

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Low-Down on Insects

In "Insect Fact and Folklore" Dr. Lucy W. Clausen discusses insects as they effect man – for good or for ill. She shows how generations of human beings have utilized them, worshipped them, fought against them; and combines folklore and legend as well as facts and anecdotes. The MacMillan Co. has just released this book which has a bit to report on Pacific Grove and the monarch butterflies, so we will discuss the publication and the author in the Diary today.

It is appropriate that we repeat the paragraph in "Insect Fact and Folklore" which has particular reference to Pacific Grove and the annual pilgrimage of the butterflies, so here it is.

"In California, the municipality of Pacific Grove has passed stringent laws to protect the monarch butterflies; to destroy them may bring one a fine of \$500 or possibly a six months jail sentence. In this little town, sheltered from the broad Pacific, a strange recurring phenomenon of nature takes place. For years, with the same accuracy of timing as the celebrated swallows of Capistrano, a mass migration of millions of monarch butterflies arrives to settle in Pacific Grove each winter.

"These fragile creatures travel in a body more than 3,000 miles, and always seek the same grove of pine trees that their ancestors sought before them. Starting in isolated parts of Alaska, they fly the most direct route, being joined by more monarch butterflies in Canada and the northern United States. For the final lap they wing their way over 20 miles of ocean. In mid-winter, when butterflies are seldom seen elsewhere, the streets and lawns of this California town are filled with golden wings. With the coming of spring they leave the town as mysteriously as they arrive."

The author of this remarkable book on insect life was born in New York City. She was graduated from Long Island University and did graduate work in entomology at Cornell University. She took her M.S. and Ph.D. at New York University. She became assistant in the Department of Entomology in the American Museum of Natural History and is now in the Museum's Department of Public Instruction and a lecturer at

Columbia University, all of which prepared her for the writing of "Insect Fact and Folklore."

Following are a few gleanings from Dr. Clausen's book: "Among our flowering plants 85 per cent depend upon insects for the setting of fruit and the production of seed. If all insects were destroyed there would not be such fruit as Smyrna figs, apples, pears, peaches, cherries, plums, or strawberries; and among the vegetable crops, cabbage, cauliflower, Kale, Kohlrabi, radish, carrot, parsnip, melon and squash would be missing.

"The average insect can pull over 20 times its own weight and a small leaf-eating beetle can pull 42.7 times its own weight. In contrast to these figures, a man can pull but .86, a horse from .5 to 83 of his own dead weight.

A man has 92 distinct muscles ... grasshoppers 909 ... a caterpillar 4,000. There are some United States inhabitants who eat dried caterpillars.

"The silkworm moth has been cultivated so long that it cannot exist without being cared for by humans. Two thousand five hundred cocoons are required for one pound of silk.

"Cricket fighting in China has proved as popular as cock fighting. The wing-beat of the housefly equals 345 strokes per second, or 20,000 per minute. The deer botfly is the fastest animal on wings.

"The United States uses about 10 million pounds of beeswax annually, six to seven million pounds being produced in this country, the balance imported. Beeswax was essential war material needed in World War II at the rate of more than a million pounds a year; it has more than 100 important military uses."

These quotations are merely a few of the answers to questions we hear almost daily, some of which are not only interesting and entertaining but are important in our daily lives.