

DR. HARRY JUSTIN RODDY, NATURALIST

A warm and delightful account of one of Lancaster's great natural scientists by one of his associates.

When the late Mrs. Charles Y. Tanger suggested that I write a paper on "Dr. Roddy, The Naturalist," I felt both highly honored and flattered. First, I was perfectly aware of the fact that she was far more qualified than I to write this paper. Another point in her favor was the fact that we had both become acquainted with Dr. Roddy at about the same time.

Harry Justin Roddy was born at Landisburg, Pennsylvania, on May 25, 1856, the son of William Henry and Susan Catherine (Waggoner) Roddy. He passed away at the home of his daughter in Pittsburgh, September 4, 1943.

He was graduated from the Millersville State Normal School in 1881. From Kansas City University he earned the Ph.D. degree in 1903. In 1939 he was granted the honorary degree of Sc.D. by Franklin and Marshall College. Dr. Roddy's active life was primarily concerned with teaching, and for 65 years he pursued the teaching profession, a record seldom equaled. From 1877 to 1887 he taught in the public schools of Pennsylvania. In 1887 he began his teaching career at the Millersville State Normal School where he continued until he reached the retirement age of 70 in 1926.

One of his former students expresses the following tribute: "Always I was impressed, as he stood in front of our class, that he himself was just finding out the things he told us, for they seemed so fresh to him and he appeared delighted to know about them."

Dr. Roddy married Anna Houck Graver on December 21, 1891. They had two children, Anna Mary (Mrs. Clair Kintner) and Henry Justin (deceased). Appropriately Dr. Roddy is buried against a ridge of Cambrian sandstone in Lancaster County soil, in the immediate region where he began his geological investigations.

Shortly after retiring from Millersville State Teachers College in 1926, at the age of seventy, Dr. Roddy came to Franklin and Marshall College as Professor of Geology and Curator of the North Museum.

The Lancaster Recreation and Playground Association, under the leadership of Mr. Grant D. Brandon, realizing the dearth of outdoor activities for adults, offered a series of Saturday afternoon nature hikes to all those interested. Dr. Roddy with his wonderful knowledge of natural history was chosen to lead these hikes. At the time these hikes were started Lancaster County had few, if any, really outstanding amateur naturalists. Lest this appear to be a rather rash statement, let me amend it by saying, there were quite a few people with potential ability, groping about in the dark, trying frantically to get started in the right direction. Their opportunity had now arrived in the person of Dr. Roddy. Our first few hikes were called off because of rain, but we were not discouraged, for in the gleam of his honest face and pleasant manner, we felt was one to show us the way. I remember when I approached him in the rain, hoping the hike would not be called off, but he decided for health's sake it had to be cancelled. At the same time, he assured me that next week's hike would be to the same place. "To visit an extinct volcano and the remains of a Devonian Forest." Can you imagine what an exciting event this would be for a young naturalist to look forward to?

The next week the weather was ideal, and we went with him by trolley car to Millersville and hiked from there along the igneous dikes known as Stony Ridge, back of Millersville. This was his extinct volcano and the remains of a Devonian Forest turned out to be a large stand of *Equisetum*, commonly known as scouring rush. Fossil specimens of Devonian time indicate it grew to a height of fifty (50) feet some 270 million years ago, and though still persisting through the ages, it has now degenerated in size from two to four feet.

Dr. Roddy possessed a fascinating way of stimulating one's imagination, and soon we became interested in many different categories of natural history.

At this time, Botany had quite a number of amateur followers and from this group was formed the Muhlenberg Botanical Society, which still meets in the North Museum and presents many interesting programs. We can search the literature in vain for a plant named in his honor, yet this fact does not detract one iota from his fame as a botanist. He knew plants and knew them well. Most of our local botanists owe their success to what he taught them. Often, when he came upon a plant, the identification of which he was not certain, he would recline on the ground alongside the plant and pick it apart. I learned the identification of many plants from him as he assumed this prone position. Hundreds of school teachers, who attended his classes at Millersville, speak in terms of high praise for his ability to make any subject sound extremely interesting. He had an uncanny way of ferreting out unusual trees and plants. He, at one time, located an extremely rare plant, the Box Huckleberry at Mount Dempsey, near Landisburg, Penna.

Dr. Roddy loved the feel of wood. The many beautiful pieces of furniture, he turned out by hand, are well known and prized possessions of their present owners. On a recent visit to Perry County, I interviewed his cousin, Mrs. Clara Waggoner Bistline, who lives but a short distance from Dr. Roddy's former home at Landisburg, Penna. She told me that

in his younger days he spent a lot of time at a workbench in the old mill. She showed me some fine examples of his handiwork; a large curved-handle coffee table with wooden wheels, two trays (one from the old homestead) and a drop-leaf table in which the grain of wood made a delightful pattern. All of these were of walnut wood. I have known him to go out, select dead Cedar trees, take them to the saw mill, have them sawed into boards and with hand tools, work them into as fine a set of dining room furniture, as you would care to own. The particular set I have in mind, is now in the possession of Mrs. Louis Harnish, former wife of Dr. Roddy's son, H. Justin Roddy Jr., now deceased.

Dr. Roddy walked with a limp caused by a severe injury in his youth and was seldom seen without a cane. Sometimes I felt he could get along without a cane, but he loved the feel of wood so much. He had over a hundred canes, made from many kinds of wood, from many different parts of the world. He once made a cane from the black keys of an old parlor organ, because he was determined to have one made of ebony. He selected the keys by dropping them into a bucket of water, those that floated he threw away, for he knew that the specific gravity of good ebony would cause it to sink, no matter how old and seasoned it might be. These he glued together in a clever overlapping manner and then worked them into a fine tapered cane.

I have often heard him say that some day he was going to make a violin. He informed me that he had selected the wood from an old barn in Perry County. He, however, did not seem in a great hurry to begin work on it, but kept reminding me that he would do it before he died. This went on for years. Then one day, several years before his death, I opened a drawer in his desk and to my surprise, there, neatly carved out were the parts of a violin. I closed the drawer with a feeling that I had discovered something that was not meant for my eyes. I also felt that Dr. Roddy knew that his time was running out. He finally finished the violin, which Dr. Herbert H. Beck, after testing it, pronounced a fine instrument with a very pleasant tone. The violin is now in the possession of a grandson at Bellevue near Pittsburgh, Penna.

Dr. Roddy was at one time a member of the Lancaster Tree Commission and wrote a series of articles on trees which was published in the local newspapers. Also published in the local papers were many articles with illustrations on birds, insects, mammals and reptiles. His publication on the Reptiles of Lancaster Co. and Pennsylvania, although in need of revision due to the changes in nomenclature, remains the most recent compilation of the Reptiles of Lancaster Co. and Pennsylvania ever published in Lancaster. While Dr. Roddy was compiling the list of Reptilia, we visited many localities and crawled through some of the best mudholes in the county. He was very much interested in the concretions formed in fresh water by the agency of blue-green algae and other plants and published several papers on these strange objects, which are still forming in the Little Conestoga Creek.

Dr. Roddy was such a versatile individual, that it is unfair to pin him down to one category, but the area of natural science that I know he loved dearly and which he pursued most diligently, even up to his last days, was

Dr. Harry Justin Roddy



Paleontology, the study of fossils. It is in this field that he made a name for himself which will not be forgotten, having had no less than seven fossils named in his honor.¹ He knew and worked with some of the country's most outstanding geologists. Dr. Charles D. Walcott, onetime secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, while living, was recognized as the foremost Cambrian Geologist in this country. He was a personal friend of Dr. Roddy and came to Lancaster on numerous occasions to go afield with him. Van Ingen, Resser and Howell, all good Paleontologists, were men that Dr. Roddy knew well. I knew Dr. Resser personally and have met Howell at Princeton. Dr. Glen L. Jepson, Vertebrate Paleontologist at Princeton University, frequently came to Lancaster to visit Dr. Roddy. I went with them to Perry Co. to hunt fossil fish in the Silurian Red Beds of Perry Co., near Landisburg. It is well to remember that Dr. Roddy's contributions to the field of Paleontology were many. He discovered twenty-five new species of Cambrian fossils.

Often we would go to some section of the county to investigate something in the field of natural science. Dr. Roddy would look up a local school teacher, who always seemed highly pleased to go afield with the man who taught him so much while at Millersville State Teachers College.

Once in Lebanon County, while on a fossil hunt with a group of young men, we stayed overnight at the home of one of his former students, who was now a farmer. We slept in the barn that night among the hay. Dr. Roddy had refused the hospitality of his host to sleep in the guest room

and went with us to the barn. Dr. Roddy was a man who loved humor and enjoyed many a hearty laugh. This night proved most interesting to us younger men, for there was a rumor that Dr. Roddy had an artificial leg and we were all dying of curiosity to see if it was true. When we all removed our trousers before hitting the hay, he revealed a pair of natural legs.

Dr. Roddy was proud of the group he had taught and would write articles for papers and magazines, telling of the progress the group was making. When the weather got too severe for outdoor activities, he kindly consented to give a series of courses in Geology, in the Geology Department of Franklin and Marshall College. This went on for several years and was eagerly devoured by most of those attending. Many of his lectures were illustrated with slides and I had somewhat of an advantage over the other students inasmuch as I operated the projector and had to follow his every word to be ready to change the slides. Most of my background in the fields of Geology and Paleontology, I owe to this most patient man.

After working with him in the museum for a number of years, he made me the Assistant Curator of the museum. Many of the models I made for him, I attempted only because he would say, "You can do it." The portrait of Dr. Roddy painted by Florence Starr Taylor was commissioned by the College Alumni Association as a token of their respect for him and his efforts in the field of science. He holds in his hands a small model of a Mastodon, which he insisted on having in the portrait because he said it was the best model I had made and admired it very much. One could go on writing of personal experiences with this man, his interests were so many and varied.

A splendid memorial to Harry Justin Roddy was written by Benjamin L. Miller and published in the proceedings of the Geological Society of America, Annual Report for 1944, a copy of which is in the Library of Franklin and Marshall College. Dr. Roddy was a Fellow of this organization.

After he left Franklin and Marshall College and went to live with his daughter, Anna Mary (Mrs. Clair Kintner) at Bellevue, Penna., I received an invitation to come to visit them. I spent a most enjoyable week. Often we would sit by the fireside and talk about old times. During the day we visited museums, the zoo and botanical gardens. Up to this time my travels were not very extensive and I was having the time of my life. In the Botanical Garden, he sat down to rest, while I brought him news of a new-found wonder such as the Aracaria Tree. He often spoke of this tree, but I had never seen one and here I found it growing in the gardens. One evening his grandson attempted to play Dr. Roddy's violin, which was the first time I heard it, but the noises that came from it sounded more like a cat caught under the garden gate. I felt it could have fallen into better hands. The boy at that time was not a musician. Before leaving the next morning, I went to Dr. Roddy's bedroom to say good-bye. We both knew we would never see each other again. However, one does not forget so great a person and we of the North Museum and Planetarium of Franklin and Marshall College are keeping alive the memory of this

man who contributed so much to the fields of education and natural science.

FOOTNOTES

1. **Bulletin of the Geological Society of America**, Volume 49, pages 195-248, 13 plates, 1 figure, February 1, 1938, Article — "Lower Cambrian Olenellus Zone of the Appalachians" by Charles Elmer Resser and Benjamin Franklin Howell
 - a/ *Camptostroma rodnyi*
 - b/ *Paterina rodnyi*
 - c/ *Eoagnostus rodnyi*
 - d/ *Olenellus rodnyi*
 - e/ *Lancastria rodnyi*
 - f/ *Roddyia typa* — a unique crustacean"Cambrian System (Restricted) of the Southern Appalachians" by Charles Elmer Resser, October 31, 1938
 - g/ *Periomella rodnyi*

PUBLICATIONS BY HARRY JUSTIN RODDY

1902

Elementary Geography, American Book Company, Revised editions in 1913, 1921 and 1924. Latest edition; 128 pages, figures, maps.

1904

Complete Geography, American Book Company, Revised editions in 1913 and 1921. Latest edition; 144 pages, figures, maps and various State supplements.

1909

"The Lower Cambrian of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania (Abstract)", **Science**, new series, volume 30, page 415.

1915

"Concretions in Streams Formed by the Agency of Blue-green Algae and Related Plants," **American Philosophical Society Proceedings**, volume 54, pages 246-258, 2 figures.

1916

Physical and Industrial Geography of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania 113 pages, 42 figures, 4 maps.

1926

"Problems of Calcareous Concretions in Streams (Abstract)", **Pennsylvania Academy of Science Proceedings**, volume 1, page 76.

1928

"Reptiles of Lancaster County and the State of Pennsylvania", **Publications of the Department of Natural History of Franklin and Marshall College**, 53 pages, 25 figures, 1 map.

Dr. Roddy also furnished material in natural history to several writers and was a frequent contributor on scientific trips to local newspapers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. John W. Price, Sr. is retired from the Lancaster City Fire Department and has been curator of the North Museum at Franklin and Marshall College.