Further development of Butler's scientific thinking was evolved through his formal educational training. When he went to Brookville College, he was a student of John P. D. John, who was a professor of mathematics. After a year at Brookville College, Butler attended Hanover College in southern Indiana and was a student of John W. Coulter, one of Indiana's most prominent botanists. Finally, Butler attended Indiana University, where he was a student of Daniel Kirkwood, distinguished astronomer, and Richard Owen, noted naturalist and geologist. At Indiana University, however, Butler became so obsessed with his study of birds that he neglected the classics and was debarred from graduation.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> E. R. Quick, "Dr. Rufus Haymond," *Bulletin of the Brookville Society of Natural History*, No. 3 (College Corner, Ohio, 1888), 21-25.

<sup>3</sup> Amos W. Butler, "Early History of the Indiana Academy of Science," *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science*, XXXIII (1924), 14.

<sup>4</sup> David Starr Jordan, *The Days of a Man* (2 vols., Yonkers-on-Hudson, New York, 1922), I, 240; Edington, "There Were Giants in Those Days," *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science*, XLIV, 32-37; Marcus Ward Lyon, Jr., "Amos William Butler," *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science*, XLVII (1938), 21-25; Barton Warren Evermann, "Amos William Butler," *The Audubon Year Book*, 1932 (n.p., n.d.), 5-19.

When Butler returned to Brookville, he found a number of persons who shared his interests. Notable among these men was a Presbyterian minister, David R. Moore, who was born at Rising Sun, Indiana, on January 9, 1850. He graduated from Miami University in 1871, Lane Theological Seminary in 1875, and Princeton Theological Seminary in 1878.<sup>5</sup> Intensely alert toward all things scientific, he stimulated others in that direction. To promote greater interest, he invited those who wished to expand and exchange their information to meet at his home for informal discussions. The group held occasional lectures in the Presbyterian church, and the attendance became so large that Butler conceived the idea of a formal organization. After discussing the venture with Moore, Butler and Moore suggested the plan to the group at one of the meetings. The proposal was met with such enthusiasm that a special meeting was called on January 12, 1881, at Moore's residence. At that meeting action was taken immediately to elect officers. Moore was elected president, Charles F. Goodwin, a prominent young banker, vice-president, Butler, secretary, Edgar R. Quick, editor of the *Franklin Democrat*, correspondent, and John T. Rehme, treasurer. The new president appointed a committee, consisting of Butler, Frank Barton, and Quick, to draft a constitution.

At the second meeting, which was held on January 21, 1881, the organization decided to call itself the Brookville Society of Natural History, and it adopted a constitution. It specified departments and chose curators for each department. It decided to hold meetings every second Friday evening in the society's room over Emerson B. Rockafellar's stove store. It established the ideals of the society in the prospectus of its constitution, a portion of which is repeated here as follows:

Special features augur for the society a useful and brilliant future. The reputation of certain persons of the past generation for original research and eminence in scientific studies have already brought the name of Brookville upon National Scientific records, and some members of the society have already acquired notable records as collectors and students. The society will make the county a study and will aim to such discoveries as will not only be pleasureable to its members but of profit to the people of the county. It will seek also to establish a museum that will be a practical exhibit of its work and a credit to

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<sup>5</sup> Amos W. Butler, "David R. Moore," *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science*, XLII (1933), 18-19.

the county. It will gather together with the Smithsonian Institution and other leading scientific societies of the country, and number among its honorary members distinguished professors of science and instructors of Natural History.<sup>6</sup>

The society offered its services to the public and asked that it be made the depository for all material which might be included in a museum to benefit the public. It also scheduled a number of formal lectures. Among the prominent lecturers who addressed the group were David Starr Jordan, professor of zoology at Indiana University, John M. Coulter, David Worth Dennis, professor of biology at Earlham College, John P. D. John, who had become president of Moore's Hill College, Barton W. Evermann, prominent naturalist, and Stanley Coulter, botanist and conservationist.

The society became extremely active. One year after its founding Butler and Quick published several papers in the *Journal of the Cincinnati Society of Natural History*. Also in 1882 the society revised Haymond's report of 1869 and published it in the *Historical Atlas of Franklin County*. Quick, who had charge of preparing a list of mammals, was praised at the conclusion of his list by the following statement: "Through Mr. Quick's liberality, specimens have been placed in the museums of the Zoological Society of London, the Royal Society of Berlin, and the Cincinnati Society of Natural History."<sup>7</sup> And in the same year the entire society was encouraged by this comment: "The society has already accomplished much, and bids fair to be one of the most successful in the West."<sup>8</sup> Citizens of Brookville and its outlying regions co-operated particularly well in donating specimens to the society, and its museum grew to sizable proportions. The Brookville National Bank donated the parlor of the Walz mansion to the society for use as a museum and meeting room.

Quick published an account of the society's progress in his paper, the *Franklin Democrat*, in March, 1883. He wrote, "On this second anniversary of our birth, we congratulate ourselves and thank our friends that we have so far exceeded our highest dreams and today stand without an equal in the

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<sup>6</sup> Constitution and By-Laws of the Brookville Society of Natural History, from the scrapbook of George W. Homsher. The scrapbook is now in the Brookville Public Library, Brookville, Indiana.

<sup>7</sup> *Historical Atlas of Franklin County, Indiana* (Chicago, 1882), 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

state of Indiana. Our collection has increased to thousands of specimens and our library is now approaching its 1000th volume."<sup>9</sup>

The society published its first bulletin in 1885. Its preface read as follows:

The Brookville Society of Natural History was organized in the month of February, 1881, and one year from the date of its organization was incorporated under the laws of Indiana . . . . What has been accomplished justifies the endeavors now made to issue a Bulletin which shall proclaim the worth of the Society, and afford such a medium of literary exchange as will bring it into relationship with scientists and scientific institutions all over the world. As may be seen from the list herein published, all departments of study in natural history are represented, and measures taken from the pursuit of research in all, under the supervision of competent curators. The local field of the Society presents the necessary material for each and every department to an extent in variety and abundance exceeding any other portion of the state.<sup>10</sup>

Long before 1885, however, Butler began carrying on activities beyond the limits of the society. He attended the American Association for the Advancement of Science in August, 1881, which met at Cincinnati. The program and the congeniality of the group left a deep impression on him. In the following year, he attended the meeting held at Montreal where he increased his contacts and began to visualize the possibility of a state organization. He started to correspond with all the prominent scientists of the state in order to obtain their opinions of such an organization. From most of these men he received approval and encouragement. Later, at the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science at Ann Arbor in 1885, Butler and other scientists from Indiana held a conference and determined that the Brookville Society of Natural History, as the most active scientific society in the state, should call a meeting and prepare a program for the purpose of organizing the state society. After he returned to Brookville, Butler brought the matter before the Brookville society, and a committee, consisting of Butler, Moore, and S. P. Stoddard, was appointed to make all arrangements for a gathering of the Indiana scientists.

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<sup>9</sup> E. R. Quick, "Scientific Notes," Brookville, Indiana, *Franklin Democrat*, March 1, 1883.

<sup>10</sup> "Brookville Society of Natural History," in the *Bulletin of the Brookville Society of Natural History*, No. 1 (Richmond, Indiana, 1885), preface.

The meeting was held in the Marion County Courthouse on December 29, 1885, with John P. D. John as temporary chairman. The forty persons in attendance adopted a permanent organization with a constitution and by-laws and elected as president David Starr Jordan, president of Indiana University. Butler, Moore, Quick, and Stoddard, of the Brookville society, became charter members of the new state organization, which was named the Indiana Academy of Science. The academy held its first field meeting May 20-22, 1886, at Brookville, with the Brookville Society of Natural History as its host, and they spent the first day among the hills along the east fork of the Whitewater River. Butler wrote

In the deep water above the ford the members of the Academy went swimming. There, as Dr. Dennis said, the members saw each other as they were, a thing they had never done before. There Jordan climbed a rock just below the surface of the water and formally christened the Academy. "For," said he, "when the members of the Academy can all go swimming together, it is bound to be a success."<sup>11</sup>

Thus the Brookville Society of Natural History performed the important function of being the direct causative agent for the founding of the Indiana Academy of Science, which has become the largest organization of its sort in the country.

Meanwhile, the Brookville Society of Natural History had published its second bulletin in 1886. The society, however, lost two of the stimulants for the organization. They were Moore, who left Brookville in 1886, and Haymond, who died on July 29, 1886. Gradually the fibers of the society pulled apart. For five years it had been an extremely active and valuable organization, but it lost impetus and disintegrated rather rapidly as more emphasis and attention were given to the broader scope of the Indiana Academy of Science. Probably the main cause of its disintegration was that the constitution stated that any person in Franklin County was eligible to be a resident member of the organization; consequently, the society gained members who were not scientifically trained. The third and last of the bulletins of the Brookville Society of Natural History appeared in 1888. Within the following three years most of the material in the museum was returned to the donors or dispersed in other ways. The last meeting was held in 1890 or 1891 despite conscientious efforts for its revival.

<sup>11</sup> Butler, "Early History of the Indiana Academy of Science," *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science*, XXXIII, 15-18. There is an Amos W. Butler Collection in the Indiana University Library, Bloomington, Indiana. Editor.