

Sketch of Fielding Bradford Meek (1817-1876)



Twice-A-Week Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 18 October 1913, p5:



On a certain day in the year of grace 1838 a large boat came floating down the Ohio river and landed at Yellow Banks, a small village located on the site of the modern city of Owensboro. The villagers allowed but a short time to elapse before they hied them to the river shore to inspect and find out about the new comer. They soon discovered that it was a respectable sort of

flat boat fitted up as a store boat on the interior with shelves and counters, and on the shelves a stock of dry goods and other merchandise.

The two proprietors in charge were a young man of twenty-one years, one Fielding B. Meek, and the other Capt. Samuel Heath, ten or fifteen years his senior. The boat had been fitted out at Madison, Ind., where Meek had spent his life and of which Heath had for sometime been a resident. Shortly after preparing and equipping the boat the owners decided to sail for Yellow Banks and open business there. Their boat on arrival at its destination was made fast near a brick warehouse on the river bank, and the public was notified that Messrs. Heath & Meek were ready to do business with those desiring goods in their line.

As some of our readers may be curious to know where that brick warehouse was located, we gratify their curiosity by stating that the river bank on the south side at that point in 1838 was located about a half mile nearer the Indiana shore than it is today, and soundings at about that distance out will no doubt bring up some of the veritable bricks used in that ancient structure.

Capt. Heath was a person of popular manners and soon ingratiated himself into public favor. There was nothing puritanical about him, or his tastes, and he had no difficulty in rapidly adjusting himself to all the social observances of the community. He had had experience in the business of a merchant and ranked high among good salesmen in that day and region, the credit system was universal. It had never been nipped by the cold frosts which of later years have sadly denuded it of its seductive attractions. So it was not long until the tide of trade flowed freely to the store boat.

In various points of view there was a decided contrast between Mr. Meek and his partner. The former was inclined to be timid and reserved in manner, neat in dress, with the unmistakable bearing of a gentleman. He was new to the business of the merchants, and depended largely on the superior knowledge and experience of his senior. One of his biographers speaks of his life before coming to Yellow Banks as follows:

“He was born in the city of Madison, Ind., December 10, 1817. His grandparents were Irish Presbyterians, who emigrated to this county from the county Armagh about the year 1768. His father died when he was but here years old, leaving the family in moderate circumstances. He was educated in the public schools of Madison. His attention was early attracted to the fossil shells so abundant in the rocks in the vicinity of his home. Arriving at the age of manhood, he invested the small sum received from his father’s estate in mercantile business.

The new merchants rapidly disposed of their stock, but were not as fortunate in collecting their accounts. In March 1841, they were under the necessity of obtaining a loan from Joseph Potts of \$1,000 to secure which they executed a mortgage on their store house (the same having been a boat before it came ashore). Three years afterwards he had transferred all of his interests in the store house with all its appurtenances to Capt. Heath, the appurtenances being debts, liabilities and mortgages against the firm and notes, accounts, and mortgages in its favor.

Meek had considerable talent for portrait painting and replenished his wasted fortunes by that pursuit. The late James Weir, Esq., engaged him to paint the portraits of his father and mother. These pictures are now in possession of Mrs. Clinton Griffith, of Owensboro. Besides Mr. Weir he had other patrons.

In 1840 the Owensboro Bulletin had been established. It was a weekly paper, the first ever published in the town and had leanings for Henry Clay. There was no telegraph in those

days and it took news a long time to come from the far east, or from any source to the village on the Ohio. The steamboat was the most available means for transmitting mails, but its going and coming were altogether uncertain. The readers of the Bulletin were content to trust for political instruction to the pronouncements of the editor, and to local contributions in weekly installments of wit and wisdom furnished by such of his friends about town as he was so fortunate as to enlist. Among others, Meek having the ability and spare time would now and then give the editor a "lift."

In 1842 Charles Dickens, who had achieved a meteorical reputation in England by his novels, decided on an outing to the New World for the double purpose of obtaining fresh material from that quarter to diversify his story telling, and at the same time replenish his coffers from the money bags of his American cousins. Mr. Dickens published an account of that journey, which ever after was the most conspicuous skeleton in his literary cabinet.

The steamboat Fulton, which bore the Dickens in that May from Louisville to St. Louis, stopped at all landings to let off and take on passengers, and to receive and discharge freight. All these tedious interruptions of the voyage, instead of causing annoyance to the distinguished novelist, were quite to his hand. It enabled him to spend some hours on shore at many places (such as busy Yellow Banks), and thus get new and distinct ideas of how the western American lived and moved, and had his being. No message preceded the arrival of the Fulton announcing the distinguished passenger it had on board. But its cables were not fully made fast before the word was ashore and circulating all over the village that the famous Mr. Dickens had arrived. In that day and many years afterwards the arrival of a steamboat was never so commonplace an event as to prevent the rank and file of the Yellow Bankers laying aside all other earthly cares and pursuits, and hastening to the river shore to welcome it, or at least to see who had arrived upon it.

The sight of the celebrated Englishman making his way through the few streets of the place, as far from the landings as to reach its principal edifice, modeled after an enlarged "W" goods box, with a hip-roof on top, known as the court house, caused a feeling of subdued enthusiasm among the people. This accomplished, the visitor turned himself about and sought refuge on the steamer, which in due time resumed its voyage.

In two days after the Dickens had departed, the "Bulletin" made its regular weekly appearance. It contained an article announcing that by accident some sheets of Mr. Dickens' notes had been blown from the boat while backing out into the stream, and two of them reached the shore and came to the hands of the editor through the kindness of a friend. By a most remarkable chance, the rescued sheets contained detached notes from which Mr. Dickens evidently intended to write a more extended and elaborate account of the village and its people. The notes, however, were taken in Gurney short hand, in which Mr. Dickens was a consummate expert, but were an enigma to all who saw them, till they fell into the hands of Mr. Meek, who was himself a disciple of Gurney. Without knowledge of the public, Meek was engaged to transcribe them, and what purported to be the translation appeared in the "Bulletin" as follows:

Captain -----, a large red-faced Yahoo" (so the notes ran), "was introduced by the master, who insisted on calling me Mr. Dicken (eliding the s). I politely corrected him, insisting on my own name." "No, no, Mr. Dicken, I know your family in this country. We sometimes speak of them as the Dickenses, but old Kit Dicken of Vienna Fort, a very smart man though but

little education, never had no s tacked on it.” “Captain,” I suggested “I have neither family or kindred in this country.” “But, Mr. Dickens,” (the obtuse ass persisted), “there is no trouble identifying you with the Kentucky Dickens, because such a rare family favor as you have to old Kit, I never saw before in my life. He’s enough like you to be your twin brother.”

“The infernal priggishness of the old fool grew unbearable.” As a parting shot he added that Old Kit will be so d- — d- — mad when he hears you were in twenty miles of him and did not stop to see him, he’ll come d- — d- — near going into fits. At this point I bade the captain good morning, and assured him I was relieved to know I was at least twenty miles from my American relatives.”

What further conversation occurred between the captain and the Englishman was not preserved, nor did Mr. Dickens in his published ‘American Notes’ even refer to the circumstance. The publication in the “Bulletin” created no small sensation at Yellow Banks. The public selected two or three persons among whom was the one referred to as “Captain,” and while each of the accused denied the imputation, each was ready to believe one of the other two was the one intended. This uncertainty relieved Meek, and moreover no one could absolutely know that the notes had not, after all, been truly transcribed.

Meek was early interested in all that pertained to the science of paleontology. Everything that suggested the Mound builders attracted his attention. Stone implements and utensils, flints, spear heads, horn flair hooks, pots, and vases, arrows and arrow hears, fossils of all kinds, human relics, bones of extinct animals and other objects of antiquity were south and studied. In gratitude his taste in this respect he most naturally formed the friendship of George Scarborough, then a young man not far from his own age, and withal a fine thinker and well equipped scholarly man. He had arrived in Yellow Banks in the thirties, coming from New York seeking in the south employment as a school teacher. He was so engaged several years, but abandoned that pursuit of his marriage to Miss Thompson, daughter of Hon. Phil Thompson, a prominent lawyer and wealthy citizen of the town. The tragic death of her father not long after left Mrs. Scarborough with a comfortable fortune.

So called Indian Mounds, abounded in this region which had never been disturbed by the curious investigator. Scarborough and Meek became noted for their searches in these receptacles of the secrets of prehistoric ages. Sometimes their labors were in vain, but often they unearthed and gathered much that disclosed the story of the past.

During all the time he resided in Owensboro, (a name that finally came to its own, dropping the pioneer substitute of Yellow Banks), he prosecuted his scientific studies, especially in the line of geology. At all times he was noted for the purity and gentleness of his life and his rare facility in attracting and keeping friends. Of Meek it could be said, if of any one, he lived and died without an enemy.

After 1850 engagements taking him elsewhere, gradually weaned from his Kentucky home. A thoughtful and kindly sketch of his life is contained in the Smithsonian report for 1877 and from it is taken the following:

“In the year 1848 he was associated with David Dale Owen in the geological survey of Iowa and Minnesota, and in 1852 became an assistant to Professor Hall in the preparation of the paleontology of the state of New York. Under the direction of Professor Hall, he explored the Badlands of Nebraska, and collected a valuable series of fossils. In 1858 he came to Washington,

where he resided continuously to the time of his death, leaving the city for a few months only from time to time while engaged in studying the paleontology of Illinois, Ohio and California and later in Florida during the winter on account of his health. During his residence in the Institute he gradually lost his hearing and could only be communicated with by means of writing. He gradually withdrew from social intercourse, and devoted his life exclusively to the prosecution of science. He was in correspondence with the principal investigators of the world in the line of paleontology and although scarcely known in this city, his name was familiar to the cultivators of geology everywhere. He was a man of singular truthfulness and critical accuracy and was highly esteemed by the few who had the pleasure of his acquaintance.”

He is spoken of by the writer above quoted as “an esteemed collaborator of this institution, who occupied for upward of twenty years a room in the Smithsonian building and assisted without salary in the operation of the establishment. He was devoted to paleontology, and was one of the principal authorities in the country in the line of fossil shells. At the time of his death he had just completed a large volume on the paleontology of the Upper Missouri, published in connection with Dr. Hayden’s surveys. He was obliged on account of his health to spend his winters in Florida, but delaying his departure too long and unduly exerting himself the day before he intended to leave, he was seized with a hemorrhage, and after an illness of a few days, died on the 21st of December, 1876.”

When Meek bade Owensboro adieu sixty years ago, he left behind him friends by the score. Leaving out those that sleep at peaceful Elmwood. Col. James M. Holmes, a worthy friend of such a man, is the only one remaining. At the green old age of eighty nine his memory is a clear, as his heart is true to his friends old and new. To him and to Mr. F. W. True of the Smithsonian Institute the writer is grateful for aid in preparing this paper.

LUCIUS P. LITTLE

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Owensboro Bulletin, 20 January 1843
Letter to editor William Pattee:

"Mr. Editor - Some months since, whilst standing on the wharfboat, at the landing of our town, looking at some passengers going on board a steamboat, I noticed one of them, a little swarthy squint-eyed fellow, in the hurry of the moment drop a loose scrap of paper. Supposing it of no value, I said nothing. After the boat started, however, curiosity led me to examine it. Imagine my astonishment on looking at it, to find it was a loose leaf from the port-folio of Charles Dickens; containing his 'Notes on Owensboro.' This accounts for (Dickens) having passed our town by with silent contempt, whilst he heralded forth long descriptions of towns (judging from his own works) of far less note than Owensboro.

I herewith send you a true copy of the same which you will please publish for the edification of the citizens of our town.

Yours truly,
Eugene"

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Owensboro Monitor, Owensboro, KY, 12 September 1866, p3:

Charles Dickens finds his home engagements so numerous that he can not visit this country the present year, as he hoped to do.—*Exchange*.

When he concludes to come, we hope he will give the people of Owensboro a chance to pay their respects to him, and not keep them in a state of suspense as he did upon a former occasion, which some of our older inhabitants will remember. If such another scene could transpire, where would we find a Fielding B. Meek among us? Echo answers, *where!*

Owensboro Examiner, Owensboro, KY, Friday, 5 January 1877, p5:

**Death of a Distinguished Gentleman
Who Once Resided in Owensboro.**

Prof. Fielding B. Meek, who died in Washington City on the 21st ult., was at one time a resident of this city, and is well remembered by some of our older citizens. The *Washington Union* speaks of Prof. Meeks as the greatest paleontologist of this country, and had but one or two living peers in the world. Some of the fossils and geological specimens used in the schools of this city were collected by Prof. Meeks during his residence in Owensboro, more than thirty years ago. He is remembered as a modest, unassuming gentleman—one whom all classes loved and esteemed.

Senator McCreery, writing from Washington City to a gentleman in this place, under date of Dec. 23, 1876, says:

"On yesterday, as raw a day as we have had during the gusty winter, I accompanied the mortal remains of Fielding B. Meek to their last resting place. He was buried in the Congressional graveyard amid overhanging evergreens, typical of the fact that his fame will be fresh in the memories of the present and the coming generation. It was touching to witness the tender solicitude of his scientific friends during his illness, and their deep affliction at his irreparable loss. Prof. Henry offered the last tribute over his lifeless form which will be followed by a more imposing ceremonial in April or May."

Funeral of a Noted Paleontologist.

[Washington Union, 23d.]

The funeral of Prof. Fielding B. Meek, who died on the 31st inst., took place yesterday afternoon from the Geological Hall of the Smithsonian Institution, and was largely attended. The members of the Philosophical Society, of which he was a member, were present in a body, as were also a number of other leading scientists of the District. The interment was made at Congressional Cemetery.

Prof. Meek was regarded as the first paleontologist of this country, and had but two or three living peers in the world. The last thirty years of his life were devoted almost without interruption to the study of fossils, and he accomplished a vast amount of labor in his chosen line of research. He had no kindred in this country. A good many years ago he became deaf, and from that time shunned society and lived a hermit life at the institution, having no other companions than his books and fossils. His position will be filled with difficulty.

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Congressional Cemetery, Washington, DC

Twice-A-Week Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 25 June 1891, p2:

From article, "Auld Lang Syne: Reminiscences of Owensboro's Early Efforts in the Direction of Journalism, reviewing articles that appeared in the "Owensboro Bulletin", Owensboro's first newspaper:

A lecture by Robert Triplett on "How to Elevate Character," delivered before the Lyceum Society, occupied nearly seven columns. Mr. Triplett was a man of marked intellectual force, a great thinker and of varied accomplishments of which sufficient evidence appears in his book—"Roland Trevor or the Pilot of Human Life, being an autobiography of the author, showing how to make and lose a fortune and how to make another." In one number appeared an account by "Eugene" of the landing and sojourn of Charles Dickens and his wife for a night in Owensboro, accompanied by what purported to be a leaf from the portfolio of the novelist, giving his impressions of the place. Many of its allusions were caustic and personal and so thinly disguised as no doubt to be quite recognizable then, but not so at this distance. Although Mr. Dickens was at the time in America and passed the Yellow Banks on a steamboat, yet in his own account of his travels he omits this leaf. It is known to the writer that "Eugene" was no other than the distinguished Fielding B. Meek, in whom a strong sense of humor was allied to great talents. He was then engaged in trade in Owensboro. He closed his career but a few years ago, having long occupied a high official position at Washington City in connection with the Smithsonian Institute where by his scholarship, varied attainments and scientific labors he achieved a national fame.

TWO EARLY SCIENTISTS OF YELLOW BANKS

George Scarborough, the subject of my last sketch, the young man from Massachusetts, was one of the most noble, refined, Christian gentleman living in this city at that time. As administrator of his father-in-law's estate he managed the business and divided out the property to each heir to the satisfaction of all concerned. He was geologist, a chemist, psychologist, conchologist, as well as versed in the science of birds, insects and fish. He gathered and maintained a large cabinet of these specimens. In 1844, or 1845 he built the large two-story brick building now owned and occupied by Wm. Shelby and his son-in-law, Mr. McCallister, and called it Snode Villa and for years he maintained and taught school in that building. After spending the greater part of his beautiful life in this place, his adopted home, he returned to his native land, married his second wife, lived to a very ripe age, died and was laid to rest at his early home. He was a Unitarian in religion, but never intruded his opinion on any one. I went to his Sunday-school, the first I attended in this city. Mr. Scarborough was very fond of the company of scientific men, but one in particular is worthy of mention here. Fielding B. Meek was his kindred spirit. They took a great many strolls together, investigating the geologocal formations of the earth, gathering insects and flowers. Meek grew rapidly in studying these sciences and was soon called to Washington and assigned a place in one of the large buildings set apart by the government for the display and study of these sciences, and at his death, which occurred while the late Hon. Thomas McCreery was United States senator from Kentucky, that gentleman pronounced a eulogy upon the dead man, whom he had known so long. By one of the scientific papers published at Washington at that time, Meek had risen so high in his chosen studies, he was pronounced as the greatest paleontologist in the national capital. George Scarborough was his preceptor and benefactor. Meek, while residing here, was a fine writer. One of his squibs was headed, "Stray Leaves From the Portfolio of Charles Dickens," claimed to have been dropped in our streets during a late visit to our Yellow Banks by that distinguished writer, scholar and traveler. In describing one of our popular young men, he said in this young man's vanity, the perfumery, had been so lavishly used that this young man seemed to have been blown by some ill wind from the spicy regions of Abyssinia. FRANK L. HALL.

Dropped Stitches in Owensboro History

The "home industry" of knitting socks for the family has gone out of fashion—one of the deplorable effects of the introduction of labor saving machinery. But its passing was not so far in the dim and shadowy past, and many there be who see in memory's picture gallery the form of a gray haired woman sitting by the chimney side where the flickering firelight plays at cosy corners with fantastic shadows, now sending its rays to the remotest corner of the big old fashioned room, now leaving all in sombre gloaming. She plies her knitting needles whose constant click keeps time to the crackling of the great wood fire that sheds its genial warmth around. Now and then she lifts her face and speaks to the figure of a stout old man half buried in a country newspaper at the other side of the chimney piece. And ever and anon she drops a stitch.

Oh, those dropped stitches! What woes they bring, what suffering, what injustice, perchance! For the dropped stitch, with a little wear, makes a hole in the sock, and then the boy who wears it must either present it for a darning and take a flogging for being unduly hard on his footgear or suffer in silence from a sore heel. But the darning needle and the gourd are called into service and the dropped stitch is mended, rough and unsatisfactory as all amends for past shortcomings must be, but better than no amends.

Muse of history, how many dropped stitches do appear in thy knitting; what big holes in the finished fabric! How many a great souled man have you made no record of, how many great events passed unnoted, how many important dates and facts left to the keeping of uncertain tradition. But a faithful hand diligently plying history's darning needle may, in some fashion, make good the defects of your original handiwork. Dropped stitches in the history of Owensboro and Daviess county are quite as abundant as elsewhere in the world. It is the purpose of this sketch, and probably of others to follow, to notice some men and things and doings that have heretofore been ignored or overlooked.

Fielden B. Meek.

Away back in the early forties, on an autumn afternoon when the splendid stretch of water adjacent to Owensboro was flashing in the prismatic reflections of a cloudless sunset, a big old unsightly barge hove in sight around the bend at the head of the island. It was one of those quaint craft known as merchandise boats—a

general floating store—hundreds of which floated down or were towed up the river in those days. A man would buy a stock of merchandise at Pittsburgh, put it aboard a barge and drift down the river, stopping here and there wherever trade was good. Disposing of his stock he would sell his barge as broken up lumber at New Orleans or Natchez perhaps, and return North by packet.

Such a craft was the one—"Gilbert Mottier by name"—which floated down upon Owensboro on that autumn day. It landed at the wharf and a young man of unpretentious appearance stepped ashore. He was Fielden B. Meek, the man who in later years was recognized as perhaps the most brilliant citizen of Owensboro, and who, when he died, was pronounced "The greatest paleontologist of the age."

Meek had come from Vevay, Ind., with his barge load of merchandise, intending to make the trip to the lower Mississippi. But weeks passed and his craft still anchored at the wharf. The weeks grew into months, and finally Fielden B. Meek decided, as many a man has decided since, to make Owensboro his permanent abiding place. He kept store in the barge for about a year when he moved his stock to a building on the river front and abandoned the barge. For years it remained tied up to the bank, sometimes serving as a warehouse, and finally sank, just above the present site of the wharf-boat. For thirty years, in times of low water, parts of the gunwales could be seen above the water.

Meek, with a partner named Heath, Mottier by name—which floated down river trip, kept store for several years, during which time Meek began to be recognized as a man of genius. He devoted some attention to portrait painting and finally gave up his mercantile business to devote his entire time to art.

Wrote Brilliant Articles.

About this time unusually brilliant articles began to appear in the local papers. Some of them dealt with local men and local happenings, but others took a broader scope, deserving the name of real literature. Only the favored few knew that the former river merchant was the author. He wrote a series of papers entitled "Leaves From the Portfolio of Charles Dickens." They were excellent imitations of Dickens' style, and following closely upon Dickens' visits to America, might easily have been taken for genuine productions of the king of novelists. One of these, describing the conduct of a dude in the lobby of Bristow's hotel, then the fashionable hos-

telry of the town was so true that even the man described recognized himself. He wanted to reply, but doubting his ability, asked Fielden Meek to write the article for him. Meek undertook an apology in answer to his own arguments, making a more laughable story than the original at the expense of the young dude.

In those days Meek was closely associated with George Scarborough, the New England pedagogue, who kept a school at "Snowden Villa," now known as the "Old McCallister Place." Scarborough was one of the finest scholars that ever lived in Owensboro and from association with him Meek developed a love of scientific investigation. He developed a habit of walking along the streets examining every pebble that he came across. After a time his explorations took a wider range, and he examined the rocks and various formations throughout all the country around Owensboro. Before any of his friends realized it he had developed into a great geologist. He wrote learned articles on geological subjects and gathered together a fine cabinet of specimens. His name became known among scholars.

Goes to Washington.

Twenty years after Fielden B. Meek had drifted into Owensboro a river barterer, the Smithsonian institution in Washington, the greatest seat of scientific learning and investigation in all the land, stood in need of a chief of its geological department. The place was offered to Meek and accepted. He went away to become one of the greatest scientific men of the world—and to be forgotten by the people among whom he had lived for half a life time.

After years of service the great geologist died among his specimens at the Smithsonian institution. He had made few friends in Washington. All of his time had been devoted to his work, his investigations.

A few of his associates gathered around his casket as it was about to be borne away to the cemetery. There were no funeral ceremonies, not even a minister present. As the little group stood about the bier of the former river barterer, Senator Thomas B. McCreary, who had known Meek in the days of his obscurity, raised his voice and made some remarks about his life. The remains were buried in a Washington cemetery without pomp and without ceremony.

The name of Fielden B. Meek is recorded among the great men of the scientific world, but Owensboro, where he achieved his greatness, scarcely knows that he was ever numbered among her

Glenn Hodges in his article, "A tale of our city Did Charles Dickens really visit Owensboro?" published in the Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY (1 December 2002, p3E) wrote the following:

Fielding B. Meek actually did live in Owensboro in the 1840s and that he was here as late as 1850 when the census was taken. He lived in a residence owned by Thomas Higdon. Meek gave the census taker his age as 32, his birthplace as Indiana and his occupation as geologist.

According to a 1911 encyclopedia biography, Fielding Bradford Meek was born Dec. 10, 1817, in Madison, Ind. He went into business as a merchant early in life, but devoted his leisure time to collecting fossils and studying rocks around Madison.

Unsuccessful, Meek gave up as a merchant and devoted all of his time to science, working in 1848 on the U.S. Geological Survey in Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota. In 1852, he began working as a paleontologist and assisted in an exploration of the Badlands of Dakota. In 1858, he joined the Smithsonian Institution and in the next years made an admirable contribution to science, writing several volumes on fossils found in the Upper Missouri Country and California.

At the Smithsonian, Meek received no salary but was compensated with the use of a workroom and a bedroom under the stairs in a corner of a lecture hall, according to a Smithsonian Preservation Quarterly article by Heather Ewing.

The room was destroyed in a fire in 1865 at the Smithsonian, and Meek occupied a room in the north towers of the museum, Ewing wrote in 1992.

Ewing's article also said Meek was in frail health during the last years of his life and spent the winters in Florida where he continued his studies. "He had no family, as evidenced by the finely drawn picture of his cat (titled 'this is all the family I have') and few friends," according to Ewing. "Meek gradually lost his hearing and could only be communicated with by means of writing. He gradually withdrew from social intercourse and devoted his life exclusively to the prosecution of science."

The eccentric, reclusive Meek was scarcely known in Washington, but his name was familiar to cultivators of geology everywhere, Ewing said. Meek died in Washington in 1876 at the age of 59.

Woodson had apparently learned of Meek's previous residence in Owensboro when he opined that the odd geologist was "Eugene."

When he wrote his article in 1891, Woodson alleged that Meek had the intellectual talent to fool anyone familiar with Dickens' writing style. Woodson never proved that it actually was Meek who wrote the letter to Pattee, but he thought he had a very well-grounded suspicion.

Whether a brilliant news scoop or cleverly absurd, Eugene's letter to the editor made Dickens' alleged visit here a unique footnote in history.

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Smithsonian Institution Archives - Internet:

Fielding Bradford Meek (1817-1876) was a paleontologist; geologist; resident collaborator in Paleontology at the Smithsonian; and a member of the Megatherium Club. Along with Ferdinand Hayden, he authored a book on Paleontology of the Upper Missouri.

"[T]he paleontologist is a queer character," Robert Kennicott notes in his letter "Folks at Home". "Indeed he [Meek] is very excellent and Honorable gentleman with fine feelings and extremely modest though he is now one of our best Paleontologists."

Meek was born on December 10, 1817 in Madison, Indiana, along with a brother and two sisters. The beginning of his life was a bit difficult, having poor health and a father who passed away when he was only three years old. Despite the hardships, Meek moved forward with his career and in 1848, was made assistant to Dr. David Dale Owen and helped organize the United States Geological Survey of Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Once his work with Dr. David Dale Owen was completed, Meek went to work with another Megatherium Club member, Ferdinand Vandever Hayden, publishing many writings under the name "Meek & Hayden". Three years after, Meek began preparing his publication on Cretaceous fossils from Nebraska for the American Academy of Arts and Sciences of Boston; this would be his first publication.

Moving to Washington, DC in 1858, Meek became a member of the Megatherium Club, earning a room and workspace in the main tower of the Castle, thanks to the help of Assistant Secretary Spencer Baird. Though in poor health for most of his life and becoming increasingly deaf as the years went on, Meek's health never caused him to opt out of conversing with scientists in the Castle, according to Megatherium Club members.

Meek died in the Smithsonian's Castle on December 21, 1876, and the Smithsonian gave him a proper funeral in the Castle where Secretary Joseph Henry honored Meek and spoke of his life's accomplishments and feats.

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Daviess County, KY 1850 Federal Census:

SCHEDULE I.—Free Inhabitants in Owensboro 45 **in the County of** Daviess **State** 691
of Kentucky **enumerated by me, on the** 22nd **day of** July **1850.** Abraham **Ass't Marshal** 346

Dwellings numbered in the order of visitation.	Families numbered in the order of visitation.	The Name of every Person whose usual place of abode on the first day of June, 1850, was in this family.	DESCRIPTION.			Profession, Occupation, or Trade of each Male Person over 15 years of age.	Value of Real Estate owned.	PLACE OF BIRTH. Naming the State, Territory, or Country.	Married within the year.	Attended School within the year.	Whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, pauper, or convict.	
			Age.	Sex.	Color (White, black, or mulatto).							
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	1	George A Holmes	29	M		Physician	5100	Ky				
2		Annie "	61	F				Ky				
3		A E "	4	M				Ky				
4		A E "	1	M				"				
5	2	Thomas Higdon	38	M		carpenter	200	"				
6		R B "	11	M				"		/		
7		E B "	8	F				"		/		
8		Joe D "	5	M				"				
9		Race A "	1	M				"				
10		Fielding B Meek	32	M		Geologist		Pa				

Fielding Bradford Meek, was born 10 December 1817 Madison, Jefferson County, IN. He was the son of Alexander A. Meek (1786-1821) & Martha McCullough (c1790-1836). He was a resident of Owensboro, Daviess County, KY from 1838 until the 1850's. He is listed as a geologist in the 1850 Federal census of Daviess County, KY. In 1858 he moved to Washington, DC, where he died at the Smithsonian Institute on 21 December 1876 and was buried there in the Congressional Cemetery.

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Also see: "Biographical Memoir of Fielding Bradford Meek", National Academy of Sciences (<http://www.nasonline.org/publications/biographical-memoirs/memoir-pdfs/meek-f-b.pdf>)