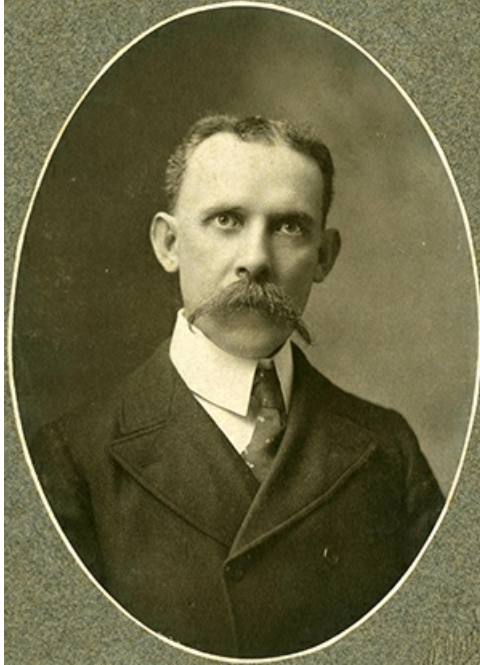


Elisha Mitchell Scientific Society ^[1]

Elisha Mitchell Scientific Society

by Nancy Smith Midgette, 2006



Francis Preston Venable, founder of the Elisha Mitchell Scientific Society. Image from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries.

The Elisha Mitchell Scientific Society, founded in Chapel Hill in 1883 by Francis Preston Venable ^[2] and other University of North Carolina ^[3] scientists, served as a forerunner of the modern North Carolina Academy of Science ^[4]. Scientists throughout the post-Civil War South, employed largely by underfunded colleges and universities ^[5], found themselves unable to travel to national disciplinary meetings and thus isolated from the spirit of professionalism that was sweeping the nation. Well educated and determined to pursue careers as professional scientists, Venable and his colleagues sought to establish the camaraderie they deemed essential to their intellectual growth and research efforts.

During 1883-84 the society, named for UNC scientist and educator Elisha Mitchell ^[6] (1793-1857), convened seven times, offered a total of 67 papers, and attracted 82 regular members, including UNC faculty, educators from other colleges throughout the state, and members of the community. But despite the organization's apparently successful beginning, it declined steadily thereafter. Given the difficulty of travel even over relatively short distances, few out-of-town members attended meetings. Meanwhile, local citizens lost interest in the technical presentations, and a series of more general public lectures did little to boost interest. By 1888 membership had declined to 66 persons, 41 of whom lived less than 60 miles from Chapel Hill.

In effect, the Elisha Mitchell Scientific Society had become a local organization and in 1892 chose to limit its membership to UNC faculty and students. A decade later North Carolina scientists formed the North Carolina Academy of Science to meet their professional needs. Meanwhile, the Mitchell Society met sporadically until 1983, when it officially "passed its torch" to the larger, statewide academy.

References:

Nancy Smith Midgette, *To Foster the Spirit of Professionalism: Southern Scientists and State Academies of Science* (1991).

Midgette, "Vanguard of a New Generation: The Elisha Mitchell Scientific Society and the Scientific Profession in the South," *Journal of the Elisha Mitchell Scientific Society* 100 (Summer 1984).

Additional Resources:

"Elisha Mitchell 1793-1857." North Carolina Highway Historical Marker Program.

<https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?ct=ddl&sp=search&k=Markers&sv=N-38> ^[7] (November 7, 2012).

Journal of the Elisha Mitchell Scientific Society / Journal of the North Carolina Academy of Science search page.
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries. <http://www.lib.unc.edu/dc/jncas/index.php> [8] (November 7, 2012).

"About the Journal." University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Libraries. <http://www.lib.unc.edu/dc/jncas/about.php> [9]
(November 7, 2012).

"Elisha Mitchell Scientific Society Records, 1883-1983 Collection No: 40183." Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/uars/ead/40183.html> [10] (November 7, 2012).

Journal of the Elisha Mitchell Scientific Society at Archive.org. <https://archive.org/search.php?query=Journal%20of%20the%20Elisha%20Mitchell%20Scientific%20Society> [11] (November 7, 2012).

Image Credits:

Cole & Holliday. "Francis Preston Venable." Durham, N.C. North Carolina Collection Photographic Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/vir_museum/id/671
(November 7, 2012). [12]

Subjects:

[Gilded Age \(1876-1900\)](#) [13]

[Science, technology, and innovations](#) [14]

Authors:

[Midgette, Nancy Smith](#) [15]

Origin - location:

[University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#) [16]

From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) [17]

1 January 2006 | Midgette, Nancy Smith

Source URL: <https://www.ncpedia.org/elisha-mitchell-scientific-society>

Links

[1] <https://www.ncpedia.org/elisha-mitchell-scientific-society> [2] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/venable-francis-preston> [3]
<https://www.ncpedia.org/university-north-carolina-chapel-hi> [4] <https://www.ncpedia.org/north-carolina-academy-science> [5]
<https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/universities-and-> [6] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/mitchell-elisha-0> [7]
<https://www.ncdcr.gov/about/history/division-historical-resources/nc-highway-historical-marker-program/Markers.aspx?ct=ddl&sp=search&k=Markers&sv=N-38> [8] <http://www.lib.unc.edu/dc/jncas/index.php> [9] <http://www.lib.unc.edu/dc/jncas/about.php> [10]
<http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/uars/ead/40183.html> [11] <https://archive.org/search.php?query=Journal%20of%20the%20Elisha%20Mitchell%20Scientific%20Society> [12] http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/vir_museum/id/671
[13] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/gilded-age-1876-1> [14] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/science> [15]
<https://www.ncpedia.org/category/authors/midgette-nancy-smi> [16] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/piedmon-33> [17]
<https://www.ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/encyclopedia->