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Erster jahresbericht des vereins  
für erdkunde zu Dresden.  
1865.





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## Erster Jahresbericht des Vereins für Erdkunde zu Dresden. 1865.

Two Reports, issued by a Geographical Society formed in Dresden, Saxony, March 27, 1863, have been recently received from them. The above number, which has been more particularly examined, contains an account of the organization with 23 members, and their proceedings for one year. Their meetings were held on the first Friday of each month, and one evening a week they assembled for *conversazione*. The Reports embrace two years, are in German, and worthy a diligent perusal. Their monthly meetings are conducted very much like our own; after the reports are made and matters of business disposed of, a lecture or reading is given by some one on a topic connected with the grand object of the Society, and whenever the expected reader is absent, their President, the Consul, Dr. Charles Andree, seems ready to supply his place, with an ability and learning which must be highly appreciated, if we may judge from these valuable and fascinating reports. As the Society is composed of scholars, accomplished travellers, intelligent navigators and professional gentlemen, and probably many inquirers after truth, for in one year they had increased to 143 members, the lectures must have been exceedingly interesting. A cursory view of the subjects introduced, so far as reported for the first year, will verify our opinion. Dr. Andree began with erudite remarks on the history of Geography, which for ages seemed to sleep, until Humboldt appeared and a host of others. Dr. Schlomilch's observations on the great questions of a new admeasurement of a Degree on the earth (as that made by Eratosthenes, A. C. 276, between Syene and Alexandria, was not perfectly accurate), and the fact that Austrian, Prussian and Saxon commissioners were taking measures for this purpose, are here stated. Dr. Oberlander's description of the Australian Colony, and of the aborigines in that inhospitable region; Dr. Hantsche's picturesque view of the Harem in Persia, and its unhappy tendency to idleness and all manner of evil; Lieut. W. Schultz's relation of his sojourn in Brazil; Dr. Behrner on the sect of the Druses in Arabia, their origin and dangerous power; Dr. B. J. Schmidt's passage of the great Cordillera of the Andes in 1856, a mountain said to be 14,000 feet above the level of the sea, with volcanic peaks where he found vegetation sterile and salt marshes, without food or water for the caravan, and where not a wild animal, or even a chaffer (*Rafes*) broke the monotony among the thorn bushes and crippled plants in the dreary path to the Pampas; and finally the observations of Pres. Andree on German emigrants—who settled as farmers in Pennsylvania, a most thriving and industrious race, all these will be found attractive, as a novel, and peculiarly valuable for information. We have not room to embrace the subsequent readings in the second number of these reports, but we cannot pass over in silence the learned and elaborate essay of 23 pp. on the Chaldaic Seleucus, whom Dr. Sophus Ruge demonstrates to have been one of the ancient precursors of the Copernican system.

One subject, however, has been reserved and set apart from the above summary for a more particular notice. I refer to the reading of Lieut. Schultz, who had been a long time in South America. He gave an account of a Muscle-bill (*Muschel*) of large dimensions described in a MS. he met with, written by Antonio Bieira, a missionary, in 1653, which was found on the seacoast of Maranham in Brazil—whether the island or main of that name is meant, he does not state; but the important fact is, that this huge hill of shells was similar to one on the seashore in Denmark. Pres. Andree afterwards goes on to describe the Danish Muscle-hills, and mentions the discovery of bones and skeletons; and among them the bones of the "mountain cock" were disinterred; and he further remarks, that as this bird lived among firs, the bill of shells must have been covered with them long ago, as the fir-tree there had given way to a grove of beech, and that to another of oaks, evincing the lapse of many ages.



Now it is well known that in clearing up the land in New England, a growth of hard wood is usually followed by a forest of firs and pines. This Muscle-hill, therefore, must have been of great antiquity, and perhaps it was the hand work of North men, long before Columbus discovered America. For a reference to these Muscleshills brings to our recollection a very remarkable Oyster-shell deposit or mound, situated in Newcastle, County of Lincoln, State of Maine. It lies on the western bank of Damariscotta river, upon a projection of land, forming part of the homestead or estate of the late Samuel and Joseph Glidden; an estate which has been in that family (who are supposed to be of Danish descent) five or six generations. I believe it is now the property of William T. Glidden, Esq., of the firm of Glidden & Williams in this city.

Several writers have alluded to this spot of mysterious origin; but the most descriptive and accurate account of it may be found in the Third Report of that eminent Geologist, Dr. Charles T. Jackson, of Boston, who in 1838, when he was Geological Surveyor of Maine, visited this spot on the 3d of August.

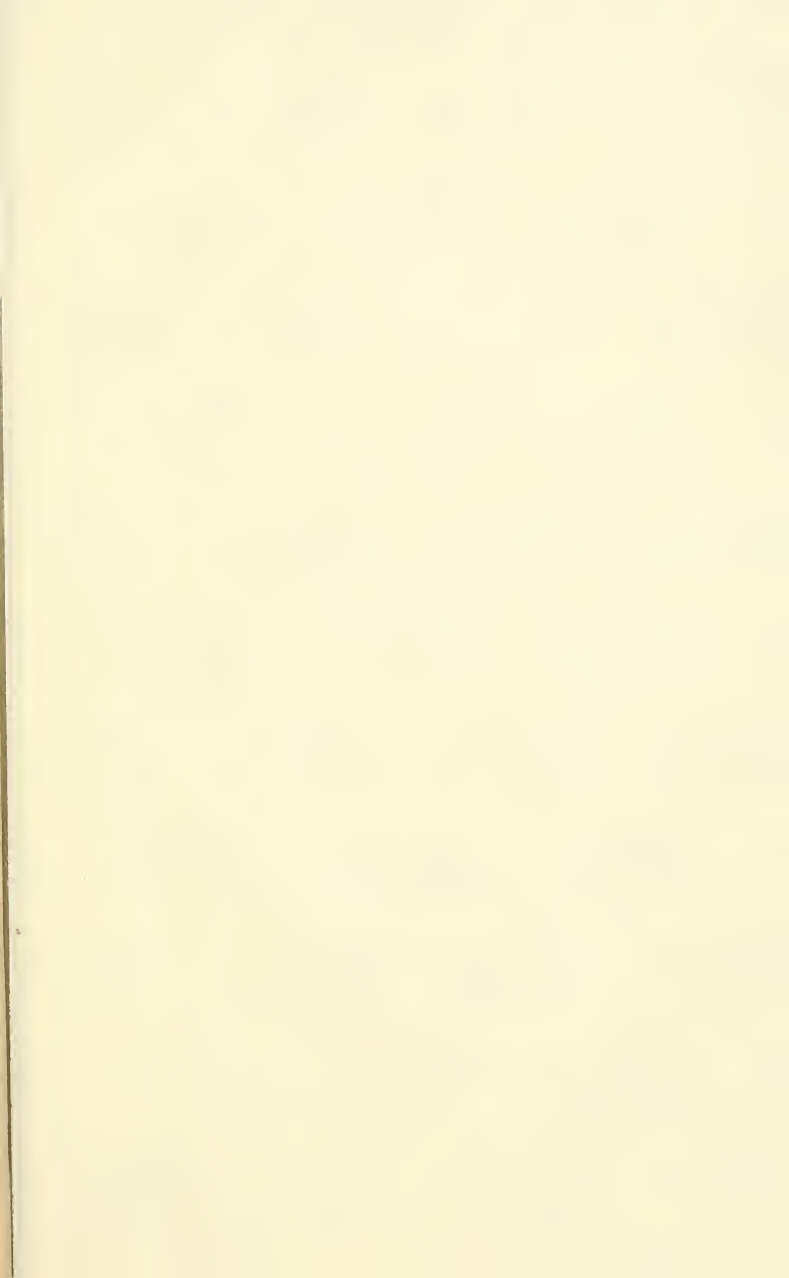
"This bed of oyster-shells forms a cliff at the highest point 25 feet above the sea level, and slopes down to the shore, six feet above high water mark, and extends 108 rods in length, and from 80 to 100 in width. These shells are disposed in regular layers and are very perfectly preserved, being whitened by the action of the weather, whenever exposed, and forming a fine shell marl. . . . . From our measurement it would appear there are no less than 44,906,400 of cubic feet of shells in this bed."

The writer of this notice visited this spot some years ago, and as he walked along the shore beneath the bank of oyster shells, he observed them as if they were arranged in layers in a perpendicular wall 12 or 15 feet high, smooth and uniform as though cut down by some supernatural hand. This spot is about a mile from Nobleborough bridge below, and from the falls above. Several large trees are flourishing on this spot, and it is said it was once covered with a heavy growth of hard wood.

"Various conjectures," says Dr. Jackson, "have been formed as to the origin of this deposit, and the general belief is, that these shells were heaped up there by the ancient Indian tribes, who formerly frequented the spot. The regular stratiform position and the perfection of the shells, appear to oppose this theory, as also the scarcity of living oysters in the neighboring salt water. They are, however, of comparatively recent deposition, for they evidently rest on diluvial soil. It is said that arrow heads, bone stilettoes and human bones have been found in the bed of shelves near the surface." Judge Williamson, in his History of Maine, vol. i. p. 166, remarks that "oysters were originally plenty" on the seaboard of Maine. They were once found in Oyster Creek so called, in Damariscotta river, and in St. George's river, but are now nearly extinct.

The Danish and Brazilian Muscleshills and the oyster mound all bear on their face the features of great antiquity. Why might not all these have been planted by the same race? For it must be remembered that Muscle (*Musculæ*) is a generic term for bivalves of various kinds. What was this vast collection of shells intended for? Could it have been for a cemetery, as bones and skeletons have been found in its bosom? By whom was it made? That in Denmark must have been by the Danes. Is it not only possible, but probable that this Oyster Deposit was the work of the Northmen, and now stands as a monument of their emigration to this country long, long ago. The subject is a profound mystery, and deserves investigation. s.

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