



## **William M. Mann, SMA 1905 (1886 - 1960)**



Bill was born on July 1, 1886, in Helena, Montana. His father, a harness maker, was an ardent sportsman and amateur taxidermist. He died when Bill was only seven. Bill later said his earliest recollections were of a mounted owl in their home, geese in their back yard, and intimate studies of wildlife on hunting trips with his father. Insects in particular fascinated him, and before grammar school he was engrossed in an investigation over why certain beetles inhabited ant colonies. The dedication to research and collecting lasted until his death. He ran away from home when he was thirteen years old with the notion of going to South Africa to help the Boers. After some days of shivering and starving in the Rocky Mountains, he came to a cattle ranch where they fed him and let him stay on for the winter as a chore boy. He was restored to his family, and they sent him to the Staunton Military Academy (SMA) to be taught discipline - he was now fourteen! Bill graduated in 1905 from SMA, and then was a student at State College of Washington from 1907 to 1909. He completed his BA degree at Stanford University in 1911. He enrolled at Harvard in a doctoral program in entomology and traveled widely in the Middle East for his graduate research. Bill was awarded a DSc degree in 1915. After his doctoral research, a fellowship paid for his studies in Fiji and Australia. In 1916, he became an entomologist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C., a position he maintained until 1925.

In May of 1925, he was appointed superintendent of the National Zoological Park. What a step up from 1904 when he had a job, paying \$1 a day, cleaning animal cages at the same zoo. The title was changed to director on October 30, 1926. Also, in 1926, he was married to Lucille Quarry. Their married life was a team effort involving travels to Africa and Asia for collecting specimens and tending to the Zoo from an apartment opposite the Adam's Mill Road gate. During their courtship, he escorted Lucille and a girl

friend of hers to a zoo in New York. An official of the park invited the three of them to the reptile house to inspect a rare exhibit. Lucille shuddered and said she and her friend would wait outdoors. Inside, Bill forgot that his intended and her friend were outside in a rainstorm and were soaked for more than an hour while he studied the snakes inside!

Their apartment in Washington, D.C., frequently served as a nursery for four-footed babies. Bill arrived home one night with a new-born bear cub in his shirt. "I seem to have this bear," he stated. Lucille sighed, asked for a minute "to get used to it," and then went to the kitchen for formula and the baby bottle. The apartment building management sent a circular around one day prohibiting animals among the tenants. Bill met the issue head on with a letter to the property's board of directors. It was terse: "Gentlemen. Please may we have a lion in our apartment?" The directors arrived in a horrified bloc. Their wayward tenant soon had them on their hands and knees, mewling at the lion cub that stirred the rebellion. That ended the no-animal directive for the Manns.

Bill was an active promoter of the Zoo. He led expeditions seeking rare specimens. During his tenure he raised funds for construction of the reptile house, and during the depression garnered Works Progress Administration funds for the bird house, elephant house, and small mammal-great ape facility.

The landlords were not the only victims run over by Mann animals. Bill faced an annual struggle with Congress over appropriations. Sometimes he would show up on the Hill for a budget hearing accompanied by one or more of his charges. Bill found that if a Congressman had a talking mynah bird perched on his shoulder, he was less likely to erase Zoo money from a pending bill.

During his long tenure, he held the Zoo together through World War II and the Korean War, lean years for public appropriations. He served under five different presidents of the United States, and upon his retirement had earned the respect of the Washington community and the International Union of Zoological Parks. His retirement in 1956 was an event which touched many biologists in Washington, D.C., and abroad.

His lifelong interest in entomology, which continued while at the Zoo, led him to donate his insect collection to the U.S. National Museum in May of 1955. There were 136,288 specimens of which 116,000 were ants. The collection included 700 types

Bill wrote two noteworthy books: *Wild Animals in Captivity* (first published in 1930 but reprinted up to 1948); and *Ant Hill Odyssey* (his autobiography). He died on October 10, 1960.

Bill was elected to the Washington Biologists' Field Club in 1922 and was awarded an honorary membership in 1956.