

# Burdick, Clifford

## Leslie (1894–1992)

JAMES L. HAYWARD

James L. Hayward, Ph.D. (Washington State University), is a professor emeritus of biology at Andrews University where he taught for 30 years. He is widely published in literature dealing with ornithology, behavioral ecology, and paleontology, and has contributed numerous articles to Adventist publications. His book, *The Creation-Evolution Controversy: An Annotated Bibliography* (Scarecrow Press, 1998), won a *Choice* award from the American Library Association. He also edited *Creation Reconsidered* (Association of Adventist Forums, 2000).

Clifford Leslie Burdick, a Seventh-day Adventist consulting geologist, was an outspoken defender of young earth creationism and involved in the search for Noah's Ark. Many of his claims were sensationalist and later discredited.

### Early Life and Education

Born in 1894, Burdick was a graduate of the Seventh Day Baptist Milton College of Wisconsin. After accepting the Seventh-day Adventist message, Burdick enrolled at Emmanuel Missionary College (EMC, now Andrews University) in hopes of becoming a missionary. There he met the prominent creationist George McCready Price who inspired Burdick's interest in "Flood geology."<sup>1</sup>

In 1922 Burdick submitted a thesis to EMC entitled "The Sabbath: Its Development in America," which he later claimed earned him a Master of Arts degree in theology. Records show, however, that he never received a degree at EMC. He also claimed to have received a master's degree in geology from the University of Wisconsin. Although he did complete several courses in geology there, he failed his oral exams and thus was denied a degree.<sup>2</sup>

During the 1950s Burdick took courses in geology and paleontology at the University of Arizona with plans to earn a PhD. In 1960, three days before his major oral exam, a faculty member on his examining committee discovered that Burdick had written an article on Flood geology for the Adventist magazine, *Signs of the Times*. When Burdick found out that one of his committee members knew he was a creationist, he became so ill he was



Clifford Leslie Burdick.

From *Youth's Instructor*, July 11, 1967

unable to answer some of the questions on the exam and he failed. He was not allowed to retake the exam despite multiple requests and a lawsuit against the university.<sup>3</sup>

Burdick never successfully earned a graduate degree from an accredited university. In 1966, however, he obtained a “doctor of philosophy degree in geology” from the University of Physical Science in Phoenix, Arizona, an institution with no campus, professors, permanent address, or phone number. This was the source of the “PhD” appended to his name on articles he wrote.<sup>4</sup>

## Creationist Activity

In the mid-1960s, when he still hoped to earn a degree in geology from the University of Arizona, Burdick worked with a group of paleontologists at UA who were studying fossil pollen from the Petrified Forest in Arizona. Using techniques he learned during this project, Burdick looked for and reported finding pollen in Precambrian rocks at the base of Grand Canyon. Such a discovery, if confirmed, would present a significant challenge to evolutionary theory, which holds that rocks that old should not contain plant fossils. Arthur V. Chadwick, a fellow Seventh-day Adventist creationist and pollen expert, reexamined Burdick’s purported evidence but could find no evidence for fossil pollen. Chadwick wrote that “application of the cardinal principle of the scientific method—reproducibility—has failed to authenticate his [Burdick’s] record. Thus the hypothesis that the grains are authentic examples of Precambrian pollen can only be treated with incredulity at present, even among creationists.”<sup>5</sup>

For many years Burdick claimed that fossil human footprints had been found comingled with dinosaur footprints in the Paluxy River bed near Glen Rose, Texas.<sup>6</sup> This claim was another challenge to the evolutionary paradigm, for according to evolutionists, dinosaurs and humans did not live during the same time period. But the purported tracks were carefully examined by Seventh-day Adventist creationist Berney Neufeld who wrote that “The Glen Rose region of the Paluxy River does not provide good evidence for the past existence of giant men. Nor does it provide evidence for the co-existence of such man (or other large mammals) and the giant dinosaurs.”<sup>7</sup> Some creationists, however, like former Baptist minister Carl E. Baugh of the Creation Evidence Museum, near Glen Rose, continued to promulgate Burdick’s claim.<sup>8</sup>

In 1968, Burdick claimed to have been shown a human sandal print containing several trilobites, extinct marine animals, in Paleozoic shale in northern Utah. While visiting the location with the original discoverer, William J. Meister, Burdick said he “found a couple of child’s footprints at the same location.”<sup>9</sup> Once again, fellow creationists who examined the rocks and purported fossils were unable to corroborate Burdick’s claims.<sup>10</sup>

In 1966 and 1968, Burdick was involved in an expedition to Turkey’s Mount Ararat, sponsored by the Archaeological Research Foundation of New York, to search for Noah’s ark. The Foundation was chaired by Adventist televangelist George Vandeman who presided over a board of directors made up of other noted Adventists. This expedition and others sponsored by it were unable to find the ark.<sup>11</sup>

Burdick was an active member of the Deluge Geology Society (DGS), founded by George McCready Price in 1938.<sup>12</sup> Both Burdick and Frank Lewis Marsh, another Adventist creationist, were members of the steering committee that established the Creation Research Society.<sup>13</sup> In 1973 Burdick received the Eminent Miltonian Award from his alma mater, Milton College.<sup>14</sup> He penned a number of articles for creationist journals and periodicals, including *Signs of the Times* and the *Review and Herald*, and he authored a small book on the Grand Canyon entitled *Canyon of Canyons*.<sup>15</sup>

## Death and Legacy

Some creationists consider Clifford Burdick to have been a pioneering flood geologist; others consider him to have been an untrustworthy sensationalist. He died in 1992 at the age of 98.

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design*. Expanded edition. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 141; Gerald B. Heyes, "Pioneer of Creationism: An Interview with Geologist Clifford Burdick," *Creation Ex Nihilo* 9, no. 3 (June 1987): 9–12.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers, *The Creationists*, 141, 478–479, note 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 287–288.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 290. See also "Clifford Burdick (1894–1992)," Talk Origins, Accessed August 11, 2016, <http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/credentials.html>

<sup>5</sup> Numbers, *The Creationists*, 291–293. Arthur V. Chadwick, "Precambrian Pollen in the Grand Canyon—A Reexamination," *Origins* 8, no. 1 (1981): 7–12.

<sup>6</sup> Numbers, *The Creationists*, 293.

<sup>7</sup> Berney Neufeld, "Dinosaur Tracks and Giant Men," *Origins* 2, no. 2 (1975): 64–76.

<sup>8</sup> "Clifford Burdick (1894–1992)."

<sup>9</sup> Heyes, "Pioneer of Creationism."

<sup>10</sup> Numbers, *The Creationists*, 293–294. Heyes, "Pioneer of Creationism." The Heyes interview is prefaced by the statement, "However, please note that CMI [Creation Ministries International] today does not use the claim of trilobites inside a human sandal print, also known as the 'Meister sandalprint', because the evidence is ambiguous. The print is not part of a trackway, and the geology of the area is such that all sorts of flat, sprawled shapes arise from natural processes."

<sup>11</sup> B. J. Corbin, *The Explorers of Ararat and the Search for Noah's Ark*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Long Beach, CA: Great Commission Illustrated Books, 1999). Chapter 7, 198–218, focuses on the work of Burdick. See also Inez P. Vorek, "Desert Valley Church Member Receives the Eminent Miltonian Award for 1973." *Pacific Union Recorder*, July 16, 1973, 6. For Vandeman's involvement in this project, see *The Explorers of Ararat and the Search for Noah's Ark*, 226–234.

<sup>12</sup> Numbers, *The Creationists*, 137–141.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 254–259,

<sup>14</sup> Vorek, "Desert Valley Church Member Receives the Eminent Miltonian Award for 1973."

<sup>15</sup> For example, see Clifford L. Burdick, "Were the First Americans Giants? More Huge Footprints Discovered," *Signs of the Times*, February 1958, 23–24; Clifford L. Burdick, "One Hundred Years after Darwin," *Review and Herald*, February 26, 1959, 6–7; Clifford L. Burdick, *Canyon of Canyons* (Caldwell, ID: Bible-Science Association, 1974).

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