Remembering Rockport's renowned ichthyologist

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No scientific discipline was so immediately effected by Darwin's theory as that of Biology.

Upon which subject, we return to Eigenmann...

III.

1877, and what a difference between the compact, anciently manicured European countryside and the expansive, untouched 'Eden' of America! How riveting, dangerous, how *wild* all of Spencer County must have seemed to young Eigenmann. Only fourteen years old in 1877, he arrived in Rockport with an immigrant uncle.

What sights! What strangeness in the southern Indiana landscape — the sovereignty of ash and oak, 80 feet tall and forests full; the sweet evening whistling of the bobwhite quail; doles upon doles of coffee-colored turkeys; turtle and lizard, bobcat and squirrel, hill and creek, and *open land* everywhere!

And the threatening and bountiful Ohio River, wrapping around Rockport like the arm of a titan! What richness of natural experience!

One wonders the effect, the incalculable influence, that being thrust upon the fresh American countryside might have had upon Eigenmann. Perhaps it was this assault of environmental stimulation that would instill in him a passion for investigation, for new frontiers...

> "In the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed."
>
> — *Charles Darwin*

Eigenmann had been born in Flehingen, Germany, a tiny village slowly swallowed up by progress, which can now be found as the Northeastern section of the city of Karlsruhe. Presuming that Eigenmann came to America a native German speaker, it is likely that his first academic achievement would have been to gain proficiency in English. It is also worth noting that much of the educational material of the time relied heavily on a student's mastery of Latin; and before 1894, Rockport High School offered a three year, three semester per year curriculum. In view of these facts, Eigenmann's educational experience at Rockport High School was perhaps quite rigorous and necessarily so.

Also in relation to his secondary schooling in Rockport, it is possible that Eigenmann benefited from a commission received by Rockport High School in 1882 from the State Board of Education. (As previously noted, 1882 is the year of Eigenmann's graduation from secondary school and his subsequent entrance into Indiana University.) The commission granted that graduates of Rockport High School gain admittance to Indiana University without further examination. Rockport High School was one of 22 secondary schools in Indiana to receive the honor.

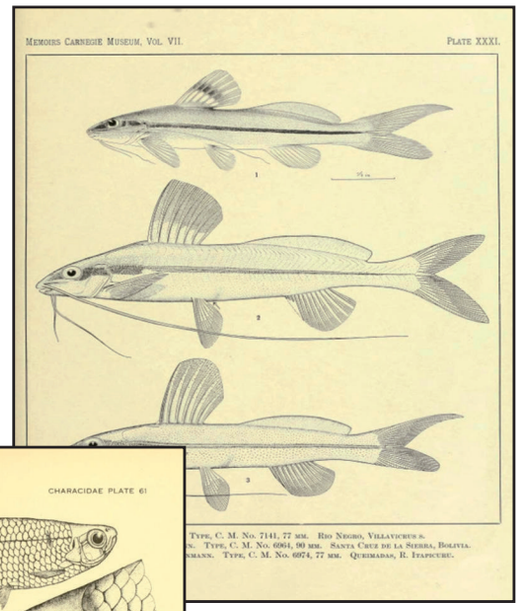
Whatever the circumstances of admittance, Eigenmann enrolled in Indiana University with an aim at studying law. All evidence suggests that he excelled his freshman year, because in his sophomore year, Eigenmann was accepted into a college course that would alter the structure of his life.

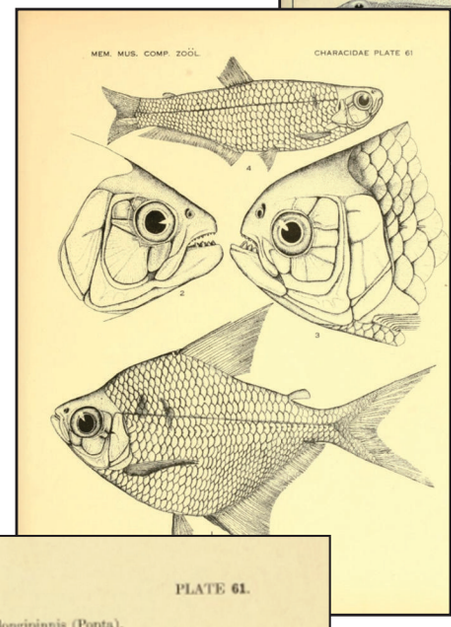
Eigenmann's acceptance into the course had a lot to do with one of Indiana University's newest professors, Dr. David Starr Jordan, who took the post of professor of natural history the same year that Eigenmann entered the university as a student. Eventually Jordan would author multitudes of scientific treatises, essays and research studies, become president of Indiana University, serve as the first president of Standford University, be elected president of the National Education Association, serve as president of the World Peace Foundation, have two high schools named for him (one in Los Angeles, the other in Long Beach), and become the namesakes for Jordan River (a section of Clear Creek that flows through the IU campus), Jordan Avenue in Bloomington, two buildings called Jordan Hall (one housing the Department of Biology at IU and one that houses the Psychology Department at Stanford) and the 1966 NOAAS *David Starr Jordan*, a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration fisheries research ship (eventually sold for scrap in 2010).

At the time that Carl H. Eigenmann first met him, Jordan was an energetic, young, engaging, likable and forward-thinking professor of natural history. And so, in his sophomore year, when the University allowed students (for the first time) to choose between a year's study of Latin or Biology, Eigenmann chose the exciting, contemporary course of Biology. As a result, his initial motivation for studying law was quickly, completely replaced.

Jordan clearly favored Eigenmann as a self-disciplined, inherently talented scientist. Eigenmann flourished in the particular research of fishes (ichthyology), beginning with the taxonomy of darters vs. true perches. In 1885, the year before Eigenmann would receive his Bachelor Degree, he and the other young ichthyologists under Jordan's tutelage had been published in the Proceedings of the National Museum and would submit an astounding 14 papers to the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Science. This number does not include the 14 that Jordan would submit himself, either solely or jointly with students to the United States National Museum.

(This extremely impressive aggregate of undergraduate publications certainly speaks to the cutting-edge quality of the team's subject matter and methods.)





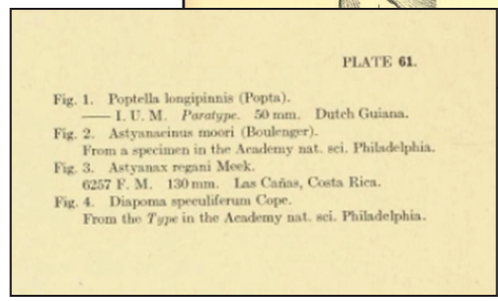


PLATE 61.

Fig. 1. Poptella longipinnis (Popta).
—— I. U. M. *Paratype.* 50 mm. Dutch Guiana.
Fig. 2. Astyanacinus moori (Boulenger).
From a specimen in the Academy nat. sci. Philadelphia.
Fig. 3. Astyanax regani Meek.
6257 F. M. 130 mm. Las Cañas, Costa Rica.
Fig. 4. Diapoma speculiferum Cope.
From the *Type* in the Academy nat. sci. Philadelphia.

***Stream of work* — Eigenmann included plates of artists' renderings in as many of his publications as possible. The extremely detailed scientist often noted alongside his plates the color variances and other properties unable to be captured by black and white artistic representations. Above, Plate 31 from "*Pimelodella* and *Typhlobagrus*" (Brazilian catfishes), a 1917 publication of Eigenmann's printed by the Carnegie Museum. Center, Plate 61 from the 1921 publication, "The American *Characidae*, Volume 3," detailing four specimen of tropical freshwater fishes from South America.**

Eigenmann would also publish his first review paper on *Eleotridinae* (commonly referred to as 'gobi') and would follow it with a similar document on *Diodontidae* (porcupine fish), published the following year and in his name only.

The latter text is significant for another reason: in the document Eigenmann states himself "indebted to Miss Rosa Smith." She, a young Californian and an accomplished ichthyologist in her own right, had provided him via written correspondence the description of two specimens from the west coast which had aided his research.

IV.

After graduating in 1886, Eigenmann traveled to California, arriving too late (what providence!) to take the principalship of a school that an Indiana University colleague had to offer. Whether Eigenmann was disappointed in the missed opportunity

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