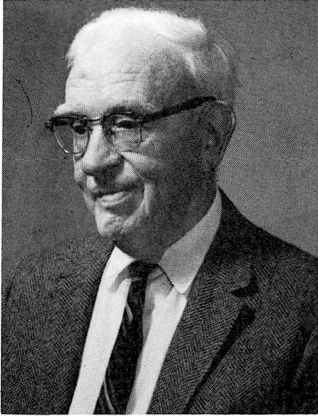


Memorial to Benjamin Franklin Howell

1890–1976

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With the death of Benjamin Franklin Howell, Professor of Geology and Paleontology Emeritus at Princeton University, the profession of paleontology lost an ardent and enthusiastic scientist and teacher; Princeton University lost one of its eminent and loyal sons; and Princeton's Department of Geological and Geophysical Sciences lost the long-lasting friendship and counsel of a close friend and honored colleague. He passed away on May 28, 1976, in State College, Pennsylvania, where he had lived with his son's family during the previous year.

Ben Howell was born on September 30, 1890, in Troy Hills, New Jersey, the son of Benjamin Franklin Howell, a businessman, and Caroline Quimby Howell. He attended the local grammar school and commuted to high school in Morristown, New Jersey. Before beginning his studies at Princeton University in 1909, he attended Morris Academy in Morristown. At Princeton his interest was initially in biology, but it shifted to geology largely through the influence of Professor Gilbert Van Ingen, invertebrate paleontologist in the Department of Geology. He later served under Van Ingen as a summer field assistant; it was largely this experience that developed his interest in the biological aspects of the past, particularly of the invertebrates, which remained the major emphasis of his lifetime career.

Ben received the B.S. degree in 1913, the A.M. degree in geology at Princeton University in 1915, and the Ph.D. degree in geology in 1920. His thesis, "The faunas of the Cambrian *Paradoxides* beds at Manuels, Newfoundland," was completed under the supervision of Van Ingen. This was subsequently published in the *Bulletin of American Paleontology* in 1925. While still a graduate student he married Claire Homan Mead, a childhood friend. During his graduate student years he was appointed instructor in the geology department in 1915. During the First World War he also served, from 1917 to 1920, as vice-president of the academic board of the United States School of Military Aeronautics at Princeton University.

After the war, he continued his long and distinguished career on the faculty of the geology department as an assistant professor from 1920 to 1925, as associate professor from 1925 to 1947, and as professor from 1947 to his retirement in 1959. In his teaching Professor Howell was untiring in his devotion to his students, many of whom were inspired by him to continue in professional careers in paleontology and stratigraphy. In his capacity as Curator of Paleontology and Stratigraphy from 1924 until 1959, he assembled at Princeton University one of the largest collections of Cambrian fossils in the world, especially of trilobites. He was not only an avid collector of fossils but also a veritable "pack rat" at the university. His office and laboratory were piled high with cardboard boxes, wrapping paper, old coat hangers, picture frames, notebook covers, nuts and bolts,

colored pencils, and so forth. One of his colleagues recalled that he once happened to mention to Ben that the gearshift knob in his car had been lost or stolen. Without a moment's hesitation, Ben went directly to a small drawer containing a half dozen gearshift knobs and offered the colleague his choice.

In his personal relationships with students, colleagues, and friends, Ben stood out as a very kind man, a good-natured man, a compassionate man, and an even-tempered man at peace with his surroundings and with his fellow men. Both in and out of the classroom he will be remembered also for his spontaneous wit, with a humorous story always ready to illustrate the discussion at hand.

Extracurricular appointments during Howell's career included adult education courses in his position as Professor of Geology and Geography at the Wagner Free Institute of Science in Philadelphia from 1928 to 1947, appointment as part-time Curator of Paleontology at the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences, and lecturer at the University of Pennsylvania during this same period.

Howell was a very active member and officer of both national and international organizations. As a Fellow of the Paleontological Society of America, he was elected secretary of the society in 1931, serving in this capacity until 1939, and he was elected its president in 1944. In the early 1950s he was active in this society's committee on Devonian fossils of North America. He was also instrumental in launching the *Treatise on Invertebrate Paleontology*.

He was elected a Fellow of the Geological Society of America in 1932 and vice-president in 1945, and he was a member of the Paleontological Research Institute and the National Association of Geology Teachers. During the 1930s he was also chairman of the Cambrian section of the National Research Council's Committee on Stratigraphy. He also served for many years as editor for paleozoology of the widely distributed *Biological Abstracts*. Throughout his career he was a consultant for the U.S. Geological Survey, the United States National Museum, the Geological Survey of Canada, the Canadian National Museum, the geological surveys of Vermont and Montana, and the Department of Geology at Colorado School of Mines. On the international scene, Howell was a well-recognized authority on the paleontology, more especially the trilobites, of the Cambrian Period, which extended from about 600 million years ago to about 500 million years ago and marked the earliest appearance of abundant marine invertebrates. He was one of the founders of the International Paleontological Union and served as its secretary in 1936 and 1937 and as its vice-president in 1938. During this same decade he was also the American editor of *Palaeontologisches Zentralblatt*. He was an honorary foreign member of the Geological Society of London as well as of the Paleontological Society of India.

As a member of the Class of 1913 at Princeton, he was awarded the 1913 Distinguished Service Cup in 1947 for his outstanding scientific contributions. It was also the Class of 1913 "poet," John C. Hawkins, who signalized Ben Howell's discovery of what were then considered to be the oldest fossil fish remains, named *Eoichthus howelli*, as follows:

"Ben Howell found a fossil fish.

He asked it almost hourly,

'What is your name? Is it Joe Gish?'

The fish responded sourly,

'No, but since it is your wish,

I'm *Eoichthus howelli*.' "

During his long career Howell was one of the more prolific writers in the geological profession. His complete bibliography includes more than 200 titles of geological and paleontological papers, most of which were published in American journals, but included many which were published abroad.

In 1975 the Department of Geological and Geophysical Sciences established the Benjamin F. Howell Prize for excellence in junior independent work in the department.

Professor Howell is survived by his wife, three sisters, and by his son, Benjamin Franklin Howell, Jr., and three grandchildren. His son is Professor of Geophysics and Associate Dean of the Graduate School at Pennsylvania State University.

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