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Harry J. Bennett
1904–1983

Bernice is a small community in Union Parish, Louisiana, a few miles south of the Arkansas line and west of Lake d'Arbon. Harry Jackson Bennett was born there in 1904. He died of a sudden heart stoppage on May 23, 1983, in Baton Rouge, a few weeks short of 79 years of age. He was probably the most telling friend this Laboratory ever had outside of Mississippi.

I met Harry Bennett in 1931 at the Grand Isle marine laboratory of Louisiana State University and we have both tried to promote zoology and the teaching of it ever since. He was a stricter moralist than I, but some of our wants and desires coincided and we cooperated well. When Louisiana State University saw fit to abolish the Grand Isle laboratory it pained us both. We pointed out to the L.S.U. people that this Laboratory was as close as their own had been and that they could join us at little expense. That ploy was successful and in 1956 L.S.U. was the first out-of-state affiliate of the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory. Now there are 57 colleges and universities from South Carolina to Oklahoma to North Dakota formally affiliated with this Laboratory for teaching purposes.

I have heard Bennett say many times that the most important teachers in America were those of the first grade. He took deep interest in all science teaching and promoted it as hard as he could. For many years he taught a course here in the summer, "Marine Zoology for Teachers." The students were mostly women. He got them muddied, made them catch the animals alive, scared them badly, and graded them very gently. They always gave him a party at the end of the session.

After getting a bachelor's degree at L.S.U., Harry Bennett went to the University of Illinois in 1926 as a student of H. B. Ward, who revolutionized parasitology in this country. He took a master's and the doctor's degree there and came back to L.S.U. where he was in the Zoology Department for 45 years. He did stints as Assistant Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences from 1938 to 1942 and director of the Marine Laboratory for ten years (1946–1956). In 1968 he was awarded the Distinguished Faculty Fellowship of the L.S.U. Foundation. He published 32 papers and served as president of the Association of Southeastern Biologists in 1956. He was a member of the American Society of Zoologists, the American Society of Parasitologists, the American Microscopical Society, the Louisiana and Tennessee academies of science, Sigma Xi, Phi Kappa Phi, and the American Malaria Society. He served for several years on the Commission for the Study of Schistosomiasis.

When the last World War came he decided to go and in spite of being color-blind he flimflammed the Army and served in the Sanitary Corps in the Pacific, quite creditably, and came out a Lieutenant Colonel. During his retirement years he performed a task for the Louisiana Academy of Sciences and wrote a fine history of the Academy. It was published in 1983 just before his demise. Harry Bennett always tried and he did very well.

He is survived by his wife, the former Miss Jane Tobie, also of the Ward school, three daughters and six grandchildren.

Gordon Gunter
Ocean Springs, Mississippi
June 24, 1983