

In Memoriam: George A. Hall, 1920–2008

Author: Jackson, Jerome A.

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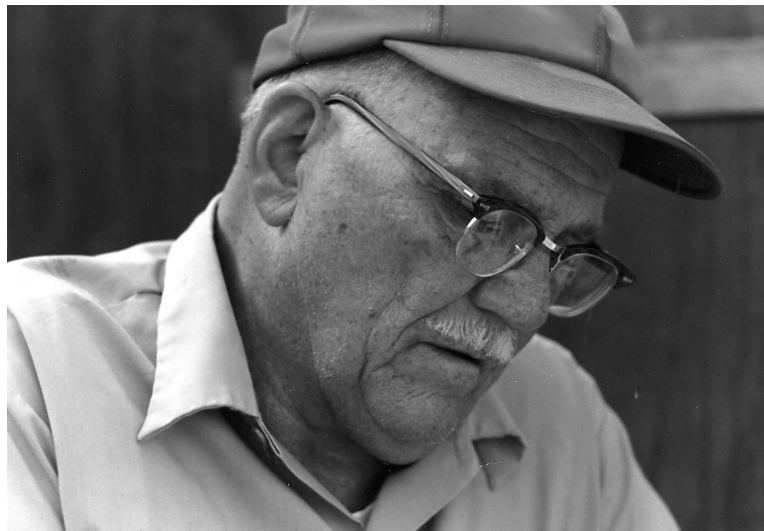


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IN MEMORIAM: GEORGE A. HALL, 1920–2008

JEROME A. JACKSON

Department of Marine and Ecological Sciences, Florida Gulf Coast University, Ft. Myers, Florida 33965, USA



George A. Hall, 1920–2008
(Photograph by Tanya Hall, Allegheny Front Station, undated.)

George Arthur Hall, Jr., died on 28 February 2008 in Morgantown, West Virginia, following a long illness. George was born on 16 June 1920, in Parkersburg, West Virginia, at the nearest hospital to his parents' home across the bridge in Belpre, Ohio. George and his younger brother John, both avid stamp collectors, were close. John died a few years ago. The Hall family moved to Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, a Pittsburg suburb, where George grew up and graduated from high school in 1937. In 1941, he received a B.S. in Chemistry from West Virginia University, where his achievements included the Whitehill Award for Excellence in Chemistry and membership in Phi Beta Kappa. He was awarded a Ph.D. in Physical Chemistry from The Ohio State University in 1945. From 1944 to 1946, George was an Instructor in Chemistry at Ohio State. Although George's professional training and employment were in the field of chemistry, his strong interest in birds was fostered during his childhood by his scoutmaster, L. J. Reed. Following completion of his graduate work, his ornithological avocation quickly became a parallel "career."

From 1946 to 1950, George was Instructor in Chemistry at the University of Wisconsin. While there, he came under the influence of Joseph Hickey, John T. Emlen, and Aldo Leopold and joined the Wilson Ornithological Society (WOS, 1946) and the American Ornithologists' Union (AOU, 1949). George noted that for his informal ornithological training, Joe Hickey was his "major professor" and that when he returned to West Virginia, he "did post-doc work under Maurice Brooks."

In 1950, George was appointed Assistant Professor of Chemistry at West Virginia University (WVU), where he became Professor of Chemistry and Forestry in 1977, WVU thus recognizing his research with birds and work with students in the Division of Forestry and Natural Resources. George retired from WVU as Emeritus Professor in 1986.

George's passion was West Virginia birds and their ecology. He became intimately involved with the Brooks Bird Club and published numerous notes and articles in *The Redstart*, which he edited from 1956 to 1962. He initiated the West Virginia Bird Records

Committee and served as Chair. His broad interests culminated in publication of *West Virginia Birds* (1983, Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Special Publication, no. 7) and *The West Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas* (1994, co-edited with A. R. Buckelew, Jr., University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania). In 1959, while editor of *The Redstart*, George became Appalachian Regional Editor for *Audubon Field Notes*, and he continued in that capacity through 1999, 40 years later, as regional editor for *North American Birds*.

George edited *The Wilson Bulletin* from 1964 to 1973 and was known for the quality of his editing. His editorial correspondence was typed on a manual typewriter, and the combination of his typing technique and the machine's perversity resulted in missives in which individual letters were not aligned in neat rows. Within words, some letters were high, some low, and the effect was that the letters seemed to be trying to leap off the page. He served the WOS as President, Acting Secretary, Council member, and in several other capacities. George was active on AOU committees and in the Cooper Ornithological Society and several other ornithological organizations. Throughout his career, he worked closely with the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources to promote the understanding and welfare of birds in the state.

In addition to his geographic focus on West Virginia, George had a strong taxonomic interest in wood warblers. He wrote the *Birds of North America* accounts for Magnolia Warbler and Yellow-throated Warbler, papers on hybridization between Mourning and MacGillivray's warblers, and fall migration patterns of wood warblers in the southern Appalachians. In the mid-1950s, George became a founder of the Allegheny Front Migration Observatory (AFMO) in the Monongahela National Forest, Grant County, West Virginia. George's most recent publication summarized banding efforts at AFMO from 1958 through the 2000 season.

For his contributions to ornithology, George was made Elective Member of the AOU in 1968 and was elected Fellow in 1985. In 2005, he was honored as a writer for his West Virginia bird books by the Friends of Blackwater Canyon. In 2007, he was awarded the first William and Nancy Klamm Service Award for service and dedication to the WOS.

I knew George for more than 40 years. He was the editor who accepted my first manuscript for publication in *The Wilson Bulletin* when I was a graduate student. I later came to know that he was especially interested, and effective, in encouraging students. We worked closely, especially with the WOS, and he was an important mentor when I edited *The Wilson Bulletin*. We also shared strong interests in ornithological history, and George, Harold Mayfield, and I collaborated in writing the history of the WOS. At AOU and WOS meetings, George and I often got together for lunch or dinner, where discussions often turned to ornithological history or our families—we had sons the same age. I recall vividly an occasion when the lunch was enjoyable and the waitress pleasant. I left a dollar as a tip for the five-dollar meal. George dropped a \$20 bill on the table as he left. When we got outside, I commented to George on his generosity and he responded, greatly surprised, "Good Lord, I thought that was a dollar!" and ran back inside. Alas, the table had already been cleared and the waitress rewarded. That was my introduction to the fact that George's vision was severely impaired. He had learned to deal with it when using binoculars but had difficulties in many situations.

George was a modest, dependable, reserved individual with a wonderfully subtle sense of humor. He saw the best in everyone and spoke positively or not at all. In committee and Council meetings he was generally silent until asked for his opinion, which was always well-thought-out and highly regarded. He loved birds and being in the field. When his son Andrew was growing up, George was active with Little League, and he paid his debt to scouting by being actively involved as an adult scout leader. George was a superb mentor to students, young ornithologists, and others who sought his help. In recent years, he had become a strong advocate of the "rails to trails" movement and enjoyed birding along those trails at every opportunity.

George A. Hall leaves behind legions of birders, banders, students, and casual observers of birds who were touched by his generosity in sharing the birds that he loved. He is survived by Tanya, his wife of 43 years; their son, Andrew, and his wife, Elena; and his grandson, Alec.