

Verrill, Alpheus Hyatt
b. 23 July 1871 / d. 14 November 1954

Alpheus Hyatt Verrill was born on July 23, 1871, in New Haven, Connecticut, to Addison Emery and Flora L. (Smith) Verrill. The Verrill side of Alpheus' heritage was descended from settlers of Gloucester, Massachusetts, around 1720. His grandmother (Hillborn) was descended from Quakers that settled in Pennsylvania prior to 1688. Several other prominent pre-revolutionary families make up Alpheus' family tree as well: Cordwell, Garland, Stevens, Shreeve, and Waterhouse-- to name a few. Addison was a renowned zoologist and professor for forty-three years at Yale, as well. He was a faculty member in various capacities for the University for a total of sixty-two years. In the summer of 1860, Addison went with two other students, N.S. Shaler and Alpheus Hyatt, to study marine invertebrates on the coast of Maine. The friendship between Hyatt and Addison lasted their entire lives. In honor of this friendship he bestowed upon his second son his friend's namesake: Alpheus Hyatt Verrill. Addison must have passed his love and desire for knowledge for literally everything under the sun along with his good friend's name on to Alpheus since he became just as prominent in the scientific communities as his father.

On January 21, 1892, Alpheus Hyatt Verrill married Kathryn L. McCarthy. This marriage produced four children: Dorothy I. (Mrs. Russell Rhodes), Eric E., Loyola K. (Mrs. F. Cintron., Jr), and Valerie G. (Mrs. P. A. C. Ellis). In 1944, Verrill married his second wife, Lida Ruth Shaw Kohler. This second marriage did not produce any children.

Alpheus Hyatt Verrill was educated at New Haven's Hopkins Grammar School, the Yale School of Fine Arts, and studied zoology and geology at the Yale Sheffield

Scientific School. In addition to his education and exploring, Verrill also had a knack for art and photography from a young age. At the age of nine he was able to produce accurate drawings of live insects (MacKinnon). These artistic abilities earned him the honor of illustrating the natural history section of *Webster's International Dictionary* in 1896, illustrating for the *Clarendon Dictionary*, and again for a later edition of *Webster's*. In 1901, Verrill accompanied his father on a collecting trip to Bermuda in the roles of artist and photographer. In the realm of photography Verrill developed the autochrome process of natural color in 1902. He later put these natural skills to use in illustrating his own books and reports. He also used his artistic ability to earn money while traveling, "...If I found myself in need of funds on my trips I painted color scenes inside pearl shells and sold them. I also colored postcards and earned money that way," (Bird 6F).

At the age of sixteen, in 1888, Verrill made an expedition for the Yale museum, more than likely becoming one of the youngest explorers to make a solo expedition to acquire fauna from tropical jungles. On this expedition the discovery of four new kinds of birds was attributed to him. This early expedition kicked off a lifetime of globe trotting and exploring for the sake of science. Verrill lived in Dominica from 1903 to 1906, British Guiana from 1913 to 1917, and in Panama from 1917 to 1921. Verrill made his last collecting trip to Panama in 1950, just four years before his death. Collecting trips were also made to Bermuda, Bolivia, Chile, Panama, Peru, Santo Domingo, and Surinam. On these trips Verrill studied everything from the ancient civilizations to the inhabitants of the time, from plants to animals, and from extinct to living. From 1916 to 1932, Verrill was commissioned by George G. Heye and his Museum of the American Indian to embark on ethnographic and archaeological fieldwork. On these "missions" Verrill

collected cultural artifacts, vocabulary lists, and produced oil paintings from life of members of the Caribs in British Guiana; the San Blas Indians and the Guaymis of Panama; the Aymara, Colla, and Sirionos of Bolivia; the Yungas of Peru; and the Panos of Chile. The oil paintings were exhibited in the Royal Geographical Society in addition to being displayed in the Museum of the American Indian (MacKinnon). Two of his most important contributions from these expeditions were the finding of a once believed extinct shrew-like animal, *Solenodon paradoxus*, in Santo Domingo in 1907, and his work in the 1920s from a ceremonial center of an unknown Coclé culture in Panama. In the 1940s, Verrill made a shell collecting trip to the West Indies and yet more discoveries. He discovered five unknown species and the second known specimen of *Murux spectrum*, a carnivorous rock or dye snail (MacKinnon). Verrill also published two semi-autobiographical books about his time spent exploring these regions, *My Jungle Trails* and *Thirty Years in the Jungle*. Of his lifetime of adventuring Verrill said in a 1952 interview with the *Miami Herald*:

“Men today are resigned to being shelved at 65, to retire, to vegetate. They have heard that men live to three score and ten and are content with that span. Their narrow way of life gives them a narrow point of view. They know their own bailwick, that is all, and they have no faith or belief in any other way of life, civilization, or point of view (Bird 7F).”

Verrill’s explorations and adventuring weren’t confined to dry land; he also headed numerous excavating trips in the ocean. In the early 1920s he chartered a retired mail and trade schooner, the VIGILANT, for an “extended trip down islands” (Blytman). The book *In the Wake of the Buccaneers* is an account of his adventures on

this trip. In 1929, Verrill was hired by a syndicate to locate and recover a treasure lost in 1637 one hundred miles north of the Dominican Republic on the Silver Shoals. Verrill did succeed in finding this shipwreck and retrieving a few artifacts by consulting the records of Sir William Phipps' from 1687. However, funds ran short, forcing the expedition to a halt. He was unable to ever relocate the shipwreck again. A different syndicate hired Verrill from 1937 to 1938 to locate another shipwreck's treasure. This time the expedition was located in western Florida on the Suwannee River and the goal was a treasure thought to belong to Jean Lafitte. Verrill said that he located this treasure and even found gold on his drill, but the chest could not be pulled up and only slipped deeper into the muck.

In addition to being a world-class explorer, photographer, artist, and zoologist, Verrill was also an accomplished author. Verrill wrote 116 books ranging from how-tos, to zoology, to children's fiction. As a technical writer Verrill published informational books on the new technologies of automobiles, gasoline engines, and wireless electricity. In addition to technological books Verrill also wrote how-to books on knot-tying, driving, home radios, aircrafts, sailboats, and carpentry. After becoming the popular science editor of *American Boy Magazine* around 1906 his work became noticed by publishers and he began writing books geared towards young boys on gardening, camping, gasoline engines, collecting, and various other outdoor activities. His other topics for articles and books included geography, natural history, treasure hunting, zoology, geology, and science fiction. Many of his technical writings were published by Norman W. Henley Publishing Co., the "practical books for practical men" company, while his other writings were published by Putnam, L.C. Page & Co., and Appleton & Co., to name a few

(Brockmann). His 1909 book, *The A.B.C. of Automobile Driving* was translated and used by the Japanese army as a training manual (MacKinnon 289). Many of his books remained standards on their subjects for many years and saw several editions produced. His 1905 book, *Knots, Splices, and Rope-work*, went through five editions between 1905 and 1946 and is still being reproduced by independent companies today. Around 1912, his books on gasoline engines and airplanes earned him the position of a technical advisor on gasoline engines for the Aeronautical Society. Many of Verrill's scientific books were translated into French, Spanish, and Romanian. Even his Radio Detective fictional series was translated into Czech and Finnish.

In the realm of technical communication Verrill was on top of new technology and willing to explore new genres of writing. While Verrill's contemporary and fellow writer for the Norman W. Henley Publishing Co., Victor Page, has been noted as stating in his books' prefaces that they weren't intended for children, Verrill did publish technical books for children (Brockmann 287). His desire to get young boys up off the couch and out exploring or doing something else can be seen in his books. Verrill stated in the 1952 interview with the *Herald*, "Even young lads today have seemingly lost their curiosity about discovery, creative work, the marvels of Nature, the fascination of woodcraft. Even the great outdoors, the woods, and all the wonders in it, do not attract them." His fictional series about young adventurers, *Radio Detectives* and *The Boy Adventurers*, were intended to educate the young readers while at the same time piquing their curiosity about the world surrounding them. While Verrill's books for the Norman W. Henley Publishing Co. were geared towards adults on technical subjects, the Harper & Brothers Co. produced a "Harper's practical books for young boys" series. Verrill

produced at least five books for this series on topics ranging from how airplanes work to gardening and collecting. For his adult readership Verrill also produced technical books on a wide range of topics that were new for the time period. In 1912 he produced *Gasolene engines; their operation, use and care; a comprehensive, simple and practical work treating of gasolene engines for stationary, marine or vehicle use ...* for the Henley Publishing Co. only 15 years after the first American internal combustion engine was produced (Brockmann 300). The 1922 book *The home radio; how to make and use it*” even today seems like a daunting task to instruct others in accomplishing. In addition to the production of the text, all of Verrill’s books were fully illustrated, many times by the author himself, to aid the readers with a visual of the process. The 1912 book *Knots, Splices, and Rope-work* contains over 150 illustrations showing how to produce a knot, splice, or other rope work.

Alpheus Hyatt Verrill’s contribution, not only to the field of technical communication, but to the world in general is undeniable. His granddaughter, world renowned female bullfighter, Conchita Cintron said of her grandfather in her autobiography, “Tall and slim, with friendly blue eyes and a distinguished mustache and small gray beard,...I yearned to be old enough to enter his world, so far from the humdrum of daily life. With him everything was marvelous, and even moths could become interesting creatures, not just subjects for camphor and naphthaline...His joy of life, his simplicity, and his enthusiasm were contagious,” (Cintron 8). While Verrill’s passing on November 14, 1954 in Lake Worth, Florida went mostly unnoted, the memory of this remarkable writer will be preserved in the leaves of paper left behind.

Elizabeth Richardson

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Works by Verrill (not comprehensive)

Fiction

An American Crusoe: a record of remarkable adventures on a desert island with only a jackknife
Barton's mills: a saga of the pioneers
Before the conquerers; a modern adventure in the land of the Incas
Carib gold
Deep sea hunters in the frozen seas
Deep sea hunters in the South Seas
In Morgan's wake
Inca's treasure house
Jungle chums: a story of a boy's adventures in British Guiana
Marooned in the forest; the story of a primitive fight for life
The Bridge of Light
The boy adventurers in the land of El Dorado
The boy adventurers in the land of the monkey men
The boy adventurers in the unknown land
The boy adventures in the forbidden land
The cruise of the Cormorant
The deep sea hunters; adventures on a whaler
The Golden City; the tale of adventure in unknown Guiana
The radio detectives
The radio detectives southward bound
The radio detectives under the sea
The trail of the cloven foot
The trail of the white Indians; sequel to the Trail of the cloven foot
The treasure of Bloody Gut
Uncle Abner's legacy
When the moon ran wild (as Ray Ainsbury)

Journal Articles

Notes on the fauna of the island of Dominica, British West Indies/ w. G.E. Verrill
Notes on *Solenodon paradoxus* Brandt/ w. J.A. Allen
Who Doesn't Know Beans

Juvenile

Boy's outdoor vacation book;
Gasoline-engine book for boys
Harper's aircraft book; why aeroplanes fly, how to make models, and all about aircraft, little and big
Harper's book for young gardeners; how to make the best use a little land
Harper's book for young naturalists; a guide to collecting and preparing specimens, with descriptions of the life, habits and haunts of birds, insects, plants, etc
The boy collector's handbook
The boys' book of buccaneers

The boys' book of carpentry
The boy's book of whalers
The young collector's handbook

Non-Fiction (Adult)

A-B-C of automobile driving...
Additions to the avifauna of Dominica
Along New England Shores
America's Ancient Civilizations
Book of camping
Cuba of today
Cuba past and present
Foods America gave the world; the strange, fascinating and often romantic histories of many native American food plants, their origin and other interesting and curious facts concerning them
Gasoline engines
Getting together with Latin America
Great conquerors of South and Central America,
Harper's gasoline engine book; how the engine is made, how to use it at home, in boats and vehicles, elsewhere and how to keep it in order
Harper's wireless book; how to use wireless electricity in telegraphing, telephoning and the transmission of power
How to operate a motor car
Illustrations of mollusks
In the wake of the buccaneers,
Inquisition
Islands and their mysteries
Isles of spice and palm
Jamaica of today
Knots, splices and rope work
Lost treasure; true tales of hidden hoards
Love stories of some famous pirates
Memorial to Samuel Warren Barrington, William Barrington: their descendants, allied families, and other Barringtons
Minerals, metals and gems; also, all rocks and stones, as well as ores, crystals, sands, clays and earths; something of their peculiarities, how they are formed, where they are found, how mined and what uses are made of them.
Minerals, metals, and gems
My boat trip through the Guiana wilderness
My jungle trails ; a narrative of adventures in the jungles of Central and South America, and the West Indies, of strange Indian tribes, and their curious customs, the flora and fauna of the countries, and incidents both exciting and humorous,
Old civilizations of the New world,
Our Indians; the story of the Indians of the United States
Panama of today
Panama, past and present

Perfumes and spices, including an account of soaps and cosmetics; the story of the history, source, preparation, and use of the spices, perfumes, soaps, and cosmetics which are in everyday use.

Pets for pleasure and profit

Porto Rico past and present and San Domingo of today,

Radio for amateurs: how to make use, and install wireless telephone and telegraph instruments

Rivers and their mysteries

Romantic and historic Florida

Romantic and historic Maine

Romantic and historic Virginia

Secret treasure; hidden riches of the British Isles

Shell Collector's Handbook; w'/ Ruth Verrill

Smugglers and smuggling

South and Central American trade conditions of today, including Mexico, Cuba, Haiti and Dominican Republic,

South and Central American trade conditions of today. With complete information to 1919.

Strange animals and their stories

Strange birds and their stories. Mysteries of bird life. Migrations. Nesting habits. Birds of beaches and deserts. Winged jewels. Clowns of birddom. Valuable birds. Bird law courts. Bird communists. Flightless birds.

Strange creatures of the sea;

Strange customs, Manners and Beliefs, A remarkable account of curious beliefs and odd superstitions, strange ways of living, and amazing customs and manners of many peoples and tribes around the earth

Strange fish and their stories. Mysteries of the fish world. Ogres of the deep. Living nightmares of the deep. Visiting the ocean butterflies. How fish sleep. The fish menagerie. Fish that never existed.

Strange insects and their stories. How they live. Various kinds and species. Curious traits. Their intelligence. Ways of communicating with each other. Battle for survival. Benefit to all mankind, etc., etc.

Strange prehistoric animals and their stories ...

Strange reptiles and their stories

Strange sea shells and their stories. How they are made and grow. How they are colored and the patterns produced. Rare shells. Shells that build a raft. Shells that bore in rocks. Giant shells. The shell that sinks ships, etc., etc.

The American Indian; North, South, and Central America

The amateur carpenter

The book of camping

The book of the motor boat; how to operate and care for motor boats and motors

The book of the sailboat: how to rig, sail and handle small boats

The book of the West Indies

The heart of old New England

The home radio up to date, how to make and use it

The Ocean and its mysteries

The real Americans
The real story of the pirate
The real story of the whaler; whaling, past and present
The strange story of our earth; a panorama of the growth of our planet as revealed by the sciences of geology and paleontology.
They Found Gold; the story of successful treasure hunts
Thirty years in the jungle
Travelers' tales of Old Cuba
Under Peruvian skies
West Indies of today
Wonder creatures of the sea
Wonder plants and plant wonders

Translations

Radiovi detktivovo v tropech: dobroduzny roman pro mladez (Czech, fiction)

Radiosalapoliisit meren alla (Finnish, fiction)

Radiosalapliisit

Radiosalapliisit kuoleman kynnyksella, w/ J.G.

Coutumes et croyances estranges (French)

L'inquisition

Le Monde etrange des betes et des plantes/ w Renaud Paulian

Moeurs estranges des mullusques. With R. Thevenin

Moeurs etranges des insects

Moeurs etranges des oiseaux

Moeurs etranges des poisons

Moeurs etranges des reptiles

Inchizitia (Romanian)

Animales taros y sus curioisidades (Spanish)

Antiquas civilizaciones de America

Costumbres y creencias raras

Extranas criaturas del mar

Historia del traje

Insectos raros y sus curiosidades

Peces raros y sus curiosidades

Viejas civilizaciones del Nuevo Mundo