G. ARTHUR COOPER: THE ULTIMATE ARM-FOOT MAN

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G. Arthur Cooper was born on February 9, 1902, at College Point, New York, was educated at Colgate and Yale, and spent nearly 60 years as a research paleontologist and scientific administrator at the Natural History Museum of the Smithsonian.

Early on he became interested in collecting- first minerals and, later, Middle Devonian fossils that he found in and around Hamilton, New York. His love affair with brachiopods began under the sharp eyes of Schuchert and Dunbar at Yale, and was nurtured through extensive field work and collecting in New York, the Appalachians, Nevada, West Texas, the Mid-West, Oregon, Mexico and elsewhere. In fact, anyplace that provided a biostratigraphic challenge was fair game for Coop's attention. Systematic monographs and biostratigraphic applications of brachiopod distributions in time and space were the products of Cooper's research skills.

His first major work (with Schuchert) dealt with two basic articulate groups- the orthids and the pentamerids. When this was published in the early 1930s, Cooper made a vow that he would consider his brachiopod work complete when he had published a monograph on each of the orders of that time. And he proceeded to plan his research for the next four decades with this goal in mind. At the time of his retirement in 1971, he had not yet published a major paper on the rhynchonellids or the terebratulids. So Dr. Cooper stayed on at the Museum, in retirement for nearly two decades, to finish "The Terebratulacea (Brachiopoda), Triassic to Recent: A Study of the Brachidia (Loops)" and the "Jurassic Brachiopods of Saudi Arabia" (mainly rhynchonelloids). During the same time, he and Dick Grant also managed to produce the incredible, award-winning, eight-volume monograph of the Permian brachiopod faunas of West Texas.

This brief summary of his career does not dwell on Cooper's understated skills as research manager whereby he parlayed the Department of Geology into two separate departments and eight divisions and planned expansion into most of the new east wing in the early 1960s. Nor does it explain his influence over the field of brachiopodology in this century. During the 1950s and 1960s, particularly, Cooper was teacher and mentor of most of the current specialists in the field and he and his good wife, Jo, hosted most of the world's brachiopod workers who came to Washington to absorb the niceties of systematics from Cooper and to revel in the glories and diversity of the world's greatest collection of fossil brachiopods.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S247526220000112X Published online by Cambridge University Press