

George Grant MacCurdy, 1863-1947

[originally published in *American Anthropologist*, 50:516-524, 1948]

THEODORE D. McCOWN

*University of California
Berkeley, California*

THE American Anthropological Association has lost through the death of George Grant MacCurdy on November 15, 1947, one of its founding members, its Secretary for the fourteen-year period from 1903 to 1916 and its President in 1931. He and Mrs. MacCurdy were motoring south to spend the winter. As he crossed the road from his own car to ask for road directions near Plainfield, New Jersey, he was fatally injured by a passing automobile.

MacCurdy was born in Warrensburg, Missouri, on April 17, 1863. As a native son he often used the well-known phrase implying scepticism and disbelief, usually with a twinkle in his eye, when he felt that his credulity was being imposed upon. A man with a great fund of human kindness and unwilling to believe ill of others, he found this a ready means of expressing doubt and scepticism without conveying censure.

Son of William J. and Margaret Smith MacCurdy, he early knew the labor of the farm. The elder MacCurdy had set his face against slavery and, having freed his slaves on his Georgia plantation, was moving westward when the beginning of the Civil War found the family at Warrensburg. The life of a farmer had no deep appeal to the active and inquiring mind of young MacCurdy. The Second District Normal School at Warrensburg was the scene of his graduation in 1887. His first school-teaching job came at the age of eighteen, periods of teaching to earn tuition to pay for his Normal School training alternating with periods of study. Two years after graduation he was a Superintendent of Schools.

The year 1889 marked a turning point in MacCurdy's career. As a YMCA delegate from Warrensburg to a conference at Mt. Hermon, Massachusetts, he was able to visit Boston and Cambridge and his enthusiasm was kindled to become a student at Harvard. Two more years as a schoolmaster intervened but in 1891 he came to Harvard on a scholarship and matriculated with advanced standing. Biology and geology were the subjects which interested him then. He was awarded his A.B. in 1893 and the M.A. he took a year later. The summer of 1894 he spent

at Alexander Agassiz' biological laboratory at Newport.

During the later years at Harvard MacCurdy became acquainted with Professor and Mrs. Edward E. Salisbury of Yale. Mrs. Salisbury was a kinswoman, and she and her husband, discerning the enthusiasm and ability of their young relative, offered to finance a period of study abroad. So in 1895 MacCurdy journeyed to Vienna. His Harvard training and his interests in biology made it natural for him to attend the International Zoological Congress at Leyden in 1896. This was the occasion at which Eugene DuBois first exhibited the remains of *Pithecanthropus erectus* to the curious, no less among the scientists than among the public. Young MacCurdy found this experience of a decisive character and henceforth was to devote himself intensively, though not exclusively, to paleo-anthropology. Paris in 1896-1897 and Berlin in 1897-1898 followed the Vienna studies. These were important years not alone in that the definition and scope of his later work was laid down, but in the many friendships he formed among anthropologists and prehistorians. Vienna, perhaps because he lived there first, was always first in his mind and heart when recalling these student days. Fundamentally the temper of the time and of the people of that city were congenial to his own temperament, and these influences were lasting and always very vivid to him.

MacCurdy returned to the United States in 1898, was offered and accepted an instructorship at Yale, and began his association with that institution and its Peabody Museum which was to terminate thirty-three years later, when in 1931, he became Emeritus Research Associate with professorial rank and Emeritus Curator of the Anthropological Collections. These were busy years, a doctorate of philosophy to obtain – which he did in 1905 (Yale) –, teaching, responsibility for the growing collections in the Museum, a part-time job during 1910-1912 at the American Museum of Natural History cataloguing and arranging for exhibition the Old World prehistoric collections, public and professional service as Secretary of this

Association, and summer visits abroad as a member or delegate to scientific congresses.

The summer of 1919 marked his marriage to Glenn Bartlett. It was the beginning of a new period of fruitful and happy activity, unquestionably stimulated by Mrs. MacCurdy's enthusiasm for prehistoric archeology, her never-failing encouragement of her husband's work, and her constant companionship on their repeated travels abroad. In 1921 Dr. and Mrs. MacCurdy and Dr. Charles Peabody founded the American School in France for Prehistoric Studies. MacCurdy served as Director the first year, Charles Peabody the second year, Ales Hrdlička the third, and then in 1924 MacCurdy resumed the directorship. A managing committee was the original governing body, later replaced by a board of Trustees in 1926 when the School was incorporated under the name of the American School of Prehistoric Research.

The original idea was closely linked to the training of students and the conduct of archeological excavations at prehistoric sites. In the field of classical archeology these needs and others had long been met by schools at Rome and Athens. Relations with the Archaeological Institute of America and the American Anthropological Association were established from the very beginning and were formalized in 1926 by making certain officers of both associations *ex officio* members of the Board.

The summer term of the School was the principal yearly activity until the outbreak of World War II. It provided an opportunity for from half a dozen to twenty American and other students to visit and study prehistoric sites and important museum collections during eight or ten weeks. The itinerary varied from summer to summer but normally included a period of excavation in the Dordogne. Through the cooperation of the Archaeological Society of Washington, which had a lease on a site near St. Leon-sur-Vezere, the students received their first experience of getting Paleolithic dirt on their hands and under their fingernails. The high esteem in which MacCurdy was held by his European colleagues was of immense benefit to the students in assuring "conferences" by these men and in opening doors on off-days and at odd hours.

A second activity was the publication of the Bulletin, whose first number was a four-page leaflet issued in 1926, largely devoted to stating the aims, organization and hopes of the new institution. The Bulletin grew in time to a sizable yearly issue containing articles of

importance in the field of prehistory and ancient man. MacCurdy was the editor of the first fifteen numbers as well as a contributor.

Another field of endeavor was the collaboration with and support of the work abroad of institutions and prehistorians engaged in searching for new facts about ancient man. The longest of these cooperative projects was the series of joint expeditions of the School with the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem. Under the leadership of Professor Dorothy A. E. Garrod they began in 1928 in the Kurdish part of Iraq, and continued in Palestine for seven seasons at the Wady Mughara group of caves. The Royal College of Surgeons, London, became a partner in the later phases of this enterprise. Over a dozen American institutions possess collections of the Paleolithic and Mesolithic cultural material from Mt. Carmel because of their support of the School's activities. The achievement of a separate physical home for the School never was realized but as the years passed the ties with the Peabody Museum at Harvard grew stronger, and today the American School's "share" of the Mt. Carmel fossil human remains is in the charge of that Museum, under the supervision of the School's present Director, Dr. H. O'N. Hencken.

Dr. and Mrs. MacCurdy gave of themselves unstintingly to the School in thought, deed, and financially, so that the phrase "our school" was justifiably appropriate. Yet the conception was bigger than an avocation or a hobby, and MacCurdy kindled a strong flame of enthusiasm in many friends and acquaintances that brought enduring support to the School for its work of making plain humanity's dim past. Nor did he ever lose sight of the fact that a school's chief function is to teach, to provide the facilities and the encouragement for learning; and that its success is measured by the distinction of its graduates. Within the ever present financial limitations of the School it achieved all these in full measure.

MacCurdy's published professional contributions were principally in physical anthropology and prehistoric archeology, with the latter predominating. As a museum curator at Yale he was drawn into the Americanist field; his work on the art and antiquities of Chiriqui and his study of the Peruvian skeletal material of the Bingham expedition are to be viewed in this connection. But his major interest was in the prehistory of the Old World, and beginning in 1900, for forty years he provided his American colleagues with reports and accounts of

significant discoveries abroad of ancient man and his culture. In 1924 MacCurdy's great fund of knowledge and personal experience in this field was presented in the two volumes of *Human Origins*. It appeared at what was the beginning of an extraordinarily active period of field investigations with a consequent increase of new information, significant parts being the work of MacCurdy and the American School, its collaborators and students. The volumes are, however, of fundamental importance, and their special features such as the gazeteer of sites, to mention only one, are of lasting value. As one of the organizers of the International Symposium on Ancient Man held at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia in 1937, and as the editor of the volume, *Early Man*, which resulted therefrom, he played a major role in the advance of our knowledge of man's antiquity throughout the world.

MacCurdy's life was long, fruitful, and he remained vigorous both physically and mentally until his death. A man of multitudinous friendships both in America and abroad, he received numerous honors. His activities as a member of the American Anthropological Association have already been noted. He was Secretary of Section H of the AAAS and a Vice-president of that Association in 1905, Vice-president of the Archaeological Institute of America, a Trustee of the Laboratory of Anthropology, Member of the American Philosophical Society and of the National Research Council, Vice-president of the International Congress of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences (Oslo, 1936), and a fellow or member of fifteen or more foreign and American scientific societies, a number of these being honorary.

The modesty and unassuming kindliness of his personality was complemented by a sane and clear intellect. He was, I think, never troubled about the role and place of anthropology among the sciences. It was to study and make plain the history of Man-his culture and his body. His doubts arose over the amount and timeliness of the means to achieve this end. His personal contributions as scholar and as Director of the American School were notable in advancing towards this goal. He saw clearly too that cooperative endeavor would make the greatest gains, and so he and Mrs. MacCurdy, through the School, labored unremittingly to help others in their efforts at understanding Man's early failures and successes.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The select bibliography presented here may be supplemented by referring to the complete citations in *Bulletin 16* of the American School of Prehistoric Research (1948). Reports made in MacCurdy's capacity as Secretary of the American Anthropological Association which appeared in the *American Anthropologist*, and reports in the same journal, in *Science*, and elsewhere, of the activities of Section H, AAAS, and of numerous scientific meetings and congresses both in the United States and abroad, are not listed here. Neither are book reviews. Commencing in 1912 he contributed annually the article on Anthropology and Ethnology to the *American Year Book* for the years 1911-1918 and for 1925. Editorship of the *Bulletin of the American School of Prehistoric Research* began in 1926 and continued through 1939. Original articles are listed herein, but reports on the yearly activities of the School are omitted.¹

- 1897
 " 'Pithecanthropus erectus,' by Leon Manouvrier [translation]." *AJS*, 4th series, 4: 213-234.
 "Indices ponderaux du crane." *BSAP*, 4th series, 8: 5-16.
- 1899
 "Extent of Instruction in Anthropology in Europe and the United States." *Science*, n.s., 10: 910-917.
- 1900
 "A New Paleolithic Station." *Science*, n.s., II: 792-793.
 "The Obsidian Razor of the Aztecs." *AA*, n.s., 2: 417-421.
- 1902
 "The Teaching of Anthropology in the United States." *Science*, n.s., 15: 211-216.
 "Anthropological Collections of Yale University Museum." *AA*, n.s., 4: 192-194.
- 1903
 "Progress in Anthropology at Peabody Museum, Yale University." *AA*, n.s., 5: 67-70.

¹ The bibliography here presented consists of 107 items, the complete one, compiled by Dr. MacCurdy himself, of 270.

The following abbreviations are employed:

AA	American Anthropologist
AJA	American Journal of Archaeology
AJS	American Journal of Science
AJPA	American Journal of Physical Anthropology
AMJ	American Museum Journal
A&A	Art and Archaeology
BASPR	Bulletin of the American School of Prehistoric Research
BSAP	Bulletin de la Société d' Anthropologie de Paris
JSAP	Journal de la Société des Américanistes de Paris
NH	Natural History
PAAAS	Proceedings, American Association for the Advancement of Science
PAPS	Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society
SM	Scientific Monthly

- 1904
 "Danish Museums of Archaeology." *AA*, n.s., 6: 90-94.
 "John Wesley Powell." *JSAP*, n.s., 1: 339-344.
- 1905
 "Prehistoric Surgery – A Neolithic Survival." *AA*, n.s., 7: 17-23.
 "The Eolithic Problem-Evidences of a Rude Industry Antedating the Paleolithic." *AA*, n.s., 7: 425-479.
- 1907
 "Some Phases of Prehistoric Archeology" (Vice-Presidential Address). *PAAAAS*, 56: 1-25.
 "The Armadillo in the Ancient Art of Chiriqui." *Proceedings*, Fifteenth International Congress of Americanists, 2nd section, pp. 147-163.
- 1908
 "Some Recent Paleolithic Discoveries." *AA*, n.s., 10: 634-643.
- 1909
 "Ernest Theodore Hamy." *AA*, n.s., 11: 145-147.
 "Penck on the Antiquity of Man." *Records of the Past*, 8: 33-38.
 "Eolithic and Paleolithic Man." *AA*, n.s., 11: 145-147.
 "The Alligator in the Ancient Art of Chiriqui." *Proceedings*, Sixteenth International Congress of Americanists, pp. 311-312.
- 1910
 "An Aztec Calendar Stone in Yale University Museum." *AA*, n.s., 12: 481-496.
- 1911
 "Recent Discoveries Bearing on the Antiquity of Man in Europe." *Smithsonian Report for 1909*, pp.531-583.
 "A Study of Chiriquian Antiquities." *Memoirs of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 3: 1-249.
 "Chiriqui." *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, 3: 563-565.
 "Somatology and Man's Antiquity." *Records of the Past*, 10: 322-331.
- 1912
 "Pleistocene Man from Ipswich (England)." *Science*, n.s., 35: 505-507.
 "Some Notable Works on South American Archeology." *AA*, n.s., 14:194-196.
 "The Cave Man as Artist." *The Century Magazine*, 84: No.3, pp. 439-448.
 "A New French Cavern with Paleolithic Mural Engravings." *Science*, n.s., 36: 2-270.
 "Notes on the Ancient Art of Central America." *AA*, n.s., 14: 314-319.
- 1913
 "Cultural Proof of Man's Antiquity." *AMJ*, 13: 27-30.
 "Ancestor Hunting: The Significance of the Piltdown Skull." *AA*, n.s., 15: 248--255.
 "Ancient Man, His Environment and His Art." *Popular Science Monthly* (July), pp. 5-22.
 "Shell Gorgets from Missouri." *AA*, n.s., 15: 395-414.
 "On the Relation of Archeology to Ethnology from the Quaternary Standpoint." *AA*, n.s., 15:567-573.
 "Note on the Archeology of Chiriqui." *AA*, n.s., 15: 661-667.
- 1914
 "A Fossil Human Skeleton from German East Africa." *Science*, n.s., 40: 19-20.
 "La Combe, a Paleolithic Cave in the Dordogne." *AA*, n.s., 16: 157-184.
 "More Paleolithic Art." *Records of the Past* (Jan.-Feb.), pp. 30-33.
 "The Man of Piltdown." *AA*, n.s., 16: 331-336.
 "Human Skulls from Gazelle Peninsula." *Anthropological Publications*, University of Pennsylvania Museum, 6: 1-21.
- "Paleolithic Art as Represented in the Collections of the American Museum of Natural History." *AMJ*, 14: 225-237.
 "The Passing of a Connecticut Rock Shelter." *AJS*, 4th series, 38: 511-522.
- 1915
 "Interglacial Man from Ehringsdorf near Weimar." *AA*, n.s., 17: 139-142.
 "The Cavern of the Three Brothers (Ariege)." *Science*, n.s., 41: 782-783.
 "Neolithic Period." *New International Encyclopedia*, 16: 714-717.
 "Neandertal Man in Spain: the Lower Jaw of Bañolas." *Science*, n.s., 41: 84-85.
 "Race in the Pacific Area with Special Reference to the Origin of the American Indians: Antiquity of Occupation." *AA*, n.s., 17: 708-711.
- 1916
 "Paleolithic Period." *New International Encyclopedia*, 17: 738-743.
 "The Revision of *Eoanthropus dawsoni*." *Science*, n.s., 43: 228-231.
 "The Dawn of Art." *A&A*, 4: 71-90.
 "The Octopus Motive in Ancient Chiriquian Art." *AA*, n.s., 18: 366-383.
 "The Cult of the Ax." *Holmes Anniversary Volume*, pp. 301-315.
- 1917
 "Archeological Evidences of Man's Antiquity at Vero, Florida." *Journal of Geology*, 25: 56-62.
 "The Problem of Man's Antiquity at Vero, Florida," *AA*, n.s., 19: 252-261.
 "Some Mounds of Eastern Tennessee." *Proceedings*, Nineteenth International Congress of Americanists, pp. 59-74.
 "The Wesleyan University Collection of Antiquities from Tennessee." *ibid.*, pp. 75-94.
- 1918
 "Surgery Among the Ancient Peruvians." *A&A*, 7: 381-394.
- 1919
 "Nature Reflected in the Art of the Ancient Chiriquians." *NH*, 19: 141-151.
 "Anthropology and Post-Bellum Reconstruction." *AJPA*, 2: 69-72.
 "The Academic Teaching of Anthropology in Connection with Other Departments." *AA*, n.s., 21:49-60.
- 1920
 "Aspects of theSkull: How Shall They Be Represented?" *AJPA*, 3:77-81.
- 1921
 "American Foundation in France for Prehistoric Studies." *AA*, n.s., 23: 115-116.
 "A Rare Effigy Pipe from Tennessee." *A&A*, 11: 261-262.
 "Fossil Man from Rhodesia." *Science*, n.s., 54: 577.
- 1922
 "New Discoveries of Neandertal Man at La Quina and La Ferrassie." *AJPA*, 5:1-3.
 "A Remarkable Human Lower Jaw from Peru." *AJPA*, 5: 17-20.
 "The First Session's Work of the American School in France for Prehistoric Studies." *AA*, n.s., 24:61-71.
 "The Skull from Broken Hill in Rhodesia." *AA*, n.s., 24: 97-98.
 "Emil Cartailhac." *AA*, n.s., 24: 112-114.
 "The Preservation of Prehistoric Monuments in France." *A&A*, 14: 91-96.
- 1923
 "'The Palaeolithic Period in Siberia,' by Gero von Merhart, [editor and translator]." *AA*, n.s., 25: 21-55.

- "Certain Specimens from the Riviere Collection." *AA* , n.s., 25: 72-89.
- "Human Skeletal Remains from the Highlands of Peru." *AJPA*, 6: 217-329.
1924
- "Recent Developments in Prehistory ." *SM*, 18: 467--475.
- "The Field of Paleolithic Art." *AA* , n.s., 26: 27-50.
- Human Origins. A Manual of Prehistory* (in 2 volumes). 956 pages. D. Appleton and Company.
- "What is an Eolith?" *NH*, 24: 656-658.
1925
- "American School of Prehistoric Research: Excavations and Researches, 1924." *A&-A*, 19: 121-130.
- "American School of Prehistoric Research." *Ibid.*, 20: 327.
1926
- "New Light on the Progress of Primitive Man." *Current History*, 23: 663-674.
- "American School of Prehistoric Research." *A&-A*, 21: 75-81.
- "Proof of Man's Cultural Evolution." *SM*, 21: 138-140.
- "Concerning 'Human Origins'" *AA*, n.s., 27: 308-310.
1927
- "The Peabody Museum of Natural History." *General Guide to the Exhibition Halls. Hall of Anthropology*, pp. 50-53.
- "The Octopus in the Ancient Art of Chiriqui." *I pek*, pp. 42-45.
- "Obituary of the Duc de Loubat." *AA*, n.s., 29: 340-341.
- "Prehistoric Switzerland." *A&A*, 24: 199-211.
1928
- "Prehistoric Man." American Library Association, *Reading with a Purpose Series*, No.43, pp. 1-45.
1929
- "The Past, Present and Future of Old World Prehistory." *BASPR*, No.5, pp.11-19.
- "Old World Prehistory in Retrospect and Prospect." *PAPS*, 68: 95-106. ,
- "Cultural Evolution," in: *The Evolution of Earth and Man*, pp. 274-303. Yale University Press.
1930
- "Recent Progress in the Field of Old World Prehistory." *PAPS*, 59: 175-192. See also *Smithsonian Report* (1930), pp. 495-509.
- "Boucher de Crèvecoeur de Perthes, Jacques." *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, 2: 648.
1931
- "The Abri des Merveilles at Castel-Merle near Sergeac (Dordogne)." *BASPR*, No.7, pp. 12-37.
- "The Use of Rock Crystal by Paleolithic Man." *Proceedings, National Academy of Sciences*, 17:633-63 7.
1932
- "The Coming of Man." *The University Society*, pp. 1-157. New York.
- "The Race Called Neandertal." *AA*, n.s., 34: 545-546. See also *AJPA*, 16: 515.
- "Archaeology." *Collier's National Encyclopedia*, 1: 300-324.
1933
- "Prehistoric Research in the Near East." *PAPS*, 72: 121-135.
1934
- "New Light on Prehistoric Man in Asia." *PAPS*, 74: 185-191.
- "Prehistory in Palestine." *SM* (October), pp. 380-384.
1936
- "Prehistoric Man in Palestine." *PAPS*, 76: 523-541.
1937
- Editor and Contributor: *Early Man* (As Depicted by Leading Authorities at the International Symposium, Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia). 362 pages. J. B. Lippincott Company.
- "American Caves and Cave Dwellers." *AJA*, 41: 383-387.
- "Man's First Pictures." *Frontiers*, 2: 40-43.
1941
- "Newly Discovered Cave Paintings in Southern France." *AJA*, 45: 509-512.
1942
- "Obituary of Addison L. Green." *AJA*, 46: 548.