Rudy Eller was a quiet man. He conducted his professional life as he did his personal one—unobtrusively.

I met him in the twilight of his life when he had essentially put aside his professional preoccupation with fossils and tended other interests. In our meetings he never complained about his failing health nor did he volunteer the information that he had been fitted with a prosthetic device to assist a fragile heart.

In a modest but persistent way he was a benefactor of the Geology Department at Alfred University. This philanthropy was the focal point of our common interest and formed the basis of our conversation and correspondence. He was reticent to discuss his personal accomplishments but spoke glowingly of field trips in the Alfred area and of collecting fossils in nearby ravines and stream beds—now long since altered by the erosion which had occurred during passage of decades since he last explored them as a young, would-be geologist.

E. Rudy Eller was born in Buffalo, New York, on March 17, 1904. Little is recorded about his youth as he was reluctant to discuss that part of his life. In 1925 he matriculated at Alfred University in Allegany County, New York. He originally intended to major in ceramics, but his interests turned to natural science under the tutelage of Fred Ross. The two became fast friends and field companions as Rudy's interests gradually identified with the discipline of geology. He also found time for an interesting array of extracurricular athletic activities, including football, wrestling, and track. His natural flair for order was enhanced by a number of managerial positions for the school newspaper—*Fiat Lux*. He was inducted into the Klan Alpine fraternity and held student assistantships during much of his Alfred residence.

Despite his rather wide range of non-academic activities, he was somewhat of an introvert, choosing his friends selectively but with lifelong tenacity. The *Kanakadea*, yearbook for his 1930 graduation from Alfred, carried the following description of him:

Rudy—our man of mystery! Blasé and well dressed, silently maintains his even tenure [sic] behind his mask of indifference. No outward warmth need anyone expect, although his more intimate acquaintances find him the staunchest of friends.

The three years following graduation from Alfred were spent at the University of Pittsburgh from which he received an M.S. The Pittsburg years were also those of the formative association with the Carnegie Museum of Natural History with which he was to be identified for all of his professional life. While enrolled in the graduate school, he was appointed graduate assistant for the museum collections. During part of the summers of 1931–1933, he returned to Alfred and conducted field investigations in the Upper Devonian strata, which formed the basis for many of his early publications.
Rudy had been appointed a temporary section assistant at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in 1933. In 1936 the appointment became a permanent one. In 1943 he was promoted to assistant curator of geology and invertebrate paleontology and became curator three years later. After a long career he retired on March 31, 1970, as curator emeritus.

Eller’s stratigraphic interests were relatively parochial, never straying too far from the Upper Devonian sequences of New York and Pennsylvania. His paleontological research was somewhat esoteric. Eller had a casual interest in Devonian “glass sponges” and was responsible for acquiring the large private collection of the Hall brothers of Wellsville, New York, for the Carnegie Museum. Several groups of arthropoda held his interest from time to time; he described new species as they came to his attention. His principal research efforts were vested in the fossilized remnants of the mastigatory apparatus (scolecodonts) of extinct lower paleozoic worms. His bibliography reflects this preoccupation.

According to John Carter, who succeeded Eller at the Carnegie Museum, his (Eller’s) main paleontological goal was to demonstrate the biostratigraphic utility of the scolecodonts. He did not succeed during his lifetime, but his work acted as a catalyst for other investigators who may in time provide the relationships he sought to establish. Eller also developed an expertise in antiques and ancient American glass and applied his knowledge in these areas to the museum’s advantage.

Eller received an honorary Sc.D. from Waynesburg College in 1947. He was a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, The Pennsylvania Academy of Science, and the Pennsylvania Field Geologists Association. He was elected to Fellowship in the Paleontological Society and the Geological Society of America. He also held memberships in the Society of the Study of Evolution, The National Early American Glass Club, and the Pittsburgh Color Camera Club.

Eller married Ildra Harris of Wellsville, New York, in the summer of 1934. She was an Alfred alumna and had taught French at the university from 1926 to 1934. The wedding ceremony was performed by Alfred’s President Boothe Colwell Davis in Plainfield, New Jersey.

Eugene Rudy Eller died at age 72 on July 9, 1976, after a short illness. Mrs. Eller had preceded him in death. Survivors include a son, Steven B. of Savannah, Georgia; a daughter, Mrs. Margaret Page of Kingston, Arkansas; a sister, Virginia Pillou of Buffalo, New York; and five grandchildren. He was interred in the Alfred Rural Cemetery, Alfred, New York. To perpetuate Rudy’s memory, an annual competition for an undergraduate scholarship in geology at Alfred University has been established in his name.

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SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF E. R. ELLER


