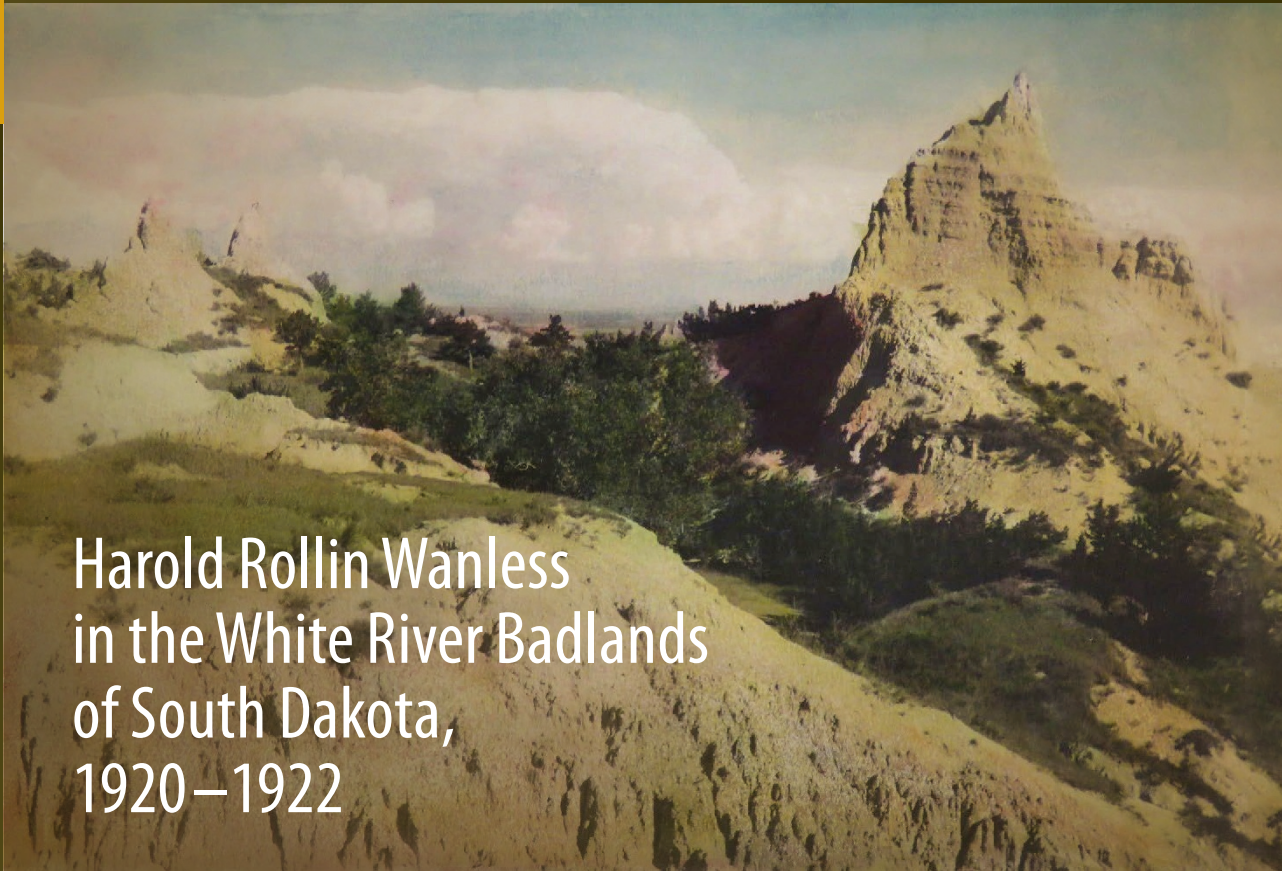


Harold Rogers Wanless  
Emmett Evanoff

# The Diaries of a Bonedigger



Harold Rollin Wanless  
in the White River Badlands  
of South Dakota,  
1920–1922

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River Badlands of South Dakota,  
1920–1922

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Harold Rogers Wanless  
Department of Geography and  
Sustainable Development  
University of Miami  
Coral Gables, FL, USA

Emmett Evanoff  
Department of Earth and Atmospheric  
Sciences  
University of Northern Colorado  
Greeley, CO, USA

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**A view from near Cedar Pass looking east along the edge of the Wall of the Badlands. The hollow in the foreground is occupied by a small temporary lake formed by the blocking of one of the canyons by a large landslide. Cottonwood trees have become quite well established around this, as well as cedars, and considerable smaller vegetation. The Matterhorn-like butte to the right is capped by the *Leptauchenia* clays. (This favorite autochrome photograph of Harold Rollin Wanless was taken on July 3, 1920)**

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## Preface

This book provides an intimate first-hand look at what the White River Badlands and its people were like and how geologists worked in the field a century ago, through the writing and photography of Harold Rollin Wanless in 1920–1923. Physically it is essentially unchanged. It is a dusty, dry place commonly with searing heat in the summer. These Badlands are also one of the most spectacular landscapes in North America, with castellated buttes and spires rising out of the prairie and winding their way for over 50 miles as a near-continuous wall. A hundred years ago the land was completely homesteaded, but it is now protected as Badlands National Park.

The rocks of the Badlands contain perhaps the most prolific fossil record of ancient mammals in North America. These fossils have been the focus of early explorers and then paleontologists for almost 175 years. This book records the gathering and preserving of that record as modern vertebrate paleontology was emerging.

In human ways, the White River Badlands a century ago was quite different from today. A century ago, there were many more people in the area, as every 40 acre lot was claimed as homesteads by hardworking and hopeful ranch families. The Milwaukee Railroad had arrived only a decade ago providing access for agriculture and livestock to markets in Rapid City or Chicago. Also, 1920 was the time of the beginning of automobile transportation, with Model T Fords navigating the rutted wagon roads. Car and especially truck transportation was much slower in 1920, and the new railroads were still the main link to the outside world.

The native Lakota Sioux still held a presence in the area but were adapting to the new ways of life. 1920 was only 30 years after the Wounded Knee massacre and the subsequent breaking up of the large Sioux Reservation lands that had been held in trust for the tribes. These changed their lives forever.

Secondly, this book focuses on the question of the qualities of Harold Rollin Wanless and his exposure that guided his transition from a capable student of geology to a renowned field and academic geologist. The student must have talent, abilities, and a love of nature. The student must be able to adapt to new environments and situations as fieldwork requires. Solid training at a good university or college prepares the student for their career. Finally, the student should have the chance to work in the field with an established field geologist who acts as a mentor and instills intellectual curiosity for the larger meaning of what they are observing. Harold Rollin Wanless had

all these attributes and advantages, and his experiences in the Badlands from 1920 through 1923 changed his life.

The two authors of this book became interactive as Emmet Evanoff, who has studied the geology of the Badlands for over a quarter century, has been trying to accurately locate the geologic features that Harold Rollin Wanless had measured and described in the 1920–22 field seasons. Harold Rogers Wanless (his son) was able to provide many photographs and a copy of the 1920 journal/diary (Chaps. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 in this book) which began a long and rewarding interaction.

Harold Rogers Wanless was born in 1942, over 20 years after these field adventures. He is honored to be a part of presenting this look of his father's early efforts in the summer of 1920. He appreciates the love of his life, Lynn Bauer, for her support and patience in this endeavor.

Most history books are written by contemporary people trying to figure out what people did and thought and how they lived back then. This following narrative is word for word his observations, activities, and feelings from 1920, over one hundred years ago. From his numerous college-days' letters to his naturalist mother and colleagues, Harold had developed a habit of thorough observation, recording, and communication, and we now all benefit from it.

As with all academic research, the authors have many people to thank for their help and support. Most of the field studies a century ago by Wanless are now in Badlands National Park. We thank Rachel Benton (retired) and Ellen Starck, chief geologists and paleontologists in the park, for the many years of their support. Ed Welsh, interpretive ranger, Alexi Richmond, seasonal preparator, and Bret Buskirk, intern, all at Badlands National Park has helped us in the field. Emmett Evanoff also thanks his chief photographer and wife, Kathleen Brill, and his long-time field assistant Justin Little for their help in relocating and documenting the Wanless photographic sites in the park. Vanessa Rhue and Chris Norris provided us with copies of Wanless' 1921 and 1922 field notes and photographs from the archives of the Yale Peabody Museum. Sammi Merrit at the University of Illinois Library Archives provided us with letters and an unpublished manuscript that has become Chap. 1 of this book. Alison Beninato guided us to approval of using skull reconstructions from the *Transaction of the American Philosophical Society*. John Murray of Murnor Studios in Coral Gables, Florida, aided in improving the contrast of some photographic plates from 1920 to 1922. Alice Levine and Melissa Lester provided helpful edits to the manuscript. We thank all these people for their support.

Coral Gables, FL, USA  
Greeley, CO, USA

Harold Rogers Wanless  
Emmett Evanoff

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