IN MEMORIAM

RONALD KINNISON DEFORD

Ronald Kinnison DeFord, age 92, Professor Emeritus of Geological Sciences, died May 7, 1994. Ronald joined the University as a Professor in 1948, and he was Graduate Advisor in the Department from 1949 to 1967. He supervised 19 Ph.D. dissertations and 126 masters theses. After nominal retirement in 1972 and appointment to Professor Emeritus, he continued as the faculty supervisor of Technical Sessions, a course required of all graduate students in Geological Sciences, until 1987. He then retired in fact at the age of 85, partly because of the afflictions of Parkinson's Disease. Ronald's influence on the Department and University was immense, as a teacher, a leader, and a colleague.

Ronald was born in San Diego, California, on January 22, 1902, the son of George Washington DeFord and Amelie Stenger DeFord. In 1921, DeFord earned an Engineer of Mines degree from Colorado School of Mines in Golden, Colorado, and in 1922 he received his Master of Science degree in Geology from that school. His thesis topic was the Tertiary History of the Front Range. In 1924, Midwest Refining Company employed him and assigned him as resident geologist to a then fairly remote station at Roswell, New Mexico. Five years later he drove the stake that marked the location for the discovery well for Hobbs Field, one of the major oil fields of North America. In 1933, he was stationed in Midland, Texas, with Argo Oil Corporation. He lived in Midland until 1948, when he accepted an appointment as Professor of Geology at The University of Texas at Austin.

The Professor, as he was known to all, was first and foremost a teacher. Immediately after receiving his masters degree, he served as an instructor on a geology field trip. Then he took temporary jobs, including one as a laborer at a smelter, as he sought academic opportunities. His first classroom assignment after graduation was as an instructor of chemistry at the Colorado School of Mines from 1923 to 1924. The breadth of his intellectual interests was documented by his 1923 application for a Rhodes Scholarship at Oxford in English Language and Literature. Though he did not receive the scholarship, his next teaching assignment was as an instructor and then as Assistant Professor of English at the Colorado School of Mines from 1931 to 1933. When he became Graduate Advisor in our Department, he encouraged all students to acquire an adequate foundation not only in geology, but also in mathematics, physics, chemistry, English, and foreign language. For instance, he requested that all graduate students in Geological Sciences complete a course in thermodynamics as part of the curriculum for a Ph.D. degree. His

interests and skills in English usage were always evident when he edited student manuscripts. Among the memorable courses he taught were undergraduate classes in physical geology and graduate courses in Geology of Fluids and Advanced General Geology. Vigorous discussions with students were hallmarks of his teaching. In the early 1960's, he occasionally taught a course in geology for aspiring teachers in the College of Education. The final week was a debate of evolution *versus* the Bible; Professor DeFord brought his big red brassbound Bible to class and made future teachers defend evolution as he defended the Bible. He used the same family Bible in a different sense at the start of the first day of class in physical geology. He looked out at the class solemnly, introduced himself, and read a few verses from Genesis. He then closed the book, turned to the class, and said, "I hope that by the end of this semester you will realize that all of that is not true."

One of his enduring contributions to teaching and to the Department was in his leadership of the graduate course called Technical Sessions, a one-credit-hour course meeting twice each week. In that course, each graduate student has been required to make at least one formal presentation of research results to an audience of students, faculty, and others. DeFord used the course to teach clear, effective speaking, and graduates of the Department have often attributed their successes in lecture presentations to the high standards he so ably imparted. Each student speaker was also required to prepare copies of an abstract for all in attendance, after that abstract had been discussed with and edited and approved by DeFord. A volume of abstracts of talks for the last nine years of Ronald's leadership was compiled and presented to him in 1986, and a copy is kept by the Geology Library as a resource and a record of the science he influenced. All have warm memories of the style in which he presided over the course.

Many of his teaching contributions came during supervision of graduate students doing field work in west Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Chihuahua, Mexico. Almost all of the nearly 150 graduate students who received degrees under his supervision based at least part of their research upon careful field studies of an area in one of these regions. Stories of his abilities, enthusiasm, and insights under sometimes trying conditions are legion. Even in 1960, when Ronald was 58, his young students couldn't understand how this "old man" could walk their legs off all summer long. Little did they know that starting in the middle of the month of April, if one drove out along Mount Bonnell Road west of Mt. Barker, one would see Ronald's jeep parked, and he would be running up and down the hills getting in shape so that he could out-do those young "kids" when they met him in Trans-Pecos Texas or northeastern Chihuahua. He also learned enough Spanish to be understood and to understand during the Chihuahua excursions.

He organized field trips for students and faculty into northern Mexico in conjunction with Pemex geologists, and he taught participants both geology and other useful things, such as how to stop leaks in a car radiator in the midst of an empty desert. (He took an egg, separated the white from the yolk, dropped the yolk into a soup pot, dropped the white into the car's radiator while it was hot and running, and coagulation of the egg white stopped little leaks.) He was a stickler for promptness on field trips, and students recall long highway drives with no rest stops, to make certain to be at the appointed places at the appointed times.

The importance of his contributions to the educations and lives of these students has been shown in part by the enthusiastic response when the Ronald K. DeFord Field Scholarship Fund was established in the Geology Foundation of the University in 1972. In the first three years of its existence, 48 former graduate students contributed to the fund, and before Ronald's death, the endowment had grown to a balance of over $170,000 contributed by more than 180 donors.

Ronald participated in more than a dozen scientific societies and received special recognition from many of them. His awards included the Individual Merit Award Medal from Colorado School of Mines in 1963, election to the Permian Basin Hall of Fame in Midland in 1975, and honorary life membership of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists. He was a former president and a life member of The West Texas Geological Society, and that society cosponsored a symposium in his honor in 1970. He was awarded the title of "Professor Extraordinario" by La Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico in 1968. He was a founding member of the Chancellor's Council of The University of Texas and a member of the President's Councils at both The University of Texas and the Colorado School of Mines. He was also a Life Member of the UT Ex-Student's Association and The Eyes of Texas Society.

DeFord was also a great patron of the Arts and a supporter of many civic organizations. He was a founding member of the Midland Community Theatre and was voted Life Member by the Board of Governors in 1970. He was elected to the Knights of the Symphony in Austin and was proclaimed King Brio VI in 1971. He was a founding member of the Austin Lyric Opera, and he was an avid supporter of Laguna Gloria Art Museum, several Chamber Music groups, The Festival-Institute at Round Top, and the local Gilbert & Sullivan Society. He will be remembered also for his love of ballroom dancing, and although many geology faculty took years of ballroom dance classes to emulate him, none could match his style, particularly in the waltz.

DeFord is survived by his wife of 17 years, Marion Wier Rich DeFord, and his four step-children: Nell Hill Gillespie of Beverly Hills, California; John Hill DeFord of Tulsa, Oklahoma; Stephen Geoffrey Rich of Phoenix, Arizona; and Lisa Rich Beck of Austin. In addition, he is survived by his mother-in-law, Mabel Wier of Austin, and by his sister-in-law and brother-in-law, Marjorie and John Eason of Georgetown, Texas. He was preceded in death by his sister, Estella. His first wife, Amma (Mary Amma Spence), died in 1976; she accompanied Ronald for many summer field seasons, living with him in primitive conditions in the west and participating in field trips.

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Robert M. Berdahl, President
The University of Texas at Austin

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H. Paul Kelley, Secretary
The General Faculty

This Memorial Resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professor Douglas Smith (Chair), Professor Emeritus William R. Muehlberger, and Professor Emeritus Keith Young.