

By SARITA WEEKS

He might have been born in South America or Europe or Russia or China, Africa or Australia, but he was not. It was our great fortune that God Almighty chose our verdant Chautauqua County in the state of New York and our small city of kind people — Jamestown — to be the birthplace of Roger Tory Peterson. The same who became the greatest ornithologist of the last century and one might say of the entire world, who has been honored by scientists, royalty and layman for his immense contribution to the world.

Alas too many Jamestowners still think of him as the boy next door who was "crazy about birds," but many young people do not even know who he is! This is shocking, as Peterson is a giant among the giants of history who not

only uncovered nature's wonders for us to see, but taught us to observe exactly, minutely and reverently the world about us and its creatures with which the good Lord chose to enrich and embellish our lives.

It is hard to realize that Peterson, the genius revered around the world should have been born at 12 Bowen St. in Jamestown. His father, a Swede, was Carl Gustaf Peterson from Karlstad County Parish, Sweden, and his mother was Henrietta Bader from Germany. Both were immigrants to this country. His father was a cabinet maker who wanted his son to become a good responsible wage earner.

The ghost of an ancestor journeyman painter Carl Gottfield Folchert who lived in 1730 is the only antecedent who might have endowed Roger Tory Peterson with his exceptional skill as a painter ...

Peterson's life as a young boy was



not affluent and joyful, but rather somber and when he joined a Junior Audubon Club at age 11, a dazzling world of living singing color appeared to his eager heart. Here, on a butterfly's, a moth's and a bird's wing, in a soft dark mossy wood or a golden field he might escape from his stern father who it is said was a firm disciplinarian if he thought his son had done wrong. In the warm embrace of nature his longings for peace and beauty were assuaged.

Thus the pattern for Peterson's extraordinary life was set. He roamed the four corners of the world as well as the Arctic and Antarctica with the same quiet determination as he had roamed the lovely hills and dales and lake of Chautauqua County with his friends Carl Hammerstrom and Clarence Beal.

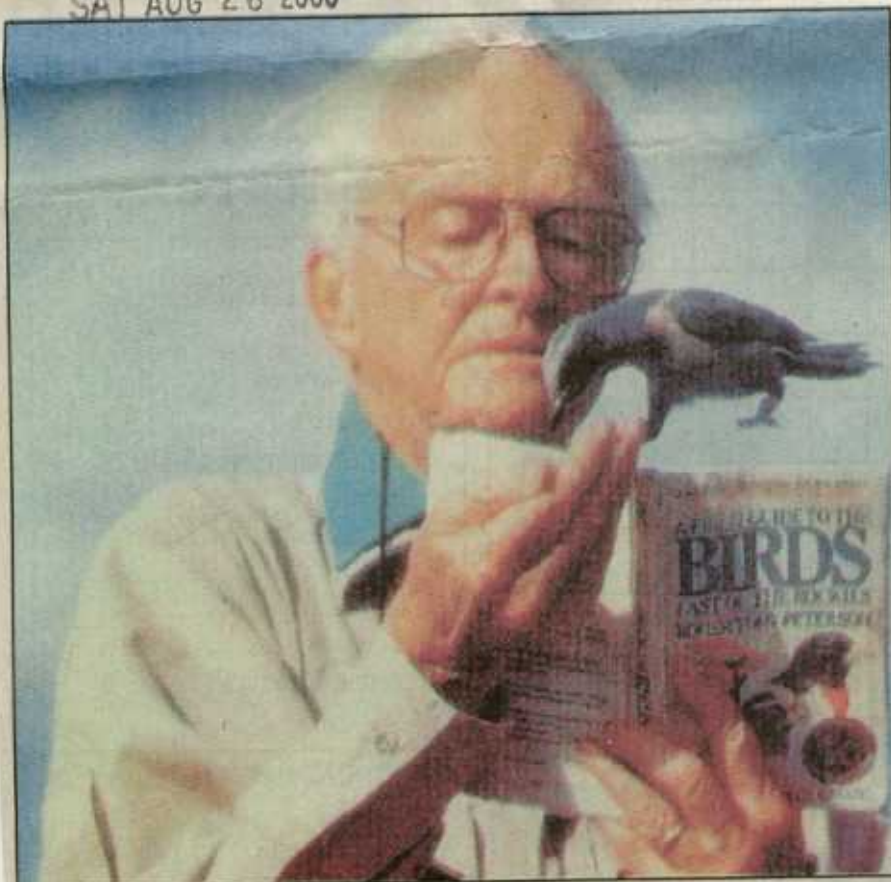
Peterson grew up to be a 6-foot-tall man, weighing about 180 pounds, handsome aquiline nosed, slender and unbelievably strong. His legs were of steel permitting him to climb to the highest, sharpest, most dangerous rock peak to photograph an eagle's nest, or allowing him to trek for miles and miles in the ice and snowy expanses of Antarctica in sub-zero weather to photograph one of his favorite birds, the penguins, of which he took 100,000 slides.

Only a man possessed of extreme determination and an indomitable spirit could have pursued his dreams across marshes and deserts and mountains and plains as he did. He was, one might say, inebriated by the magic of nature and especially of birds. Shortly before he died in 1996, he estimated that he had seen 5,000 of the world's total of 9,000 species of birds.

The very first bird he saw and touched was a flicker and one of the birds he rather liked was a blue jay because it was so cocky and assured.

Peterson must have been born under a lucky star on Aug. 28, 1908, for civilization had arrived at that point to provide him with the two essential "tools of his trade" — binoculars that allowed the viewer to see not only at a distance, but in great detail, and the modern miracle of the camera and its magical film, which

SAT AUG 26 2000



Above, Peterson holds a copy of his *A Field Guide to the Birds* while a scrub jay lands on his hand to eat out of his hand. At top is Peterson's painting of a flicker.