

*A White-Bearded Plainsman: The Memoirs of Archaeologist W. Raymond Wood*, by W. Raymond Wood. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011. xvii, 364 pp. Illustrations, appendix, references, index. \$49.95 cloth.

Reviewer David Mayer Gradwohl is professor emeritus of anthropology and founding director of the Iowa State University Archaeological Laboratory. He has worked in prairie and plains archaeology for 60 years.

This book traces the formative childhood experiences and long professional career of W. Raymond (“Ray”) Wood, a leading scholar in the anthropology of the plains and prairies of North America. Attaining his professional goals and status was certainly not guaranteed to him as a child who was born and grew up during the Depression years in small rural towns of western Nebraska. Wood modestly attributes his success to the fact that he “unconsciously managed to be in the right place and the right time” (332). To be sure, serendipity was one factor in Wood’s accomplished career. But more critical would be his boundless curiosity, dogged determination to find answers to his questions, a dash of chutzpah, and a driven work ethic to finish and publish all of his research. Never content with loose ends, Wood always had an eye out for his next project, whether something relatively new or a further insight into matters he had researched decades ago.

Wood recounts his childhood in the Nebraska Sandhills in generally positive terms. His family was nurturing and supportive of his obvious intelligence and prodigious interests. But Wood’s multifaceted interests and questions went beyond those normally dealt with in the small schools in Gordon and then Cody, Nebraska, where his father was a railroad station agent. Furthermore, the available municipal libraries had only limited books and reference sources on the topics Wood wanted to pursue—in particular, fossil hominids. So, undaunted, he wrote off to renowned experts at museums and academic departments in the United States and abroad. Some of those scholars replied by sending books and articles that were written for professional audiences, not schoolchildren. Wood immersed himself in reading those materials, increasing his vocabulary, appreciation for science, and awareness of worlds far beyond the Nebraska Sandhills. Given the meager educational opportunities available in his hometown, during his sophomore and junior years of high school Wood commuted to the preparatory school run by Chadron State Teachers College. During the week, he lived in a rented room near the college; on weekends, he took the train home via his father’s railroad pass. Those years not only exposed Wood to some college-level classes but also conditioned him to living away from home and, to a large degree, fending for himself. Another formative factor in Wood’s youth was that he spent the sum-

mers in Missouri with an aunt on the family's farm. Thus he became more aware of the great diversity in weather and environments in the American midlands.

Following the tracks of his older brother, Wood went to Lincoln to pursue his undergraduate college degree at the University of Nebraska. Academics, for the most part, were the least of his challenges. Constantly in need of funds for housing, food, books, and tuition, Wood had his own "work-study" program, taking an amazing number of jobs and becoming adept at various survival tactics along the way. As a result, by the time he graduated from college with an anthropology major, Wood had gained an unusual amount of field survey and excavation experience and had established life-long professional connections with a good many important archaeologists. Wood continued at Nebraska for his master's degree and then went to the University of Oregon for his Ph.D., writing his acclaimed dissertation, "An Interpretation of Mandan Culture History."

During his career, Wood secured employment with a number of institutions, including the Missouri River Basin Surveys (National Park Service), University of Arkansas, and University of Missouri, with sabbaticals at the University of Nebraska and University of Colorado. His research projects centered in Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Arkansas, Kansas, and Missouri. In his book, Wood discusses his research topics, deftly weaving in goodly amounts of ecology, geology, ethnology, and history. As diverse as his geographic fieldwork throughout the Plains is the span of temporal contexts he studied, ranging from Paleo-Indian, Archaic, Woodland, Plains Village Tradition, and Mississippian to ethnohistoric and historic Native American occupations and historic Euro-American sites. He applied his analytical skills to a number of interdisciplinary questions, including cartography, zooarchaeology, ethnobotany, and the ethnohistorical approach in interpreting archival documents.

Wood's book is engagingly written and, in places, self-effacingly candid. The book demonstrates Wood's eclectic nature, expertise in scientific research, and skill as a raconteur on paper as well as orally around a campfire with a six-pack or in the hotel bar at a professional conference. (In the interest of full disclosure, I confess that I have known Ray Wood since our undergraduate days at the University of Nebraska.) Wood's occasional parenthetical asides and brief digressions usually reveal his wicked sense of humor and are often obliquely informative. Less amusing is the book's index, which is incomplete and inconsistent, rendering it less than reliable as a search tool.

Scholars interested in the history of research in the plains, changing methods in ferreting out data, and evolving theoretical paradigms, will find this tome of particular relevance. Beyond that audience, Wood's book will be of interest not only to anthropologists, archaeologists, and laypersons interested in the plains and prairies (including in Iowa), but more generally as a case study for those intrigued by how individuals anticipate, prepare for, and pursue their careers: what factors in their childhood backgrounds influence their interests, what opportunities they have to follow their goals, what serendipitous elements come into play, what mentors leave their stamp on their minds, and what influences these individuals have, in turn, on the younger people who work with them, whether as students, apprentices, interns, or coworkers.