



Pearl and Earl Douglass under Lone Tree on their homestead in the Uinta Basin.

LOVE AMONG THE FOSSILS

Earl and Pearl Douglass at Dinosaur National Monument

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On a hot summer Sunday in August 1909, a caravan of several dozen people from the small community of Vernal, Utah, headed toward the twisted portal of Split Mountain Canyon about twenty miles east of town. The townsfolk had ventured out on the Sabbath to see the fossilized remains of a giant dinosaur, discovered only a few days before by a paleontologist named Earl Douglass who was working for the Carnegie Museum of Pittsburgh. The skeleton was embedded high up in one of the jagged hogback ridges that ripple around the flanks of Split Mountain. “For a time,” Douglass wrote in his diary, “the rocks that never had the impress of a woman’s foot and seldom that of a man swarmed with people of all ages.”¹ Some were disappointed after the hot climb up the steep ridge to find only a row of darkened knobs protruding from the cliff, hardly recognizable as the sixty-five-foot monster Douglass had described when he had gone into Vernal to report his find. But for Douglass, a small, wiry man tanned by uncounted days under the sun spent in the search for fossils, the discovery at Split Mountain represented the apex of a long, difficult personal and professional journey. Scientists and historians have duly noted Douglass’s discovery of the great cache of dinosaur skeletons that are now part of Dinosaur National Monument. But little has been written about his personal life or the path that brought him to Utah and the many years he spent trying to make both

¹ Earl Douglass, August 22, 1909, Diary 25, Earl Douglass Papers, 1879–1953, Special Collections, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter cited as Douglass Papers); *Vernal (UT) Express*, August 20, 27, 1909.

a living and a home at the site of his 1909 discovery.² A man of modest means—and modest disposition—Douglass had struggled to get an education and to find a place within the rarefied world of professional science. Joined in Utah by his wife Pearl Goetschius Douglass, Douglass settled down to work what was to become one of the world’s greatest dinosaur quarries. It was a task that took him nearly fourteen years. The endeavor brought him and his little family much joy and much heartache. Always, it was a labor of love.

Born in Medford, Minnesota, in 1862, Earl Douglass came from a hardscrabble farm family, far removed from the august eastern halls of science, both in geography and intellectual stance. Looking back on his childhood, Douglass vividly remembered the wonder and beauty of the natural world that was so intimate a part of his farm life—the smell of freshly turned earth, icy crystals clinging to the jack oak on cold winter mornings, and the tiny fossils of strange creatures embedded in the rocks of a nearby quarry. Nature beguiled Douglass from an early age, but agricultural life was never satisfying to him, either financially or intellectually, and Douglass

doggedly sought to make a place for himself in a different world. Typical of young boys in rural America, Douglass did farm work in the summers and attended school during the winter months. In later life, Douglass recalled learning little from his elementary education in the Medford school, but he was an avid reader, devouring books on wide-ranging subjects whenever they came to hand or when he could find the money to buy them. In high school, Douglass developed a passion for poetry, which he read and wrote throughout his life.³ He once confided to his diary that he hoped someday to be “a poet, an author, an orator, . . . a traveler, a scientist, an artist, and a naturalist.”⁴ In 1882, he passed the examination for a teaching certificate, and for several years he taught in Medford-area schools. He continued to work summers as a hired agricultural laborer. But neither teaching nor farm work earned him much money, and Douglass was determined to get a college education.⁵

Money wasn’t the only reason that Douglass was intent on leaving the agricultural world of his childhood. Of his youth, Douglass later wrote, “I reveled in wasteness and wildness and dreariness. . . . Someone has said that hell is from the old Anglo-Saxon word *helled* which means walled in. I had been walled in and, perhaps, like Satan, I entered chaos, but there were at least large spaces[,] great possibilities and freedom, that most poetic and fruitful conception.”⁶ Douglass had an inquiring mind and his quest for knowledge did not always sit well with the settled assumptions of a nineteenth-century rural

2 Douglass’s discovery is noted in several histories of paleontology; see, for example, John Wilford Noble, *The Riddle of the Dinosaur* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 121–23; Edwin H. Colbert, *Great Dinosaur Hunters and Their Discoveries* (New York: Dover, 1968), 156–57; Helen J. McGinnis, *Carnegie’s Dinosaurs* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Institute, 1986), 17–21; Tom Rea, *Bone Wars: The Excavation and Celebrity of Andrew Carnegie’s Dinosaur* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), Kindle edition, location 2178; and John M. Good, Theodore E. White, and Gilbert Stucker, *The Dinosaur Quarry. Dinosaur National Monument, Colorado, Utah* (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1958), 27–32. Wallace Stegner described Earl Douglass’s work at the quarry in *Mormon Country* (1942; University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 302–318. For a lengthier discussion that addresses Douglass’s life, as well as his discovery of the quarry, see R. G. Beidleman, “Administrative History: Dinosaur National Monument,” (typescript, n.d.), digital copy available at <http://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/hisnps/NPSHistory/adminhistory.htm#d>, accessed July 17, 2015. Douglass and his family believed that he never received proper recognition for his work. His son Gawin spent many years preparing a biography of his father, typescripts of which are housed in the Douglass Papers. In 2009, the family privately published a version of Gawin’s biography as G. E. Douglass, *Speak to the Earth and It Will Teach You: The Life and Times of Earl Douglass, 1862–1931* (n.p., 2009). The book consists of a compilation of Earl Douglass’s diaries, notebooks, correspondence, and poetry, along with Gawin Douglass’s memories of his father.

3 Douglass’s papers at the Marriott Library include hundreds of poems written from his childhood through the 1920s. Douglass also wrote numerous short stories. See boxes 32–36 in the Douglass Papers.

4 Douglass, October 28, 1887, Diary 5, Douglass Papers.

5 Douglass wrote many autobiographical sketches, which can be found in his papers at the University of Utah. Some of these are handwritten and some typescripts; none are dated. Some sketches are titled (see, for example “The First Chapter of Genesis” and “Personality”), but there are multiple variations of these and most are not paginated. Many sketches have no title and are referred to here simply as “Reminiscences.” For additional biographical information, see W. J. Holland, “Earl Douglass: A Sketch in Appreciation of His Life and Work,” *Annals of the Carnegie Museum* II (June 1931), 279–92, and “Earl Douglass—A Summary of Events,” undated, Douglass Papers. See also G. E. Douglass, *Speak to the Earth* and Beidleman, “Administrative History,” 1–9.

6 “The First Chapter of Genesis,” Douglass Papers.



Earl Douglass as a young man.

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culture. His father was a Seventh-Day Adventist, and by his teens Douglass increasingly found the rigors of that religious observation difficult. Like many late-nineteenth-century Americans, Douglass grew uncomfortable with the disparities between the teachings of traditional Protestantism and science.⁷ In his unpublished reminiscences, Douglass described how a growing interest in the natural world conflicted with the religious teachings of his youth. This conflict was deeply troubling for Douglass, and the effort to reconcile a scientific understanding of the world with a deeply spiritual appreciation for the wonders and mysteries of life dominated the poetry, fiction, and personal musings he penned constantly throughout his life.

7 For an overview of the changes to American religion during the rise of modern science in the late nineteenth century, see Rebecca Edwards, *New Spirits: Americans in the "Gilded Age," 1865–1905* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 160–81, and Ruth C. Crocker, "Cultural and Intellectual Life in the Gilded Age," in *The Gilded Age: Perspectives on the Origins of Modern America*, ed. Charles W. Calhoun, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 225–27.

Douglass's rejection of his father's faith began during a youthful visit to a rock quarry near the family farm. The quarryman showed Douglass fossils of strange creatures embedded in the rock layers. "That to me was one of my first chapters in the genesis of my mind—my first lesson in geology, the beginning of my thoughts to explore into the mysteries of a strange world in which we are suddenly plunged ignorant and wondering," he recalled. Evidence of an ancient earth inhabited by long-vanished animals ran contrary to the interpretation of the Bible on which he had been raised.

The belief in the account of creation in six literal days was too completely driven into my consciousness and was too thoroughly bound up with our eternal fate. The people with whom I was raised were commissioned by the almighty and the angels of Revelations to proclaim the last message of mercy to a dying world To declare, then, that the world was more than six thousand years old and was made in more than six days was, therefore, to deny God and his Word and the sacredness of the Sabbath. In fact it would be to be . . . branded with that name too awful to mention without horror—an infidel or atheist [*sic*].⁸

Though it seemed to go against all that he had been taught, indeed to challenge the very order of good society and family ties, Douglass could not resist the desire to learn about new theories in geology and the latest discoveries being made by biologists and paleontologists as they dug into the earth's ancient past. "If heaven was nearer in my infancy and studying into the mysteries which surround us has been following the Devil," Douglass noted sardonically in his reminiscence, "I have gone towards perdition but the way has been fascinating."⁹ Douglass continued to have great affection for the poetry of the Bible, which, he bemoaned, the religious dogmatists of his youth too often ignored. And he believed there were important moral lessons behind Biblical mythology. But he rejected the traditional religion of his Midwestern rural upbringing in favor of a new kind of spiritualism rooted in sci-

8 "The First Chapter of Genesis," Douglass Papers.

9 Ibid.

ence. “Better it seems to me not to have a definite belief in a personal god,” he wrote, “and let virtue, love, truth, mercy, and justice rest on their own merits.”¹⁰ Douglass’s enthrallment with science was tinged with a deep emotionalism, and he found not merely knowledge but spiritual sustenance in his study of nature. By the time he entered adulthood, he was convinced that in science lay the path to what he believed constituted truth.¹¹

Pursuing that path proved to be a challenge. With few financial resources, he struggled to piece together more education. In 1882, he left Minnesota and joined his sister, Ida, on her homestead in South Dakota. Again, he did agricultural work in the summers, taught school in the winters, and saved his money. In 1888 he attended one term at the University of South Dakota at Vermillion and then transferred to South Dakota State College at Brookings where he studied geology and botany. A summer collecting expedition to Mexico with one of his instructors led to a job at the Missouri Botanical Gardens in 1890. But Douglass’s first love was geology, and in 1892 he returned to South Dakota to continue his studies. Following a favorite professor, Douglass moved on to Iowa State College, where he completed a bachelor’s degree in the fall of 1893. A college degree fulfilled Douglass’s thirst for knowledge, but it did little to improve his economic circumstances or to provide him a new profession. Having graduated, Douglass returned to school teaching, taking work during the winters in small, rural schools. But now Douglass had other plans for his summers. Rather than taking on farm work, he determined to spend his summers collecting. Douglass was not yet a scientist in the

modern sense of a professional who makes a living by practicing a trained discipline within an institutional setting. He was a “naturalist” in the older tradition of an amateur who pursued his interests as an avocation, making a living from other means. For nearly a decade following his graduation, Douglass devoted his summers to exploring, collecting geological specimens and interesting fossils, returning to teach school in the fall.

Douglass taught mostly in Montana. One of the professors he had studied with in South Dakota had taken a position at the newly established agricultural college in Bozeman, and he encouraged Douglass to come study the geology of the Madison and Gallatin valleys. He helped secure a position for Douglass in a tiny, one-room school about thirty miles southwest of Bozeman. Over the next few years, Douglass taught in various small Montana schools. He was quickly fascinated by the region’s geology. Even during the school years, weather permitting, he would head out after classes to pick at rocks. He made meticulous notes and sketches, recorded everything he found, and soon had a good reputation among the state’s small scientific community for his work as a field geologist. But ancient flora and fauna were not the only features of the rural Montana landscape that captured Douglass’s attention. He was thirty-two years old and unmarried. An ardent diarist, Douglass, who by nature was generally taciturn and solitary, began to make occasional entries about the young women he encountered in his work and travels.¹² In 1896, while teaching at a school in the Ruby Valley, Douglass fell in love. From their very first meeting, Douglass later said, he found Pearl Goetschius to be “just the one I had all my life wished that I might find.” He told her mother that “since I first knew Pearl no other girl has had any lasting influence on my affections. . . . With her acquaintance a new element—an unspeakable happiness came into my life.”¹³

Actually it took quite some time for that happiness to flourish, nearly ten years, in fact. Pearl

10 Douglass, October 28, 1915, Diary 31, Douglass Papers.

11 Douglass rejected atheism, which he understood was one possible conclusion when accepting science over a literal interpretation of the Bible. He believed in God as the creator of the universe and as the “source of the best in men.” Douglass, October 18, 1915, Diary 31 Douglass Papers. Douglass wrote frequently about religion in his diaries, poems, and essays. Several good examples can be found in his reminiscence entitled, “The First Chapter of Genesis,” and his poems “Picture of Gethsemane” and “The Great Unknown,” all in Douglass Papers. Beidleman says in the “Administrative History” that Douglass was active in the Unitarian Church (p. 8), but beyond a few references to attending unidentified church services in his early diaries, there are no documents in the nearly twenty-two linear feet composing the Douglass Papers indicating that Douglass was a member of any church during his adulthood.

12 Douglass’s interest in women is difficult to discern from his diaries, which he partially wrote in shorthand. But the scattered references to “beautiful girl,” “longing for,” “admire her,” “dreaming of” suggest the gist of his interest.

13 Earl Douglass to Mrs. Goetschius, April 10, 1904, Douglass Papers.

may have been the light of Earl's life, but in 1896 she was also one of his students, barely sixteen years old. He was thirty-four. Although none of their early correspondence survives, it seems clear that Pearl took a liking to the shy geologist with a fondness for poetry. But Earl, smitten as he was, had sufficient presence of mind to realize that the relationship was not likely to be acceptable, most especially to Pearl's parents. He left the Ruby Valley, taking up school posts elsewhere in Montana, and over the next few years he continued his summer expeditions. On occasion, those trips took Earl back to the Ruby Valley where he visited the Goetschius family ranch. Try as he might, he could not put Pearl out of his mind.¹⁴

While Earl conducted a tentative courtship of Pearl, he decided to try once again to advance his education. He wanted to pursue his collecting full-time, and only a job with a museum or university would provide that opportunity. He enrolled at the University of Montana and, as before, taught school to raise money, took courses as long as he could afford to, and then returned to teaching. In 1900 he earned a master's degree and the following year was awarded a fellowship to study at Princeton University. "Here I am in the neighborhood of 40," he wrote in his diary not long after his birthday in 1900, "and still struggling to get an education. . . . About all I possess are books, bones and team wagon [*sic*]. I am about where I ought to have been 15 years ago. But I am still a student because that is all that satisfies me."¹⁵ He spent a year at Princeton working with John Bell Hatcher, one of America's leading paleontologists. When Hatcher was hired by

the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh, he encouraged the museum to also hire Douglass. In the spring of 1902, Douglass moved to Pittsburgh. He never completed his degree at Princeton, but with the Carnegie job Douglass was at last a professional scientist being paid to do the work he loved. It had been a long road from that stone quarry in Medford where he had first seen fossils. Although Douglass lived in Pittsburgh part of the year and worked with the Carnegie's other scientists to study and write about the museum's collections, he had been hired as a field paleontologist. His job was to go out and find fossils.

The fossils that the Carnegie particularly wanted to find were those of dinosaurs. The Carnegie Museum, founded in 1896, was a relative newcomer to the field of vertebrate paleontology. Since the 1860s two wealthy "gentlemen" scientists, Edward Drinker Cope and Othniel C. Marsh, had presided over a series of spectacular fossil discoveries that had greatly expanded scientific knowledge of dinosaurs. But it was the work of one of Cope's former students, Henry Fairfield Osborn, that caught the attention of Andrew Carnegie. In 1891 the American Museum of Natural History in New York City hired Osborn to oversee its new department of paleontology. Sensitive to a growing public interest in dinosaurs, Osborn worked with the artist Charles Knight and the museum's staff to fill the exhibition halls with dramatic paintings and skeletons reassembled into lifelike poses. The popular press of the day often carried news of Osborn's work, and in the fall of 1898 Andrew Carnegie sent a copy of one such newspaper article to William J. Holland, director of the new Carnegie Museum. Holland, a distinguished entomologist, later recalled that the clipping was accompanied by a cryptic handwritten note from Carnegie: "Buy this for Pittsburgh."¹⁶

14 Earl's infatuation with Pearl can be traced, with difficulty, in his diary for the period March 15, 1896, to June 5, 1897. The diary frequently switches into shorthand, an almost sure indication that a girl was on his mind. The name of Pearl Goetschius is recorded among the thirty-two names of his students. In the diary, Douglass notes that he likes the new school he is teaching at but "probably cannot stay long." He writes that "there is one . . . that I think a good deal of." He notes that she is "younger than me" and he uses the word "infatuation" but also says he "must keep looking" at her. "I can't very help saying something would tell what her but will not do see her coming across the field happy inspire happy day alas leaves no course cause pleasure so long as friend friend [*sic*] may every worthy of it." The quoted entries are from Douglass, September 16, October 16, November 1, and November 17, 1896, Diary 14, Douglass Papers.

15 Douglass, October 30, 1900, Diary 17, Douglass Papers.

16 On the history of paleontology in the nineteenth century and the Carnegie Museum's role in the field, see Wilford, *Riddle of the Dinosaur*; Colbert, *The Great Dinosaur Hunters*; Robert Plate, *The Dinosaur Hunters: Othniel C. Marsh and Edward D. Cope* (New York: David McKay, 1964); Douglas J. Preston, *Dinosaurs in the Attic: An Excursion into the American Museum of Natural History* (New York: St. Martin's, 1986); Geoffrey Hellman, *Bankers, Bones and Beetles: The First Century of the American Museum of Natural History* (Garden City, NJ: Natural History Press, 1968); Rea, *Bone Wars*. Holland's story about Carnegie's note appears in "The Presentation of a Reproduction of Diplodocus Carnegie to the Trustees of the British Museum," *Annals of the Carnegie Museum* III (August 1905), 449.



Pearl and Gawin Douglass, 1908.

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Despite all of the great discoveries of Cope, Marsh, Osborn, and others, dinosaur fossils were still very rare in the late nineteenth century—too rare even for Andrew Carnegie to buy. The only way to secure enough fossils for the kind of reconstructions that were bringing an awed public into the American Museum was to go out into the field and find them. To do just that, Holland hired John Bell Hatcher, a former student of Marsh with a reputation for uncanny luck in finding dinosaur fossils. In the summer of 1899, the Carnegie's first field expedition discovered exactly what it had set out to find. Near Sheep Creek, Wyoming, the team uncovered fossils of a giant *Diplodocus*. The bones were shipped to Pittsburgh and reassembled into a single skeleton. Andrew Carnegie was so thrilled with the dinosaur, which Holland named *Diplodocus carnegii*, that he ordered the museum to make life-size plaster replicas for distribution to the great museums of Europe. Carnegie wanted more,

and each summer Holland sent crews out into the field to hunt for fossils, any fossils, but most especially for dinosaurs.

In the summer of 1902, Douglass's first field expedition for the Carnegie Museum took him back to Montana. He visited Pearl in the Ruby Valley, and emboldened by the security and status of his new job and by the passage of time, he openly declared his love. After his return to Pittsburgh they continued to correspond, awkwardly at first and then more ardently. Pearl had another suitor, but Earl was persistent. He visited the Ruby Valley again in 1903, and sometime during the summer the two became secretly engaged. Earl had hopes that Pearl would soon join him in Pittsburgh to begin married life. He bought and furnished a small house, but Pearl's father died suddenly, and she was reticent to leave her mother alone to work the ranch and raise her younger brothers. Having after so many years finally come to a mutual love and decision to marry, the delay and separation were excruciating. "If only my own sweet girl could be here," Earl wrote, "if only for this afternoon. How sweet to rest—together with my arm around her and her dear hand in my own and her head leaning on my shoulder! Dear heart your womanly nature is starving for the manifestation of that love which is all yours. How many hundreds of things I want to say to you yet maybe if you were here we wouldn't say much but rest warm and happy close together."¹⁷

For nearly a year they kept their engagement secret, until April 1904, when Earl wrote to Pearl's mother, formally asking for her hand in marriage. Wryly noting that the couple could not be accused of being overly hasty, Earl said that their decision to marry was based on mutual love. "That love that began to be felt when I had seen her but a few times, I never could conquer and now, after all these years, it is part of my very being and without it it seems that life would be unendurable. I think that without it too she would be very unhappy. We do hope that we may have your willingness and consent that when things can be satisfactorily arranged we may be each other's for life."¹⁸ The arrangements took

17 Earl Douglass to Pearl Goetschius, April 10, 1904, Douglass Papers.

18 Douglass to Mrs. Goetschius, April 10, 1904, Douglass Papers.

another year, but in the fall of 1905, Earl returned to the Ruby Valley, and they were married. Pearl returned to Pittsburgh with Earl, where they settled in to the little house he had bought. Throughout 1906 and 1907 they lived in Pittsburgh. The Carnegie Museum was constructing a new exhibition hall, and Douglass worked with his colleagues to prepare exhibits for the new building. Early in 1908, Pearl gave birth to a son, whom they named Gawin.

The two years following his marriage, culminating with the birth of his son and the opening of the new museum, were among the most rewarding in Douglass's life. Yet the city was not really where he wanted to be. He yearned to be out in the wide-open spaces of the West, roaming the hillsides, hunting for fossils. Douglass was a field man, not a museum curator or laboratory scientist. Nor was he particularly comfortable working under the close tutelage of William Holland, whose management style could be imperious and dictatorial. Douglass's son Gawin later recalled that with the death of John Bell Hatcher in 1904, "things were not to be the same" at the Carnegie for his father, and over the coming years the relationship between Holland and Douglass grew fractious.¹⁹ Following the birth of his son and the completion of the exhibit hall, Douglass wanted badly to get back into the field. Although much of the Carnegie's field work up to that point had been in Wyoming and Montana, Douglass now proposed that he spend the summer of 1908 in Utah.

Having heard from Hatcher about a brief Princeton expedition to Utah in 1899, Douglass believed that the Eocene beds in the Uinta Basin seemed especially promising. Douglass told Holland that he wanted to conduct "a more thorough exploration of this interesting, but little known region."²⁰ Holland agreed and Earl headed west in April 1908, dropping Pearl and baby Gawin off in Medford to spend the summer with the Fernando Douglass family. Looking back on his investigations of the Uinta Basin, Earl later recalled that he had set out convinced that he would find dinosaur fossils, but there is little in his diaries or correspondence to suggest that he was much interested in dinosaurs at the time. His specialty

was ancient mammals, and once he arrived in Utah he confined his attention to Eocene fossils. In July, Douglass, accompanied by his brother-in-law Frank Goetschius, came across fragments of a very large femur. They turned their attention to the Jurassic strata near Split Mountain. Guided by the owner of a placer dredge operation on the Green River, Earl and Frank found "a huge broken femur 2 ft. across the head and 66 inches long, a fibula 4 feet long, vertebrae, part of a toe bone, another large limb bone or two etc."²¹ At the home of a local rancher who had assembled a collection of fossils, they examined a large *Diplodocus* femur. Douglass found these dinosaur fossils interesting but no more so than the mammalian remains that were the focus of his attention.²² The Carnegie sent Douglass back to Utah for further work the following summer.

In popular retellings of Douglass's explorations in 1909, he was said to have worked for many weeks searching for dinosaur fossils and made his great find just as he was ready to give up the hunt and return to Pittsburgh.²³ In fact, Doug-

21 Quoted in G. E. Douglass, *Speak to the Earth*, 438. The appendix to *Speak to the Earth* reprints in full Douglass's 1908 field notebook; the quotation is from the entry for July. There is no diary for the 1908 field season in the Douglass Papers at the Marriott Library.

22 William Holland visited Douglass in the field in early September 1908. Holland later wrote that he and Douglass discovered a *Diplodocus* femur; because the bone was too large to move, Holland wrote that he instructed Douglass to return the following year to collect it. Douglass's field notebook for 1908 does not record a discovery by the two men. There are no entries in Douglass's field notebook for the period that Holland was in the field with him, but the entry for September 9 notes that Holland had visited; the entry says that the two men visited the site where Douglass and Frank Goetschius had earlier found the *Diplodocus* femur. For Holland's story of the Carnegie Museum's work in Utah, see William Holland, *To the River Plate and Back: A Narrative of a Scientific Mission to South America, with Observations Upon Things Seen and Suggested* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1913), 1–15. The story of Holland helping Douglass find a "dinosaur thigh bone" is included in McGinnis, *Carnegie's Dinosaurs*, 18.

23 See, for example, Stegner, *Mormon Country*, 302–318; Colbert, *Great Dinosaur Hunters*, 156–57; Ann Zwinger, *Run, River Run: A Naturalist's Journey Down One of the Great Rivers of the West* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 193; and Wilford, *Riddle of the Dinosaur*, 119–23. In his own recollection, written many years later, Douglass said that he set out in 1909 convinced that he would find dinosaur fossils; see "Story of Discovery of Dinosaur Monument," undated typescript, Douglass Papers. His diary, however, clearly shows his focus on other fossils, as does one of the few scientific papers

19 G. E. Douglass, *Speak to the Earth*, 202.

20 Unsigned letter addressed to William Holland, December 1907, Douglass Papers.

lass did not arrive in Utah until late July and, as in the previous year, he devoted his attention to the mammalian fossils in the region's Wasatch Formation. Only a scolding letter from Holland, received on August 4, prompted Douglass to pick up the dinosaur search east of Vernal. Within a few days he found a number of fragments and small bones, "but nothing good." Then, on August 17, Douglass spotted eight large vertebrae of a "brontosaurus" exposed in a ridge face in the foothills just south of Split Mountain. "It was a beautiful sight," he wrote in his diary that night. "Part of the ledge had weathered away and several of the vertebra had weathered out and the beautifully preserved centra lay on the ground. It is by far the best looking dinosaur prospect I have ever found."²⁴

Douglass telegraphed the news to Holland, who promptly named the dinosaur *Apatosaurus louisae* in honor of Andrew Carnegie's wife. Holland instructed Douglass to excavate the skeleton and make arrangements to ship it back to Pittsburgh. With the help of several men hired from the nearby town of Vernal, Douglass began the task of working the fossils out of the sandstone, covering them with plaster-soaked burlap, and preparing them to be hauled to the nearest rail stop.²⁵ After only a short period of work Douglass realized that he had stumbled on something much more important than a single skeleton. He'd found a dinosaur graveyard, filled with many skeletons representing a variety of genera—*Stegosaurus*, *Barosaurus*, *Camarasaurus*, *Antrodemus*, and *Diplodocus*, among others. And the skeletons were of unusually good quality. Many seemed to be nearly complete, including skulls, and were articulated, a rarity that promised to help settle long-standing confusion over dinosaur anatomy and taxonomy. Excavating the site could take many years. In anticipation of the costs of maintaining a crew in the field for

that Douglass published about his work in Utah; see Earl Douglass, "Preliminary Description of Some New Titanotheres from the Uinta Deposits," *Annals of the Carnegie Museum* VI (August 1910), 304–313.

24 Douglass, August 6, 12, 17, 1909, Diary 24, Douglass Papers. The letter from Holland is not in the Douglass papers but it is mentioned by Douglass in his diary entry from August 6.

25 During the Carnegie's excavation of the quarry, fossils were taken by wagon south to Dragon, Utah, the western terminus of the narrow-gauge Uintah Railway. At Mack, Colorado, the fossils were transferred to the Denver and Rio Grande for the journey east.

a number of years and of shipping the huge fossils from Utah to Pittsburgh, Andrew Carnegie increased to \$15,000 the special annual fund that he had earlier established to finance the museum's search for dinosaurs. Carnegie also gave Douglass a personal reward of \$2,000.²⁶

As the significance of Douglass's find became more apparent and as Andrew Carnegie's investment in the excavation increased, Holland grew concerned that the museum might lose control of the quarry. Because the site was located on public land open to homestead and mineral entry, Holland feared that someone would claim the quarry under the public land laws and force the Carnegie Museum either to abandon its work or extract an exorbitant fee to allow Douglass to continue his labors. The federal government had only a few years earlier opened sizeable portions of the two Ute reservations located in the Uinta Basin to public entry. At the time Douglass discovered the quarry, there was intense interest in agricultural settlement and mineral exploration in the area. And there was always the danger that other paleontologists would try to usurp the quarry—dinosaur hunting was a pretty rough-and-tumble competition at that time. The Carnegie Museum had already lost control of a promising site in Nebraska when a local rancher filed a claim on the land and then offered access to the highest-bidding paleontologist. In order to prevent a reoccurrence of that episode, in December 1911, Holland instructed Douglass to file a claim under the Desert Land Act for title to the quarry on behalf of the museum. "This is a matter that it seems to me should be attended to," Holland wrote. "There certainly has been enough work done on the spot to justify us in proving up and

26 When the Carnegie Museum completed its excavations in 1922, 300 specimens representing ten species had been removed. Twenty-four nearly complete skeletons had been found; two of these—the *Apatosaurus* discovered in 1909 and a *Camarasaurus lentus* found in 1922—are still considered to be among the finest skeletons ever excavated. By September 1910, Douglass estimated that he had spent between five and six thousand dollars to excavate only one skeleton. Douglass, September 2, 1910, Diary 2, Douglass Papers. On William Holland's growing awareness of the quarry's importance, see his "Editorial Notes" for the *Annals of the Carnegie Museum* VI (August 1910), 301–303; VII (November 1910), 1–4; VIII (December 1911), 1–4; VIII (May 1912), 191–95; and VIII (March 1913), 380–81. On the personal reward to Douglass, see Holland, "Earl Douglass," 283, and Douglass, February 23, 1911, Diary 28, Douglass Papers.

securing title.”²⁷

In January 1912, Douglass did as Holland instructed. But after discussion among officials in the General Land Office, the Department of the Interior, and the Smithsonian Institution (which operated the National Museum of Natural History) the federal government rejected the Carnegie’s claim. Sensitive of the need to protect the valuable quarry site from commercial plunder but unwilling to see it fall into private ownership, the government decided to designate the exact acreage in the Carnegie’s claim (eighty acres in total) as a national monument. The Antiquities Act, passed in 1906 with the support of many of America’s leading scientists, including William Holland, was intended to preserve important scientific discoveries made on public lands by designating these areas as national monuments.²⁸ The government intended the monument designation of the Utah dinosaur quarry to be temporary; once all the fossils were removed

27 For Holland’s concerns about title to the land, see his letters to Douglass of December 9, 1911, February 12, and March 12, 1912, Douglass Papers. The quotation is from the December letter.

28 The Antiquities Act gave the president authority to set aside lands as national monuments in order to protect “objects of historic and scientific interest.” The law was motivated primarily by a concern among professional archeologists over the collecting of artifacts from prehistoric Indian sites by private commercial interests. However, President Theodore Roosevelt and fellow conservationists realized that the law also could be used to preserve areas of scenic interest without the political complexities of congressional approval because the law gave the president power to create monuments by executive order. Roosevelt and subsequent presidents used the Antiquities Act to set aside many scenic areas such as the Grand Canyon, Zion, and, most recently, Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments. The government’s decision to create Dinosaur National Monument in 1915 was based solely on the scientific importance of the fossils; there was no discussion of the area’s scenic qualities (this concern emerged only decades later during the New Deal when the monument was expanded to include the Green and Yampa river canyons). The government intended the national monument designation to be temporary; once all the fossils were excavated the government would return the land to public entry. On the history of the Antiquities Act, see Hal Rothman, *Preserving Different Pasts: The American National Monuments* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989). For a full description of the Carnegie’s effort to claim the land and the government’s decision to proclaim the area as a national monument, see Susan Rhoades Neel, “A Monument in Name Only: The Debate Over Dinosaur National Monument, 1909–1929,” *Journal of the Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts, and Letters* 84 (2007), 201–8.

the land would revert to public entry. Douglass and Holland were initially angered by the government’s action but were quickly mollified when the Secretary of the Interior assured them that the Carnegie Museum would have exclusive excavation rights. In January 1916 the department issued the Carnegie a permit for Douglass’s work; the permit was renewed without difficulty for the next five years. No other paleontologists or scientific groups were permitted to work at the quarry.²⁹ Although the monument came under the jurisdiction of the newly created National Park Service, its director, Stephen Mather, deferred oversight of the Carnegie’s permit to the Smithsonian Institution. No money for management of the monument was allocated in the park service budget, and no agency official was stationed at the site or even visited the quarry. No signs indicated that the quarry was a national monument and people who visited the site considered it to be the Carnegie Museum’s private property, a misimpression that Douglass and his employers did little to set straight.

With the Carnegie Museum’s control of the quarry secured, Douglass settled into the job of excavating, packaging, and shipping fossils back to Pittsburgh. He also began the task of creating a home. Within only a few months of his initial discovery in 1909, Earl had been joined in Utah by Pearl and baby Gawin. She quickly fell in love with the place and determined to stay with her husband as he and the small crew of local laborers worked the quarry.³⁰ Conditions were rugged at first, but within a year the canvas tent they lived in was replaced by a log cabin. Pearl

29 The National Museum of Natural History wanted to excavate at the Utah quarry, which was why the Smithsonian Institution had favored the decision to reject the Carnegie’s Desert Land claim in favor of national monument status. However, the National Museum lacked funding to mount an excavation until 1923. The University of Utah also wanted access to the quarry, but the Department of the Interior denied it a permit until after the Carnegie had finished its work. See Neel “A Monument in Name Only.”

30 The Douglasses returned to Pittsburgh for the winter of 1910–1911 and again in 1913; Earl remained in Pittsburgh during 1913 and early 1914 (to assist in the unpacking and processing of the first shipment of fossils from the Utah quarry), but Pearl and Gawin spent the winter of 1913–1914 alone at the Utah homestead in order to fill the residency requirement under the Homestead Act. The family remained at the homestead until 1923, never returning to Pittsburgh. Douglass sold his home in Pittsburgh to help finance the homestead.



Orchid Draw, site of the Douglass Desert Land Claim.

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planted a garden and cooked for the crew. Earl bought a milk cow, several pigs, and chickens to feed everyone. The crew cleared a rough access road in order to transport the fossils to the railroad and this made travel to the little town of Vernal easier. By the spring of 1911, the Douglasses began to consider establishing a permanent home near the quarry. "These scenes and this country . . . have grown so dear to me," Earl confided in his diary. "I want to plow, to sow, to reap, to garden, to have fine animals about me, to see things grow and blossom. I want to get at the real significance of things and help my fellow man to arise and come into the light of freedom and truth. . . . I want Pearl to be happy and contented," he wrote. Earl located a spring nestled among the cliffs west of the quarry about a mile and a half, surrounded by fifteen acres of flat land that seemed ideal for growing corn, fruit trees, and fodder for a herd of beef cattle. He reasoned that a herd could graze on the flats lying southwest of the quarry along the Green River near a stand of large cottonwood trees growing so closely together that locals referred to the spot as Lone Tree. Confident that he could be both a paleontologist and a rancher, Earl filed a claim

under the Desert Land Act on the area surrounding the spring (called Orchid Draw) and a separate homestead claim on the Green River land.³¹

Earl resettled his sister, Nettie, and their elderly, blind father, Fernando, from Medford, Minnesota, to the new Utah homestead, which the Douglasses called Dinosaur Ranch. With the help of a hired man, Earl cleared fields in Orchid Draw. Over several years he put in crops of corn, potatoes, and wheat. The household garden was expanded with fruit trees and flowers. Construction of a two-story stone house near the Lone Tree began. In a notebook, Pearl jotted down what she wanted in the new house—a lawn with trees, a "conveniently and economically planned" pantry. "O to have a homey home," she wrote; "How grand it would be."³² Earl bought a small herd of sheep and a good-sized cattle herd, including four expensive purebred shorthorn

³¹ Both claims lay outside the boundaries of the eighty-acre national monument. After the expansion of Dinosaur National Monument in 1938, the original Douglass holdings were transferred to the federal government.

³² "Things I want to have and about our new house," written by hand in bound notebook labeled "A Few Reflections by Pearl Douglass," n.d., Douglass Papers.

cows and a bull. A corral and stable quartered several horses including a team for the white-topped buggy that Earl bought for Pearl. "Our object is not at all to raise grain, vegetables, fruits, stock etc to see and get money," he proclaimed. The money would be welcome, he admitted to his diary, but the "main object of all is to live better and more truly."³³

In many ways the life that the Douglasses built at Dinosaur Ranch was idyllic. For Earl, there was the satisfaction of doing the great work he had always dreamed of, living amidst the raw beauty of nature yet filled with intellectual challenge. He read and wrote endlessly. Although little of his work was ever published, his personal papers are filled with poetry, scientific investigations, essays about the natural world, musings on the meanings of life and the universe—his restless mind found expression. He summarized his sentiments in a poem, "Hymn of the Wilderness":

Here, freed from man's contending thought,
That makes a din of hate and strife,
I find what long in vain I sought,
A nearness to the source of life;
Where scenes are fresh and thoughts are free
My deeper self returns to me.³⁴

For a man who had spent much of his life wandering, alone, always searching, Douglass had finally found what he was looking for. In the fall of 1914, as the world descended into a terrible war, Douglass wrote, "At last I am where I have longed to be and where I intend to spend a greater part of the rest of my life. I am far away from sights, sounds, suffering and degeneracy of a great city. I am out where the air is pure and sweet; where we have fresh food and something of freedom and independence."³⁵

33 Douglass began a separate diary for matters relating to the homestead in January 1914. Most entries are by Earl, although Pearl occasionally wrote in the notebooks that Earl labeled "FARM." These are actually two separate books, the first covering the period 1914–1916 and the second the period 1916–1920; they are listed as diaries 31 and 35 in the Douglass Papers. In *Speak to the Earth*, Gawin Douglass quotes from what he refers to as his father's "farm books." These appear to be the same items in the Douglass Papers identified as Diary 31 and Diary 35.

34 "Hymn of the Wilderness," Douglass Papers.

35 Douglass, September 2, 1914, Diary 30, Douglass Papers.

With Pearl at his side, Earl was happy as never before in his life. Few of Pearl's personal records remain from this period, but it seems she was content as well. On her tenth wedding anniversary, she wrote how quickly the years of their marriage had passed: "the secret of the shortness of time was our happiness."³⁶ She enjoyed the company of a growing community as more homesteaders settled near Jensen and along the Green River, including some of the quarry workers who moved their families to the area. The Douglasses joined with their new neighbors to establish a school with Pearl serving as the teacher. Pearl was active also in the Lone Tree Betterment Society, an informal association of local homesteaders dedicated to the study of important local issues, the occasional scholarly lecture (given mostly by Earl or scientists who visited the quarry), and a goodly amount of picnicking and friendly socializing.³⁷ Pearl watched carefully but happily over her only child. On his birthday each year she recorded in a special notebook how much he had grown, what he had accomplished in his studies, and the gifts he received, simple things like his own china plate and mug painted with calla lilies, a poem written just for him by his father, and, on several birthdays, his own cow (by fourteen, Pearl noted, Gawin had three cows).³⁸ Gawin recalled a child's paradise at the Dinosaur homestead. Left on his own most of the time, he and his dog Taft scrambled over the rocky terrain, waded along the shallow banks of the Green River below the Split Mountain portal, and excavated his own cache of pretend dinosaurs. He delighted visitors with a precocious knowledge of the quarry workings: "Being the only child in camp and listening daily to 'dinosaur talk' filled me with scientific knowledge far beyond my years," he explained. Gawin helped with the garden, of course, and, as he grew older, with the livestock. But as he later characterized his childhood, "life was one continual round of pleasure for me."³⁹

36 Douglass, October 20, 1915, Diary 30, Douglass Papers.

37 "Records of the Lone Tree Betterment Society," Douglass Papers. See also "Lone Tree Betterment Society," *Vernal Express*, October 22, 1915.

38 "Record of Gawin Earl Douglass," hardbound notebook with handwritten entries, Douglass Papers. The notebook contains annual entries from 1914 to 1927.

39 For Gawin's personal memories of his childhood, see *Speak to the Earth*, chapters 32 and 33, 353–67. The quotations are from *Speak to the Earth*, 353 and 366.

Yet life at Dinosaur Ranch could be difficult as well. It was blisteringly hot in the summers and bitterly cold in winters. Quarrying, for all the great scientific value of the fossils, was mostly just hard, dirty, tedious work, and Douglass was frequently exasperated by it. "I cannot put in a full day at manual labor at the quarry and do all the planning, writing ordering and/or/other things. That is out of the question, and if I am expected to be a mule and a manager at the same time . . . I can't stand it."⁴⁰ From Pittsburgh Holland sent Douglass a steady stream of hectoring letters about the pace and cost of the work. He was especially critical of Douglass's book-keeping, constantly demanding receipts and account reconciliations for expenditures and fossil shipments. From Douglass's perspective, Holland was an imperious easterner who had no idea what it took to move tons of rock by hand in a remote corner of the West where it was dry, windy, and, depending on the time of year, either scorching hot or twenty degrees below zero. "I have served the museum a good many years with the hope of rising in the work—getting a share of honor due, and a living salary," he wrote in his diary; "I have not gotten the things I hoped nor is there any prospect near that I will get them. I see very well that the policy which governs does not include independence honor or comfort for me."⁴¹

Even more disheartening to Douglass was his inability to make a success of the homestead.⁴² Like so many homesteaders in the arid West, Douglass overestimated the land's productive capacity. The natural spring he initially believed capable of supplying sufficient water for the crops did not. He built small reservoirs to store the water but these quickly silted up with mud or were washed away by the infrequent but torrential summer rainstorms typical in canyon

40 Douglass, October 26, 1914, Diary 32, Douglass Papers.

41 Ibid.

42 The decline of the homestead can be traced through Douglass's "FARM" diaries (Diaries 31 and 35), Douglass Papers. From the beginning in 1914 the diaries show a series of crop failures and problems with the livestock that became especially acute by the summer of 1917. Most of these problems were typical of dry-land farming, especially the quixotic climate and perpetual need for more water. Some problems, however, seemed to have arisen from Douglass's decision making (delaying the construction of fences around his fields, for example) and the division of his attention between the fossil quarry and the homestead.

country. The only reliable source of water, he eventually concluded, was the Green River and that would have to be pumped up to the fields. Reluctantly he ordered expensive pumping equipment, but it proved difficult to install and never provided adequate water. The constant need for more or better fencing, the extra winterfeed for the cattle when his own hay crop was insufficient, and the shipping costs for supplies were expenses difficult to bear on his modest Carnegie salary. Douglass had to give up on the sheep herd when protecting it from the local mountain lions and coyotes proved futile. The cold winters took a toll on his cattle, especially the expensive purebred shorthorns. The stone house remained unfinished, and the family continued to live in the log cabin they had inhabited since the quarry work began.⁴³ Douglass managed to prove up on both of his claims by 1918, but the following year drought destroyed all his crops. This was followed by an especially long and cold winter during which most of the cattle died. With the end of World War I, agricultural prices plummeted, and the Douglass homestead never recovered.⁴⁴

That same year Andrew Carnegie died and the annual support he had provided the Carnegie Museum for fieldwork ended. William Holland retired several years later, and the new director, Douglas Stewart, began to scale back the Carnegie Museum's costly fieldwork. Work at the Utah quarry was especially problematic because the Carnegie's exclusive control of the site was beginning to face criticism from other institutions. The Smithsonian Institution had initially agreed to the exclusive permit arrangement for the Carnegie, largely because its National Museum of Natural History could not afford to conduct its own excavations at the site. But

43 The original cabin had been expanded over the years with several wood plank additions. When Douglass sought an insurance policy for the home in 1926, he listed it as having five rooms, "part logs and part lumber" worth \$800. In the same application, he noted that the stone house had cost \$1,500, but had no roof or windows. Douglass to E. A. Manker, October 11, 1926, Douglass Papers.

44 In the January 11, 1920, entry of his second "FARM" diary, Douglass noted with dark humor, "I am still contemplating writing a story giving my ideal of a farm if only for my own amusement." Diary 35, Douglass Papers. Gawin noted in his recollections of this period that "no further work was done on the ranch after 1921." *Speak to the Earth*, 373. There are no entries in the "FARM" diary after January 1920.



Gawin Douglass at his seventh birthday party in 1915.

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by 1921, the National Museum's fortune had improved and the Smithsonian told the Department of the Interior that it wanted access to the quarry. The University of Utah had also begun agitating for access, on the grounds that the state should retain some of the fossils found within its territory. After meetings in Washington early in 1922, Stewart realized that there was little likelihood that the Carnegie's permit would be renewed. He ordered Douglass to stop excavating, pack up his tools, and return to Pittsburgh. Douglass could not bear the prospect of returning to the East. He asked the Carnegie to assign him other fieldwork in Utah or Colorado, but the museum, after years of funding expeditions all around the world, decided it was time to concentrate on processing and studying the collections it already owned. Stewart declined to keep Dou-

glass in the field and after nearly twenty years in its employ, Earl parted ways with the Carnegie.

By the time he quit, Douglass had grown bitter not only about the Carnegie's treatment of him but also what he came increasingly to see as the museum's determination to simply plunder the quarry for its own aggrandizement.⁴⁵ Over the

⁴⁵ Charles Walcott to Secretary of Interior, January 30, 1922; Secretary of Interior to Charles Walcott, January 31, 1922, Permits File, Central Classified Files, Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior, Record Group 48, National Archives, Washington, D.C. See also Douglas Stewart to Earl Douglass, October 9 and November 7, 1922, Douglass Papers. For Douglass's resentment over his treatment by the Carnegie Museum, see Earl Douglass to Pearl Douglass, January 13, 1926; Earl Douglass to Harry Ratliff, March 7, 1927; and Earl Douglass to O. A. Peterson, April 19, 1927, all in Douglass Papers.



Earl Douglass in the log home at Dinosaur Ranch.

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years Douglass had come to believe that the quarry itself was worthy of preservation. His appreciation for the unusual beauty of the Split Mountain area, combined with a conviction that one could find in nature important moral and spiritual lessons as well as scientific ones, led him to envision the construction of a unique kind of museum at the quarry. "How appropriate," he wrote in his diary in 1915, "that [the fossilized dinosaurs] be exposed in relief as they were buried, to show the tragedy of their death and to reveal something of their lives and surroundings. . . . How appropriate to build a fair sized building over them to protect them, to have this a thing of substantial [*sic*] beauty modeled after nature, to have this large enough to contain related fossils and other curiosities." Here, he believed, people could learn to appreciate nature in a manner impossible in those august eastern institutions, like the Carnegie, where nature was cleaned,

sorted, cataloged, and displayed behind glass. Douglass was convinced that a living museum, one literally carved out of rock, would attract people from far and wide.⁴⁶ He resented the fact that his fellow scientists, including those in the federal government as well as the Carnegie, looked upon the quarry as nothing more than a hole in the ground, its only value in what could be dug up and hauled away.

Boosters in the town of Vernal embraced Douglass's concept of an *in situ* museum. Enlisting the support of Utah's congressional delegation, they urged the federal government to undertake the

⁴⁶ Douglass, October 28, 1915, Diary 33, Douglass Papers. Douglass first wrote in his diary about the possibility of a museum at the quarry on August 14, 1912, but at that time he envisioned only conventional exhibits. By 1915, he was thinking about the unique, *in situ* museum that was eventually constructed in the 1950s.

project. When asked for his advice, William Holland scoffed at the idea, calling it nothing more than a plot by a few local people to get rich at the government's expense. "I do not . . . think that the people of the United States would be justified in undertaking any such wild scheme," he wrote the park service in 1921. "In my humble judgement [*sic*], as a citizen of the United States and as a heavy tax-payer, I could think of nothing more scandalous [than] appropriating money simply to preserve intact what is in truth only a 'hole in the ground.'" The National Park Service agreed with Holland. "Your letter . . . reflects very succinctly our own impression as to the conditions in the Dinosaur National Monument," assistant director Arno Cammerer told Holland. "Needless to say, we have no intentions [*sic*] of spending one dollar of Government funds on fruitless work of this kind." From the time of its inception, Dinosaur National Monument had been, for the federal government, nothing more than a legal contrivance to make possible the orderly, scientific removal of the fossil specimens from the site. The idea of preserving some of the fossils at the site or of making the quarry itself the object of interest was absurd. "This monument is in truth nothing except a gash in the . . . mountainside," Cammerer said, from which scientific specimens were being removed for proper study in accredited museums. Dinosaur, he said, was a monument "in name only."⁴⁷

With the Carnegie's announcement in 1922 that it would quit the quarry, the National Museum of Natural History and the University of Utah sent in crews for quick excavations intended to retrieve only enough fossils for public displays. With these institutions satisfied, activity at the quarry came to an end. The federal government, which had authority over the quarry because of its status as a national monument, had no plans to provide even for the protection of the now-abandoned but still fossil-rich quarry from the ravages of weather or vandals. For a time Douglass kept a watchful eye on the quarry, stopping cars as they passed by his homestead. But after 1924, Douglass spent less and less time in the area. He hoped to find employment with the University of

Utah, but the assistance he provided to the university's team during their quick dig did not lead to a permanent job.

The failure of the homestead and the end of Earl's employment with the Carnegie left the Douglass family in dire financial circumstances, so much so that the little family was split apart. Douglass's father had died at the homestead in 1916 at the age of eighty-six. Just a few months after the Carnegie told Earl of the decision to end work at the quarry, his sister Nettie suffered a stroke. She lay incapacitated for months in the Douglass cabin with Pearl tending her. She died in March 1923. Soon Pearl's health deteriorated, undermined by the long years of hard work and cold winters at Dinosaur Ranch and, perhaps, by the stress of the couple's declining fortunes. Doctors recommended a warmer climate and lower altitude. With what little money he could muster, in the fall of 1923, Earl sent Pearl to California to recuperate. Gawin went with her, while Earl remained in Utah. She spent nearly two years there, but still ill, she returned to her family in Montana. For the rest of the decade, Pearl lived mostly in Montana, with extended visits to Salt Lake City, where Gawin was enrolled in high school. Earl took what work he could find, mostly prospecting for minerals and oil, in Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, and as far away as Arizona and Texas. He visited Pearl in California and Montana when he could. The Dinosaur Ranch was abandoned.⁴⁸ "It is surely a waiting, trying time," he wrote Pearl in 1926, "and I am trying to drown despair with work. Am doing all I know how to do, and working all I can. Life surely sometimes seems a hard proposition and worse than vain."⁴⁹

47 William Holland to Arno Cammerer, November 8, 1921; Arno Cammerer to William Holland, November 9, 1921; Arno Cammerer to William Andersen, May 17, 1922, all in Dinosaur National Monument File, Central Classified Files, Records of the National Park Service, RG 79, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

48 Douglass took out a five-year mortgage on the homestead property in 1921 but by 1926 he was behind in repayment. He also fell behind in paying taxes on the property. In 1927 the state began foreclosure proceedings. Douglass sought an extension of the mortgage loan, but documents in the Douglass Papers are unclear about the outcome. Gawin said that "the homestead eventually reverted back to the government." See *Speak to the Earth*, 373. In the exchange of correspondence concerning overdue taxes and the state's foreclosure effort, Earl Douglass noted that the land was no longer used and the buildings were vacant. See Earl Douglass to J. T. Oldroyd, State Land Office, November 11, 1926, Douglass Papers. The Desert Land claim on Orchid Draw remained in place until the 1990s when the National Park Service acquired it from Douglass's heirs.

49 Earl Douglass to Pearl Douglass, February 4, 1926,

In all the long years before their marriage, Earl and Pearl had sustained their relationship through letters, separated by distance but finding love in words. Now, again separated, they tried desperately to maintain their connection through correspondence, but the long absences, economic strain, and poor health made it very difficult. “I wish I could see you,” Pearl complained, “and talk to you as I feel, this writing is so unsatisfactory.”⁵⁰ Earl found it increasingly difficult to write to his wife. He was deeply ashamed of his inability to provide for Pearl and Gawin. “I won the hand of a girl to be my life partner . . . and though that love now is the most sacred thing in my life was it not selfish and wrong on my part,” he wrote. “Her faithfulness to me and my ideals has ruined her . . . My wish is to provide for her and shield and protect her and the fates have been against me. . . . This pains and humiliates me.” As a young man, Earl had hoped someday to be a “great man, ‘great’ like the poets,” but that now seemed only a cruel dream. “I have accomplished something in my life that will endure [but] am left to starve so far as the world is concerned. . . . [I]t seems that our troubles and disappointments are more than I can bear. It seems that everything, almost, has gone against us. . . . I see all our hopes in desert dust.”⁵¹

Pearl, deep in her own despair and loneliness, grew distraught by Earl’s distance. “With all the other bad luck I felt I was losing the interest and sympathy of my life companion,” she wrote in December 1926. “When your letters become fewer and shorter I thought this hard luck financially was crowding out all love.”⁵² He tried to console her. “Do not think for a moment, My dear Pearl that for a single moment I ever ceased to love you, and disappointment makes me realize it still more deeply,” he wrote. “I wanted to be an honored and gallant protector to you and the circumstances broke my spirit.”⁵³ She fretted that her poor health had created extra hardship for the family: “I have often wondered that you

did not give me up—that my ill health has made me a burden to my family. The last few years you have given all you had for my medical aid.” She declared her continued devotion: “Just because you have met back luck and failure, why should you feel yourself unworthy of the one who has tried to stay beside you and help you.” But when her brother taunted that her absent husband no longer cared for her, Pearl grew more depressed. “Some times I wonder if my boys really love me any more,” she wrote Earl. “Will we ever be together as we have been?”⁵⁴

Sadly, they were not. Although Earl visited Pearl in Montana and they scrimped together enough to put a down payment on a small house in Salt Lake City in 1930, Earl and Pearl lived apart for most of the remaining years of his life.⁵⁵ The onset of the Great Depression dashed any hopes that the oil industry would begin development in the Uinta Basin and Earl continued to struggle for means to earn a living. In one of his notebooks from this period he wrote: “I feel that I have some talent. One may overestimate it. Yet all my life I have been down and those that I know are shallow have risen by pure gall. . . . Sometimes I think that when disease and sickness come, when all the phantoms of life have vanished, death after all is the best friend, a consummation most devotedly to be wished.”⁵⁶ Late in 1930 Douglass fell ill. He was sixty-eight years old and had long suffered from “stomach troubles” but now, according to his son Gawin, Earl developed serious prostate disease, which required surgery. Earl sold off some of his private fossil collection to pay for his medical care, but in late January 1931, he died. The last entry in his notebook of reflections for 1930 reads: “I see no reason on earth why mammal skeletons older than Tertiary not preserved. Some one will find them. Wish I could. But all right if don’t. Plenty to discover anyway.”⁵⁷ Pearl soon sold the house

Douglass Papers.

50 Pearl Douglass to Earl Douglass, December 8, 1926, Douglass Papers.

51 Earl Douglass to Pearl Douglass, November 29, 1926, Douglass Papers.

52 Pearl Douglass to Earl Douglass, December 8, 1926, Douglass Papers.

53 Earl Douglass to Pearl Douglass, December 11, 1926, Douglass Papers.

54 Pearl Douglass to Earl Douglass, November 14, 1926, Douglass Papers

55 There are few records in the Douglass Papers from the last difficult years of Earl and Pearl’s marriage. Earl was a prolific diarist throughout his life, but the collection contains no diaries covering the period after 1928 and there are only scattered entries for the period 1921–1928. The preserved correspondence between Earl and Pearl grows less frequent after 1926 and there are no letters after 1929.

56 “The Spiritual,” notebook, 1920–1928, Douglass Papers.

57 “Inspirations,” notebook, 1929–1930, Douglass Papers.

in Salt Lake City and moved to California with Gawin, where she remained until her death in 1955.

The story of Earl and Pearl Douglass is bitter-sweet. Despite a life of determination and hard work, Douglass died impoverished and largely unnoted in the scientific world he so admired and yearned to be part of. In the final years of his life nothing pained Douglass more than his inability to provide a secure and comfortable life for the woman he had fallen in love with when she was hardly more than a child. Yet Douglass was right when he said that his accomplishments would be enduring, however little they brought him and his family financial stability or acclaim during his lifetime. Today fossils from the quarry he discovered reside in many museums, some of them still considered to be among the finest dinosaur specimens ever uncovered. Visitors to Dinosaur National Monument can walk through a modern in situ museum, just as Douglass had once envisioned. No signs of the homestead that Earl and Pearl worked so hard to make into a home remain. Still, it is possible to stand on the banks of the Green River as it emerges from Split Mountain, with a gentle breeze cooling the sunset, and imagine what it must have been like to be in love among the fossils.

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WEB SUPPLEMENT



Visit history.utah.gov/uhqextras to read an interview with Susan Rhoades Neel and to view photographs of Dinosaur National Monument from the historical society's collection.