

Joseph Grinnell

President

Joseph Grinnell was born on 27 February 1877, at Ft. Sill (then Indian Territory) in what is now Oklahoma. His family was of New England origin, but his father, a physician, moved the family to California when Grinnell was still young. Joseph's schooling through college was in Pasadena. He attended Pasadena High School and then enrolled in what was known as Throop Polytechnic Institute (now the California Institute of Technology) where he received a bachelor's degree in 1897. He began his graduate studies at Stanford University shortly thereafter, receiving his M.A. degree in 1901. Even as a high school student he had displayed an interest in natural history and had begun to amass a collection of vertebrates. In 1896, while only 19 years old, he made his first visit to Alaska, where he collected around Sitka. Two years later he returned to Kotzebue and the Bering Sea Region where he not only collected vertebrates but also apparently prospected for gold. An apocryphal tale suggests that he found a rich claim but was robbed of it by claim jumpers; however, this cannot be substantiated. Between these early expeditions, he served as instructor at Throop Polytech, teaching assistant at Stanford, and instructor in the Palo Alto High School. He received an appointment at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1905, and almost all of his subsequent field collecting was carried out within the state of California. Shortly after joining the Berkeley faculty, however, he returned to coastal Alaska in 1907 on an expedition headed by Annie M. Alexander, who became his life-long benefactor. In 1908 she founded the California Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at the University of California, Berkeley, of which Grinnell was named Director. Together with Louise Kellogg, Alexander supported the Zoology Museum and Grinnell until his death at age 63 on 29 May 1939. During those 31 years as Director of the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Grinnell developed a highly organized approach to field collecting, which has had an influence far beyond the state of California, to which he restricted not only his own efforts, but if possible, those of his students. Most of his many publications were devoted to birds, but 76 treat wholly or in part of mammals.

In addition to his systematic and ecological work, he played a significant role in the developing field of conservation. His impact on teaching biology at Berkeley was profound, as is suggested by the fact that 15 years after his death his principal course "Zoology 113" and his graduate seminar "Vertebrate Review" were still essentially Grinnellian.

Obituaries

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Hall, E. R. 1939. Joseph Grinnell (1877 to 1939). *Journal of Mammalogy*, 20(4):409–417.

Additional sources

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<http://mvz.berkeley.edu/Grinnell.html>.

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