



Alvin Seale (1871-1958)

Biographical Sketch by Jane Radcliffe, Archives Volunteer

Alvin Seale, the famed ichthyologist and aquarium designer, was born in Fairmount, Indiana on July 8, 1871. W.C. Herre, a friend who worked at the College of Fisheries at the University of Washington, wrote about him in 1959, the year after his death, in Science (pp. 313-314) published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The following paragraphs summarize his comments.

Seale was an Indiana farm boy, born into a Quaker family. We don't know much of his early history. The first remarkable fact we have is that, in 1892, he rode his bicycle from Indiana to California to go to Stanford and study under the guidance of the eminent ichthyologist David Starr Jordan.

Still an undergraduate, in 1896, he was selected by Professor Jordan to travel to Point Barrow, Alaska to search of salmon in the Mackenzie River. He would later return to collect sea birds. In 1899, he went back to Stanford, but left again to act as a field naturalist for the Bishop Museum in Honolulu Hawaii. Two years later he was appointed Curator of Fishes by that museum. This position lasted until 1904. He returned to Stanford, and finally graduated in 1905, 13 years after he began. By now he was a world authority on the fishes of Polynesia and a respected ichthyologist.

In 1906 he was in charge of another Alaskan expedition, this time for the University of California's Anna Alexander Museum. Then in 1907 President Theodore Roosevelt appointed him chief of the Division of Fisheries of the Philippine Bureau of Science.

He spent the next 10 years in the Philippines conducting many first studies on fish, shellfish, and sponges. He also helped develop the new sponge, pearl, and sardine industries, and drafted regulations to standardize their practices. Then he drew plans for an aquarium in Manila, supervised its construction, and collected fish for its displays.

He resigned his post in Manila in 1917 and accepted a job as ichthyologist at the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology. He retired from that position in 1920, and returned to California, settling on a ranch in Corallitos.

His retirement did not last. In 1921, he was recruited by Barton W. Evermann of the California Academy of Sciences to assist in the planning of the Steinhart Aquarium being built in Golden Gate Park. When it opened in 1923, he was appointed Superintendent, and held that post until his final retirement in 1941, at the age of 70.

During these years he traveled to Hawaii, Samoa and the Galapagos as head of scientific Staff on the G. Allan Hancock Expedition. He also collected fishes for the Aquarium.

Widowed in 1936, he donated 1300 volumes from his personal library, in memory of his wife, Ethel Prouty, to the Pacific Grove Public Library. Two years later he married Jessie Frapwell. He traveled with her on a worldwide tour of aquariums in Ceylon, Italy, Germany, Holland, France, England, and the one he had built in the Philippines

Alvin Seale died on July 28, 1958 at his ranch in Corallitos, California. He was the author or co-author of some 162 books and articles. Herre ends his comments thus: "I pay tribute to Alvin Seale not only as a scientist but also as a man who enriched the lives of his family, his friends, and his associates."

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