Memorial to Edward S. C. Smith
1894-1971

PHILIP C. HEWITT
Department of Earth Sciences, State University of New York, Brockport, New York 14420

Professor Edward Staples Cousens Smith, chairman of the geology department of Union College in Schenectady, New York, until his retirement in 1960, died in Gainesville, Florida, on November 11, 1971. His wife Frances survived him by almost three years. Mrs. Smith passed away on October 12, 1974.

Known as the “Prof” by his students and many of his colleagues, Smith epitomized everything of value as a scientist, a geologist, and a teacher. With his ready wit, immense knowledge, and crackling “down Maine” accent, he developed a small but excellent program in geology and taught many fine and highly loyal students. He imparted something of his own enjoyment in field and research work to them, showing his real affection for the young men and his eagerness to teach them.

Born in Biddeford, Maine, on August 23, 1894, Prof. Smith studied chemistry at Bowdoin College, from which he was graduated in 1918. At that time Bowdoin had no geology department but his interest in mineralogy had been whetted by his love of the outdoors and nursed by his instructors in chemistry. His graduate study was taken at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University, and it was from Harvard that he received his M.A. degree in 1920. From 1921 to 1923 he was an instructor at Radcliffe College; then he went to Union College to spend the next thirty-seven years, the remainder of his career as a teacher.

In 1925 Prof. Smith became chairman of the geology department at Union and began to develop a strong major. His primary interests were in mineralogy, geomorphology, and the history of geology. However, he taught courses in many areas and had breadth in geology generally as well as depth in his own particular specialties. He established an excellent library for the use of his students, which included virtually all American and many foreign journals. In addition, many rare and highly valued acquisitions are in the Union College Library, thanks to his efforts. This includes a fine copy of the original William Smith Map in remarkable condition.

In addition to the excellent library, Prof. Smith nurtured and developed excellent collections of minerals which established Union College as a repository for many fine and rare mineral specimens. Few small colleges can approach Union in the excellence of such collections, which includes the Wheatley and Pfordte Collections as well as his own fluorescent minerals collection, a subject in which he had great interest even during his later years. It was in the area of mineral fluorescence that he did much research even after his active teaching duties were completed.

Prof. Smith was a Fellow of the Geological Society of America and of the Mineralogical Society and a member of numerous other professional organizations. He was very active in the Society of the Sigma Xi. In addition, Smith was an early organizer, supporter, and president of the New York State Geological Association. His professional interests were notable;
yet he did not ignore the necessity for bringing geology to a popular level. Frequently, he spoke for groups other than professionals and helped to develop an appreciation of geology in those whose interests in the Earth were not professional. As an example, Smith developed one of the earliest television courses in geology—a series of programs, which were well received and which helped to provide for the public a real insight into the field. He also delivered a series of radio talks for the General Electric Science Forum over WGY in Schenectady. He was an early and tireless worker in the field of conservation and was involved in environmental concerns well before it became fashionable. The need to preserve and protect our natural and nonrenewable resources was a major interest. He spoke before many groups and wrote for many publications on the subject.

Prof. Smith was so obviously a “down Mainer” that it is no surprise to note that much of his research was based upon field work done in his native state. His contributions in that area included study of the Cambrian of northern Maine, various aspects of Mount Katahdin, an area along the Kennebec River, igneous exposures of Mount Kineo and vicinity, and Rangeley conglomerate as well as a number of others. He did not ignore New York State, for he published a number of scientific articles on the geology of that area also. His breadth of professional interest is demonstrated by the variability of subject matter. Smith wrote on such varied subjects as polycrase in New York, tillite in Maine, and rock creep on Mount Katahdin. Along with William H. Parsons, he wrote an article on mineral fluorescence.

Prof. Smith published in a number of journals, including the American Journal of Science, American Mineralogist, Geological Society of America Bulletin, Geographical Review, Bulletin of the Appalachian Mountain Club, and others. In Reynolds’ Excursions in Science (1939), he wrote an article on meteorites.

Applied Atomic Power, a book by Smith and others, was published by Prentice-Hall in 1946. One of the earliest compilations of the subject matter designed for the new “atomic age,” this was a useful reference work for the student and the general public as well. Smith wrote an excellent manuscript for a book on the history of geology that he never published. Originally written for a course he offered in this subject, the manuscript covered that period from the early Greek philosophers to the vigorous American geologists. Although he was asked many times to publish this work, he never did. It is regrettable that it never reached the geologic public, for Smith stood in a special place in time and space. He followed the group of New York geologists who had developed the basis for our own stratigraphy, yet he was, in his early and middle years, a contemporary of those who worked for them. Thus, he straddled two eras—theirs and ours—and it was through him that much of the early flavor of American geology was passed on. Students who heard his lectures on this subject were imbued with a love for and knowledge of the past and a healthy respect for the prowess of our geologist ancestors.

Prof Smith was a friend of those whose names appear in many areas of the science of geology. He helped Rudolf Ruedemann in Maine and Ruedemann named Oldhamia smithi for him. He helped Chris Hartnagel in New York, and it was Hartnagel who provided the wonderful stories and anecdotes about James Hall and others (which thrilled Prof’s students and colleagues).

His research qualified him as a fine scientist. His love of the outdoors qualified him as a special person—a geological scientist. Yet it was his love of people that is most important.

Prof. Smith was a warm, wonderful man with a huge talent for teaching. A listing of his students would be a long one with many distinguished names appearing on it. He was able to bring life to his subject and to develop in his students a love and understanding
of the study of the Earth. His influence on future professionals was immense. His influence on the layman toward an appreciation of the Earth was equally great. On his retirement, his students established the E.S.C. Smith Prize, an endowed fund to provide an award for promising geology majors at Union College. It was established with the warm affection of his friends, students, and colleagues. At no time did they forget him nor did he forget them. His newsletters kept them in touch with him, even after his retirement.

I know that one of Prof. Smith's most difficult tasks was to write a memorial to Chris Hartnagel, his very close friend. Chris had taught him much. Now I realize this same difficulty in writing about the "Prof." Partly it was difficult because he was my friend who taught me so much. He taught me to teach and made things possible for me. But it was difficult mostly because it is an ending, a last word—a word of love, but a last word nonetheless.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF E.S.C. SMITH

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