



ERNEST A. CHOATE

1900-1980

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JAMES K. MERITT

Ernest A. Choate was born in Philadelphia on February 20, 1900, the oldest of four children born to Eleanor and Ernest Choate. Following his education in the Philadelphia elementary school system, Ernie attended West Philadelphia High School. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, majoring in English, and subsequently received both a master's degree and a doctorate from that institution.

Education was the center of Ernie's professional life. He taught English at Penn, Lehigh, and Temple before accepting the position of Principal of Germantown High School, a position he held until his retirement in 1965. He published innumerable articles and several books dealing with education, including one college-level textbook.

When a young man in his twenties, Ernie happened to meet Conrad Roland, who was then a student at the Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, and the two became extremely close friends. Roland was an accomplished bird artist, an avid birder, and a member of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club, an organization which Ernie joined in 1932. Ernie had always had an interest in natural history because of the early influence of his father, and this interest was given further stimulation by Conrad Roland and others, such as Witmer Stone, whom he met in the DVOC.

As a boy Ernie spent quite a bit of time in Cape May as his parents often vacationed there. The fact that several DVOC members maintained summer homes there provided an additional bond between Ernie and these fellow birders. Following his marriage in 1930 to Mary Elizabeth Craig, Ernie rented various homes in Cape May or Cape May Point where they spent summer vacations. In 1938 he bought a home in Cape May Point and moved there permanently following his retirement in 1965.

Ernie traveled extensively. He and Mary made several trips to the Caribbean (principally Puerto Rico and Grenada) and to Europe. Ernie also visited Egypt several times to study birds as portrayed in ancient hieroglyphics. Following Mary's death in 1964 after a long illness, he traveled

to Africa again several times and made trips to Australia, India, Antarctica, and South America. In 1974 he participated on a DVOC trip to Alaska which Lester Thomas and I had arranged.

Ernie was a co-founder of the Cape May Geographic Society. He was aware of Cape May's unique natural history value and was an early leader in its conservation efforts, making a number of trips to Trenton to espouse the cause. He served on the Board of Directors of the New Jersey Audubon Society, was a long-time compiler of the Audubon Cape May Christmas Counts, and also served as regional records editor for the New Jersey Audubon Society. His home at Cape May Point (aptly nicknamed the Choate Hilton) became a meeting place for birders from near and far.

In the DVOC, Ernie served as editor of *Cassinia* from 1943 through 1949, as vice-president in 1956-1957, and as president in 1958-1959. He was elected an Honorary Member of the Club in 1969.

In 1973 Ernie published his *The Dictionary of American Bird Names*, a project on which he had been working for years. Because of his extensive knowledge of English and ornithology and his scholarly inquisitiveness he was uniquely qualified to write such a book. A second edition, revised by Dr. Raymond A. Paynter to bring it into accord with the AOU's 1983 *Check-list*, has recently been published.

Ernie was always much in demand as a speaker and presented many programs to various natural history groups on his travels or on Cape May plant and bird life.

He had an unsurpassed sense of humor, and this could at times be biting and sarcastic. The aura of officialism that prevailed at DVOC meetings was shattered on more than a few occasions by some caustic comment of Ernie's coming from the back row. His complete mastery of English made him a formidable opponent in any argument, and Ernie always expressed his true thoughts on any subject. If honesty and tact ever came into conflict, honesty always won hands down. This was a trait which at times irritated some but inspired admiration in others.

Ernie made his last trip in early 1980, one to Mexico and California. He wrote his daughters that he was having a fine time and that he was especially pleased in finally adding the Black-chinned Sparrow to his life list. As he was returning from that trip he was stricken, and he succumbed in a Dallas hospital on March 12, 1980.

To his daughters, Elaine and Shirley, the Club has extended its deepest sympathy. In his passing, the Club lost one of the most distinguished members in its history.

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