

Althea Rosina Sherman

Althea Rosina Sherman was born (1853) and died (1943) in National Iowa, six miles west of the Mississippi River. Yet hers was not an insular life. This remarkable woman traveled widely, belonged to many scientific organizations, taught, sketched and was the author of several books and numerous articles.

After graduating from Oberlin College in Oberlin Ohio in 1875, Miss Sherman taught for four years before pursuing art studies at the Chicago Art Institute and the Art Students League in New York City. She earned her Masters in Art at Oberlin and then taught at Carleton College in MN and in Wichita KS; she was supervisor of drawing in Tacoma WA from 1892 until 1895 when she came home to assist in caring for her parents. Her sister, Amelia who was a medical doctor, shared the family home with her.

Their property, with its 162 species of birds deepened Althea's interest in birds. Although educated in art, not ornithology, her avian observations and her scholarly publications over the remainder of her life brought her considerable renown.

From November 1913 to August 1914, Miss Sherman enjoyed a 33,000 mile trip through Europe, the Middle East and Asia. She visited 20 countries and described the birds and archeological marvels in her book, *Birds by the Wayside*. The onset of World War I made it necessary to return home earlier than planned.

This opinionated observer had her own ideas about right and wrong in the world of birds; her initial admiration for house wrens turned to an implacable loathing. Several of her articles advocated removing wren boxes to reduce their predations against other birds.

Chimney swifts were another matter. In 1915 she designed and had a 28 foot-tall chimney swift tower built on the farm property in National. She used the tower to study the nesting habits of the swifts. After she died the original tower was moved and a replica was built in 2009; it is occasionally open for tours during non-breeding seasons. (Note: There is an article about modern chimney swift towers in the July/August issue of Audubon magazine. <http://www.audubonmagazine.org/web/swifftowers>.)

After her death, her friend, Fred J. Pierce, edited 60 notebooks of her bird observations, into the book, *Birds of an Iowa Dooryard*.