

# A Tribute to Loris Shano Russell, 1904-1998

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It was somewhat daunting to try to write the story of a man as accomplished as Loris Shano Russell. On one hand, it is relatively easy to record or list the numerous publications and awards. On the other hand, it is much harder to see through all of the accomplishments in order to glimpse something of the man himself. I got to know Loris only later in his life, as the one tasked with arranging his weekly visits to the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), and so in this report I have relied on many who knew him earlier, in particular, John E. Storer.

Russell's accomplishments were many. He was one of the last of the "old school" of palaeontologists, those who studied and published original findings in geology, stratigraphy, and both fossil invertebrates and vertebrates: a broad concept rather foreign to most of us in today's specialized world. He was extremely organized, and was meticulous with everything he did, whether it was science, museology, ham and military

radio operation, or administration. He was unfailingly polite and dignified, and always came to work wearing jacket and tie; about the worst name he ever called anyone in public was "stuffed shirt", a phrase he reserved for H. F. Osborn.

Loris died in July 1998, in his 95<sup>th</sup> year, and was predeceased by his beloved wife Grace, in March 1998. Their partnership of 60 years is the stuff of legends. They did everything together, from hosting museum dignitaries at their home, to attending antique markets, to working in the dirt and the heat in the badlands of Alberta collecting fossils (Figure 1). Grace never did learn very much about the fossils, but that didn't matter to her at all – she was there for, and with, Loris. When he was hospitalised in 1990, Grace visited several times a week, as long as the Wheel-Trans vehicles were available to take her there, as she was then not very mobile herself. Their separation at this time must have been very difficult for both of them. Grace was an out-



FIGURE 1. Grace and Loris Russell, 10 June 1986, in the Red Deer River valley, at the site where the holotype of *Edmontosaurus regalis* was collected by Levi and C. H. Sternberg in 1912. Photo by Maurice Stefanuk. (Photo courtesy ROM Archives).

spoken fan of her husband, and she was as forthright with people as he was quiet and formal. Their differences were marked, yet their partnership flourished. They had no children, and the topic was never discussed with others. Many “Grace” stories exist; several are related in Churcher (2003). Francis Cook passed on the following story. At the NMC (National Museum of Canada, now the Canadian Museum of Nature) staff party for Loris when he was leaving and moving to the ROM, Grace invited everyone to visit them in their new quarters in Toronto and to use their swimming pool. Loris quietly yet respectfully deflected her enthusiasm by pointing out that they were moving to an apartment building and he was not sure that it included privileges for an infinite number of visitors to use the pool.

Loris Shano Russell was born in April 1904, in Brooklyn, New York. His parents were Matilda Shano of Newfoundland, and Milan Winslow Russell of New York. Loris’ middle name came from his mother’s maiden name, of course, and Loris told me that “Shano” was an anglicised version of the French “Chenaud”. As for his unusual first name, Loris told me that his parents simply were looking for something different when they picked it; there was no family history to the name.

In 1908, when Loris was four, his family moved to Calgary, Alberta, where he grew up. He attended both public and high school in Calgary, and must have had a keen early interest in science, judging by early photos of him (Figures 2 and 3). He attended the University of Alberta, Edmonton, and graduated with a B.Sc. in Geology in 1927; however, he had already started publishing before graduation! He spent some time prospecting the Paskapoo Formation in Alberta near his family’s home: his first two reviewed papers (published in 1926) are both on fossils of the Paskapoo. By this time he must have already encountered the Sternberg family of dinosaur collecting fame, as there is a 1923 photo of Loris excavating in the Red Deer River Valley, north of the Bleriot Ferry (Figure 4). Even at this early point in his career, his published papers were representative of his broad-ranging interests: one is on fossil molluscs, and the other on the fossil mammal *Catopsalis*. Fossils were not his only early interest, however. Before his first refereed papers on fossils, he had published a note on Alberta’s birds in 1923.

At Princeton University, he studied under William Berryman Scott, the famous geologist and palaeontologist. W. A. Parks, then Head of the Department of Geology at the University of Toronto (UT), had wanted him to study at the UT, but Loris thought that it would be better to study with Scott, one of the very few European-trained professional vertebrate palaeontologists then teaching in North America. Loris was awarded his M.A. in 1929, and his Ph.D. in 1930, for a dissertation entitled “Stratigraphy and Paleontology of the Uppermost Cretaceous and Lower Tertiary Formations of Alberta”, a copy of which is in the ROM



FIGURE 2. Loris Russell, 1920. Photographer unknown. (Photo courtesy ROM Archives).

library. By graduation he had published at least a dozen papers, including papers on subjects as diverse as fossil pelecypods, gastropods, fish, turtles, dinosaurs, marsupials and mammal tracks. These papers may have partly resulted from his summer work as a student assistant in 1925-1929 at the Research Council of Alberta in Edmonton.

After graduating from Princeton in 1930 at the age of 26, he moved to Ottawa and served as Assistant Palaeontologist for the Geological Survey of Canada (GSC) until 1936, and an Assistant Geologist in 1937. During this period (1930-1937), he published over two dozen papers, again on a wide variety of topics: besides the requisite geological and stratigraphic works, there were a number of papers on fossil mammals and fresh-water molluscs, with smaller contributions on turtles, plesiosaurs and dinosaurs. Because of the utility of molluscs in biostratigraphy, many of his earlier works concentrated on these fossils. Of course his interests were not all palaeontological, and he joined the Ottawa Field-Naturalists’ Club in 1933. He later became an honorary member of this organization in 1972, after serving as Vice-President for 1954-1956, and as President for 1957-1958.



FIGURE 3. Loris Russell, 1922. Photographer unknown. (Photo courtesy ROM Archives).

During his initial period in Ottawa (1930-1937) Loris met his future wife and constant companion of 60 years, Grace. Grace Evelyn LeFeuvre was eight years younger than Loris. Her mother was born in Montreal of Irish stock, and her father had immigrated to Canada from Jersey, in the Channel Islands. Grace and Loris had met by arrangement of their mothers. While working at the GSC in Ottawa, where he could take Grace out on dates, Loris was offered the position of Assistant Director of the Vertebrate Section of the then separate Royal Ontario Museum of Palaeontology (ROMP), in 1937. This position came about due to the death of W. A. Parks in 1936, and Parks' protégé, Madeleine A. Fritz, simultaneously being appointed Assistant Director of the Invertebrate Section of ROMP. He considered turning down the offer, because he did not want to be far from Grace. The only solution was marriage, and his proposal was to the point: "I'm not going there without you". It appears he may have, at least briefly, because he moved to Toronto in 1937, and they were not married until 1938. Upon their marriage, Grace had to give up her nursing career, as only one income per household was allowed during the Depression.

With the Assistant Directorship at the ROMP came an Assistant Professorship at the UT, in Palaeontology. However, this work was interrupted by the Second World War. With his ability as a ham radio operator (Figure 5), he served from 1942 to 1945 in the Royal Canadian Signal Corps. He first learned this skill in 1922, an interest that he may have gotten from his father, who was a telegrapher for the railway (although his father had died earlier in 1911). At war's end, he was



FIGURE 4. Loris Russell (right) and C. M. Sternberg (left) excavating an *Edmontosaurus* skeleton in the Red Deer River valley, 1923. Photo by J. E. Thurston. (Photo courtesy ROM Archives).



FIGURE 5. Loris Russell, circa 1922. Photographer unknown. (Photo courtesy ROM Archives).

transferred to the Reserve with the rank of Major. He continued an interest in communications, and collected early telegraph and other communications equipment, which since has been donated to the Museum of Science and Technology in Ottawa. In 1946 he was appointed Director of the ROMP and in 1948 Associate Professor at the UT. During 1937-1950 he continued his studies of fossil vertebrates, producing some two dozen papers on fishes, dinosaurs, creodonts, titanotheres, horses, and mastodons, as well as others on the geology of Alberta, fossil gastropods, eurypterids and even living rattlesnakes!

In 1950 came the offer to become Chief of the Zoology Section at the NMC, an offer he could not resist. He and Grace returned to Ottawa, and remained there for the next 13 years. In 1956 he was appointed Director of the Natural History Branch of the NMC (Figure 6), a post that he held until 1963. This time at the NMC was arguably the single most important part of his career as a research museum administrator, which he filled with steady competence, vision and perceptive guidance of staff activities. He hired several productive research and curatorial staff, including Wann Langston, Don McAllister and Arthur Clarke, who shared Loris' professional interests in vertebrate palaeontology, ichthyology, and malacology, respectively. He profoundly influenced the direction of the Canadian natural sciences even outside his own fields of interest. For instance, in 1955 he suggested to invertebrate zoologist E. L. Bousfield that, as a staff member of a national institution, he might consider field studies on the Canadian Pacific coast and break from a previous eight-year Ph.D. obsession with the Atlantic coast. This perceptive suggestion led to the discovery of a diverse, major fauna of amphipod crustaceans of which, during the next 30+ years, more than 200 species and higher taxa were newly described.

This period (1950-1963) must have been a very busy time for him, because in addition, in 1958 alone, he was appointed Acting Director of the Human History Branch at NMC, President of the Society of Verte-

brate Paleontology, President of Section IV (Geology) of the Royal Society of Canada and he received an honorary LL.D. from the University of Alberta. He later became the President of the Canadian Museums Association (CMA) in 1961, and was awarded the Willet G. Miller Medal from the Royal Society of Canada (RSC) in 1959. With respect to the RSC, at the time of his death in 1998 he was the most senior member (by seven years over three other elderly fellows) of the entire RSC roster of approximately 1500 names, having been elected at the remarkable youthful age of 32 (in 1936), and with 62 years of mostly active participation in this select group of Canadian scientists.

While at the NMC, Loris always had the deep respect of the staff, even though he had a bit of difficulty adjusting to the fact that they were no longer required to work Saturday mornings, as they had when he joined the GSC in the 1930s. When the NMC staff complained in winter about the cold and drafty Victoria Memorial Museum building where they all had offices, Loris quietly remarked that when Dr. Rand (Chief Zoologist from 1942-1947 and a very productive staff member) was there, he just put on an overcoat and went on working. During 1950-1963, he wrote nearly 60 papers, with a broad range of topics: geology, eurypterids, molluscs, fishes, acanthodians, champsosaurs, carnivores, horses, and rabbits. Also during this time he produced more synthetic papers that included discussions of mammalian migrations, continental zoology of the North American Pleistocene, the geological record of evolution, as well as some on museology. These later papers were unlike anything he had written before, and spoke of a greater involvement in the museum community. Examples are several reports on television in museums, out-of-doors museums, plastics in the museum, and historical conservation along the St. Lawrence Seaway.

Loris was intrigued by museums and was involved in the earliest days of the CMA. He was a forward-thinking museologist, whose central tenet could be summed up as: "Museums are doing their job when they are telling stories to the public". This was not the prevailing thought in the 1960s, when the object was supposed to speak for itself, aided by lighting and gadgets, but it seems to be the popular notion once again, where story-centred galleries are becoming common.

Although Loris may well have had a lifelong interest in material culture, it was during this period that this interest blossomed; being the President of the CMA from 1961-1963 and Acting Director of the Human History Branch of the NMC no doubt spurred it on. Constrained by a lack of time to do much palaeontological research while handling administration, Loris decided he would try to apply scientific methods to some research in material history, as an experiment. He chose oil lamps as a subject for research, perhaps as a manifestation of industrial development coupled with social history, and it kept him "occupied and

broke” for years. Loris and Grace visited antique shops together, often in small towns on their way to do palaeontological fieldwork. Some of these adventures are described in his 1969 *Rounda* article. His habit of meticulously documenting and labelling everything, plus his deep-seated love of a good story (he claimed it came from growing up in the “Wild West”), put him in the position to do ground-breaking research in material culture. Loris developed a superb collection of well-documented lamps, which were later kept in glass display cases in their Toronto apartment; these have since been donated to the ROM. Several books, *A Heritage of Canadian Light* (1968), *Handy Things to Have Around the House* (1979), and *Every Day Life in Colonial Canada* (1980) resulted from this research. These are still standard references today; indeed, *A Heritage of Light* was reprinted in February 2003 by the University of Toronto Press. He became a speaker in demand at various material culture conferences over the next few decades.

In 1963, Loris left NMC under some controversy. Upheaval in the administrative ranks of the NMC made for some messy politics, which Loris did not care for. Returning to Toronto and the ROM, he became the Head of the Life Sciences Division at the ROM, and a year later, he filled the newly created position of Chief Biologist. By that time, the five former Royal Ontario Museums (zoology, palaeontology, mineralogy, geology and archaeology) had been amalgamated into a single institution under one Director. Much of his continued success at ROM was due to Anne Liebeck, Loris’ able secretary (Figure 7). She guarded the entrance to Loris’ office and answered his telephone, so that he could continue his studies virtually without interruption. In 1964, he received a Diploma with Distinction from the Museums Association of Great Britain. With Loris’ return to Toronto came a professorship in the Department of Geology at the UT. He took on three Ph.D. students before retiring: John Storer (graduated in 1970), and Paul Ramaekers and Mark Wilson, both of whom graduated in 1974. Loris officially retired in 1970, when he was appointed Professor Emeritus at the UT in 1970, and Honorary Curator at the ROM in 1971. Loris continued to serve the scientific community after retirement – he was elected in 1971 to the Presidency of the Royal Canadian Institute, and in 1972 to the Presidency of the International Palaeontological Union, a four-year term. He published another 36 papers during this time, with a familiar breadth of topics. Several papers hinted of things to come: his museology papers concentrated on lighting and lamps, and his articles on “Tertiary Mammals of Saskatchewan, Part 1” and “The Great Saskatchewan Mouse Mine” began a series of papers on these important faunas from Saskatchewan. As well, Loris’ paper on “Body temperature of dinosaurs and its relationship to their extinction” in 1965 marks the first, and often overlooked, discussion in the Eng-



FIGURE 6. Loris Russell, 8 November 1956, as Head of the Department of Natural History, National Museum of Canada. Photographer unknown. (Photo courtesy of the CMN Archives, negative #J4171).

lish scientific literature of what was later to become a revolution in thinking: dinosaurs as active “warm-blooded” animals. Grace often cited this paper as one of the reasons she was so proud of “her hubby”. It was not a secret wish of Loris’ that perhaps Bob Bakker and John Ostrom (the oft-cited originators of this hypothesis) and others might have given him more credit for this early insightful work.

His official retirement only meant less administration. He continued fieldwork in Alberta each summer with Grace and others, well into his eighties, until at least 1988, supported by NSERC (Natural Science and Engineering Research Council of Canada) grants. These grants and the subsequent fieldwork meant that he actively published papers until about 1990, with over 40 contributions since retirement. He continued to come into his ROM office daily from 1971 until about 1990, when he first entered hospital for a hip-replacement operation. He never left hospitals after the first operation. From 1994 until 1997, while still wheelchair-bound due to a second failed hip replacement operation, I arranged that he visit ROM one day a week (except during winters) using Wheel-Trans services. During these visits he worked on his last manuscript, concerning the biostratigraphy of the Horseshoe Canyon Formation. Although this paper was never published, staff at the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology and the Canadian Museum of Nature plan to publish a paper in the near future on the biostratigraphy of the Horseshoe Canyon Formation rec-



FIGURE 7. Loris Russell and Anne Liebeck at ROM, 1971. Photo by L. R. Warren. (Photo courtesy ROM Photography).

ognizing Loris' essential contributions by including him as a posthumous co-author. Many important palaeontological contributions came from this post-retirement period, for example, the series of papers on the Tertiary Mammals of Saskatchewan (Parts 2 through 7). More awards came late in his life, in particular, the Canadian Silver Jubilee Medal in 1978, the Billings Medal from the Geological Association of Canada in 1984 and the Romer-Simpson Medal from the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology in 1992.

As Tokaryk (1998) noted, much of Loris' scientific work was accomplished solo, judging by the rarity of co-authored publications (only 10 out of more than 200 papers published over 70 years have co-authors). This was partly due to the paucity of other Canadian palaeontologists at the time (although he was ably assisted, or worked with, a number of others in the field), but mostly to do with the fact that he could handle both the geological and palaeontological parts of his chosen projects. A measure of the impact of his work can be taken by counting the number of his papers that were abstracted in the German abstract series *Palaeontologisches Zentralblatt* (after 1950 called *Zentralblatt für Geologie und Paläontologie, Teil 2*) or *Neues Jahrbuch für Mineralogie, Geologie und Paläontologie*

(after 1942 called *Zentralblatt für Mineralogie, Geologie und Paläontologie*). Between 1927 and 1989, I found 68 Russell papers had been abstracted, by a total of 15 different reviewers (besides those who wrote anonymously), although more than half of this total were written by Jaworski or Wenz on molluscs and von Huene, primarily on dinosaurs.

He was an adventuresome scientist, always willing to strike off in a new direction. While on holiday with Grace in Hawaii, he collected some fossil land snails at the famous Diamond Head locality of picture postcard fame. A drawer of this material remains at the ROM, labelled and researched, although he never did publish on them. Nor was he afraid of being wrong, or did he mind greatly if new research invalidated a few of his ideas: that was the way science worked. As long as the work was careful and the facts were straight, then this was fine with him, an admirable quality in a scientist!

Another quality that many people noticed in Loris was his phenomenal memory for field localities. He really could find fossil localities he hadn't seen in 40 years. His successes were legion, so the few exceptions stood out, and yet all of these exceptions seemed to have complicating factors. For instance, he was frus-

trated about not being able to relocate the Calgary Paskapoo Formation localities he collected as a young student, only to realise that housing developments had probably covered the area. He tried many times to find Brown's (1914) Erickson's Landing locality. Although in Russell (1929) he reported relocating this locality, Krause (1978) expressed some doubt about this, and Loris must have harboured some doubts himself. Eventually, as reported by Fox (1990), Loris concluded that there was no way to determine from exactly which level the slump block containing the fossils was derived, and so he never was able to collect significant additional material.

Certainly Loris had a happy outlook on life, and he taught by example, both in the field and in the laboratory. He was an inspiring influence to all who worked with him. He was also the kind of person who would retreat to his workshop to solve design problems, perhaps a legacy of his ham radio days. He designed a unique machine for feeding a thin stream of washed fossil concentrate onto a rubber belt (Figure 8), the movement of which was controlled by a foot pedal. The belt passed under a microscope, allowing him to focus on, and select out, any fossils of interest with his free hands. Uninteresting concentrate rotated off the belt and into a box of scrap. We have preserved this machine at the ROM; perhaps someday others will use it. It was known by words beginning with the letter 'M', such as 'Miraculous Moving Miocene Mouse Machine'. For work on site at the Kleinfelder Farm locality in Saskatchewan (appropriately enough called the 'Mouse Mine'), he also designed two rotary sieves, described in his 1970 *Rotunda* article.

Although Dr. Russell (as he was known) seemed a little stiff and intimidating with some people, he actually had a wry yet somewhat playful sense of humour that surfaced quietly with those he knew well. He was quite amused by the ironies of growing older. On a couple of occasions he observed: "We used to call Scott and Osborn and their generation the 'old boys', and look how things have turned out now". He would tell the story of being a young geological assistant in the 1920s when one evening he got some sort of buzzing insect stuck in his ear. On asking another assistant, who was a medical student, what he should do, he was told "Well, take it out of there!". Loris' father was a religious fundamentalist, so Loris learned the Bible while young. In his later years he was not religious, but appreciated and was amused by the fundamentalist side of Western life. He liked to recount Charlie Sternberg's remark "My, aren't we clever", when William "Bible Bill" Aberhart (Dean of the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute) stated in a radio sermon that palaeontologists were actually manufacturing fake dinosaur bones in seclusion in the badlands. At a gathering for an NMC staff member about to be married, Francis Cook noticed Loris was drinking milk, whereas the rest of those in attendance were



FIGURE 8. Loris Russell with the Marvellous Moving Miocene Mouse Machine, 1981. Photographer unknown. (Photo courtesy ROM Photography).

not. The host, when this was mentioned, assured Francis that Loris was drinking milk only because he had an ulcer, but that he had laced it with whiskey, thereby obeying doctor's orders yet joining his colleagues. He always found his own way.

Several obituaries already have been written (Harrington 1998; Shaul 1998; Sues 1998; Tokaryk 1998; Churcher 2003), and two appreciations (Swinton 1976; Churcher 1993), with many additional biographical details. Swinton (1976) also included a fairly complete Russell bibliography up to 1976. A more complete bibliography is included herein.

The Russell papers, including diaries, field notes, photos, films (several different kinds), correspondence and other records, were inventoried by Boden (1999) and Baltovich (2001), and are placed in the ROM archives. His slides and reprints of scientific articles are stored in the Section of Palaeobiology, Department of Natural History, ROM. Hopefully, someone in the future will take advantage of this material (particularly the diaries and films) and write a book on Loris Russell.

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Compiled by KEVIN L. SEYMOUR

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