

Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian

Carl E. Akeley

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turous citizens of the past.

Over the years Clarendon has had its share of outstanding citizens. Probably the most famous of these people is Carl E. Akeley who achieved major accomplishments in several areas. Born May 19, 1864, Akeley is most noted for his efforts in developing taxidermy from a primitive process to an art. His first attempt at taxidermy came as a lad of 12 or 13 years old when he mounted a canary for an elderly neighbor who was distraught on the death of her pet bird.

His first important challenge in this field came in 1885 when, as an apprentice for Ward's Scientific Establishment of Rochester, he was despatched to St. Thomas, Ontario where he was to preserve the corpse of Jumbo, most famous elephant of P.T. Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth. Jumbo had met his accidental end in a head-on collision with a train. Akeley and his assistant completed the monumental task of mounting Jumbo's skin as Barnum had ordered and the unveiling of the specimen took place the following February at the Powers Hotel in Rochester.

Akeley worked later in Milwaukee as a taxidermist, then at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago and finally with the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. He is best known for his work relating to his several trips to Africa and the mounting of numerous specimens he collected there. He perfected the technique of mounting animals against backgrounds of their natural surroundings. On one of his trips to Africa he strangled a leopard with his bare hands after the cat attacked him. On another African venture he was charged by a bull elephant and nearly crushed to death.

Between his trips to Africa he lectured about his travel experiences and there are several people living today in Orleans County who remember hearing his lectures firsthand as a child.

Akeley's reputation eventually reached the White House in Washington, D.C. and soon after, Carl Akeley and his wife were invited to a luncheon with President and Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt. It was Akeley who interested Roosevelt in hunting in Africa and in later years Akeley met Roosevelt and his son, Kermit, in Africa during a hunting trip there. Akeley acquired a terrific admiration for Roosevelt and considered him "the truest sportsman of them all." Akeley's book, "In Brightest Africa," is dedicated to Roosevelt and the Akeley Gallery in the American Museum of Natural History in New York City is dedicated in Roosevelt's memory.

Akeley envisioned a gorilla sanctuary in Africa for this threatened animal and contacted authorities of the Belgian Congo in Brussels, Belgium with his idea. The result was the formation of the Parc National Albert, similar to an American national park, which was created by His Majesty, Albert, King of Belgium.

Akeley, a man of many talents, was also an inventor and held patents for numerous inventions. He invented a motion picture camera designed mainly for naturalists which was patented about 1916. He was the first person up to that time to secure motion pictures of the gorilla in its secluded natural haunts in Africa. His camera was so advanced and reliable that the Air Force was using them during World War II. In addition to his above mentioned talents, he was also a sculptor with several sculptures on display even today at various museums which depict mainly wildlife in Africa.

In 1926 George Eastman, the photographic manufacturer of Rochester, wanted to make a safari to Africa and contacted Akeley to help him plan the trip. Akeley met Eastman and his party in Africa and is mentioned several times in Eastman's book about this safari. Eastman advised Akeley to take it easy as he had not been in such good health on this, his fifth trip to the dark continent. A short while later during this trip, Akeley died on the slopes of Mt. Mikeno and is buried there in an area he described as "the most beautiful spot in the world."

Akeley was also an author and there are several books by and about him in the Swan Library in Albion. The only known display of his taxidermy work in our area is at the Cobblestone Museum in Childs, just north of Albion, where a fox with a partridge is on exhibit. The George Eastman House in Rochester has an example of his famous motion picture camera on exhibit.

Clarendon will honor this famous son on June 3 by the placing of a historic marker at the home he was born in on Hinds Road in Clarendon at 7 p.m. The Clarendon Town Board, Clarendon Historical Society and the Town Historian invite the public to attend the unveiling.

"O Lord,
Thou givest us everything,

at the price
of an effort."

--Leonardo DaVinci



Dear Readers:

The following article has been written by Alan J. Isselhard, Clarendon Town Historian. It is my privilege to present here, Mr. Isselhard's research on one of our most talented and adven-