Memorial to Louis Wade Currier 1890–1970

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When Louis Wade Currier died on June 23, 1970, after a lingering illness, the geologic profession lost a dedicated geologist, a real scholar, and a penetrating critic. A man of impeccable integrity, Dr. Currier resembled his grandfather, the Hon. Albert Currier, who served in both the House and Senate of Massachusetts, and was also a builder and contractor who never signed a contract—his word was his bond. Louis Currier, or “Lou,” as he was known to his many friends and associates, was born in Middletown Springs, Vermont, May 4, 1890. His father, Dr. Walter Bryant Currier, was a dentist and postmaster of South Acton, Massachusetts, for many years. His mother, Florence Beresford Wade, of Ann Arbor, Michigan, was a relative of Lord Charles Beresford of England, a gay-blade friend of Edward VII.

Lou received a B.S. degree from Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1914, an A.M. degree from Northwestern University in 1920, and his Ph.D. in geology from Syracuse University in 1930. He spent the years from 1914 to 1930 in teaching as well as in doing graduate work, and his students must have profited greatly from his enthusiasm and his clear and concise method of expression. During this period he also worked part time as a geologist for the Illinois and Kentucky Geological Surveys, and articles dealing with the lead, zinc, and fluor spar deposits in the two states were published. In 1918 he worked for the War Industries Board, and subsequently enlisted in the Army where he was assigned to the Aviation Photographic Section.

In 1921 Louis Currier was appointed Assistant Professor of mineralogy at Syracuse University, and he married Evelyn Richardson at that time. He remained at Syracuse for four years until he received an appointment as Associate Professor of Geology at the Missouri School of Mines in Rollo. Lou stayed there for three years when he left to finish his work for the Ph.D. degree, which he received from Syracuse University in 1930. He immediately joined the U.S. Geological Survey where he began a fruitful career that ended with his retirement, at the age of 70, in June, 1960. Retirement of a dedicated geologist from the Geological Survey did not mean changing to fishing and golf. He took a job for a year as editor for the American Geophysical Union, then became a lecturer in geology at the University of Maryland from 1962-1964. This was followed by a tour of duty as a member of the writing staff of the Earth Science Curriculum Project of the American Geological Institute. He then spent a year as Visiting Professor of Geology at the University of North Carolina. His early interest in teaching was reactivated by these experiences to such an extent that he developed an
idea for a teaching aid consisting of a series of geologic maps of differing terrain and geologic structure, together with cross sections, text, and questions. This appeared in 1965 as *Geologic Map Portfolio No. 1*, containing eight plates of colored geologic maps from different areas with accompanying sections and a text of sixty-four pages. This was published by the Williams and Heintz Map Corporation of Washington, D.C., and was so successful that it went into a second printing in 1967.

Although his early work on the Geological Survey was in Idaho, he was able, before long, to convince the Survey that his place was in New England, where he continued to work for the balance of his Survey career, first in mapping the metamorphic rocks, then as an expert on building stones, an important industry in the northeast. The cooperative project between the U.S. Geological Survey and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, beginning in 1938, was a natural for Lou, and it is indeed fortunate for all concerned that the Survey chose him to lead this joint project. It proved to be a fruitful venture and, with a small staff under his personal guidance, a long series of maps, depicting bedrock geology and surficial geology on separate sheets, were produced. These were helpful to highway engineers as well as to those engaged in exploration for ground water. He was able to convince skeptical engineers that his "long hair" geology could be useful to them not only in solving problems of source materials for various engineering projects, but also as an aid in arriving at costs of highway construction, and so forth. Later, when geophysical investigations were added to the program, the usefulness was extended further. It was a tremendous success and has paid dividends far beyond its cost. He became involved in the granitization controversy and was able to debate the subject with all the zeal of the newly reformed.

Lou had a long-standing and deep interest in dramatics, and while in Syracuse was an actor, director and, at one time, president of the Syracuse Drama League. When he came to Washington, he was soon identified with the Washington Drama Guild and the Washington Civic Theatre. Thus, when he joined the U.S. Geological Survey in 1930 he naturally gravitated to the famous Pick and Hammer Club shows, where his dramatic talents flowered in fertile soil. He quickly filled the positions of actor and director of these shows and brought them to a new standard of excellence. The rehearsals of these shows, in which Lou painstakingly portrayed each character as a guide to the aspiring actor who played the part, will live long in the memories of those fortunate enough to have witnessed them. He also combined his unusual skill at both humor and satire in writing the anonymous "Foreward" for the programs. These are utterly delightful little satirical essays on current problems in the administration of the Geological Survey. On many occasions he appeared before the curtain during the intermission and gave a monologue of priceless satire. In recognition of his many and varied contributions to these shows, he was dubbed "Mr. Pick & Hammer" at the first show after his retirement in 1960, and presented with a silver cigar box filled with his favorite cigars.

Dr. Currier was a Fellow of The Geological Society of America and the Mineralogical Society of America, a member of the Society of Economic Geologists, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Geological Society of Washington (past President), the Washington Academy of Sciences (past Vice-President), Sigma Xi,
and the Cosmos Club. He received the Distinguished Service Medal of the Interior Department, its highest award. He was a long-time representative of the U.S. Geological Survey on the Committee on Natural Building Stones of the American Society for Testing and Materials (Chairman, 1948 to 1960), and was elected as its first Honorary Member.

As a close personal friend of Lou Currier for nearly 40 years, I can attest to his utterly delightful personality—full of genuine warmth (in spite of a sometimes stern exterior), a subtle and often devastating sense of humor, and an ability always to be scholarly but never stuffy. He always was willing to help those whom he thought could profit from it, but was impatient with stupidity. His creed was that no one should be worse for having known him, and his many friends are testimony to the fact that he worked at it. Dr. Currier is survived by his wife, Evelyn Richardson Currier, a son, Professor Wade R. Currier of Glassboro State College, a daughter, Mrs. Warren G. Preisser of Annapolis, Maryland, seven grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

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