HE OLD AU SABLE

by

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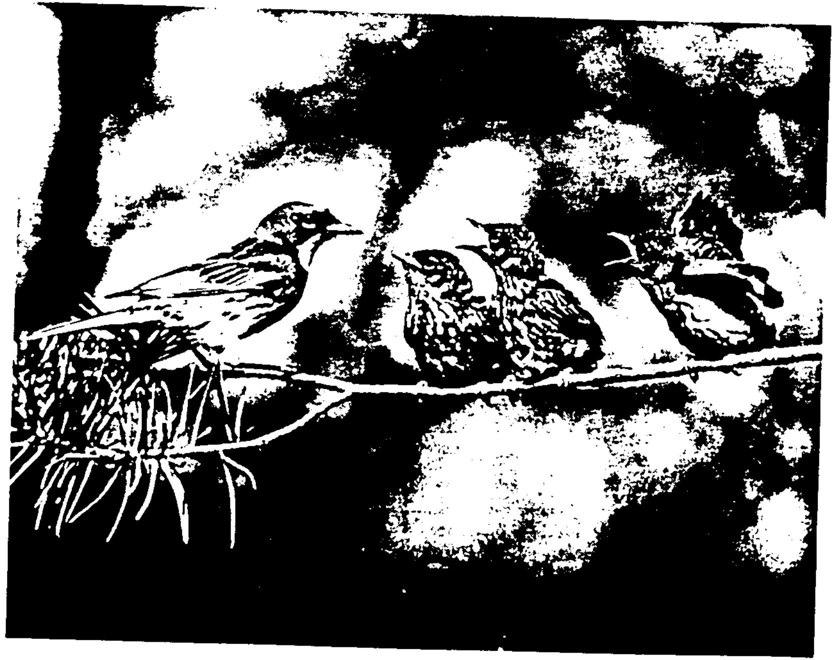
lliam B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE FIRES AND THE PHOENIX

The shy, little bird nesting near the root of the jack pine is the Kirtland's Warbler. Only in the Au Sable valley and its environs do they find the country they like, goodly tracts of a hundred or more acres of young jack pines about six or eight feet tall interspersed with scrub oak and aspens and an undergrowth of huckleberries, raspberries, bracken, sweet fern and grasses. For reasons of their own this rare songster and his mate will nest nowhere else. Ninety percent of all the Kirtland's Warblers spend their summers in an area roughly confined by a circle having a fifty-mile radius with Mio as its center. To this habitat they return every May like the many less melodious cottagers along the famous stream.

The stands of jack pine, which seem to be so essential to the happiness implied in the warbler's song, are the result of forest fires. The other conifers were destroyed. Their seeds could not withstand the heat, but those of the jack pine took hold because fire popped open its resistant seed-pods and dispersed their contents. The scrubby little trees grew up to dot the clearings made by the fire. Once there was a cathedral cover of mighty pillars of white and Norway pines with their gothic branches overarching the soft, springy, pine-needle-carpeted floor. Now there is a wilderness relieved only by trees fit for pulp and firewood. True, there is another incidental benefit



Kirtland's Warbler with fledglings on a jack-pine branch under a June sky. (Courtesy of Kingman Museum, Battle Creek, through Edward M. Brigham, Jr.)

of berry bushes. Huckleberrying was once a popular and profitable pursuit. Old Bill Ellis, the engineer who drove a narrow-gauge train from Glennie to Oscoda, used to stop so that his passengers could go berry-picking, and blow his whistle to signal it was time to go. Sometimes, when berrying was at its best, men left the lumber mills. It was not only a great holiday but profitable as well. A bushel a day was easily picked and readily sold. The harvest was carted away to be shipped to Detroit and Cleveland. Families tented in the patches where the huckleberries were thickest and in the evening joined in songs, accompanied by fiddles and harmonicas, around the campfire.

Michigan has had more and greater forest fires than almost any other state. This, of course, is not a record to be proud of; nor is it a basis for blame. It is simply a historical fact. Geological data show that the fires date back to prehistoric times. Frag-

ments of trees scorched by fire are to be found in sandstone and glacial deposits.

Lightning started most of these prehistoric fires; others are attributable to the hunting and the wars of Indians and of the aborigines who preceded them. Fire was used to drive in game and to drive away enemies.

When fires started in the pine forests there was nothing to stop them except the shore of a lake, a less combustible, deciduous stand, or heavy rains which too often did not occur.

With the onset of lumbering, the fires flared oftener and grew larger. To clear the land, slashings, the hewed-off branches, were burned. Control of these fires was difficult or impossible. There were neither laws to forbid them, nor fire wardens to stop them. No one could foresee how far these fires might reach. Many towns and sawmills were destroyed. In 1862 one of these flash fires burned out the town of Alpena. And, during attempts to rebuild, it was again damaged in 1863, 1867, and 1869.

Besides the losses of lives and homes and industries there was a tremendous loss of the pine, the tree that made Michigan great. Studies by the United States Department of Agriculture showed that "of the original stand of 380 billion board feet of saw timber, approximately 35 billion feet was cut and burned in clearing land; 73 billion feet was burned and wasted during and after lumbering or destroyed by forest fires independent of lumbering operations; 204 billion feet was cut for lumber; and 40 billion feet was cut for other products." Wrote W. N. Sparhawk, author of the report: "In many parts of the state the amount of timber destroyed by fire exceeded the amount cut. In the region tributary to the Au Sable River, for instance, it has been estimated that 20 billion feet of pine was burned, and only 14 billion feet was cut by loggers."

With the year 1871 came the worst of all recorded fires. When the facts were belatedly learned, the well-known Chicago fire of that year was overshadowed by one on the same day (October 7) in northern Wisconsin. For two or three days that forest fire had moved eastward to Lake Michigan. It reached the town of Peshtigo where the air literally exploded to engulf the inhabitants in flames. Over fifteen hundred were killed, and but few escaped.

At the same time in Michigan even greater fires were raging with the loss of over two hundred lives. Along Lake Michigan, on the west coast, Manistee, Glen Haven and Holland were destroyed. Across the state between Saginaw and Lake Huron

many more towns were consumed by the fires which had generated violent gales. Tornadoes developed, both spreading and intensifying the flames. Two-thirds of the population of Huron and Sanilac counties were homeless. Many people fled into the waters of the lakes for salvation. The smoke and fog over the Great Lakes was too dense for navigation.

These fires, starting in a year of extreme drouth and, during the first week of October, did not abate until the eighteenth of that month. Smoldering fires continued for two weeks longer and the smoke was still heavy enough to hinder navigation.

The records of these fires, sketchy though they are, tell a story of terror and devastation. Farther north, where settlements were sparse and communications lacking, the incidence and extent of the fires were currently not so well known; but the blackened rings in the trees that survived and the charred stumps furnish lasting proof of the ruin of a great resource.

In 1894, Upper Michigan suffered severely in a series of fires afflicting Minnesota, Wisconsin and New York. These started in September, again following a drouth. They were only stopped by the heavy fall rains.

Oscoda and Au Sable, the two towns on Lake Huron at the mouth of the Au Sable River, by their sacrifice to fire aroused public interest in fire prevention. They were the last communities in Michigan to be wiped out by forest fire. This was on July 11, 1911, the result of the burning of slashings in Iosco County during exceptionally hot, dry weather. More than twenty people died. Many of the survivors were saved by immersing themselves in the waters of the Au Sable and Lake Huron.

For a few days before the fire reached Oscoda, refugees from Glennie and other towns to the west arrived. The time for escape was shorter than they had thought. As in Peshtigo, the heated gases whirling ahead of the forest fire ignited and the town flared into flames.

Ships from Port Huron stood offshore ready to evacuate refugees, but because of the sandbars at the mouth of the Au Sable they were not successful. A hot wind scorched and smothered many of those trying that route of escape.

Trains of the Detroit and Mackinac Railroad coming from Tawas were able to carry away the majority of the seven or eight hundred inhabitants.

Gladys Grant, a thirteen-year-old girl, whose grandfather

Joseph Chevrier* owned the original hotel in Oscoda, was supported in the cooling waters of Lake Huron on the ample arm of her Aunt Mollie who was so stout and sturdy that she had to have her clothes made. They found an opportunity to escape on the last train to leave for Tawas. Her recollection is of a scene wild with terror and confusion and clouded in smoke.

"It was a sort of a combustion, like an explosion," she said later. The flames jumped from one place to another, but spared the Methodist Church and the school, both high on a hill. Felix Solomon tried to carry away his trunk but collapsed, fell over it, and was burned. Bill McCuaig, driver of the express wagon of the Loud Lumber Company, knew where all the old people lived. He galloped his team about the fire-rimmed streets and rescued them.

Though no fire after the Oscoda-Au Sable holocaust came near its cost in lives and fortune, many fires continued to occur annually. In 1925 there were 132 fires of over one thousand acres each. In that year nearly twenty-five thousand acres burned in Crawford County alone and fires of similar size occurred there in 1928. Again in early September, 1933, simultaneous fires at what was left of Deward and at Lovells burned off nearly forty thousand acres. The greater one at Lovells swept over thirty thousand acres. The flames were finally checked near the river. One witness of this fire, Douglas Middleton, revisiting again and again for years afterward, was appalled by the devastation and its duration. The landscape remained sad and bleak. Looking south from the Douglas Hotel for several miles there was nothing but charred skeletons of dead trees.

Of the more recent fires one of the largest was that which occurred in 1946 in the Huron National Forest in Oscoda County. Sometimes manpower for the fight against the fire is lacking and it is necessary to call on the prisoners in the county jail for help, as in the case of the fire in 1960 near Kellogg's Bridge.

Almost all forest fires are man-made. A ten-year survey (1939-

* Both Glennie and Chevrier were named after early settlers of Oscoda. The heroic John Glennie was killed later by an abortive explosion in an attempt to shoot a line to a shipwreck offshore at Oscoda.

Joseph Chevrier had a furniture store and an undertaking establishment in addition to the hotel in Oscoda. Part of the original hotel was moved to the region of Five Channels Dam. Chevrier's son-in-law, Lovell Grant, was a newspaperman from Bay City and a photographer who spent some time near the present site of Lovells.

1948) in Michigan showed that only three percent were caused by lightning. With the decline of lumbering and with the prevention of sparks from locomotives two major factors have disappeared. One relatively new factor which is peculiar to the Au Sable valley is the incendiary effect of military operations in the areas reserved for training the National Guard. On occasion it has been necessary to call on the conservationist to stop the conflagration started by engines of war. Perhaps there is a moral in this.

So effective have the fire wardens been that clearings growing up to jack pine suitable for nesting of the Kirtland's Warbler have steadily decreased in size and number. This paradoxically unfavorable result of praiseworthy efforts to save has given a new concern to the conservationist and now he has turned about and by controlled fires attempted to provide the environment essential to the survival of the Kirtland's Warbler.

This contrary policy might seem ridiculous and puzzling until one learns what kind of a bird this warbler is – and how rare it is – and also what a relatively small area is involved as its habitat.

Periodic counts by the ornithologists long interested in this bird (H. F. Mayfield, F. M. Holden, Middleton, R. E. Olsen, Verne Dockham, and others) indicate that in recent years there were probably no more than a thousand. Furthermore, although the census showed a slight increase from 1951 to 1961 it is probable that the trend is generally downward.

The instinctive behavior of the Kirtland's Warbler – and possibly its particular kind of food – are accommodated by conditions which it finds in the Au Sable valley. Nesting on the ground, it needs a base which will dry rapidly and prevent drowning of the nestlings. This it finds in the loose and porous so-called Grayling sand of the uplands along the Au Sable drainage. Naïvely, it trusts the cover of the low branches of the jack pine to protect and hide its nest. The cowbird makes a mockery of this precaution. But that is the way it has to be for the little warbler.

These jack pines cannot be too big nor in stands too dense. If they are, Kirtland's Warbler will have none of it. And while a pair keep to themselves, they seem to like to have others of their kind not too far away, at least within the range of sound of each other's song. Such a combination of privacy with yet the sound and sense of the presence of a neighbor means to the

warbler a tract of at least eighty acres per colony. There are only rare exceptions. The smallest area ever recorded was a thirty-two-acre tract found in 1952.

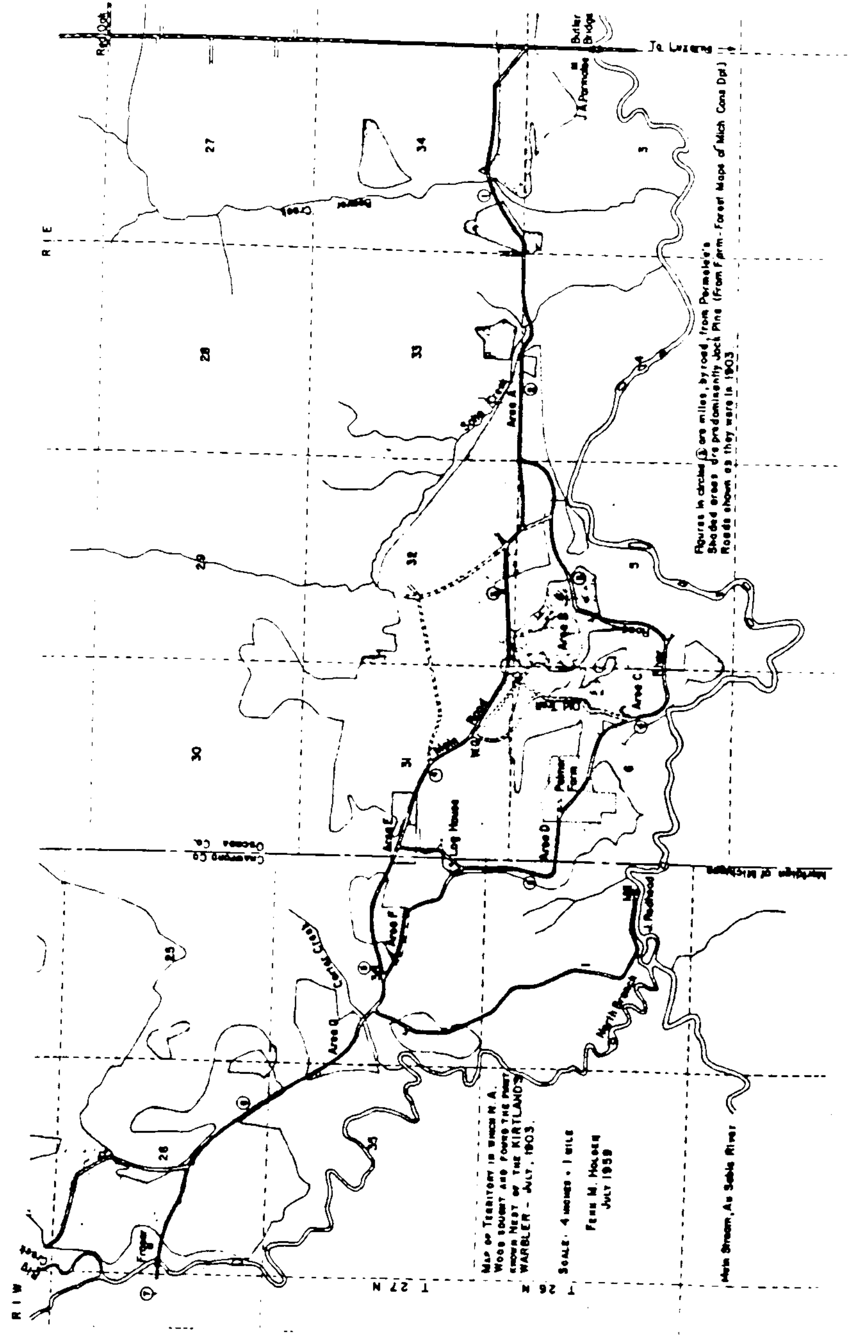
Kirtland's Warbler is primarily insectivorous, but it will indulge in huckleberries in August when they are ripe and soft. And it has been known to peck at automobile grease on a rag, but why, nobody knows.

There is not much water standing around in these sand plains but the warbler seems never to need more than dew. Whether there is some insect life peculiar to the burned wood remaining in the fire clearings or in the new growth is not known. In any case, as Mayfield writes, "this bird is unusual among living creatures in being dependent upon fire."

Several other characteristics of Kirtland's Warbler peculiar both to itself and peculiar in themselves make this bird attractive to both the scientific and sentimental student of bird life. For one thing, this warbler is quite shy. Not a strange trait in a bird except when linked with a trusting attitude which permits observers to come within arm's length and with a tameness which leads it occasionally to perch on the watcher's person. This warbler nesting in remote, unsettled, jack-pine wastelands spends its winters in the more uninhabited islands of the Bahamas.

Mayfield writes of Kirtland's Warbler that its "bright plumage, spirited song, and trusting manner have engendered affection in everyone who has come to know it in the field." Many of its admirers may remember with affection others who were also beautiful but dumb. For this most attractive little bird (some may call it "cute") is not really acute enough to outwit the cowbird, a small blackbird with a brown head, an emigrant from the ancient Western grasslands of the bison. Though dull in color, it is yet bright enough to usurp the benefits of the warbler's nest. Repeatedly and widely, the cowbird makes Kirtland's Warbler the victim of his parasitic cuckoldry. The female cowbird manages to slip into the secreted warbler's nest when the mother is out, and in a matter of seconds lay an egg and perhaps even find time to carry away one of the warbler's eggs. Not only can that rascal repeat the maneuver, not mistaking her egg for the warbler's, but also the warbler fails to recognize the switch even to the extent of hunting food for the cowbird fledgling. Her own young, later to hatch, are often smothered by the intruders.

Thus aborting much of the warbler's reproduction, the cowbird has now apparently become the greatest enemy of this rare


Butler Bridge
Log House
Area A
Area B
Area C
Area D
Area E
Area F
Area G
North Branch
Main Stream, Au Sable River
Crawford Co.
Oscoda Co.
R 1 E
R 1 W
T 27 N
T 26 N

bird. The warbler also, of course, suffers the depredations of the usual predators, such as squirrels, crows, blue jays and hawks. And improved forest-fire control has sharply limited the acreage newly growing up to jack pines, the kind of environment the Kirtland's Warbler unswervingly demands. But the predators, and the fire wardens, the overzealous photographer and formerly the specimen-seeking ornithologist, all of these together have been of but small import as compared to the cowbird as a threat to the survival of this fascinating bird of the Au Sable that is capable of giving so much delight to one treated by his song.

On a June day in 1903 this clear and joyous song attracted the attention of an assistant in the Museum of Zoology at the University of Michigan, E. H. Frothingham. The story of the discovery as the late Josselyn Van Tyne told it to Holden reveals that trout-fishing on the Au Sable was directly responsible for the meeting of man and bird, and eventually to the discovery of its breeding grounds.

Frothingham and a friend, Tom Gale, were camped out not far from Rory Frazer's Halfway House. They heard the sweet, melodious and unknown song pouring persistently from a clump of jack pines near their camp. But they could not find the bird. Later on a trip to the river to fish they heard the song again. This time Gale saw the warbler and shot and skinned it, so that it could be identified. But by the time they broke camp the specimen which had been hanging on the tent flap was "all beat up from swishing in the wind."

Said Gale, "What shall I do with this thing, toss it in the river?"

"No, no," said Frothingham. "I want to show it to Norman Wood."

Wood was the Curator of Birds at the museum in Ann Arbor. He justified Frothingham's confidence in his ability to identify the warbler. He recognized it at once as the one name after Dr. Jared P. Kirtland on whose farm near Cleveland the second known specimen had been taken in 1851. (A prior but undescribed specimen had been collected in the Caribbean by Samuel Cabot, Jr., in 1841).

It being June and school being out, Norman Wood lost no time heading for the site described by Gale and Frothingham. He took the train to Roscommon, hired a boat, and in two days floated sixty miles down the South Branch, then the Middle Branch, to Butler Bridge, now named Parmalee Bridge.

Jim Parmalee then had an establishment near the bridge. He

farmed a little, raised some stock, and guided, and provided accommodations for, fishermen and other travelers.

Norman Wood qualified on both counts. As he traveled, he fished. And he made notes of his trip on his way down the South Branch: "I cast 3 flies and take about 20 trout, all Brook and Beauties, but all under 8 in. but 2. In the camp where we are tonight is a tracing of a Rainbow Trout 18 in. long and one 5 lbs. weight and 20 in. long. I have made a list of birds seen, I think about 40 species."

Camp Douglas, where Wood stopped overnight, was a lumber camp probably at the mouth of Douglas Creek. Next day at dusk he and his companion Dr. Hinsdale arrived at Parmalee's.

This was on July 1 and the next day, losing no time, he set out on his search for the nest of Kirtland's Warbler. After a two-mile walk he suddenly heard the "New Song." "This is the Kirtland's Warbler," he said to himself, and in his subsequent notes wrote: "It is a song so clear and at the same time so joyous that words of mine are a poor expression."

Nevertheless Wood tried to give a syllabic expression of the song: "But the sweetness of the melody and the volume of it! — I think it a wonderful and beautiful song."

All observers are struck by the power and beauty of the song of the Kirtland's Warbler. Gale and Frothingham called it sweet and melodious. To Mayfield it was "spirited." All agree with the tribute offered by Wood in 1903 when he first heard the lovely melody: "Its song, the most beautiful of any warbler, is so wild and clear and has such a ringing, liquid quality. I feel well repaid for my trip by this one experience."

And this warbler sings three or four times a minute from dawn to dusk. He sings when in danger, while bathing, and in the act of mating. And he sings even when he has no mate.

Wood has tried to describe the song as "we-chee-chee-chee-cherrr," but all familiar with it find it actually very difficult to imitate. And they also agree that it reveals the Jack-pine Warbler's presence without a doubt. Its power and volume is so great that it can be heard a quarter of a mile away.

Not only does the song lead the ornithologist to the warbler but also to the well-hidden nest. For one of the most remarkable things about this warbler and its song is that it can sing loudly with a mouth full of food.

Wood was unsuccessful in his first quest for the nest, but he

followed the bird he first heard during his walk on July 2, 1903 until he was so near the bird that he "was amazed at the volume of sound. I saw the singer flit to a low scrub oak and sing," he noted. "Sorry to say, I shot the beautiful singer and carried his body away (in the interest of science)."

For the next five days Wood's search for the nest was fruitless. He shot two more specimens of Kirtland's Warbler and also juncos, Migrant Shrikes, a night-hawk and others needed for the museum. But, though having convinced himself that the Jack-pine Warbler's nest was on or near the ground, he crawled around on hands and knees through the rough bramble, but was unable to find the treasure. On July 8 he set out for

> . . . the Jack Pine Plains 8 miles west of Parmalee's (in Crawford Co.) . . . and at 10 o'clock came to a colony. I got out of the buggy and shot a male, then went ½ mile further and saw a male on a Burnt Stub. This one had a worm in His mouth and I thought I would stay and watch Him as I had an idea from his actions that His nest was *near* by. This male tried to sing with a big green worm in His mouth and His song was like this Ch Ch Che Che *Che a* (the *a* long drawn out). He sang a number of times but never dropped the worm. When He saw me He seemed quite uneasy and worked his tail very like Palm Warbler and gave an anxious tone to His song. Now it was Cha Cha Chee chee twick a a a delivered in a scolding manner. After watching me for a few minutes He dropped from the Stub (in a long glide) and I hurried to find Him at the nest. When I got there (the spot I saw him light) I could not see or flush Him. So I stood very quietly and watched. In a few minutes He was at His old place on the Stub with a worm. Again he dove down, this time 2 rods to the west of the Stub and I started to go there. When just south of the Stub I flushed a female from the ground and after a close look on the ground I saw *the nest* at the foot of a Jack Pine 6 feet tall. The nest was partially covered with low blueberry bushes and Sweet Fern Plants. In the nest were 2 young about 1 week old I should judge, and best of all, 1 egg. This egg was a beautiful pinkish white thinly sprinkled with several shades of Brown spots gathered in a cluster forming a sort of wreath at the larger end. This egg .72 x .56 and must have been not fertile as it contained no

embryo. The nest was 2 inches in diameter and the same in depth, very neat and compact. A depression in the ground thickly lined with fine dead grasses and Pine needles, and last of all, a few hairs from a Horses mane or tail.

Norman Wood stayed on for another week with Jim Parmalee making observations and collection specimens. Among the many birds he found in the area were five kinds of woodpecker, including the rare three-toed variety and five kinds of warblers, besides Kirtland's. He shot eight of the latter in about as many days, a heavy toll for the poor little birds, but – "in the interest of science." Wood also made arrangements with Parmalee to collect and send more specimens for the museum at Ann Arbor. He kept this quiet to protect his friend from risk of prosecution.

In September of 1903 Wood returned. This time he and Professor Reighard floated down the Middle Branch of the Au Sable from Grayling. His diary reads:

> Sept. 11, 1903. Friday, at 6 A.M. we got up, ate breakfast and traveled on, passing the mouth of the North Branch at about 12 noon. We drew the net in a bayou and secured a number of fish, some grayfish and shells. We put up our tent near the mouth of the North Branch. There is a mill here called "Red Head's" [named for Jack Redhead, an early pioneer and guide]. And here I saw a Bald Eagle fly over. In the P.M. we cared for the fish and shells.
>
> Sept. 12, Sat. morning we got an early start to walk to R. Fraser's about 3 miles, as we wanted to collect some fish in Big Creek and North Branch. We walked up the terrace and onto the level Jack-Plains where in a burnt spot I saw and shot a 3-toed Wood Pecker, (P. arcticus). We soon came to the Warbler colony of July and watched carefully the Jack Pine but did not see or hear one.

Wood learned later that they had left for the Bahamas about three weeks before his arrival.

The original roads, the tote roads of the lumbermen, were blocked by private owners of pieces of land across the road. And the resulting detours have changed distances and relative locations from those noted by Wood. A map prepared by Holden gives a good idea of these changes and shows the sites of Redhead's, Parmalee's and Frazer's places in relation to the rivers and the jack-pine plains.

Of the many changes in the Au Sable valley to make it more favorable to wildlife probably none has more significance than that wrought by George W. Mason. This former president of American Motors qualified as a genuine philanthropist, a kindly, gentle nature lover. He never mentioned his many good works. His plans for them were known only to those essential to their fruition.

As a member of the law firm consultant to American Motors, Bethel Kelley told him one evening while they were sitting by the fireside of Mason's home on the river, "You will be remembered in history not for building and selling an automobile nor anything else you have done so much as providing for the people of Michigan something almost impossible to duplicate, fourteen continuous miles of trout stream in a naturally wooded valley."

In retrospect it is clear that for many years Mason planned the realization of this dream to recreate a haven for solitude. He and D. B. Lee acquired the acreage along the South Branch between Chase and Smith bridges from the estate of William C. Durant, founder of General Motors. When Lee died, Mason took over this property according to their agreement. Some of these "river forties," as these forty-acre tracts were known, had river cottages. After Mason bought them these cottages were no longer occupied nor cared for. As far as he was concerned, they didn't exist. They were left to the porcupines and the winds, frost, and snow of winter to destroy. Mason's guests soon knew that these cottages were neither to be seen nor mentioned.

To these guests Mason represented the spirit of trout fishing. Though this representative himself was a substantial three hundred pounds, his spirit was ethereal, permeating the whole place with its guiding force.

George Mason's first discovery of the joy of fishing came when he was a farmer boy in South Dakota. From the day he caught three pickerel in the Cheyenne River he was a devotee of angling. He refined his angling to an art and thus became a dry-fly fisherman. And he thought everyone else who wanted to fish should be one, too. He felt sorry for the bait fisherman: Why shouldn't a man get the enjoyment of doing it the right way?

Once, when viewing the stretch in front of his river where surplus fish from the live-boxes of the boats were released, he

suddenly began to chew hard on his cigar. A bait fisherman was coming down the river approaching the stretch where bread was tossed to hungry, leaping fish and where by general understanding (with George Mason) no one ever fished.

As the bait fisherman drew near, Mason hailed him.

"Have you fished here before?" asked Mason.

No, he hadn't. This was the first time.

"Are you using worms?"

"Yes, I am."

"Well, now, you're new around here and I know you have a perfect right to fish along here anywhere you want to. But we release a lot of fish here and feed them and for people that don't know about it we sort of have a rule that you don't fish from up here to down to the next bend."

The bait fisherman was quite gentlemanly about it. He methodically reeled up a large gob of nightcrawlers until it emerged from the water.

Mason nearly chewed his cigar in two.

"Did you ever try fishing with flies?" he asked.

"No, I never did."

"Well, how about stepping out here a minute and letting me rig you up?"

Lunch, which had been held up during this encounter, was now completely forgotten. The new candidate for dry-fly fishing acquiesced, climbed out of the water and was properly outfitted. With some good gut leaders, a box of dry flies and a short course of instruction he returned to the river while the champion for the dry fly dreamed of another convert.

In 1941 Kelley was included in the invitation for the lawyer's week-end at Mason's. That was his first year in practice. Newly arrived from his native Kentucky, somewhat of the build of a mountaineer and tardily arriving at the fishing camp with borrowed equipment, he was the target for some fun. Tardiness was a serious violation of the Mason rules of punctuality. Leaving Detroit at dawn, he got to Mason's only just in time for breakfast. The panic he showed when his borrowed equipment was missing from his car gave the gang a good time. They were ready to get in the boats with their guides.

Said Mason, "I can see you don't belong with this crowd. What do you think of a fisherman who will lose his equipment when he's finally ready to fish?"

But with a hint or two Kelley soon found his gear on his bed where the guide had placed it.

Mason, realizing he needed help and instruction, took him in his boat with himself. He gave him the proper flies and some rudimentary lessons in casting technique.

There wasn't much time to practice; they soon came to a pool where trout were rising all around the boat. A good hatch was on. A little excited by the hatch (as what true fisherman isn't?), Mason shouted, "Take the near one! Take the near one! Take the near one!"

Kelley's best cast put his fly in the bushes on the opposite side of the stream. And it put most of the fish down, ending some good possibilities.

"Kelley," said Mason, "you'll never make a trout fisherman. You remind me of a clumsy cub bear playing with himself."

And thereafter he was Cub Bear Kelley at Mason's.

A willingness to try and especially to use a dry fly were all that George Mason asked. If you were willing and liked it, you belonged to his club. As is customary in such clubs and lodges, a guest book was kept. It enrolled the names of many men of prominence. And under "Remarks" it listed many trite and sometimes pretentious comments such as, "Had fine week-end. Caught 7. Found 2 lying under big stump in big hole. Took one 12½ inches long." And so on.

One of the frequent guests was Ed Zern, a great favorite of Mason's. On one visit he contributed this little satire on the usual remarks:

"Had wonderful time this morning. Got up. Rigged rod. Found 2 lying in south corner of dining room up on left-hand side of plate. Took both."

The hungry fishermen at Mason's were lucky in that their host was a true gourmet and also lucky in that John and Anna from Norway did most of the cooking. On big week-ends it was a ritual that *trout au bleu* be cooked and served on tables beside the river. The recipe for this, which Mason had brought back from Europe, required that the trout be immersed in boiling water as soon as killed.

Another of his imported recipes was for *sauce bearnaise.* This was served generously with the cold steak left over from that grilled on charcoal the day before.

Mason's delight in food imposed a heavy load upon him. His cumbersome weight made wading impossible for him and it was

the customary thing to fish from the Au Sable river boat. Guides were always on hand to pole these for the guests. John, Mark and Lacy Stephan, Earl Madsen, and Bill Jensen were some of them. Lester Royce, the banker in Roscommon, was also a regular at Mason's.

For almost a score of years another guest at Mason's was Bambi, a doe which, when first found injured, was cared for by him. He had a barn with a stall built. But Bambi only remained secluded there during the hunting season. At all other times she ranged the woods widely at will. She loved to eat cigarettes, except for one brand, and would come to the fishermen in the stream to beg them. English Ovals, redolent with Turkish tobacco, she rejected and no one could fool her into accepting them. She seemed totally fearless of humans. Once she frightened Bev Anderson out of his wits by coming out of the woods and taking his sandwich away from him.

Every year the fertile Bambi came home with one or two fawns; and once, in addition to the two new ones, she was followed by her two offspring of the previous year.

Near the end of his life Mason reckoned up the approximate number of keepable trout he had caught (including those not kept) and arranged to leave the Conservation Department twenty-five thousand dollars to replace them at a dollar a fish.

Mason supported with enthusiasm the Phoenix Project at the University of Michigan. He liked the thought behind this development of atomic power for peaceful purposes for its concept, "From these ashes there shall rise . . . ." In a sense, creation and recreation was also the theme for the George Mason Reserve along the South Branch.

George Mason had long planned a chapel in the woods to provide for those contemplative meditations which he expected of fishermen, hunters, and other nature lovers. In 1954, the last year of his life, he had the satisfaction of seeing it under way. For him the place for the practice of religion was in the wildwood where you are alone and as close to God as you can get.

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The Author

Hazen L. Miller graduated from the Medical School of the University of Michigan in 1920. He is a urologist practicing in the suburbs north of Detroit. Some of his other interests are books, history, fly-fishing, art, old maps and unusual people. These interests moved him to try to tell the story of a fascinating bit of America.

Dr. Miller has a retreat on the North Branch of the Au Sable which he calls Aswe Wood, a name derived from *As You Like It.* Over the door are Shakespeare's lines:

And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything:
I would not change it.

(*Continued from front flap*)

legendary grayling, a fish that once inhabited the Au Sable River in almost unbelievable abundance. The beauty and taste of the grayling were unparalleled, as was its eagerness to fly at anything fishermen offered it.

It is only natural that in a setting such as this strong personalities should play a dominant role, and Dr. Miller presents several in vivid detail, including the Indian Chief David Shoppenagon.

The reader will be fascinated by the material this book contains, and will long remember it. It would not be surprising at all if he should decide to visit the beautiful Au Sable and its historic regions.