

## Sellars, Richard West | 1935-2017

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Richard West Sellars

Richard West Sellars, 82, of Santa Fe, N.M., died Wednesday, Nov. 1, 2017, after a struggle with Alzheimer's disease.

There will be no funeral, but a memorial service will be held in early 2018. His ashes will be buried in the Sellars family plot in Decatur at a later date.

Richard was born in Decatur in 1935 and was the son of wildcatter oilman Robert Thompson Sellars Sr. and schoolteacher Johnnie Mae Blankenship Sellars. He knew the security of a multigenerational network of relatives and friends in that small town. He left there to attend Baylor University, graduating with a degree in geology in 1957. After a few years as an independent oilman in Jackson, Miss., he realized his interests actually lay more in history, geography and literature. He furthered his education in these fields at North Texas State University and the University of Missouri – Columbia, earning a PhD in Western History in 1972.

Although his original goal was to teach on the college level, he immediately found employment with the National Park Service upon receiving his degree. Soon he wholeheartedly embraced a career that afforded not only intellectual analysis of NPS historical and natural park units, but also interesting travel. He visited at least 350 of these sites. From 1979 to 1988, he headed the Southwest Cultural Resources Center in Santa Fe, overseeing programs in history, archaeology and historic architecture for the Southwest Region and Servicewide programs in submerged cultural resources. Richard served as acting superintendent at Pea Ridge National Military Park and San Antonio Missions National Historical Park. He was also a consultant with the Dallas County Historical Foundation on preservation and interpretation of the Texas School Book Depository and Dealey Plaza in Dallas, site of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, leading to the establishment of today's Sixth Floor Museum.

But it was in writing and lecturing that he found the greatest satisfaction. His articles on American history and cultural and natural resource preservation appeared in numerous publications, and he frequently taught courses on preservation philosophy, policy and practice and historic preservation at National Park Service training centers and various universities. He is best known as the author of "Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History," published in 1997 by Yale University Press and the chief catalyst for a major initiative by the National Park Service to revitalize natural resource management in the parks.

After his retirement in 2008, he worked on a history of cultural resources management in the National Park Service, which remains unfinished. His achievements were recognized by the National Park Service and related organizations with the Eastern National Authors Award in 1997, the George P. Hartzog award and the U.S. Department of the Interior Meritorious Service Award in 2008 and the George Melendez Wright Award for Excellence in 2011. He will be remembered for his unwavering commitment to preservation principles and devotion to the National Park Service.

He was preceded in death by his parents; and his brother, Robert Thompson Sellars Jr. He is survived by his sister, Sally Florian and her husband, James; sister-in-law Sharon Sellars; cousins Ben Man, John Sellars and Elaine Hyland; nieces Amanda Callinan, Melinda ("Tenna") Florian and Kathryn Sellars; nephews Jason Florian and Trevor Stevenson; three great-nieces; and his wife of 40 years, Judith Stevenson Sellars.

Memorial donations may be made to the George Wright Society, P.O. Box 65, Hancock, MI, 49930-0065; Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), 962 Wayne Avenue, Suite 610, Silver Spring, MD, 20910; or The Food Depot, 1222A Siler Road, Santa Fe, NM, 87507-4107.