IN MEMORIAM

HENRY GORDON DAMON

Dr. Henry Gordon Damon, member of the faculty of the Department of Geology of The University of Texas for 35 years, died in Austin on February 3, 1960. Dr. Damon retired from active teaching in 1957 but he enjoyed good health and was in his office nearly every day until he suffered a heart attack in early January which claimed his life a month later.

Gordon was born at Corsicana, Texas, April 12, 1883, the eldest of three children born to Henry Gordon Damon and Margaret Houston Rogers Damon. He is survived by a sister, Dr. Eleanor Damon Pace, of Austin, Texas, with whom he lived. Gordon came from pioneer stock, being a grandson of Colonel William P. Rogers of the Second Texas Regiment C.S.A., a hero of the battle of Corinth (1862). His father, a Confederate veteran, was a lawyer in Corsicana and active in the oil developments at Corsicana in 1895, which was the first oil production of any consequence in Texas.

Gordon's early education was in the Corsicana Public Schools and Baylor University Preparatory School, but on account of poor health he was rarely able to complete a school term. He entered Baylor University in 1901 but was not able to finish the term because of his health. His doctor ordered a change in climate and in 1902 Gordon transferred to Vanderbilt University, graduating with a B.S. degree in 1906.

After graduating from Vanderbilt, Gordon taught school for one year at Nacogdoches and then studied law at The University of Texas in 1907-1908. He received a license to practice law in 1908 and for the next nine years he practiced law in Corsicana. However, he continued to be troubled with a stomach ailment and was under the care of a physician much of the time. His doctor felt that he should give up the practice of law and seek some work that would be less confining. Gordon decided to try teaching again and in 1917-1918, he taught physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics at La Grange High School; in 1918-1919, he taught similar courses in Austin High School, and in 1919-1920, he taught physics. chemistry and general science at the San Antonio Military Academy. For the next four years (1920-1923) Gordon was with the State Department of Education as Supervisor of Science. This position required him to visit the high schools of the state to determine whether the work in science was acceptable for accreditation. His health did not improve and his doctor advised him to seek work which would take him outdoors. It was at this point that Gordon decided to take up geology. He had some acquaintance with the subject because as early as the summer of 1919, Gordon, along with the writer, was a member of a field course in Geology given by The University of Texas in the Llano region under the direction of Dr. H. P. Bybee. He entered the graduate school of The University of Texas in the fall of 1923 and received the Master of Arts degree in geology, in 1924. His thesis, under the supervision of Dr. H. P. Bybee, was entitled: "The vertical displacement in the main fault of the Balcones fault system at a point west of the City of Austin, Texas." Prior to 1924, only 5 Master's degrees in geology had been granted by The University of Texas. In 1924, two more were added to the list: Gordon Damon and A. K. Tyson. Gordon's first teaching in the Department of Geology, The University of Texas, was in 1924-1925, when he taught laboratory sections of General Geology under an appointment as a Tutor in Geology.

In 1925, he was appointed to an instructorship and served continuously on the faculty until his death, advancing to Assistant Professor in 1931 and to an Associate Professorship in 1943. Gordon's chief contribution to the Department during the early years of his tenure was in the organization of the laboratory work in General Geology. Firmly convinced that the laboratory work was a very important part of a course in General Geology, he organized the material, planned field trips, prepared a manual which was used for many years, and trained the instructors who were assigned to teach the various laboratory sections.

Gordon's chief interest in geology was in sedimentation and he decided to complete his doctorate in this field. Selecting the University of Iowa, one of the leading schools in sedimentation, Gordon entered the graduate school in 1930 and in the year following completed the residence requirements for the doctorate, while also serving as a Teaching Fellow. His dissertation was a study of the basal Cretaceous conglomerates on the east side of the Llano uplift in Central Texas. He devoted several summers to the field and laboratory work on this problem and was awarded the Ph.D. degree by the University of Iowa in 1940.

The discovery of the East Texas oil field in the early 30's and other stratigraphic-trap type fields increased interest in sedimentation and there was a demand for specialized courses in this field. Dr. Damon organized and taught the first course in sedimentation to be given at The University of Texas in 1939-40. Other courses were added and by 1946 Dr. Damon was teaching two senior and one graduate course in sedimentation which he continued to do alone through 1951. Finally the load became too heavy for one man and Dr. Robert Folk was added to the staff and together they handled the teaching and graduate research in sedimentation until his retirement.

Dr. Damon was primarily a teacher although he was interested in research and always had several projects under way. However, his main contribution to research was through his students in the aid and direction of their research projects. Exceptions to this were the several summers he spent working on the tripoli and glass sand deposit of North Central Texas for the Bureau of Economic Geology (see bibliography).

The professional and scientific organizations of which Dr. Damon was a member include: American Association of Petroleum Geologists, Society of Economic Paleontologists and Mineralogists, Fellow of the Texas Academy of Science, Texas State Teachers Association, Sigma Xi, and Sigma Gamma Epsilon. His social fraternity was Sigma Nu. He is listed in the American Men of Science. He was an active member of the University Baptist Church and regularly attended many of the church functions.

Dr. Damon was a lover of music and with his sister, Dr. Pace, attended almost every musical event on the campus and regularly went to San Antonio for the opera. He also enjoyed traveling and recording his trips with colored pictures. Gordon was a very modest individual, so few people knew that he wrote from time to time short humorous poems (some about his students), and many brief fictional stories or anecdotes about some of his experiences. In particular he was interested in the adventures of his father while he was fighting for the Confederacy, and wrote several stories about Civil War and Reconstruction days.

Dr. Damon was a quiet, scholarly person with firm convictions and always ready to defend his viewpoint. He was painstaking in the organization of his work and research, and kept up with the scientific literature by faithfully abstracting and cross-indexing most articles in his field until his last few months. He insisted that his students be equally well prepared and his favorite course was chiefly concerned with seeing that the students kept up with recent research by reviewing scientific articles for class discussion. His main interests in sedimentation were environments of deposition, processes of sedimentation, and heavy mineral studies. In his heavy mineral course, he insisted that the students work out properties and identify the minerals themselves, feeling rightly that the students learned more by working individually rather than being flatly told what the mineral was. Consequently, Dr. Damon interested many students in going further into the field of sedimentation. He was quick to give encouragement and individual help to deserving students but impatient with those careless in their work. Perhaps his greatest success lay in the personal aid he gave to his students and they all speak affectionately of the encouragement he gave them and the interest he showed. He went so far as to make a careful card-index of even the students he advised from year to year and kept a record of their progress. On reunion days he was sure to be visited by many former students for long chats. In his long teaching career at the University of Texas, Dr. Damon came in contact with many students and among these he has a host of friends who will remember him as a fine teacher, a person dedicated to his subject, and a scholarly gentleman.

Fred M. Bullard, Chairman
S. P. Ellison
H. H. Power

Publications of Henry Gordon Damon

1922. The teaching of science in Texas High Schools: Bull. 136, Department of Education, State of Texas.

1940. (with Gordon R. McNutt) Cretaceous in the vicinity of Austin: Excursions 1 and 2, 53rd Annual Meeting, Geological Society of America, pp. 3-15.

1940. Cretaceous conglomerates on the east side of the Llano uplift, Texas (abstract): Iowa University publ. Aims and progress of research, series 66, Jan. 23, 1940.

1946. The origin and distribution of spiculite near Lampasas, Lampasas County, Texas: University of Texas publication 4301, pp. 271-282.

1952. Glass sands of the Trinity group in North-central Texas: Open file, Bureau of Economic Geology, University of Texas.

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