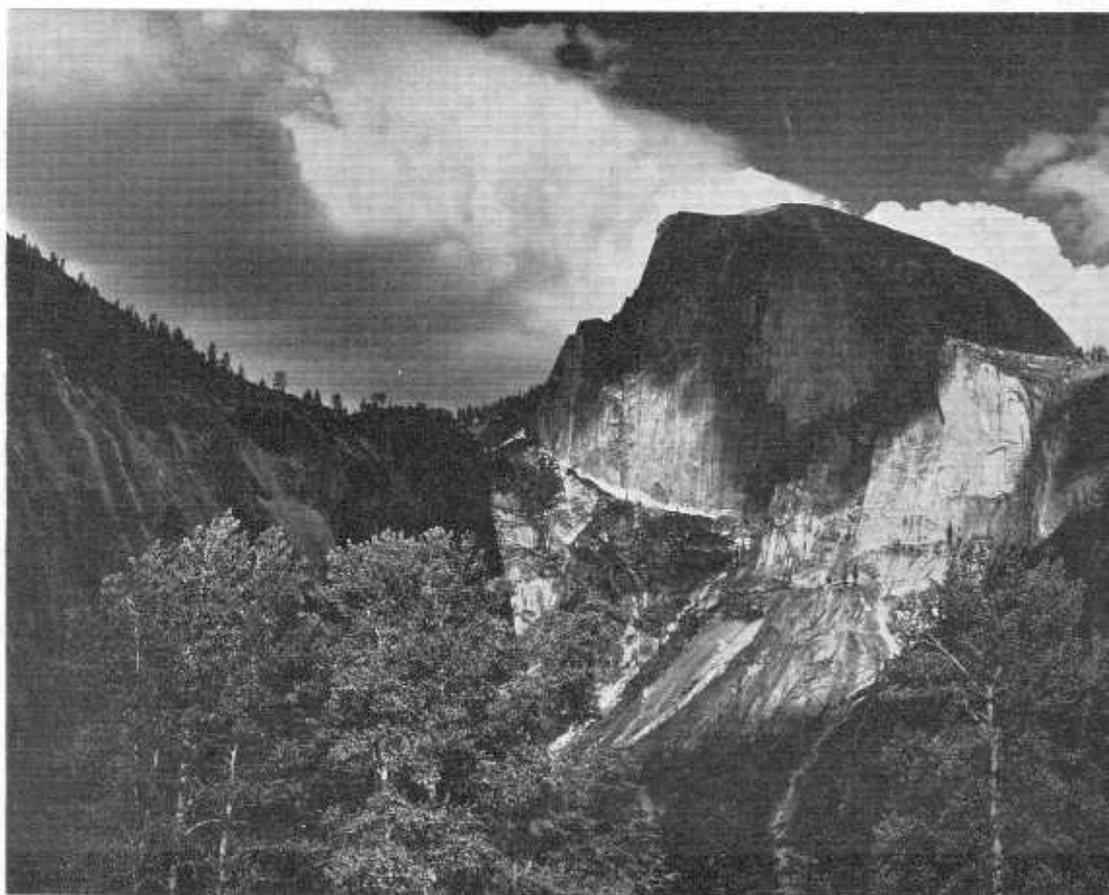


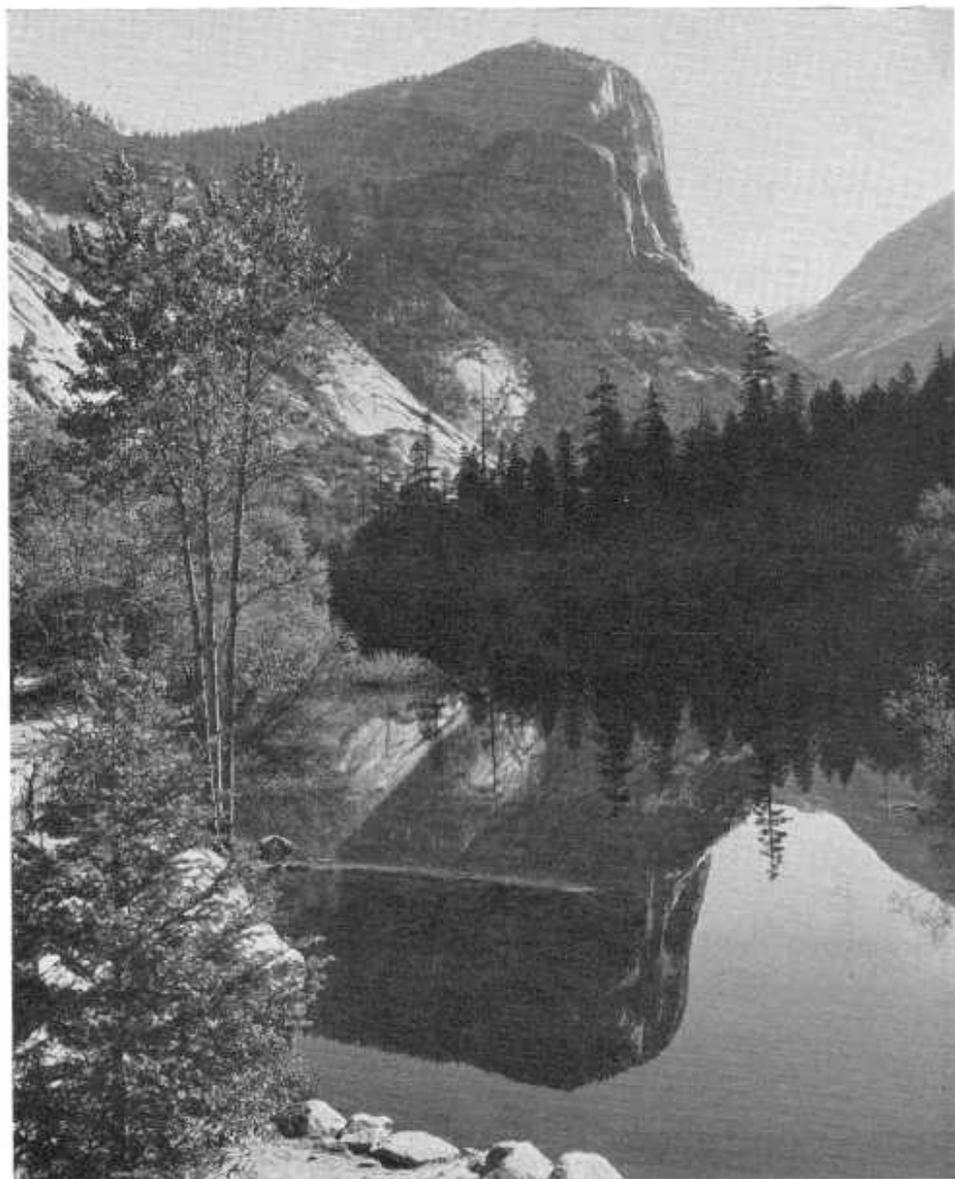
YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES

VOLUME XXXII • NUMBER 4

APRIL 1953



*Half Dome, Yosemite Valley
—Ansel Adams*



Mirror Lake and Mount Watkins, Morning. By Ansel Adams from "My Camera in Yosemite Valley." Reproduction by permission of Virginia Adams and Houghton Mifflin Company. Mount Watkins, the massive granite peak strikingly reflected in this well-known scene, perpetuates the name of one of Yosemite's outstanding early-day photographers—Carleton E. Watkins.

Yosemite Nature Notes

THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF
THE YOSEMITE NATURALIST DIVISION AND
THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION, INC.

John C. Preston, Superintendent

D. E. McHenry, Park Naturalist

D. H. Hubbard, Assoc. Park Naturalist

N. B. Herkenham, Asst. Park Naturalist

W. W. Bryant, Junior Park Naturalist

VOL. XXXII

APRIL 1953

NO. 4

CARLETON E. WATKINS, PIONEER PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE PACIFIC COAST

By Ralph H. Anderson, Information Specialist, National Park Service

Foreword: One of the most admired and photographed features in Yosemite Valley is Mt. Watkins, the peak that is magnificently reflected in beautiful Mirror Lake. Probably few of the many visitors who see this prominent landmark realize that the man for whom it was named was one of Yosemite's earliest and most noteworthy photographers—Carleton E. Watkins. The following article relates only a part of his fascinating history.

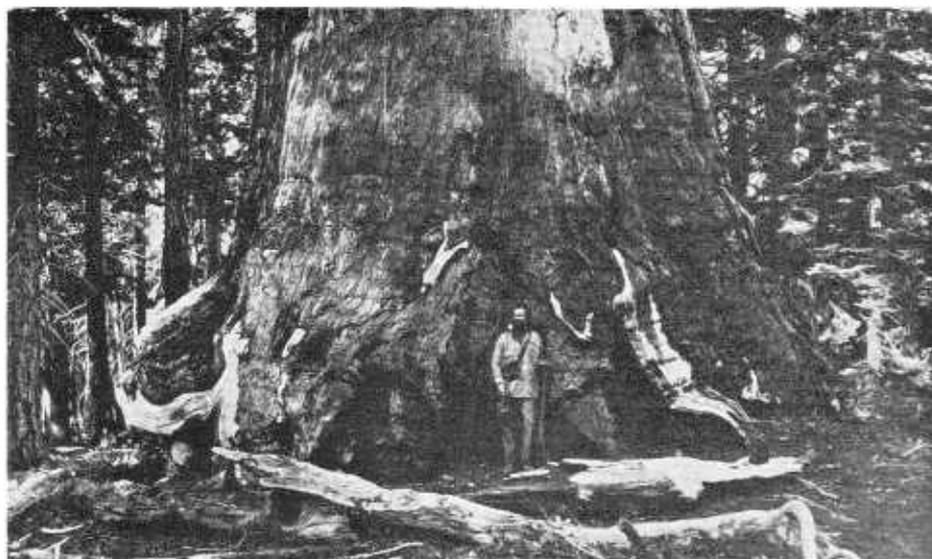
In the quiet little town of Oneonta, Oswego County, New York, two of California's most famous pioneers got their start. Two boys, Collis P. Huntington and Carleton E. Watkins, practically lived together, played together, went to school together.

Watkins was born on November 11, 1829, youngest of a family of five children. His parents were Scotch hotel keepers. There were two sisters, Harriet and Caroline, and two brothers, Charles and George. As news of the gold rush in California reached young Carleton and his friend Collis, they were fired with a desire for adventure. In the spring of 1851 the two young men set out for California with knapsacks loaded with needles, thread, calico, and other household items that would find a ready sale on their long trek on foot across country to the gold fields.

Watkins secured a job in a store in San Francisco where he met a daguerreotypist, R. H. Vance, who had studios in San Francisco, Sacra-

mento, and San Jose. When Vance's experienced operator in San Jose left unexpectedly Watkins was called upon to substitute with the understanding that he would be replaced before the heavy week-end trade. But Watkins became so proficient as a daguerreotypist in a remarkably short time that he continued to work for Vance before moving back to San Francisco in 1857 or 1858, where he opened his own business, using the then newly developed wet-plate process.

In the summer of 1858 or 1859 Watkins made his first photographic trip into the uncharted wilderness of the Sierra, taking with him an enormous camera constructed for the purpose and capable of making 18 by 22-inch photographic plates. On this trip he visited the Mariposa Grove of giant sequoias and photographed Galen Clark standing at the base of the Grizzly Giant. This is said to be the first actual photograph of a giant sequoia, although engravings of the huge trees had ap-



Galen Clark—discoverer of Mariposa Grove and first State guardian of Yosemite Valley—standing at the base of the Grizzly Giant, 1858 or 1859. Taken by Carleton E. Watkins, this is probably the first photograph of a giant sequoia.

peared earlier in publications and on letter sheets. Not until 1861 did Watkins visit Yosemite Valley, using the same camera. On both of these trips he carried also a stereo camera, since there was a great demand for stereographs at that time. In the January 1918 issue of *News Notes of California Libraries* Charles B. Turrill aptly stated:

In our present day photographic methods, it is almost impossible to understand the difficulties of the task and the indomitable energy and courage of the man who produced those pictures. . . . At least twelve mules were required to pack the outfit. . . . It must be borne in mind that large glass plates formed a very important part of his equipment. The tent used in coating and developing these plates was a load for one mule. This young man was compelled to take five mules in his train carrying camera, tent, etc., around the Valley with him, from point to point. As each picture was made the tent had to be set up, the plates coated and then immediately exposed and at once developed.

On the trip to Yosemite Valley in 1861, Watkins included an arduous trek along the south rim of the valley, where he made extraordinary photographs from Old Inspiration Point

and other scenic spots. These photographs unquestionably had a profound effect in influencing public opinion in the East, which led to shaping legislation for setting aside Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Grove as a California state park, in an act of Congress signed by Abraham Lincoln in 1864.

The Yosemite Book, published as a report of the Whitney Survey, contained many of Watkins' finest landscapes. In 1868 he was awarded first prize at the Paris International Exposition by the committee on photographic landscapes, the "only medal for California views." It is interesting to note that a pen-and-ink drawing of this medal was made by his old friend, William Keith, San Francisco artist, and this appeared on the backs of Watkins' old stereo views. At the Philadelphia Centennial celebration in 1876, Watkins' views of Yosemite were paid high honor. Photographs made at the centennial show Watkins' large pictures conspicuously.

During the sixties and seventies Watkins made many trips to Yosemite. Lady C. F. Gordon-Cumming, writing in *Granite Crags*, stated:

Happily for the Yosemite, it lends itself admirably to photography, and has found various enthusiastic artists in that line, chief among whom still ranks Mr. Watkins, whose beautiful work reached us in England some years ago, and first made me long to visit this grand region. He has been working here all this summer, camping in the valley, and carrying his materials in a great covered wagon, which he stations at some accessible spot, and thence makes his expeditions to all the finest points.

The trip referred to was in 1878 and it was evident that Watkins by that time was famous throughout the world.

We have learned from Julia Watkins, daughter of Carleton E. Watkins, that her father had a studio next to that of Isaiah W. Taber, another famous early-day photographer. There was even a doorway between their adjoining studios and they borrowed from each other frequently. While Watkins was away on a trip one time, Taber is reported to have appropriated all of Watkins' famous 18 by 22-inch glass plates. Julia stated that following this experience the doorway between the two studios was completely sealed, and her father started anew using a smaller camera and announced his new "Boudoir Series."

In November 1873 Watkins made a trip to Utah, chartering two railroad cars to carry his wagon, team, and photographic equipment. Through his friend, Collis P. Huntington, Watkins had a lifetime pass on the railroads, in return for which he did extensive work for Mr. Huntington gratis. William Keith accompanied Watkins on this trip to Utah and made valuable use of Watkins' photographs for many of his oil paintings.

In 1880 Watkins made his first trip to southern California and east as far as Tucson, Arizona, photographing the progress of railroad construction. It was on this trip that he wrote a series of letters to Frances ("Frankie") Sneed who was operating his studio on Montgomery Street in San Francisco. These letters reveal extreme difficulties encountered by the pioneer photographer in his business. Competition was keen and Watkins, despite his fame, was already feeling the pinch. In a letter to "Frankie," his future wife, from Santa Monica on June 26, 1880, he wrote, "If this business don't give us a living we will go and squat on some government land and raise spuds." Some evidence of the volume of business the studio was conducting appears in a letter written April 3 from Los Angeles, which stated, "Tell Bagnasco to print the Fruit Exhibition (the 200 stereos) just as fast as he can and send them along 50 at a time, to Carter & Rice, Los Angeles."

Indication of the sad state of business affairs was revealed in a letter Watkins wrote to "Frankie" from the Casa Grande ruin on this same trip in the spring of 1880:

When a customer comes in your place get all you can in the way of price but don't let one go on account of price. Sell all you [can] for all you can get. That is the rule of all other dealers in my goods and I have stood out for good prices to my own detriment long enough. This year give 'em h--- with their own shot.

As near as we can determine, Watkins married Frances Sneed on his 51st birthday, November 11, 1880. He had met his petite bride at Virginia City, Nevada, some time earlier. In our collection of Watkins' material in the Yosemite Museum is an excellent photograph of the interior of his studio, with his daughter Julia and son Collis at the doorway.

Beside the doorway is Julia's favorite doll, Araminta Clementina Josephina Watkins. Julia vividly remembers those early days in the top floor of that building on Montgomery Street. The reception room and the studio, with its elaborate props, were downstairs. Her father would sometimes call up the stairway that he would soon bring a distinguished visitor to meet the family, thus giving her mother time to straighten up their living quarters.

Julia remembers going to bed in the room adjoining the living room and watching through a crack in the doorway the shadow profile of her jovial father as he chuckled over the cartoons and jokes in his favorite magazine, *Puck*, or wiped tears from his eyes after reading a sad story in the *Overland Monthly*, another of his magazines. He was evidently a man of deep feelings, quick to respond to humor or pathos. Julia Watkins possesses her father's lovable personality and his joy in living.

Carleton Watkins' profound appreciation of the out-of-doors is reflected in his magnificent photographs. His unyielding enthusiasm and energy led him to rise at day-break morning after morning on his long treks into Yosemite. One of his favorite spots here was Mirror Lake, reflecting a noble mountain which now bears his name (see frontispiece).

Watkins made a second trip to the copper mines at Anaconda and Butte, Montana, in 1890. On this trip he wrote a series of letters to his wife in San Francisco which disclose their continued struggle in the photographic business and a number of physical ailments that plagued Watkins during the later years of his life. All of these letters reveal his unflinching sense of humor despite ad-



Carleton E. Watkins, from a cameo carved by an Italian artist in San Francisco. This cameo is the best known likeness of the pioneer photographer, and is a prized possession of Julia Watkins, his daughter.

versity, and his warmth of feeling toward family and friends.

During the development of the Kern County Land Company, Watkins visited Bakersfield, California, and made a series of some 700 views of the Hagen and Tevis property on 8 by 10-inch negatives on dry plates. This was probably his last large commercial job. One evening when he returned from a hard day of photography, he found the property owners were having an elaborate dinner party. They invited him to join them. Watkins had only his old work clothes and his one white shirt was dirty. Nevertheless they insisted he join the gay party, and promised that they would dress him up. Whereupon Watkins washed his shirt and his hosts produced a linen duster, nattily cut in the shape of a swallowtail coat. While everyone else at the affair was in full dress, Watkins was the life of the party dressed in the improvised suit.

Watkins continued to suffer ill health, poverty, and misfortune through the early 1900's. He had many friends among the prominent citizens of California, including Governor Pardee, who helped him in his later years. His friend, Collis P. Huntington, gave him an 81-acre ranch at Capay in Yolo County. Some of his relatives were living at the ranch at the time of the San Francisco earthquake and fire of April 18, 1906. This accounts for the preservation of a number of photographs and letters which are vital to our knowledge of Watkins' life. Practically all of his photographic

plates and fine collection of daquerreotypes were destroyed in the fire. Almost blind, ill, and bitterly disappointed, Watkins was led from his burning studio on that date by his son Collis to the home of his photographer friend, Charles B. Turrill. He never recovered from this tragic experience which blotted out for all time any possibility of his again being self-supporting and independent.

In 1910 Watkins had failed in health to such an extent that he was committed to the State institution at Napa. He died there in 1916 at the age of 87.



Historic photograph of Carlleton E. Watkins, almost blind and failing in health, being forcefully led from his San Francisco studio by his son Collis (on right) and a friend, on the morning of April 18, 1906, following the earthquake. Watkins' studio was on the top floor of the corner building on the right. Photo copied from the original at the Society of California Pioneers, San Francisco.

EXOTIC TORTOISE DISCOVERED IN YOSEMITE VALLEY

By Orthello L. Wallis, Park Ranger

A desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) was discovered plodding its way across the road near Camp 7 in Yosemite Valley, elevation 4,000 feet, on September 29 last year by Bill Nuttley, an employee of the Yosemite Park and Curry Company. This find was extraordinary because it was made so far from the turtle's native home in the arid deserts of southeastern California, Utah, Arizona, Nevada, and Sonora, Mexico.

The reptile was given to another employee who took it home to his son, age 12, and daughter, age 5. The next morning, of course, they took the tortoise to school. The teacher, Mr. L. D. Moore, who is a summer member of the ranger-naturalist staff in Yosemite, explained that this particular turtle was not native to the park and had not been reported previously from this location.

The strange occurrence of this turtle in Yosemite Valley probably was the result of its release by some visitor who had picked the turtle up on the distant desert. When this person had grown tired of it as a pet, he had let the tortoise go in these surroundings which are so poorly suited to its requirements. Actually, the introduction of exotic animals into a national park is prohibited by Federal law, for such an action might eventually cause serious disturbance of the natural conditions. With respect to the desert tortoise, however, this danger would be slight because the environment in Yosemite is so unlike that of the desertland.

Indeed, the danger would more readily apply to the survival of the tortoise.

In its proper habitat the desert tortoise lives entirely upon the land and feeds upon vegetation. In Yosemite National Park, only one species of turtle, the western pond turtle (*Clemmys marmorata*), occurs natively. It is found in some of the ponds and lakes in the Mather District of the park, and is carnivorous in its food habits. It has flipper-like, webbed feet, whereas the desert tortoise has stumpy legs like those of an elephant. Although it is equally correct to call these reptiles "turtles," the ones which live on the land are usually referred to as tortoises.

The bottom shell, or plastron, of the tortoise consists of bony plates called scutes. As the animal grows, new layers are annually added to the scutes. Mr. Moore counted 20 "rings" on the scutes of the desert tortoise which indicated an age of 20 years. In older individuals the plates may become worn with wear, making it more difficult to estimate the age by this method.

In its native habitat the tortoise will draw its head and hind feet into its shell and will fold its front feet in ahead of its head when disturbed. These feet are covered by horny scales which provide protection against enemies. The individual found in Yosemite Valley did not readily respond to disturbances in this manner, indicating that it previously had become used to man.



DEAD BEAR. BURNED HOUSE

By Homer W. Robinson, Assistant Chief Ranger

On Friday, April 3, a resident of Merced who owns a summer home in the private Foresta area within the park telephoned the Ranger Office during the noon hour to report that the home of a Mr. Patterson at Foresta had burned. The man making the report said he had just arrived at Foresta from Merced, had discovered the house had burned very recently, as it was still smoking, and there was a dead bear in a tree nearby.

An investigation a short time later revealed the dead bear weighing 150 to 200 pounds on top of a power transformer in the tree near the site of the burned house. The bear plainly met death by electrocution as he was in close proximity to the high voltage transmission line, and had been severely burned.

When linemen of the power company removed the dead bear they also found a dead gray squirrel nearby. Possibly the bear climbed in doing so he had to pass by the tree in search of the squirrel, and wires which served two houses in the vicinity. It appears that bruin hooked a paw over one or more of these wires to pull himself up the tree, electrocuting himself and making a short circuit at the entrance box on the end of the Patterson home, and so caused the fire.

To our knowledge there were no witnesses to the burning of the house. There were still live coals at the site when the investigation was made about 2 o'clock Friday afternoon, and the condition of trees and shrubs surrounding the house indicated the fire had started about daylight that morning when there was

no wind. Also, the condition of the bear indicated he had been dead only a matter of hours. Linking the electrocuted bear with the burned house is pure conjecture, but it does seem probable.

This is the first instance we know of where a bear might be suspected of arson, and suggests a somewhat different kind of fire danger, which has not heretofore been anticipated in our forest protection measures!



John Mulledy

Electrocuted bear on top of power transformer in tree at Foresta.

CONFUSING PARTNERS

By Sam W. Elkins, Ranger Naturalist

In early July last year I found myself standing on the shores of Harden Lake. This is a readily accessible spot, perched on the south rim of the Tuolumne River Canyon, a little less than a mile north of the old Tioga Road near White Wolf. The lake itself is about 7,600 feet in elevation and is surrounded by a dense stand of lodgepole pines, aspens, and red firs.

I paused by the lake to admire the view and catch my breath when I heard a loud chorus of calls, obviously made by young birds in the near vicinity. With just a little searching I found the sound coming from a hole containing a nest about 20 feet up in the side of a dead lodgepole pine. The sound was occasioned by the visit of one of the parent birds, whose tail could be seen sticking out of the hole at the time. In a few moments it emerged and showed itself to be a male Williamson sapsucker. His colors were dominantly black and white, with a black crown and back, and white rump, face stripes, and wing patches. He also has a distinctive red throat patch and yellow belly.

He rested on the side of the tree for a few moments and then flew away. In a very short time the tree was again visited by an adult bird. This bird looked like it had no business there whatsoever because its plumage had not the vaguest resemblance to that of the one who had so recently left. The young birds

recognized the newcomer, however, and put up their familiar chatter demanding food and attention. This stranger entered the hole and from the sounds that were emitted there was no doubt that the young birds not only recognized it, but appreciated its presence. Shortly the stranger appeared and showed itself to be a female of the Williamson sapsucker. She has an entirely different color pattern from the male, her colors being predominantly in browns. She showed a "flicker-like" barred back, brown head, white rump, and yellow belly.

In checking through the literature on these interesting partners I found the confusion was deep-seated. When observers first discovered these birds the male and female were actually assigned to separate genera. In 1852 the female was called the black-breasted woodpecker, *Melanerpes thyroideus*, by John Cassin. In 1860 Cassin described the male and called it the Williamson woodpecker, *Sphyrapicus williamsonii*. In each case the immature bird of the same sex was assumed to be the opposite-sexed partner. It wasn't until 1875 that this ornithological muddle was straightened out by Henry Henshaw who came upon a nest similar to the one at Harden Lake where he found male, female, and immature all living together. It was then that the name Williamson sapsucker, *Sphyrapicus thyroideus*, was first correctly assigned to both sexes.





BOOK REVIEW

By Richard G. Lillard, Ranger Naturalist

A NATURAL HISTORY OF WESTERN TREES, by Donald Culross Peattie, illustrated by Paul Landacre. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1953. 751 + xiv pp. \$6.00.

In this handsome volume, dedicated to Mary Tresidder, the author takes up more than two hundred species of native trees to be found in the vast area between the Pacific Ocean and the 100th meridian, and the Arctic Ocean and the Mexican boundary. For each species he supplies a summary of alternate names, geographical range, and botanical characteristics, and then he goes on to provide an essay that charmingly places the tree in its total ecological setting, both natural and human.

The essays, many of which have already appeared in popular and semipopular magazines, are models of the kind of information and the technique of presentation that are encouraged by the Yosemite Field School as it teaches student natural-

ists how to give talks and lead nature walks. For the essays work into the discussion of a tree all relevant details of ornithology, entomology, lumbering, social history, and ethnology, while also quietly campaigning for conservation and showing an appreciation for the beauty and wonder of Nature.

All the trees of Yosemite National Park appear in due course, with especially rich essays on giant sequoia, western white pine, sugar pine, Sierra juniper, and quaking aspen. The wood engravings by Mr. Landacre are useful for identification of trees by such details as trunks, leaves, fruits, cones, or flowers, though they are less helpful when they show the distant appearance of whole trees such as white-bark pine and California buckeye. The book provides hours of good reading for anyone who is interested in the trees of Yosemite, the flora of the West, and the world of Nature.



Digitized by
Yosemite Online Library

<http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library/>

Dan Anderson