

# A RECENTLY DISCOVERED SKELETAL SPECIMEN OF A PASSENGER PIGEON (*ECTOPISTES MIGRATORIUS*)

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Charles K. Carpenter (1872 - 1948) was a prominent minister in several communities in northern Illinois and a charter member of the Illinois State Academy of Science (Schorger 1951). His lifelong avocation was making observations of nature and preparing study skins and life mounts of specimens collected in the region. After his retirement from the church in 1940, he organized the collections and observations into the "The Northern Illinois Museum of Natural History," which he maintained at his home in Baileyville, Ogle County, Illinois. After Charles K. Carpenter's death in 1948, most of the life mounts were given to Polo High School, also in Ogle County, where they remained until 1983 when they were donated to the Illinois State Museum. Many of the bird study skins, egg sets, and photographs were given to Cornell College, Mount Vernon, Iowa, and in 1985-86 these collections were transferred to the Illinois State Museum.

Among the specimens exhibited by Carpenter was a life mount of a Passenger Pigeon (*Ectopistes migratorius*) collected by his father, F.A. Carpenter (1846 - 1919), on August 24, 1891, at or near Baileyville. After years of handling by high school students, the Passenger Pigeon was in deplorable and irreparable condition. While disassembling the mount to recover the skeletal material, we were delighted to find a nearly complete skeleton, along with some dehydrated muscle tissue. Only the femurs and part of the synsacrum had been removed during original preparation. The right wing, distal to the ulna and radius, was also missing, probably due to student misuse. The dried soft tissue was removed and sent to the frozen tissue bank at Louisiana State University School of Medicine, New Orleans, for permanent storage and curation (Number HCD 5659). The skeleton was cataloged 691095 in the osteology collection of the Illinois State Museum.

Unfortunately, the collection data on the most recent specimen tag of the life mount was incomplete (two earlier, disassociated tags had identical catalog numbers and complete collection data). A thorough search of Carpenter's personal journals, species cross-file cards, and loose tags that accompanied the collection failed to reveal more than one Passenger Pigeon handled by either of the Carpenters. The association of the specimen with the Baileyville collection data can be made with confidence.

Schorger (1955) reported that 14 complete and 1 incomplete Passenger Pigeon skeletons were known to exist. Eight years later Hahn (1963) noted 16 skeletons in existence with only one specimen recorded with locality data (Maryland). The latest listing (Wood *et al.* 1982) indicated 13 complete and 7 partial skeletal specimens. Combining the Hahn and Wood *et al.* lists, and eliminating duplicates, we calculated that there are 19 complete and 7 partial skeletal specimens of Passenger Pigeon in museum collections. The Baileyville specimen adds one to the total, apparently the first addition in many years. Discounting archaeological specimens, it may be the only Passenger Pigeon skeleton known from Illinois.

At the time when Passenger Pigeons were in existence taxidermy mounts were often prepared with more of the skeleton intact than is now customary. Possibly other valuable skeletal specimens may be discovered through the use of x-ray examination of dilapidated mounts.

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