Obituary

MAX MINOR PEET
1885–1949

The death of Max Minor Peet on March 25, 1949 was a rude shock to his many friends. He had felt ill that morning, but in spite of this he did not shorten his eight o’clock lecture to the Junior students. Death came suddenly an hour later from coronary thrombosis.

Doctor Peet was such a youthful, vital person that it did not seem possible that he was sixty-three. He was born in Iosco, Michigan, October 20, 1885 and was the son of Lafayette and Eunice Ann Peet. He received his A.B. degree from the University of Michigan in 1908 and an M.A. and M.D. degree in 1910.
He early showed promise in the field of science while attending high school in Ypsilanti. An ornithology contest for college students was being held at the nearby University of Michigan. The budding ornithologist asked if a high school student might enter the competition, and upon receiving permission, proceeded to win first prize. This was an original and very beautiful Audubon print.

Doctor Peet went on to win world fame as an ornithologist. His first scientific publication written in 1905 was entitled “Observations on the Nesting Habits of a Pair of House Wrens.” He started collecting bird specimens early. As late as 1932 he was sent by the University to the Chisos Mountains in Texas to collect. He was a crack wing shot, as was his father before him, and he succeeded in bringing back a number of specimens of the White Throated Swift, the fastest flying bird in the United States.

He claimed that any proficiency that he acquired in surgery started with the preparation of Hummingbird skins, a most difficult technical procedure. The specimens he prepared with his own hands were second to none. His ability to prepare specimens of day-old nesting House Wrens, Blackbirds, and the like was probably unique. The delicacy of the baby birds makes them exceedingly difficult to skin. Probably no one else ever mastered this particular technique so perfectly.

Doctor Peet was one of the early discoverers of the nesting places of the rare Kirtland Warbler. From a description given him by a rural mail carrier he believed that this bird, which nests only in Michigan, had been seen near Roscommon. While he was driving in a horse-drawn buggy he heard a song he had never heard before. He thought that this must be the Kirtland Warbler, which proved to be the case. Some of the specimens he took at this time are in the Smithsonian Institute and the American Museum of Natural History.

His own collection of birds numbered approximately 15,000 and was probably the largest private collection in the country. He was interested in obtaining a completely representative collection of American birds found north of the Rio Grande; this entails 1400 species and sub-species. There still remained a few gaps to be filled and he was constantly in touch with field ornithologists to fill these. There was scarcely an ornithologist in the country who had not at one time or another borrowed from the Peet Collection. At the time of his death he was engaged in an x-ray study of the skulls of the two kinds of Golden-eye Duck in an attempt to identify these birds finally, on a basis of skull structure rather than plumage. This original method had already created a great deal of interest though it had not yet been published.

In spite of his active interest in Natural History both before and after entering medical school, he had always planned to become a surgeon. His surgical career began with an internship at Rhode Island General Hospital. After two years he went to the University of Pennsylvania as Robert Robinson Porter Fellow in Research Medicine. He was assistant chief surgeon at the Philadelphia General Hospital from 1914 to 1916. At this time he did a number of experimental Eck fistulae. With Doctor Charles H. Frazier, by whom he was trained, he probably attempted the first Eck fistula on the human.

In 1916 he returned to the University of Michigan as Instructor in Surgery. What little neurosurgery there was, he did. It was only later, however, when Doctor Hugh Cabot came on as Professor of Surgery in 1919 that he began to specialize. He continued to do some general surgery until 1926, when he reluctantly gave it up. He became Professor of Surgery in charge of the Division of Neurosurgery in 1930.

In 1925 he introduced hypertonic glucose for the control of increased intra cranial