

Fred Rapp: Vicksburg's Own Naturalist



Fred Rapp, born in 1879 and a life-long resident of the Vicksburg area, was an ardent and enthusiastic naturalist who contributed significantly to the understanding of the flora and ornithology of the Kalamazoo-Vicksburg sector of southwestern Michigan.

By trade he was a farmhand, carpenter, restaurateur and storekeeper, but all of his spare time was devoted to his hobbies of botany and ornithology. Influenced greatly by both his father and grandmother, Fred Rapp's interest in plants and birds began early in grade school.

Though his formal education ended with ninth grade, he pursued his botanical interest to an extent which in later years made him an authority on the plants of the Vicksburg area. He amassed a collection of approximately 16,000 specimens, most of which were collected within a six-mile radius of his hometown.

Some specimens were rare or unusual to the area, including the lotus *Nelumbo lutea* L. He was the discoverer of several species of *Rubus*, the genus name of the rose family, which had never been found before in Michigan. One such example, *Rubus rappi* Bailey, was named partly in his honor.

Rapp's interest was not limited to collecting plants. He accumulated a bird skin collection of 100 different species found in the Vicksburg area, and taught himself how to mount them. In 1931, he published "A Bird List of Vicksburg, Michigan" consisting of 204 species of birds found within a six-mile radius of Vicksburg. In 1966 he published a supplement to his Bird List which added another 25 birds. In 1961 he was awarded a citation by the U. S. Fisheries and Wildlife Service for serving 66 years as a bird observer and 48 years for both observing and banding migratory birds.

In 1967 he donated his plant collection to Western Michigan University. His collection of approximately 30 mounted bird species and 400 sets of bird eggs were given to the Kalamazoo Nature Center.

Fred Rapp's interest in nature never wavered and he continued collecting plants and bird watching until 1971 when he was confined to a nursing home. He died in 1975 at the age of 96.

-- Excerpts from a paper presented at the Botany Section of the 84th Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters, Wayne State University, in 1980 by Richard W. Phippen and Susan H. Matthews