

# John George Franclemont

*April 15, 1912 — May 26, 2004*

Professor Emeritus John George Franclemont, known to his family, friends, and colleagues as Jack, always let it be known that he was born on the day the Titanic sank—April 15, 1912. For Cornell, the balance sheet for that day was immensely meliorated by Jack's lifetime of contributions. Early on, he focused on insect natural history, collecting moths and butterflies in his native Buffalo, as well as in the Adirondacks. He enrolled as an undergraduate at Cornell University, studying under the tutelage of Professor W.T.M. Forbes, the dean of American lepidopterists, and earned his Baccalaureate degree in 1935. He began his graduate program at Cornell, but World War II, during which he served as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army Medical Corps, interrupted that. He served as a mosquito eradication specialist in the Pacific, moving from Bougainville and New Georgia in the Solomons, to the Philippines as the war progressed. In addition to his official mosquito duties, Jack made extensive collections of moths, which were sent home to Professor Forbes. At the end of the War, he was honorably discharged from active duty with the rank of Captain.

Returning to civilian life, Jack was an Assistant Entomologist at Cornell University (1946-47), and then an Entomologist with the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, U.S. Department of Agriculture, stationed at the Smithsonian Institution, Museum of Natural History, Washington, D.C. (1947-53). During this time, he was responsible for identifications of noctuid and geometroid moths, at the same time completing his doctoral dissertation from Cornell University, which awarded him the Ph.D. degree in 1953. Upon completion of his doctorate, Jack returned to Cornell to serve as Associate Professor of Entomology, being promoted to Professor in 1959. He retired officially in 1977, although he continued to teach a course in advanced insect systematics and advising graduate students for several years.

During his tenure at Cornell, Jack mentored over 20 doctoral students in insect systematics, and served as minor member for nearly 30 more. His students populated university professorial positions across North America. At one point, six curators at the U.S. National Museum of Natural History were Franclemont students. The first loves of his life were insect natural history and his succession of West Highland or Cairn terriers (Cho, Duffy, Angie, and Belle), and so he could focus his efforts on being available to students nearly whenever they needed assistance. His large office on the southwest corner of Comstock Hall, lined from floor to ceiling with his incomparable entomological library and working specimens, served as an oracle of entomological knowledge for those taking

the time to seek it. His patient demeanor and understated approach to explaining the vagaries of artificial human systems developed to describe nature's wonders helped make all of us better taxonomists.

Jack's life work revolved around the development of resources necessary to answer questions of species circumscription, life history, and infraspecific variability for moths residing in North America. To this end, he spent numerous summers collecting moths in Montana, Texas, and across the various mountain ranges of southern Arizona. He specialized in collecting large series of specimens to adequately uncover natural variation in wing pattern coloration. He took this endeavor to an experimental level by rearing large numbers of individuals from various females, permitting a view to the levels of natural variation present within single localities and broods. He understood that novel techniques and character systems—sex pheromones, chromosomes, protein analysis, and behavioral studies were available during his working period—were essential for uncovering the cryptic species that comprise in many cases those biological entities we now take for species. Jack involved many of his students in these field seasons, and therefore many active biodiversity surveys run today can be traced to Jack's acumen in field biology. Working with Lepidoptera, most of which are herbivorous as caterpillars, he called upon his interests in botany to document the suitability of various hosts for larval development. His collecting activities resulted in a personal collection of more than 350,000 spread moths and butterflies, an extensive collection of preserved and photographed caterpillars associated with the adult stages, and about 9000 Canada balsam mounted microscope slide preparations of the internal genitalia of moths. This immense resource was donated to the Cornell University Insect Collection, where it joins the collection of his mentor, W.T.M. Forbes, forming the most significant Lepidoptera collection housed by any university worldwide.

Jack joined his love of natural history specimens with the traditional means to access information about them; books. Throughout his life he built a personal library focusing on moths and butterflies and their larvae, but also including a broad array of historical works fundamental to the field of entomology. The John G. Franclemont Library of Entomology was donated to the Department of Entomology, with his wish to have the proceeds of its sale support a future Cornell Lepidopterist. The university conferred on him the title of "Builder of Cornell" for his several generous donations.

Jack taught insect taxonomy courses to both undergraduates and graduate students throughout his time as a Professor. These courses always benefited from Jack's amassing of specimens to be used as teaching material. Jack's course materials, many collected on numerous nights along Six-Mile Creek in Ithaca, were often better prepared

than those seen in most other university collections, yet their fate was to be broken and glued by a succession of neophyte entomologists. Like his graduate students, these many budding entomologists were able to take away from Cornell the ability to deal knowledgeably with insect diversity through direct observation of natural history specimens, backed up by Jack's deep understanding of insect natural history.

Jack was both a mentor and friend to his students. He felt that he was extremely lucky not to have to choose between his hobby and his work. Nonetheless, he was a multidimensional personality with interests in music, literature, and cinema. His homes on Williams Street and then in Ellis Hollow were the sites of social evenings with graduate students, leavened with visits from neighbors and friends such as Vladimir Nabokov, the aspiring lepidopterist. His students spent much time interacting with him during their times here, and at least in part through those interactions, they developed into leaders in the field of insect systematics. Observing how some of them operate as mentors during their own careers, it is clear that lessons learned from Jack have been carried on to future generations. In closing, one of Jack's former and first Ph.D. students, Ron Hodges, stated in "A remembrance of John G. Franclemont," as part of a "Contributions from former students in honor of his 80th birthday" (April 15, 1992), the following which accurately captures the essence of Jack Franclemont:

*"Above all, Jack is highly ethical, honest, positively forthright, helpful, humorous in a subtle, non-destructive way, and caring. All of his students benefited from these qualities."*

*E. Richard Hoebeke, Richard B. Root, James K. Liebherr*