

GLEANINGS FROM THE LIFE OF J. WARREN JACOBS, SCIENTIST

ANNA M. FONNER

A ring which belonged to the late Joseph Warren Jacobs of Waynesburg, Pennsylvania, bears the inscription, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country." This quotation is appropriate to the life of Mr. Jacobs. Until his death in 1947, he was one of the nation's authorities on ornithology and oology, and was the world's foremost builder of bird-houses. His experience in the field of oology was great, and his knowledge of birds was broad. Many professors from prominent colleges and universities came to Waynesburg to talk with him and to learn from his experience. Yet, despite world-wide fame as a naturalist in the truest sense of the word, relatively few of his fellow residents in Waynesburg knew or cared about J. Warren Jacobs, Scientist.

However, some of our nation's lawmakers knew of this scientific work, and in the early 1900's a bill was introduced into Congress to confiscate the J. Warren Jacobs collection of birds' eggs and scientific

Miss Fonner, an August 1967 graduate of Waynesburg College, is a granddaughter of J. Warren Jacobs.—Editor

Note: Instead of asking Miss Fonner to document her paper in the usual way the editor has chosen to reproduce the following four paragraphs from one of Miss Fonner's letters:

"There has never been a biography written of Mr. Jacobs, and I have discovered a wealth of material that would make a very complete and interesting book. In addition to interviews with several of Mr. Jacobs' sons and daughters, I was given free access to Mr. Jacobs' own personal notes and records. All of my material came from these sources.

"Among Mr. Jacobs' personal papers I found many interesting items. Copies of published manuscripts, complete records of every egg in his collection, letters from personal friends and dignitaries, his diploma and gold medal awarded at the St. Louis Exposition, personal diaries, old account books and an assortment of notes written on scraps of paper. I browsed through the many volumes of the guest book from the Jacobs Museum of Applied Oology. I found a hand-written copy of the Jacobs family history, tracing his ancestry back to the Kent family of Derry County, Ireland. He was a great-grandson of Thomas Kent who fought with a Maryland company in the Revolution.

"Among the personal effects of Mr. Jacobs, are pen and ink drawings of various birds with their nests in natural settings, some of them drawn when he was just seventeen-years-old. My search also turned up several poems he had written, most of them pertaining to things of nature.

"I titled my manuscript 'Gleanings from the life of J. Warren Jacobs, Scientist,' for that is just what it is. I gleaned bits and pieces of his life from the wealth of material available. Someday, I hope to write his complete biography."

records. The reason given for this move was the idea that no private individual had the right to own such a complete scientific project. The bill was defeated, and Jacobs was left to pursue his life's study in peace.

If the bill had not been defeated, this scientific work would have been lost to posterity. J. Harold Jacobs, registered architect of Waynesburg, and a son of the late J. Warren Jacobs, told me the following story. His father's egg collection was housed in large, hand-made glass cases in an upstairs room of his home. When his father learned of the proposed bill, he removed all of the screws from the tops of the glass cases and made a large, wooden mallet. If the bill had passed, he intended to remove the tops of the cases and destroy the collection. Cases, eggs and mallet are still intact, and in the possession of the Jacobs family.

J. Warren Jacobs, Scientist, was born December 5, 1868, in a log cabin, located approximately two miles south of Waynesburg, in a rural area known as Smith Creek, Franklin Township, Greene County, Pennsylvania. He was the eighth of ten children born to Henry and Eleanor Kent Jacobs. Warren was a delicate, sensitive child — a contradiction to his burly, blacksmith father. At a very early age, he showed an intense interest in nature and a definite artistic talent. When Warren was eight years old, his father moved his blacksmith shop and family to the village of Waynesburg, where Warren remained a resident until his death, February 27, 1947.

The fine craftsmanship of Henry Jacobs, blacksmith, buggy maker and wagon builder, was known for miles around, and was much in demand. His buggies and wagons were sturdy creations, often embellished with beautiful hand-painted scrollwork. The unusual thing about this scrollwork was that it was done by young Warren. A child, not yet in his teens, he accompanied his father on his trips throughout the district and painted the buggies and wagons.

The sight of a little boy hand-decorating his father's creations was, naturally, a curiosity, and always drew a large crowd of interested observers. Once, at a farm near Graysville, Pennsylvania, about twenty miles from Waynesburg, the usual group of "sidewalk superintendents" collected to watch Warren paint. They discovered that it would be a long process and took seats on the top rail of a wooden fence. Finally, the fence became so overloaded with men that it broke, throwing splintered boards and spectators onto the ground in a heap, much to the delight of the "boy artist."

Warren Jacobs' formal schooling ended with the sixth grade, but



This picture of Mr. Jacobs was made about three years before his death.

his education continued throughout his life. By the time he was fourteen, he had read through the Bible four times and completed the Dictionary twice. He was completely fascinated by the wonders of nature, and his curiosity was never satisfied. He spent so much time communing with nature that he was considered a "sissy" by other boys his age and by his older brothers. His blacksmith father looked at it a little differently. He considered young Warren an insult to his own masculinity, and when he could not interest the boy in an apprenticeship at the forge and anvil, suggested, indelicately, that his seventh son find remunerative employment immediately and pay his own "baggage."

Warren turned to his artistic talent and began a lifelong career of sign painting. His mastery with a brush soon earned for him a reputation for skill and originality that is still unsurpassed in his home and neighboring counties.

His artistry with pen and ink also emerged at this time, and he was much in demand to write family histories and to enter records into family Bibles. Each page of his distinctive penmanship was bordered with beautiful, delicate designs in colored inks. (The examples of this man's pen-and-ink artistry that I have seen defy description.)

It was during one of these assignments that he met his future bride. He had been commissioned by a Waynesburg grocer, Jasper Dulany, to enter records in the Dulany family Bible. At this home, he met Mr. Dulany's daughter, Emma, whom he later married.

J. Warren Jacobs and Mary Emma Dulany were married March 24, 1897, at the Dulany home in East Waynesburg. After their marriage, they made their home at 404 South Washington Street, Waynesburg, Pennsylvania. They became the parents of twelve children — six boys and six girls. Seven of their nine surviving children live in or near Waynesburg at the present time.

Although Mr. Jacobs painted signs to provide the necessities for his family, most of his time was spent roaming the fields and wooded hillsides in pursuit of his studies of ornithology and oology. His income as a sign painter suffered, not only from his scientific pursuits, but also from his convictions. As one of his daughters phrased it, "Money was pretty scarce. Pop would never paint a sign for a restaurant that sold liquor, even if it would keep the gas from being shut off tomorrow."

As the Jacobs family grew, so did the J. Warren Jacobs Museum of Applied Oology. Advertisements for the Museum state that it was

"an institution for the study of behavior and relationship of birds." Mr. Jacobs observed birds intensively, sometimes taking eggs for the purpose of studying them. Each set of eggs in this large collection is numbered and a detailed record is kept of the date, time of day, location, conditions of nest and eggs, measurements and coloration of eggs, etc., along with Mr. Jacobs' personal comments and observations. He took sets for study and comparison and he specialized in abnormalities. Mr. Jacobs' contributions to the fields of ornithology and oology were great enough to earn for him a Gold Medal at the St. Louis Exposition of 1904.

During my interview with one of Jacobs' sons, he reminisced about his father's trip to the St. Louis Exposition. He mentioned the fact that his father spent his last dollar to buy a small merry-go-round there, and to have it dismantled and shipped home to his children. Then he had to wire for money to come home on. The merry-go-round was ridden and enjoyed by all the children in the neighborhood for years.

The merry-go-round is a thing of the past, but the gold medal-winning scientific work, enlarged by forty-three years of additional study, still exists.

Much of the Jacobs study and observation concerned the mystery of migration. He believed that birds returned to the vicinity of their last nesting place. This idea was proved to his satisfaction many times, but one of the most unusual bits of evidence to support this theory is in the form of four sets of crow eggs. Mr. Jacobs collected these sets, one each year for four consecutive years, in the same general vicinity. The scientific value of their discovery is the fact that, rather than being the normal blue-green, they are definitely rust in color.

His records also show that he has established the genealogy of certain birds through cell structure and coloration of eggs.

As a part of his study of migration, Mr. Jacobs built a multiple room house for a colony of purple martins and observed the results. Over a period of a year the flock had expanded so much that he had to build a second house. From his observations he concluded that the old birds as well as the young were returning. Within a few years he had built four bird-houses, each able to house one hundred pairs of birds. The ornate structure attracted many people, and Jacobs received several requests for bird-houses and feeding stations.

This was the beginning of the Jacobs Bird-house Company which, for over fifty years, sold thousands of custom-made bird-houses.

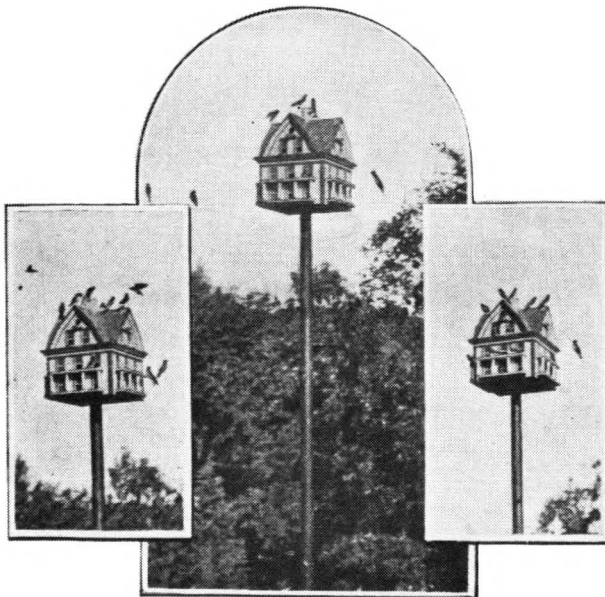


Mr. Jacobs, age 27. For many years, this was the way J. Warren Jacobs traveled over the country on his field trips.



J. Warren Jacobs with his two oldest children, Marie and Ben. Mr. Jacobs made this "contraption" just to entertain his children. He called it a "Mule-a-mobile."

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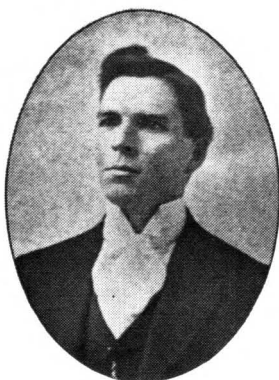
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The Birds are Your Friends, Encourage and Protect Them

By J. Warren Jacobs, President,
Jacobs Bird-House Co.

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J. WARREN JACOBS
PRESIDENT AND GENERAL MANAGER
JACOBS BIRD-HOUSE CO.

EDITOR OF
AMERICAN BIRD-HOUSE JOURNAL

AUTHOR

"Gleanings No. 2, The Story of a Martin Colony," 1903.

"Gleanings No. 5, The Purple Martin and Houses for its Summer Home," 1909.

"Gleanings No. 5," First, Second and Third Supplements.

Numerous magazine articles on bird houses and their occupants.

FELLOW

American Association for the Advancement of Science.

MEMBER

American Ornithologists' Union.

National Association of Audubon Societies.

The Wilson Ornithological Club.

Cooper Ornithological Club of California.

Western Pennsylvania Ornithologists' Association.

Michigan Ornithological Club.

Oologists' Association of America.

Advisory Council, World's Congress on Birds, World's Fair, Chicago, 1893.

National Geographic Society.

American Forestry Association.

Corresponding Member, Delaware Valley Ornithological Club.

(Foreign) British Royal Society of Arts and Manufactures.

AWARD

Diploma and Highest Award Gold Medal for Economic and Scientific Ornithological Studies, conferred by the International Jury of Awards, Universal Exposition, St. Louis, 1904.



Inside front cover of *The American Bird-House Journal* shows both sides of the gold medal awarded to Mr. Jacobs at the St. Louis Universal Exposition, 1904.

Henry Ford bought fifteen, and William Rockefeller ordered six. Jacobs bird-houses were known in forty-eight states, and in Mexico, Canada and Russia. He built houses for wrens, chickadees, nuthatches, titmice, cardinals and song sparrows, as well as for the purple martins. Martin houses were the largest and the most ornate. One of them, the Capitol, weighed more than five hundred pounds and was almost eight feet tall. After Mr. Jacobs' death, his sons, who had other interests, closed the business that had become almost a byword in many states and countries.

During the last few years of his life, Mr. Jacobs turned a steep bank on Ten Mile Creek at the back of his property into a level bird sanctuary, with small bird-houses, several varieties of trees and climbing, flowering vines for nesting places.

Many articles written by Mr. Jacobs, and based on his scientific studies, have been published in such journals as the *Pennsylvania Zoological Bulletin*, *Bird Lore* and the *Oologist*. Mr. W. E. Clyde Todd, in *Birds of Western Pennsylvania*, quotes Mr. Jacobs' scientific findings of the purple martin and other birds native to southwestern Pennsylvania.

Mr. Jacobs was a Fellow in the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He was a member of the American Ornithologists' Union, National Association of Audubon Societies, The Wilson Ornithological Club, Cooper Ornithological Club of California, Western Pennsylvania Ornithologists' Association, Michigan Ornithological Club, Oologists' Association of America, Advisory Council of World's Congress on Birds at the Chicago World's Fair 1893, National Geographic Society, American Forestry Association, Corresponding Member of Delaware Valley Ornithological Club, Honorary Board of World's Museum of Comparative Oology at Santa Barbara, California, and (foreign) British Royal Society of Arts and Manufactures.

He received Honorable Mention for Scientific Studies of Birds, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893, and in 1904, Mr. Jacobs received a diploma and Highest Award Gold Medal for Economic and Scientific Ornithological Studies, conferred by the International Jury of Awards, Universal Exposition, St. Louis, Missouri.

The Jacobs Museum of Applied Oology received visitors from all over the world. All of these persons are registered in a guest book, which includes several volumes and is intact today along with the collection of eggs and complete scientific records for each set. The

signatures in this book include those of William Howard Taft and William Jennings Bryan.

Mr. Jacobs received world-wide recognition as a scientist, but to residents of his home town he was J. Warren Jacobs, sign painter. A gentleman once came to Waynesburg to fulfill a speaking engagement. He was a well known public speaker and a collector of autographs of famous people. During his talk before a group of local businessmen, a member of the audience brought forth peals of laughter by asking if there were anyone in Waynesburg whose autograph he would like. The laughter turned to amazement and a few expressions of thoughtful recognition when the guest replied that yes, there was one. J. Warren Jacobs, Scientist.

During my interview with a daughter of Mr. Jacobs, I asked the well-worn question: "What was your father really like?"

She replied, "He was many things to many people and completely misunderstood by most. I believe it was best summed up by the minister at his funeral who remarked, 'Anyone so close to nature must surely have been close to God.'"