



### ***Gustav Eisen (1847-1947)***

Biographical Sketch by Jane Radcliffe, Archives Volunteer  
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Gustav Eisen was born in Stockholm, Sweden, on August 2, 1847. A frail and sickly boy, Eisen was sent to Visby to attend school and to better his health. He later graduated from the University of Uppsala in 1873 and came to California the same year to partake in a California biotic survey sponsored by the Swedish Academy of Sciences. Struck by the opportunities abounding in California, Eisen remained in the state and made it his home. He became a member of the California Academy of Sciences the following year.

Eisen's interests were numerous and he has been described as a horticulturalist, a biologist, a zoologist, an artist and illustrator, an archaeologist, a viticulturalist, anologist, arborist, microbiologist, cartographer, explorer, and would be considered today to be a pioneer conservationist.

In 1874, Eisen made his first trip to Yosemite Valley and continued to travel throughout the Sierra Nevada with his German friend, Dr. Friedrich Ratzel of Leipzig. This trip introduced Eisen to the sequoias that he would later work diligently to protect. From 1874 through 1880 Eisen would make up to five trips a year to the Sierras, leaving for up to a week or more at a time. During this time, Eisen would also become one of the pioneer vintners of California, purchasing over 600 acres of land in Fresno. He built the Eisen Vineyard, producing his first vintage in 1875.

Along with improving grape cultivation in California, Eisen introduced the Smyrna fig, and the alligator pear (avocado). He would extend his scholarship of horticulture by writing the definitive books on the cultivation of raisins and figs, respectively.

In 1888, Eisen began to actively campaign to save the giant sequoias of the Sierra Nevada, beginning with a lecture of appeal to the California Academy of Sciences. After continued lectures, his cause picked up momentum in 1890 when he made a trip to Washington D.C. to speak with the Secretary of Agriculture. Eisen's efforts were acknowledged by then Academy President H. W. Harkness, and a committee was established to explore the issue. The committee's findings resulted in a petition and report sent to the United States Senate and House. This report was particularly influential and Congress subsequently passed the measure establishing Sequoia National Park on September 9, 1890, the anniversary of California admission to the Union.

Eisen's career continued to flourish at the California Academy of Sciences, first serving as curator of archaeology, ethnology, and lower animals beginning in 1893, then curator of biology in 1895, and finally as curator of invertebrates in 1897. Eisen's studies included earthworms (which attracted correspondence with Charles Darwin) and entomological studies of the anopheles mosquito. This research resulted in the identification of the parasite that causes malaria.

Eisen's publications also flourished including a multi-volume book on the Holy Grail, an extensive book on the subject of glass, and a three volume work on the portraits of George Washington. A true renaissance man of his time, Eisen's death in 1940 was honored by the California Academy of Sciences with a request to have a peak in Sequoia National Park named after him. The request was approved and his ashes are buried on Mt. Eisen.

Sources Consulted:

"Gustav Eisen / Wilderness Steward / an Appraisal," by Allan Shields.

"History of Invertebrate Zoology at the California Academy of Sciences," Proceedings of the California Academy of Sciences, Vol. 58, No. 12, May 11, 2007.

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