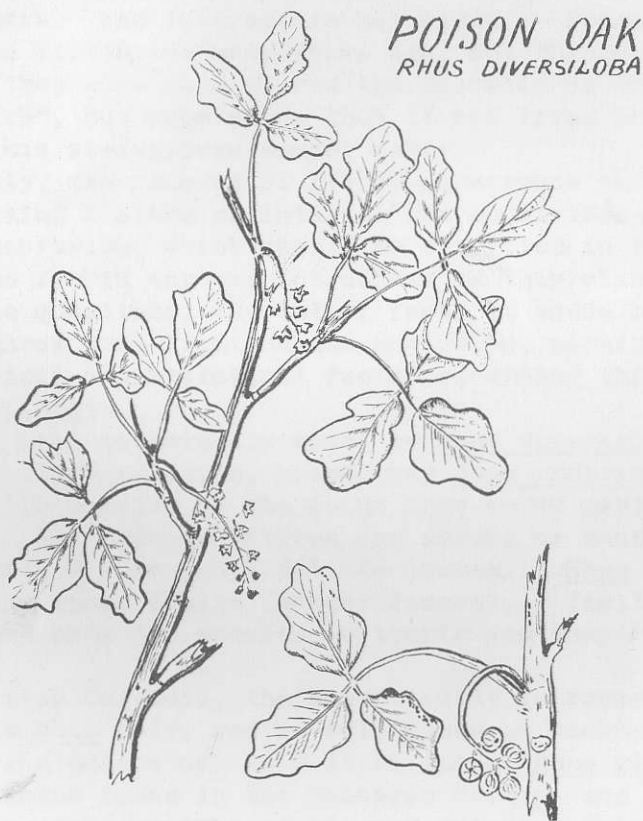


The  
**VICTORIA  
NATURALIST**

Vol. 20 No. 5

January, 1964



*Published by the*  
**VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY**  
*Victoria, B.C.*

THE CASE OF THE DISAPPEARING POISON OAK

Cover Picture and Story  
by Dr. A. F. Szczawinski

There is always a certain fascination whenever poison oak puts in an appearance. It arouses fear in some, annoyance in others, and interest in botanists. Poison oak was known to Victorians many years ago, and through perseverance they were able to rid the district of this "green menace", but ever since then it has lived on in memory and has always been sought after.

Recently, two records of its re-occurrence were reported, causing a storm of interest and enquiries, and indeed some confusion, which should be clarified in the minds of those who are in any way introduced to this plant. To answer these questions, the author feels it would be beneficial to throw some light on the confusion, particularly as to botanical and historical facts concerning this plant.  
Botanical account:

Poison oak, botanically known as Rhus diversiloba T. & G., and its close relative, poison ivy Rhus radicans L., are two of 120 species of the genus Rhus known particularly to us here. All representatives are shrubs or woody vines with pinnately 3 - to many, foliate leaves. Rhus is a member of the sumac family (Anacardiaceae), a family with 70 genera and some 500 species in tropic and temperate regions.

In British Columbia, the sumac family is represented by the genus Rhus only, and is well known on account of poison ivy and poison oak as well as sumac, Rhus glabra, a striking shrub found in the Okanagan Valley, and so prominent in the fall because of its red colour. Poison oak is known to occur only in the Victoria area.

Rhus diversiloba T. & G. Poison oak.

Synonyms: R. toxicodendron ssp. diversiloba Engl.,  
Toxicodendron diversilobum Greene,

Toxicodendron lobadioides Greene,

R. diversiloba f. radicans McNair.

Erect, glabrous to pubescent shrub or a vine, climbing walls, fences or trees, up to 15 m. tall. Leaves: alternate, compound, with leaflets deeply lobed and somewhat resembling small leaves of Garry oak, glossy or dull green in spring and summer, turning brilliant red in fall. Flowers: small, yellow-greenish and unattractive. Fruit: small, bead-like, white or cream coloured, about 1/8 inch in diameter.

Habitat: Rocky outcrops, banks and waste places, always in sunny and dry spots.

Distribution: In British Columbia, poison oak is very limited in its distribution, being restricted to the Victoria area on Vancouver Island and to some Gulf Islands, (Valdez, Texada), this area being its northern boundary. Its distribution extends south to Mexico, west of the Cascades and Sierra Nevada.

Poison oak had been common around Saanich Arm and Swan Lake, and in rocky exposed places on Saanich Peninsula, but it had been considered extinct in this area for almost 50 years. In the herbarium of the Provincial Museum, there are specimens collected with the following data:

1. Saanich Arm, Vancouver Island, Aug. 1896 by J.R. Anderson.
2. Saanich Arm, Vancouver Island, July 1910, by J.R. Anderson.
3. Saanich Arm, Vancouver Island, July 1917, by J.R. Anderson.

Unfortunately, there are no supporting specimens in the herbarium from other localities in this area, and the author does not know of any such records in other herbaria. In analysing the above facts, it is obvious that the last collection was made in 1917, 46 years ago, and it would appear that the plant was considered extinct on Southern Vancouver Island.

Poison oak was re-collected by Freeman King on Prospect Lake Road, Lake District, in 1962. This record from the Victoria area is the first authentic one supported by a specimen since 1917, and is very valuable, as it indicates the re-occurrence of poison oak. In 1963, an additional record was added from the Highland District where the plant is still surviving in rocky, exposed habitat.

Poisonous principle:

The poisonous property of poison oak is due to urushiol, a yellowish, slightly volatile oil. It occurs in the leaves, flowers, fruit and bark of the stem and roots. Poisoning cannot occur unless one comes in contact with some object carrying the poison. Contact with poison oak produces severe inflammation and blistering. Some individuals claim immunity to it. The most recent investigations seem to indicate that susceptibility to it is a matter of degree, and it is doubtful whether or not anyone is absolutely immune. The degree of immunity seems to vary with the condition of the individual, the condition of the plant, and circumstances under which the individual is exposed.

Treatment:

Wash and rinse the skin thoroughly a few times with hot water and ordinary kitchen or laundry soap containing an excess of alkali. Soaps containing oils should not be used. Application of baking soda or Epsom salts, 2 teaspoonfuls to a cup of water, is also recommended. It is desirable to consult a physician, especially in bad cases of poisoning.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### MATING OF RED AND YELLOW-SHAFTED FLICKERS

by Adrian Paul, Kleena Kleene, B.C.

In 1962, I noticed that a flicker with a red moustache had for a mate a bird with a red nape band. Further study confirmed that the male's wing linings were reddish and the female's yellow.

The nest was 22 feet from the ground on the north side of a lodge-pole pine, which made the light poor for observation of the entrance hole. However, by visiting the nest during early morning and late evening sunlight, I was able to get a fair idea of the head markings of the young birds, when they were old enough to look out.

At least one had a somewhat dull red moustache and a bright red crescent on the nape. At least one had a dull red moustache, but no crescent on the nape. One had a blackish moustache. I saw none with a bright red moustache.

\*\*\*\*\*

## GREAT HORNED OWLS IN VICTORIA

by Grace Bell

Two forms of the great horned owl, Bubo virginianus, have been seen in Victoria area this fall. On October 31, Mrs. J.S. Norrington of Selkirk Avenue, Craigflower district, reported a dark plumaged bird in her garden. It was perched on a bare fir limb, about 20 feet above ground-level. Several members of the Natural History Society hurried to see this uncommon, powerful bird, clearly visible from Mrs. Norrington's living-room window, facing Selkirk Water.

The second Bubo, a light-coloured bird, was reported by Mr. and Mrs. K. Howard of David Street, Oak Bay. It was perched in a leafless oak tree, in the backyard of the adjoining property. It is interesting to note that both big owls were in heavily populated areas, on opposite sides of town.

The dark phased Bubo, which may have been a dusky horned owl, Bubo v. saturatus (Ridgway), showed a red mouth when it yawned; the light phased bird showed a pallid mouth lining. It is possible that the pale bird was an Arctic horned owl, Bubo virginianus wapacuthu (Gmelin). Its appearance fitted snowy regions, but its colouring also merged well with the bark of Garry oak. Despite a steady drizzle, watching this bird was also easy and comfortable. We were well sheltered by the Howard's back porch, with the bird only about a hundred feet away.

The Oak Bay owl shared the limelight with a merlin, which moved from one nearby television antenna to another, ki-ki-ki-ki'ing loudly as it did so. Crows noisily harried both birds, sometimes perching nearby to jeer, but remaining warily out of reach. Each time the crows flocked in toward the owl, they also swooped on the merlin. In response, the little falcon crouched, turned its head upward and uttered a short, screaming whistle, as if warning its tormentors not to go too far with their antics. The owl seemed quite unperturbed by the disturbance. A tree creeper and a few chickadees came along, apparently unafraid and presumably aware that, for the time being, the two predators were not concerned with them. A few robins also made alarm noises and ventured fairly close to the owl, but kept well away from the merlin, which seemed far too interested in the owl to pursue anything.

Mrs. Margot Bowden, a resident of Haro Road, also

had a Bubo on her property, and reported that its eerie shrieks rang through the wood. She described it as a monstrous thing that produced an unearthly sound. She imitated the call, and I must admit it was fearful. Her ability to duplicate nature sounds is good, so I have every reason to believe its accuracy. A writer in Bent's "Life Histories of North American Birds of Prey - Part 2", describes just such fearsome sounds as emanating from Bubo virginianus.

Other great horned owls have been reported by Mrs. E. G. Bousfield, who watched one in the garden of Dr. and Mrs. J.W. Anderson, on McAnally Road, and Mr. R.C. Mackenzie-Grieve saw two in the Ten Mile Point area.

There are fascinating accounts of these birds in Bent's "Life Histories....". One writer refers to their very thick plumage. The bird on Selkirk Avenue displayed this feature while preening. When it lowered its head, the outer feathers were parted, revealing a dense, buff-cream, downy undercoat.

Describing the severe winter of 1915-16, Mr. Walter F. Burton of Victoria, B.C., has this to say: "We have a plague of horned owls..... Which has cleaned out all our pheasants. Hundreds have been shot. The horned owl invasion extended at least as far south as Portland... At least 75 percent of those taken have been females."

That report sounds alarming when it is realized that these great winged creatures are beneficial to man. They help control the population of other small animals and are a steadying influence on the "swaying balance of nature".

\*\*\*\*\*

## MONKEY PUZZLES GROW IN VICTORIA

by R.Y. Edwards

Many people dislike the monkey puzzle tree, Araucaria imbricata, also called Chile pine. Some call it bizzare, others sinister. One gloomy author thought it fit to guard the entrances to cemeteries. Haig-Brown, in his unusual book "Fisherman's Winter" sums up the situation fairly, I think. He says, "I had never really admired the Araucaria before. Grown in Victoria gardens and on city lots as the monkey puzzle tree, it is a curiosity, really out of place, seldom thriving, often sooty and dull.

In its native surroundings, shaped by the wind and the climate, fresh with new growth, set off by clear blue skies and a mountain background, it is at once lovely and curious."

The monkey puzzle is a native of the southern Andes, its range follows the divide between Chile and Argentina as a narrow strip 250 miles long. There, it grows in open, savannah-like forests, and may occur to timberline as the last stunted trees. In "The Wonders of Life on Earth", published by Life, is a photograph of these trees at timberline. A rocky slope has the stunted trees scattered about it, and their forms are pruned by the elements to rather palm-like balls of branches, standing on slender bare trunks. It is an exotic landscape.

Seeds of Chile pine are edible, but in most places where it is planted, seeds are rarely produced. In the Andes, it is a favoured food of Indians, where tree and men live together.

Archibald Menzies, sailing with Captain Vancouver, discovered this tree in 1780, but this statement would appear ridiculous to the people who at that time had been munching its seeds for generations.

Chile pine is not a pine. It is one of 30 or so living species in the family Araucariaceae, a primitive family of conifers now limited to the southern hemisphere, but once common over North America. Some of this continent's famous petrified forests are remains of trees like the monkey puzzle, especially those in Arizona and New Mexico.

It is not difficult to identify monkey puzzles in Victoria. The leaves are large, coarse scales, surrounding branches which stand out horizontally from the trunk in regular whorls.

Many of these trees are scattered throughout Victoria. To list a few, there is one near the Burns statue in Beacon Hill Park, one at Beckwith and Quadra, one at Skinner and Catherine, two near Pandora and Cook, two near 3371 Shelbourne, and one in the park at Menzies and Michigan.

\*\*\*\*\*

Forested areas are natural reservoirs. One cubic foot of good forest soil can hold two gallons of water; a square mile can hold over 50,000,000 gallons.

## BRITISH COLUMBIA NATURE COUNCIL

A representative from each of seven allied groups, the Natural History Societies of Vancouver, Victoria, Vernon, Kelowna, Penticton and Duncan, and Thetis Park Nature Sanctuary Association, forms the British Columbia Nature Council. Dr. T.M.C. Taylor, of Vancouver is President of the Council.

Aims of the Council are to provide British Columbia naturalists with a unified voice; to promote co-operation of natural history societies, and similar groups, in British Columbia; to encourage and aid formation of natural history societies in British Columbia and to promote activities of interest to British Columbia naturalists.

\*\*\*\*\*

## BRITISH COLUMBIA NATURE COUNCIL MEETING

Report by Gladys E. Soulsby

Legislation protecting Provincial Parks, predator control, use of poison sprays, Monashee game preserve and the possibility of holding a junior naturalist camp on a provincial scale were highlights of discussions during a meeting of the British Columbia Nature Council in Vancouver, on November 23.

Because discussion revealed that legislation protecting British Columbia Provincial Parks is weak, Vancouver Natural History Society will spearhead a drive to have it strengthened to assure that Provincial Parks cannot be utilized for other than recreational purposes. It was pointed out that under present British Columbia law, any individual or organization with sufficient financial power and influence can appropriate park land for non-recreational activities.

North Okanagan Natural History Society, of Vernon, reported it is studying predator control and other aspects of Monashee Game Preserve. Earlier in the year, the Provincial Government declared the Monashee area a game reserve, then later reversed their decision.

Victoria Natural History Society is deeply concerned with detrimental effects of various pesticides on all forms of life, and have formed a committee to investigate hazards of the use of these poisons.

Canadian Audubon Society and Okanagan Natural History Society members proposed holding a Provincial junior

naturalist camp. So far, such camps have operated only on a district basis. If the new proposal materializes, it will be a first, not only for British Columbia, but for Canada. Freeman King, of Victoria, with many years experience of junior naturalist camps, spoke on the subject and, after the meeting, went to Kelowna to examine prospective sites for a Provincial camp.

All British Columbia natural history societies are to submit their field trip information to the Vancouver delegate of the Nature Council. This information will be consolidated and sent to Provincial Parks Branch nature houses and other suitable information outlets. Visitors will thereby be informed of local activities and can take part in them if they wish.

The possibility of adding a British Columbia section to "Canadian Trails" was discussed, as was the formation of new natural history societies.

As soon as possible, the Council will issue the first edition of a newsletter. The writer of this report is to be editor.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### IMPORTANT FLYER

On occasion, dozens of letters arriving on the desk of a Government official can prove that a group such as ours means business -- and we do.

Many of you would write a letter in support of an important conservation issue -- if you knew the facts. When we urgently need the support of every member, we will see to it that you have the facts. We will issue a "flyer" bearing "flying instructions" and will expect you to "fly at it" to put over our point. We feel sure that we can rely on you, if we do our part.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### BIRDS FOR THE RECORD

by Alan Poynter

Ten swans, probably whistling, were reported on November 8. This was the beginning of a nice migration of the species in this area, with small flocks of three and

four seen throughout the month. Great horned owls are still popping up all over the city, up to the time of writing.

Mr. R. Fryer saw two blue jays on November 13, bringing the area total to five. He also saw a tree sparrow the same day -- indicating unusual activity in our more northern latitudes.

Three more golden plover were seen on November 16, by Poynter and Tatum.

Ken Dobson (we will be seeing the name often) saw three wandering tattlers at Sidney on November 17. On the same day, eight fulmars were seen at one time at Clover Point (where else?) by Jack Barnett and Gerry Bennet of Toronto. This is the largest count of this species, from shore.

Mrs. A.R. Davidson reported a Cassin's auklet on November 17, and was the first to spot the two knots on the 18th.

Clover Point was buzzing on November 19 after Mr. R. Fryer phoned in a report of three eider ducks and ten whistling swans.

Thanks to Mrs. Stewart, we are positive that an Anna's hummingbird was in Prospect Lake area during November 13-18. This is only the second time this bird has been seen in British Columbia, I think.

Dr. J. Tatum did it again! -- saw pine grosbeaks on little Saanich mountain -- the first report for many years. The Davidsons went out on December 1 and saw eight. (This bird was the 100th "lifer" for Dr. Tatum since his arrival in Canada on September 11.)

A red-breasted sapsucker was reported at 2474 Bowker Avenue on December 5.

An osprey was seen at Esquimalt Lagoon on December 1. Blue birds were reported on Duke Road -- the first report for almost two years.

Miss M. C. Melburn had a yellow warbler at her feeder several times in early December.

Even hunters are noticing effects of unusual winds. Popular Tofino goose hunting areas are being deserted in favour of the more productive inside passage, where Canada geese and black brant have been reported in good numbers.

Ancient murrelets and red and northern phalaropes were seen until the end of November. It is worthy of note that this was an extremely good year for shoreline observation

of these species.

Why is it we find dead fulmars on shore? It is an unusual bird to find close to the City, yet four specimens were collected by members this fall.

\*\*\*\*\*

### JUNIOR JOTTINGS

by Nancy Chapman

Trips to Bear Hill, on Old West Saanich Road, proved very enjoyable. From the summit of this beautiful little hill one can see most of Saanich Peninsula and the ocean beyond, dotted with islands of all sizes. A great abundance of arbutus berries provided welcome splashes of colour.

On trips to Goldstream, during the latter part of November, dead spawning salmon provided excellent specimens for those interested in anatomy. Several were dissected for careful study. A complete skeleton of a dead deer was also studied in great detail.

Our group system has been altered, and several new leaders have been appointed. The new leaders are: Carlyn Slader, Linda James, Jan Murphy, Bob Fleischer, and Mark Danes in "A" Group; Nancy Pope, Penny Beavan, Dan Gifford, Dale Rickard, and Linda Gregg in "B" Group. Trevor Gibbens and Shirley Martin are group leaders for "A" and "B" Groups.

Over 300 people, including a company of Girl Guides, have visited Francis Park during the past month. The Girl Guides were taken on a tour of Lyre Tree Trail.

Displays at the Nature House include pond life, mosses, lichens, fungi and trees. All trails are open, except the New Forest Trail, which is good only if you like winter swimming.

The front of the new sign at Francis Park entrance has been landscaped with a variety of native British Columbia trees, including larch, Douglas fir, mountain fir, mountain hemlock, shore pine and a couple of species of cedars. It certainly is attractive.

\*\*\*\*\*

### WATER BEARS IN THETIS LAKE

by Professor C.W. Lowe

The wonderful beauty and variety of life in Thetis Park gives great pleasure to all who behold it. There are hundreds of plants and animals, just as fascinating, to be found in the water of the lake. Most of them are submerged below the surface. A few larger plants, water lilies, pondweeds and water buttercups emerge above the surface in order to have their flowers pollinated by wind or insects. Other plants, such as hornwort, are pollinated in the water, and the aquatic quillwort, lives and reproduces by spores underwater. Some of the aquatic animals, apart from frogs and salamanders, have the early part of their life in the water and emerge when they become adult. These include many insects like dragonflies, may-flies and numerous tiny midges.

Most of the organisms in the water are microscopic. Many of these are definitely plants and others are certainly animals, but a large number have both plant and animal characteristics. Several of these small organisms are active swimmers, some are just floaters or drifters, and a large number are sedentary, attached to stones, rocks, plants or animals. Many can be found in the detritus of the lake bed.

The swimming and inactive, free-floating organisms constitute plankton. Most of the plants belong to a great group known as algae. The animal life belongs to a number of groups and includes insects, rotifers, crustaceans, protozoa and a somewhat rare group -- tardigrades -- some times called water bears.

For some reason, workers in microscopic fresh-water biology rarely see these strange creatures. The writer, who has examined collections of fresh-water algae and plankton from nearly all parts of Canada has seen a few from a swamp near Holland River, Ontario, and some from a small pool on the west side of Lake Winnipeg, Manitoba. These were in preserved material. The first living water bears he found were in a small amount of mixed vegetation taken from Thetis Lake in October, 1959. In May 1962, more were found in some small masses of green algae in both Thetis and Shawnigan Lakes. They were also present in Thetis Lake in Mid-July and in November 1962.

(To be continued next month)

MEETINGS AND FIELD TRIPS

REGULAR MEETING: The regular monthly meeting of The  
 January 14, 1964 Victoria Natural History Society will  
 be held at 8 p.m. in the cafeteria of  
 the Douglas Building.  
 Dr. A.L. Orr-Ewing, M.C. Ph.D.,  
 Research Officer (genetics), B.C. Forest  
 Service, will give an illustrated talk  
 on "Forest Tree Breeding In B.C."

AUDUBON WILDLIFE FILM:

January 3 - 4 The third Audubon Wildlife Film will  
 be shown at 8 p.m. in Oak Bay Junior  
 High School. Mr. Edgar T. Jones will  
 present "Alberta Outdoors".

SPECIAL MEETING:

January 8 Mr. Chester P. Lyons will present his  
 film, "The Right To Live", at a special  
 meeting of Victoria Natural History  
 Society at 8 p.m., in the Douglas Bldg.  
 cafeteria. This meeting is open to  
 anyone wishing to attend.

ENTOMOLOGY:

January 18 Dr. John Chapman will lead an expedition  
 to Beaver Lake Pond. Meet at Monterey  
 parking lot, 9:30 a.m.

BIRD GROUP:

January 25 Meet at Monterey parking lot at 9:30  
 a.m. or Beaver Lake Park at 10 a.m.  
 Bring lunch. Alan Poynter will lead.

BOTANY GROUP:

January 28 Meet at the Provincial Museum at 8 p.m.  
 Freeman King will speak about and show  
 specimens found in Rithet's Swamp.

JUNIOR GROUP:

Meet every Saturday at 1:30 p.m. at  
 Monterey parking lot for field trips.

**HAPPY NEW YEAR:** The editors wish you health, happiness  
 and prosperity for 1964, and many years to come. May you  
 have good birding, bug hunting, fungus foraging, or what-  
 ever you do.

\*\*\*\*\*



# VICTORIA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

## OFFICERS, 1963-64

### Honorary Presidents

HON. EARL C. WESTWOOD  
Minister of Recreation and Conservation

MR. J. W. EASTMAN  
Former Provincial Plant Pathologist

### Honorary Life Members

DR. G. CLIFFORD CARL  
MR. GEORGE A. HARDY  
MR. FREEMAN F. KING  
MR. ALBERT R. DAVIDSON  
MR. GEORGE E. WINKLER

### Past Presidents

ROBERT CONNELL . . . . 1944-48  
G. CLIFFORD CARL . . . . 1948-49  
GEORGE A. HARDY . . . . 1949-50  
MRS. R. G. HOBSON . . . . 1950-52  
J. A. CUNNINGHAM . . . . 1952-54  
C. W. LOWE . . . . . 1954-56

A. O. HAYES . . . . . 1956-57  
P. M. MONCKTON . . . . 1957-58  
MRS. G. E. SOULSBY . . . 1958-59  
RALPH FRYER . . . . . 1960-  
FREEMAN KING . . . . . 1960-62  
P. J. CROFT . . . . . 1962-63

### President

MISS ENID K. LEMON  
1007 Government Street  
Telephone GR 7-2194

### Vice-President

G. A. POYNTER  
Telephone EV 4-8330

### Editors

W. D. REITH  
6882 Wallace Drive  
Brentwood Bay, B.C.  
Telephone GR 4-2223

G. CLIFFORD CARL  
410 Queen Anne Heights  
Telephone EV 3-8524

### Treasurer

J. L. RIMMINGTON  
3372 Henderson Road  
Telephone EV 4-9257

### Librarian

A. R. DAVIDSON  
Telephone EV 4-9595

### Secretary

MISS EDITH VALENS  
239 St. Andrews Street  
Telephone EV 5-8855

### Chairmen of Groups

Programme and Publicity  
FREEMAN KING  
Telephone GR 9-2966

Ornithology  
G. A. POYNTER.....EV 4-8330

Botany  
MISS M. C. MELBURN  
Telephone EV 4-9052  
MRS. F. A. SHERMAN  
R.R. 1, Sidney  
Telephone GR 5-2268

Entomology  
DR. JOHN A. CHAPMAN  
Telephone EV 4-5568

Zoology  
DR. G. CLIFFORD CARL  
Telephone EV 3-8524

Audubon Lectures  
MISS ENID K. LEMON  
Telephone GR 7-2194

Federation  
MRS. G. E. SOULSBY, EV 6-5028

Geology  
A. H. MARRION  
Telephone EV 4-1983

Juniors  
FREEMAN KING .....GR 9-2966  
MRS. K. OSBORNE.....EV 5-8164

Annual dues, including subscription:  
Single, \$2.00; Family, \$3.00; Junior, \$1.00; Life Membership, \$30.00;  
Life Membership, husband and wife, \$50.00.