

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and
Social Sciences

Great Plains Studies, Center for

Spring 2012

Review of *A White-Bearded Plainsman: The Memoirs of Archaeologist W. Raymond Wood*. By W. Raymond Wood.

Peter Bleed

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, pbleed@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [Geography Commons](#)

Bleed, Peter, "Review of *A White-Bearded Plainsman: The Memoirs of Archaeologist W. Raymond Wood*. By W. Raymond Wood." (2012).
Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences. 1224.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch/1224>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

A White-Bearded Plainsman: The Memoirs of Archaeologist W. Raymond Wood. By W. Raymond Wood. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011. xvii + 364 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$49.95 cloth.

Over a period of more than 50 years, Ray Wood has published a string of major works on Great Plains culture history and other subjects. He has held important professional posts, interacted with a vast cohort, and trained a generation of mid-continent archaeologists. Beyond all that, Ray's memoir, *A White-Bearded Plainsman*, shows him to be a fine writer and terrific storyteller.

Wood presents his story in chronological order, appropriate for a culture historian, but it happens that Ray came up at a time when Plains archaeology was blooming: his story describes the growth of Plains prehistory. Born and raised on the northern edge of the Nebraska Sandhills, Wood begins by recollecting the youthful experiences that made him curious about the region, sensitive to its subtle but distinctive features, and freely disposed to rambling across its substantial breadth. After prepping at Chadron State College, Ray came to the University of Nebraska, where he found a stimulating post-WWII community that included a vibrant group of archaeologists.

At the behest of the new Department of Anthropology, the university became the base for the Smithsonian Institution's Missouri River Basin Surveys of the Inter-Agency Archeological Salvage Program, a recently conceived unit created to deal with archeological resources being destroyed by the huge reservoirs under construction across the Northern Plains. Ray had access to a "genial cadre" and a string of fieldwork and analysis opportunities. He worked closely with several of the leaders of the Basin Surveys, but was never directly employed on the program's staff. It is easy to be critical of "salvage archeology," but Wood's presentation communicates the sincere interest, industry, and scholarly and resource limitations that were part of that work. His description of the social life of the Plains archeological community is warm, and, as he relates his adventures and associations, it is clear he was always a research scholar. From the beginning of his career he had the ability to frame interesting questions and proceed to present excavation results with clarity and insight. After completing his PhD at Oregon, Ray took a teaching and research post at

Missouri, allowing him to conduct problem-oriented investigations and support a string of graduate students who entered the profession with skill and drive.

Plains scholars will read this book to understand the growth of Great Plains research and also because it presents substantive discussions of important aspects of Plains culture history. Anyone interested in the history of American archaeology should read this memoir because it records a formative phase in the development of government involvement in cultural resources. Ray's positive account of how he stayed active, interested, and engaged in significant work will be helpful to anyone interested in understanding what it takes to become and remain a productive scholar. Finally, Ray's students, associates, and friends—a substantial community—will read it with joy.

PETER BLEED

Department of Anthropology, Emeritus
University of Nebraska–Lincoln