

## Warblers Outside Her Sickroom Window

A Poem for Ruth Williston Stevens Wheat  
March 28, 1902-November 24, 1934

May 13, 1933, *Saw yellow warbler*  
*and two blackburnian warblers,*  
my mother pencil-dashed into her three-year diary, 1932-34,  
brief space for each year, her last years

Birds listed only for April-May,  
time of radiantly plumaged passerines from the South, from rain forests,  
birds she enjoyed out window or bedded on back porch.  
Born a "Blue Baby," heart defect at birth,  
bluish skin discoloration, heart failure comes

Doctor warns her, no school prom!  
"I am going to live my life!" she declares to her mother.  
Doctor warns her--no baby!  
"I will have a child!"  
May 10, 1933: *Saw first oriole--Hypo at night--complete ease!*

In bed in my blue-walled room upstairs,  
lights blaring throughout house,  
voices from living room re-arranged for her care,  
Dr. Doran's, Dr. Allen's, my father's

Eager for life:  
riding astern my father's motorcycle, arms firm 'round his waist  
Appleton's restaurant, downtown Seneca Street, Geneva, cocktails, lunch  
Belhurst Inn, once Under Ground Railroad refuge, evening dining  
Seneca Yacht Club, covered sailing races for *Geneva Daily Times*  
reporting her husband usually taking winning gun  
cruising with him aboard his 32-foot cabin yawl, *Lotus*  
the 38 miles of Seneca Lake,  
longest of upstate New York's Finger Lakes  
And her warblers—her magnificent warblers:

*Palm, Parula, Prairie, Yellow-rumped, Yellowthroat*  
*Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green*  
*Blackpoll, Black and White*  
*Canada*—necklace of black on yellow  
*Yellow*—rainfall of rusty stripes down yellow breast  
*Blackburnian*—throat flamed orange— “firethroat”  
*Redstart*—striking orange wing and tail patches on robe of black  
*Chestnut-sided*—flanks streaked reddish, head capped by sun  
*Cape May*—tiger striped, face solar-eclipsed by chestnut cheek patch  
*Magnolia*—contest of contrasts: ebony streaks race down yellow breast,  
           fair-weather cumulus glorifies dark wings and tail

May 14, 1934: Saw scarlet tanager and 7 warblers from my porch.

**Maxwell Corydon Wheat, Jr.**

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Photo by Scott Stoner