Memorial to Robert C. McDowell
1935–2000
RANDALL C. ORNDORFF
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Robert C. McDowell, a career geologist with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), died July 2, 2000, at his home in Bluemont, Virginia. His career spanned 33 continuous years with the USGS.

Bob was born February 15, 1935, in Glens Falls, New York, and was raised in Fincastle, Virginia. He received his undergraduate training at Virginia Polytechnic Institute (Virginia Tech), where he earned a bachelor of science degree in 1956. He then served in the United States Army for three years as an infantry officer and airborne ranger officer, reaching the rank of first lieutenant. He served as the aide de camp to the post commander at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Upon completion of his military service, he entered the graduate program at Virginia Tech and received a master of science degree in geology in 1964. After attending Harvard University, he returned to Virginia Tech and received his doctorate degree in 1968. His dissertation was on the structural geology of the Macks Mountain area, Virginia.

Bob joined the USGS in 1967 and was part of the Kentucky project, for which he mapped all or parts of nine quadrangles. From 1977 to 1987 he was chief of the Kentucky State Geologic Map Project and studied the Silurian stratigraphy of the Cincinnati Arch.

From 1978 to 1983, Bob helped develop a geological agency in the Dominican Republic. That agency’s work included regional studies and geologic mapping to support mineral assessments. Part of his work in the Dominican Republic was to train junior and mid-level geologists in field methods. From 1985 to 1995, Bob worked on compilation of the geology of the Newark Basin for the New Jersey State geologic map and was project chief of the Appalachian Basin project. His work in the central and southern Appalachians included field studies of deformation along the Alleghany structural front and in the Valley and Ridge province, and he investigated structures in a seismically active area in Giles County, Virginia. At the time of his death he was responsible for geologic mapping and regional geologic studies of the Ozarks of Missouri. His work was vital to understanding the potential environmental impact of lead and zinc mining on public lands.

For nearly four years, Bob was the associate branch chief of the Branch of Eastern Regional Geology, where he helped plan and administer programs and projects. One of his duties was to review and approve manuscripts for scientific soundness and clarity of presentation. Bob excelled at this task and was often sought out by his colleagues for technical review of their manuscripts. Bob had the distinguished opportunity to play the role of John Wesley Powell in the reenactment of a USGS field camp at the 1995 Reston Open House. This was a great honor for him; his pride in and loyalty to the USGS were evident.

Bob’s love of the outdoors coincided well with his profession, and he thrived on working in the field. He will long be remembered for his contributions to the geology of Kentucky through his maps, his papers on the geology of the state, and his leadership in completing the project. In
recognition of his dedication to the Kentucky project, Bob was given the Kentucky Governor's Award in 1978.

Over the years, Bob was a member of many professional societies, including the Geological Society of America, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Geological Society of Washington, and the American Association of Petroleum Geologists.

Bob's personal interests were mostly tied to the outdoors. He participated in the annual Audubon Society Christmas bird count, was a beekeeper, and enjoyed gardening. He was active in the Blumomt Citizens Association and was deeply committed to many charitable causes. His questing mind explored endless aspects of the world, including scientific and natural subjects, current events, history, and genealogy.

Those of us who knew Bob well were fortunate to experience his giving, humorous, and gentle spirit, and those who knew him as an acquaintance were touched, enriched, and made to feel comfortable. He is survived by his wife, Joyce Solomon, and his children, Genevieve Owen, Kyle McDowell, and Ashley McDowell and stepchildren Sarah Turner and Jamie Mandel.

**SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF R.C. MCDOWELL**


