

Reminiscences of 'Strick'

-by George E. Ball

The following is the text of a presentation by George E. Ball, on the occasion of the first annual Strickland Lecture, March 6th, 1996.

Tradition evokes in one a deep feeling of the very best of the past-- memories of incredible bravery, foresight, opportunities seized, great literature, great architecture, great music, great thought-- the things that make life worth living, or conversely, the things worth dying for, to preserve their memory.

I recall vividly the night I had the privilege of attending a ceremony in the lecture hall in the Jardin des Plantes, in Paris- the very hall in which Buffon and Lamarck had lectured nearly 200 years previously, and in which Cuvier and Geoffroy de St. Hilaire held their great debates. The hall was filled with prominent Frenchmen, many wearing a small red emblem, which I learned signified membership in the Legion of Honor-- **a reminder of distinction, of greatness.**

The occasion was the presentation of a sword to the late Serge Balachowsky, then head of the Entomology Department of the Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle. Balachowsky had been inducted recently into the National Academy of Science of France, and he was entitled to wear a ceremonial sword on state occasions. In the lapel of his suit coat, Balachowsky wore the red emblem of the Legion of Honor, and walked with a pronounced limp-- something to remind him of the time that he spent in the company of the Gestapo in wartime France. He had been a member of the Resistance, and when captured, he received the treatment reserved for such individuals. But, because of his knowledge of infectious diseases-- he had been on the staff of the Institut Pasteur-- and the German need for such knowledge, his life was spared.

The sword to be presented was purchased by Balachowsky's colleagues -- a signal of their respect and affection for him, and what he stood for. The sword itself, that he requested, was that of a naval officer from the early part of the 19th Century. This was the time when French naval ships carried out extensive explorations in the Tropics of the world, in the course of which biological material was collected that came to the Museum National, and came to form a major part of the great collection housed there now. The study of these collections was an important component of establishing French influence in the development of biology, particularly comparative morphology and systematics. The sword, as well was a **reminder of the days of growth and turmoil of the French Empire-- of French grandeur, I suppose.**

I must not linger on the feeling of electricity that permeated that hall as Balachowsky's associates arose to speak of his scientific contributions, as well as his wartime contributions, and he himself spoke about the French expeditions that brought back the biological riches that their crews obtained in the far corners of the world. I found the occasion to be overwhelming emotionally, and I was not even French. I was touched by **TRADITION.**

Tradition-- what is it?

Ralph Klein, our distinguished premier, and his drinking buddies at his favorite Calgary watering hole, probably think, in their few moments of sobriety early in the evening, that **tradition** is the mash from which that renowned Alberta ale, **Traditional**, is brewed.

With a less restrictive concept, they would be nearly right. If one thinks of information about past meritorious actions, beliefs, attitudes, et cetera, as the analogue of the mash from which ale is made, and the transfer of this information orally as the analogue of the brewing process, the recipients of the information are being treated to tradition, just as the frequenters of taverns are being treated to **Traditional Ale**.

During the past few days John Spence and company have been in the process of developing tradition-- in this instance, centered around a departed person of stature, who happened to be an entomologist, and who founded the University of Alberta's Department of Entomology-- an administrative unit of academic endeavor that exists no longer.

To paraphrase, indeed to warp, Shakespeare's version of Marc Antony's address to the Roman Senate on the death of Julius Caesar, I am not here to bury the Department of Entomology, but to praise its founder. It is especially fitting to speak of Professor Strickland on this occasion, that marks the main social event of the First Strickland Celebration.

In his lifetime, I did not know Professor Strickland all that well, for he and his wife, Alice, departed to their retirement home in Victoria, British Columbia, before Kay and I arrived with our two boys, in 1954. I had met him on a short visit to Edmonton, the previous summer, and Kay and I visited the Stricklands once, in 1955, in Victoria. He was very cordial and friendly, and was clearly a person who one would dearly have loved to have had as a colleague, or mentor. People of his compassion and humanity are rare commodities in the University now.

But, daily-- as for the past 42 years-- I am in close contact with the legacy that he left, in the form of insect collections, library, and a card catalogue of records of Alberta insects. These are tools used in taxonomic research, and in the modest extension work that the Strickland Entomological Museum continues to do. In courses that my colleagues and I have given, we have used frequently the colored wall charts and other teaching aids that he prepared so skillfully and painstakingly. In a sense, then, we have maintained contact with Strick. He continues to be a part of us, though physically, he departed some 34 years ago.

I propose to speak about:

EDGAR HAROLD STRICKLAND, born in 1889, died in 1962.

I will avoid a biography, as such. Brian Hocking provided one, in a brilliant two page obituary, published in the Canadian Entomologist, in 1963. Also, in Dr. Hocking's account of the history of the Department of Entomology from its founding in 1922 until 1964, the year his report was written, Professor Strickland's contributions figure prominently. I wish to offer some summary remarks about his career.

"Strick", as he was known to his colleagues of similar age and stature (certainly, I did not venture to address him thus) was all things that a citizen should be. John Kennedy's aphorism "Ask NOT what your country can do for you, but rather ask what YOU can do for your country" could have been composed on the basis of Strick's life.

He served in two world wars, in the First, in a machine gun company; he was wounded in France, in 1918; in the second, much to his regret, he was declared too old for overseas service, so he contented himself with serving as Commanding Officer of the Army Basic Training Unit at Wetaskiwin, which is located some 40 miles south of Edmonton. Also, he served as aide-de-camp to the Lieutenant Governor. He attained the rank of Colonel, and was addressed thus for the rest of his life, by many of his younger colleagues and students.

Returning to campus in 1945, at the end of World War II, he was instrumental in obtaining adequate housing for veterans who were students, and as well, he saw that the housing needs were met of young, new and impecunious faculty members and their families: they received inexpensive housing on what was then the southeastern corner of the campus. My family and I enjoyed this great benefit when we came to Edmonton.

As a member of the faculty, he seemed to have been indefatigable. He was a superb teacher, and before departing on military leave in 1940, he had given as many as five courses in a year, and was facing the prospect of seven, at that time.

He realized the importance of knowing as much as possible about the local fauna, and he set about collecting, preserving, and identifying with a will. He built not only a very useful collection himself, but also his spirit was such that the Department became the recipient of several other important collections because their owners valued the friendship and cooperation that they had received from Strick.

His entomological research, summarized in 60 scientific papers and numerous government reports, collectively was very broad. He conducted studies on every major pest species known in the Canadian prairies at the time he worked, and from these studies came practical recommendations that depended upon knowledge of life histories of the pest species, and that were cheap to apply-- just what was required through the years of the Great Depression.

He prepared a number of faunal lists, the most impressive two being of the Orders Diptera and Hymenoptera. These were based on a lot of personal collecting, and as well, on painstaking searches of the literature.

I want to tell a few stories that encapsulate my impressions of Strick.

Taxonomic publications-- what should they feature?

Rowan and the development of the collections

Bequaert, and the aculeate wasps from southern Alberta

Wheat stem sawfly-- CHECK PAUL RIEGERT

In 1925, wanted to investigate the genetics.

The ptilinum of higher Diptera

The elytral locking mechanisms of beetles

The dangers of DDT and like broad spectrum biocides.

Appointment of Brian Hocking -- his eye to the future; another great part of his legacy.

Like Julius Caesar in Gaul, he came, he saw, he conquered.

He CAME to Alberta to LEARN and eventually to TEACH. He did both with distinction and aplomb.

He SAW what had to be done to develop knowledge of insects in Alberta, and he did the research that set entomological enquiry in the proper directions. This vision encompassed morphology, development, systematics, behavior, and above all applied entomology. He SAW a major role in assisting as best he could development of agriculture in the province.

He CONQUERED the hearts and minds of those whom he touched in the course of a lifetime.

Brian Hocking wrote, in 1963: Professor Strickland made his generous contract with life early, and he kept it to the end.

Edgar Harold Strickland showed the way and provided the tools. The Department that he established and that continued for some 72 years no longer exists, but that is the only part of his legacy that we have no longer. Strickland would have been disappointed by the loss, but I expect he would have set about identifying the opportunities that the changed circumstances provide. He would have continued his educational activities and the pursuit of knowledge of insects, as best as he could do.

WE, WHO METAPHORICALLY, ARE THE BEARERS OF THE TORCH THAT HE LIT, CAN DO NO LESS.

WE MUST DO NO LESS.

FLOREAT ENTOMOLOGIA (may entomology flourish)