

# News and Comment

## New Light on the Origins of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club

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The history of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club (OFNC) is a subject of considerable interest given the organization's great longevity and significant influence on the evolution of Canadian science and conservation. A probe of 19th-century Ottawa newspapers has led to the proper identification of a little known precursor organization — the "Ottawa Naturalists' Field Club" — that appears to have significantly strengthened a weak link in the otherwise unbroken chain of natural history investigation in Ottawa reaching back to the pre-Confederation era. This and additional findings suggest that Dr. Edward Van Cortlandt, while duly recognized as an important pioneer naturalist, played an even greater role than generally understood in the emergence of a robust natural history tradition in Canada's capital and the eventual creation of the OFNC.

**Key Words:** Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club; Ottawa Naturalists' Field Club; Ottawa Literary and Scientific Society; Ottawa Natural History Society; Ottawa Mechanics' Institute and Athenaeum; Edward Van Cortlandt; natural history; newspapers; journalism history

The establishment of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club (OFNC) in March 1879 is a well-documented, landmark moment in the history of Canadian science (Brodo 1981; Brunton 2004; see also Brunton 2015, which references this study's central finding). As the most comprehensive chronicle of the life of the organization states, the OFNC's birth that year "launched careers, changed government policy, protected tens of thousands of hectares of Canadian natural landscape, produced internationally recognized and significant scientific publications, made huge contributions to our understanding and appreciation of North American natural sciences, and enriched thousands of lives" (Brunton 2004: 1).

The club also has what might be called a "prehistory," an embryonic phase of natural history activity in the Ottawa area reaching back to the 1850s that predates the establishment of the club and testifies to a well-rooted scientific interest in the local natural environment that eventually gave rise to the OFNC. The club came into existence as an off-shoot of a parent organization, the Ottawa Literary and Scientific Society (OLSS), after frustrations evidently arose among a number of OLSS members who believed that direct interaction with the natural world — through field trips beyond the city limits, first-hand observation of the region's plant and animal populations, and the collecting of floral, faunal, and geological specimens — was being overshadowed within the "culturally-oriented" OLSS by literary lectures held at a downtown meeting hall in Canada's increasingly urbanized and industrialized national capital. As Daniel F. Brunton's history of the OFNC noted, the club's founders wanted "to see more activity and greater opportunities being provided for natural environment investigations" (Brunton 2004: 5; see also Harrington 1909).

The purpose of this paper is to fill a gap in the historical record covering a key period in the evolution of Ottawa's natural history community between late 1869 and early 1871. The paper attempts to illuminate — as much as possible given the scant documentation that appears to have survived from this time — the people involved and the tensions that prevailed as the OFNC's precursor organizations struggled with financial and structural challenges while preserving a continuous commitment to natural history research that began at least as early as 1863.

### The OLSS and Van Cortlandt

The OLSS (1869–1907) itself had evolved from two earlier organizations aimed at encouraging Ottawa's intellectual development: the Ottawa (formerly Bytown) Mechanics' Institute and Athenaeum (BMIA/OMIA, 1853–1869), and the Ottawa Natural History Society (ONHS, 1863–1869). The latter had broken off from the OMIA in 1863 over what appear to have been reasons similar to those cited by the founders of the OFNC in 1879. An even earlier entity, the more simply titled Bytown Mechanics' Institute (BMI), functioned from 1847 to 1849, but left few traces of its existence. It wasn't until after the organization was resurrected with an expanded name in 1853 that the OMIA played a significant role in Ottawa's intellectual development. Yet the earlier BMI appears likely to have planted an important seed that germinated a few years later.

Although the roots of the OFNC have been traced back along an "unbroken chain of organized, non-governmental natural history investigation" to the 1863 founding of the ONHS (Brunton 2004: 1), it is arguable that, as early as 1853, the Mechanics' Institute was providing an important outlet for investigating and recording aspects of the Ottawa area's natural history. So,

too, was the allied Ottawa Silurian Society (OSS), an organization roughly contemporaneous with the OMIA and specifically devoted to studying the region's geological and paleontological riches.

At the centre of activity in each of these forerunners to the OFNC — in leading field trips, assembling and managing collections, donating specimens, maintaining libraries, delivering lectures, organizing exhibitions, publishing studies, identifying natural resource deposits, mentoring fellow enthusiasts, and promoting what might even be called a “proto-conservationist” ethic — was Dr. Edward Van Cortlandt (Figure 1), rightly described by Brunton as a “remarkably energetic man.” Another of the three pioneer Ottawa naturalists identified by Brunton, paleontologist Elkanah Billings, named a fossil sea lily, *Carabocrinus vancortlandti*, after his friend and mentor, Dr. Van Cortlandt, “whose zeal in the advancement of science has been productive of many beneficial results,” as Billings (1859: 32) wrote. In fact, Van Cortlandt had the unique distinction of having papers published by all three OFNC predecessors (BMIA, OSS, and ONHS) concerned with the natural history of the region (Van Cortlandt 1853a, 1860, 1867). Van Cortlandt also published what appears to be the first inventory of Ottawa-area animal species (Van Cortlandt 1859), a landmark archeological report (Van Cortlandt 1853b), and numerous other lectures and reports on the local environment, mostly in the columns of the *Ottawa Citizen*.

### Establishment of the ONFC

Van Cortlandt must now also be credited with initiating a predecessor field club for nature-minded citizens, the Ottawa Naturalists' Field Club (ONFC), in 1870 — nearly a decade before the formation of the almost-identically named Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club and at a time when the aforementioned unbroken chain was at its most tenuous.

The ONFC helped bridge the brief (less than a year) but critical period between the dissolution of the ONHS and the creation of the OLSS's natural history branch. The latter was formed only in October 1870, in apparent response to the creation earlier that year of Van Cortlandt's field club. Although having a fixed and apparently small number of members, the ONFC may have been seen as a potential competitor for the attention (and membership dues) of the capital's outdoorsy intellectuals.

The published and archival historical record of the OFNC does not document the existence of this earlier, Van Cortlandt-led organization. Its apparently brief flowering in 1870 nevertheless offered another clear indication that a perceived imbalance between purely theoretical, non-field-based pursuits and hands-on natural history investigation was present in 1870 in the months after the OLSS was officially launched following the merger of the ONHS and OMIA. This same concern seems to have led to the formation of the



FIGURE 1. Dr. Edward Van Cortlandt (1805–1875) was one of Bytown's first physicians and a leading figure in several societies devoted to the study of the natural history of the Ottawa area, including its plant and animal populations, natural resources, geological and paleontological features, and archeological traces.

ONHS in 1863 and certainly prompted the creation of the OFNC in 1879.

Evidence of the existence of the ONFC is found in a series of news items published in 1870 in the *Ottawa Citizen* and in a national directory of businesses and civic organizations published in 1871. This was an era when such organizations earned frequent and sometimes remarkably detailed press accounts of meetings, lectures, and field trips. In fact, by the mid-1850s, the *Ottawa Citizen* had become a particularly important outlet for communicating knowledge of and research into the Ottawa area's and Canada's natural history, principally because of Elkanah Billings' role as an editor of the paper in those years. His landmark launch in February 1856 of *The Canadian Naturalist and Geologist*, Canada's first scholarly journal “devoted exclusively to the study of Natural History,” was a direct outgrowth of Billings' writings in the *Ottawa Citizen*, and was formally announced in the columns of the newspaper (Billings 1856).

In the case of the ONFC, however, press coverage of the group in 1870 is more slight and sporadic, perhaps suggesting a fragile association of members under Van Cortlandt's leadership that did not endure beyond its first year or so. Nevertheless, newspaper references to the club's formation offer additional evidence of an impulse within Ottawa's naturalist community to resist organizational changes that threatened to reduce opportunities for field research or diminished the perceived status of such work. And as stated above, there are indications that the ONFC's formation in January 1870 led the OLSS to launch its own natural history department that October. That initiative at least kept the torch

of excursion-based research alight within the OLSS through the 1870s until it fully flamed with the birth of the OFNC in 1879.

Curiously, however, the journals of E. A. Meredith, who presided over and championed the 1869–1870 amalgamation of the ONHS and OMIA into the new OLSS (and whose archived writings at Library and Archives Canada are a well-known source of Ottawa history during this era), make no mention of any conflict over the amalgamation; nor do the archived records of the OLSS, held by the City of Ottawa Archives. Brunton (2004) has noted that the ONHS records from 1869 offer “surprisingly little” discussion of the amalgamation.

Although archived internal records, society-published pamphlets, and personal papers of club members can all be useful sources for tracing the histories of such 19th-century civic institutions, the era’s newspapers also offer significant auxiliary information. Sometimes, as appears to be the case here, they reveal important facts that are otherwise absent from the documented past.

The first evidence that a new naturalists’ field club had been organized in Ottawa in the wake of the ONHS’s amalgamation with the OMIA is found in the 20 January 1870 edition of the *Ottawa Citizen* (Figure 2). The news brief introduced some confusion over the precise name of the new organization. It was made clear at this time, though, that the field club would “in no way interfere with the working of the Literary and Scientific Institute [i.e., OLSS], the end and aim of their object being the exercise of congenial spirits in practical scientific explorations” (Ottawa Citizen 1870a).

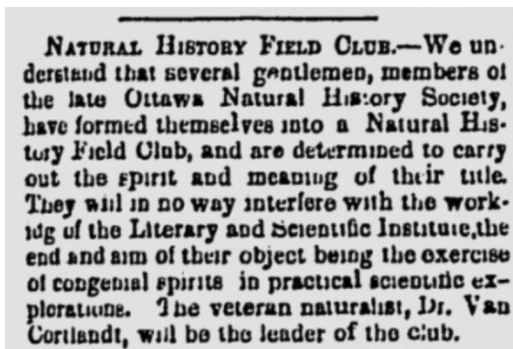


FIGURE 2. This news brief appeared in the *Ottawa Citizen* on 20 January 1870, just one day after the newspaper carried a report of the official launch of the Ottawa Literary and Scientific Society (OLSS).

### The ONFC and the OLSS

A few days later, it was reported under the headline “Naturalists Field Club” that “from the nature of this association, its membership is naturally limited; and we learn that its list of members is already completed.

Arrangements will be made for a tramp in a comparatively short time” (Ottawa Citizen 1870b).

The timing of the news that this new club had been formed raises some interesting questions. It emerged just one day after the inaugural election of the officers of the newly formed OLSS (Ottawa Citizen 1870c). Was this a challenge to the new OLSS leadership? Intriguingly, Van Cortlandt was not among those who assumed executive positions, even though he had accepted reappointment as curator of the ONHS on 12 November 1869, the position he held during the entire existence of the ONHS, during the same meeting at which members discussed the amalgamation idea and ultimately decided to support it (Ottawa Citizen 1869a).

It appears that, in the opinion of Van Cortlandt and the “several gentlemen” who assembled themselves into the fledgling field club just two months later, the new OLSS was giving unacceptably short shrift to the scientific side of its mandate. This viewpoint evidently led Van Cortlandt to eschew involvement with the new group and to launch an independent organization devoted to “practical scientific explorations.” This appears to have triggered a defensive response by the OLSS (its October 1870 inauguration of a natural history department). This parallels the tensions underlying the 1879 situation that led to the creation of the more specialized OFNC from within the membership of the OLSS.

Van Cortlandt was not the only observer of the situation unfolding in late 1869 and early 1870 who appeared to be concerned that something important might be lacking in the new OLSS. A week after the *Ottawa Citizen* reported the formation of the ONFC, a brief but pointed letter (Figure 3) by a writer identified only as “J.” and headlined “A Move In The Wrong Direction” revealed simmering tensions over the amalgamation of the OMIA and ONHS into the OLSS and even concerns about its long-term viability: “At the onset of the movement to unite the Mechanics’ Institute and the Ottawa Natural Society [sic], I was forcibly struck with the rapid and inconsiderate manner in which these two perfectly opposite elements were to be conjoined,” the critic stated (J. 1870) “Subsequent results have shown the correctness of the opinion. On the one side, the [also recently organized] Ottawa Literary club have [sic] clearly taken the wind out of the sails of the contemplated new Institute. On the other side, the Naturalists’ Field Club will most certainly checkmate them in a purely scientific point of view.” The same writer predicted a sorry outcome — “pity the specimens” — for the newly combined museum collections of the two antecedent organizations.

There appears to have been no immediate response to J.’s public grumbling. However, subsequent news coverage contains additional indications of the field club’s determination to endure, as well as signs of concern that the new OLSS might not survive. Responding to such concerns, its leaders took steps to improve the

### A MOVE IN THE WRONG DIRECTION.

To the Editor of "The Ottawa Citizen."

At the onset of the movement to unite the Mechanics' Institute and the Ottawa Natural Society, I was forcibly struck with the rapid and inconsiderate manner in which these two perfectly opposite elements were to be conjoined. Subsequent results have shown the correctness of the opinion. On the one side, the Ottawa Literary Club have clearly taken the wind out of the sails of the contemplated new Institute. On the other side, the Naturalists' Field Club will most certainly checkmate them in a purely scientific point of view. I am moreover assured that the removal of the specimens from the museum of the late Natural History Society, is to be under the control and superintendance of Mr. Sacey, the room-keeper of the Mechanics' Institute. If such is the case, all I can say is, "pi y the specimens."

J.

FIGURE 3. This letter, published in the *Ottawa Citizen* in late January 1870, expressed doubt that the newly formed Ottawa Literary and Scientific Society (OLSS) would survive, as a competitor literary club had recently been launched and Van Cortlandt's field club would "checkmate" the OLSS in terms of scientific research.

organization's prospects, including embracing a more conspicuous pursuit of natural history investigation.

On 12 April 1870 a letter to the *Ottawa Citizen* by "V.C." — unquestionably Van Cortlandt — begins: "Perhaps *de die in diem* you will admit the notes of the 'Ottawa Naturalist Field Club,' taken as the subjects present themselves." The note is crafted in classic Van Cortlandt style, the decorous Latin phrasing a signature feature of his newspaper correspondence and other writings. He follows with a series of observations about the return to Ottawa that week of several "spring birds," including white-breasted swallows [Tree Swallow] and the unexpectedly early "migratory thrush, *Turdus Migratorius* [sic]" — i.e., the American Robin — which "announced his coming ten days earlier than usual" (V. C. 1870).

Two weeks later, the newspaper further reported that "we are assured that the members of the Ottawa Naturalists' Field Club intend that grass shall not grow under their feet" before an excursion "to the best spot for edification and research" is carried out — "so we have been informed by the leaders of the club" (*Ottawa Citizen* 1870d). The news item noted that the field trip would not be scheduled until the House of Commons rose for the summer, an indication that at least some of the members, as with all intellectual organizations in the city at that time, were federal public servants.

There was also a reference to the club planning to have "departments" to be led by subject specialists, presumably in fields such as botany, entomology, paleontology, zoology, archeology, and so on.

Unfortunately, the local newspaper record is silent with regards to the ONFC's activities between May 1870 and January 1871, as no archived issues of the *Ottawa Citizen* exist for that period and other titles do not fill the gap in coverage. Surviving copies of a bilingual newspaper, *Le Courrier d'Outaouais/The Ottawa Courier*, do cover this period, but searches of this poorly preserved newspaper yielded no coverage of the OLSS or ONFC; similarly, issues of the *Ottawa Times* during these months offer no apparent coverage of the newly formed field club, though a series of three articles in November 1869 had made note of the ongoing negotiations to amalgamate the ONHS and OMA and — with a viewpoint strongly shaped by Meredith's stated view that the two societies "were to a great extent Rival Societies" and would be "best served by their union" — the *Times* firmly encouraged such a merger (*Ottawa Times* 1869c; see also *Ottawa Times* 1869a and *Ottawa Times* 1869b).

However, a particularly illuminating piece of evidence documenting the existence of the ONFC is found in a publishing venture carried out in 1871 by the Montreal-based printer John Lovell. The 2,562-page *Lovell's Canadian Dominion Directory for 1871* includes an entry for the "Ottawa Naturalist's Field Club" (Figure 4) that lists the names of its 11 founding members — including "Dr. Van Cortlandt" — and a brief mission statement emphasizing the "purely utilitarian" aims of the organization, highlighting a project intended to achieve "the restoration of Salmon to the tributaries of the Ottawa River" (Lovell's 1871: 625).

The *Lovell's* entry identifies the following "Pioneers of the Club," an impressive group of individuals with strong links to the recently disbanded ONHS: Rev. Thomas D. Phillipps, a Church of England minister and assistant master at the Ottawa Grammar School who had served in executive positions with the ONHS (Vice-president 1865-1868 and Acting President Aug-Oct 1867); J. McLardy, almost certainly the man identified elsewhere in local history sources (see, for example, *Ottawa Citizen* 1869b) as Henry J. McLardy, a Presbyterian minister and founding secretary of Ottawa's first animal welfare organization, the Metropolitan Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, in 1871 (*Ottawa Citizen* 1871c); W. F. Whitcher, the federal government's powerful and sometimes controversial commissioner of fisheries (Whitcher 1872; Richardson 1880: 1153); James Ogilvy, a prominent Ottawa merchant and ONHS Treasurer (1865-1870); lawyer Richard Bradley; the inaugural (1863) ONHS president Braddish Billings, Jr., a notable Canadian botanist and entomologist identified by Brunton as one of Ottawa's three most important "pioneer resident naturalists" along with Billings' brother, Elkanah, and Van

Cortlandt; H. B. Small (1831-1919), civil servant and avid local naturalist who would author numerous books about natural history and who, with his son H. B. Small Jr. (1854-1949), the president of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club in 1883, would be a founding member of the OFNC in 1879; George B. L. Fellowes, a lawyer and politician who would serve as Ottawa's mayor in 1876; William Pittman Lett, the longtime clerk of the City of Ottawa, who was also a local literary figure and prodigious chronicler of Bytown/Ottawa's early history as well as an executive member of the BMI (1848-49); and C. McNab who was presumably the county clerk Charles McNab.

#### **OTTAWA NATURALIST'S FIELD CLUB.**

Established 1869, for the advancement of Natural history.

Their excursions are intended to be purely utilitarian, and the restoration of Salmon to the tributaries of the Ottawa River the first measure contemplated. This club has materially assisted in effecting the preservation of fish and game.

*Pioneers of the Club.*—Rev. T. D. Phillipps, J. McLardy, W. F. Whitcher, Dr. Van Cortlandt, James Ogilvy, R. A. Bradley, B. Billings, H. B. Small, George B. L. Fellowes, W. P. Lett and C. McNab.

FIGURE 4. An entry in *Lovell's Canadian and Dominion Directory for 1871* lists the founding members of the Ottawa Naturalists' Field Club and notes their intent to pursue "utilitarian" projects such as the restoration of salmon to the Ottawa River watershed.

The members of the newly formed (and ultimately short-lived) ONFC appeared to conflate — at least for the purposes of the *Lovell's* entry — the origins of their organization with a July 1869 salmon-stocking reconnaissance expedition to the confluence of the Ottawa and Salmon rivers at Montebello, Que., a mission carried out by three of the above gentlemen — Phillipps, McLardy and Van Cortlandt — under the auspices, in fact, of a "sub-committee" of the ONHS. According to a detailed report on the trio's July 19-20, 1869 trip to Montebello, located about 65 kilometres east of Ottawa, the Salmon showed "such promise of favorable results as regard its capabilities and value as a salmon breeding river, and a means of re-stocking the Ottawa and its tributaries with this incomparable attraction to the anglers and inestimable treat to the epicure" (*Ottawa Citizen* 1869b).

This well-documented undertaking was approvingly (though belatedly) referenced by Whitcher in his annual federal fisheries report for 1872, which detailed a number of artificial fish propagation and repopulation schemes across Canada and mapped out the planned restocking of the Salmon River under the direction of Samuel Wilmot, the Newcastle, Ont.-based pisciculturist who would go on to work with Whitcher for nearly 20 years as the federal superintendent of fish culture, pioneering Canada's fish hatchery system (Whitcher 1872; McCullough 1990).

More broadly, the salmon restoration project initiated by the ONHS "sub-committee" that evolved into the ONFC took place at a time when Van Cortlandt and other naturalists were colliding with industrial and political interests in the Ottawa area over the effects of sawdust pollution, viewed by Van Cortlandt as a threat not only to aquatic life but also to human health and navigation (Boswell 2014). This writer has elsewhere explored the steps taken in the 1860s by Van Cortlandt (initially in his capacity as Ottawa's medical officer of health) and Whitcher (as federal fisheries commissioner and Canada's top regulator of water quality in navigable streams) to curb the dumping of sawmill waste into the Ottawa River from the massive complex of mills at the Chaudière Falls just upstream from Parliament Hill. These efforts, alas, were largely unsuccessful (R. Boswell, unpublished document).

Among the other conservation activities previously undertaken by members of the fledgling ONFC was one in which Whitcher and Van Cortlandt had rather ingeniously collaborated to prevent the slaughter of snipe by Ottawa-area hunters. In April 1867, Van Cortlandt and Whitcher gained press coverage for their respective roles in a legal test case to foster the protection of insect-eating songbirds. Whitcher had apparently arranged with a local hunter — federal lands department clerk Frederick Austin — to allow himself to be charged with "shooting snipe contrary to law." While not specifically protected by game laws in Canada, the snipe, Whitcher would argue in court, should be declared off-limits to hunters under provisions of the "Insectivorous Birds Bill," legislation meant to protect songbird species that consume insects and, thus, help protect farmers' crops from pests. Van Cortlandt was called to the stand as an expert witness to give scholarly evidence that snipes do, in fact, eat insects. The case was decided in "prosecutor" Whitcher's favour, Austin was charged a token penalty of \$1 and a legal precedent to make snipe-hunting illegal in Canada had been established (*Ottawa Times* 1867).

Whatever plans Van Cortlandt, Whitcher and their fellow naturalists had to continue pursuing such measures under an independent ONFC banner, the initiative appears to have fizzled out in 1871. In the spring of that year, the *Ottawa Citizen* reported a number of notable developments. First, Van Cortlandt, by then 65 years old, and destined to pass away in March 1875, had suffered a serious illness in early 1871, undoubtedly greatly undermining development plans for the ONFC (*Ottawa Citizen* 1871a). Furthermore, his fellow ONFC founder and Ottawa natural history "pioneer" Braddish Billings, Jr., would die in 1871, robbing the nascent group of an influential veteran figure in the study of the Ottawa area's natural environment.

#### **Response by the OLSS**

Meanwhile, at a meeting on 28 October 1870, the OLSS had established a naturalists' membership cate-

gory with a mission to “complete the collection of objects illustrative of the Natural History of the Ottawa valley” (Ottawa Citizen 1871b). This move was evidently aimed at countering the creation of the ONFC and reassuring anyone inclined toward field research, specimen collection, and other hands-on scientific endeavours that such activities would be encouraged by the new society. Nevertheless, as of May 1871, the OLSS was still scrambling to enlist enough “life members” (at the hefty sum of \$50 apiece) to cover its debts and ensure a stable future. One of the problems, the *Ottawa Citizen* reported at the time, was that “a good many members of the old Mechanics’ Institute and Athenaeum and Natural History Society have not signed the new roll” (Ottawa Citizen 1871b).

Thus, although the 1869 amalgamation of the ONHS and OMIA “appears to have been seamless, with the members of the ONHS effectively becoming the Natural History Branch of the newly created OLSS” (Brunton 2004: 5), the newspaper record suggests it was more complicated than that. There is no sign in archived records or elsewhere that Van Cortlandt, so much a fixture of Bytown/Ottawa’s successive nature-oriented organizations since 1853, ever joined the OLSS as an executive member, though the newspaper record shows that he did attend OLSS lectures on at least two occasions in December 1870 and February 1871 when the topics involved paleontology and botany (Ottawa Times 1870; Ottawa Times 1871d). Yet it is clear that, for some period of time in 1870 and possibly beyond, he attempted to keep the spirit of the old ONHS alive by forming the Ottawa Naturalists’ Field Club, although its role in the community may have been made moot soon after by the OLSS’s creation of a natural history branch.

### Emergence of the OFNC

The OLSS overcame its early difficulties in the years that followed and attracted a sufficient number of supporters, including those interested in field-based natural history studies, to endure into the 20th century. However, the OLSS structure never really did fully satisfy the needs of naturalists drawn to field trips, specimen gathering, and the presentation of original research about the Ottawa area’s natural environment (Brunton 2004). OFNC founder W. H. Harrington recalled that, in 1878, James Fletcher “and a few kindred spirits [Harrington included] often discussed the possibility and necessity of reviving in Ottawa the scientific researches which had existed in earlier years” (Harrington 1909: 201). The factors driving that era’s naturalists to launch their new club in 1879 were apparently pre-empted by Van Cortlandt and his field club peers nearly a decade earlier.

In December 1883, when reflecting in his inaugural address on the OFNC’s early progress, newly installed president Dr. H. Beaumont Small, Jr. stated: “There is one point I would ask you to think over before the

annual meeting, that is the name of the Club, which, I think, should be changed, so that it will read the Ottawa Naturalists’ Field Club, instead of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists’ Club. The change of a name is a serious matter always. Here it can hardly be called a change, rather an alteration, and in my opinion a correction” (Small 1884). Small was presumably alluding to Van Cortlandt’s short-lived ONFC of 13 years earlier. His father, the distinguished naturalist H. B. Small, Sr., was an associate of Van Cortlandt and, as we now know from Lovell’s directory, a member of the ONFC, although he was never listed as an ONHS member. Small Sr. may have recounted to his son the amalgamation controversy that spawned the ONFC in 1870.

Small’s push for the OFNC to be renamed the Ottawa Naturalists’ Field Club was not embraced. Yet this and other traces of the long-forgotten enterprise once championed by Van Cortlandt, promoter of just such an association for the “exercise of congenial spirits in practical scientific explorations,” shine a light on this little known but significant phase in the evolution of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists’ Club.

### Conclusion

This paper details the January 1870 founding of the Ottawa Naturalists’ Field Club, a previously undocumented precursor to the Ottawa Field-Naturalists’ Club and a notable contributor to that storied organization’s “unbroken chain” of naturalist activity extending back into pre-Confederation Canada. The paper also underscores the exceptional role of Dr. Edward Van Cortlandt in spearheading the creation of the ONFC, in participating in its inaugural project of attempting the reintroduction of salmon to the Ottawa River watershed, and in generally pioneering and promoting the study of the Ottawa area’s natural history throughout the 1850s, 1860s and early 1870s.

This study, it might also be said, goes some way towards completing a research project envisioned in the pages of this journal more than 75 years ago by Aurèle LaRocque, a prominent Ottawa naturalist and OFNC member. Later a distinguished Ohio State University geologist who died an Emeritus Professor in 1990 (Hansen 1991), LaRocque noted in a 1939 review of J. R. Dymond’s *Fishes of the Ottawa Region* (LaRocque 1939) that Van Cortlandt’s early inventories of Ottawa fish species had proven valuable and been duly referenced in Dymond’s volume, adding that: “The reviewer has collected a good deal of information concerning Dr. Van Cortlandt which he intends to include in an account of the beginnings of Natural History in the Ottawa region to appear later in *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*.” That intended study was apparently never pursued; had it been, LaRocque might well have learned that Van Cortlandt, as shown here, did much to lay the foundations of the OFNC itself.

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## Upcoming Meetings and Workshops

### International Conference on Mycorrhiza

The 8<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Mycorrhiza, hosted by the International Mycorrhiza Society, to be held 3–7 August 2015 at Northern Arizona University's High Country Conference Center, Flagstaff, Arizona.

The theme of the conference is: 'Mycorrhizal Integration across Continents and Scales'. Registration is currently open. More information is available at <http://nau.edu/Merriam-Powell/ICOM8/>.

### Annual Symposium on the Conservation and Biology of Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles

The 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Symposium on the Conservation and Biology of Tortoises and Freshwater Turtles, hosted by the Turtle Survival Alliance and the International Union for Conservation of Nature Tortoise and Freshwater Turtle Specialist Group, to be held 6–9 August 2015 at

the Westin La Paloma Resort, Tuscon, Arizona. Registration is currently open. More information is available at <http://www.turtlesurvival.org/conference#.VVpOUC6YQeo>.

### Annual Phycological Society of America

### Meeting

The Annual Phycological Society of America Meeting to be held 8–13 August 2015 at Drexel University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The theme of the meeting is: '50 for 50—Phycology in Philly', a celebration of the

Journal of Phycology's 50<sup>th</sup> year of publication. Registration is currently open. More information is available at <http://www.psaalgae.org/meetings/2015/8/8/2015-psa-annual-meeting>.

### Ecological Society of America Annual Meeting

The 2015 Ecological Society of America Annual Meeting to be held 9–14 August 2015 at the Baltimore Convention Center, Baltimore, Maryland. The theme of the conference is: 'Ecological Science at the Frontier:

Celebrating ESA's Centennial', celebrating the Society's 100<sup>th</sup> year. Registration is currently open. More information is available at <http://esa.org/baltimore/>.

### American Fisheries Society Annual Meeting

The 145<sup>th</sup> American Fisheries Society Annual Meeting, hosted by the Oregon Chapter and Western Division of the American Fisheries Society, to be held 16–20

August 2015 at the Oregon Convention Center, Portland, Oregon. Registration is currently open. More information is available at <http://2015.fisheries.org/>.

### Northeast Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Meeting

The 2015 Northeast Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Meeting to be held 18–20 August 2015 at the Alton Jones Education Center of the Univer-

sity of Rhode Island, Greenwich, Rhode Island. Registration is currently open. More information is available at <http://northeastparc.org/next-meeting-info/>.

### International Barcode of Life Conference

The 6<sup>th</sup> International Barcode of Life Conference, hosted by the International Barcode of Life project, to be held 18–21 August 2015 at the University of Guelph,

Guelph, Ontario. The theme of the conference is: 'Barcodes to Biomes'. Registration is currently open. More information is available at <http://dnabarcodes2015.org/>.

### Annual General Meeting of the Entomological Society of Ontario

The 152<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Meeting of the Entomological Society of Ontario to be held 18–20 September 2015 at the Queen's University Biological Station,

Elgin, Ontario. More information is available at <http://www.entsocont.ca/agm-2015.html>.



## International Conference on Ecology and Transportation

The 8<sup>th</sup> biennial International Conference on Ecology and Transportation, hosted by the North Carolina Department of Transportation with support from the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, to be held 20–24 September 2015 at Raleigh Convention Center, Raleigh, North Carolina.

The theme of the conference is: ‘Roads to Resilience: Strengthening Essential Transportation and Ecological Assets across Diverse Landscapes’. Registration is currently open. More information is available at [http://www.icoet.net/ICOET\\_2015/index.asp](http://www.icoet.net/ICOET_2015/index.asp).

## Student Conference on Conservation Science – New York

The 6<sup>th</sup> annual Student Conference on Conservation Science – New York, hosted by the American Museum of Natural History’s Center for Biodiversity and Conservation and Yale University School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, to be held 7–9 October 2015 at the American Museum of Natural History, New York,

New York. Registration is currently open. More information is available at <http://www.amnh.org/our-research/center-for-biodiversity-conservation/events-exhibitions/conferences-and-symposia/2015-sccs-ny>.

### The Wildlife Society’s Annual Conference

to be held 17–21 October 2015 at the RBC Convention Center, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Registration is currently open. More information is available at <http://www.tws-conference.org/>.

The 22<sup>nd</sup> annual conference of the Wildlife Society Center, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Registration is currently

### Landmark decision halts Ostrander Wind Farm Project on the grounds of serious and irreversible harm to the Blanding’s Turtle

A decision by the Court of Appeal for Ontario on April 20, 2015 upholds the landmark decision to halt the Ostrander Wind Farm Project on the grounds that the project would cause serious and irreversible harm to a

threatened wildlife species: the Blanding’s Turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*). This decision was notable, because it was the first time that a renewable energy project, approved under the *Ontario Green Energy Act* and *Environmental Protection Act*, was overturned due to concerns for an at-risk species.

The Ostrander Wind Farm Project of the Ostrander Point Wind Energy LP was issued a Renewable Energy Approval by the Ontario Ministry of the Environment in December 2012. This project would involve construction of nine wind turbine generators, plus supporting infrastructure (including access roads), built on a 324-hectare area of crown land in Prince Edward County, Ontario.

Two local interest groups – the Prince Edward County Field Naturalists and the Alliance to Protect Prince Edward County – opposed this project, filing an appeal with the Environmental Review Tribunal. This appeal claimed that the Ostrander project should be stopped because it would cause serious harm to human health, and serious and irreversible harm to a variety of wildlife species and the natural environment, including birds, bats, butterflies, turtles, and alvar plants. In July 2013, the Renewable Energy Approval was revoked by the Environmental Review Tribunal. This landmark decision was nearly overturned; in February 2014 the Divisional Court set aside the Tribunal’s decision, and reinstated the Renewable Energy Approval. This recent decision by the Court of Appeal for Ontario restores the Tribunal’s decision, and halts the Ostrander Wind

Farm Project.

Interestingly, the decision to halt the Ostrander Wind Farm Project was based solely on the Blanding’s Turtle. The Tribunal rejected all claims of serious and irreversible harm to human health and wildlife, with the exception of the claim of serious and irreversible harm to the Blanding’s Turtle. This Great Lakes population of the Blanding’s Turtle is listed as threatened, both provincially (under the *Ontario Endangered Species Act*) and federally (under the *Species at Risk Act*). The Ostrander Wind Farm Project was determined to pose a serious and irreversible harm to this species because of the loss of habitat and road development, two of the major threats to this species. Blanding’s Turtle is a biologically significant species; this is one of the longest-lived freshwater turtle species, and is the only living representative of its genus. This decision provides precedent for future renewable energy projects, suggesting that companies must seriously consider the potential risks their projects pose for wildlife species.

For further information, see: **Court of Appeal for Ontario**. 2015. *Prince Edward County Field Naturalists v. Ostrander Point GP Inc.*, 2015 ONCA 269. Accessed 20 May 2015. [www.ontariocourts.ca/decisions/2015/2015ONCA0269.htm](http://www.ontariocourts.ca/decisions/2015/2015ONCA0269.htm).