

ARLOW BURDETT STOUT, The Early Years

This article is adapted from
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*The Garden of Eaton:
The Botanical Adventures of
Mary Emily Eaton
& her colleagues
(1873-1961)*

We all, at some point in our lives, struggle with establishing career choices. For some, it is clear from a young age what path they will take. For others it is more complicated. There is no magic formula to follow a path to success. One must learn, practice, persevere, and slowly the reasons for your life's work becomes clear. It is a process, not a formula. It is an alertness to seize opportunities, to realize who can enhance your chances. Some may call this the good old boy network. I think the people you meet in this story would call it sheer guts, determination, early awareness of your personal talents and interests and the ability to be alive to the moment as it arrives.

Many of us know the name "Stout", mostly from the Stout Award, the highest honor awarded a daylily by the American Hemerocallis Society. Let me take you on a journey with the real Dr. A. B. Stout during his college days,



A. B. STOUT.
Vice-President of the Wisconsin Archeological Society.

Image courtesy the Wisconsin Archeological Society. The Wisconsin Archeologist, Vol. 5, Number 2. Jan to April, 1906 Frontispiece

as he searches among his numerous interests for the path he will follow in his career. Letters in the North Dakota State Archives tell the story of a path not taken.

Arlow Burdette Stout (1876-1957), called "Bert" by his friends and family, grew up in the lush, natural history mecca of Albion, Wisconsin. His love of the outdoors had been encouraged early by his exposure

to Thure Ludwig Théodor Kumlien (1819-1888). Kumlien, a Swedish naturalist, taught at Albion Academy in Wisconsin from 1867 to 1870. Twenty years later at age 16 (1890) Stout attended this Academy and was taught by Kumlien's 37-year-old son, Professor Ludwig Kumlien (1853-1902). In 1891 Professor Kumlien accepted the position of professor of physics and natural history at Milton College. Stout moved with him to Milton College, taking all the classes he could from his mentor during one winter term.

In 1903, as a high school teacher, Stout became good friends with R. A. Harper, a professor at the University of Wisconsin. Together they tromped through the Baraboo, Wisconsin, woods with Professor Harper's students and associates. This friendship would be very valuable for Stout as he developed his career. As Stout began college at the University of Wisconsin, he became an assistant to Professor R. A. Harper in the Botany Department.

It had been a long struggle for Stout to get to this point in his life. Often he had to interrupt his own education to work and save sufficient funds to go on with school or college. This made him an "older than average" student

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Charles E. Brown of Milwaukee, Joyce W. Caron, H.E. Cole (second from right), and A.B. Stout, all of Baraboo, rest at Messenger's Spring at the south end of Devil's Lake State Park, Wisconsin. 1906 ca. Image used with permission of Wisconsin Historical Society. Image ID: 63789

through most of his education, and he still did not have a definitive idea of where his career path would take him.

Through involvement with the Wisconsin archaeological community in 1906 Stout met Orin G. Libby. Libby, previously a professor at the University of Wisconsin, was now headquartered at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks as head of the History Department. In addition to his University duties, he served as the director of the newly formed State Historical Society of North Dakota (SHSND).

Dr. Libby was just beginning to plan and organize archaeological field work in North Dakota, especially documenting the Native American villages along the Missouri River. As former Indian lands

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were opened to homesteading and roads and railroads spread across the prairie, Libby and the society recognized the increasing urgency of the need to record and protect the abandoned village sites along the Missouri River in North Dakota.

A brief article about the society's upcoming annual meeting published in the *Grand Forks Herald* on June 16, 1908, announced that the keynote speaker, A. B. Stout of Madison, Wisconsin, would present "Prehistoric Monuments in the Northwest", illustrated by lantern slides. The paper said of the speaker,

Mr. Stout is a young archaeologist of promise who is just finishing his work in the University of Wisconsin. He has won a name for himself among local archaeologists in Wisconsin and his published work in the *Wisconsin Archaeologist* has received favorable notice from well known scientists elsewhere. He has been secured by our state historical society (ND) to do six weeks field work on our prehistoric remains in the Missouri Valley. From his expert examination of our Indian mounds and village sites, we will derive great benefit. At Fargo, where he is the principal speaker at the annual meeting of the State Historical Society, he will show what he has been able to discover in the rich Wisconsin field and by his diagrams and maps will show us how we can do similar work here.

Dr. Libby engaged Stout for a six-week field season to measure, plat and map the Missouri River villages. By June 27, 1908, Stout reports to Libby about his assignment. Stout's group traveled 300 miles of the Missouri River, and plats with notes were submitted to Libby. Libby stated to the museum director Mr. H. C. Fish that "I am in receipt of the two maps which Stout has prepared and they are first class."

Reporting in the *Collections of the State Historical Society of North Dakota*, Vol. II, Dr. Libby summed up the 1908 field season:

During the present season a departure from the usual procedure in field work was tried. An enthusiastic young archaeologist from Wisconsin, A. B. Stout, was placed in charge of the Missouri valley field work for six weeks. The result of the experiment was most gratifying. Not only were eight sites carefully explored and reported on, in maps and charts which are models in every respect, but much new evidence was secured as to the characteristics of each of the three tribes that now live together on the Fort Berthold reservation, the Arikara, the Grosventres and the Mandans. Mr. Stout was also of the utmost assistance to our regular force of field workers, in showing them how work could be done to best advantage and the best means of presenting evidence when it has been accumulated. The work of Mr. Stout will be noticed elsewhere in this volume in connection with the maps of typical villages of the Missouri valley.

Perhaps, in 1908, when Bert Stout stood on the hot earth, sweating under his damp hat in the brilliant North Dakota August sun, he took a break from his focus on measuring and plating Fort Clark, the former living site of the Mandan and Hidatsa Indian's. He was such a hard worker, but maybe he paused work long enough to marvel at the beauty of this place, the high land jutting out toward the river waters, backed by a ring of circling hills announcing unseen lands beyond. As he gazed slowly around, Bert could see the land was so protected on one side by the river, and on the other sides from high vantage points. He could see why the Mandan Indians had settled here, building earthen

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lodges to house their families. Standing on the edge of the previous Fort Clark Mittuhankush village, looking over the meandering Missouri River bed, you can imagine the feel of drum beats announcing the birth of a new child, or the cadence of drummers and singer's voices rising to the sky as they gathered to honor a deceased loved one. Perhaps Stout heard the horses switching their tails, flicking flies, moving restlessly on the dusty soil, and the rising shouts of children as they rush to the bluff, shrilly announcing the approaching steamboat as it appeared on the river to the south.

By late August, Stout was indicating he would be available in 1909. After describing to Libby the location of the Fort Berthold and Fort Clark sites on a hand-drawn map, Stout writes, "It is of course rather early to make plans for next season, but I think I can say that I can spend six or eight weeks in Dakota if agreeable to all."

The 1909 archaeological group attracted much more press and publicity. The *Grand Forks Herald* celebrated the return of the group:

Along the banks of the Missouri River from Fort Berthold on the north and Fort Rice on the south, there lies a region rich with the early history of North Dakota and it is from this region that Dr. O. G. Libby of the department of history at the university, and William Greenleaf and Francis Templeton, of the city, returned Sunday morning. In company with H. C. Fish, the state curator; Prof A. B. Stout, the Wisconsin university archaeologist; James St. Armor of Neche, field guide Holding Eagle, a Hidatsa, guide Sitting Crow, a Mandan, and James Holding Eagle, son of Holding Eagle as interpreter.

The *Herald* later added,

Such is the work that the State Historical society is carrying on in an effort to learn something of the early history of the state. To build up a state's history it is necessary to lay the foundations by studying the early centers of civilization and the trip just finished has been a most valuable one in furnishing new data on this important subject.

Over the following 15 months, Stout continued his work in Wisconsin and Libby continued his attempts to provide guidance and assistance.

Letter from Libby to Stout. Feb 7, 1910

So far I have not been able to make any progress in the matter of the Minnesota position we spoke of last summer, but I haven't entirely abandoned the matter, though I presume you are in the way for something better by this time. How are your plans for next summer?

Letter from Stout to Libby, Feb 13, 1910

In regard to my future work I will say to you that I am not satisfied with myself. I am doing well in botany and like it but I guess I like everything I do. Fieldwork in archaeology has always fascinated me and should a good position in that line come in view I would be sorely tempted to accept. It seems to me that the Minnesota Bunch are a set of fossils and that work with them would be sure to be difficult.

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In this same letter, Stout writes Libby that he is investigating an archeology position in Nebraska, but there were complications, and it would not pay enough to live on.

Letter from Libby to Stout, March 2, 1910

I enclose a copy of your article on "Boulder Outlines" ...I still feel that Minnesota is the place for you, if we could wedge you in... If we were five years farther along here, I could give you sufficient work to launch you in the new field permanently."

Letter from Stout to Libby, Feb 21, 1911

Here at Madison things have come my way. I want my PhD one year from June. Then I may leave here for something better. I now handle the correspondence work in botany and I am on the lecture staff (on Wisconsin archaeology though – by my choice). Each year I get an increase of at least \$250.

You ask about next year? Expect to spend it here finishing for my PhD. During the summer I have a chance to teach about 15 hours per week at \$200 to \$225 for the six weeks. Mr. Payne (from Nebraska) has written that he would like a field excursion next summer – with you and me and others – I will be free from about August 10 to September 15. I guess I can say now for a certainty that I can be with you in May.

Letter from Stout to Libby, May 18, 1911

Dear Professor Libby,

Spring has blossomed out with the flowers into Midsummer weather with us and leaves us little ambition to do much but exist. We will get used to it in time I trust.

I am not sure that my last letter explained the nature of my work this summer. I am employed by the Wisconsin Experimental Station to work on the diseases of cereal. And quite free to plan my work and it will keep me busy most of the time for about six or seven weeks. I shall make one or two trips through certain parts of the state...I might possibly arrange for work with you from about August 15 to September 15 if it was of considerable importance.

Well, I guess I shall pass archaeology by now – nothing good seems in view. I simply could not go to Nebraska for \$1,500 with the possibility of unfavorable action by the legislature. Had things been running smoothly I think I should have gone.

The graduate committee has agreed to allow me to come up for my PhD one year from now. I have worked hard and have some good things for publication. When I get my degree I shall either get something good here or fly to an agricultural college.

In August 1911 the third volume of *Collections of the State Historical Society* was issued. *The Grand Forks Evening Times* said the publication was an:

interesting and instructive publication. The Indian section of the volume is devoted largely to a reproduction of some Chippewa and Mandan legends. A. B. Stout writes of the unique finds

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made by him in our state, a turtle mosaic made of boulders. This valuable relic was afterwards transferred to the Capitol grounds where it will be preserved by the society."

In the fall of 1911, Stout's colleague, Professor R. A. Harper, accepted a position as Torrey Professor of Botany and head of the Department of Botany at Columbia University, New York. Within a few weeks Stout made his career choice and followed his mentor to New York.

Letter from Stout to Libby, November 21, 1911

Dear Dr. Libby,

It has been a long time since I have heard from you. I am of the opinion that I have already sent you a note stating that I am now in NY City, but I am not sure about it.

We have been here about 8 weeks and I am fairly well settled in my new position which is opening up well. As director of the laboratory I help the graduate students from Columbia and carry on my own research which is to be chiefly in plant breeding.

Next year I shall give a course for Columbia students. New York City has some attractive features. We live out by the garden where everything is lovely. 45 minutes by elevated gets us downtown, anywhere we want to go. Although I am now still further away from North Dakota you may be assured that I am still interested in your work and I shall always wish to have your progress especially in the field work. It has seemed to me that I have done well to give up archaeological work. Things did not shape themselves well at Wisconsin...

What I have been able to do in that line has been a source of great pleasure to me – and most pleasurable of all has been my experiences in North Dakota for which I have you to thank. You have been very kindly interested in me for which I wish to thank you.

I know you are a busy man and that you are not extra fond of writing letters – so I will appreciate an occasional one the more. With best of regards to the members of your family.

Yours truly, A. B. Stout

Director of the Laboratory, New York Botanical Garden, New York City

Primary References Cited and Consulted

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