

Vernon Orlando Bailey

President

Vernon Bailey was born of pioneer parents, the fourth child of Hiram and Emily Bailey, on 21 June 1864 in Manchester, Michigan. His father had learned the mason's trade, but was by preference a woodsman and hunter, and when Vernon was about 6 years old the family moved west to Elk River, Minnesota, on the western frontier. This move was accomplished in a horse-drawn wagon and must have taken some months to cover the 700 miles. The only opportunity for schooling in a frontier homestead such as his parents established was at home, but late in 1873 the families of the adjacent homesteads built a schoolhouse and formal coursework began. Like most early mammalogists, Bailey began by collecting the organisms in his surroundings. Self-taught in taxidermy, he began to prepare museum specimens, which he sold to firms in Ontario, Canada, and in Halle, Germany. Some of these specimens were in turn purchased by C. Hart Merriam, leading him to contact Bailey who was then 19. This was prior to Merriam's being named to his government position, eventually in the Bureau of Biological Survey, and their lifelong association gained Bailey entree into the Bureau. In 1887 Bailey was appointed as a field naturalist and sent to the northern Great Plains and Rocky Mountains. For virtually every year thereafter, until his final trip to Nevada in 1937, he collected for the Bureau and for the U.S. National Museum. However, he found time to take course work at the University of Michigan in 1893 and at George Washington University in 1894–1895.

He retired from the Biological Survey in 1933, having gained the rank of Chief Field Naturalist, but continued to work until his death in Washington on 20 April 1942. He was survived by his wife, Florence Merriam Bailey, herself a biologist, whom he married in 1904. In addition to the presidency of the American Society of Mammalogists, he served as President of the Biological Society of Washington.

Obituary

Zahniser, H. 1942. Vernon Orlando Bailey. 1894–1942. *Science*, 96:6–7.