Memorial to John Charles Maher
1914–1980

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The geologic profession is poorer today; John C. Maher died Saturday morning, August 9, 1980, after a lingering illness.

John was born March 24, 1914, in Lincoln, Nebraska. He received his public school education and attended the University of Nebraska in Lincoln where his parents, John T. and Martha Maher, owned and operated a neighborhood grocery store. John received his A.B. in geology in 1935 and immediately went to work as a field geologist for the Nebraska Geological Survey. He continued his studies while working and by 1937 had earned his M.S. and had completed all course and examination requirements for the Ph.D. He later undertook additional graduate studies at Louisiana State University.

Job opportunities were scarce during the depression, so when he received an offer from Shell Oil Corp. in early 1937, John left his graduate studies and went to work in Tulsa. His assignment included Kansas, Oklahoma, and the Texas Panhandle. He soon recognized that "the top of the Arbuckle" was not everywhere the same age. Working largely on his own time, he zoned the sequence of lithologically similar carbonates and began to develop prospects based on his zonation—many of which later produced.

In May 1938, John accepted a cut in pay and began his long association with the U.S. Geological Survey because it afforded him more opportunity for stratigraphic research. From 1938 to 1944 John applied subsurface stratigraphic methods, then being developed for petroleum exploration, to ground-water problems in Louisiana. These pioneering efforts had a beneficial effect on the water-supply problems of several Louisiana communities, including Natchitoches and Alexandria. The greatest challenges came at the beginning of World War II, with the construction of training camps, all of which required water—a task comparable to securing safe and adequate supplies of water for several instantly appearing cities. John's commendations from the Defense Department attest to his success.

In April 1944 John was asked to transfer to Tulsa and apply his extensive knowledge of subsurface stratigraphy to the problems of petroleum geology. Within a year he was designated Supervising Geologist in charge of several projects in the west-central United States. His early efforts in the stratigraphic analysis of sedimentary basins for hydrocarbon potential made a direct contribution to the successful exploration campaign across western Kansas and into eastern Colorado in the early 1950s. Other basin studies followed. His method of stratigraphic analysis utilizing composite interpretive logs became a standard for subsurface stratigraphers. He developed a manual describing his methods that became a "best seller" when published by the Oklahoma Geological Survey.

In August 1957 John joined the Pure Oil Co. and organized a stratigraphic research section to evaluate the petroleum potential of frontier areas including foreign and offshore basins; his successes led to his promotion to Chief Stratigrapher. In August 1962 John rejoined the Survey and turned his efforts to the geologic framework and petroleum potential of the Atlantic Continental Shelf and eastern Gulf of Mexico. In 1966 he joined a Survey team to study Naval Petroleum Reserve No. 1 (Elk Hills) in the southern San Joaquin Valley. The energy crisis of 1973 put John into the Office of International Geology as a petroleum consultant to advise foreign nations regarding energy problems. The following year he played a leading role in the formation of the Circum-Pacific Council for Energy and Mineral Resources to which his considerable energy was devoted when he was stricken by his final illness.

The Circum-Pacific Conference was conceived as a one-time meeting, but now is regarded as a conference to assess Pacific energy and mineral needs and resources every four years under different sponsorships. A permanent Council was formed and is a complex organization of government, industry, and academic people from more than 25 nations and 43 international societies that will assure continued communication and cooperation. Geological training schools have been organized. In addition, the Circum-Pacific Map Project Committee was organized and has published several maps of this area. All of these ideas were generated by John Maher—ideas which were truly exceptional and advanced. John's wide reputation for scientific achievement and his superb administrative and organizational abilities were vital to the success of the project and its present healthy status, and several awards of appreciation indicate the success of his efforts.

John's reputation as a scientist and stratigrapher is not geographically confined: his published investigations range from the Atlantic Coast to California and from the Gulf Coast into Canada and Alaska; rock terminology first proposed in his pioneering studies is in common use by geologists working the Atlantic continental margin, the central United States, and California. John leaves a truly extraordinary publication record, having authored or coauthored more than 130 scientific and technical reports. John had a boundless enthusiasm for his profession and almost always was involved with advising, training, and/or employing young geologists; several score of practicing geologists owe a debt to John for a hand-up during their early years.

John recognized the importance of the exchange of scientific knowledge and enthusiastically supported both national and local professional societies. He was elected a Fellow of the Geological Society of America in 1945. John was a member of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists, Sigma Gamma Epsilon, and Sigma Xi, as well as several local geological societies. John was honored by the Survey on more than one occasion and had received the Distinguished Service Award, the highest honor awarded by the Department of the Interior, for his service to the Nation. The AAPG also honored John with its Distinguished Service Award; ironically, the award presentation took place a few days after John was stricken, and he was unable to attend the ceremony. John accepted his fate without rancor but rather with resigned dignity until the end.

John grew up in Lincoln, where he lived until he went to work for Shell in Tulsa. After accepting his first assignment for the Survey with headquarters in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, he married his college sweetheart, Eleanor Josephine Cronn, on December 10, 1938. "Jo" was a devoted wife, mother, and partner during all John's remaining years. Her quiet, faithful devotion to John during the long months of his final confinement was truly inspiring; her strength never wavered during the entire ordeal. John was proud

of his Irish heritage and named his sons accordingly: John Patrick and Michael Timm. Jo, Pat, and Mike survive John, as does his mother, Martha, age 91.

The extent and diversity of John's publication record give an indication of the man; he had tremendous initiative and drive coupled with a talent for organizing and planning that is extremely rare. John was a no-nonsense kind of fellow and all business, but never too busy to counsel with a friend or colleague. John generally called things exactly as he saw them and pulled no punches, particularly in regard to man-made problems that impeded the progress of his work. John's mind was obviously on his work most of his active hours, but when he did relax, what a warm, generous person emerged! John did not bestow friendship lightly, but once given, his continuing concern and faithful friendship made him truly loved by those fortunate enough to know him well. The profession has lost an astute and prolific practitioner, but many of us have lost much more, a rare and treasured friend.

Acknowledgments

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