Memorial to Parke A. Dickey
1909–1995

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Parke Atherton Dickey, 85, passed away on February 3, 1995, at his residence in Haverford, Pennsylvania. Parke is survived by his wife Janet and by three children: Margaret Wilde of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; Louise Pinkow of Boulder, Colorado, and Thomas of Lincoln University, Pennsylvania, and six grandchildren.

Parke was a creative geologist, dedicated researcher, and inspiring educator. He rendered a long and distinguished service to petroleum geology that included his persistent efforts to combine geological and engineering activities to improve reservoir development. He was extremely well liked and respected by his many friends, colleagues, and fellow geologists. He derived great satisfaction from watching former employees and students go on to prominent positions in the petroleum industry.

Parke grew up in Chicago, Illinois, and Oxford, Pennsylvania. He attended Lincoln University, in Pennsylvania, for two years, continuing at Johns Hopkins University, where he completed his Ph.D. in geology in 1932. His first job, in 1930-1931, was working for Lago Petroleum in Maracaibo, Venezuela. After obtaining his Ph.D. he returned to South America, this time to Colombia, where he worked as a field geologist for the Tropical Oil Company. He mapped large areas of the jungle-covered Middle Magdalena Valley. Tropical diseases forced him to return to Pennsylvania in 1938. Parke spent the next eight years involved in various aspects of the petroleum industry of Pennsylvania, where he had the opportunity of straddling exploration and production. This experience convinced him that successful oil-field development is a joint venture among geologists, geophysicists, and engineers, way ahead of its acceptance by the industry.

Parke was invited in 1946 by the Carter Oil Company, an Esso (now EXXON) affiliate, to organize a geological research group in their Tulsa, Oklahoma, laboratory. Parke showed an uncanny ability to choose a cadre of very capable young professionals. He also motivated and encouraged them to develop creative geological principles. At that time, oil-company research in petroleum geology was a new activity. Parke’s direction was of primary importance for the development of a very successful research program on subjects such as petroleum geochemistry, sedimentary facies, palynology, sequence stratigraphy, and computer applications to geology. What was done during the next twelve years influenced future research and exploration activities of EXXON in particular and the industry in general. In 1961, he took early retirement from Esso to become head of the earth sciences department of the University of Tulsa. He brought to his new job his commitment to research, and as a result the department was accredited for the Ph.D. program. In 1975 Parke became a professor emeritus. In 1979 he joined Oil & Gas Consultants International. Since that year until 1990 he taught short courses in development geology in the United States and worldwide in many of the oil-producing countries. To complement his teaching he wrote a best-selling textbook on development geology, now in its third edition.

Parke was a man of tremendous energy and unflagging enthusiasm. He participated in many of the activities of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists, American Petroleum Institute, Geological Society of America, American Geophysical Union, and Society of Petroleum Engineers. He published innumerable geological and petroleum engineering articles, covering a variety of subjects. Beginning in 1953, he and Janet ran a small cattle ranch.
near the town of Owasso, just north of Tulsa, Oklahoma. He had all sorts of interests in matters outside of his profession. Parke and Janet obtained their pilot licenses in their 60s and rafted down the Colorado River in their 80s. During a visit to England Parke was denied a rental car because of his age; undaunted, he rented an airplane instead.

As a hobby, Parke wrote articles about the history of geological and geographical exploration, including the Drake Well, and the measurement of Mount Everest as the highest in the world. In October 1961 he participated in a U.S. government-sponsored exchange program with Soviet petroleum scientists. Before the trip he spent many hours studying the Russian language. Parke was in Moscow at the end of the visit when the Cuban missile crisis occurred. Nevertheless, he went ahead with plans for a train trip to Tashkent, Alma Ata, and Samarkand. Parke was an elder of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and was active in the establishment of the Presbyterian Church of Owasso. He served for 12 years as a trustee of the Collinsville (Oklahoma) Memorial Hospital, and for 22 years as a director of the small, community-oriented First Bank of Owasso.

Parke was a devoted family man. Janet was his constant companion on most of his trips. Toward the end of his life, Parke developed a painful and crippling arthritis that finally forced the Dickeys to sell their farm in Oklahoma and move to a retirement community in Haverford, Pennsylvania, where Parke passed away. The death of Parke Dickey is a great loss not only for family and friends but also for the geological fraternity. However, the many happy memories of his fruitful life will remain with all who had the privilege of knowing him.

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