

= Guy Bradley =

Guy Morrell Bradley ( April 25 , 1870 ? July 8 , 1905 ) was an American game warden and deputy sheriff for Monroe County , Florida . Born in Chicago , Illinois , he relocated to Florida with his family when he was young . As a boy , he often served as guide to visiting fishermen and plume hunters , although he later denounced poaching after legislation was passed to protect the dwindling number of birds . In 1902 , Bradley was hired by the American Ornithologists ' Union , at the request of the Florida Audubon Society , to become one of the country 's first game wardens .

Tasked with protecting the area 's wading birds from hunters , he patrolled the area stretching from Florida 's west coast , through the Everglades , to Key West , single @-@ handedly enforcing the ban on bird hunting . Bradley was shot and killed in the line of duty , after confronting a man and his two sons who were hunting egrets in the Everglades . His much @-@ publicized death at the age of 35 galvanized conservationists , and served as inspiration for future legislation to protect Florida 's bird populations . Several national awards and places have been named in his honor .

= = Early life = =

Guy Bradley was born in Chicago , Illinois , in 1870 . His family had strong ties to the city ; his father , Edwin Ruthven Bradley , was born there in 1840 , and two members of the family held high positions in Chicago 's law enforcement . Six years after Guy 's birth , the family relocated to Florida . After making their home in smaller towns , the family eventually settled in Fort Lauderdale , where Edwin became keeper of the Fort Lauderdale House of Refuge . Shortly after the death of Bradley 's sister Flora from an unknown illness ? which also affected Guy , leaving him ill for several years ? the family moved to Lake Worth . Edwin became a postman , earning an annual wage of six hundred dollars . He , with the help of his oldest son , later received national attention for being one of several barefoot mailmen , who operated until a road was constructed in 1892 .

The family then relocated to Miami , where Edwin served as superintendent of the Dade County school district . In 1885 , fifteen @-@ year @-@ old Guy and his older brother Louis served as scouts for noted French plume hunter Jean Chevalier on his trip to the Everglades . Accompanied by their friend Charlie Pierce , the men set sail on Pierce 's craft , the Bonton , ending their journey in Key West . At the time , plume feathers ? selling for more than \$ 20 an ounce ( \$ 501 in 2011 ) ? were reportedly more valuable than gold . On their expedition , which lasted several weeks , the young men and Chevalier 's party killed 1 @,@ 397 individual birds of thirty @-@ six different species .

= = Hunt for plumes = =

At the turn of the 20th century , vast numbers of birds were being killed in order to provide feathers to decorate women 's hats . The fashion craze , which began in the 1870s , became so prominent that by 1886 birds were being killed for the millinery trade at a rate of five million a year ; many species faced extinction as a result . In Florida , plume birds were first driven away from the most populated areas in the northern part of the state , and forced to nest further south . Rookeries concentrated in and around the Everglades area , which had abundant food and seasonal dry periods , ideal for nesting birds . By the late 1880s , there were no longer any large numbers of plume birds within reach of Florida 's most settled cities .

The most popular plumes came from various species of wading birds , known as " little snowies " for their snowy @-@ white feathers ; even more prized were the " nuptial plumes " , grown during mating season and displayed by birds during courtship . Poachers often stole into the densely populated rookeries , where they would shoot and then pluck the roosting birds clean , leaving their carcasses to rot . Unprotected eggs became easy prey for predators , as were newly hatched birds , who also starved or died from exposure . One ex @-@ poacher would later write of the practice , " The heads and necks of the young birds were hanging out of the nests by the hundreds . I am done with bird hunting forever ! "

In the mid @-@ 1890s , Edwin became head of the Florida Coast Line Canal and Transportation Company and then the Model Land Company , both of which sold land for the railroads . In 1900 , after twenty years living in Lake Worth , the family moved to Flamingo in Monroe County , near the Everglades . Edwin had heard that railroad tycoon Henry Flagler planned to build his railroad through the area , and that the then primitive city of Flamingo would flourish as a result ; Flagler later changed his mind , deciding to build to Key West instead . Guy and his brother , who continued working as guides and hunters , each received a quarter of a mile of land on Florida Bay as part of their father 's deal with the Model Land Company . While working variously as a postman , farmer and boatman during his 20s , Guy continued to augment his income with an occasional plume hunt . In 1899 , he married the young widow Sophronia ( " Fronie " ) Vickers Kirvin from Key West . Their first child , Morrell , was born a year later .

= = Game warden = =

When the Florida legislature passed the American Ornithologists ' Union ( AOU ) model law to outlaw the killing of plume birds , this created a need for qualified and competent wardens to enforce it . Kirk Munroe , a friend of the Bradley family and a founding vice president of the Florida Audubon Society , recommended Guy for the position . Seen as different from the other " wild " young men in Flamingo , Bradley was described as " pleasant , quiet ? fair , with blue eyes , always whistling and a pretty good violinist ? [ a ] social asset to the isolated , frontier community , clean @-@ cut , reliable , courageous , energetic and conscientious " .

Bradley was at this time a reformed plume hunter , who had given up the profession after the passage of the Lacey Act of 1900 . In a letter to William Dutcher , president of the Florida Audubon Society , Bradley wrote " I used to hunt plume birds , but since the game laws were passed , I have not killed a plume bird . For it is a cruel and hard calling not withstanding being unlawful . I make this statement upon honor . " Soon after being accepted for the position , Bradley traveled to Key West to secure his appointment as both game warden and deputy sheriff , which gave him the authority to arrest those hunting illegally .

As one of the first game wardens , Bradley was responsible for reporting suspected poachers and the businesses with which they worked . He was paid a monthly stipend of \$ 35 ( \$ 917 in 2010 ) to single @-@ handedly patrol the enormous area stretching from the Ten Thousand Islands on Florida 's west coast , through the Everglades , to Key West , which served as nesting areas for popular plume birds such as egrets , herons , spoonbills and ibis . Bradley took his job seriously ; he educated locals about the newly implemented laws which made plume hunting a punishable offense , spoke to hunters directly , and posted warning signs throughout his territory . He also set up a network of spies who watched for suspicious behavior , and employed his brother Louis and others close to him to work as assistant wardens during the height of the plume season .

= = Difficulties = =

In 1903 , President Theodore Roosevelt created the first wildlife refuge in the United States , Pelican Island . Its first warden , Paul Kroegel , joined forces with Bradley to enforce the illegality of bird @-@ hunting in Florida . By 1904 , the various Audubon organizations had 34 wardens employed in ten states . Conservationist publications were optimistic that Bradley and other wardens would be successful in their enforcement ; in AOU 's January 1904 issue of The Auk , an editor wrote : " The natives are beginning to realize that the birds are to be protected and that the wardens are fearless men who are not to be trifled with . The Bradleys have the reputation of being the best rifle shots in that vicinity and they would not hesitate to shoot when necessary . "

After accepting the position as game warden , however , Bradley became a vilified figure in southern Florida ; working alone , with no reinforcements , he had been shot at more than once . In 1904 , Bradley alerted visiting ornithologist and author Frank Chapman that one of the more isolated rookeries , called Cuthbert , had been " shot out " despite previously having been found to be in good condition . He reportedly said , " You could 've walked right around the Rookery on those bird

's bodies ? between four and five hundred of them . "

Bradley took the slaughter to mean that he was being watched by local hunters , who only could have discovered the rookery by tracking his movements . Chapman later wrote , " Under his guardianship the ' white birds ' had increased in numbers , which , with aigrettes selling at \$ 32 an ounce , made the venture worth the risk ( for there was a risk ; as the man who attempted to ' shoot out ' a rookery while Bradley was on guard would probably have lost his own ' plume ' ) ; the warden watched and in his absence his charges were slaughtered . "

= = Death = =

On July 8 , 1905 , Bradley heard gunshots close to his waterfront home in Flamingo . He set sail in his small skiff , and encountered a father and his two sons by the name of Smith , who were shooting up a rookery . The families had known each other for years , but Civil War veteran Walter Smith had a reputation for being troublesome , and Bradley had previously had altercations with him . He had arrested Smith on one occasion and Smith 's oldest son , Tom , twice for poaching . Smith threatened to retaliate against Bradley if he tried again , reportedly telling the warden , " You ever arrest one of my boys again , I 'll kill you . "

According to Walter Smith 's account , Bradley encountered the three men as they were loading dead plume birds onto their boat . An argument ensued , and as the warden attempted to arrest one of the young men , Smith opened fire with his hunting rifle , fatally wounding Bradley . His body was found the next day by his brother 's search party , after drifting 10 miles ( 16 km ) from the scene of the crime . He had bled to death .

= = Aftermath = =

Smith set sail to Key West and turned himself in to the authorities the next day . Despite evidence found by the prosecution ? paid for by the Florida Audubon Society ? that Bradley had not fired his weapon , Smith claimed self @-@ defense . He maintained that the warden had fired first , but missed , hitting Smith 's boat . Those who knew Bradley , however , insisted that he had been an excellent shot , and would not have missed his target had he , in fact , shot first . Smith later was found not guilty of murder , when the jury decided there was insufficient evidence to convict ; he served only five months in jail , unable to pay \$ 5 @,@ 000 for bail . While he was incarcerated , Bradley 's two brothers @-@ in @-@ law burned down Smith 's Flamingo home .

Bradley 's death and Smith 's acquittal made national headlines ; detailed stories ran in the New York Times , the New York Herald , the Philadelphia North American , and Forest and Stream . The warden 's wife and two young children were given a home in Key West , paid for by donations secured by the Florida Audubon Society . The Society , however , made no effort to replace Bradley , and his job as warden went unfilled . Bradley 's obituary , written by William Dutcher and published in August 1905 's edition of Bird Lore , characterized him as " fearless and brave . " Dutcher eulogized Bradley by saying , " A faithful and devoted warden , who was a young and sturdy man , cut off in a moment , for what ? That a few more plume birds might be secured to adorn heartless women 's bonnets . Heretofore the price has been the life of the birds , now is added human blood . Every great movement must have its martyrs , and Guy M. Bradley is the first martyr in bird protection . "

With no one to replace Bradley , lawlessness continued in the Everglades and rookeries were devastated for several more years . Frank Chapman remarked that " There is no community sufficiently law @-@ abiding to leave a bank vault unmolested if it were left unprotected . We have given up . We can 't protect it , and the rookery will have to go . " In November 1908 , game warden and deputy sheriff of DeSoto County , Columbus G. McLeod , went missing near Charlotte Harbor . A month later , his boat was found weighted down and sunk ; inside , police found the warden 's bloodstained hat , long gashes cut into the crown with what appeared to be an axe . It was suspected that he was killed by poachers . His body was never found and the perpetrators were not caught . Later that year , an employee of the South Carolina Audubon Society , Pressly Reeves ,

was shot and killed during an ambush by unknown assailants .

= = Legacy = =

These three deaths within as many years helped end the commercial trade of feathers from Florida . In 1910 , the New York legislature passed the Audubon Plumage Act , outlawing the plume trade ; other states followed , and Congress soon banned the import of hats decorated with bird feathers . In time , the fashion craze for bird feathers faded . As the demand for plumage dwindled , thousands of birds returned to the Everglades rookeries ; adventure writer Zane Grey wrote after visiting a creek near Cape Sable :

Though we saw birds everywhere , in the air and on the foliage , we were not in the least prepared for what a bend in the stream disclosed . Banks of foliage as white with curlew as if with heavy snow ! With tremendous flapping of wings that merged into a roar , thousands of curlew took wing , out over the water . ? It was a most wonderful experience .

Bradley was buried on a shell ridge at Cape Sable , overlooking Florida Bay . A nearby monument was erected by the Florida Audubon Society , reading : " Guy M. Bradley , 1870 ? 1905 , Faithful Unto Death , As Game Warden of Monroe County He Gave his Life for the Cause to Which He Was Pledged " . The grave and monument , however , were later washed away in 1960 's Hurricane Donna . The original gravestone was recovered , and is now on display at the Flamingo Visitor Center . A nearby plaque was also dedicated to Bradley 's memory , and reads : " Audubon warden was shot and killed off this shore by outlaw feather hunters , July 8 , 1905 . His martyrdom created nationwide indignation , strengthened bird protection laws and helped bring Everglades National Park into being . "

The story of Bradley 's defense of the Everglades ' birds , and the manner of his death , has been depicted in both literature and film . Author Marjory Stoneman Douglas , who would later become famous for publicizing the need for conserving and restoring the Everglades , based the hero of her 1930 short story " Plumes " on Bradley . The 1958 film *Wind Across the Everglades* , starring Christopher Plummer and Burl Ives , was loosely based upon Bradley 's life and death .

In 1988 , the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation established the Guy Bradley Award to recognize achievements in wildlife law enforcement . The award is presented annually to two recipients , one state and one federal officer . Another honor , the Guy Bradley Lifetime Conservation Award , was established in 1997 by the Audubon Society Everglades Ecosystem Restoration Campaign to those who promote conservation and offer workable conservation solutions . A trail in the Everglades , leading from the Flamingo Visitor Center to the Flamingo Campground , also was named in Bradley 's honor .