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# Canu and Bassler

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Raymond Smith Bassler (1878-1961) (Figures 1 and 2) officially joined the United States National Museum (USNM) as a preparator in 1902. From the age of 15, he had prepared Palaeozoic fossils for E.O. Ulrich in Cincinnati, Ohio, and when Ulrich came to the USNM in 1900 Bassler followed and continued unofficially in the same capacity. By 1904 Bassler had finished his Master's degree, had started on his Ph.D. (earned in 1905 from George Washington University), had become an assistant curator, and had published papers with Ulrich on Palaeozoic bryozoans as well as bryozoans from the Maryland Miocene.<sup>1</sup> At the same time he became an assistant professor of geology at George Washington University, a position from which he retired in 1948. In 1908 he became curator, and from 1929 to 1948 was head curator of the USNM's Department of Geology.<sup>2</sup> Although Bassler continued to collect Palaeozoic fossils and publish on them,<sup>3</sup> his interests turned more toward Cretaceous, Tertiary, Quaternary, and Recent bryozoans based on collections made by the U.S. Geological Survey, the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries vessel *Albatross*, and his own efforts. All of this material fueled his collaboration with Ferdinand Canu.

Ferdinand Canu (1863-1932) received his education at the Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers and the Musée d'Histoire Naturelle de Paris. For 33 years, until his retirement in 1914, he taught in the public schools of Paris. In 1890 he began the study of meteorology, geology, and palaeontology producing papers on the first two subjects in 1894 and 1895.<sup>4</sup> His first bryozoan publication came in 1897, and by his death he had over 100 publications on Cretaceous, Tertiary, Quaternary, and Recent bryozoans. He was awarded the French Legion of Honour<sup>5</sup> and in 1923, the Daniel Giraud Elliot Medal of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States for *North American Later Tertiary and Quaternary Bryozoa* which was coauthored with Bassler.<sup>6</sup>

Correspondence between Canu and Bassler began in 1905 with the usual exchange of specimens and reprints,<sup>7</sup> and by 1909 Bassler asked Canu to identify specimens for him. In agreeing, Canu explained that a fee was customary for this service but that specimens to complete his collections would be acceptable.<sup>8</sup> In 1912, after Canu completed notes on the Eocene of Wilmington, North Carolina, Bassler asked him to be senior author of a volume on American Tertiary Bryozoa because 'my knowledge of Tertiary Bryozoa is not



*Figure 1 (left). Bassler at Mammoth Cave, Kentucky, 1890 (age 12)*  
*Figure 2 (bottom). Bassler's first fossil collection, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1893*

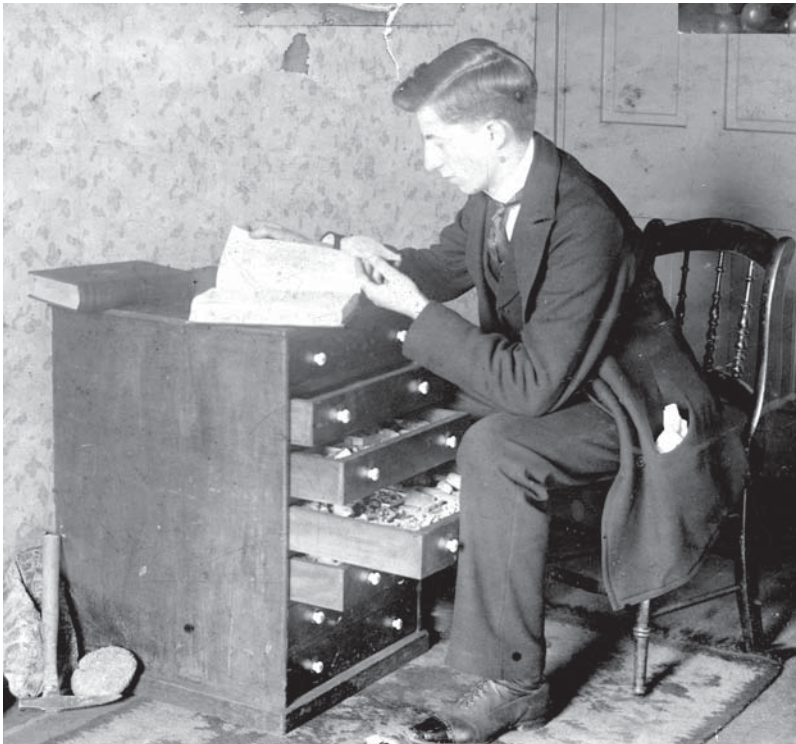




Figure 3. Bassler and his assistant Adelaide Quizenberry with the manuscript of Canu and Bassler's *North American Early Tertiary Bryozoa* (c. 1919).

very deep'.<sup>9</sup> Canu agreed enthusiastically and proposed amendments to Bassler's plan for the project.<sup>10</sup> It took more than four years to complete the manuscript of *North American Early Tertiary Bryozoa* (Figure 3) because of the constraints of World War I on communications and resources, and the inability of Canu to work full time on the project due to the 'civil mobilization' of the French people.<sup>11</sup> As their correspondence increased it took on a more personal note which included the exchange of photos of themselves and other bryozoan colleagues, trading stamps, postcards, political opinions, war news, and news of their families.<sup>12</sup> By the end of World War I they moved beyond their original agreement and began work on the Philippine bryozoans from the *Albatross* collections<sup>13</sup> and by 1925 they had completed ten publications.

Bassler expressed an interest in travelling to France and meeting Canu as early as 1914,<sup>14</sup> but the trip did not take place until the summer of 1926 (Figures 4 and 5). It was his first trip outside the United States and included not only France but also Germany (where he met Ehrhard Voigt, and Ernst and Eveline Marcus),<sup>15</sup> and Austria. Bassler stayed with Canu for the duration of his visit to France which seems to have cemented their friendship completely.<sup>16</sup> Bassler returned to France twice more<sup>17</sup> before Canu finally visited the United States in the summer of 1930 (Figures 6 and 7), where he spent the first week with Joseph A. Cushman and Bassler in New England and then on to Washington with Bassler for the rest of his stay.<sup>18</sup>

Canu's health began to deteriorate before his trip to the United States,<sup>19</sup> and by

*Study on the morphology and  
biology of the Homo risor*



*Mo. Canu chasseur*



*Mo. Canu chanteur*



*Mo. Canu minéralogiste*



*Mo. Canu acteur*



*Mo. Canu dessinateur*



*Mo. Canu architecte*



*Mo. Canu acrobate*



*Mo. Canu musicien*



*Mr. Canu botaniste*



*Mr. Canu pêcheur  
de baleines dans l'Ontario*



*Mr. Canu peintre*



*Mr. Canu brigand*



*Ruins of Humbigopolis  
Mr. Canu archéologue*



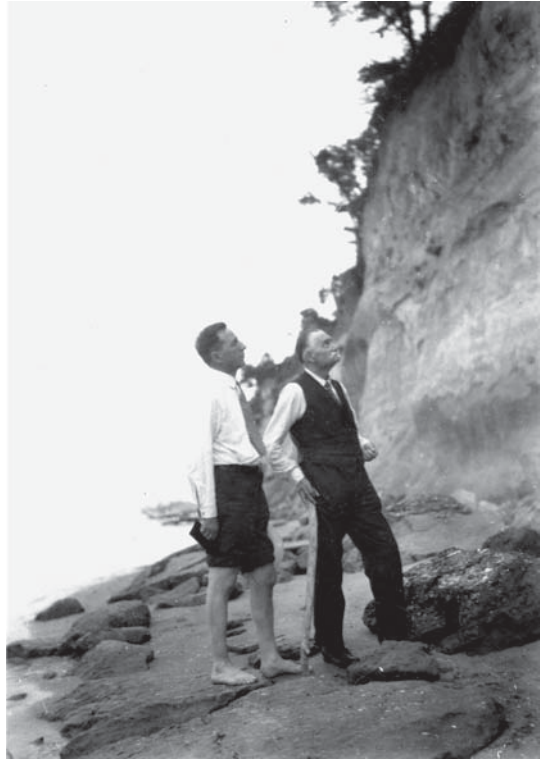
*Mr. Canu galant  
offre un bouquet de  
*Gonista europea*  
au photographe*

Figure 4 (above and facing page). Photographs taken of Canu at the Palace grounds, Versailles, by Madam Jean (Canu's housekeeper) [this page; bottom right - holding a spray of yellow Broom]; with titles by Canu. Series presented to Bassler on the occasion of his 1926 trip to Europe.



*Figure 5. Canu and Bassler in Canu's study, Versailles, August, 1926.*

September of that year he decided not to accept any new work since he and Bassler were still working on the Vincentown and Australian monographs and Bassler's duties as Head Curator were taking up more of his time.<sup>20</sup> Their close collaboration ended on 12th February 1932 when according to Bassler '...awakening with a slight headache, which



*Figure 6 (right). Canu and Bassler studying the Calvert Formation (Miocene) at Chesapeake Beach, Maryland, USA (Summer, 1930)*

*Figure 7 (bottom). "A last farewell". Canu and Bassler at Union Station, Washington, D.C. (July 1930)*





grew steadily worse, he [Canu] passed away from cerebral hemorrhage within a few hours. Thus came to a close our association in scientific work of almost a quarter of a century'.<sup>21</sup>

## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank William Cox and his colleagues in the Office of the Smithsonian Institution Archives for access to Bassler's files and Ronald Lindsey of the Natural History Branch Library, Smithsonian Institution Libraries for help with Web searches.

## Notes

All correspondence cited below is in the Smithsonian Institution Archives, record unit 7234, Ray S. Bassler Papers, 1875 to 1961 and undated.

- 1 K.E. Caster, 'Memorial to Ray S. Bassler', *Geological Society of America Bulletin*, 76 (1965), P167-74, P168-69.
- 2 <http://www.siris.si.edu/>; Smithsonian Institution Archives and Manuscript Catalog.
- 3 Caster, note 1, p. 169.
- 4 R.S. Bassler, attachment to letter to F. Canu dated 9th March 1928.
- 5 R.S. Bassler, letter to G. Canu, 16th August 1940.
- 6 <http://www4.nationalacademies.org/>; recipients of the Daniel Giraud Elliot Medal.
- 7 F. Canu, postcard to R.S. Bassler, 17th February 1905.
- 8 F. Canu, letter to R.S. Bassler, 11th May 1909.
- 9 R.S. Bassler, letter to F. Canu, 30th August 1912.
- 10 F. Canu, letter to R.S. Bassler, 12th September 1912.
- 11 F. Canu and R.S. Bassler, 'North American Early Tertiary Bryozoa', *United States National Museum Bulletin*, 106 (1920), 1-879, 2.
- 12 R.S. Bassler, letter to F. Canu, 14th May 1914, and subsequent letters.
- 13 R.S. Bassler, letter to F. Canu, 12th November 1918; Bassler also describes the victory celebrations of the previous night in Washington.
- 14 R.S. Bassler, letter to F. Canu, 14th May 1914.
- 15 See Winston, figure 2, *this volume*.
- 16 R.S. Bassler, letter to F. Canu, 4th October 1926; after returning from Europe Bassler wrote '... you are no longer Monsieur Canu but Friend Canu for anybody can be a Monsieur but few a friend like you'.
- 17 R.S. Bassler, letter to G. Canu, 2nd April, 1932.
- 18 R.S. Bassler, letter to F. Canu, 5th May, 1930.
- 19 R.S. Bassler, letter to F. Canu, 30th January 1930.
- 20 R.S. Bassler, letter to F. Canu, 22nd September 1930.
- 21 F. Canu and R.S. Bassler, 'New Species of Tertiary Cheilostome Bryozoa from Victoria, Australia', *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections*, 93, 9 (1935), 1-54, 1.