

# Eigenmann - Rockport's renowned ichthyologist

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During the winter of '06-'07, Eigenmann would be found in Europe at the University of Freiburg studying the eyes of cave vertebrates. He would also visit museums in London, Paris and Vienna for further research. In 1909, the Carnegie Institution of Washington would publish the four-volume, "Cave Vertebrates of North America, a study of degenerate evolution," a culminating document representing a decade of analysis.

Other important events occurred during these laborious years. Eigenmann took an active role in convincing Congress and President Taft to investigate fauna along the Panama Canal (for which the US had taken over construction in 1904). Eigenmann would make use of the results. One of his former students brought back a large selection of South American fresh-water fish for the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh. And, in 1908 the graduate school of Indiana University was reorganized; Eigenmann was relieved of teaching duties and made dean of the graduate school.

Also in 1908, Eigenmann funded his own research trip to the Caribbean city

of Georgetown, Guyana, (stopping off in Pittsburgh along the way, where he received a pledge that the Carnegie Museum would help with the funding). The result of the study between South American and North American fish yielded 28 new genera and 128 new species. That he had suffered illness along the excursion had not stopped the scientist from carrying out one of the most influential scientific investigations of his time. (It should be noted that Eigenmann's theories as an ichthyologist not only sought to explain differences in fishes. Through his studies, Eigenmann theorized that certain land masses — i.e. parts of South America and parts of Africa — must have been connected in the distant past in order to account for evolutionary mutations between existent fauna. Now so commonplace as to be taught in elementary school, theories of these kinds were only beginning to develop at the dawn of the 20th century.)

Upon his return, the Carnegie Museum would name him honorary curator of fishes, while allowing Eigenmann to continue to reside and work in Bloomington. The Carnegie Museum would also acquire specimens delivered by Eigenmann after a prodigious 1912

excursion that took him through Panama and into Columbia (at last!).

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Then in 1914, the 'Great War' (known now as World War I) commenced. The United States would become officially involved in 1917.

Together with his students, Eigenmann would spend the war years publishing on South American fishes. In 1918 (at the age of 55), the first of two parts of "The American Characidae" (freshwater tropic and subtropic fishes) would be published. The completed volume would later be considered Eigenmann's *magnum opus*.

In May of 1918, President Wilson issued The Travel Control Act, requiring passports for travel during the time of and for a short time after World War I. In consequence Eigenmann found himself delayed for five weeks in New Orleans, while on his way to another South American excursion (the scientist had, after all, been born in Germany!); the delay would only end after a direct appeal to President Wilson.

Though he didn't know it, the trip would be Eigenmann's final expedition.

He was accompanied by Mr. W.R. Allen, a traveling fellow of the University of Illinois (which funded the study along with Indiana University, the National Academy of Sciences and the American Association for the Advancement of Science), and his daughter, Adele, a medical student at IU.

They traversed the heights of the Andes (collecting samples from as high as 15,900 feet), La Paz, Bolivia, and Lake Titicaca. The fishes in this area were more sparse than anticipated, disappointing the ichthyologist and his companions. The scientists returned on June 1, 1919 with a successful, though small, collection.

Eigenmann, unable (due to declining health) to continue his life's work in the Amazon, would be instrumental in sending Allen back in 1920, followed by Nathan E. Pearson in 1921 and Dr. Carl Ternetz from 1923-25. Eigenmann had shown the way; his fellows would persevere.

The expeditions, extending so deeply into the South American continent, were without equal. The samples of Ternetz alone were considered a triumph for Bloomington sciences.

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