

Memorial to Kenneth Edward Caster

1908–1992

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Paleontology lost one of its most ardent students and teachers when Kenneth E. Caster died of complications resulting from a heart condition at University Hospital, Cincinnati, Ohio, May 18, 1992, at the age of 84. For 50 years he taught undergraduate and graduate students and the lay public alike through stimulation by lecturing, counseling, and example. He was an avid collector of fossils, expert in their preparation, and skillful, enthusiastic, and eloquent in their description and interpretation.

Born in New Albany, Pennsylvania, January 26, 1908, Ken Caster was raised, in part, by his grandparents, in Ithaca, New York. Here his interest in nature was brought out through work with his Boy Scout leaders: the entomologist J. Chester Bradley, and the natural historian E. Laurence Palmer, both of whom taught at Cornell University. He received his bachelor's degree from Cornell in 1929, in zoology, specializing in lepidoptery. Late in his undergraduate career, he came under the influence of the Cenozoic paleontologist Gilbert D. Harris of Cornell, who founded the *Bulletins of American Paleontology* and the Paleontological Research Institution in Ithaca. Among other jobs, Ken Caster helped Harris study and catalog his extensive mollusk collection and typeset and print many of the *Bulletins of American Paleontology* on Harris's own printing presses. In order to publish his master's thesis (1931) on Eocene mollusks and foraminifers of Angola, Ken himself had to make the sun-exposed collotype plates as well as set the plate captions in type. He had previous experience in publishing in the *Bulletins*, because he printed his own senior research paper, "Higher Fossil Faunas of the Upper Allegheny [River]." This paper illustrated the fossils of the clastic rocks of the seaward edge of the Catskill delta. Following the lead of George H. Chadwick in the early U.S. application of the facies concept, Ken utilized facies in his Cornell doctoral study (1933) on the stratigraphy and magnafacies and parvafacies of the Devonian and Mississippian deltaic complex of southwestern New York and the oil region of northwestern Pennsylvania.

After work as a graduate assistant and then instructor in geology and paleontology at Cornell between 1929 and 1935, Caster then taught biology at the State University of New York colleges at Geneseo and Potsdam. In September 1936, Ken and his wife Anneliese Schloh Caster (Annie), moved to Cincinnati. There, Ken became instructor in geology and curator of the geology museum at the University of Cincinnati.

In 1940, he became the youngest Fellow of the Graduate School, and by 1952 he was a full professor. By then, he had published more than 50 papers and books, covering a diversity of fossil groups, which belong to five phyla and eight geologic systems, and are present on four continents: some of his works were published in German or Portuguese.

In addition to stratigraphic and faunal studies, Ken's works included papers on Devonian cephalopods, Ordovician eurypterids and other arthropods, extensive studies of sponges from the Cambrian, Devonian, and Mississippian, jellyfish from the Devonian and Cretaceous, and brachiopods and pelecypods from the Ordovician, Devonian, and Mississippian. Some of



Caster's keenest analytical work was the detailed comparisons of complex trails from Devonian, Triassic, and Jurassic strata with trails made by modern horseshoe crabs; he was one of the pioneers of ichnology in North America.

The recognition Caster had attained was enhanced by receipt of a Guggenheim fellowship to South America, where he was professor of geology at the University of São Paulo in Brazil from 1944 to 1947, lecturing in both Portuguese and English. In 1947, another Guggenheim fellowship allowed him to travel and study geology in Brazil and then to be visiting professor at the School of Mines in Medellín, Colombia. Subsequent fellowships allowed him to expand his geological and paleontological studies to South Africa and New Zealand. In Australia, he was a Fulbright visiting professor at the University of Tasmania in 1956–1957.

His studies in the Southern Hemisphere convinced him of the validity of a mechanism such as continental drift in advance of the wide acceptance of plate tectonics; he wrote and lectured widely on the topic of continental drift and used the concept in his historical geology course. His Southern Hemisphere work was acknowledged by receipt of the Orville A. Derby Medal at the Brazilian Geological Survey Centennial (1952) and the Gondwana Medal of the Geological Survey of India (1956).

In the 1950s and 1960s, Caster's work took on two new directions, the study of which was interspersed with less esoteric papers on paleontological techniques, brachiopods, and paleogeography. First, he began to study the elusive and obscure early fossil echinoderms; his many papers in this area culminated in his large contributions on these groups to the *Treatise on Invertebrate Paleontology*. Second, he delved deeply into the study of unusual arthropods. In part, this interest is shown by his collaboration with his friend and colleague, the late Erik N. K. Waering on the study of eurypterids. Caster's scholarly writing spanned six decades and well over 100 works, and it brought him the Paleontological Society Medal in 1976. Ken Caster's complete bibliography is listed in *Studies in Paleontology and Stratigraphy* (edited by John Pojeta and J.K. Pope, *Bulletins of American Paleontology*, v. 67, no. 287, 1975) and "Kenneth E. Caster, Honorary Member of Sigma Gamma Epsilon" (by F. D. Holland, Jr., in *The Compass*, v. 67, p. 7–10).

In addition to his scholarly work, Ken Caster was also a teacher of paleontology, stratigraphy, and historical geology. In his career, he supervised 30 master's theses and 25 doctoral dissertations. In 1975, his students honored Ken with a Festschrift volume on the anniversary of his 45th year of teaching. He was an invited lecturer at more than 30 U.S. colleges and universities. In addition to teaching undergraduate and graduate college students, Ken and Annie Caster took a keen interest in the numerous amateur paleontologists in the Cincinnati area. A large, well-known group, the Dry Dredgers, was founded in 1942 as an outgrowth of an evening course that Ken taught for many years. Conventional wisdom has it that the name came from a quotation attributed to James Hall: "Collecting fossils at Cincinnati is like dry dredging on an ancient sea bottom."

Ken also served his profession, university, and community. He was a long-term trustee of the Paleontological Research Institution and served three terms as president of the Board of Trustees (1943–1945, 1951–1954, 1967–1969). He was secretary (1950–1955), vice president (1958), president (1960), and memoir editor (1976–1979) of the Paleontological Society. For 22 years he was faculty advisor to the University of Cincinnati chapter of Sigma Gamma Epsilon; he was national vice president for five years, and he was elected an honorary member in 1986. He served on numerous university and community committees for the arts, natural history, and civil liberties.

Throughout his work and travels, Ken was aided and assisted by his wife Annie, also a geologist. She illustrated numerous papers for Ken. The Casters were renowned for welcoming students into their home. Evening events ranged from a candlelight supper with a student's potential employer, to gatherings of greater lights of the paleontological fraternity, to costume parties for departmental graduate students. Some of these student soirées led to

Kenneth's entertaining all late-stayers with Amazonian bird songs rendered on calls hand-crafted from exotic polished woods taken from a gorgeous inlaid box brought down from the top shelf of his book-laden study. (A common favorite was the call of the non-avian capybara.)

Words do not adequately convey the memories Ken's students carry of the open office door, the ready help with a book or reprint, the turn of phrase or probing, leading question, the excitement of a spring two-week field trip, the vision of Ken, in his red leather cap and his gaucho cape, using a whisk broom to brush snow from a roadside outcrop trace on a frosty early Sunday morning.

He had a keen sense of humor and enjoyed a good laugh. He took delight in his students' practical jokes, such as the visit of "The Little Men's Marching Society," when one morning his long library table, office wall, and ceiling were covered with dusty baby-shoe footprints; or the birthday card full of confetti that dumped out all over his lap, chair, and desk, as he opened it in his tilt-back chair. With great pomp, his students awarded him his degree from the "University of the State of Collapse" (a creation of Rousseau Flower) and, in imitation of his Southern Hemisphere Award, gave him the "Agawana Medal."

There will be no more psychologically challenging doodles as Christmas cards. We miss his hearty laugh and his radiating warmth, élan, and joie de vivre. His was a life well and fully lived.