
SOME PIONEERS IN NATURAL HISTORY AND BIOLOGY IN SOUTHERN ILLINOIS

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CYRUS THOMAS

When the Southern Illinois Normal University opened its doors to students in 1874, there was on the faculty a biologist and naturalist of national reputation, Cyrus Thomas, who became one of the foremost early systematic and economic entomologists.

Cyrus Thomas was born July 27, 1825, at Kingsport, Tennessee. He attended the schools of his native state. As a young man he began the study of law. He moved to Illinois in 1849. For a short time after coming to Illinois he was engaged in teaching school. Later he was appointed deputy county clerk in the office of John A. Logan, who was county clerk of Jackson County.

In 1851 Thomas was elected county clerk of Jackson County. About this time he was admitted to the bar. He held the office of county clerk for one term, and at the expiration of his term of office he began the practice of law at Murphysboro. While engaged in the practice of law he also applied himself to the study of natural history.

In 1864, upon the death of his wife, who was a sister of John A. Logan, he abandoned law, and entered the ministry of the Lutheran Church, a profession for which he had been quietly making preparation.

During the period from 1869 to 1873 Thomas served as entomologist and botanist on the United States

Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories, under Ferdinand V. Hayden. Thomas's reports, published with the reports of the expedition, constituted an important feature of these publications.

In 1874 Cyrus Thomas was appointed a member of the faculty of the Southern Illinois Normal University, beginning his work in this institution at the opening of the fall term that year. His salary, \$1800 per year, was the highest paid to any member of the faculty except the president, then called the principal. He was listed as teacher of natural history and physiology, and later as also curator of the museum.

In 1875 Thomas was appointed State Entomologist of Illinois. He was then able to devote only a part of his time to the work in the Southern Illinois State Normal University.

During the period from 1874 to 1876 vast areas of the plain west of the Mississippi River were devastated by the Rocky Mountain locust, or grasshopper. In order to meet this problem, Congress provided for the appointment of the United States Entomological Commission, of which Charles V. Riley was made Chairman, and Cyrus Thomas and A. S. Packard, Jr. were appointed the other members. Thomas was made treasurer of the commission. He had made a special study of the Acrididae (true locusts, or grasshoppers), had been connected with the United States Geological Survey as an en-

tomologist from 1869 to 1873, and was State Entomologist of Illinois. His work on the Commission necessitated the severance of his connection with the Southern Illinois Normal University. The work of the Commission was begun in 1877 and completed in 1882. It constituted an important step in the development of economic entomology in the United States.

After the completion of the work of the United States Entomological Commission, Cyrus Thomas devoted the remaining twenty five years of his life to work in archaeology and ethnology with the Bureau of American Ethnology, under the Smithsonian Institute. He became a recognized authority on the Cherokee and Shawnee Indians, and the Maya inscriptions and codices. He remained active in the later years of his life. When he was eighty-four years of age, it was said that he was mentally as active as ever. He died June 27, 1910, at the age of eighty-four years and eleven months.

Thomas published his first paper in 1859, in the *Prairie Farmer*, on the chinch bug. He continued to publish articles on entomological subjects in the *Prairie Farmer* and the *Illinois Farmer* for a number of years. In the *Transactions of the Illinois Horticultural Society* for 1877-78 he published a rather long article covering a number of injurious insects. His third report as State Entomologist, published in 1879, contained the first comprehensive taxonomic study of the homopterous family Aphididae (Aphids) published in America. His most important paper was the synopsis of the Acrididae (true locusts, or grasshoppers) of North America, published in 1873. He named many new species in the Acrididae and the Aphididae.

GEORGE HAZEN FRENCH

George Hazen French was born in central New York March 19, 1841. He attended the rural schools of his native region. In the fall of 1859 or 1860 he entered Cortland Academy as a student. He attended this academy two terms. This was the only schooling he had above the common rural schools of that time. In the botany class in the academy he did his first work in the identification of plants. He evidently showed unusual interest and ability in this work, as he received from Professor Woods, author of the textbook used, an invitation to go with him on a collecting trip in the west.

French began teaching in the rural schools of central New York, in the fall of 1861. His salary was \$1.75 per week or \$7.00 per month and board. He got the board by "boarding around" among the patrons of the school. This was the custom in the district schools at that time. French wrote in the notes on his life experiences that the salary was not exceptionally low. He continued to teach in the rural schools of central New York for several years.

He then came west to Illinois and taught in the schools of this state. In 1868 he passed the state examination given by Newton Bateman, State Superintendent of Illinois, and received a state certificate.

In the fall of 1868 French accepted a position as science teacher in the Illinois Agricultural College, Irvington. He stated in his notes that he "had never seen the inside of a college." He had studied chemistry and other sciences while teaching. He continued to teach sciences in the college at Irvington for nine years.

One of the things that had an important influence on the later work

of French was his meeting with George W. Vasey, a botanist, who had made a collecting trip in the west under government patronage. He taught French how to mount plants in the proper way. The latter began vigorously to carry on the work of collecting plants and making exchanges with other botanists. He discovered a new species of shooting star (*Dodecatheon*) in this region, which Vasey named in his honor *Dodecatheon Frenchii*.

French studied Greek with the daughter of the president of the college at Irvington. He had also learned some French. The college began publishing B. Sc. after his name, and at the commencement in 1874 conferred the A.M. degree upon him.

When in 1877 Cyrus Thomas was appointed a member of the United States Entomological Commission, French became his assistant. In August of 1877 French moved to Carbondale where he served as Assistant State Entomologist, working in the museum of the Southern Illinois Normal University. On July 1, 1878 he became a member of the faculty of this institution, as instructor in natural sciences, and curator of the museum. His subjects were zoology, botany, and physiology. He held this position for thirty-six years. He continued his work as Assistant State Entomologist for about two years after coming to Carbondale.

Soon after moving to Carbondale, French began writing for the scientific press. He wrote and published a manual on the butterflies of this region which passed through three editions. He also wrote a manual on the mushrooms of the region.

On the afternoon of November 23, 1883, the building of Southern Illinois Normal University was destroyed by fire and the museum was de-

stroyed with it. Only the herbarium and a few cases of insects were saved. In the years that followed, French built up another museum, better than the one that had been destroyed. Most of the specimens and collections were the results of his own work.

French became widely known for his entomological work. He was a member of the A.A.A.S., the Illinois State Academy of Science, the Entomological Society of France, the Entomological Society of Belgium, and other scientific organizations. His life came to a close January 2, 1935, when he was ninety-three years old.

JOHN P. GILBERT

Professor John P. Gilbert was the first biologist on the faculty of the Southern Illinois Normal University with university training.

John Philo Gilbert was a native son of Southern Illinois. He was born on a farm in Jefferson County July 27, 1872. His early education was secured in the country schools. He was bereft of the care and help of his parents early in life, as the death of his mother occurred when he was seven years of age and that of his father when he was sixteen. Thus he was left to plan his own career with the assistance of the older children of the family.

He began his educational career as a country school teacher. He entered the Southern Illinois Normal University as a student in 1892. After four years of active school life in this institution, during which he became prominent in debate and oratory, he graduated in 1896. After his graduation he advanced rapidly in the teaching profession, holding such responsible positions as the principalship of the high schools of Olney and Mattoon, and the superintendency of the schools of Tuscola.

In 1903 Mr. Gilbert entered the University of Illinois. Here he pursued his biological studies and also taught biology in the academy of the University. At the University he received the bachelor's degree in 1905 and the master's degree in 1906. He won high honors as a member of a debating team that won an intercollegiate debate between the University of Illinois and the University of Indiana. In the University of Illinois he was elected to the honorary scientific fraternity Sigma Xi.

In 1911 Gilbert became head of the Department of Biology of the Southern Illinois Normal University. This position he filled with conspicuous success. In 1920 he was given a leave of absence beginning September 1, in order that he might serve as secretary of the Southern Illinois Development Association. Within a year his health, which was already impaired, failed completely, and on April 10, 1921, the hand of death cut short his useful life in the 49th year of his age.

For some time Gilbert was active in chautauqua work, carrying the messages of nature study to children and adults. Upon the decline in the work in the chautauquas, he participated actively in the work of the State Farmers' Institute of Illinois. He was a man of wide and varied interests. The State Dairy Association, State Poultry Association, and the horticultural interests of Southern Illinois received his active support. He was active in church, lodge, and other worthy community enterprises. Gilbert's energy and ambition, his intellectual ability, his abounding optimism and his ability as a public speaker made him a strong factor in the advancement of Southern Illinois.

In this paper we have considered the work of a very few among many pioneers. May we remember with appreciation the work that the pioneers did, often under great handicaps, and the foundations that they laid.