

## **ALBERT HEALD VANVLEET, A PIONEER OKLAHOMA SCIENTIST.**

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Albert Heald VanVleet died at his home in Norman, Oklahoma, June 22, 1925. He was born in Page county, Iowa, and received his elementary education in the common schools of that section. Later he entered the Eastern Nebraska State Normal School, at Peru, Nebraska, and here evidenced much interest in biological studies, being an assistant and doing special work in the department of natural science for two years. On graduation he was offered the professorship of physics and chemistry in the normal. There being no opening there in his particular field and desiring funds to continue his studies, he accepted this position, carrying on his natural science investigations as time permitted. Later he became a student in the University of Wisconsin, where he majored in the biological sciences, graduating in 1895. In October of the same year he entered the University of Leipzig, Germany, and in 1897 secured the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from this institution. Here he carried on research work in zoology under Dr. Leuckhart, his botanical work being under Dr. Pfeffer the noted German plant physiologist. Returning to the United States he continued his graduate studies at Johns Hopkins University until the autumn of 1898, when he took up his work in the University of Oklahoma as professor of the natural sciences.

Dr. VanVleet found a department extremely limited as to equipment, there having been little or no work of this nature offered in the university prior to this time. However he brought with him much which was of service in organizing his department. He had in his years of study in America and Europe, accumulated an excellent private library of biological publications, not only in the English but in German, French, Italian and Russian. Being an expert photographer he had a large collection of photographs, taken in this country and abroad, and sets of pen and ink drawings, many in colors, the results of his years of laboratory work in animal and plant morphology. This material was housed in a part of the university building which at that time stood alone on the campus.

Dr. Van Vleet found a region practically unexplored from the botanical, zoological and geological standpoint, and at once interested himself in establishing a state natural history and geological survey. Dr. Boyd, then president of the university, saw the value

of such an undertaking, and lending his influence a law was passed that same winter establishing such a survey and appropriating the sum of \$200 per year for its maintenance. Dr. VanVleet being made director at once organized an expedition, obtained a team of horses, wagon and other necessary equipment, and himself advanced a part of the necessary funds to get the work started. With three



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companions he spent the summer of 1899, making a preliminary survey of what was then included in the Territory of Oklahoma. On this trip a large amount of material was obtained, including plants, minerals, fossils, photographs etc., as well as valuable field notes.

He was just getting his department well established when fire

destroyed the university building in 1902. In this fire Dr. VanVleet lost most of his library, herbarium material, photographs and field notes, some of this being data he intended to use later in published reports. He was thus compelled to begin over again, knowing that much of that which had been lost could never be replaced.

Commencing a second time the work of developing a biological department he collected widely and in the botanical field conducted exchanges with botanists in various sections of the country. He was reaching a position where he could begin to see the results of his labors, when the main building of the university burned and he again found a large part of the work of years destroyed. These fires discouraged Dr. VanVleet greatly and he never again attempted to build up a large herbarium or conduct extensive field investigations.

Dr VanVleet was a modest man, probably too much so for his own best interests. He did not publish extensively; not as much as his research work would have justified. He was preeminently a field naturalist and was always interested in the classification and ecological relationships of plants and animals. During his early years in Nebraska as well as later in Oklahoma, he was much interested in birds and made a careful and thorough study of the birds of these regions. Among articles published by him along these lines are, "Notes on Nebraska Birds", "The Bluejay", "Birds and Birds Nests", "April and April Birds", "Some Marsh Birds" "List of Birds of Oklahoma", etc. These appeared in such publications as, "The Ornithologist and Oologist", and in special reports. He also interested himself in a study of snakes, and published a preliminary report on the snakes of the territory.

As a field botanist he probably knew Oklahoma plants better than any other person, altho he published little along this line. This failure to publish may be attributed in part to the fires which destroyed much of his plant material along with the accompanying field notes. Then in later years many other interests crowding in, including his work as dean of the graduate school, he found less time to devote to research in his particular field.

Dr. VanVleet was a man who saw certain needs before they were generally recognized. This is exemplified in a paper which he read before the Oklahoma Teachers Association in 1900, advocating medical inspection in the public schools of the territory. In the preparation of this paper he wrote to the superintendent of schools in fourteen of the most important cities of the United States. He re-

ceived replies from all but New York and found Boston to be the only one having regular medical inspection at that time. Thus a measure was brought to the attention of the school authorities of the territory, which has later been largely adopted throughout the country.

As time went on and the university enlarged, Dr. VanVleet saw several departments develop from that of natural science. Geology was the first of these to be established, and later, departments of zoology, bacteriology and physiology were formed, he retaining the work in botany. He had an important part in the establishment of the pre-medic work which served as a foundation for the later development of the medical school. That he was unselfish in his interests is shown by the fact that for a number of years before his death, his department occupied very crowded quarters in the oldest building on the campus, with very poor laboratory and office facilities. Had he insisted he might have obtained somewhat better accommodations, but he asked no special favors because of long service.

He was a man who made friends with both students and faculty. This is shown by the many expressions of regret received by his wife since his death. He was always willing and anxious to help the worthy student but intolerant of the shirker. He numbered among his friends a host of those who had sat under his teaching, during his years of university service. He lamented the fact in late years that the size of his classes and his many outside duties, prevented the personal contact with individual students, which had been possible at an earlier time.

He was an exceptionally agreeable man to work with. In the more than eight years of association with him in the same department, the writer never saw him irritable or "out of sorts". Even when ill and in great pain he kept up an attitude of cheerfulness.

His interest in civic affairs and in the welfare of the university as a whole, as well as his work as a teacher and scientist, make his loss keenly felt by those with whom he has been intimately associated.