

Memorial to Horace Elmer Wood, 2nd 1901-1975

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Horace Nixon Elmer Wood was born in Portland, Oregon, on February 6, 1901. In his teen years he deleted "Nixon" and affixed "2nd" to his name, the latter because there had been another family member of the same name. His father was Captain Albert Norton Wood, U.S. Navy, and his mother, Dr. Edith Elmer Wood, author and housing reformer. Because the family moved frequently, he lived at times in Europe, Puerto Rico, and several places in the United States.

As a lad in Washington, D.C., Horace haunted the National Museum and became well acquainted with the vertebrate paleontologists, J. W. Gidley and C. W. Gilmore. The interest, thus awakened, determined his future profession. He attended high school in Washington and at the Brooklyn Polytechnic Preparatory School in New York, from which he was graduated at the age of 16. He entered Princeton University in 1917, where he studied paleontology with W. B. Scott and W. J. Sinclair and stratigraphy with Gilbert Van Ingen. After graduating from Princeton in 1921, he entered the graduate school of Columbia University, New York, where William K. Gregory was his major professor.

Gregory had dual appointments at Columbia and the American Museum of Natural History. Advanced class work and research by his students were conducted at the museum. Thus Horace began a lifelong connection with the American Museum, first as a volunteer, later as Research Associate and Fellow. Most of his studies of fossil mammals were made there and several were published there.

While in graduate school Wood taught first at Brooklyn Polytechnic, 1921 to 1923, and then at Washington Square College of New York University, 1924 to 1931, continuing after receiving his Ph.D. from Columbia in 1927. In 1931 he moved to Dana College in Newark, New Jersey, where he founded a biology department. It continued through several transformations of the institution, which eventually became the Newark Colleges of Rutgers University. He led the department throughout the rest of his active career except from 1943 to 1946 when he was on duty as first lieutenant and captain in the Army Air Corps, serving as ground school instructor in Mississippi and Alabama. In the late 1950s his eyesight deteriorated and other problems arose that led to his retirement as Professor Emeritus of Vertebrate Paleontology in 1959 at the early age of fifty-eight. He spent most of the rest of his life in an old family home at Cape May Court House, New Jersey. Although a few papers incorporating earlier research were published thereafter, the ailments necessitating his retirement essentially ended his active career. On July 8, 1975, he suffered a stroke and he died on August 13, 1975.

In 1925 Wood married Dr. Florence Dowden, a student of autotomy in Crustacea, who thereafter devoted herself mainly to assisting him. She illustrated most of his pub-

lications. They had one son, Thurston Elliott Wood. Wife and son survive as does a brother, Albert Elmer Wood, also a vertebrate paleontologist.

While still in graduate school, Wood decided that specialization on some particular systematic group was most likely to lead to a successful career in paleontology. He selected the fossil rhinoceroses, or more broadly the *Ceratomorpha*, which include not only the living rhinoceroses and their enormously more diverse extinct allies but also the tapirs and their likewise highly diverse extinct relatives. His doctoral dissertation, published in 1927, was entitled "Some early Tertiary rhinoceroses and hyracodonts." The hyracodonts were a family, long extinct (also rhinoceroses in a broader sense and often called cursorial rhinoceroses). In graduate school he also began studying another extinct family of early rhinoceros relatives, the Hyrachyidae. This eventually resulted in a major contribution published by the American Museum in 1934. In all, Wood published twenty-four papers on *Ceratomorpha* and became the leading American specialist on that group. His health problems prevented his completion of a plan to review the whole group, and some of his observations and notes remain unpublished. Throughout his active career Wood was also interested in studies of mammalian teeth in groups other than rhinoceroses, and he published several brief but useful papers on such topics.

Wood's second major interest was in stratigraphy, specifically that of continental mammal-bearing strata in the United States. In 1923 he assisted Professor L. A. Manhardt on the "New York University Field Expedition in Vertebrate Paleontology," which worked by horse and wagon in the Big Badlands (Oligocene White River Group) of South Dakota. Again for New York University, in 1928 he began study of the field localities of early fossil rhinoceroses, mostly in South Dakota, Nebraska, Wyoming, Utah, and Colorado. In 1931 he started what was essentially a long series of working family summer excursions, which eventually covered most of the major strata and localities for North American Tertiary mammals from South Dakota and Nebraska west to California, south to Texas, and north to Alberta and Saskatchewan. These widespread field observations continued periodically from 1931 through 1941 and then after his war service every summer from 1948 to 1953. The last three seasons were concentrated on the Powder River Basin, where a considerable collection of fossil mammals, with good stratigraphic data, was made and later presented to the American Museum.

Those field studies made Wood uniquely qualified to act as chairman of the committee appointed in 1938 by the Vertebrate Section of the Paleontological Society (nucleus of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology, founded in 1940) to prepare a report on "a provincial North American time-scale." Under Wood's guidance the committee acted well and, considering the complexity of the subject, rapidly. In addition to the seven formal committee members, almost all then-active American students of fossil mammals (and the strata in which they occur) became involved. The committee report, often referred to simply as the Wood Report, was published by the Geological Society of America in 1941. Its influence has been enormous, not only within its original geographic scope but also throughout the world. It introduced a system of nomenclature and definition for provincial ages and stages for continental Cenozoic strata, primarily mammal-bearing or correlatable with such deposits. As a system, this is applicable on all the continents (except Antarctica up to now). As an example, the system was applied to almost all the North American mammalian local faunas and mammal-bearing strata known up to 1940. This is clearly Wood's greatest achievement in geology.

In the 1950s, although the essential contributions of the Wood Report remained valid, it was clear that expansion and revision were called for. Many further relevant paleontological discoveries had been made, requiring modified definitions and incorpora-

tion into the system. Important questions of principle and procedure had also arisen, such as clearer distinction of ages and stages or type concepts and designations. A new committee headed by Wood, now under the aegis of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology, was appointed, but after doing considerable work Wood had to retire. The great task, well started by him, was carried to the eve of publication by others, but for reasons not pertinent here it was never quite completed. In connection with this work, not long before his retirement Wood served in behalf of the Geological Society of America on the American Commission on Stratigraphic Nomenclature from 1954 to 1956.

Wood was a Fellow of the Geological Society of America, which he joined in 1930. He was a charter member of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology and its president (1956–1957). He was long a member of the New York Academy of Sciences, secretary of its Section of Biology (1937–1938), and vice-president (1939–1940). He also belonged to several other professional societies and served on numerous committees.

In addition to my personal memories and files, this brief account of a useful, distinguished, but sadly curtailed career has been based on personal communications and clippings provided by Mrs. H. E. Wood, 2nd, on an obituary notice by A. E. Wood, on a vita compiled by H. E. Wood, 2nd, in the 1950s, and on publications and other records in the Simroe Foundation.

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