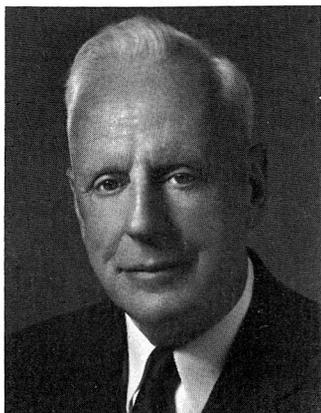


# Memorial to Martin Van Couvering 1888-1976

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Martin Van Couvering, pioneer and acknowledged leader in the application of professionalism in geology to the extractive industries, died at Pasadena, California, on December 19, 1976, in his eighty-eighth year. He was to have received the Human Needs Award of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists in Washington, D.C., June 15, 1977, on what would have been his eighty-ninth birthday. The presentation was made posthumously.

Some geologists achieve distinction by voluminous publications on specialized scientific subjects of various degrees of importance, or lack of it; some score outstanding coups in the mineral or energy industries, and may incidentally attain considerable financial as well as professional recognition thereby;

still others are pre-eminent among their fellows because of their embodiment of the ideals of integrity and honesty, and their high standards of professional ability and personal deportment. They become exemplary not by design but by consistency of character. Martin Van Couvering has been perhaps the outstanding example of the last category, while achieving no small degree of success in the second. Lest this sound stuffy, it should be remarked that to the very last Martin retained his twinkly eye, his puckish wit, his kindly sense of humor, his lively interest in his fellows, and a helpful and enthusiastic relationship with his juniors. To them he was and will remain "Martin," everybody's wise and benevolent Dutch uncle. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*, so nothing will be said about Martin's puns, which frequently bordered on the outrageous, but gave him great personal satisfaction.

Martin was born June 15, 1888, in Allendale, Michigan, then and still a small community in the wooden-shoe region around Holland. During his salad days he moved from Michigan to the Pacific Coast, which thenceforth was to be his primary base. His first academic degree was a B.S. in Mining Engineering in 1916, from Oregon Agricultural College, and it is noteworthy that he actually pursued two professional careers sequentially, for many years in petroleum engineering, then in petroleum geology—undoubtedly with some useful degree of overlap.

Soon after his graduation, World War I spread to the United States, and Martin entered military service. He was soon overseas, attending and later instructing in the Artillery School at Saumur, France. After the Armistice he remained on duty in Germany until 1919. When he returned to the States, he resumed his budding career in petroleum engineering, working first as an inspector and then as Chief Petroleum Engineer for the California Department of Oil and Gas.

By 1922, however, he was ready to undertake self-employment as a consultant and opened an office at Long Beach. This was the beginning of a consulting career of fifty-four years. Inevitably this involved many assignments of different types, for

many and diverse clients, at locations all over the world, including supervision of the drilling of a 90,000-bbl.-per-day oil well in Iraq (1927) and preparation of principal testimony and exhibits for the Kettleman Hills North Dome lawsuit (1938). The models he prepared for this suit were widely exhibited, and as a form of publication compared favorably in circulation and impact with the more formal types of technical publication. Routinely, however, the private and confidential nature of investigations precluded publication.

The fascination of geology as such, in contrast with engineering, became irresistible by the close of the thirties. So in 1941, at the mature age of fifty-three, Martin received his master's degree in geology from the University of California, Los Angeles. For the remainder of his long professional life he elected to consider himself primarily a geologist, although there continued to be the same parallelism between fields that had existed when he was professionally classed as an engineer.

The record of his activities as a consultant is full and detailed, and includes not only private but public assignments of responsibility. Meanwhile he had become involved in the humanistic aspects of his calling and had become active in the affairs of scientific and technical societies in his field. He joined the American Association of Petroleum Geologists in 1924. In 1946, he organized a stratigraphic study group in Los Angeles, which led naturally to his election as president of AAPG's Pacific Section in 1947. During his term he launched the Pacific Coast Section's highly successful *Pacific Petroleum Geologist*, a monthly newsletter. In 1967, he was elected to honorary membership in AAPG, for distinguished contributions to his profession, and in 1972 his beloved Pacific Section established the Martin Van Couvering Awards for deserving students.

Martin Van Couvering has been a Fellow of the Geological Society of America since 1947, as well as an Honorary Member of the New Mexico and Utah Geological Societies. In 1963, at the age of seventy-five, he opened a new and entirely unselfish phase of his professional life—he accepted nomination to the presidency of a new organization, the fledgling American Institute of Professional Geologists. No one else was considered when Martin's availability became known, because no one so well and widely exemplified the ideals of professional honor, combined with professional competence, that AIPG wished to promulgate. His election was unanimous and extremely gratifying in its results. Martin became "CPG No. 1," and Number One he has remained. He received a special certificate of recognition from AIPG in 1965; the creation by AIPG of the Ben H. Parker Award resulted in his being its first recipient in 1969.

Martin Van Couvering undertook these new assignments for his profession with characteristic unselfishness, zest, and dedication, and made no secret of the fact that he enjoyed them. He lectured, he visited, and he went on field trips—no matter where or when—for a decade or more after his AIPG (now Association of Professional Geological Scientists) commitment. If there were a geological field trip being held by anyone, Martin would in all probability be a participant, this, after a full lifetime of involvement and production.

Martin's family life, like his career, is pleasant to review because it was equally admirable. On July 30, 1917, sixty years ago this summer, immediately after enlisting in the Army, he married Marian Turley. Of their life together his widow remarked, "In almost sixty years of marriage, and six years prior to that, I never knew Martin to do anything that was dishonest, mean, or petty, or other than honorable." No one will disagree.

Martin leaves four children: Turley Van Couvering of Lynwood, California; Lynne (Mrs. F. L.) Vernon of Pasadena; Allan Van Couvering of Brea, California; and Dr. Nancy Van Couvering of El Cerrito, California.

He also leaves at least two generations of geologists who, whether they have yet discovered it or not, are his professional debtors. Those of us who were privileged to know him have not the slightest doubt of the extent of our obligation.