Memorial to Elias Howard Sellards

Dr. Elias Howard Sellards, Professor, Director Emeritus of the Bureau of Economic Geology, former Director of the Texas Memorial Museum, and distinguished geologist, died at the age of 85 in Austin, Texas, February 4, 1961. He is survived by his two daughters, Mrs. H. A. (Helen) Hemphill and Mrs. F. H. (Daphne) McGowan, both of Houston, Texas; five grandchildren; eight great-grandchildren; and one brother, E. W. Sellards, Topeka, Kansas. His wife, Mrs. Anna Mary (Alford) Sellards, preceded him in death in 1952.

Dr. Sellards was born May 2, 1875, at Carter, Kentucky, the son of Wiley W. Sellards and Sarah (Menix) Sellards. The family moved to Kansas by covered wagon while Dr. Sellards was a youth. He attended school both at Carter, Kentucky, and Scranton, Kansas, completing his high-school education at Scranton in 1894. He was a student at Washburn Academy at Topeka, Kansas, and then attended the University of Kansas at Lawrence and was graduated with the B.A. degree in 1899; he received the M.A. degree from that University in 1900. While at the University of Kansas, he was a student of Samuel W. Williston, a renowned teacher of Vertebrate Paleontology. He continued graduate study from 1901 to 1903 at Yale University, holding both a scholarship and fellowship, and received the Ph.D. degree in 1903. At Yale his work brought him under the influence of three famous teachers, Charles Schuchert, Charles E. Beecher, and H. S. Williams. Charles Schuchert became a close personal friend and visited Dr. Sellards many times in his home. Dr. Sellards' dissertation was on "Fossil Plants of the Upper Paleozoic of Kansas" and "A Study of the Structure of Paleozoic Cockroaches with Descriptions of New Forms."

Dr. Sellards began his teaching career as Instructor in Geology and Mineralogy at Rutgers College, New Brunswick, New Jersey, during the 1903-1904 school year. He accepted the Chair of Professor of Geology and Zoology at the University of Florida, at Gainesville, in 1904 and continued in this position until 1907, when he became State Geologist of Florida and moved to Tallahassee. While he was Florida State Geologist, he published twelve annual reports, two bulletins, and numerous articles of enduring prominence. These publications related mainly to basic geology and mineral resources of Florida. During this period he devoted considerable attention to fossil vertebrates, especially early man, and was constantly on the alert for evidence of early man. In 1913, human remains were found in the undisturbed wall of a canal at Vero (now Vero Beach), Florida. This discovery resulted in a conference of noted scientists at the site in 1916.

Dr. Sellards moved to Texas in 1918 to accept the position of Geologist on the staff of the Bureau of Economic Geology offered by the late Dr. J. A. Udden, then Director. He was appointed Associate Director of the Bureau in 1925 and succeeded to the directorship in 1932, which position he held until 1945 when he was placed on modified service. He was appointed Professor of Geology and a member of the Graduate Faculty at The University of Texas in 1926 and was Director of the Texas Memorial Museum, Austin, from 1938 until retirement in 1957. He was the beloved Director Emeritus of the Bureau of Economic Geology from 1945 until his death, maintaining an office in J Hall on The Little Campus and entering into the activities of the Bureau as his physical condition permitted.

During his thirty-nine years of service at The University of Texas, Dr. Sellards attacked geological and paleontological problems with insatiable interest. One of his first assignments, placed on him by the Attorney General of Texas, was to determine the original boundary between Oklahoma and Texas along the Red River. He presented his work so thoroughly that the Supreme Court of the United States rendered an opinion favorable to Texas.

Between never-ending administrative duties, he found time to author and edit extensive reports on the geology and mineral resources of Texas. Among the important contributions are the two-volume compendium on the stratigraphy and structure of Texas, with accompanying geologic and structural maps of the State, and a book on "Early Man in America" including bibliography of literature on that subject. He was engaged on extensive revision of this book at the time of his death. During W.P.A. days, Dr. Sellards directed a paleontological project which assembled an outstanding collection of Pleistocene fossils remains, many of which are on exhibit at the Texas Memorial Museum.

Dr. Sellards was a member of numerous professional organizations and held office in several. He was a charter member of the Paleontological Society and served as vice-president in 1931 and president in 1942. He was elected a Fellow of The Geological Society of America in 1905 and served as councilor from 1938 to 1940 and as vice-president in 1943. He was a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and of the Texas Academy of Science (elected honorary life member in 1943). He was a member of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology, American Association of Petroleum Geologists (an honorary member since 1946), Society of Economic Paleontologists and Mineralogists (president in 1938), Society of Economic Geology, Texas Archaeological Society, Society for American Archaeology, Texas Chapter of Sigma Xi (chapter president in 1925), Texas Philosophical Society, and Southwestern Geological Society (president in 1924, 1931, 1932, 1935, and 1936).

He served on the Texas Planning Board in 1934-1936; Executive Committee of the Colorado River Authority in 1934-1935; Mineral Resources Planning Board of Texas; National Resources Committee of the Texas Centennial Exposition in 1935-1936; Public Works Committee of Texas, 1935; Sub-Committee on Materials for Highway Construction, National Research Council; Florida State Conservation Commission, 1908-1912; and the first Conference for Preservation of National Resources (Washington, D.C.), 1908.

Dr. Sellards participated in University affairs by serving on the Sharp-Cullinan Scholarship Committee, 1939-1943; Advisory Committee of the Bureau of Business Research, 1939; Advisory Committee of the Division of Natural Resources, 1939; Committee on Research Grants and Publications, 1939; University Research Council, 1940; and Committee on Membership in the Graduate Faculty, 1941-1942. He was largely responsible for initiating the Petroleum Engineering Department of the University.

Dr. Sellards was a member of the University Presbyterian Church, Austin, and was interested in civic betterment. The University of Kansas presented the Erasmus Haworth Award for a distinguished alumnus in 1958 to him at an alumni luncheon in Los Angeles and the University of Florida has established the Sellards' Geology Student Award in his honor because of his contributions to basic geology in that state.

Elias Howard Sellards lived to see many of his dreams come true. His work was directed on such broad scientific research that it gave him a golden opportunity to make many discoveries and contributions of lasting value. He was the dean of workers on the subject of early man and was well known among anthropologists as well as geologists. He grew constantly in the admiration of his fellow workers, and the example he set in his daily life might well be emulated. The professions of geology and paleontology have lost one of their great men.

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