

Memorial to Charles William Wilson, Jr. 1905–1985

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On June 21, 1985, after a long struggle with Alzheimer's disease, Charles W. Wilson, Jr., professor and geologist, died in Nashville, Tennessee, at the age of 79 years. He was born September 6, 1905, in Mayfield, Kentucky. After graduating from Mayfield High School, he received his B.A. in 1927 and M.S. in 1928 from Vanderbilt University, where he was captain of the track team and a member of Phi Beta Kappa. In 1931 he received his Ph.D. from Princeton University, whereupon he returned to Vanderbilt University in September 1931 and taught for 41 years. He became an associate professor in 1940 and full professor in 1946. The only break in his teaching career was a two-year leave to work with the War Production Board during the latter part of World War II.

From 1930 to World War II, he was active in the Yellowstone–Big Horn Research Association of Wyoming and Montana. This research brought him fame as a geologist, and it also led him to his wife of 50 years, Barbara Bookman Wilson. Wilson is survived by his widow; two sons, Charles William Wilson III, a mathematician, and John Morris Wilson, a geologist; a daughter, Kathryn Ann Wilson, an executive secretary; and by 9 grandchildren and 5 great-grandchildren. The summer 1947 issue of the *Vanderbilt Alumnus* said, "His family constitutes one third of his life, academic and professional work make up a second third, and the final third is his hobby—geology."

Because the geology department had only two faculty members for many years, Wilson usually taught three courses each semester, most with a laboratory. All of his students experienced a thorough, demanding course, made pleasant by his kindly humor. While teaching so many courses, he continually made progress in his research, beginning his working days early and ending them late. He was a prolific scholar, concentrating on lines of activity that included or were related to geologic mapping

I first met Wilson when I was an undergraduate student in 1947; I worked as his field assistant in mapping. During that time I learned how fast he could move. In college he was a runner; as a professional geologist, "power walker" might be an accurate description of his progress. His students accused him of hitting rocks with his hammer as he walked, as a polo player hits the ball, then identifying the rock fragments in mid-air. This is not much of an exaggeration, although he did pore over samples when he needed to.

His avowed goal, which he achieved after about 40 years, was to personally map each of the 120 7½-minute quadrangles in the central basin of Tennessee. Charlie actually produced about 200 geologic maps, many with co-workers whom he trained in mapping.

Lest the reader believe he only did mapping, it should be added that Wilson produced 10 books and about 50 articles on varied topics, including stratigraphy, structure, systematic paleontology, and the impact of meteors. His stratigraphic work

remains the standard for our region. He was a pioneer in our understanding of the structure of the region, and was one of the few early researchers of meteor impact structures. Two special contributions to Tennessee geology are his annotated bibliographies. Most researchers interested in the geology of Tennessee still find useful beginnings in these works.

Wilson worked many years with the Tennessee Division of Geology as a consultant. Most of his mapping in Tennessee and many of his other projects were supported or published by that agency. Indeed, after his retirement, he worked full-time with the Division until he was 70 years old. He was also a consultant for other organizations, including The California Company, General Shale Products Corporation, and Tennessee Valley Authority.

Wilson was always proud of his association with the Geological Society of America, and to have been elected a Fellow in 1937. He was one of the founders of the Southeastern Mineral Symposium, later the Southeastern Section of the Geological Society of America. He served as secretary of the new section during three of its formative years. His scientific and professional memberships included the American Association of Petroleum Geologists, American Geophysical Union, Paleontological Society, American Commission on Stratigraphic Nomenclature, Tennessee Academy of Science, and Sigma Xi.

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