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In Memoriam: Herbert R. Werner; R. Ellsworth Call

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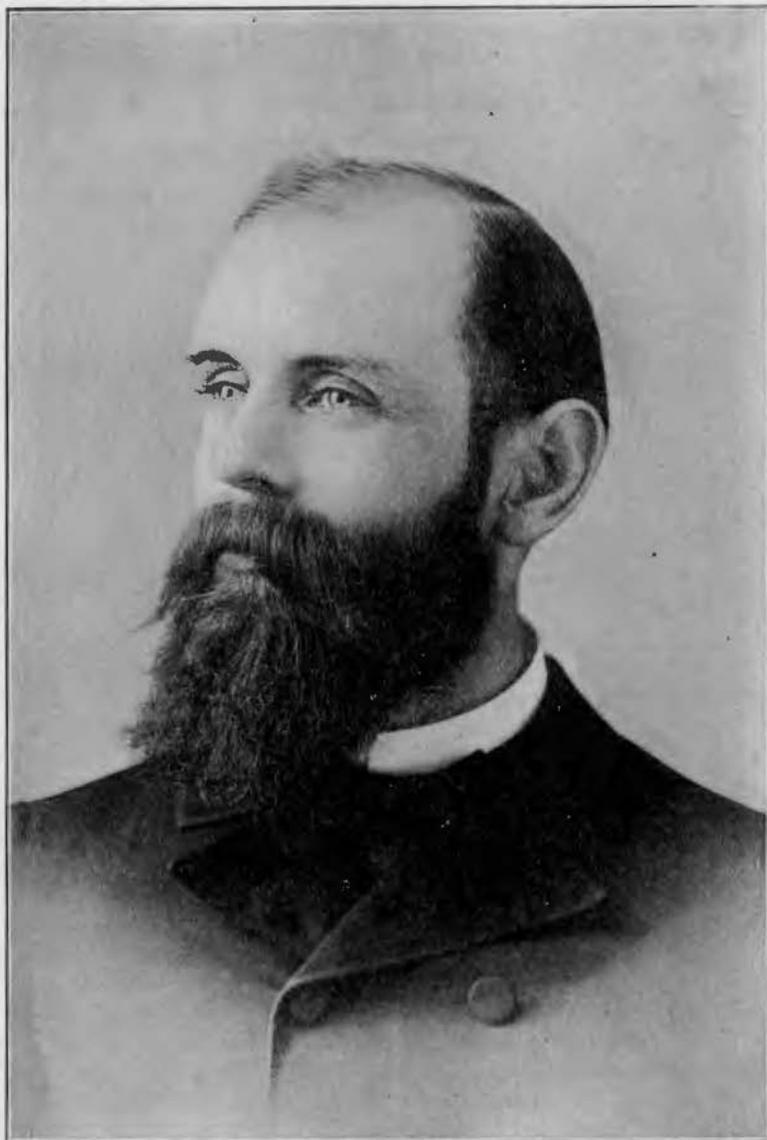
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R. Ellsworth Call

Call's parents lived in Des Moines, and for a period of many years, even while his employment took him into distant states, he usually spent the summers with them. During this time his extensive collection of shells and his fine scientific library were housed in the Capital City. He was the author of many memoirs, mainly upon subjects of Conchology.

Richard Ellsworth Call was born on May 13, 1856, in Brooklyn, New York, where his early education was obtained in the public schools. From high school he went to Cazenovia Seminary, from which he was graduated in 1875. Then he attended Syracuse University, but did not remain to finish the prescribed course. While there he fell in at Ithaca with David Starr Jordan, John C. Branner, and other Cornell scientists of that day, who in after years were closely associated with his investigations. Leaving college he taught country school for several years, at the same time devoting his leisure hours to collecting and studying in natural history. In the meanwhile his parents moved to Des Moines. During the years 1890 and 1891 he attended Indiana State University, receiving the A. B. and A. M. degrees. In 1893 he finished the medical course at the Hospital College of Medicine of Louisville, Kentucky, graduating with the degree of M. D. Ohio University, at Athens, conferred upon him the honorary degree of Ph. D. in 1895. He died in New York City on March 14, 1917.

Call's principal vocation was teaching. He was connected with the schools all his life. Besides instructing in the sciences in the high schools of Stonington, Connecticut, Moline, Des Moines, Louisville, Brooklyn and New York City, he occupied for a time the Chair of Zoology in the Missouri State University. He served as curator of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences; and for periods of three years each he performed the duties of superintendent of Schools of David City Nebraska, and of Lawrenceburg, Indiana. He was an able and entertaining lecturer, and his services in this field were much sought. His work as lecturer for the Board of Education of New York City was especially noteworthy and satisfactory.

Of his more productive work in pure science there was wide range. In geology his efforts were mainly of the reconnaissance type. Yet he published a number of geological memoirs of note. Joining the staff of the United States Geological Survey, which was then studying the old desiccated Lake Bonneville—the all but vanquished remnant of which is the Great Salt Lake of today, from the clays and sands of the old beaches of that vast ancient body of water he collected the molluscan shells, endeavoring to show by their depauperate character that they lived under the inhospitable environment of a glacial climate, to which Gilbert ascribed the origin of this great expanse of inland waters. Some of the forms unearthed proved to be new to science, and were so described.

After similar fashion he worked with the late W J McGee on the loess shells of central Iowa. Notwithstanding the fact that depauperate forms are found to be abundant at Des Moines, in other parts of the state they were not detected by subsequent investigators. Later, also, the loess itself was demonstrated to be not a deposit derived from the glaciers but an interglacial formation. However, together, McGee and

Call barely escaped making one of the great geological discoveries of the century—the establishment of the multiplicity of the Glacial Epoch. The Des Moines sections furnished all the evidence but they were not properly interpreted.

Call afterwards extensively studied the loess of the upper Mississippi Valley, and came to the conclusion that this remarkable loam formation was a great lake deposit, accumulated something after the manner of the beds of the alleged vast Tertiary lakes of the Great plains region. Here again his judgment was at fault, for all of the deposits of this description were finally proved to be mainly epirotic formations laid down by the winds. His close association with government folk in the far west evidently firmly implanted in his mind this early but erroneous notion. His views on this subject are elaborated in a series of articles which appear in the *American Naturalist*. These papers were long worthy of careful perusal if for no other reason than that they supplied the best summary of our scant knowledge on the loess up to the date of their publication.

During several summers Professor Call served as assistant geologist on the Arkansas Geological Survey under Dr. J. C. Branner. His main work was on the Crowley Ridge, a long narrow elevation of Tertiary formations rising out of the wide Mississippi flood plain in the eastern part of the state. The report was published as a special volume of the Survey series.

When resident of Iowa, Call became interested in the artesian waters and collected data from a number of deep drill wells put down in various parts of the state. His principal results appeared from time to time in the *Bulletin of the Iowa Weather Service*. Many brief papers and articles were published on geological subjects in the scientific journals.

Call published most extensively on the mollusks, fishes, and reptiles. A synopsis of the Unionidæ of the United States formed the initial number of a *Bulletin* series of the Des Moines Academy of Sciences and found wide circulation. The Unionidæ of Arkansas formed a profusely illustrated memoir that was published by the St. Louis Academy of Science. His shorter papers on Conchology were many and varied. The "Anatomy of *Campeloma*" was a model of its kind, and was based entirely upon materials obtained around Des Moines.

One group of mollusks in which Call became very much interested was the little known family of the Strepomatidæ, turreted snails inhabiting southern rivers. The Coosa, Black Warrior, and Tombigbee rivers of Alabama in particular harbored these water snails. For a number of years he was accustomed to collect extensively in these streams and their numerous tributaries. Isaac Lea, Thomas Conrad, Thomas Say and Constantine Rafinesque described many species but these were never very well defined; and a large synonymy resulted. It was our Iowa naturalist's special mission to pass in review all the described forms, to collect abundantly from all the original localities, and to adjudicate the numerous varieties in accordance with modern canons of taxonomy. This he was able to do in most satisfactory fashion. Having accomplished this gigantic task he generously sent typical and authenticated sets of the shells to

many of the principal museums of this country and Europe where conchology was stressed. Many private cabinets were also made beneficiaries of this work.

Investigations on the fishes were mainly systematic in character. Part of the time spent along these lines was in conjunction with Prof. Seth E. Meek. He made a very complete collection of the fish fauna of the Des Moines river basin, which for some reason was never quite finished or published in full. A preliminary account appeared in the Proceedings of our Academy. He worked for several years on the fishes of New York. How complete this work was at the time of his death was not known. Much was done towards working out a better taxonomy of North American fishes. In a similar way he was intensively taken up with improving the taxonomy of North American reptiles. The Fishes of the Ohio River was a magnificent volume and Call's most complete work on the group.

In the fields of botany important contributions were made to the knowledge of the hardwood forests of Arkansas, the ferns of the Ozarks, and the plants of Iowa.

When residing in Louisville, Call unearthed, among the historical documents of the Filson Club of that place, the unpublished notes of that eccentric French naturalist, Constantine Samuel Rafinesque, who for many years in the early part of the last century made America his home. In the "Life and Writings of Rafinesque" Call set aright most of the old naturalist's descriptions of invertebrates of the Mississippi Valley, which had long been the despair of systematists of later days. This sumptuous quarto volume was published by the Filson Club, and proved to be one of its most cherished publications. The monograph on the Mammoth Cave of Kentucky was a quarto tome, edition de luxe, sumptuously printed on deckle edge, antique wove, unsized paper and contained thirty plates. Its character was historic, scenic, biologic and bibliographic.

Call's was really a brilliant mind. Had he been set in a congenial environment and had he not been continually hampered by his teaching, which he was always forced to follow in order to gain a livelihood, he doubtless would have developed into one of the great naturalists of his country and perhaps of his day. His purse was always lean; and he could do little along purely scientific lines that he planned. Although genuinely generous many of his actions were often misinterpreted by those who did not know him very well. So preoccupied was his mind at times that he became very forgetful. Not infrequently he would borrow an armful of books from some friend and the very next day he could not for the life of him tell to whom they belonged. On this account some of these books doubtless never got back to the original owners. It was the same with specimens. Soon many persons began to judge him harshly. Really this was largely mistaken inference. On the other hand he was equally careless with his own property. Lending freely any of his books or specimens he promptly forgot by whom they were received; and it might be months before they turned up again.

These things changed greatly after his marriage, which took place rather late in life. His absentmindedness grew noticeably ameliorated. At the same time his powers of concentration of mind visibly deteriorated. His

productive efforts became less spontaneous and more irregular. Within a lenstrum he ceased publishing altogether; and soon passed out of sight of his old scientific circle. From that day to the date of his demise, twenty-five years later, he remained completely inactive; and the newer generation of zoologists knew him not.

The experience of our own Academy furnishes a curious instance of his usual lack of mental equipoise. The minutes of the early meetings which were turned over to him as secretary on about the third or fourth session immediately vanished. He had laid them down somewhere while the members were chatting after adjournment. In his endeavor several years afterward to record the proceedings in a special blank book purchased for the purpose he lost two entire meetings, forgot the titles of half of the papers read, and failed to enumerate most of the charter members and original promoters of the society. Several years later when the State of Iowa assumed the publication of the Academy's Proceedings Secretary Osborn did all he could to rectify these delinquencies by obtaining from each member abstracts of his papers and printing them *en masse*. In this way some members provided notes on no less than six to eight papers which they had actually presented and read but of which no record had been made in the minutes.

In the late eighties of the last century a number of Professor Call's friends in Des Moines, realizing fully both his brilliant attainments and his difficulty in getting a suitable living, put forth special effort to have him appointed to the headship of the science department of the Des Moines West High School, then a much sought post. In this they succeeded nicely; and he entered upon his duties with great zest and high hopes. But it was not long before there was an unfortunate flare-up between instructor and school committee in which the versatile and enthusiastic naturalist was soon worsted. The best and most entertaining lecturer the school had ever had, the most ardent scientist who had ever ventured to the city, and perhaps the best science teacher who ever darkened the doors of high school was summarily dismissed. But his students, with greatest enthusiasm and keen appreciation far beyond their years, had entered the fairy demesne of science. Some of these "delinquents" from that beginning followed the paths so auspiciously opened up and successfully made science their life's occupation. Perhaps after all this intensive study of a circumscribed field was the best science training possible. *Quien sabe?*

Professor Call was my first acquaintance with a real live scientist of national reputation. It was very early in my career. As a youngster of thirteen years, in the first half of high school, I had already made modest beginning at collecting shells, insects, birds and minerals. My teacher was a John W. King, who was also principal. King was noticeably eccentric in his manners and methods, but he was an avowed follower of Herbert Spencer, and he was especially fond of trying out the Spencerian theories of education. So soon as he found out that any one of his pupils had become especially interested in any particular subject he at once set about to encourage him to greater and more systematic effort. Being a neighbor of Call's he made arrangement to take over one evening half a dozen of his kiddies, among them also Uly S. Grant, who has

since become a distinguished authority on geology, and a leader in higher education, as dean of Northwestern University.

Upon our arrival at his home Call joyously gave up the entire evening to these youngsters, showing them his books and his cabinet of shells, all the while giving a fascinating running talk on the high points of interest. The youthful company had also thoughtfully come prepared; for they had their pockets full of specimens of which they wished to know the names. They had already learned the long Latin titles of some few forms but they wanted to enlarge their scientific vocabulary. Call willingly helped to do this.

Call was indeed a naturalist of the most versatile sort. This very fact prevented him from concentrating effort deeply upon any one thing or for any length of time. His exceptionally alert mind and normal great activity thus largely spent their force unavailingly. His efforts were bent along the line of the formal systematist rather than of the philosopher. With him product rather than process was the all-important desideratum. He was widely read; and of biological topics his knowledge almost bordered on the uncanny. There were few fields of science in which he could not discourse intelligently and at length in all their genetic, developmental and taxonomic aspects.

He was what is generally called a Bohemian, although always with serious ambitions. He was a brilliant talker whether in a small company or on the lecture platform, fully able at the moment to turn his vast knowledge to account. His conversation abounded in lively anecdote told with infinite zest; he was thoroughly genial and ready at good humored repartee; and he was never hampered by any excessive reverence for ancestral proprieties. Even an ordinary social gathering must have consisted of very ponderous interests if it could not be stirred into animation by a man with so much more quicksilver in his veins than falls to the lot of the average citizen.

Call was generous to a fault, helpful beyond measure, and thoroughly sympathetic. As a teacher he was seemingly without a peer. It is perhaps from this angle that the value of his great services should be judged rather than from that of cold, copious and creative productivity.

CHARLES KEYES.