

Passenger Pigeon Correspondence

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1945



Title Statement

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Profile Description

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Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

Ms.2011.082

Unit Date

1945

Language

The materials in the collection are in English.

Abstract

The collection consists of Virginia Tech librarian Ralph Brown's 1945 compilation of correspondence on passenger pigeons.

Creator

Brown, Ralph Minthorne, 1878-1958

Extent

0.1 Cubic Feet 1 folder

Repository

Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech

Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open for research.

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Source of Acquisition

The collection was transferred to Special Collections in July 2011.

Processing Information

The processing, arrangement, and description of the Passenger Pigeon Correspondence was completed in September 2011.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: [identification of item], [box], [folder], Passenger Pigeon Correspondence, Ms2011-082, Special Collections and University Archives, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va.

Biographical Note

Ralph Minthorne Brown, head librarian of Virginia Polytechnic Institute (Virginia Tech) from 1926 to 1947, was born at Fort Shaw, Montana, in 1878. He graduated from Cornell University in 1901 and served as a librarian in Chicago and Buffalo, New York before becoming chief of the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey's Division of Library and Archives in 1906. He remained in that position until serving as an ambulance driver in World War I. After the war, Brown worked as an editor for Rand McNally, then for Popular Mechanics, and finally as a librarian at North Dakota State College before arriving at Virginia Tech in 1926.

When not working, Brown indulged in his many personal interests, including poetry and genealogy; he was also an avid book collector, amateur historian and naturalist. During his time in Blacksburg, Brown actively collected and recorded the history of both Virginia Tech and the New River Valley, his chief accomplishment here perhaps being the compilation of V.P.I. Historical Index, 1872-1942. Other projects included legislative histories of both the school and Blacksburg as well as a bibliography of Matthew Fontaine Maury. Brown's interest in nature led him to keep and compile notes on local ornithological and weather observations. He frequently presented talks on these and other subjects to campus and community groups.

Brown retired from Virginia Tech in 1947 and died in Tulsa, Oklahoma on November 30, 1958, survived by one daughter.

Scope and Content

The collection consists of Ralph Brown's 1945 compilation of correspondence on passenger pigeons.

Brown was a Virginia Tech librarian working under the request of a professor A. L. Dean of the V. P. I. Agricultural extension division. The latter had made inquiries to ornithologists regarding "the possibility that the extermination of the passenger pigeon was caused by disease."

All the six ornithologists contacted disagreed with Dean's hypothesis. "Market hunting," not illness, they affirmed, brought about the end to the passenger pigeon.

More specifically, Dr. S. C. Bishop of the University of Rochester wrote that "so far as [he] is concerned, there [was] no particular mystery about the end of the Passenger Pigeon. It was slaughtered by the millions." John T. Zimmer and A. C. Bent who represent the American Museum of Natural History and Smithsonian Institution, respectively, also agreed. Nonetheless, Bent offers some hope to the initial theory by noting that "there may have been some disease or weakening from in-breeding, which brought about the end." Similarly the Smithsonian's Dr. A. Wetmore and Virginia's J. J. Murray provide Dean with some additional readings on ornithological history.

Brown sent the compilation, upon completion, to Dr. W. A. Murrell of the University of Florida.

Related Archival Materials

See the following materials, which are also at Virginia Tech Special Collections and University Archives:
Ralph Minthorne Brown Papers, Ms1970-002, which includes ornithological observations
Ralph M. Brown, Library Director, Records, RG 23/1/1, on the finding aid for Records of the Virginia Tech University Libraries, RG 23

Keywords

Faculty and staff
Ornithology
Science and Technology
University Archives

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Arrangement

The collection is arranged by material type.

Description of Subordinate Components

Correspondence

Unit Date 1945

folder 1