

2016

Lawrence W. Saylor, Coleopterist *Extraordinaire*

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LAWRENCE W. SAYLOR, COLEOPTERIST *EXTRAORDINAIRE*

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ABSTRACT

Lawrence Saylor was a preeminent scarab beetle taxonomist during the 1930s and 1940s who produced a large and significant body of taxonomic work in a relatively short period of time. We know very little about him due, in some measure, to the fact that insect taxonomy was a sideline to his many other professional employments. A review of Saylor's life is provided here based upon new information recently acquired as well as a brief review of his scientific publications.

Key Words: history, Scarabaeidae, Melolonthinae, biography, taxonomist

It seems, therefore, that a taste for collecting beetles is some indication of future success in life.

— Charles Darwin

Lawrence Webster Saylor (1913–1999) was a highly insightful and productive beetle taxonomist who produced 74 publications dealing with New World scarab beetles in a relatively short period of time during the 1930s and 1940s. And yet in spite of this remarkable and important body of work, we know very little about Saylor as a person due, in some measure, to the fact that insect taxonomy was a sideline to his many other professional employments . . . a sideline that was more productive than an entire career's worth of work by some of his contemporaries. I have always been impressed with the quality of Saylor's scarab studies because of his productivity, detailed observations, discoveries, and the utility of his implied species concept.

I recently received family keepsakes from his nephew, John Saylor in Dublin, California, that cast additional light on his career. These mementos included a bound volume of his publications during 1932–1943 with Saylor's signature and handwritten list of his employments on the inside back cover (Fig. 1), several typed copies of his publication list, a 1969 letter from Milt Sanderson (specialist on *Phyllophaga* Harris at the Illinois Natural History Survey) wherein Milt wrote that Larry and his publications were a great influence on his own career), a handwritten, comedic "taxonomist's prayer," several handmade Christmas cards, and a copy of the May 1963 Oak Leaf, the newsletter of the Naval Supply Center, Oakland, California, in which Saylor's donation of his extensive beetle collection to the California Academy of Sciences (San Francisco) is featured along with his photograph.

I know of very few images of him. The first is from the 1934 Blue and Gold Yearbook from the

University of California-Berkeley where he was a student (Fig. 2). A second is while he was a second lieutenant in the US Army in 1946 (Fig. 3). Another is from the 1963 Oak Leaf (Fig. 4). And the last is from a family reunion in 1997 (Fig. 5), two years before he passed away. There must be additional images in his personnel files with the government, military, and private industry, but I have been unable to locate them. Some additional material was gleaned from Ancestry.com that provided further information on his family; I was unable to discern who posted that information on the web.

"Larry" was born 30 July 1913 at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton, Washington. His father, Morgan (1884–1978), was 29 years old and a naval officer, and his mother, Winnie (1888–1956), was 24. His two younger brothers, Louis (1915–2009) and Morgan (1918–1984), were both born when the family was in Pennsylvania. Larry first became interested in insects at age six (1919) while the family lived in Olongapo, Luzon, the Philippines (where many insects are LARGE) during his father's duty assignment at the US Naval Station in Subic Bay (Anonymous 1963). Lawrence received his B.Sc. (1934) and earned an MSc (1935) in Entomology and Parasitology at the University of California-Berkeley with a thesis entitled "The Scarabaeidae of California." The lure of lamellate antennae was very strong, and that lure stayed with him for his entire life.

Upon graduation, he was employed as a forester with the US Park Service (Department of the Interior) in Montana from 1935 to 1937. From 1937 to 1941, he was employed as a biologist in Washington, DC with the Bureau of Biological Survey of the US Department of Agriculture, which was transferred (along with the Bureau of Fisheries) to the Department of the Interior in 1939, and then both

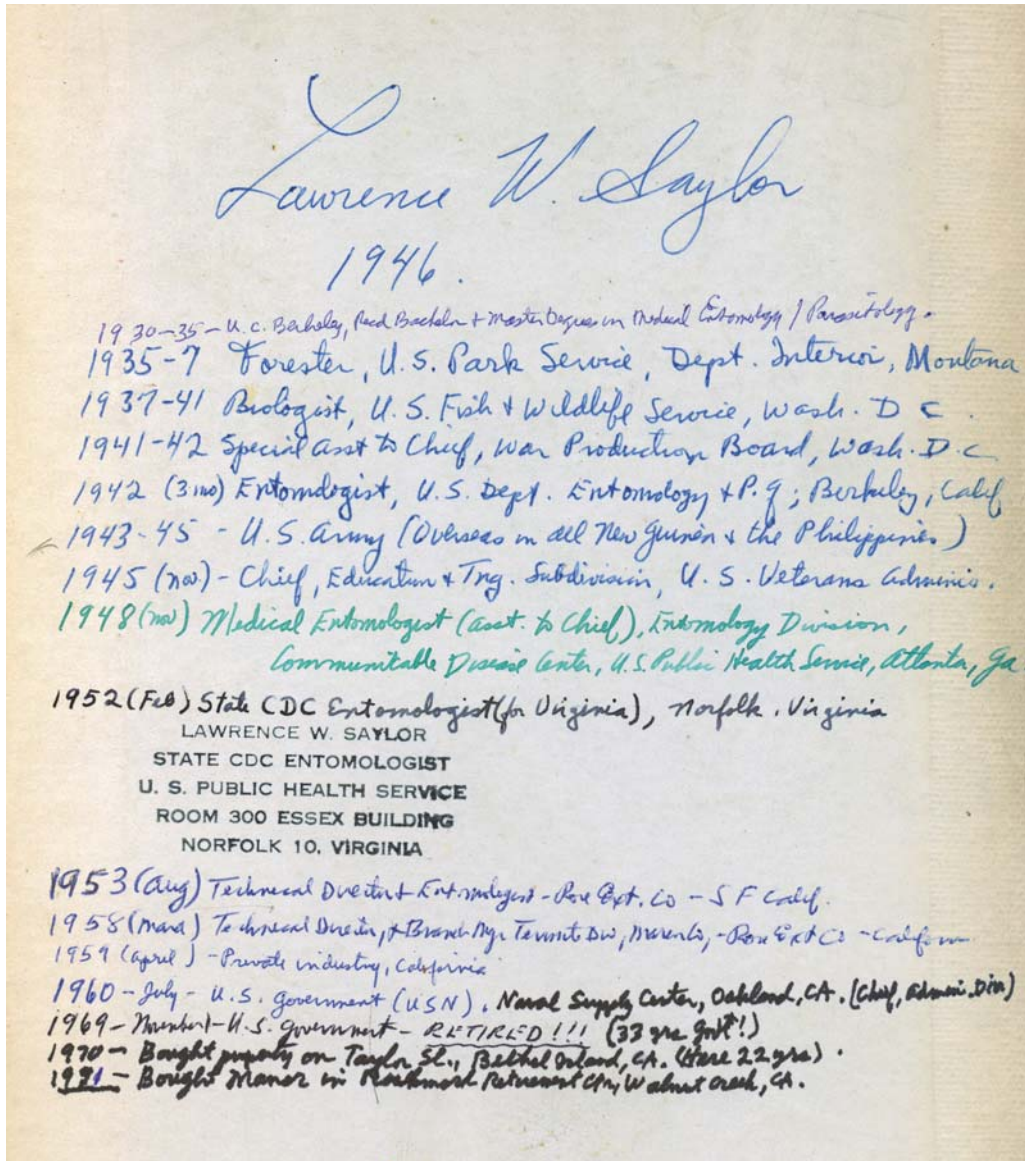


Fig. 1. Lawrence Saylor's signature and handwritten list of his employments on the inside back cover of his bound volume of his publications 1932-1943.

agencies were combined in 1941 to form the US Fish and Wildlife Service. From 1941 to 1942, he was a special assistant to the Chief of the War Production Board in Washington, DC, and from 1942 to early 1946 he was a lieutenant in the US Army. At the end of 1942, he spent three months as an entomologist in the US "Department of Entomology and Plant Quarantine" in Berkeley, California. From 1943 to 1945, he was deployed to

the Philippines and New Guinea (again where there are LARGE insects). After the war (November 1945), he served as the Chief of the Education and Training Subdivision of the US Veterans Administration. He was a research associate of the California Academy of Sciences from 1945 to 1948. In November 1948, he became a medical entomologist and Assistant to the Chief in the Entomology Division of the Communicable Disease Center



Figs. 2–5. Lawrence Saylor. **2)** As a student in the 1934 Blue and Gold Yearbook of the University of California-Berkeley; **3)** Second Lieutenant, US Army (photograph taken in 1946 by Austins Studios on Shattack Square, Berkeley, CA); **4)** In the May 1963 Oak Leaf, the newsletter of the Naval Supply Center, Oakland, CA, on the occasion of his donation of his collection to the California Academy of Sciences; **5)** Age 83, at a family reunion in 1997 (photograph by Louis Saylor (deceased), a younger brother).

(CDC) of the US Public Health Service in Atlanta, Georgia. He then served as the state CDC entomologist in the US Public Health Service in Norfolk, Virginia beginning in February 1952. He left government service in August 1953 and was employed as the technical director and entomologist for Rose Exterminating Company in San Francisco, California, where he continued through early 1960. In July 1960, he returned to government service and worked in the Administrative Division of the US Naval Supply Center in Oakland, California. In 1963, he donated his large, private collection (44,629 specimens) to the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco (Vince Lee, personal communication, September 2015).

Saylor's first publication described a new species of *Dichelonyx* Harris (Melolonthinae) from California (Saylor 1932), and four papers describing new species of *Ataenius* Harold (Aphodiinae), *Dichelonyx*, and *Copris* Geoffroy (Scarabaeinae) followed in 1933, all while he was still an undergraduate student. In 1934, he published three papers on new species of *Aegialia* Latreille (Aphodiinae) and *Phyllophaga* (Melolonthinae), the latter of which was to become a favorite genus of his wherein he described dozens of new species. The years 1935 to 1943 resulted in 50 papers (11 in 1935 alone) describing an astonishing two new subfamilies, ten new genera, and 194 new species of current day Aphodiinae, Scarabaeinae, Melolonthinae, Rutelinae, and Dynastinae from the USA, Mexico, Central and South America, and the West Indies. At this rate of discovery, he was destined to become one of the greatest scarab taxonomists of his time . . . but then WWII interrupted that stellar trajectory, and his five years of graduate work towards a PhD in invertebrate biology at George Washington University in Washington, DC was terminated. Nevertheless, he continued to publish and describe new taxa, albeit more sporadically due to his other wartime responsibilities. In 1945, Saylor published four papers describing two new genera and two new species of melolonthines as well as a revision of the genus *Dichelonyx* (Saylor 1945a). In 1946, he produced seven more papers describing one new genus and 18 new species of Melolonthinae and a new species of Dynastinae from South America. One new genus and five new species of melolonthines were published in 1947.

Saylor's last four scarab publications appeared in 1948: March (Saylor 1948a); May (Saylor 1948b); June (Saylor 1948c); and the final appearing in July (Saylor 1948d) that provided a key to the tribes and genera of the Dynastinae of the USA, which was a capstone paper for the previous papers he wrote reviewing the North American Dynastinae (Saylor 1945b, 1946a–b, 1948b, d). I am appreciative (perhaps grateful is a better word) of the fact that Larry specialized in Melolonthinae because,

otherwise, I might not have had as many opportunities with my specialty, the Dynastinae, had he “been there” before me. Conversely, I would really liked to have known him because we would have had a lot in common, not to mention he was a treasure trove of knowledge about scarab beetles. A list of Saylor's papers is presented in Appendix 1.

Saylor's published analyses and remarks about North American Dynastinae may have provided the foundation for Endrödi's later taxonomic conclusions in the latter's massive monographic works on the world dynastines (Endrödi 1966, 1969, 1976, 1977a–b, 1978, 1985) since, based on the few Endrödi determination labels seen in American collections, Endrödi did not borrow many specimens for examination (seemingly just a few from the US National Museum at the Smithsonian Institution). Instead, he may have partly relied on Saylor.

Larry was not without a humorous side, as can be seen in his “taxonomist's prayer” (Fig. 6) and several of his handmade, entomological Christmas cards (Fig. 7). His numerous scientific publications and many new genera and species of beetles are a lasting legacy about biodiversity on which we continue to build today.

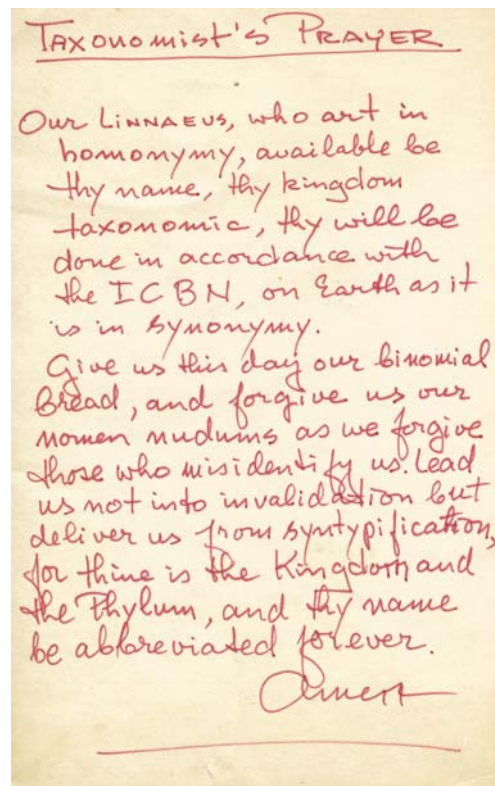


Fig. 6. A handwritten, comedic “taxonomist's prayer”.



Fig. 8. *Phobetus saylori*.

the legacy, and the scientist embodied in Lawrence Webster Saylor.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to John Saylor (Dublin, California), nephew of Larry, for providing essential family keepsakes and photographs that enabled this review. Art Evans (Richmond, Virginia) and an anonymous reviewer kindly reviewed the manuscript and offered valuable suggestions.

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(Received 8 December 2015; accepted 14 April 2016. Publication date 18 June 2016.)

APPENDIX 1

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