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JOHN ROBERT EYER: ENTOMOLOGICAL WORK IN PENNSYLVANIA AND LIST OF PUBLICATIONS¹

A. G. Wheeler, Jr.² and G. L. Jubb, Jr.³

John Robert Eyer died at Carlsbad, New Mexico, on January 30, 1976. J. G. Watts and W. A. Iselin (1976), his former colleagues in the Department of Botany and Entomology at New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, wrote an obituary and quite naturally focused on Eyer's work at the University's Agricultural Experiment Station. Since Dr. Eyer's first positions in entomology were in Pennsylvania, we have prepared this biographical sketch to preserve the record of his early accomplishments.

Our knowledge of Dr. Eyer's work was obtained through correspondence with him from January, 1974, to November, 1975. In seven letters⁴ he discussed his undergraduate years at Cornell University and his positions in entomology in Pennsylvania. His candid and often humorous remarks helped immeasurably in preparing an account of the history of entomology in the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (Wheeler and Valley, 1975) and the forthcoming paper by the second author on grape insect research in Erie County, Pennsylvania. He was most gracious in helping us, and he seemed to take delight in reminiscing about his early years in Pennsylvania. His own interest in history is shown by his persistence in editing and completing in 1971, despite failing health, the first volume of the New Mexico State University Reminiscences.

Dr. Eyer's sense of humor was revealed in several of his letters. He quickly dispensed with formalities by addressing us by our first names since, after all, we are "bugs in the same rug."⁵ Arthritis made it difficult for him to write, and he asked that we excuse his "tenebrionid tracks."⁵ Another time he apologized for his "third-grade" ruled paper.⁶ Although we never had the opportunity to meet Dr. Eyer, we feel that we got to know him as an entomologist and friend through our correspondence.

JOHN ROBERT EYER

John Eyer was born March 15, 1895, at Dayton, Ohio, and was educated in the public schools of Greenville, Ohio. Eyer's interest in natural history was piqued early. In 1907, he and a friend, Howard Weaver, organized the Naturalists Union of Greenville. The group made regular collecting trips, and during 1909-10, Eyer kept a diary in which he described and often sketched interesting plant and animal life he had found (Figs. 1-2). Work which led to publication of a note on the life history of a citheroniid moth in 1914 was completed while he was still a high school student.

Eyer began a formal study of entomology at Cornell University from which he received an A.B. degree in 1917. He studied insect systematics under J. C. Bradley (Fig. 3) and began comparative work on the male genitalia of Microlepidoptera at the suggestion of W. T. M. Forbes. At Cornell, Eyer began to correspond with August Busck

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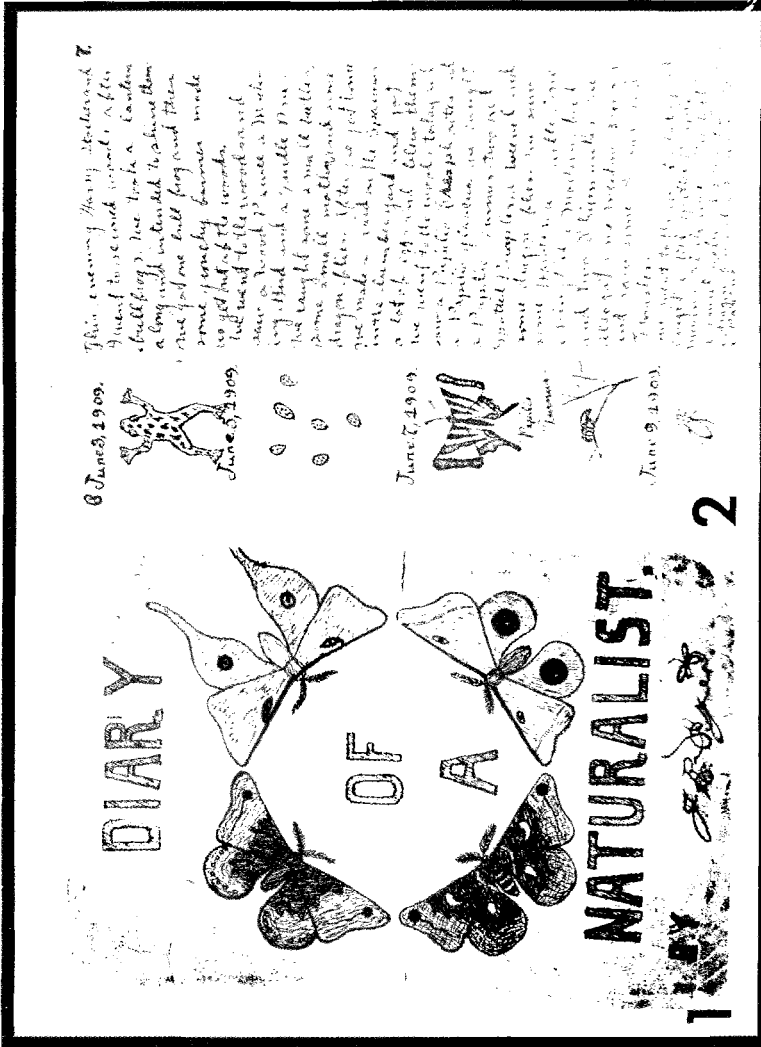
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⁴Letters are on file at the Center for the History of Entomology, Department of Entomology, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802.

⁵Letter dated January 29, 1974, from Eyer to A. G. Wheeler, Jr.

⁶Letter dated February 28, 1974, from Eyer to A. G. Wheeler, Jr.



Figs. 1-2. Eyer's "Diary of a Naturalist" kept during 1909-10 while a high school student. Fig. 1. Cover; Fig. 2. Typical page illustrating and describing plant and animal life observed on field trips. Courtesy of the Center for the History of Entomology, Pennsylvania State University.



Fig. 3. Laboratory of J. C. Bradley in Roberts Hall, Department of Entomology, Cornell University, ca. 1915. Eyer is in the left foreground. Behind Eyer is W. A. Clemens. S. W. Frost is in the right foreground, and behind him is M. D. Leonard. Courtesy of S. W. Frost.

and Carl Heinrich, specialists in Lepidoptera at the U.S. National Museum in Washington.⁷ While he was a Cornell student, he worked one summer for the New York State Insect List in Albany.⁸

When Eyer finished at Cornell, C. H. Hadley placed him in employment in Pennsylvania.⁹ Hadley had known Eyer at Cornell and then had accepted a position in extension entomology at Pennsylvania State College in 1917. He was a trusted friend and adviser who greatly influenced Eyer's early career. During April-October, 1917, Eyer conducted a survey of apple and peach insect pests and tested insecticides in the Tyson Brothers orchards at Floradale¹⁰ in the fruit growing region of southcentral Pennsylvania. He also assembled a collection of fruit and vegetable pests before World War I interrupted his work.

In October, 1917, Eyer entered the army at Camp Sherman, Ohio, and worked in the bacteriological and pathological laboratory at the Base Hospital. He continued to correspond with Hadley, who in Eyer's words, was able to "spring" him out of the army in 1919 and to convince him to study for his Master's Degree at Penn State. According to Eyer, he would have undertaken graduate work at Ohio State University under Herbert Osborn had not Hadley been the more able politician.⁶

⁷Copies of correspondence with August Busck and Carl Heinrich were obtained from the Smithsonian Archives, Record Unit 140, Department of Entomology Records, 1909-1963, Box 17.

⁸Letter dated November 30, 1975, from Eyer to G. L. Jubb, Jr.

⁹Letter dated April 24, 1975, from Eyer to A. G. Wheeler, Jr.

¹⁰Letter dated January 8, 1974, from Eyer to G. L. Jubb, Jr.

In May, 1919, Eyer went to Penn State's field laboratory at Girard, Erie County, as Instructor in Economic Entomology (Fig. 4). At the time, the College had a tacit agreement with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Plant Industry, which maintained a field station nearby at North East. The Girard group would study insects and diseases affecting vegetables, while the work at North East would be confined to fruit pests.¹¹ During the summers of 1919-21, Eyer worked on the life history and control of potato leafhopper and conducted field studies on his thesis project, "The Biology of the Onion Maggot." E. H. Dusham supervised his research and H. E. Hodgkiss made trips from State College to Girard to offer suggestions.¹¹ S. W. Frost and G. B. Newman were also helpful.¹² Eyer's winters were spent at the main campus at State College where he attended classes and lived at the University Club.¹¹



Fig. 4. John Eyer in July, 1919, as a graduate student and Instructor in Economic Entomology at Pennsylvania State College's field laboratory at Girard, Erie County. Courtesy of L. A. Adams.

¹¹Letter dated February 9, 1974, from Eyer to G. L. Jubb, Jr.

¹²Letter dated January 18, 1974, from Eyer to K. C. Kim.

After completing his M.S. degree, Eyer went to the University of Minnesota in October, 1921, to continue his graduate work. W. A. Riley supervised his doctoral thesis, "The Comparative Morphology of the Male Genitalia of the Primitive Lepidoptera." Eyer received a Ph.D. in 1924, and then for a third time was placed in a position by C. H. Hadley,⁹ who had left Penn State and then the USDA to become director of the Bureau of Plant Industry in Harrisburg. In February, 1924, Hadley employed Eyer as an entomologist at the North East laboratory. Among his colleagues on an enthusiastic, young staff were D. M. DeLong and J. N. Knull, who later won acclaim for their entomological work at Ohio State. Eyer enjoyed the camaraderie in the Bureau; the entomologists at North East and Harrisburg were "all good Joes" and were "admirable companions in the field, in the office and when on visits together to the summer meetings of the eastern branch of the American Association of E. E. [Economic Entomologists]."⁶

The early reports and bulletins of H. A. Surface, innovative director of entomological work at Harrisburg during 1903-16 (Wheeler and Valley, 1975), were helpful in getting Eyer started in fruit research at North East. J. G. Sanders, Hadley's predecessor as director of the Bureau of Plant Industry, was a "grand friend" who also gave helpful advice.⁵ Dr. Eyer acknowledged G. A. Runner of the USDA Fruit Insect Investigations Laboratory in Sandusky, Ohio, and F. Z. Hartzell of the New York Agricultural Experiment Station at Fredonia for suggesting "avenues of investigation."⁵

At North East, Eyer conducted research on grape insects, and in 1926 completed, with plant pathologist W. A. McCubbin, a bulletin on grape insects and diseases. He tested chemicals against oriental fruit moth, rose chafer, cherry fruit flies, and cherry aphids. He also cooperated with R. D. Engle, Erie County Agent, on public relations work with European corn borer and in training growers in techniques for spraying grape leafhopper. Most of his winters were spent in Harrisburg making genitalic dissections of Lepidoptera and Neuroptera. One winter, while his wife was recuperating from surgery in a Wilkes-Barre hospital, he was allowed to make surveys of greenhouse pests in Lackawanna and Luzerne counties.¹¹

Near the end of his tenure with the Bureau, Eyer was granted a leave of absence from February to April, 1927, to work on pink bollworm with the USDA at Marfa, Texas.^{13,14} He left the Bureau in September, 1927, mainly because the cold winters affected his health, but also because he was wary of the changes that might take place because of the "political holocaust that swept C. H. Hadley 'out of' and R. H. Bell 'into' Directorship."⁶ Eyer's suspicions were well founded; the Bureau soon was to undergo internal conflict resulting in dismissals and resignations from the staff and to terminate nearly all biological and taxonomic work (Wheeler and Valley, 1975).

Eyer left Pennsylvania in late September, 1927, spent a day with G. A. Runner at the USDA laboratory at Sandusky, Ohio, then left by train for New Mexico⁶ where he was to spend the remainder of his life. From 1927 to 1961 he conducted research on fruit and vegetable pests and taught various entomology courses at New Mexico State University. In 1932 he published a textbook of economic entomology which "...does not tell the student too much and on the other hand provides a very satisfactory guide or approach to various problems confronting the student of insect life" (Felt, 1932). After his retirement from the University, he worked two years with the New Mexico Department of Agriculture before moving to Carlsbad.

Dr. Eyer published more than 90 papers, mostly on economic entomology, but he always retained a strong interest in the Microlepidoptera regardless of his official duties. While in the army, he continued to correspond with Heinrich, joking that he might find time "to battle a stray 'Micro'"¹⁵; on one furlough he returned to Cornell to discuss his

¹³From personnel records of the Bureau of Plant Industry, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Harrisburg.

¹⁴Letter dated January 17, 1927, from Eyer to August Busck.

¹⁵Letter dated April 19, 1918, from Eyer to Carl Heinrich.

research interests with Forbes.¹⁶ Dr. Eyer collected and reared moths in Pennsylvania and New Mexico and sent them to Busck and Heinrich for identification. After his retirement, he was able to return to taxonomic studies of the family Opostegidae. As an occasional visitor to the U.S. National Museum in the 1960's, Dr. Eyer still displayed an obvious enthusiasm for his research.¹⁷

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¹⁶Letter dated August 30, 1918, from Eyer to Carl Heinrich.

¹⁷Personal communication with Dr. R. W. Hodges, Systematic Entomology Laboratory, USDA, at the U.S. National Museum.

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