

**A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF  
WILLIAM IRVIN UTTERBACK  
(1872-1949)**

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William Irvin Utterback was born 11 October 1872 on a farm near Crawfordsville, Montgomery Co., Indiana. His father, John Walton Utterback, represented the seventh generation of Utterbacks in the United States. The Utter-

back family tree, in the new world, has its roots in one Hermann Otterbach, a native of Trupbach near Siegen, Germany, who with forty-one other German immigrants set foot on the Virginia coast in April, 1741. This small group



FIG. 1. William I. Utterback, about 1925.

of coal miners and iron workers established the settlement known as Germanna, Virginia. They were given land and conferred tax-free status in return for settling in the outlying areas around Williamsburg and acting as a barrier between marauding indians and the civilized townfolk of British descent. This hardy German stock soon became well known for qualities such as industriousness, literacy and religious endeavors. Early records mention that nearly all members of the colony could read and write.

Very quickly the new arrivals became anglicized in ways, speech and names. Hermann Otterbach became Herman Utterback. The name has remained unchanged and the line continued unbroken to John Walton Utterback (1850-1897). John Walton married Martha Hannah Miller (1854-1936) on December 14, 1871, and ten months later she bore a son christened William Irvin Utterback.

Young Utterback exhibited a propensity for

learning, and at the age of eighteen years acquired teaching certification. In the fall of 1890 he began, in a rural Indiana elementary school, a teaching career which would span fifty-five years. In the year 1905, having earned a B.S. degree from Wabash College in 1901, Utterback moved to St. Joseph, Missouri, and took a position as high school biology teacher, a post he would hold intermittently until 1917. At the direction of the Bishop of the Presbyterian Church of Missouri, Utterback traveled in 1907 to Arkansas. He established, and became the first president of, The School of the Ozarks (presently The College of the Ozarks), a Presbyterian denominational school. The years 1908-1911 were spent as an instructor of biology at Westminster College; the following six years (1911-1917) were important in the development of Utterback's scientific career. During this period he returned to his position as biology teacher at St. Joseph High School, but more importantly he enrolled in graduate school at the University of Missouri. Utterback was granted the A.M. degree in 1915, having done a good portion of his graduate work under the direction of Dr. George Lefevre. During the summers of 1913-1914 he had the opportunity of working at the U. S. Fisheries Lab, Fairport, Iowa, where he learned a great deal about freshwater mussel biology and also did much of the work that led to the publication for which he is today most remembered, "The Naiades of Missouri," published in 1916. These middle years of his life were the most productive scientifically and a steady flow of papers, all having to do with the biology of naiades, resulted.

Other significant events in his life occurred during this period. He married Bessie Ruby Austin (1877-1938) in 1905, and from this union came a son William I., Jr. (1907) and a daughter Anna Martha (1908).

In the fall of 1917 the Utterback family moved to Spokane, Washington, where William was again employed as a high school biology teacher at Lewis and Clark High School. Mrs. Utterback was apparently adversely affected by the climate of the Spokane area and Utterback was forced to again relocate.

On October 24, 1919, Utterback accepted a

position at Marshall Normal School (presently Marshall University) in Huntington, West Virginia, for which he was paid the princely sum of \$2,000 for a ten-month academic year. Professor Utterback from this time forth adopted the Huntington area and remained at Marshall University until his retirement at the age of 73 in 1945.

Professor Utterback was, for many years, the only biologist on staff at Marshall. Old newspaper clippings indicate that he was an interesting, efficient and dedicated staff member. His teaching load included Comparative Anatomy, Embryology, Zoology, Invertebrate Zoology and other courses as student needs dictated. He also served as advisor to pre-medical students.

His advancing age and heavy course load seems to have reduced his energies given to outside research. Few scientific publications were produced during the Marshall years. Professor Utterback was a devoutly religious man and was an elder in the Huntington First Presbyterian Church. His religious beliefs often showed even in his scientific works.

"Yet in the last analysis we scientists, who deal so much with the material and natural law, may lose sight of the spiritual and supernatural in the fact that the GREAT JEHOVAH (the SELF-EXISTENT ONE) is the Alpha and Omega whether we consider Evolution in the life history of the individual or even of all Phyla."

*Phylogeny and Ontogeny of Naiades, 1928.*

While it is true that the production of scientific papers waned in the later years, he did not stop writing. In two books and several lesser publications he sought to document his ancestry (The Utterback Family 1622-1937), and to bring together his religious beliefs and scientific thinking. Through the book "The Second Triangle" and a lesser publication "The Great Life Cycle" Professor Utterback brings together the concepts of Evolution and Special Creation. His thesis states that Seth, the third born of Adam and Eve, carried the God-created line and blended it, through marriage, with the line of Anthropoid human beings which had evolved through time outside the Garden of Eden.

I have in my possession a mimeographed booklet titled *Single Verse Poems* produced by

Utterback about 1930. The following four line verse attests to the conflict which garnered much of his thinking in later life.

Special Creation and Evolution  
*Special Creation is mutation  
By God's almighty hand  
Evolution is Revolution  
Through laws at HIS command.*

#### *Utterback the man*

Professor Utterback was deeply involved in many other aspects of community life. He held memberships in the A.A.A.S., the West Virginia Academy of Science, Chi Beta Phi and the American Institute of Geneology. In addition he was an active member of the local chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution, working through the ranks to become chapter president in 1942.

Utterback epitomized the early American naturalist and corresponded regularly with such distinguished biologists as Drs. F. C. Baker, R. E. Coker, A. E. Ortmann, V. Sterki and W. H. Dall, as well as Thaddeus Surber, Bryant Walker and L. S. Frierson. In the summer of 1913-14 he surveyed, in a row boat, three hun-



FIG. 2. William I. Utterback, about 1945.

dred miles of the Osage River of central Missouri; a feat which seems overwhelming in light of present day thinking and technology. The enclosed picture of Utterback in full field regalia says a great deal about Utterback the naturalist.

Upon retirement Professor Utterback moved to Los Angeles, California, where he lived with his daughter until his death on May 16, 1949. The professor was buried May 20, 1949 in Woodmere Cemetery, Huntington, West Virginia.

#### Publications of William Irvin Utterback

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- 1916 *The Naiades of Missouri*. Univ. of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana. pp. 1-200.

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- Ca. 1920 *The Second Triangle*. Gorman Press, Boston. 80 pp.
- 1927 *The Great Life Cycle*. Gentry Bros. Printing Co., Huntington, WV. One oversized printed page.
- 1928 Phylogeny and Ontogeny of Naiades. *Proc. W. Va. Acad. Sci.* 2:60-67.
- 1930 A new genus of freshwater mussels (Naiades). *Proc. W. Va. Acad. Sci.* 4:66-69.
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- 1933 New glochidia. *Proc. W. Va. Acad. Sci.* 6:32-36.
- 1937 *The Utterback Family 1622-1937*. Gentry Bros. Printing Co., Huntington, WV. 470 p.

#### Selected Additional Readings

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