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Friends of the Stabler Family

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Robert M. Stabler

— by James Enderson

Dr. Robert M. Stabler died July 16, 1985 of a heart attack after a brief illness. With his passing, a major segment of the history of falconry in North America has come to an end.

He was born in Washington, D.C. of Quaker parents, and attended Swarthmore College and Johns Hopkins University, receiving a Sc.D. in 1931. In 1932, he took a teaching position at the University of Pennsylvania. His lifelong interest in reptiles was already developed, but in 1934 he went to Woods Hole Marine Laboratory and met Richard Bond, who flew peregrines. That summer Bond and Walter Spofford took Bob to Mt. Tom where he obtained his first peregrine. At that time, Bob also had a kestrel named Miss Lucy who developed frounce. From then on, Bob carried out research on *Trichomonas gallinae*, and was eventually instrumental in the development of enheptin and emtryl for the treatment of the disease. Pigeon racers and falconers will long be in his debt for that work.

In May 1935 a University of Pennsylvania student named Alva Nye took a tiercel peregrine from Laceyville on the Susquehanna and gave it to Bob. He was never without a falcon for the next 50 years. Another Penn freshman in 1935 was Morgan Berthrong, who had learned falconry with Frank and John Craighead in the Washington, D.C. area. Recently Morgan recalled to me how much falconry Bob had mastered in such a short time. (When Bob eventually moved to The Colorado College, it was one of the reasons Morgan, who became an expert on raptor pathology, later moved to Colorado Springs).

The foundations of North American falconry were laid in those years. Luff Meredith, a World



R.M. Stabler with his wife, Sally, and her sister Dr. Mary Alice Hamilton

War I flyer and then aviation consultant, lived at Boonton, New Jersey. Bob and Morgan visited him there, as did Joe Hickey. The Pennsylvania group grew. Hampton Carson, Jack Heisler, Howard Curtis, Earl Poole, Jim Fox, Johnny McCowen, Bob Murphy, and Jim Rice were frequent visitors to the Stabler home at Wallingford, Pennsylvania, and later at Glen Mills. In 1938, a meet was held at Darlington. Tom Rawles was there from Colorado. Rawles was a major influence in Hal Webster's falconry interests and urged Bob to move to Colorado in 1947. In the early 1940s, Steve Gatti, Bill Lasky, and Larry Zuk came to know Bob Stabler and his falconry. Morlan Nelson met him soon after the war, as old photos verify.

In 1936 Bob was given an eyas goshawk named Miss Bonnie. She died three weeks short of 19 years of age. In the 1950—1965 era, a new group of young men were his associates in falconry, including Vernon Siefert, Richard Esposito, Jerry Craig, Bob Dandrea, Kent Carnie, Buddy Graver, Ken Riddle, Dave Remple and Frank Bond.

Bob Stabler wrote forwards for the reprint of Harting's book on falconry and for Jameson's book on Japanese hawking. He was editor of *The American Falconer* and later vice president of the Falconry Club of America. He was an honorary member of the British Falconry Club and the only North American honorary member of NAFA.

Outside of falconry he was at his best as a parasitologist and teacher. His scientific publications

Frounce: Its Cause and Cure

ROBERT M. STABLER COLORADO COLLEGE, COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

Hundreds of years ago falconers were, even as they are today, plagued by a disease mainly of the mouths and crops of their birds, which disease was early referred to as "Frounce". The pigeon fancier, when it is in his birds, calls it "Canker". The parasitologist, because it is caused by the presence of a very small protozoan parasite known as *Trichomonas gallinae*, refers to it as "trichomoniasis".

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Sally and Mirza, Summer 1938

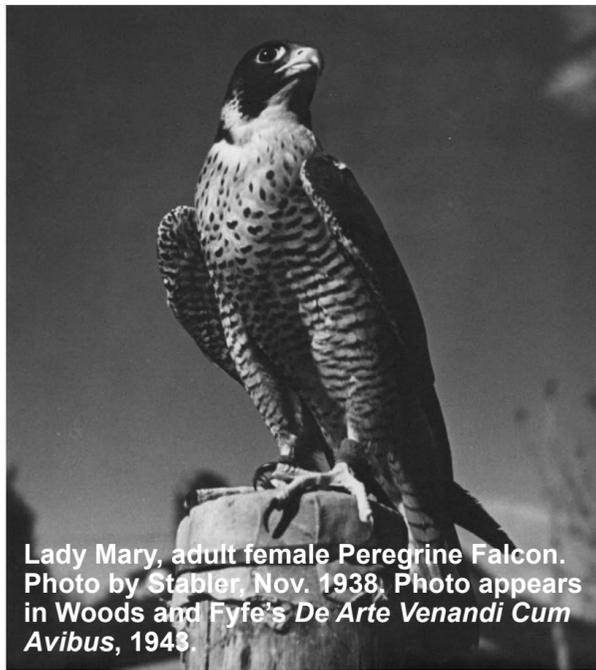


number over 100, and scores of students went on to graduate school or medical school because of his influence. He had a way of encouraging sound work from his colleagues—usually by example, sometimes by candid remark. If you made into your hawk too fast, or gave an exam that was too difficult, you were soon going to learn of your mistake. He once remarked when I was a freshman professor that both teaching and research are equally important to a biologist. I aspired to follow his example, as so many others did.

Bob remained active in falconry, research, and in serious pursuit of fly fishing until his last days. It was no minor undertaking to be his "gilly" and row the boat to the precise spot where the big rainbows waited.

Upon his death I took his tiercel peregrine to my home for temporary safe-keeping until it could be returned to The Peregrine Fund. Blocked in my yard, Luff was exposed to foreign sights and sounds, enough to rattle any falcon. That evening, prepared for a frantic bate, I knelt to pick him up. No bate! He looked up at me and stepped onto the unfamiliar glove. Of course, I thought, this bird had been handled and trained by a master.





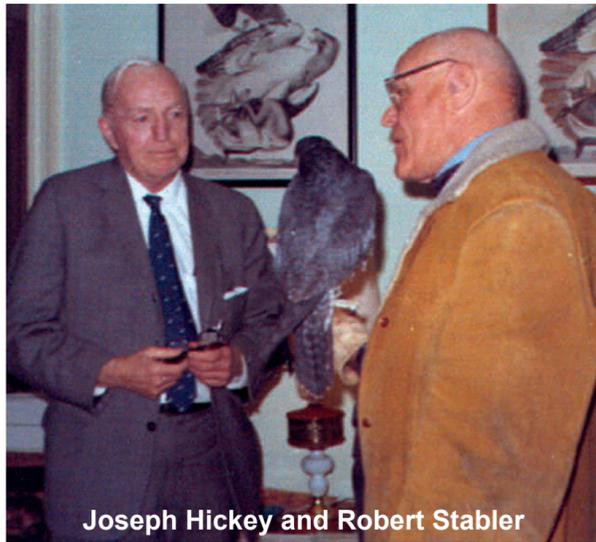
Lady Mary, adult female Peregrine Falcon. Photo by Stabler, Nov. 1938, Photo appears in Woods and Fyfe's *De Arte Venandi Cum Avibus*, 1943.



Dan Mannix, Sally Stabler, Howart Curtis, Morgan Berthrong, Jim Rice, Hampton Carson, Mrs. Carson, RM Stabler. Late 1930s.



Miss Bonnie



Joseph Hickey and Robert Stabler



RMS and Tommy, male peregrine, Feb. 1936



RMS feeding his female Goshawk, Miss Bonnie, and his dog, Gypsy, on the lawn of his home, The Eyrie, Wallingford, PA



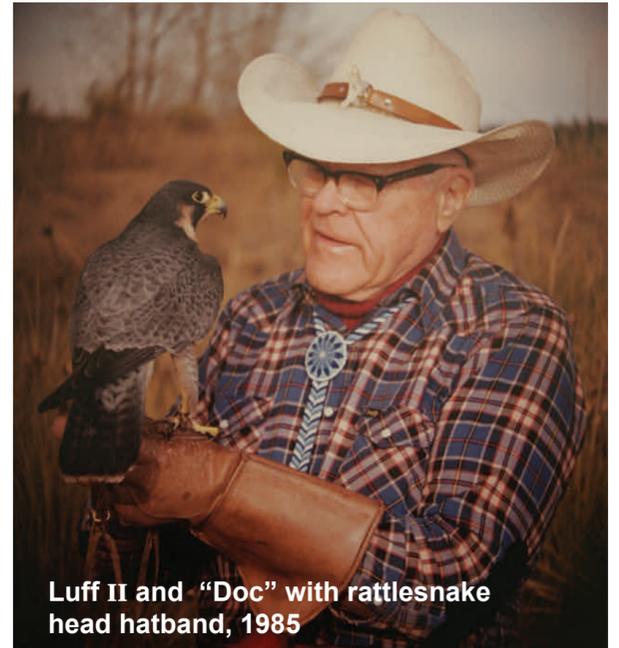
RMS with Miss Bonnie and Lady Mary, Jim Rice with Lady Lacy Belle, Dan Mannix with Tara, Sally Stabler with a Cooper's Hawk belonging to Mannix. Picture ca. late 1930s.



Stabler on Lady Anne, his cowpony with saddle once owned by Teddy Roosevelt, December 1949



RMS with Golden Eagle, "Kineo" and Peregrine, "Mirza", 1938



Luff II and "Doc" with rattlesnake head hatband, 1985