

WHARTON HUBER: 1877-1942

BY EARL POOLE

The loss, through death on March 13, 1942, of Wharton Huber, President and member of the D. V. O. C., will leave a distinct gap in the ranks of the club, and of the Academy, where he served as Curator of Mammals since 1923. His quiet, earnest enthusiasm was long a distinct force in the club, as in the many other groups with which he was identified. Always ready to impart information or help others who had problems to solve, he frequently added, often unnecessarily, to his burdens in order to do so. This trait doubtless contributed to the ill health that dogged his later years.

Wharton, as he was affectionately known to his intimates, was one of the last of the old line of collecting naturalists, who laid particular emphasis on the value of data supported by specimens. He was a keen observer, an indefatigable collector, an excellent shot, and could prepare a first-class skin. His interest and skill in photography were greatly enhanced by a keen appreciation of composition, and it is unfortunate that many of his best negatives are not better known. Several of his prints that were entered in an exhibition of wild life photography held in the British Museum were retained by that institution, as outstanding examples. Another side of his character that was not so well known to many of his casual associates was his love for flowers and the great pleasure that he derived from gardening. It was a revelation to watch him plant the bulbs of some of his favorite Dahlias. Each root was carefully separated, laid in its proper place, and covered as carefully as one would cover a feeling creature; and his enthusiasm on contemplating the results of his work was akin to his evident zeal when talking about the southwest, the land that seemed to exert a perpetual pull on him, and to which he always hoped to return.

Wharton Huber was born in Germantown, November the ninth, 1877, the son of Stiles and Arabella (McCluny) Huber. His christian name was taken from a paternal grandparent who was a direct descendant of Thomas Wharton, first governor of Pennsylvania.

While Wharton was a small boy the Huber family moved to Gwynedd Valley, where he soon came under the influence of "Squire" Thomas Gillin, who took him on collecting trips and taught him to prepare a skin.

At this stage he attended the county schools, afterward going to Cheltenham Military Academy, which he left because of the excessively strict discipline then in vogue, and his resentment of partiality. He then spent some time at Penn Charter and Delancey School, where he distinguished himself chiefly as an excellent shot. At the age of fifteen he once shot ducks with President Cleveland, and had the satisfaction of shooting a larger bag than the President, who had teased the boy about his large gun.



WHARTON HUBER

He later studied engineering at Lafayette, winning his letter on the crew and playing some football, but could never wholly put his heart into the career that had been selected for him. While attending Lafayette he joined the Phi Kappa Psi fraternity.

After college he went to the Wister Institute to work on the bird collection, but also did some excellent work at preparing bone boards. After two years of this confining work he was advised to work outdoors, and went to Loudoun County, near Herndon, Virginia, where he conducted some lumbering operations, continuing his bird collecting on the side. In 1915 he went to Las Cruces, New Mexico, for six months on a collecting trip. While there he discovered the duck which he later described as *Anas novimexicana*.

In 1917 he worked with the Philadelphia Electric Company, and in April 27, 1918, married Margaretta Matilda Mason, a descendant of Charles Mason of Mason and Dixon Line fame, who shared his remaining years.

Following their marriage the Hubers spent some time in New Mexico, returning there a year later to collect for the Museum of Comparative Zoology on a trip sponsored by Colonel John E. Thayer. In 1920 he came to the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia where he at first worked in the Department of Ornithology under Dr. Witmer Stone, and was later made Curator of Mammals. In 1921 he and Fletcher Street went to Nicaragua, where they collected birds, mammals, fishes and insects. Huber entered into this work with such vigor that he contracted a fever which incapacitated him for some time. He later went to the Bear River Marshes of Utah, where he made a large collection of the ducks that were then dying of botulism by the thousands, and succeeded in amassing a large collection illustrating the successive changes of plumage. This journey was followed by two trips to the Mescalero Apache Reservation in New Mexico, with one to the Queen Charlotte Islands in between. Still later he and Mrs. Huber went to California to collect a group of the rare Pigmy Elk, *Cervus nannodes*, which were intended for a habitat group in the Academy.

In May, 1940, Wharton's ill health prompted the Hubers to move to Cedarville, Chester County, where he lived until his death in 1942.

In addition to his extensive collecting for the Academy of Natural Sciences, he found time to build up a private collection of some 4,000 North American birds and mammals.

He was a member of the Wilderness Club, the Cooper Club, the American Society of Mammalogists and the A. O. U., served two terms as President of the Geographic Society of Philadelphia, and three as President of the D. V. O. C.