

## Let's Call Him Barnum

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but Macoun was so politically astute that he contrived not only to secure it regardless, but even to persuade Selwyn of his usefulness so that acceptance was soon changed to enthusiasm. Yet Macoun's eventual appointment as Naturalist and Assistant Director to the Survey in 1887 was again attained through astute politicking, not through any desire of the Director. Indeed, John Macoun's vaunting self-confidence and ambition, combined with his immense energy, must have been quite as much liabilities as assets, from the viewpoint of a superior; while his tendency to approach Government ministers directly (e.g., p. 173) must have made him a particularly uncomfortable subordinate.

In course of time, Macoun's eldest son, James Melville Macoun, was also hired by the Survey; yet, though first appointed in 1883, Jim's hiring was on a temporary basis, and remained so until 1897. Although quite as industrious (p. 63), Jim lacked his father's political acumen and had to weather many storms during his career with the Survey, his honesty even forcing him into direct conflict with his father concerning the potential for farming of the Peace River country (p. 162-165). Yet, when eventually his father retired in 1917 at the age of 81, it was Jim who succeeded him; and surely Jim's early death from cancer in 1920 must have expedited John's own death, six months later.

Throughout his career with the Geological Survey, John Macoun strove to secure a permanent home and proper care for the collections that he, his son and their field assistants were so steadily accumulating. He gave energetic support to the plans for new Geological Survey headquarters and to the development of a new national museum. His educational work with the public — in particular, through the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club (p. 117-118) — was in part a means for the furtherance of these aims. The usurpation of the Survey building as a temporary typhoid hospital (p. 183) and of the Victoria Memorial Museum by the politicians, after the Houses of Parliament had burned (p. 197), were setbacks that he resented but that did not cause him to deviate from his aims. Indeed, John Macoun was never one to allow himself to be deviated from any path he had elected to follow.

So that was Macoun; a man who was opinionated and difficult; believing confidently in his own infallibility, yet quite often wrong; very susceptible to flattery and, indeed, requiring it (p. 90); an uneasy colleague and a difficult subordinate; a perfectly competent botanist, yet preferring to have his finds identified and described by others, rather than spending on taxonomy the hours that might be passed more enjoyably in collecting (p. 91 and elsewhere); so self-absorbed as to be uninterested in the advances in biology that were being made elsewhere by others — all in all, a man who was arrogant, opinionated and quite often

wrong. Yet also, John Macoun was inspired by a genuine devotion of what he viewed as being, without question, God's particular creations — a love that, even if focussed on plants, embraced all the "great wealth and variety of animal life", at which "he could not help but marvel" (p. 85). His energy was immense; in the field or in his office, day after day he would work from dawn to dusk and beyond, striving single-handedly "to roll back the natural history frontiers of Canada" (p. 207) and gaining a knowledge of our animals and plants unrivalled in his time or since.

The able biography does not attempt to assess in detail John Macoun's contribution to Canadian botany. Rather, it endeavours to place him in his scientific and political context, assessing his contributions — whether positive or negative — to the development of science and settlement in our country.

However one might rate Macoun, his importance in Canadian history is beyond question and his legacy to science extends far beyond all those masses of specimens in our museums. Even though Macoun was not a geologist, every geologist who is interested in the development of our discipline should read this book, to gain a better understanding of that immensely significant interface between science and history.

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*A Second Edition published as a Centennial Project of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club; was issued in 1979, with a new introduction by R. Glover and editorial notes and bibliographical essay by W.A. Waiser.*  
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publicity and using it expertly to obtain funds for his own travels and the development of the collections of the American Museum of Natural History. His travels took him widely about the American west, by train, car, cart, horse or aeroplane, and also to Mexico, Cuba, India, Greece, Guatemala and western Canada. Wherever he went, not only did Barnum collect fossils in profusion (and vertebrate fossils in particular), but also mammals and birds, insects and even flowers.

This slim biography by his daughter is by no means a full portrait of him, for two reasons. First of all, any commentary on his scientific work is eschewed, since the authoress felt unqualified to give one (and rightly so, when on p. 38 she labels as a "dinosaur" the horned Neogene giraffid *Samotherium*!) Secondly, although Barnum's daughter, the authoress saw only a very little of her father. Her mother Marion died five days after her own birth and she was brought up by her mother's parents; her acquaintance with her father was limited to not-very-frequent visits and a period in wartime when she and he shared a Washington apartment. (He had remarried by then; and one of Frances' concerns was to try to keep her father out of a potentially dangerous extra-marital entanglement!).

This small book thus falls into three distinct parts. The account of Barnum's background, and of his life up to and including his brief first marriage, is reasonably full and very interesting. There are good accounts of some of the adventures surrounding and following his second marriage; Frances liked her stepmother Lilian and has drawn freely on the latter's three accounts of travels with her husband. The story of her time in Washington with her father, and of Barnum's later years, is quite well told. But alas! we learn far too little concerning the productive period of his life, when he was a major figure in the scientific community and loomed even larger in public regard. To learn of the Barnum Brown of that period, one must turn instead to Roland Bird's recently published autobiography and, for a review of his scientific work, to Lewis' formal obituary notice.

This little book furnishes a few interesting sidelights on a noteworthy scientist, but it serves only to whet the appetite for a longer and more comprehensive study.

## Let's Call Him Barnum

By Frances R. Brown  
 81 p., US \$8.95, *Vantage Press, New York*

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Barnum Brown (1873-1963) was, in his time, not only one of North America's foremost vertebrate paleontologists but also its foremost populist of paleontology, revelling in

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