

# B&C BOOKS



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## WILLIAM ASTOR CHANLER — Sportsman, Explorer, Adventurer

Born in Rhode Island, William Astor Chanler began life “with a silver spoon in his mouth.” A direct descendent of John Jacob Astor, the richest man in America, he and his siblings were each provided with an inheritance sufficient to maintain an elegant lifestyle.

From his early years “Willie,” as Chanler was known, craved adventure. As a teen-ager he wrestled alligators in Florida. An accomplished horseman, he raced against the finest steeplechase riders in England and beat them all. He and his brother, Winthrop, were close friends of Theodore Roosevelt and were among the early members of the Boone and Crockett Club.

Among his exploits was a 20-month 1892-93 expedition into unknown regions of East Africa. His safari was the largest sent into that area up to that time. Game

was plentiful and there were dangerous encounters, both with animals (particularly rhinos), and men.

Describing one encounter, Chanler wrote, “With loud shouts, a body of warriors, at least [sic] 200 in number, sprang from the plantations where they had been hiding and dashed toward the knoll by a road. Advancing in column, they presented a front of but five or six men. I placed six men across the road to repel their attack, and when the attacking force had reached a point about 100 paces distant, they received the first volley.”

The battle raged for several hours. There were many hand-to-hand combats. “When the natives left us in peace, three of the porters were stretched on the ground, and twelve more of our band were wounded, some as seriously as to be unable to walk,” he wrote.

On the safari, Chanler’s group made many discoveries. Searching for Lake Lorian, reportedly a large body of water, they found only a series of mud-holes, thereafter known as the Lorian Swamp. Following the Guaso Nyiro River, they came upon a large waterfall and named it Chanler Falls. They identified a new species of antelope that was later named Chanler’s reedbeek.

As the party passed through different regions, the explorers collected hundreds of specimens of wildlife, which were sent to the Smithsonian Institution,

in Washington, D.C., and to the Museum of Natural History in New York. A number of prestigious awards awaited him on his return from Africa. He was only 26 years old!

Outside his field adventures, Chanler had great sympathy for the insurgents rising against Spanish rule in Cuba. He obtained a fast boat named *Bermuda*, mounted a small cannon near the bow, and spent some perilous times smuggling guns to the rebels. Narrowly averting capture, he eventually had to scuttle the *Bermuda* and scatter his crew to escape detection. All this was winked at by American authorities, many of whom were spoiling for a war with Spain. After the tragic sinking of the *Maine* in Santiago harbor, Chanler raised a regiment of volunteers to fight in Cuba, but was turned down when he offered its services to the U.S. government. After disbanding his regiment, he later joined Teddy Roosevelt’s Rough Riders and as captain and assistant adjutant general of Volunteers, he was cited for bravery in action at the battle of Santiago.

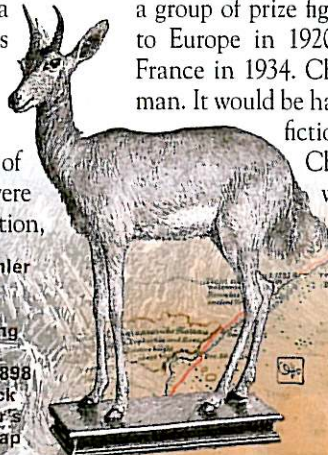
Chanler was elected to Congress after the war, but was not a candidate for reelection. Political life was too dull for him. He kept a stable of racehorses and sponsored a group of prize fighters as well. He moved to Europe in 1920 and died in Menton, France in 1934. Chanler was a remarkable man. It would be hard for an author to write fiction more exciting than Chanler’s experiences. He was truly the ultimate adventurer! ■

### WRITINGS BY WILLIAM ASTOR CHANLER

- *Hunting in Many Lands* (1895)
- *Through Jungle and Desert* (1896)

#### Also of interest:

- *A Pride of Lions* (1971) A biography of the Chanlers by Lately Thomas



From the far left: portrait of Chanler from the frontis of *Through the Jungle and Desert*; Picture of Chanler Falls photographed during the 1920s; Chanler’s band of desperados headed for Cuba in 1898 — Chanler is pictured on horseback to the far right; Sketch of Chanler’s reedbeek; and a section of the map detailing the surveyed route of Chanler’s 1892-93 expedition.

**MAP**  
of North Eastern  
**KENYA REGION**  
Surveyed during  
**WILLIAM ASTOR CHANLER'S EXPEDITION**  
in  
**EAST-AFRICA 1892-93**  
by Lieutenant  
**LUDWIG von HÖHNEL**  
Imp. and Royal Austro Hungarian Navy



*William Astor Chanler*



OTAMUS HUNT ON THE MACKENZIE RIVER