



## Frank H. Shoemaker, Self-Made Naturalist and Photographer

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Article Summary: Through photography and extensive field notes, Shoemaker created a significant record of Nebraska landscapes, flora, and fauna during the early twentieth century.

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Photographs / Images: Frank Shoemaker; butte southwest of Harrisburg, Banner County; outline map of Nebraska showing locations of Shoemaker photos in the article; red-shouldered hawk; young screech owls; Cut-Off Lake (now Carter Lake); Elizabeth Van Sant; Shoemaker, R H Wolcott, and I S Trestler at Cut-Off Lake; Branson Grove—Salt Creek; Salt Creek near Havelock; tiger beetles; woman searching a salt marsh for tiger beetles; tunnels of tiger beetles; detail of cottonwood bark; Priddy Ranch, Monroe Canyon, Sioux County; Mrs. Priddy and Joe; west Monroe Canyon; cow parsnip; map including Shoemakers's 1911 field notes; blowout near Hackberry Lake, Cherry County; killdeer near Hackberry Lake; Hackberry Lake; field notes describing Hackberry Lake; Hot Creek Valley, Sioux County; badlands, Sioux County (2 views); Sioux County [flora]

# FRANK H. SHOEMAKER,

## Self-Made Naturalist and Photographer

BY MARY ELLEN DUCEY, ELAINE NOWICK, AND REBECCA BERNTHAL



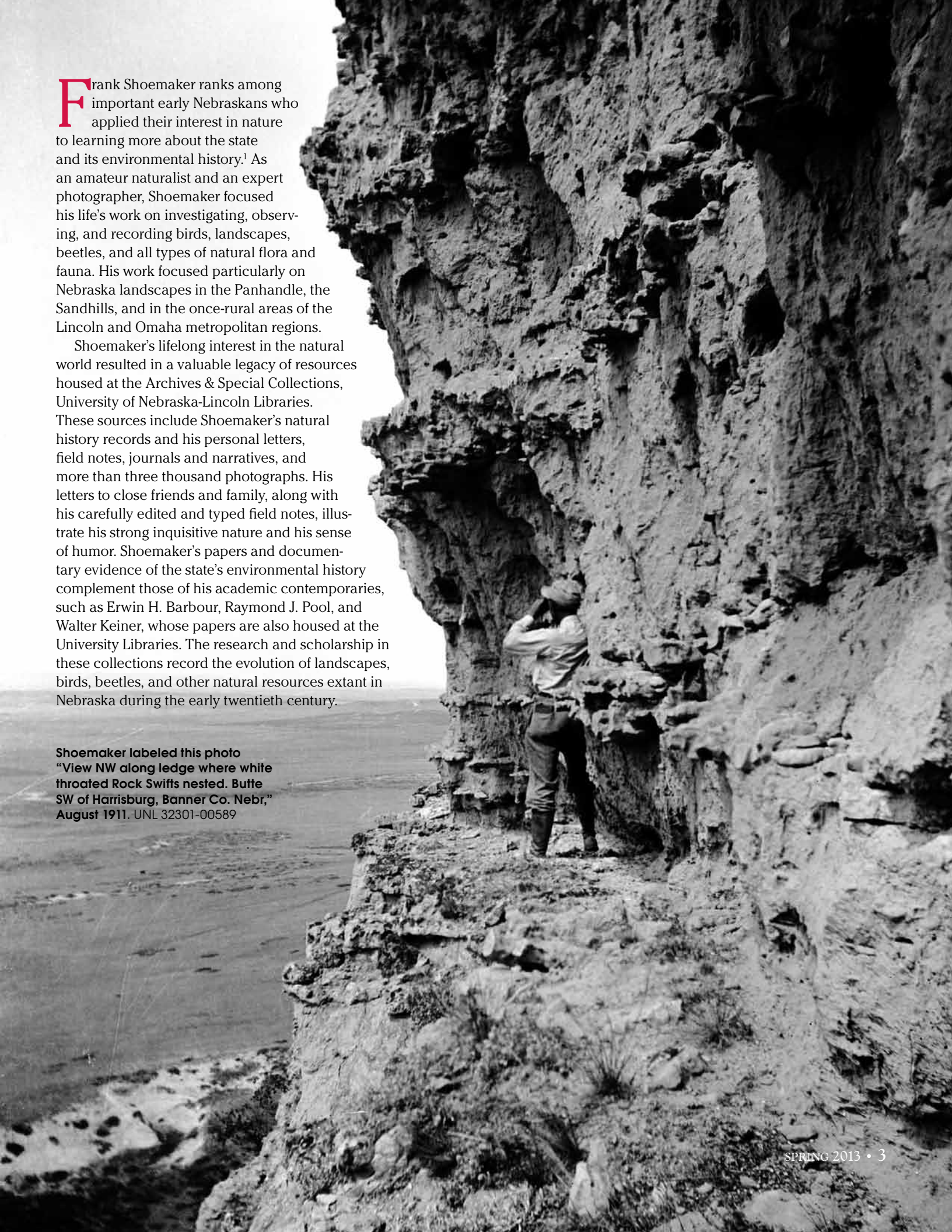
**Frank Shoemaker, undated.** Frank Shoemaker, Papers, 1890-1947, Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries, 32301-00623. All photos in this article are from this collection, hereafter credited "UNL" followed by the identification number.



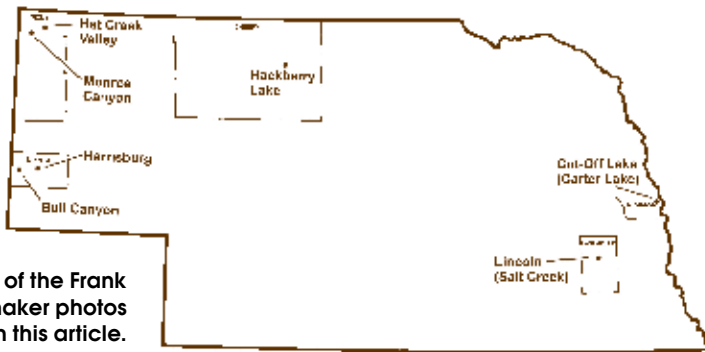
**F**rank Shoemaker ranks among important early Nebraskans who applied their interest in nature to learning more about the state and its environmental history.<sup>1</sup> As an amateur naturalist and an expert photographer, Shoemaker focused his life's work on investigating, observing, and recording birds, landscapes, beetles, and all types of natural flora and fauna. His work focused particularly on Nebraska landscapes in the Panhandle, the Sandhills, and in the once-rural areas of the Lincoln and Omaha metropolitan regions.

Shoemaker's lifelong interest in the natural world resulted in a valuable legacy of resources housed at the Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries. These sources include Shoemaker's natural history records and his personal letters, field notes, journals and narratives, and more than three thousand photographs. His letters to close friends and family, along with his carefully edited and typed field notes, illustrate his strong inquisitive nature and his sense of humor. Shoemaker's papers and documentary evidence of the state's environmental history complement those of his academic contemporaries, such as Erwin H. Barbour, Raymond J. Pool, and Walter Keiner, whose papers are also housed at the University Libraries. The research and scholarship in these collections record the evolution of landscapes, birds, beetles, and other natural resources extant in Nebraska during the early twentieth century.

**Shoemaker labeled this photo**  
"View NW along ledge where white  
throated Rock Swifts nested. Butte  
SW of Harrisburg, Banner Co. Nebr."  
August 1911. UNL 32301-00589







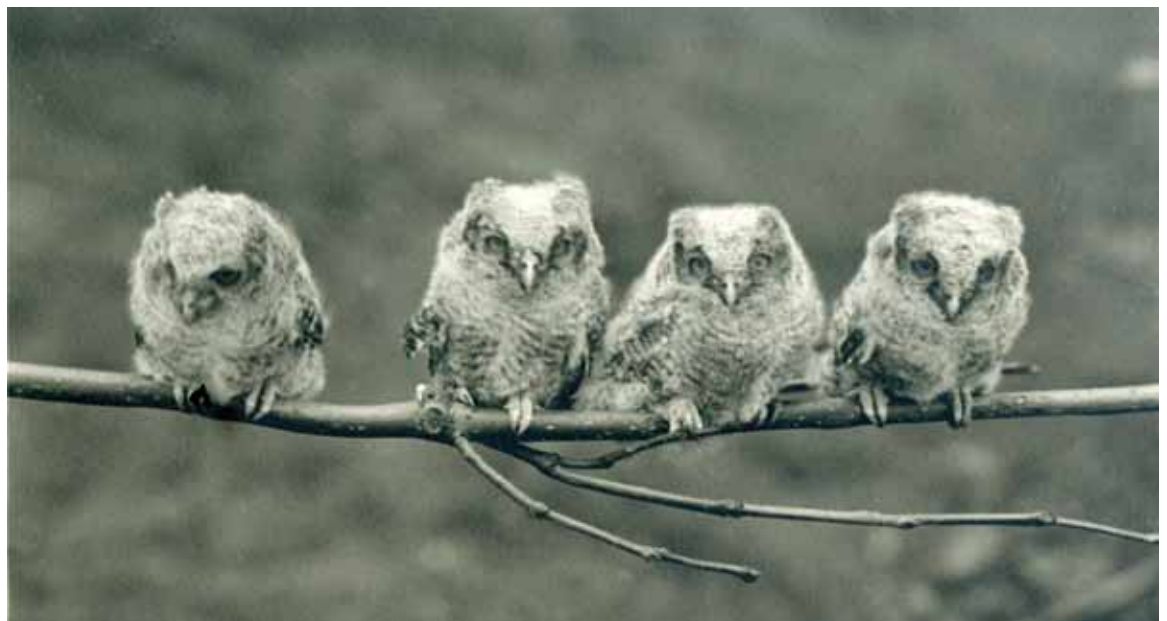
**Locations of the Frank Shoemaker photos shown in this article.**

Frank Henry Shoemaker was born on April 2, 1875, in DeWitt, Clinton County, Iowa. His parents were Samuel Henry (S. H.) and Rette F. Ferre Shoemaker. He had one sister, Jessie, seven years his senior. S. H. Shoemaker supported his family as editor of various newspapers in Iowa, first the *DeWitt Observer*, 1862 to 1888, the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 1888-1890, and last as editor of the *Chronicle* in Hampton, Franklin County, Iowa.<sup>2</sup>



**Red-shouldered hawk, undated.** UNL 32301-00610

**Young screech owls, Lincoln, undated.** UNL 32301-00609



As a young man, Shoemaker worked for his father and consequently missed his final year in high school. He wrote: "I became convinced that it was my duty to give it up and assist in the publication of the newspaper, as my father's health was at that time very poor. . . . I pursued my various studies during the evenings, practically covering the twelfth grade work and going farther in certain of the more practical branches."<sup>3</sup> Efforts to expand his knowledge despite a lack of formal education proved characteristic of Shoemaker's entire life, supported by his curiosity and his interest in all things related to natural history studies.

Bird study first dominated Shoemaker's interests and inspired him to devote much of his spare time as a young man to expanding his knowledge of species and habitats. Shoemaker collected bird nests and eggs and documented his findings and his outdoor adventures in field notes. He recorded notes on birds and their behaviors following "tramps" into the woods and fields around his home, documenting the information he discovered about Franklin County, Iowa. Early on he attended lectures of professional ornithologists, such as Herbert Osborn from the Iowa Agricultural College (now Iowa State University), who advised Shoemaker to collect government bulletins to assist his bird studies.<sup>4</sup> Taking this advice, Shoemaker wrote letters to the United States Department of Agriculture requesting publications on bird species. He sought assistance from the Smithsonian Institution "for collecting and preserving natural history material."<sup>5</sup> These government publications were the foundation for Shoemaker's studies in ornithology.

At age fifteen, Shoemaker's field notes indicate that his focus turned to observation rather than collecting. Describing flickers in his front yard Shoemaker noted that the birds "were boring in the ground with their bills, though with what object I could not surmise. I watched them for some time from my room, and noticed the exact position in which they were working that I might examine after the birds had departed. Upon examination I found that they had been engaged in boring into the honey-combed ground occupied by ants' nests, eating the insects or their larvae, or both. This is a thing I have never before noticed, but the manner in which they conducted themselves showed that it was no new business to them."<sup>6</sup> While Shoemaker noted that it was sometimes necessary to kill specimens for study, he acknowledged the greater value of research in natural settings.<sup>7</sup> Reviewing his lists for Franklin County he wrote: "the other evening I found I had 104 varieties catalogued: this species makes the 105th on my list. I cannot help being impressed with how infinitely better it is to thus study bird life than to murder and destroy to further the cause of ornithology."<sup>8</sup>

In Shoemaker's early records two statements illustrate his shifting views on collecting and observation. In an entry in his field notes on May 14, 1893, Shoemaker "concluded to spend part of today



**"A 'cut-off' from Cut-Off Lake, Omaha," 1901.**  
Formerly an oxbow in the Missouri River, today it is known as Carter Lake.  
UNL 32301-00428

in the woods, not as a collector but as a naturalist, confining myself to observation out of respect for the day."<sup>9</sup> Shoemaker's decision on that day perhaps initiated the change that became permanent over the course of his life—a dedication to observing nature in the forms that most interested him and recording it through documents and photographs. The publication of his records, in an 1896 pamphlet titled *A Partial List of the Birds of Franklin County, Iowa*, provides a second view on bird studies. In the introduction Shoemaker wrote: "other matters have so occupied my time that no opportunity has been given for systematic study in this branch. . . . This list is the result of observations made at odd times; a method not at all conducive



**Elizabeth Van Sant, 1900.**  
UNL 32301-00607

to the best results.”<sup>10</sup> Throughout his life, circumstances or practical needs left Shoemaker at odds with his desire to study nature in a professional scientific manner.

In the early 1890s, Shoemaker attended a family reunion in Hampton, Iowa, where he met a cousin, Elizabeth Van Sant, who lived in Omaha, Nebraska. Their friendship developed through correspondence about their mutual interest in birds. As a novice bird watcher, Elizabeth sought guidance from Shoemaker. Her letters discussed the value she placed on his ornithological knowledge and the information he provided about bird books. Elizabeth made trips to the library and read nearly all the works Shoemaker recommended, which led

her to many of “nature’s beautiful secrets.”<sup>11</sup> She also regularly investigated *The Auk: A Quarterly Journal of Ornithology*, published by the American Ornithologists Union, and mentioned it in her letters.<sup>12</sup> Shoemaker even promised to send his field notes to Elizabeth, who wrote: “I shall consider it a rare compliment, and shall remind you if you forget.”<sup>13</sup> In return, Elizabeth sent Shoemaker shorthand lessons and techniques. She believed that he would be able to learn them from a distance and that his efforts would be of value to him later.<sup>14</sup>

Shoemaker moved to Omaha in 1897, where he took up residence at the Van Sant home. Shoemaker explained in a letter that Elizabeth Van Sant’s father, A. C. (Adam Clarke) Van Sant, was

Left to right: Frank Shoemaker, R. H. Wolcott, and I. S. Trestler, at Cut-Off Lake near Omaha, July 4, 1902.  
UNL SF1901g040651





"the brother of my aunt by marriage. . . . Though I am not a 'blood relation' of the Van Sant's, theirs to me is a perfect home, and I would not wish for more congenial surroundings. . . . we are all natural history people."<sup>15</sup> A. C. Van Sant operated the Van Sant School of Shorthand and Typewriting and published typing manuals based on the Van Sant System of Touch Typewriting.<sup>16</sup> Shoemaker, familiar with printing and publication work, assisted in producing manuals in exchange for the opportunity to attend stenography school.<sup>17</sup>

With the benefit of his stenography training, Shoemaker made his living as a general auditor secretary for the Southern Pacific and Union Pacific railroads until 1910.<sup>18</sup> This type of work did not engage his interests in natural history. Shoemaker viewed Sundays as an opportunity to pursue his passion. In a letter to a friend he wrote:

So when the Lord's day comes around, I pull out for the woods and fields, and breathe the pure air while I learn about the different creatures the Lord has pastured out on this handsome sphere. . . . After considerable study and little amount of experience with different ways of spending Sunday, I have chosen my present method, and the Sundays are all that makes life worth living.<sup>19</sup>

Shoemaker's secretarial skills provided an income; nonetheless, he felt: "it is the regret of my life that I can not turn my natural inclination to a professional and specialized use in some way, instead of dragging a reluctant living out of matters in which at best I take an artificial interest."<sup>20</sup> The travel required by this work provided opportunities for Shoemaker to see areas of the country he later revisited, such as California and the southwest.<sup>21</sup> Over the course of seven years he traveled 20,000 miles throughout the United States and visited all but four states.<sup>22</sup>

Through involvement in the Nebraska Ornithologists Union (NOU), Shoemaker met many individuals who shared his interest in birds. The NOU held its first meeting on July 15, 1899.<sup>23</sup> A week later Shoemaker signed a letter mentioning the NOU: "Trusting that in the near future we shall have established a credible organization, and anticipating the pleasure to ourselves and profit to American ornithology when that condition is reached . . ."<sup>24</sup> Among the charter members were botanists, entomologists, and plant ecology faculty at the University of Nebraska, including Robert Wolcott, who remained Shoemaker's lifelong friend.

Along with Lawrence Bruner and Myron Swenk, Wolcott published research on birds, which served as guides for bird enthusiasts. Shoemaker may have used these resources for his own "tramps" and bird species lists.<sup>25</sup> Shoemaker served as president of the NOU in 1903. He showed pride in the development of the organization, which had grown to two hundred members, and of its having published three years of annual proceedings.<sup>26</sup>

Shoemaker spent the majority of his free time roaming about open landscapes surrounding Omaha, searching for and documenting birds. Elizabeth and others often shared these jaunts and opportunities for learning more about bird species. Shoemaker and his companions spent hours, sometimes an entire day, in the woods of Childs Point, now known as Fontenelle Forest, at Bellevue, Nebraska. Their records document many species in Omaha, in Hanscom Park and Elmwood Park, and areas such as Saddle Creek, now identified as a street in central Omaha.<sup>27</sup>

One of the more interesting experiments Shoemaker and Elizabeth tried was a "bird room" in their house. In several letters, Shoemaker explained that initially the room contained nine birds that were supplied with fresh green trees, weeds on the floor, and a fresh bath. He noted: "These natural history diversions serve to keep us alive, and do no one any harm. I doubt if you will find another place in the country where 'critters' have the same rights and accommodations as people."<sup>28</sup> Writing to his mother, Shoemaker explained that "I am almost convinced that they [birds] are diverse as so many people, and I am thoroughly convinced that they are far more interesting subjects for study."<sup>29</sup> Inhabitants of the bird room included several Baltimore orioles, a wood thrush, a house wren, and black-capped chickadees, which received names such as Mack, Texas, and Katherine.<sup>30</sup> Many of the birds were rescued from the wild, found out of nests, saved from cats, or on one occasion "brought to us by a delegation of about eight neighborhood girls."<sup>31</sup> The bird room experiment allowed Shoemaker to closely observe the distinct behavior of the birds despite the unusual habitat.

Shoemaker and Elizabeth bought a camera in 1898, which significantly changed and enhanced their observation and recording methodology. The two concentrated on landscapes, birds, plants, and insects. Their own bird room and their tramps around Omaha provided a wealth of photographic opportunities.<sup>32</sup> Shoemaker's ability to take pictures remained limited only by the amount of glass plates he could carry on each

**"Branson Grove-Salt Creek,  
7:30 p.m.," September  
28, 1918. Salt Creek, near  
Lincoln, proved a rich area  
for Shoemaker to explore  
and photograph.  
UNL 32301-00436**



**Salt Creek near Havelock,  
November 1914. Havelock  
has since been annexed by  
Lincoln. UNL 32301-00444**



**Tiger beetles collected  
by Shoemaker and  
colleagues, undated.  
UNL 32301-00605 (details)**





excursion. Shoemaker developed prints in a dark-room in the Van Sant home.<sup>33</sup>

In a letter to his friend Paul F. Carpenter, Shoemaker described the cameras and the growing collection of more than 450 plates on natural history, the subject that received their closest attention:

Elizabeth and I are in partnership in this business, owning the camera and sharing all the expenses equally. . . . Our last purchase, however, is so far in advance of any of the others that we have almost discarded them. The one with which we do all our work now we had put together to suit our own fancy. If you are conversant with photographic affairs, you will be interested to know that it consists of a Poco long-focus box with Bausch & Lomb shutter and Goerz double-anastigmatic lens. It does quick, clear work, and all that we need to have an ideal outfit is a focal-plane shutter, to work in conjunction with that now on the camera. . . . We like good landscapes and we occasionally take one. . . . We have not taken more than eight or nine portraits with all our outfits together, and most of those under pressure. It is to the photographing of natural history subjects, pure and simple, that we devote ourselves, and when we get out of that line we are filled with joy to get back again.<sup>34</sup>

Shoemaker relied on his own experience to teach himself photography, a process suited to his habit of educating himself in an area of interest. He described himself as a “hopeless slave to the camera habit” and how a camera became his “constant companion.”<sup>35</sup> He concentrated his interests and his efforts on “every class of creatures—birds, nests with eggs, nestlings, snakes, toads, frogs, grasshoppers, cicadas, butterflies, moths, gophers, chipmunks, bats, lizards, salamanders, cocoons, worms, spiders, wasps.”<sup>36</sup> Shoemaker called his photography avocation “recreational,” noting that he never sold his photographs but gave them away or created photo albums for himself.<sup>37</sup>



**“Habitat of *Cicindela togata* var. *apicalis*. Lincoln, NE,” August 1, 1915. An unidentified woman (possibly Elizabeth Van Sant) searches a salt marsh for tiger beetles. UNL 32301-00608**



**“Tunnels of cicindela larvae. Lincoln, NE,” August 8, 1915. Today the Salt Creek tiger beetle is a critically endangered subspecies. UNL 32301-00606**



He recognized that many of his pictures “owing to chance of time and circumstance, can not [*sic*] be duplicated.”<sup>38</sup> This simple statement illustrates the value of the unique photographs that Shoemaker captured and preserved on glass plates and on film.

Perhaps due to the influence of Robert Wolcott, insects as well as birds began to dominate Shoemaker’s studies. Though he did not consider himself an entomologist, he specialized in the study of *Cicindelidae*, a class of beetles.<sup>39</sup> He shared his findings with Wolcott and Lawrence Bruner, who also served at the University of Nebraska as a professor in the Entomology Department. “I spent a Sunday with Wolcott, as delightfully as usual, about a month ago and we put in most of the day on the Salt Basin. . . . I took down individuals of all our species and Professors Wolcott and Bruner identified the lot. . . .”<sup>40</sup> Shoemaker’s specific interest in tiger beetles eventually consumed a large part of his

time. He wrote to Elizabeth: “I found and captured a species of tiger beetle new to me; it is a very small, plain brown without elytral marks, and runs instead of flying. I caught several. . . .”<sup>41</sup> By 1905, Shoemaker considered himself as “entirely daft on the subject of tiger beetles; worse than ever after receipt this evening of Systematishcher Index der Cicindeliden (Deutsche Entomol. Zeitschrift 1905. II) from Dr. Walther Horn . . . the authority on the subject ‘with the author’s kind regards.’ I shall pass by as entirely unworthy of comment the fact that I can read none of it except the scientific names.”<sup>42</sup>

Moving to Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1909, Shoemaker sought an opportunity to formalize his academic training. At age thirty-four, he enrolled at the University of Nebraska. His personal responsibilities had changed and he no longer needed to provide financial assistance to his family. “My mother died three years ago. My sister has married. My father is in better health and better funds than for many years. So for the first time in my life, I am in a position to undertake plans of my own, and to try to do something for myself. This is not a complaint; nothing has given me more pleasure than the ability to help my dear ones, and I have thanked God for the privilege.”<sup>43</sup> This change allowed Shoemaker to take classes in botany, entomology and other subjects, essentially fulfilling a lifelong goal to formalize his scientific interests.<sup>44</sup>

Shoemaker planned to earn a salary that would cover his expenses and still allow him to spend most of his time attending classes.

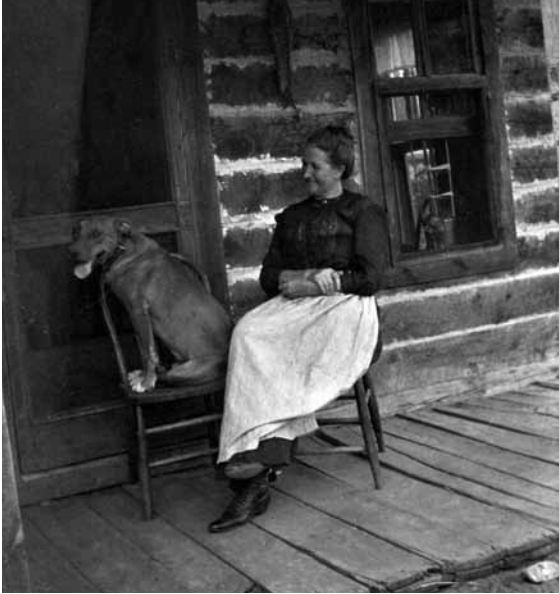
**Detail of cottonwood bark, Monroe Canyon, undated. Shoemaker placed a pocketknife in the photo to give it scale.**  
UNL 32301-00312



**Priddy Ranch, in Monroe Canyon, Sioux County, July 1917.** UNL 32301-00281







"Mrs. Priddy and Joe," August 1911. UNL 32301-00206



Looking northwest in west Monroe Canyon, July 1917. UNL 32301-00282

Being an ignorant cuss, I feel the need of much knowledge in natural history lines, and this is the chance to fill up . . . My natural history work, though it has covered a multitude of details in various fields, has never got down to first principles in any line . . . Equipped with a year of this, or better with two years, I shall be in a position to do intelligent collection and study in new fields . . . This is not a half-baked plan; I have had it in mind for years, but circumstances have never been favorable until now. Of course, a good stiff breeze from the barrens of adversity may put my house of cards hors de combat (I can mix a metaphor as well as a Martini), but the prospect is enticin' [*sic*] and here's at it. I shall be particularly fortunate in the matter of instructors at Lincoln; I have known most of the professors intimately for years, and they are delighted in the prospect of taking some small portion of the conceit out of me.<sup>45</sup>

Professors Wolcott, Bruner, and Raymond Pool were among those Shoemaker met through the NOU. Despite three years of classes, however, Shoemaker did not formally graduate from the university.

When a "stiff breeze" forced Shoemaker to support himself rather than continue classes, photography became a way to make a living. Shoemaker worked for departments at the University of Nebraska creating lantern slides, microphotographs, and doing photographic enlargements.<sup>46</sup>

He recorded that during the years 1911 to 1913, he made \$3,500 doing photography work for the university.<sup>47</sup> Departments such as chemistry, pharmacy, geology, biology, and plant pathology were among the many that benefited from Shoemaker's work with the camera.<sup>48</sup> Shoemaker traveled through Nebraska with Nebraska State Historical Society superintendent Addison E. Sheldon and curator E. E. Blackman, serving as the photographer for an expedition to investigate the site of a 1720 massacre of a Spanish military expedition in Nebraska along the valley of the Platte and Loup Rivers.<sup>49</sup>

**Cow parsnip (*Heracleum lanatum*), Monroe Canyon, June 1911. UNL 32301-00327**

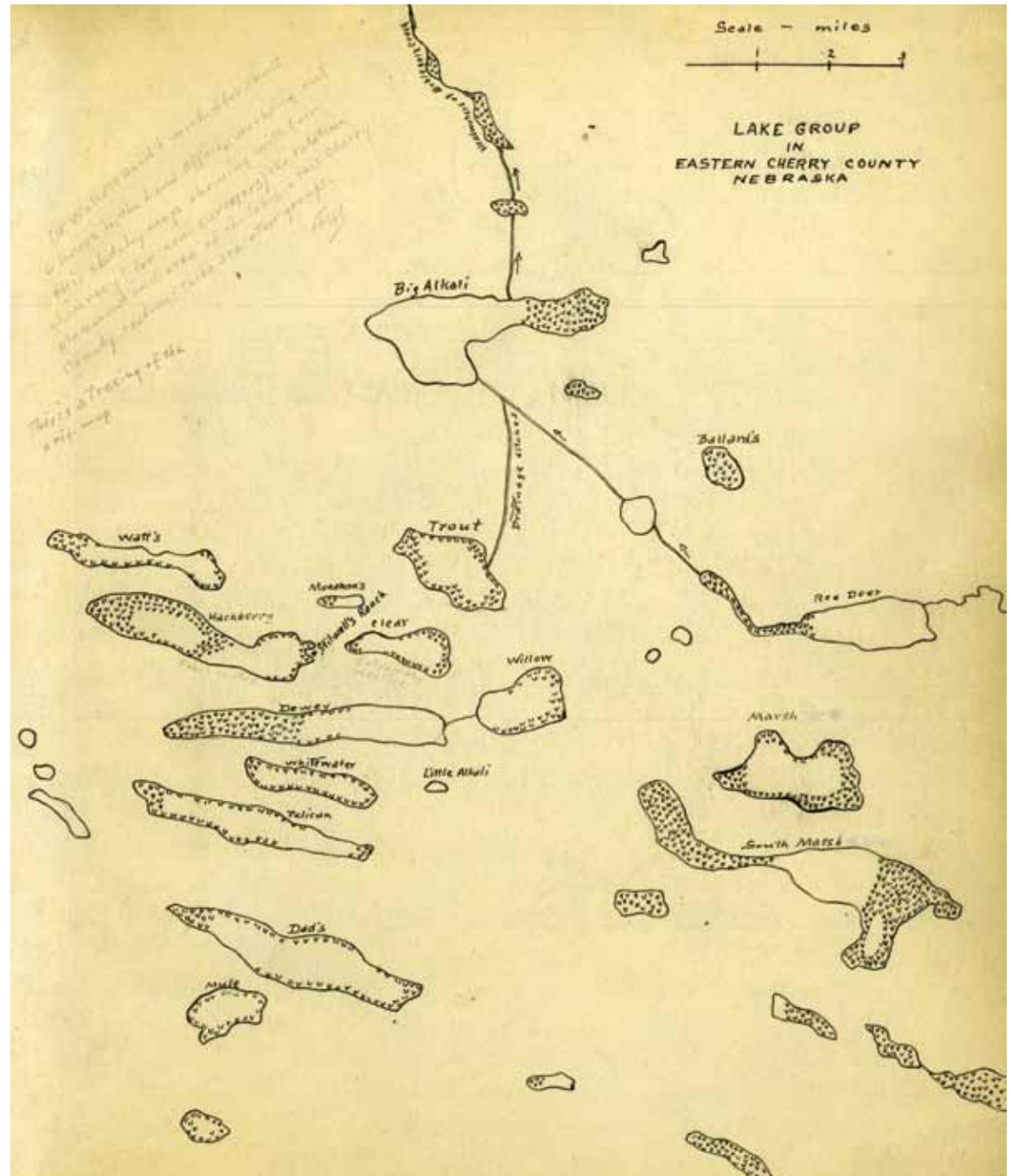


Shoemaker's contemporaries valued his work, using his photographs and lantern slides as teaching tools in the classroom. Raymond J. Pool, chair of the Department of Botany at the University of Nebraska, succinctly outlined Shoemaker's abilities in a reference letter, noting,

It is my opinion that there are very few professional photographers so completely equipped for the work they are attempting to do . . . He is never satisfied to run all of the material that

comes to him thru one standard process but he looks it over very critically from the scientific and artistic points of view and then adopts the procedure which he concludes best for each kind of material. The result of this point of view and of such methods is a large and delighted clientele and more work than he can possibly do. He combines science and art in the solution of photographic problems to a remarkably satisfying degree.<sup>50</sup>

Written in pencil on the map (which shows much of present-day Valentine National Wildlife Refuge): "Dr. Wolcott and I worked for 6 hours in the Land Office, working out this sketchy map showing with fair accuracy (for non-surveyors) the relative placement and area of the lakes in this Cherry County section; there are other groups. FHS This is a tracing of the orig. map." From Shoemaker's 1911 field notes. UNL SF1911g130004





In 1927, Shoemaker accepted a position doing photography for the University of Nebraska College of Medicine and University Hospital.<sup>51</sup> He worked at this job until the economic constraints of the Depression caused his position to be eliminated.<sup>52</sup> In addition to the loss of his job, Shoemaker also lost all of his savings. In 1926, he claimed financial assets totaling \$30,000.<sup>53</sup> In 1931 they were all gone when “the banks failed as usual and the investments went into bankruptcy, also as usual. So also as usual, I am seeking a way to gain enough to eat.”<sup>54</sup> Shoemaker was hired by the Federal Writers’ Project, with the National Parks Service at the Scotts Bluff National Monument in Gering, Nebraska.

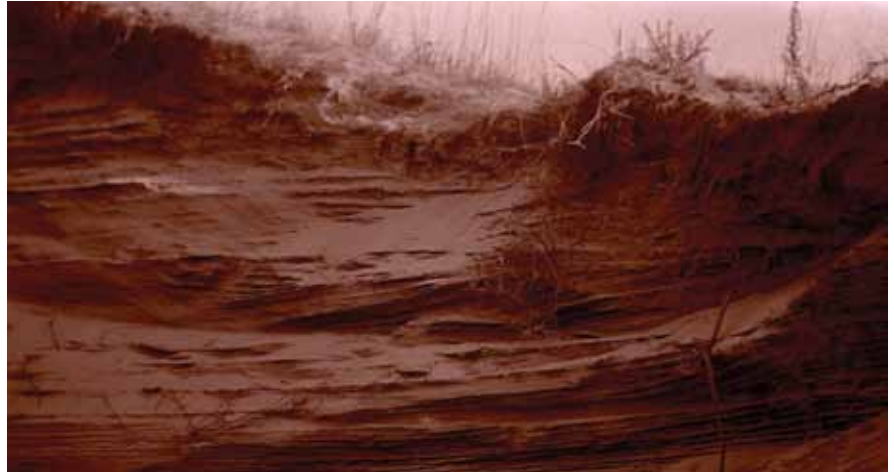
In the late 1930s, while in California and the southwestern United States, Shoemaker made his living from “tiny photographic jobs which I have been able to pick up, to gain the approximate dollar a day needful to find shelter and food.”<sup>55</sup> Returning to Lincoln, he took a job at a portrait studio and considered it funny “that despite my 44 years of photography, it had all to do with everything except portraiture . . . .”<sup>56</sup>

Shoemaker underwent surgery in August 1947.<sup>57</sup> It appears he had a challenging recovery.<sup>58</sup> He spent his final months in an apartment in Lincoln. He died on January 18, 1948, at age seventy-two. The notice in the local paper described Shoemaker as a “widely known naturalist” with interests in birds, photography, and books.<sup>59</sup> Shoemaker’s estate went into probate; the records show that at the time of his death he had \$4.74 cash at hand.<sup>60</sup> Wages from his odd jobs at the Hobby Collector’s Service and at the United States Post Office, along with proceeds from the sale of stamps, a camera, a few books, a typewriter, and a pair of binoculars, may have paid for his burial at Wyuka Cemetery in Lincoln, Nebraska.<sup>61</sup>

Shoemaker’s fascination with birds and the detailed bird records he kept provide a valuable source for ornithology studies. His records augment secondary sources on bird life of Nebraska, particularly as time and natural and man-made phenomena altered the environment of the state. When writing on summaries of long-term bird counts, Paul Johnsgard, author of more than sixty books on birds and the Great Plains, defines these records as a “great mass of potentially valuable information.”<sup>62</sup> Reaching back to the first years of last century, Shoemaker’s bird records contribute significantly to research, study, and analysis.

Shoemaker himself listed his contributions to Nebraska history through photography, particularly his work in Lincoln and at the University of Nebraska from 1911 to 1913:

During this “half-time” period with the University I did much photographic work for various departments, continuing it after my university connection had ended. Some of this work was very interesting, notably the photography of spark spectra for analysis of rare



“South wall of a blowout near Hackberry Lake, Cherry Co. Nebr. (showing stratous arrangements of the sand),” July 1911. UNL 32301-00571



Shoemaker and his companions found a group of killdeers near Hackberry Lake. While searching for a young bird that mysteriously vanished, “I had the good fortune to find the youngster, tucked away in a hoof-print in the deep soil near the water... the colors of the bird blending wonderfully with its surroundings.” After photographing the killdeer with his Kodak, Shoemaker hurried back to the ranch where he was staying, nearly half a mile away, to retrieve a better camera. “Returning on the run, I found my haste unnecessary, for the young bird was precisely as I had left it.” Though the bird was alive and unhurt, it so depended upon concealment that it refused to move even when the men touched it lightly with straws and with their fingers. From Shoemaker’s 1911 field notes. UNL SF1911g130014



Hackberry Lake, Cherry County, 1911. UNL SF1911g130015

I regret having no photograph to show the "hiding" of the baby terns, and must resort to the unhappy expedient of a pen sketch. They paddle away from the nest until they find two or three tules in a group; between these they thrust their foolish little heads, with the bill flat on the surface of the water, and behold, they are hidden - ostrich fashion!



Not far from this point, in a very muddy tract near shore, was found a nest of the Virginia rail with seven eggs, and the camera was again brought into action.

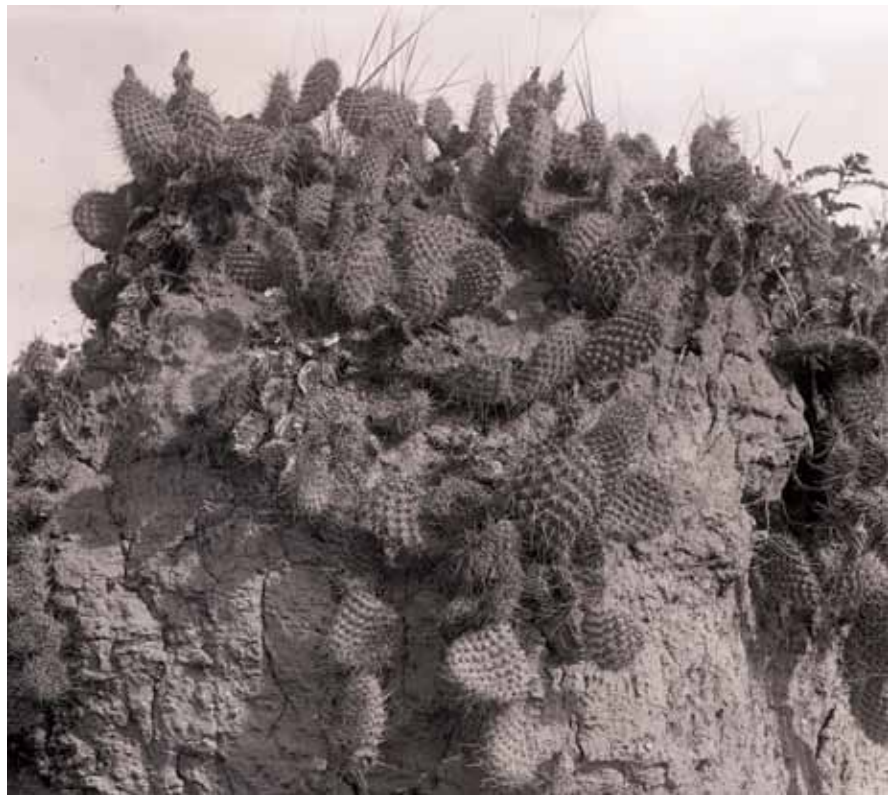


*Nest with young and egg of black tern*

Excerpt from a page of Shoemaker's 1911 field notes, describing Hackberry Lake. UNL SF1911g130015



earths, for Chemistry; the photographing of over 300 growing plants for Pharmacy, for their actual drug status of their historical interest in pharmacology, and the preparation of colored lantern slides therefrom: hundreds of paleontological and geological photographs for Geology; many photographs of books, bindings, typography, illuminated manuscripts, for the Library; photographs of every description for the Historical society—historic sites all over the state, early buildings, documents, maps, microphotography for the Departments of Bacteriology, Botany, and Plant Pathology . . . and plane photography, chiefly obliques but some experimental mapping work. Hundreds of photographs relating to the Nebraska State Capitol during its construction, for Dr. H. B. Alexander, who was Architect Goodhue's collaborator in certain phases of the decorative and inscriptional detail. Photographed in great detail for the artist Augustus Vincent Tack, all his murals in the Governor's suite, winning praise for general results and particularly color rendering.<sup>63</sup>



**Hat Creek Valley, Sioux County, undated.** UNL32301-00317



**Prairie Dog Creek badlands, Sioux County, June 1911.** UNL 32301-00250

Shoemaker's interest in photography helped him to observe the natural world as it existed and to appreciate the deep complexity inherent in the Nebraska landscape. Photography allowed him to keep a "collection" or to report on the sighting of a rare animal or plant without harming the observed species. In addition, his photographs illustrate his desire to see flora and fauna in their natural state, rather than as an object displayed on a shelf.

The camera can be considered Shoemaker's lifelong companion. "If I am 60 years old I have not discovered it; I actually come through a bit of climbing or a stiff walk (meaning 35 miles with 20 pounds equipment) without even tired feet, and not a sore muscle the next day, except where the heavy tripod punishes my right shoulder. Do you know, my left shoulder will have none of it? Grumbles within a half mile, 'Lay off, old sox; that's Righty's job. I'm just along; I won't work.'"<sup>64</sup> Photography allowed Shoemaker to create a visual record that is significant in its documentation of wildlife and natural landscapes. Shoemaker's photographs visually detail an environment that has evolved both naturally and through the development of agricultural resources. Perhaps the most profound aspects of Shoemaker's legacy are his photographs capturing landscapes that no longer exist as he

saw them. Another significant aspect is his studies of beetles, birds, and other creatures that he found in the Sandhills and in areas closer to his homes in Omaha and Lincoln. John Carter, author of *Solomon D. Butcher; Photographing the American Dream* (University of Nebraska Press, 1985), notes that Shoemaker's photographic record for natural history parallels what Butcher accomplished for social history, which is the creation of a density of materials that is valued as a whole. He defined Shoemaker as an important photographer who set a baseline for environmental studies starting in 1911.<sup>65</sup>

Shoemaker's study of the Salt Creek tiger beetle, an inhabitant of salt marshes in the Lincoln area, adds to the historical record of its population and habitats. Selected specimens that Shoemaker collected are held at the University of Nebraska State Museum. Efforts to save the beetle from extinction gained momentum in 2002, when the Nebraska office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service sought to have it listed as an endangered species.<sup>66</sup> The following year the Saline Wetlands Conservation Partnership bought 160 acres near north 27 Street and Arbor Road. Dedicated as the Frank Shoemaker Marsh, the name honors Shoemaker's legacy and the land assists the protection of the saline



Badlands, Sioux County, July 1917. UNL 32301-00187




wetlands in the area.<sup>67</sup> The Salt Creek tiger beetle was formally listed as a federally endangered species in 2005.<sup>68</sup>

Robert Wolcott, in his 1918 article, "The Value and Service of Zoological Science: Esthetical and Recreation Values," states that in animals, there is

not only the beauty of form and of color which belongs to so many natural objects, but also the beauty of motion, and in the case of birds the beauty of song, and in all higher animals even great esthetic possibilities are revealed in the degree to which their natures are akin to that of man. Animal nature study develops sympathy, judgment and the power of observation, and always excites the closest attention . . . It is clearly opposed to all that is dogmatic, and properly presented or acquired contributes to liberality of thought and respect for the points of views of others.<sup>69</sup>

This is the essence of Shoemaker's work as a photographic artist, observing and documenting

the natural environment through his camera lens, embracing a lifelong habit fueled by a desire to understand his subjects and the complexity of the natural world.

Shoemaker's passions were consistent throughout his life: birds, tiger beetles, cameras, and the celebration of nature in its pure form. His legacy is one of captured beauty and scientific data that readily inspires and educates. His self-taught interests, his work with trained scientists, his lifelong habit of thoughtful observations of the world around him, his delightful humor, and his keen sense of nature's subtlety and beauty made him an ideal interpreter of unique Nebraska landscapes. 

*Connect with Shoemaker's legacy through an online presentation of his photographs, narratives, and associated records at <http://sandhillsarchive.unl.edu/>, a website by the Center for Digital Research in the Humanities, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.*

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*Mary Ellen Ducey, Associate Professor, serves as Archivist and Special Collections Librarian at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Libraries. Elaine Nowick is professor emeritus at the University. Rebecca Bernthal is Associate Professor and Liaison Librarian at the University Libraries.*



Sioux County, undated. UNL 32301-00179

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Mary Ellen Ducey is grateful for her brother Jim Ducey's introduction to Shoemaker, which allowed them to explore Shoemaker's paths in their own ways.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to Mr. Newlean, Oct. 10, 1903, Frank Shoemaker Papers, Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, hereafter FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Frank Shoemaker field notes, Mar. 1, 1893, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>5</sup> F. W. True, letter to Frank Shoemaker, Jan. 15, 1897, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>6</sup> Frank Shoemaker field notes, July 23, 1893, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Apr. 23, 1893, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., May 14, 1893, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>10</sup> Frank Shoemaker, "A Partial List of the Birds of Franklin County, Iowa" (Hampton, Iowa, 1896), 1, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>11</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to Elizabeth Van Sant, Jan. 23, 1895, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Van Sant, letter to Frank Shoemaker, Feb. 19, 1897, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Jan. 5, 1895, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to Bert Bailey, July 15, 1903, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>16</sup> *Nebraskans 1854-1904* (Omaha, Neb.: The Bee Publishing Company, 1904), 297.

<sup>17</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to Mr. Newlean, Oct. 10, 1903, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>18</sup> Frank Shoemaker, "Memo of my Photographic Experience," Dec. 18, 1939, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>19</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to John H. P. Peterson, Sept. 7, 1901, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>20</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to Paul Carpenter, May 12, 1904, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., Aug. 19, 1904, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>22</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to "Queenie" Marchant, Oct. 10, 1935, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>23</sup> Paul A. Johnsgard, "A Century of Ornithology in Nebraska: A Personal View," 4, in *Contributions to the History of North American Ornithology* 2 (Cambridge, MA: Nuttall Ornithological Club, 2000), ed. William E. Davis Jr. and Jerome A. Jackson <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/biosciornithology/26/9> (accessed Apr. 3, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to W. D. Hunter, July 24, 1899, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>25</sup> Lawrence Bruner, Robert H. Wolcott, and Myron H. Swenk, "A Preliminary Review of the Birds of Nebraska with Synopsizes" (Omaha, NE: Klopp and Bartlett Co., 1904).

<sup>26</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to Bert Bailey, July 15, 1903, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>27</sup> Frank Shoemaker journal, "The Year 1899," 3, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>28</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to Harold M. McLaughlin, Sept. 16, 1900, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>29</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to Rette Shoemaker, Aug. 4, 1901, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Frank Shoemaker journal, July 1901, 7, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>32</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to Paul Carpenter, Sept. 8, 1901, letter to Bert Bailey, July 15, 1903, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>33</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to Bert Bailey, July 15, 1903, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>34</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to Paul Carpenter, Sept. 8, 1901, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>35</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to John H. P. Petersen, Sept. 7, 1901, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Frank Shoemaker, "Memo of my Photographic Experience," Dec. 18, 1939, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>38</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to John H. P. Petersen, Sept. 7, 1901, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>39</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to Paul Carpenter, May 12, 1904, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>40</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to I. S. Trostler, Sept. 23, 1904, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>41</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to Elizabeth Van Sant, June 23, 1903, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>42</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to Paul Carpenter, Nov. 23, 1905, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>43</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to Mr. Negley, Aug. 18, 1909, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>44</sup> Frank Shoemaker, "Memo of my Photographic Experience."

<sup>45</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to R. Blaisdell, Sept. 6, 1910, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>46</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to Edward D. Harris, July 26, 1913, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>47</sup> Frank Shoemaker, "Memo of my Photographic Experience."

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Addison E. Sheldon, "Nebraska Historical Society Expedition to the Platte-Loup Region in Search of Site of Spanish Massacre of 1720," *Nebraska History* 7, no. 3 (1924): 90 <http://www.usgennet.org/usa/ne/topic/resources/OLLibrary/Journals/HPR/Vol07/nhrv07pa.html> (accessed Apr. 3, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> Raymond J. Pool, letter to whom it may concern, Oct. 29, 1917, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>51</sup> Carleton B. Peirce, letter to Frank Shoemaker, Dec. 5, 1927, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>52</sup> Frank Shoemaker, "Memo of my Photographic Experience."

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to Mrs. Speer, Dec. 20, 1940, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>56</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to Mrs. "Bil" Arville Redfern, Mar. 29, 1943, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>57</sup> Elizabeth Van Sant, letter to Frank Shoemaker, Aug. 30, 1947, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., Sept. 17, 1947, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>59</sup> "F. Shoemaker, Widely Known Naturalist, Dies," *Nebraska State Journal*, Jan. 19, 1948, 1.

<sup>60</sup> "Receipt of County Assessor for Copy of Inventory," Nov. 2, 1948, County Court of Lancaster County Probate Records, Nebraska Public Records Office.

<sup>61</sup> "In the Matter of the Estate of Frank H. Shoemaker, No. 15077, Application for Authority to Sell Personal Property," Apr. 26, 1948, County Court of Lancaster County Probate Records, Nebraska Public Records Office.



<sup>62</sup> Paul A. Johnsgard, "A Half-century of Winter Bird Surveys at Lincoln and Scottsbluff, Nebraska," *Nebraska Bird Review* 66, no. 3 (1998): 74.

<sup>63</sup> Frank Shoemaker, "Memo of my Photographic Experience."

<sup>64</sup> Frank Shoemaker, letter to Elizabeth Van Sant, Dec. 7, 1935, FSP, ASCUNL.

<sup>65</sup> John Carter, interview with author Mary Ellen Ducey, Lincoln, Nebraska, July 27, 2012.

<sup>66</sup> Nate Jenkins, and Joe Duggan, "Beetle Nears Endangered Species List," *Lincoln Journal*, May 30, 2002, B1.

<sup>67</sup> Algis J. Laukaitis, "Lincoln's Little-Known Frank Shoemaker Marsh is a Naturalist's Dream Come True," *Lincoln Journal Star*, June 8, 2004 [http://journalstar.com/news/science/article\\_8ed6a0df-4c26-55f8-8412-20ea22938bc4.html](http://journalstar.com/news/science/article_8ed6a0df-4c26-55f8-8412-20ea22938bc4.html) (accessed Aug. 2, 2012).

<sup>68</sup> "News Release," U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Oct. 6, 2005, <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/pressrel/05-72.htm>, (accessed Dec. 12, 2012).

<sup>69</sup> Robert H. Wolcott, "The Value and Service of Zoological Science: Esthetical and Recreation Values," *Studies from the Zoological Laboratory of the University of Nebraska*, No. 120 (Lincoln): 10, reprinted from *Science* 47, no. 1222 (May 31, 1918): 521-29.



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County, August 1911.**  
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