

**WILLIAM AND CHARLOTTE SCLATER**

**Witnesses of World Change**

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On the first of February, 1896, Charlotte Seymour Mellen Stephenson married William Lutley Sclater at St. George's Church in London.<sup>1</sup> She was the daughter of the late William Proctor Mellen, New York business associate of the founding father of Colorado Springs. William Sclater was the son of a British ornithologist, and a naturalist who had distinguished himself in museum service with the British Empire. The marriage brought together two worlds: the world of European colonialism, science and culture, and the world of American modernism and westward expansion. Through the Sclaters' work and travels in the next half century, they brought significant contributions of each world to the other, and of themselves to both worlds. They participated on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean in historic developments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

William and Charlotte Sclater's story began nearly thirty years before they were married, with the beginnings of the city we now know as Colorado Springs. In 1870 former Civil War General William Jackson Palmer married Mary Lincoln Mellen, daughter of his fellow investor and developer, William Mellen.<sup>2</sup> Immediately following their wedding General Palmer brought his bride to Colorado Territory to commence building a north-south railroad line from the mining boom town of Denver to the Rio Grande River. With the assistance of government land grants,

American investors like his father-in-law, and private British capital as well, the Denver & Rio Grande reached Palmer's fledgling Fountain Colony in 1871.<sup>3</sup> Avoiding the mining supply settlement of Colorado City near the confluence of Fountain and Monument Creeks, the General and his planners created a resort community intended to cater to the tastes and needs of cultured easterners and Britons. Among the many such prospective residents General Palmer invited to his Newport in the Rockies<sup>4</sup> were his young wife's parents and their six other children. In 1871 Charlotte Mellen, Mrs. Palmer's younger half-sister, arrived with her family in Fountain Colony, by now the recently platted City of Colorado Springs. The city was incorporated a year later. After Mr. Mellen's death in 1873 the Mellen family became part of the Palmer household north of town.<sup>5</sup> The two families were hereafter closely connected in many ways.

In 1875 at age sixteen, Charlotte Mellen married Ernest Percy Stephenson at the Palmers' Glen Eyrie home. Acting as the couple's benefactor, General Palmer appointed Ernest manager of the Colorado Springs Gazette, and involved him in business ventures of the Colorado Springs Company. In 1876, the year in which Colorado achieved statehood, the Stephenson's first son was born, and they purchased a home on North Tejon Street in Colorado Springs.<sup>6</sup> Colorado was crawling with prospectors once again, this time looking for silver in the recent discoveries at Leadville. The new state's white population was rapidly spreading west and south to follow

the succession of mineral strikes, pushing for removal of the Ute, Cheyenne and Arapaho Indian Tribes as they went.<sup>7</sup>

The Stephenson's firstborn died at eleven months in 1877, and was buried in the new Colorado Springs cemetery. Several of Ernest's real estate investments failed at this time, and he began to invest in silver mines in the Wet Mountain Valley of the Arkansas River. A second son, named Eric, was born to the Stephensons in 1879. Ernest resigned as manager of the Gazette in 1880 to concentrate on his silver ventures. The couple had become estranged, however, and Ernest turned the Tejon Street house and some nearby lots over to Charlotte. The Stephenson's third son, Cyril, was born in 1880.<sup>8</sup> After the Stephensons separated, Charlotte sold the Colorado Springs properties and moved with her mother and young sons to England. Charlotte's sister, "Queen" Palmer, had also moved to England with her three daughters, the rigorous climate and high altitude of Colorado having placed considerable strain on her health.

Charlotte remained in London from 1881 to 1888, at which time she made a trip to Glen Eyrie to initiate divorce proceedings. Once her divorce from Ernest Stephenson was finalized she and her sons established residence at her mother's home in New York.<sup>9</sup>

By 1894 Eric and Cyril Stephenson were fifteen and fourteen years old, respectively, and ready for formal secondary school instruction. Their mother crossed the Atlantic to England again, this time to enroll the two boys

at Eton College, Buckinghamshire.<sup>10</sup> Mrs. Palmer died of heart failure in 1894, and her daughters crossed the Atlantic in the opposite direction to live with their father at Glen Eyrie. General Palmer renewed his efforts, upon their arrival, to make the Glen the mansion he had envisioned when he and Queen were first married. It began to take shape as a Tudor style stone castle, a far cry from the wood frame house from which the Mellen children had explored caves and viewed Ute Indian encampments along Camp Creek.

While her sons were at Eton College, Charlotte Stephenson became acquainted with William Lutley Sclater, a member of the science faculty since 1891. Mr Sclater had graduated with a Master of Arts degree in Natural Science from Keble College, Oxford in 1885. From 1887 to 1891 he had worked in Calcutta, in the British Empire's largest colonial holding, serving as deputy superintendent of the Indian Museum. At this early stage of his career he already enjoyed a secure reputation in naturalist circles as an expert in ornithology. By 1895 William Sclater and Charlotte Stephenson had made plans to marry. When William was selected to fill the position of curator for the South African Museum in Capetown, they hastened their plans in order to accomodate the position's starting date. They arrived in Kenilworth, Capetown, South Africa in 1896.<sup>12</sup>

At the South African Museum William Sclater used his expertise and energies to organize the museum's collections

and move them to a new facility. He initiated publication of the museum's "Annals" as well. During his decade of tenure at the museum he also contributed to British scientific journals based in London. He continued studies and research begun by Dr. Stark, a fellow naturalist, which he published in two volumes under the title Flora and Fauna of South Africa.<sup>13</sup>

In 1899 the conflicting interests of the British of Cape Colony and the predominantly Dutch settlers of the Transvaal and Orange Free State led to war. Hundreds of thousands of British soldiers were sent to South Africa to defeat the Boers, the Dutch farmers. It was a very costly war in terms of money, casualties and British prestige. England's willingness to use concentration camps as a means of containing the rebellion was an indicator of the extreme measures it was willing to take to maintain control of its colonial enterprises. The Boer War typified, in fact, the kind of touchy imperialism prevailing in much of the western world at the time.<sup>14</sup> Charlotte Sclater's older son, Eric Stephenson, was a member of the Gloucester Regiment in the British army. Luckily not one of the more than five thousand killed in the fighting, he was awarded both the King's Medal and Queen's medal for distinguished service to the Empire. Charlotte herself became active in the Good Hope Society, a charitable organization. She also helped to found the Field Force Fund to raise money and collect supplies for the soldiers at the front. For this latter work King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra presented

her with the Royal Red Cross, the same decoration given to Florence Nightingale for her medical service in the Crimean War (1854-1856). The Sclaters made a special trip to London at the war's end, in 1902, for Charlotte to be honored.<sup>15</sup>

In 1906 William Sclater experienced conflicts with the board of trustees of the South African Museum over his authority to make professional decisions. He decided to resign his position as curator, although the board later instated policy by which it deferred to the curator in professional matters. Eric Stephenson's regiment was stationed at Khartoum, capital of Sudan, after the Boer War. William and Charlotte traveled by rail, overland safari and Nile River boat from Capetown to Lake Victoria and on to Khartoum to visit Eric at his post. After this three month leg of the journey, they continued on to Cairo and then London before setting sail for the United States. General Palmer, having been apprised of William Sclater's employment situation, offered his protege a professorship at Colorado College in Colorado Springs, along with directorship of the College's natural history museum. It was the General's ambition to make the Colorado College Museum the most prestigious of its kind in the American West. His sister-in-law's husband had certainly demonstrated the skills in research, organization and innovation which could promote that goal.<sup>16</sup>

Cyril Stephenson accompanied his mother and step-father to Colorado Springs in 1906, spending some time with the Palmer family as well before returning to Europe. It was

the year of the centennial celebration of Lieutenant Zebulon Pike's "discovery" of Pike's Peak.<sup>17</sup> It would later surface that Lt. Pike had not actually scaled the Peak that bore his name, but a neighboring pinnacle. And of course the Indian tribes native to the Rocky Mountain region, as well as Spanish explorers for nearly three centuries, had known of the existence of the range the Utes called "The Shining Mountains."<sup>18</sup> But in 1906 the parties were all for Pike. The Palmers and the Sclaters participated in the festival of events, basing themselves at the sixty-seven room mansion Glen Eyrie had become.<sup>19</sup>

During that reunion year both families also took part in dinners and a ball honoring Jesse McDonald, current Republican Governor of Colorado, and Theodore Roosevelt's vice-president, Charles Fairbanks.<sup>20</sup> Colorado at this time was largely Republican, and enthusiasm for "Teddy's" unapologetic expansionism, both within United States borders and without, generally ran high. The Sclaters were quite removed, perhaps even insulated now, from the conflicts that earlier Indian removal policies had provoked in Colorado and the west. They were also fairly detached, by virtue of their present stations in life, from the labor problems which had erupted in the mines of Colorado. A decade earlier, and again in 1903-1904, miners' strikes for better wages and working conditions had resulted in situations severe enough to involve the state militia. Ironically, during their first months in Colorado Springs they rented a



home on Wood Avenue, which had been nick-named "Millionaire's Row" due to the preponderance of mansions built by those who had become wealthy from the gold mines of the Cripple Creek and Victor Mining District.<sup>21</sup> In 1907 General Palmer commissioned the London-trained Scotsman, Thomas MacLaren, and his partner Charles Thomas to produce architectural drawings for a home for the Sclaters. Mr. MacLaren was a friend of the famous British architect, Sir Herbert Baker, who had been active in reviving the Dutch Colonial structural styles of Cape Colony during the Sclaters' residence there.<sup>22</sup> The home was completed in November on the former Chambers family Rock Ledge Ranch, property which General Palmer had purchased in 1900 for the additional water rights it afforded his extensive estate. After a brief trip to England, William and Charlotte moved into Orchard House, named for the stands of apple and cherry trees which had been part of the Chambers' produce farm.<sup>23</sup>

Orchard House, restored today as part of the White House Ranch Historic Site, quite comprehensively personifies the cosmopolitan lifestyle of William and Charlotte Sclater. The home's location in 1907, two miles from the waning community of Colorado City and several miles outside the city limits of Colorado Springs, made it a country manor - a residence alternative popular among the growing upper middle class in Europe and America. Its Dutch Colonial exterior includes ornamental gabling along the roof edges and columns on either side of its west entrance. It is stuccoed and painted a pink-tinted beige with reddish brown ("Spanish Brown") trim, in

the manner of Hispanic missions in the southwestern United States and Mexico.<sup>24</sup> An open-beamed porch, or pergola, runs the length of the east face of the house, a feature common to ancient Greece and revived during the Italian Renaissance. This emphasis on extending one's living space out of doors was common to English country homes and was also very much in keeping with President Roosevelt's advocacy of the "strenuous life."<sup>25</sup>

The interior of Orchard House is divided into public rooms and servant work areas on the first floor, master and guest bedroom suites on the second, and servant living quarters on the third. The first and last of the divisions just described are very much British in tradition, while the bedroom suite concept is originally French.<sup>26</sup> In effect, Orchard House was an early herald of modern suburban life in Colorado Springs. In true Palmer tradition, its internal features were considerably ahead of time and place. It was completely wired for electricity, it was centrally heated by means of a coal burning furnace, and its plumbing included pressurized hot and cold running water and several complete "water closets." All this in a region where most rural homes would not see such conveniences until mid-century.

1908 was a year of extended travel for the Palmer and Sclater families. General Palmer's daughter Marjory was to be married in England in September. The party spent several months in Europe for the occasion. The trip was difficult

for Marjory's father, who had been failing in health since a riding accident left him paralyzed two years earlier.<sup>27</sup> In 1909 William Jackson Palmer died, leaving his executors, including Charlotte Sclater's brother Chase Mellen, to divide his estate equally between his three daughters.<sup>28</sup> William and Charlotte Sclater closed Orchard House and took up permanent residence in England.

William Sclater, always in demand in his field, was employed as curator of the Bird Room of the British Museum of Natural History in 1909. He now embarked upon a period of prolific authorship which spanned the remainder of his life. In 1912 he published the definitive, two-volume regional study, A History of the Birds of Colorado, with a dedication to General William Jackson Palmer for inspiring the work. He edited The Ibis periodical and held offices in the British Ornithologists' Union until 1930. He was editor of another British scientific journal, the Zoological Record, from 1921 to 1937. In 1924 and 1930 he published the first and second volumes of Systema Avium Aethiopicarum, a comprehensive and enduring contribution to African ornithology.<sup>29</sup>

During the more than thirty years they lived in England, the Sclaters continued their work in service organizations. At the outbreak of World War I, of which the Boer War and other international squabbles had been a warning, Queen Mary and Dowager Queen Alexandria requested that Charlotte Sclater revive the Field Force Fund for the relief of British troops. This she did, and in 1917 was

named a Commander of the British Empire by King George V. She was the first woman honored by this new order.<sup>30</sup>

William Sclater volunteered with the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association throughout the Great War. Both of Mrs. Sclater's sons served in the British army and both were sent to France. Eric Stephenson was killed in action in the Dardanelles in May of 1915. Cyril was wounded and died soon after, in December of 1916.<sup>31</sup> The prevailing attitude of the times toward a woman who had lost a husband or son in war was that she had given her loved one to the righteous causes of her country. Sadly, Mrs. Sclater could be said to have served her adopted homeland doubly well.

The years after World War I were years of continued travel, research and publication. William and Charlotte made a trip around the world from 1919 to 1920, including stops in New York and California. In 1935 they journeyed to the West Indies.<sup>32</sup> The Sclaters made liberal use of the continuously improving ocean liner and railroad technology of the twentieth century.

As the Sclaters were reaching their final years, so were certain aspects of the world in which they lived. The Second World War, a truly global war, would be fought on many continents and in many countries. It would be ended with the use of nuclear weapons which had globally lethal potential. The Age of Empire would end and an age of "cold war" would begin.<sup>33</sup>

In 1942 at the age of 83, Charlotte Sclater died at the couple's country cottage in Marlowe of injuries received during

a German bombing attack on London. Two years later, at the age of 81, William Sclater was killed when a bomb destroyed his home in Slone Square.<sup>34</sup> In their eight decades of life, William and Charlotte Sclater lived on three continents and witnessed a remarkable network of world changes: the white settlement and development of the Pike's Peak region, the height and decline of British imperialism in Africa and India, the exchange of cultural and scientific information between eastern and western hemispheres, and the process of technology from steam and electricity to atomic power. Through their respective roles in this network Charlotte and William Sclater quite remarkably exemplified the world citizens of their times.

**APPENDIX A**  
**CHRONOLOGY FOR WILLIAM AND CHARLOTTE SCLATER**

- 1869 Former Civil War General William Jackson Palmer marries Mary Lincoln Mellen, the daughter of his New York business associate, William Proctor Mellen, and begins plans for the settlement and development of central and southern Colorado Territory.
- 1871 Charlotte Seymour Mellen, sister-in-law to the young Mrs. ("Queen") Palmer, arrives with her parents and siblings in the General's newly-founded Fountain Colony (soon to be Colorado Springs).
- 1873 William Proctor Mellen dies, and the Mellens become part of the Palmer family and household at Glen Eyrie near Garden of the Gods.
- 1875 Charlotte Mellen weds Ernest Percy Stephenson, recently appointed by General Palmer to manage the Gazette Telegraph newspaper and certain business affairs of the Colorado Springs Company.
- 1876 Charlotte and Ernest Stephenson's first son is born in the same year that Colorado achieves statehood.
- Ernest Stephenson becomes an officer in the La Veta Town Company, another Palmer venture.
- The Stephensons purchase a home on North Tejon Street in Colorado Springs.
- 1877 The Stephenson's first son dies and is buried in the new Colorado Springs cemetery southeast of town.
- Several of Ernest Stephenson's real estate ventures fail, and he invests in silver in the Wet Mountain Valley in southwestern Colorado.
- 1879 Eric Stephenson is born.
- 1880 Ernest Stephenson resigns as manager of the Gazette Telegraph, concentrates on silver investments, and turns the Tejon Street house and some lots north of Colorado College over to Charlotte.
- Cyril Stephenson is born.
- 1881 Charlotte Stephenson sells her Colorado Springs properties and moves with her mother and sons to England, where Queen Palmer has relocated with her three daughters for health reasons.

- 1885 William Lutley Sclater, son of a prominent British ornithologist, receives his M.A. in Natural Science from Keble College, Oxford.
- 1887 William Sclater becomes deputy superintendent of Great Britain's Indian Museum, Calcutta.
- 1888 Charlotte Stephenson returns with her sons to Glen Eyrie to initiate and finalize a divorce from Ernest Stephenson. She and her sons establish residence at her mother's home in New York City.
- 1891 William Sclater is employed as a science master at Eton College, Buckinghamshire, England.
- 1894 Eric and Cyril Stephenson enter Eton college, where Charlotte Stephenson meets ornithologist, author and professor William Sclater.
- Queen Palmer dies of heart failure in London, and her daughters return to Glen Eyrie.
- 1895 William Sclater is selected to become curator of the South African Museum in Capetown.
- 1896 William Sclater and Charlotte Mellen Stephenson are married at St. George's Church, London, and move to Kenilworth, Capetown, South Africa.
- 1896-1906 William Sclater reorganizes the South African Museum collections in a new facility, initiates publication of the Museum's "Annals" and contributes articles to British scientific journals.
- William Sclater publishes Flora and Fauna of South Africa, a two-volume work begun by a Dr. Stark.
- 1899-1902 Charlotte Sclater becomes active in the Good Hope Society and co-founds the Field Force Fund to aid British troops fighting in the Boer War.
- Eric Stephenson, a member of the Gloucester Regiment, serves in the Boer war and receives both the Queen's Medal and King's Medal.
- 1902 The Sclaters journey to London for Charlotte to receive the Royal Red Cross decoration from King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra.
- 1906 William Sclater resigns as curator of the South African Musuem due to professional differences with its board of trustees.

- 1906 The Sclaters travel by rail, overland safari and Nile River boat from Capetown to Khartoum, where Eric Stephenson is stationed with his regiment.
- At General Palmer's urging, William Sclater accepts a professorship and museum directorship at Colorado College in Colorado Springs.
- The Sclaters and Cyril Stephenson arrive at Glen Eyrie, now rebuilt as an English Tudor style castle.
- The Sclaters and Palmers participate in celebrations honoring the centennial anniversary of Zebulon Pike's explorations of Colorado and a visit to Colorado by Theodore Roosevelt's vice-president, Charles Fairbanks.
- General Palmer suffers paralyzing spinal injuries from a riding accident, from which he never fully recovers.
- 1907 Architect Thomas McLaren is commissioned to design a Capetown Dutch style home for the Sclaters on the former Chambers family Rock Ledge Ranch, which General Palmer had purchased for water rights in 1900.
- After a brief trip to England Charlotte and William Sclater move from a rented home on Wood Avenue in Colorado Springs to the newly completed Orchard House.
- 1908 The Sclaters and Palmers make an extended trip to England for the wedding of the General's daughter, Marjory.
- 1909 General Palmer dies, leaving his entire estate to his daughters. William and Charlotte Sclater take up permanent residence in England.
- William Sclater is employed by the British Museum of Natural History.
- 1912 William Sclater publishes the still-definitive work, A History of the Birds of Colorado, with a dedication to General Palmer for inspiring the work.
- 1913-1930 William Sclater holds offices in the British Ornithologists' Union and edits The Ibis periodical.
- 1914 At the request of Queen Mary and Dowager Queen Alexandra, Charlotte Sclater revives the Field Force Fund for the relief of British forces in World War I.
- 1914-1918 William Sclater volunteers with the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association during World War I.



- 1915 Eric Stephenson is killed in action in France, in the Dardanelles.
- 1916 Cyril Stephenson dies after being wounded in France.
- 1917 Charlotte Sclater is named a Commander of the British Empire by King George V and Queen Mary, the first woman to be honored by this new order.
- 1919-1920 William and Charlotte Sclater travel around the world, including visits to New York and California.
- 1921-1937 William Sclater is editor of the Zoological Record in London.
- 1924 & 1930 William Sclater publishes Systema Avium Aethiopicarum, a very important contribution to African ornithology.
- 1935 The Sclaters travel to the West Indies.
- 1942 Charlotte Sclater dies at the age of 83 as the result of injuries sustained during German bombing of London in World War II.
- 1944 William Sclater dies at the age of 81 when his home is destroyed by a German bomb.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Ann R. Brooks. "The First Family of Orchard House" (Colorado Springs: White House Ranch Historic Site, 1980), 3.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall Sprague. One Hundred Plus (Colorado Springs: Colorado Springs Centennial, 1972), 3.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>4</sup>Marshall Sprague. Newport in the Rockies (Chicago: Sage Books, 1980).

<sup>5</sup>Brooks, 3.

<sup>6</sup>Delores J. Gustafson. "Update on William and Charlotte Sclater" (Colorado Springs: White House Ranch Historic Site, 1987), 1.

<sup>7</sup>Carl Abbott. Colorado: A History of the Centennial State (Boulder: Colorado Associated University Press), 109.

<sup>8</sup>Gustafson, 1.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Brooks, 2-3.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>14</sup>Gordon Craig. Europe Since 1815 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974, Alternate Edition), 301-2.

<sup>15</sup>Brooks, 4.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., and Gustafson, 3.

<sup>17</sup>Gustafson, 3.

<sup>18</sup>Rosemae Wells Campbell. "A History of the Acquisitions and Use of the Garden of the Gods" (Colorado Springs: White House Ranch Historic Site, 1987), 1.

<sup>19</sup>Sprague (1972), 18, 28.

<sup>20</sup>Gustafson, 3.

<sup>21</sup>Abbott, 141-2.

22Long Hoeft Architects. "Refurnishing Study of the 1907 Drawing Room of Charlotte Sclater, Garden of the Gods, Colorado Springs" (Denver, 1983), 6.

23Grace DeLong. "A Ranch Begins: The Chambers Period, 1874-1900" (San Bernardino, 1978), 1-2.

24Long Hoeft Architects. "Historic Structures Report and Development and Use Proposals, Orchard House, Garden of the Gods, Colorado Springs" (Denver, 1989), I, 6.

25Renee Kahn. "The Perennial Pergola" The Old House Journal XII (April 1984), 64.

26Long Hoeft Architects. "Refurnishing Study of the 1907 Sitting Room at Orchard House, Garden of the Gods, Colorado Springs" (Denver, 1984), 2.

27Brooks, 5.

28El Paso County. "In the Matter of the Estate of William J. Palmer, Deceased" (10 July, 1909, Book 452), 233.

29Brooks, 6-7.

30Gustafson, 5.

31Ibid.

32Ibid.

33Anthony Esler. The Human Venture (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986), 279, 289.

34Gustafson, 5.

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**WHITE HOUSE RANCH HISTORIC SITE  
STAFF TRAINING AND CONTINUING EDUCATION**

**NOTES**