



ELIAS HOWARD SELLARDS

1875–1961

On February 4, 1961, at Austin, Texas, death ended the amazingly versatile career of E. H. Sellards at the age of 85. Although he was primarily a paleontologist and geologist who attained world-wide recognition in those disciplines, Sellards was also famed in the archaeological profession as one of the foremost authorities on “early man” in America. In all three professions, he was noted for extensive field work, mastery of the published literature, innumerable contacts by correspondence, extremely painstaking compilations of data, heavy administrative duties, and personal dedication. Over a span of nearly 60 years, Sellards was author or co-author of some 150 publications. Seven of his first eight papers were in paleobotany; then followed numerous others on structural, stratigraphic, and economic geology, vertebrate and invertebrate paleontology, exploration of “early man” localities, indexes to localities of early man in North and South America, and his book *Early Man in America*, published in 1952 and extensively revised for a new edition at the time of his death.

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Fuller accounts of Sellards' long career, and a complete bibliography, will undoubtedly appear in the geological journals. The material here is primarily concerned with the archaeological aspects of his life, and aside from some personal views, was compiled with the generous help of T. N. Campbell, University of Texas; Glen L. Evans, Midland, Texas; and Josephine Casey, for many years secretary of the Bureau of Economic Geology at the University of Texas. Ruth D. Simpson of the Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, California, kindly provided the photograph of Sellards, taken on the Mohave Desert in May, 1959, when she took him to ancient campsites around the shores of extinct Lake Manix.

Sellards was born in Kentucky on May 2, 1875. In his youth, the family moved to Kansas. At the University of Kansas he received the B.A. in 1899 and M.A. in 1900. His Ph.D. was earned at Yale University in 1903 with a dissertation on fossil plants and cockroaches of the Upper Paleozoic in Kansas. He taught geology and mineralogy at Rutgers College in 1903–04, then accepted a chair as Professor of Geology and Zoology at the University of Florida in 1904. In 1907 he became state geologist of Florida, where he remained until 1918. Following his report on human remains and artifacts in apparent association with extinct Pleistocene fauna at Vero, Florida, in 1916, Sellards became involved in the famous controversy with some noted anthropologists who, unable to believe that such a situation was possible in America, more or less accused Sellards and other geologists of not being able to distinguish between a primary association and an accidental one. This criticism—or rather, the kind of reasoning behind it—affected him more deeply than he would ever have admitted to anyone; he disliked controversy and avoided it in publications all his life. The Vero experience had aroused in him a consuming interest in the general problem of contemporaneity of man and Pleistocene fauna in America, but it was many years before he could find time to pursue the matter again with field work.

In 1918 Sellards moved to the University of Texas as Research Geologist in its Bureau of Economic Geology. He became Director in 1932 and Director Emeritus in 1945. From 1926 to 1945 he was also Professor of Geology, and in 1938 he became the second director of the Texas Memorial Museum. Retired from the

other positions in 1945, Sellards continued as museum director until 1957 when, at age 82, he retired from that as well, to devote full time to writing.

My informal association with Sellards and his supremely able chief assistant, Glen L. Evans, began in 1939 when I joined the WPA State-wide Archeological Survey sponsored by the Anthropology Department of the University of Texas, and continued for many years. Over the years it was Evans who conducted the scores of expeditions in geological mapping, fossil and mineral collecting, and the systematic excavation of "early man" archaeological sites. The scope of this work under the nominal direction of Sellards will never be appreciated by anyone not familiar with it, but a hint may be gained from Evans' remark, in 1954, that in 17 years of field work he had driven over 750,000 miles and had filled some 50 notebooks with field data—all this in addition to routine work in the Bureau and Museum. It might have been wiser to have had Evans do less field work and more publishing. At any rate, I do know that Sellards' one real pleasure during those years was to be in the field with Evans as often as he could arrange it.

On many occasions I consulted with Sellards and Evans over the identification of artifacts found, and on all-too-rare occasions I was able to visit their "early man" excavations. When, at times, I drove Sellards to or from one of the camps, I came to appreciate his enormous stamina, iron self-discipline, and complete dedication to a life of work. Never have I known anyone else who took it for granted that one worked or traveled 365 days a year! He even had difficulty understanding why others could not stand the same pace. Early in 1954, he rode with me to see several early man sites in Arizona and California. I well remember one day, when we had driven over 700 miles, he was the one who chided me about being tired!

The winter of 1951–52 marked notable changes in Sellards' life. For years he had refused to take time off for surgery of massive ulcers; characteristically he would admit no disability even when blood transfusions reached an average of one a week. Finally, in 1952 he decided to take a few days off for a long and dangerous operation. He was then 76, but hardly had he regained consciousness when he telephoned Evans to come to the hospital to help with final revision of the manuscript of *Early*

Man in America. Glen and I both worked with him at the hospital bed as many hours as doctors and nurses would permit. Within a month he was back at the museum. After the publication of *Early Man in America*, Sellards became a different person. The indomitable old man, always unsparing of himself, began to mellow and relax; he spent more time with people and took an interest in small talk. He became more interested in the problems of others, and wherever he traveled he showed warmth and charm and a lively sense of humor which had apparently long been suppressed.

There is no need here to comment on Sellards' contributions to science; they are obvious to those who have read his publications in each field of research. I might offer as a personal opinion that, where American archaeology is concerned, his chief concern was the matter of *direct association* between evidence of man and Pleistocene fauna. So far as I know, he never thought much about the many related problems of Pleistocene chronology, the environments faced by America's earliest inhabitants, changes in climate and environment, changes in culture, extinction of characteristic Pleistocene mammals, and so on. But by concentrating on the one matter of whether claimed associations were or were not valid, he performed an invaluable function for the archaeological profession. In addition, through his command of the literature and many contacts, he became a sort of clearing house of information, ever willing to supply others with data they might otherwise have overlooked.

Sellards was a phenomenon whose like will not be seen again for a long time. We who knew him salute his ability, versatility, integrity, and courage.

The following bibliography is believed to be a complete listing of Sellards' archaeological writings, except for the omission of several abstracts which were shortly followed by publication of the complete papers.

ALEX D. KRIEGER

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