

WILLIAM HENRY CAMPBELL, 1895-1944

ERNST ANTEVS

WILLIAM H. CAMPBELL, Fellow and Trustee of The Southwest Museum in Los Angeles, drowned in Lake Tahoe at Glenbrook, Nevada, June 3, 1944, when he returned from fishing in the beautiful, still summer evening. Nobody witnessed the accident, but he apparently stumbled as he approached the mooring post, was knocked unconscious, and fell overboard. He is survived by his wife, a brother, a sister, and nephews.

William Campbell was born in Los Angeles, California, October 28, 1895, the son of Peter Craig Campbell of Kirriemuir, Scotland, and Anna Henry Campbell of Reading, Pennsylvania. He was brought up in Los Angeles, where he attended public schools. In the spring of 1917 he enlisted for war service. After a year's training at Camp Crane, Allentown, Pennsylvania, he was sent overseas in June 1918. He served as an ambulance driver on the Italian front and received the War Cross for bravery in action. Just prior to the armistice he was severely burned by mustard gas. He returned home in the spring of 1919.

On May 27, 1920, Campbell married Elizabeth Warder Crozer of Upland, Pennsylvania. For a time he worked with the Emergency Fleet Corporation at Wilmington, Delaware; but, in February 1921, on account of ill health caused by gas burns in the lungs, he moved to Pasadena, California. Gradually his health broke down completely. In the hope that dry desert air would bring relief from his lung ailment, Mr. and Mrs. Campbell went in December, 1924, to the desert 150 miles east of Los Angeles, pitching their tent at the oasis of Twentynine Palms. Here they had only two neighbors within many miles. In February, 1925, Campbell homesteaded a tract of land near the oasis, where they built a cottage which formed the nucleus for their beautiful home.

With their home built and time at their disposal, the Campbells looked about for some intellectual pursuit. They were located on the southwestern side of the Mohave Desert, the vast triangular region which, with its apex 60 miles north of Los Angeles, spreads its base on the Colorado River from Yuma to Boulder Dam. The collection and study of Indian artifacts which they had observed at water holes and in caves seemed an interesting and worthwhile pastime. The Indians themselves had departed from the region in 1913, but they were brought back to life in the narratives of Mr. William McHaney, one of the Campbells original desert neighbors. Mr. McHaney, a prospector who had traversed the region with his burros since 1879, had lived, hunted, and traveled with the Indians and had acquired an intimate first-hand

knowledge of their customs and mode of living. Thus, the Campbells commenced early in 1928 to collect Indian artifacts in caves and on camp sites in the archaeologically virgin territory around Twentynine Palms. Somewhat later they made the acquaintance of Mr. Charles A. Amsden (1899–1941), then curator of archaeology at The Southwest Museum. With encouragement and advice from him, they pushed their field work and extended its periphery. In November, 1929, they deeded their entire large archaeological collection, as well as any future collections, to The Southwest Museum. The assembled material was kept for some years at Twentynine Palms, where the Campbells built a laboratory and museum named The Desert Branch—since 1936, The Twentynine Palms Laboratory—of the Southwest Museum. During 1930–1932 Mr. Edwin F. Walker acted as curator for the collection and the museum. The modern and recent archaeology of the area was described in “An Archeological Survey of the Twentynine Palms Region.”¹

While the Campbells always collaborated, there was a certain division in their labors and an individuality in their contributions. Both shared in field work and acquired great skill in locating sites and finding artifacts. In looking for sites they would cruise at low speed, scanning the ground. Mrs. Campbell did the writing and most of the laboratory work. Mr. Campbell did the mapping, determined the elevations, and stood for equipment and transportation. He outfitted his station wagons with water and extra gas tanks, ice box, and pantry, permitting week-long trips to waterless places. He equipped them with special gears and extra wide tires for driving across soft sand and silt. He possessed the mechanical knowledge and ability to mend the cars when they broke down. Most important, he acquired such a skill in desert driving that there was hardly a place he could not reach.

Having heard that fossil bones and worked flints had been seen on the main wash of the Pinto Basin, fifty miles southeast of Twentynine Palms, the Campbells themselves located old camps strewn with bones and artifacts, then called upon expert help from the Geology Department of the California Institute of Technology. Association of the artifacts and the bones of extinct camel and horse could not be proved but appeared probable, and the geology and the location of the camps suggested that these dated from an age with much heavier rainfall—from the Pluvial age. The results of the study were presented by the Campbells, David Scharf, and Charles Amsden in “The Pinto Basin Site.”²

Now the Campbells scoured the desert far and wide “with two main

¹ *Southwest Museum Papers*, No. 7, 1931.

² *Southwest Museum Papers*, No. 9, 1935.

objectives: one to cover all likely areas where sites might be found, the other to try to discover if cultural groups follow certain geologic formations and if so, to place these types in their proper sequence." They found numerous modern arrow point-potsherd sites, located near present-day water holes; many modern arrow point-non potsherd camps near water holes, or sometimes fairly far from water; and many dart point-scrapers-non potsherd camps on old stream terraces and abandoned shorelines far from modern water. This survey was outlined in "Archaeological Problems in the Southern California Deserts."³ The most promising district, that at Baker, 150 miles northeast of Los Angeles, was studied in greater detail with the aid of Charles Amsden, Francis Bode, Joseph Barbieri, and Ernst Antevs and supplied one of the better evidences of Pluvial age man in North America. This investigation was published under the title "The Archeology of Pleistocene Lake Mohave."⁴

Having covered most of the Mohave Desert, the Campbells combed the contiguous parts of the Great Basin and ranged far into Nevada and Utah in their ever-widening search for records of Early Man. To be closer to this promising field, they built a home on Lake Tahoe at Glenbrook, Nevada, which they made their legal residence. One of their discoveries in Nevada is recorded in a preliminary paper, "A Folsom Complex in the Great Basin."⁵ Though they have large unpublished collections and field data from the Great Basin, they hoped to devote many more years to its exploration.

In recognition of his contributions to archaeology, Campbell was appointed Fellow in Archeology of The Southwest Museum in February 1932, and was elected Trustee of the Museum in January 1938, and again in January 1941.

As one of the first homesteaders at the Twentynine Palms oasis, Campbell naturally took a very active part in the establishment of the community and in its evolution into a residential desert town. He devoted much thought and time to the planning and construction of the roads. He donated land for the original American Legion building and both land and funds for the first public school. He served as local Legion Commander in 1929, 1930, and 1933.

Bill Campbell was a modest, quiet, and good-natured man with an ever-ready friendly smile. He had a keen mathematical intellect, great resourcefulness and courage, and a calm that stood up in the most

³ AMERICAN ANTIQUITY, Vol. 1, April, 1936, pp. 295-300.

⁴ *Southwest Museum Papers*, No. 11, 1937.

⁵ *The Masterkey*, January, 1940, pp. 7-11.

exasperating situations. These sterling qualities won him many firm friends. His mental stability, together with his keenly observing eye, practical mind, and extraordinary skill in handling a car, made him an outstanding desert explorer. In devoting his talents, time, and resources to the arduous task of surveying the deserts of southern California and the Great Basin, Campbell rendered a great service to archaeology.

The Corral
Globe, Arizona
September, 1944