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In Memoriam

CHARLES DEAN BUNKER

1870 - 1948

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CHARLES DEAN BUNKER

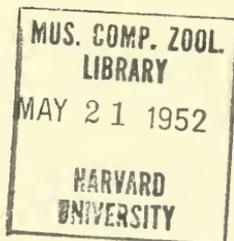
1870 - 1948

UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS

MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Miscellaneous Publication No. 3, pp. 1-11, 1 figure

Published December 15, 1951



BY

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LAWRENCE, KANSAS



CHARLES DEAN BUNKER. April 24, 1948, photo. by Rollin H. Baker

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Charles Dean Bunker, 1870-1948

BY

E. RAYMOND HALL

Charles Dean Bunker died on September 5, 1948, at his home at 1330 West Ninth Street, Lawrence, Kansas. He was cremated and his ashes were scattered from the tower of the Museum of Natural History at the University of Kansas. He was born on December 12, 1870, at Mendota, Illinois, the youngest of the seven children of David and Susan Jane (Spencer) Bunker. On January 19, 1897, at Lawrence, Kansas, he married Clara Parnell, the daughter of Andrew Jackson and Elvira (Thompson) Parnell. Two daughters and no sons resulted from this union. He is survived by his wife, his daughter Fedalma, his daughter Audrey Maurine (Mrs. Don P. Warner), and the latter's two sons, James Donald and Charles Harry.

His schooling was delayed because his parents, acting on medical advice, encouraged him to spend his childhood out of doors instead of in school. This may have had much to do with developing his interest in natural history; much of his time afield was given to hunting and to observing animals.

In the spring of 1947 Remington Kellogg came into my office and suggested that I write down some facts that Bunker had told him a few minutes before. According to these notes: "Bunker always was interested in birds. The local ornithological authority, in Mendota, was J. Banning, a taxidermist, who mounted birds for bar-rooms. Bunker asked to be taught how to mount birds and Banning said that he would give the instruction for \$10. Bunker never expected to be able to obtain \$10 and had to pass up the opportunity. But Bunker shot birds and brought them to the taxidermist to mount [in return for lessons in taxidermy or not, the notes do not state]. Bunker brought to the taxidermist the last passenger pigeon shot in that town. The bird was mounted. Years later, Bunker wrote for the pigeon but the taxidermist, then 80 years old, wanted \$100 for it and Bunker never got the specimen. In 1890 with his parents, Bunker moved to Lawrence, Kansas. There he worked in the Hoadley Printing Office.

"In Lawrence, Bunker two or three times unsuccessfully approached L. L. Dyche of the University of Kansas for a job. After

Dyche returned with his exhibit of mounted mammals from the Chicago World's Fair, Bunker again asked him for a job. Dyche terminated this chance meeting on the street by doing his best to discourage Bunker. A short time later Bunker went to Dyche's work rooms where 'Pug' Saunders was taxidermist and talked with Dyche. Although Dyche again attempted to discourage Bunker, he explained that his ambition in life was to mount birds, and after some further discussion was hired for \$15 per month."

This employment began on September 1, 1895. Bunker continued the taxidermy work with Dyche at the University of Kansas until June 1, 1901. On that date he went to the University of Oklahoma as taxidermist where he remained until the autumn of 1904 when the building that housed much of his work burned. He returned to Lawrence that autumn and in the following summer worked in the field with Charles Sternberg, the professional collector of fossil vertebrates. In the autumn of 1905 Bunker resumed work at the University of Kansas, under L. L. Dyche, and aided in installing the mounted specimens and accessories in the huge panorama of North American Mammals in the Museum of Natural History Building that had been finished in 1901. He continued in active service with the University until July 1, 1942, when he was retired. Even after that, he regularly visited the Museum on week days until the beginning of his final illness in the spring of 1948.

In December of 1909 when L. L. Dyche left the University to accept the position of Fish and Game Warden for the State of Kansas, Bunker remained as "Assistant Curator in Charge" of the Recent (as opposed to the fossil) vertebrates in the Museum of Natural History. Bunker fortunately had, or early developed, a gratifying sense of responsibility for safeguarding the study collections of vertebrates, rich in birds and mammals, that had been gathered by Dyche and under Dyche's Curatorship. Dyche collected widely in North America—from Alaska to New Mexico—and gathered long series of the larger game mammals from areas where many of the kinds are now extinct. Most of these specimens carried only field numbers on rough labels of wood, metal, cloth or pasteboard. A series of field numbers, beginning with number one for each year or for each field trip had been provided by Dyche. These numbers and, or the labels were the clues to data that might be found in the informally-kept field note-books, but almost as often as not, some of the essential data could be obtained only from Dyche—through correspondence or by conversation with him when he visited the Museum. Bunker deserves the thanks of naturalists for having

seen to it that these data were associated with the specimens while Dyche was still alive. Under Bunker's direction a consecutive set of catalogue numbers, in large ledger books, was established for birds and another set for mammals. The pertinent data for each specimen were entered in these catalogues and were entered also in permanent ink on lasting labels attached to the specimens themselves. A systematic catalogue for each class of vertebrates, consisting of large loose-leaved ledger books was prepared. Thus, an excellent cataloguing system was installed which preserved the scientific values of irreplaceable specimens, which made the data and specimens available for use, and which also taught to the student assistants, who prepared the catalogues, a sound system of cataloguing and of associating data with specimens. This system exerted a profound influence on modern curatorial practice in ornithological and mammalogical collections of American museums generally because Bunker's assistants applied part or all of his system to the many other collections with which they became associated. In the last half of his period of service at the University, Bunker emphasized the study collections and these were his "tools" for giving training to student assistants. This is noteworthy because Dyche had emphasized instead the display and exhibit features of the Museum and it was in this work that Bunker served his museum apprenticeship.

Bunker was quick to appraise the worth of persons that he met. Of those who were found wanting at first meeting, few were able subsequently to change his opinions of them. Some of his personal attachments, and especially disaffections, are best understood if viewed in the light of the position that Bunker occupied. In his early years at the University of Kansas Museum, Clarence E. McClung in Zoölogy, Samuel W. Williston in Paleontology, and Lewis Linsley Dyche in Natural History, all men of national renown at the time, were still at the University. When the two last-named did leave they were not replaced. Bunker carried on with the modern vertebrates as Handel Tongue Martin (Williston's assistant) did with the fossil vertebrates. Because the formal education of each of them had gone no further than grammar school, they were not assigned teaching duties in the University. They cared for, and added somewhat to, the Museum collections, developing meanwhile a liking for the freedom of initiative which, perforce, they exercised. Later, from time to time, when new men were appointed to the Department of Zoölogy, the newly appointed scientists, or the University administrators, or sometimes both, pro-

posed arrangements which would have restricted somewhat the freedom of action of Bunker and Martin. They resisted these "restrictions" and by various means circumvented most of them.

One of Bunker's most notable accomplishments was the training of a disproportionately large number of naturalists in a student-body of three thousand to five thousand. Among the many who came more or less under his influence, some of the more productive scholars were William H. Burt, Lawrence V. Compton, David H. Dunkel, Claude W. Hibbard, the late John Eric Hill, A. Remington Kellogg, Jean M. Linsdale, the late Wilbur S. Long, Charles C. Sperry, R. A. Stirton, Alexander Wetmore, and Theodore S. White. Bunker's system was to try out, often on a volunteer basis, the college undergraduate, next to "promote" him to receive a small hourly wage, and finally to give him responsibility for the curatorial care of one of the collections. Closer supervision by Bunker would have obtained better curatorial results, but might have revealed to the student that Bunker was not telling the whole truth when he said that lack of education and scientific know-how required him to depend entirely on the student to insure that all was in order and scientifically accurate. The combination of gratitude to Bunker for finally awarding the job, a determination to see that Bunker's work was done in a way that would protect him from criticism and censure by his superiors, and the responsibility for mastering the literature, caused the student to learn as much as he could, as fast as he could, by his own efforts. The student assistants were given to understand also that the collection must be growing to justify its existence and that it was up to them to collect. Bunker, the assistants thought, lacked the time to do this himself. For one thing, he had to cut wood almost every week end at his cabin seven miles southwest of Lawrence. The students were grateful to "Bunk" for permitting them to ride there with him. His cabin was well equipped for the student who was preparing study skins. The availability of Bunker to identify a bird, mammal, or snake new to the student was another facility. His commendation for almost every specimen, because it was an early record, or a late record, or because it was needed to fill out a series, encouraged the student to collect as almost no other system could have done. That was Bunker's system in the early twenties. Probably the large measure of responsibility placed on the student assistant was the reason for much of Bunker's success in training able naturalists. The system was approximately the same in the thirties except that in summer he took students on collecting trips also to Arizona, New

Mexico, and Colorado where they became acquainted with a variety of faunas. The students thought that Bunker was the "salt of the earth." His generosity toward needy students who assisted with the work in the Museum was remarkable. It was their privilege to use, even for their own purely personal projects, any equipment or resources that the Museum or Bunker, himself, might have. Under Bunker the student assistants dedicated their zoological efforts to the advancement of the collections and Bunker dedicated the Museum's resources to the advancement of the student assistants. As experience and maturity later brought to his assistants a fuller understanding of his motives and some of his methods, their regard and affection for him was increased still more. Evidence of this regard was the alacrity with which his former assistants responded in 1942 to the suggestion of William H. Burt that a fund be created to supplement the small retirement allowance that Bunker received beginning in that year. Animals which were named in his honor were *Neotoma bunker* Burt (Trans. San Diego Soc. Nat. Hist., 7: 181, October 31, 1932), *Antrozous bunker* Hibbard (Jour. Mamm., 15:227, May 15, 1934) and *Marmota monax bunker* Black (Jour. Mamm., 16:319, November 15, 1935).

In his early years with the University, Bunker operated the projection machine for L. L. Dyehe when the latter gave his popular illustrated lectures in the Kansas City region. Despite his observance of the self-assured Dyehe while he delighted and swayed audiences, Bunker never overcame his own natural shyness in speaking to a group. His one venture in this direction, he told me, was a talk on birds before a group of ladies in Lawrence. Despite having written notes to guide him, his nervousness, when he arose to speak, so affected his throat-muscles that he was unable effectively to say what he wished. Consequently, he thereafter consistently refused to speak to groups of people.

Bunker published little. Possibly he felt that his lack of formal education in bibliographic practices and scientific techniques handicapped him in preparing manuscript. Probably he recognized that his own responsibility in the University hierarchy was more with the objective, than the subjective, aspects of the museum materials. Certainly, when I was associated with him from 1920 to 1923 and in his retirement from 1944 until his death, he preferred that some one of the student assistants, instead of himself, publish on any noteworthy specimen or observation, because he wished the assistant to derive whatever credit attached to the report. There did appear under his name, nevertheless, four publications as follows:

"The Stormy Petrel," an ornithological magazine in 5 numbers, of 8 pages each, of which I have seen only number 5. This magazine appeared in the period of April to August, 1890, at Mendota, Illinois. Bunker and Park were co-authors.

"Habits of the Black-Capped Vireo (*Vireo atricapillus*) with one photo." Condor, 12:70-73, 1 fig., April, 1910.

"The Birds of Kansas," Kansas Univ. Sci. Bull., 7:137-158, June, 1913.

"The Kit Fox," Science, 92:35-36, July 12, 1940.

Bunker's verbal explanation of these publications was that the vireo article would not have been written except for the assistance of Alexander Wetmore and that the one on the birds of Kansas was prepared by Dix Teachenor and contemporary student assistants. In the correspondence file of the Museum, along with a rejection slip from a Kansas City newspaper, there is a manuscript, in Bunker's own hand and prepared sometime before World War I, contending that the food habits of the non-native English Sparrow were so far beneficial that the bird did not deserve the reputation for evil which the writings of some ornithologists had gained for it. Bunker cited his findings as to the large number of the destructive cankerworm eaten by these birds at Lawrence.

Bunker had invitations to join other institutions. Old letters in the Museum reveal that he refused in 1905 the position of Preparator in Paleontology in the Field Columbian Museum of Chicago and, in 1915, the position of Assistant Superintendent of the Zoological Garden in Philadelphia.

His travels took him to the Wichita Mountains in Oklahoma in 1903. In 1919 he went to the Kenai Peninsula of Alaska with Dr. John H. Outland and friends, and saved specimens of large mammals for the University of Kansas Museum. In the summer and autumn of 1911 Bunker and his assistant, Theodore Rocklund, collected along the northern, western and southern borders of Kansas. In the autumn of 1912 Bunker spent three months in west-central Kansas. Birds were the principal objective on each of these trips in Kansas. In 1915 he visited Philadelphia and in 1922 southern California. In the thirties he took collecting parties to Arizona, New Mexico, and Colorado. His daughter, Fedalma, has told me that when he was no longer able to join in the strenuous field trips, he was a changed man; he seemed to feel that his efficiency and usefulness had been definitely impaired.

Natural history was Bunker's occupation and, although his salary always was small, he seldom gave time to outside ventures that

promised personal financial gain. The one such venture that I know of took place about 1913 when he and Theodore Rocklund accepted the local agency for the Hupmobile auto. It is my impression that they sold two cars—one to themselves and a second to Walter R. Kibbie. The service given the customer was so good that Kibbie willed his Hupmobile to Bunker. When Kibbie died, in 1922, Bunker, for sentimental, rather than economic, reasons went to Riverside, California, and drove the 1914 model car back to Lawrence, Kansas. Bunker definitely was not a “joiner” and the Modern Woodmen of America, so far as the writer knows, was the only fraternal order with which he was affiliated. In the thirties he enthusiastically devoted considerable time and labor to helping William R. Green of Lawrence build a zoo and rustic building for housing historical materials of local interest. This was done with the ill-founded hope that such a development would attract municipal support for its maintenance.

Although Bunker encouraged his assistants to collect specimens of all classes of vertebrates, his personal interest was greatest in birds. When he perfected the dermestid beetle method of cleaning skeletons, he concentrated on birds. The splendid collection that resulted will long be a monument to his energy. Bunker was sincere and serene in feeling that his projects were worthy, but he was modest indeed in appraising his own personal accomplishment. In the years before 1920 he built traveling cases of mounted birds that were widely and effectively used in the public schools of Kansas. In 1915 his election to full membership in the American Ornithologists' Union was an honor which he deeply appreciated.

In his last years his greatest pleasure seemed to be obtained from the accounts that came to him of the successes and achievements of those who had received training from him. He was especially pleased, shortly before his death, to learn that there had been established, in the Kansas University Endowment Association, the Charles Dean Bunker Loan Fund for needy University students interested in natural history study.

Charley Bunker's generosity to his assistants, his modesty, his extensive fund of knowledge concerning birds and mammals, his uncommon sense about natural history museums and the ways in which they could be useful, and his effective system for training naturalists earned for him a wide reputation among zoologists, and established the University of Kansas as a place for the development of mammalogists and ornithologists.

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Transmitted October 22, 1951.

PRINTED BY
FERD VOILAND, JR., STATE PRINTER
TOPEKA, KANSAS
1951


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