Memorial to J. Edward Hoffmeister
1899-1991
H. GRAY MULTER
9855 Canaseraga Rd., Arkport, New York 14807

The geological profession has lost an honored colleague, one who served us in many capacities and always with distinction.

The elder son of a professor of pharmacology and dentistry in Baltimore, John Edward Hoffmeister received his A.B. in Chemistry in 1920 from Johns Hopkins University. He said it was the lure of the field trips in the one geology course he took, contrasted with the obnoxious smell of the chemistry labs, that caused him to switch to geology for his Ph.D., which he received in 1923.

As a graduate student he was fortunate to have the experience of working in Washington, D.C. with T. W. Vaughan at the U.S. National Museum. He also helped identify corals from the A. G. Mayor collection from American Samoa. These opportunities proved to be a turning point in his life.

Ed took his first job as a geology instructor at the University of Rochester in 1923 with the proviso that he be given periodic leaves of absence so he could begin his own coral investigations in the far Pacific. His pursuit of research with corals actually included three major periods in the Pacific followed by a period after retirement in the Florida Keys. From 1921 to 1929 he was a Fellow of the Bishop Museum, Honolulu, during which time he worked with W. A. Setchell, who invited Ed to join his first research expedition in 1926 to study the geology of the island of Eua in the Tonga Group.

A second expedition, in 1928, in conjunction with Harry Ladd, continued the work begun in the Tonga Group. In 1934 Ed led a third expedition from the University of Rochester and the Bishop Museum to eastern Fiji. Twenty-five papers were published as a result of these three Pacific expeditions, including the “Antecedent-Platform Theory” describing an origin for atolls.

From 1937 to 1938 Ed served as visiting professor at the University of Hawaii and continued his writing. Later, his Pacific expertise proved valuable during World War II when he served as an advisor to various military branches, formulating Pacific invasion plans in Washington, D.C., and later evaluating the Bikini bomb test in 1946.

In 1960 the Hoffmeisters moved to Florida so that Ed could spend his retirement years exploring the reefs of the Florida Keys. Ed and I first met at the University of Miami’s marine laboratory where as visiting professors we both had been assigned desk and laboratory space in the same small room. We soon found that we were there for the same reason, to study the Florida reefs (Pleistocene and Holocene) including their origin, growth, and evolution. We decided to join together in this challenge and did so for the next ten years. Our research results were published jointly in five papers describing a variety of topics including Holocene reef growth, mangrove reef rock, origin of the Florida Keys, the Miami oolite and its bryozoan facies and the various subaerial crusts that coat the surface of the Keys and are found at depth in cores. Ed produced a summary of this research for popular reading in a hard-cover book entitled Land from the Sea.
For Ed Hoffmeister essentials in good field work included: (1) being in the field before 8 a.m. each day, (2) careful field observations and immediate notations in the field book, (3) rereading field notes before supper in a relaxing mode with a glass of cheap sherry in one hand and a Tampa Nugget cigar in the other in order to explore in depth the probability of hypotheses brought to light during the day. Supper was commonly late. We had many victories and some defeats, but we thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Our rallying cry was a lusty "Hail Key Largo!"

Early in his academic life at the University of Rochester, Ed Hoffmeister established himself as a respected and popular professor of Geology. He shared his Pacific experiences with both students and the community at large via classroom lectures and newspaper articles. He told them of trees laden with big juicy oranges, coconut palms, and beautiful starlit nights. He added that having flies, mosquitoes, fleas, and rats running over you while you sleep "quickly causes a loss of a good deal of the romance!"

Within a year after his arrival at Rochester, Ed married Ruth Tuthill, who became an active participant in university affairs with him. Her charm always made people feel that they were among friends and part of the university family.

Two student testimonies and one dedication gift illustrate Ed Hoffmeister's success as a teacher at the University of Rochester. John D. Milliman wrote:

The degree of Ed Hoffmeister's influence upon me and my career perhaps can be illustrated by the fact that my son's middle name is Edward, and by the fact that I dedicated my first book (*Marine Carbonates*) to "my teacher, J. Edward Hoffmeister." But the admiration, warmth and love I have for this man goes far beyond those tokens, and I can only hope that I will pass a small amount of it on to my students, and they in turn to their students. For is that not the best gift of and to any teacher?

Another former student, Daniel B. Sass, expressed it this way:

His personal academic standards were of the highest caliber and set the tone for the outstanding programs which he administered at the University. A clear and engrossing lecture style commanded attention and convinced many to major in geology. He inspired such loyalty that giving 110% effort was the norm for his faculty, staff and students. In quiet effective ways he praised the self-motivated achievers and encouraged those who found some aspects of the rigorous program vexing. His concepts of honor, honesty, and the work ethic became an integral part of our lives.

Ultimately, as a token of their esteem for this teacher who had served the University of Rochester for 60 years, a large group of alumni, faculty, and staff established the Hoffmeister Study Center in the Rush Rheer Library of the university. This room, with all its appropriate books, maps, and plaque, permanently recognizes Ed's contribution to higher education.

In addition to his achievements in research and teaching, Ed Hoffmeister proved himself an able administrator and community leader. On the University of Rochester campus he served as Dean of the College of Men (1942-1943), Dean of Faculty (1943-1945), Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences (1945-1956), and Chairman of the Department of Geology and Geography (1946-1964). These were critical years for the university: campuses were merged, new schools were created, and student needs were changing during and after World War II. Under his leadership the College of Arts and Sciences grew and prospered.

In 1948 Ed became Treasurer of the Geological Society of America, an elected post which he held continuously until he resigned in 1963. As a community leader in the Rochester area, Ed served in a host of capacities including Trustee of the Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, Director of the YMCA of Rochester, President of the Federation of Churches, Trustee and President of the Rochester Museum Association, Director of Wards Natural Science Establishment, and Chairman of the Monroe County Citizens Advisory Committee.
The "retirement" years of Ed Hoffmeister, officially starting in June 1964, were actually a time of renewal, a time for resharpening his research and writing skills and working again with his corals. The Hoffmeister home in Coconut Grove, tastefully decorated by Ruth in white wicker and by Ed with Key Largo limestone flagstones, was a meeting place for local geologists including the Shell Oil and Miami University Institute of Marine Sciences laboratory staffs. These were happy and relaxing events illustrating a certain Hoffmeister style and duplicating in many ways the Hoffmeister hotel suite reunions held at annual GSA meetings for all former students. This productive life changed dramatically when Ed contracted Alzheimer's disease in 1982.

Ed Hoffmeister's laudable journey through life has come to an end. We rejoice in having known him. We now join him in his favorite Fijian farewell song that he sang with such gusto for us on so many happy occasions and as long as he could during his long illness:

ISA LEI (chorus)
Isa lei! na noqu rarawa,  
Ni Ko sa no vodo e na mataka,  
Bau nonuma na nodatou lasa  
Suva nonuma tiko ga.  

Translation
Alas! my sorrow  
On your departure tomorrow  
But remember our happy Mai  
At Suva. Do remember!

Farewell, Ed ... fair winds.

Appreciation

The family and I wish to thank the GSA and Gray Multer for this fine tribute to Ed.

Ed was most fortunate to have Gray in his later years in Florida and Harry Ladd in his early years in the Pacific as his eminent colleagues in field work and publications.

Ed considered it an honor to serve as treasurer and councilor of the Society enjoying his years of association with fellow geologists. Receiving recognition at GSA Annual Meeting in 1968 was a highlight in his career. Those of us near to Ed agree with Ian Campbell, who said on that occasion, "Ed has an essential gentleness and goodness as a man."

Geology was Ed's life; his colleagues were his friends, his students were his concern; and his family treasured his love.

Thank you all for this memorial.

—Ruth Hoffmeister

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF J. E. HOFFMEISTER

1927 (with Ladd, H. S.) Recent negative shift in the strandline in Fiji and Tonga: Journal of Geology, v. 35, no. 6, p. 542–556.