

Friedrick William Urich

Fr. Anthony de Verteuil C.S.Sp.

Spiritan House, Frederick St., Port of Spain

According to an old tradition, the Urich family originated in Switzerland. In 1888, Adolf christened his new home at St. Ann's, just outside Port Of Spain, Schweitzer House, that is Swiss House. However, the records from Germany show that as early as 1606, the Urich family were established in a little principality of Hesse, at first at the village of Umbstadt and then a century later at the town of Erbach. This was in "the very heartland of the beautiful mountain region of the Odenwald and the Vogelsberg, Hessen-Darmstadt and Oberhessen, - each little town with its church, castle, framework houses with pious sentences carved into beams, flower cases on the windows."

For some two centuries the Urichs were tradesmen or technicians, - shoemakers, surveyors, - marrying among their own social class, though in 1728 Johann F. Urich, then a shopkeeper, and no doubt deeply pierced by Cupid's shaft, married, perhaps just a little bit below his level, a blacksmith's daughter. After 1750, his son, Johann Otto Urich, is described as a Burgher, and Otto's son, Johann Balthazar Urich, born in 1777, became a land law actuary and married Caroline Gerold, the daughter of the Mayor of the nearby town. They were blessed with nine children, five boys and four girls, and in spite of the very difficult times consequent on the Napoleonic wars, they were all well educated, one of them in fact, was to become a medical doctor.

The outlook that was later to be described as *Bildung* (Education) was already in existence. It included a feeling for scholarship and art and for overall intellectual and moral striving. This admirable, solidly middle-class, Protestant ethic, the Urich's were to bring with them when they came to Trinidad.

In 1828, the Urich family council decided, that two of the young men in the family, Friedrich Gottfried, born in 1807, and his brother Wilhelm, just a year younger, should sail out to the island of Trinidad, in the West Indies, to

join their two uncles, Christian and Anselm Gerold, who ran a business in the capital, Port of Spain, and that later they might possibly go on to the United States.

And so, aged twenty one, Friedrich Urich came out to Trinidad, to be followed shortly after by his brother Wilhelm, and his first cousin Adolf Wuppermann.

Eventually, the Gerolds sent Friedrich to Angostura (Cuidad Bolivar) in Venezuela.....In 1834 Freidrich returned to Trinidad where he joined his uncles in the firm of Gerold and Urich. He returned to Germany to get married in 1841. In his diary he gives a full description of his proposal to Minchin Wilhemina Bauer... They had three sons and one daughter, Sophie, all born in Trinidad. The family lived on Abercromby Street. Their first child, Johann Frederick, born on the 4th July 1842, was Baptized at Trinity Cathedral on the 7th October. When he was twenty seven years old, in 1868, he married Marie Kernahan in St. Thomas.

The most notable of Frederick's children was Friederick William, popularly known as 'Jangoons'. Born in 1872, he was educated partly in Trinidad, partly in France and Germany (Cologne). He married Marie Seheult and had one child, Marie Louise (Liesel). His wife lived for years at Pau in the south of France where their daughter was educated. It was perhaps fortunate for her that she was not in Trinidad, for her husband was the quintessential scientist. He had laboured for a short while in the civil service but his great work was as an entomologist and zoologist, and as a professor at the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture (the forerunner of the University of the West Indies). He was never so happy as when he was celebrating the beauty and wonder of nature and especially in the smallest of creatures.

His home was basically a scientific laboratory. A visit to the bathroom would produce a glimpse of the insects known as "St.Peters" walking on the

waters of the bathtub. Two vampire bats were kept in a cage in the yard. Large tarantulas (hopefully safely confined) were fed regularly on cockroaches. Consulted about strange insects devouring the tomato plants, he found in them subjects for delightful study and not pests for destruction. But his favourite pet, which was often given the run of the yard, was a thick six-foot-long macajuel, named Cleo. On one occasion while he was entertaining guests, most appalling screams were heard coming from the maid in the yard. Urich rushed out and returned in a moment to the house, quite calmly announcing en passant that it was only Cleo! - the maid had gone to the dimly lit toilet and once in situ had discovered to her shock, that Cleo was inspecting her from close proximity.

Urich was a most congenial companion. In *Snake Hunter's Holiday*, by Ditmars and Bridges, a description is given of him and his house in 1930.

"About ten o' clock we called on the professor. He lived behind a pink stucco wall and an iron grill gate in a tiny little house that looked old-fashioned even for Port of Spain, where gingerbread effects are much appreciated as additions to architecture. We knocked and waited, knocked again and waited again, and presently an ancient Negress opened the door a crack and peered out. She promised to see if the professor was at home and we stood in the sun and mopped our faces until she returned and silently opened the door. Cecilia was a master of English and patois and as deft at mixing rum punch as her master, we discovered later, but she never used words when a gesture would talk for her. One glance around the living room told us we had not mistaken the house - a naturalist lived here. Professor Urich's living room spoke eloquently of a man and a scientist. There were a couple of small tables, marble-topped and unadorned, a few chairs, some stiff old oil paintings of stiff old gentlemen (his ancestors), and that was all that really

belonged to the room. Everything else was there because the Professor had dropped it there when he came in from a field excursion. A bay window was pretty well taken up with empty cages of wire and wood ; you had to look smart or you would trip over cans for transporting small fish. A heap of collecting bags filled one corner, bat nets the place of honour in the only rocking chair, and the handles leaned against the wall. The place was clean - scrubbed and spotless - but it was the habitation if a man who lived alone and for his own convenience. By all accounts, Professor Urich knew more about the natural history of Trinidad than any other man living.... He was stout and grizzled with a heavy, furrowed face tanned by many an expedition afield. But his face was kindly and stamped with that thoughtfulness and openness that you so often find in men who have spent their lives working out the puzzles of nature.....

We returned to Port of Spain and the Professor took up the familiar shouting, "Cécilia, fais trey punch!". "You know your President, Teddy Roosevelt, was fond of rum punch," he remarked as we sat around the little marble-topped table in his living room in the fast-gathering darkness, " He visited me here in 1916. At that time I happened to be in South Trinidad working on cane parasites and a messenger came out with orders to return to Port of Spain immediately. Teddy wanted to see the natural history of the island and I was assigned to show it to him. I think I must have succeeded. I showed him everything. I rather think he was on a diet of some kind and Mrs. Roosevelt didn't want him to drink, but we used to stop in here before we reported to his hotel after a day in the field, and have two or three rounds of rum punch. The day we went to a bat cave, he told me to bring along a flask of punch. He told Mrs. Roosevelt it was cold tea.

Oh yes, Teddy was dee-lighted with the punch."

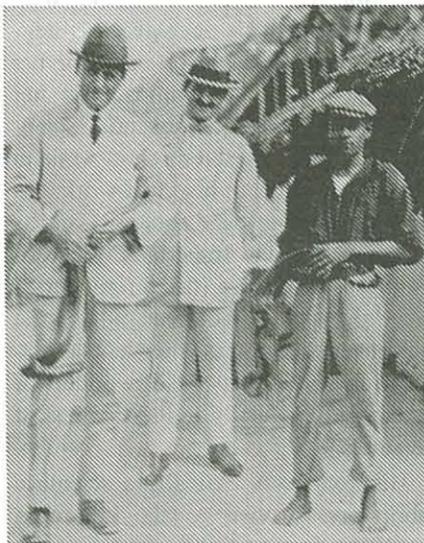
Urich was a foundation member (along with Broadway, Cacacciolo and Mole) of the Field Naturalists Society, which held their first meeting on the 10th July 1891. He was for some time the Secretary-Treasurer and contributed numerous papers to the society, being

an active member till shortly before his death. His papers were always interesting, for instance, speaking on "Mosquitoes and how to deal with them", not only did he suggest using the tiny fish *Cyprinodonte* to control the larvae, but brought a bowl of the fish into which he poured the larvae, which the fish (presumably starved in advance!) hungrily devoured. He stated that though a \$100 prize had been offered for the best means of raising dragonflies to eat mosquitoes, there was as yet no practical results. He ended by recommending that Eucalyptus branches could be hung by windows, the smell driving the mosquitoes away. Speaking on the feeding habits and skin-shedding of the rattlesnake, he brought a rattlesnake to the proceedings - but the animal would not oblige, it neither ate nor shed it's skin nor rattled.

The following are extracts from the September 1937 issue of the "Tropical Agricultural Journal", published shortly after Jangoon's death.

" Urich was a particularly outstanding example of the "born naturalist", a type which is all too rare these days .He was one of those students to whom scientific observation of living things is second nature and in his own subject, he certainly had an infinite capacity for taking pains. No group of animals ever seems to have been too insignificant to attract his attention with the result that his knowledge of species and of their modes of life was monumental.

A lifetime of distinguished technical work can hardly be summarised, but



"Jangoons" and company with an unidentified snake.

among the many problems which he studied may be mentioned his work on the Cacao Thrips and on the Sugar-Cane Frog-Hopper. His work on the former pest attracted much attention and he spent some time in the neighbouring colonies giving advice on control measures and even travelled to San Thomé at the instance of the Portuguese Government. He was also one of the very first entomologists to recognise the possibilities of the biological control of insect pests and he did much to put this on a scientific basis. Several outstandingly successful introductions of predacious and parasitic insects into other countries from Trinidad are the direct outcome of his pioneer work in this field.

As a field naturalist Urich was unsurpassed. His knowledge of the local fauna was truly amazing and he has done much to encourage its study by others, being a foundation member of the Field Naturalists' Club and an active participant in it's functions to the end of his life. His reputation abroad was, indeed, as much due to his work as a naturalist as to his more strictly official achievements, a reputation which his considerable linguistic ability did much to assist .

But apart from his technical qualifications, Urich will long be remembered for his engaging personality. He was a man of simple, yet cultivated tastes in many ways and he had the gift of making and retaining friendships. Several generations of students from the Imperial College will have kindly recollected his association. Naturally, we who worked in his own department knew him best, but for several years he came into contact with members of other departments, particularly through the week-end excursions which he used to organise to Aripo, Tuchuche and other parts of the Northern Range, of which he was so fond.

His Services were retained for the study of the local bats, in connection with the campaign against paralytic rabies. In this subject he made some notable discoveries on the feeding habits of carnivorous bats, which have a great importance in control operations. It was fortunate that he was able to publish at least a part of his work on this subject before his illness overtook him.

The importance of Urich's contribution to the scientific world becomes

clear when account is taken of the numerous new animal species that he discovered in Trinidad, which were hitherto unknown to modern science and which have consequently been named after him. The distribution of few (if any) is confined to Trinidad, and subsequent to his identification of the species, most have been discovered also on the South American mainland. Not surprisingly since Urich was also an entomologist, sixteen species of insects are numbered among the new species: five types of ants, a moth, a butterfly, and nine other kinds of insect, including *Liothrips urichi*, which was used in one of the earliest examples of biological control. But in accord with the scientist's wide range of interests, discoveries named after him vary widely, from a tiny field mouse, *Akodon urichi*, to a cute little frog with iridescent blue eyes, *Eleutherodactylus urichi* and even to a plant, a vine of the family Vacciniaceae with wax-like red and white flowers, *Psammisia urichi*, (common name, wild clove) found only at the top of Mount Tucheche and Cerro del Aripo. (A complete list of his discoveries is given below.)*

Even when he was well past middle age, "Jangoons" continued to lead expeditions to the northern range. One of his friends describes a visit to look for Guacharo birds:

"As I grew up our friendship became closer because of photography. He had very good equipment and often worked late into the night. I was always there with him. I became a very good photographer myself. He used to lend me his valuable equipment when I went off for jaunts into the county. We had many expeditions together. One of the most interesting was a visit to the caves in the Oropouche valley. We left before dawn and met the other members of the party at the end of the driving road about nine miles from the caves. There were about ten of us in the party, which included Sir Geoffrey Evans, the Principal of I.C.T.A. and a few students. The walk, up hill and down dale for 9 miles was strenuous. We each carried a torch and our food. Among mine was a thermos of hot coffee. The cave follows the course of a subterranean river. It was not easy going in pitch darkness. At times the roof was very low. There was danger of hitting your head on the stalactites. Before each step one had to ascertain the height of the roof above and the depth of the stream below. The only sounds were the murmur of the stream and the flapping of the guachero birds, that are the size of a chicken. Sometimes one had to clamber over rocks that were very slippery with the droppings of the birds. In some places the stream was broad and shallow, in

others it was narrow and deep. We were sometimes up to our waists in water. There was always the danger of dropping our torches which would have put us in a very difficult position. We travelled about a mile up the caves. No one has ever been to the end of it. There is a deep cave at the top of the Aripo Range which is supposed to be the source of the stream but no one has ever entered one end and come out the other. My hot coffee came in very useful on the way back. Jangoons, who was getting old then, looked very tired. He had to have a rest. I gave him my hot coffee. Got him to sit on a log and told the others to carry on. I would come along very slowly with Jangoons. We managed to get back to the car before dark. I cannot close this part of my recollections without mentioning Jangoon's rum punches. They were famous. It was a ritual with him. The most important part was a fresh lime preferably just picked off the tree. The punch was not mixed in a jug like everybody else's. That No! The glasses were placed in a row. Into each was placed a small quantity of sugar. Then a little water to melt the sugar, then the rum (and lime) and last of all crushed ice to fill the glass. Each was mixed with a small spoon and then ready to be consumed".

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* The following is a complete list of all the species discovered by Urich and to which his name was consequently given:

1. *Caecorhamdia urichi*. - the blind cat-fish found only in the Cumaca cave
2. *Akodon urichi* - mouse.
3. *Eleutherodactylus urichi*- frog
4. *Symmachia urichi* - butterfly
5. *Anastrepha urichi* - a fly
6. *Lygistorrhima urichi* - a fly
7. *Embia urichi*. - a strange little insect that spins webs with silk from glands in the front legs.
8. *Natada urichi*. - a moth
9. *Waldheimia urichi*.- hymenopteran insect.
10. *Xenomymar urichi*. - hymenopteran insect.
11. *Trissolcus urichi*. - hym. insect.
12. *Spelaeomyrmex urichi*. -an ant.
13. *Sericomyrmex urichi*. - an ant.
14. *Apterostigma urichi*. - an ant.
15. *Trachymyrmex urichi*. - an ant.
16. *Camponotus urichi*. - an ant
17. *Paraleyrodes urichi*. - a bug
18. *Liothrips urichi*. - a thrips
19. *Xyleborus urichi*. - a beetle
20. *Psammisia urichiana* - a vine of the family Vacciniaceae