



# A Love Affair with Birds: The Life of Thomas Sadler Roberts

*Sue Leaf*

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Imagine a Minneapolis so small that, on calm days, the roar of St. Anthony Falls could be heard in town, a time when passenger pigeons roosted in neighborhood oak trees. Now picture a dapper professor conducting his ornithology class (the university's first) by streetcar to Lake Harriet for a morning of bird-watching. The students were mostly young women—in sunhats, sailor tops, and long skirts, with binoculars strung around their necks. The professor was Thomas Sadler Roberts (1858–1946), a doctor for three decades, a bird lover virtually from birth, the father of Minnesota ornithology, and the man who, perhaps more than any other, promoted the study of the state's natural history. *A Love Affair with Birds* is the first full biography of this key figure in Minnesota's past.

Roberts came to Minnesota as a boy and began keeping detailed accounts of Minneapolis's birds. These journals, which became the basis for his landmark work *The Birds of Minnesota*, also inform this book, affording a view of the state's rich avian life in its early days—and of a young man whose passion for birds and practice of medicine among Minneapolis's elite eventually dovetailed in his launching of the beloved Bell Museum of Natural History.

Bird enthusiast, doctor, author, curator, educator, conservationist: every chapter in Roberts's life is also a chapter in the state's history, and in his story acclaimed author Sue Leaf—an avid bird enthusiast and nature lover herself—captures a true Minnesota character and his time.



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