

Memorial to Glen Kenton Merrill

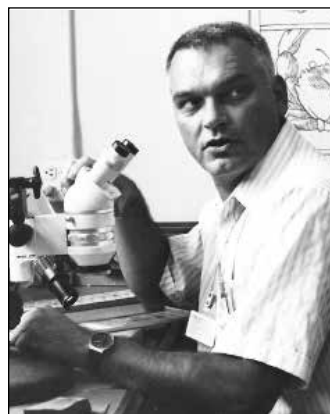
1935–2014

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Glen Kenton Merrill: born in Columbus, Ohio, 28 August 1935;
died in Houston, Texas, 2 December 2014.

Long-time Geological Society of America member and Carboniferous stratigrapher, biostratigrapher, and conodont paleontologist Glen Merrill was the son of railway mail clerk Lee D. Merrill and his second wife Gladys Jaquith Merrill, and the younger half-brother of the late Roger Merrill of Columbus, Ohio, and of Alice White. Glen grew up in central Ohio, and attended Bellpoint and Scioto Valley High schools in Delaware County. On graduating from the latter in 1953, Glen entered Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, crediting Myron Sturgeon, a well-respected paleontologist and teacher of the old school, with awakening his interest in paleontology and stratigraphy. Sturgeon had, with Walter Youngquist, previously published a paper on Allegheny (Pennsylvanian) conodonts from eastern Ohio (*Journal of Paleontology*, 1949, v. 23, no. 4, p. 380–386). While at Ohio University, young Glen added to these collections, several years later using them as the core of his own Ph.D. research. In 1954, Glen married Martha L. Metzger of Columbus; however, their marriage was short lived, and they had no children. Glen completed and received his bachelor of science degree in geology in 1957.



Glen served on active duty as a first lieutenant in the United States Army between 1957 and 1959, and in the subsequent two years until he entered the University of Texas in Austin in September 1961, he worked with the U.S. Corps of Engineers in Huntington, West Virginia. At Texas, Glen's teacher and advisor was Samuel Ellison Jr., whose own Ph.D. at the University of Missouri in the early 1940s was a pioneering work on Pennsylvanian conodonts of the American Midcontinent. Glen graduated from Texas in 1964, and his M.A. thesis, apparently drawn from his Ohio background and the biostratigraphic interests he had developed at Ohio University, was entitled "Zonation of Platform Conodont Genera in Conemaugh [Pennsylvanian] Strata of Ohio and Vicinity," with Samuel Ellison Jr., supervisor, and W. Charles Bell and Alan J. Scott, committee members.

It was during a short teaching stint in 1964 at Northwestern State College of Louisiana at Natchitoches that Glen met beautiful blonde exchange student Stina Margareta Hellberg of Gamlakarleby, Finland. They married in 1964, and Stina was a pivotal and crucial part of his life, until her own premature death on 1 January 2011.

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Although Glen would normally have continued at Texas for his Ph.D., he was even at this relatively early stage a man of strongly held and strongly defended convictions; thus, differences between him and his M.A. supervisor, Samuel Ellison Jr., led him instead to enter the Louisiana State University in the fall of 1964. There, his Ph.D. supervisor was John C. Ferm, a Pennsylvanian stratigrapher and sedimentologist, and Glen became a strong and devoted "Fermite." At Louisiana, Glen enjoyed the support and friendship of committee member palynologist George F. Hart, and benefitted from the taxonomic quality control of outside committee member Carl Rexroad, who if not yet then, is now the dean of American conodont workers. Glen was awarded his Ph.D. by Louisiana State in 1968, with a dissertation entitled "Allegheny (Pennsylvanian) Conodonts."

I first met a young and intense Glen at the first Pander [Conodont] Society meeting in Iowa City in 1968, where he impressed (and even overwhelmed!) with his knowledge of Pennsylvanian conodonts. Of particular interest to me was his insistence that the distribution of Pennsylvanian conodonts was environmentally controlled, the possibility of which had been suggested to him by D.A. Drake's unpublished master's thesis on the microfauna of the Cisco Series of Brown and Coleman counties, Texas (University of Texas, 1958). Glen apparently understood the implications of Drake's alternating *Streptognathodus/Cavusgnathus* faunas for documenting or measuring environmental control on the distribution of Pennsylvanian conodonts rather quickly. In fact, a year after entering the university, he published the abstract "Facies relationships in Pennsylvanian conodont faunas" in the 1962 Texas Journal of Science, subsequently continuing and strengthening his observations on environmental control of Pennsylvanian conodonts in both his 1964 M.A. thesis and his 1968 Ph.D. dissertation. By the late 1960s, environmental controls on faunal distributions was a "hot" topic in paleontology, and I had the perfect outdoor laboratory of repeating environments that are the Pennsylvanian cyclothems of eastern Kansas, literally outside my door in Lawrence, Kansas (both the University of Kansas and the Kansas Jayhawk "reside" on Mount Oread, built on/of the lowest cycle of four almost perfect repeating sedimentary cycles). Thus, I decided as a part of my Ph.D., to test Glen's thesis that particular conodont taxa were either restricted to, or were dominant in, specific lithologies, i.e., environments. My results were published in 1972 and used cluster and relative abundance analyses of the distribution of 29,026 conodonts that I recovered and identified from the Pennsylvanian of eastern Kansas. Because my work corroborated and supported Glen's conclusions based on his work farther east, it made possible, or at least eased, our subsequent friendship and collaboration. Our first joint paper, published in 1976 by the Royal Ontario Museum as Life Science Contribution 108, was entitled "Revision of conodont biofacies nomenclature and interpretations of environmental controls in Pennsylvanian rocks of eastern and central North America," and attempted to reconcile and integrate the patterns and nomenclature of conodont biofacies in two geologically separate regions, the cyclothems of eastern Kansas with those of the more eastern United States.

Glen's politics, military experience, and bearing were not universally popular in the late 1960s and early 1970s, not with the Vietnam War raging and widespread protest on American university and college campuses. At one meeting of the Pander Society, ironically the one at Kent State in 1974, first Chief Panderer John Huddle explained to me that it was because Glen was politically and militarily a "Hawk" that he had had (and was having) such a difficult time landing a permanent teaching job at one of the major universities. Whatever the reason, Glen persevered, initially obtaining a teaching position in 1968–1971 as an assistant professor of geology at Monmouth College in Illinois, followed in 1971 and 1972 by a similar position at the University of Texas at Arlington, before being unemployed for two years. One of the happiest periods of Glen's early teaching career may have been between 1974 and 1982, when he taught geology at the College of Charleston; while there, he was promoted to associate professor and received tenure. He would likely have stayed in Charleston had it not been that Stina, herself a strong and gifted Ph.D. (sports education), felt stymied and frustrated by the Charleston school system. With the great devotion he always had for Stina, Glen reluctantly decided to leave South Carolina so that his wife could better pursue her career. That move led them to Houston, Texas,

where Glen was appointed associate professor of geology at the University of Houston Downtown in 1982. He was promoted to professor and received tenure there in 1987, and perhaps in true Texas fashion, stayed in that saddle until shortly before he died.

On a personal level, an aspect that helped cement our friendship was that Glen, being both interested in and knowledgeable about military history, was a Germanophile, with a good working knowledge and interest in the German language. Thus, I remember Glen at one point educating German-born me by insisting that the order in which I used my given first names, Peter Hans, couldn't possibly be correct but had, according to correct German usage, to be Hans-Peter, something that was only decided in his favor, when upon his insistence, I checked my birth certificate. Over the years he characterized and often referred to me as the Great Stony-Faced Prussian for my failure to communicate as often, or as effectively, as he would have liked. A standing joke between us, one perhaps shared by others, was that when the two of us appeared, as we often did, like *alter egos* at scientific meetings, such as a memorable International Geological Congress in Moscow in 1975, there was room for confusion among our geological colleagues as to who was who? Glen, with his army-prescribed brush-cut and solid military appearance, looked and acted stereotypically like what a von Bitter should look and act like, and I, with longer hair and beard, perhaps more benign-looking and less dominant, looked and acted more like what a Merrill was expected to look and act like. His appearance and demeanor sometimes translated into minor international incidents, as when Glen, the American patriot and "Hawk" got into a serious argument and confrontation with our young woman Russian Intourist guide on a field excursion in the southern Ural Mountains of the former U.S.S.R.

Glen served on active and reserve duty in the U.S. Army Airborne for over 25 years, achieving the rank of major, and his military background and his interest in military history and things German came together in his study of World War I aviation. He was an avid airplane modeler and an early member of Cross & Cockade, a group that got its start about 1964; their publication *Cross & Cockade* contains many of Glen's contributions on WWI aviation. In the summer of 1982, with his geology student Charles Hart, he founded Americal/Gryphon to painstakingly produce decal sets of camouflage and markings that were otherwise not available for airplane modelers. The A/G range grew to more than 200 decal sets covering the aircraft of most or all of the European nations involved in World War I, as well as those of the Ottoman Empire, Russia, and the United States. Glen wrote and contributed articles to *Windsock* and to the book *Gotha!*, and authored *Jasta 5*, a comprehensive two-volume history of the Royal Prussian Jagdstaffel 5, a WWI fighter squadron that included the later infamous Hermann Goering among its aces. Glen inevitably applied the same painstaking methods and reliance on primary sources in this historical research as he was trained and used to doing in his geological and paleontological work.

The Drs. Merrill were active people, who for much of their lives were part of a group of cave explorers in Kentucky. Glen and friends began their exploration and survey of Jesse James Cave near Park City, Kentucky, in the mid to late 1950s. They made numerous trips into the cave, surveying and mapping the upper level before finding deep pits—some over 100 feet deep—that they used to descend to lower levels, which they explored and mapped. On at least one occasion, they camped at the bottom of a deep pit for several days in passages only a few feet in diameter and many hundreds of feet long. Although commercialization of the cave in the mid-1960s facilitated access, exploration and survey trips to the lower levels could (and did!) easily run to more than 24 hours and required great stamina. Glen, as project leader, and his team discovered many new passages, eventually mapping an approximately 12-mile-long cave system under about 40 acres of land, a remarkable density of cave passages. Glen was the spirit behind many years of cave exploration, and the project is still active today. Glen also conducted geologic studies, in one instance collecting small calcareous concretions from the cave floor and, undoubtedly drawing on his years of dissolving carbonate rock for conodonts, then used weak acid to discover and etch out bat skulls and wing bones at the core of some of the concretions. He published at least

one paper on his observations in caves, "Additional notes on vertical shafts in limestone caves" (*Speleological Society Bulletin*, 1960, v. 22, p. 101–108).

Professionally, Glen could be a formidable opponent who did not suffer anybody, including fools, gladly. A "Fermite" to the end, one of his last papers was a joint paper that included his student Steve Kivett (B.H. Wilkinson, Merrill, G.K., and Kivett, S.J., 2003, Stratal Order in Pennsylvanian Cyclothems: *Geological Society of America Bulletin*, v. 115, p. 1068–1087). His view, based on his experience in Illinois and states farther east, was that the order and ability to trace individual units of cyclothems was more imaginary than real, and that because of rapid facies changes, individual units could not be traced or correlated for any great distances, certainly not those claimed by the Kansas school of the late Raymond C. Moore, based on the almost perfectly repeating environments in Kansas. This not only created challenges, but also a need for diplomacy and forbearance by this Kansas graduate, who for decades was not only Glen's roommate at conferences, but also his friend, coauthor, and co-presenter. It also led to sometimes very lively and well-attended debates between Glen and colleagues, some of the liveliest and most memorable being between Glen and friend and colleague Philip Heckel of the University of Iowa.

Glen wasn't materialistic and wasn't interested in wealth or possessions; thus, he and Stina lived comfortably, but not ostentatiously. Glen liked Mexican and Asian food, the hotter the better. In restaurants he sometimes caused his friends or colleagues to squirm by practicing his Spanish, Thai, or whatever the language or culture a particular restaurant happened to be, with the wait staff. Glen liked and was knowledgeable about baseball, and watching this sport (along with a beer) was one of few leisure time activities in which he truly relaxed; he was initially a Brooklyn Dodgers fan, but when they became the L.A. Dodgers, he shifted most of his support to the Texas Rangers. Like many academics, Glen did not really know how to relax by doing nothing; I well remember his visible discomfiture when faced with an entire weekend of socializing and doing "nothing" at Nancy's and my home in the Beaver Valley of Ontario. A few years later, when Stina was still well, I casually suggested that they consider retiring to Fredericksburg, in his beloved Texas hill country. Glen wasn't having any of that, snorting that he needed to be in Houston, and that he would teach until he dropped. Which, of course, is just about what he did.

A well-known truism is that people often choose dogs whose appearance mimics their own. That was certainly the case with Glen and the succession of boxers that he and Stina, being childless, lavished their affections on. Glen's appearance, build and temperament were that of a boxer, and his entrance at a meeting or a social occasion could be intimidating; however, as with boxers, this was only skin deep, because under the façade, he could be considerate and thoughtful, and was often generous and kind.

Glen picked up the torch of Upper Carboniferous (Pennsylvanian) conodonts in the mid-1960s and held it high for the next half century, or more. He was one of the first to run with the idea that the distribution of conodonts was environmentally controlled and became comfortable with the notion and the practice of multi-element taxonomy, one of his last papers being our joint paper "Apparatus composition and structure of the Pennsylvania conodont genus *Gondolella* based on assemblages from the Desmoinesian of Northwestern Illinois, U.S.A." (*Journal of Paleontology*, 1998, v. 72, no. 1, p. 112–132). Glen and the late Heinz Kozur shared "paternity" of the conodont genus *Diplognathodus*, Heinz in turn naming the conodont genus *Merrillina* in Glen's honor. Glen Merrill kept the faith for Pennsylvanian conodonts by overcoming great adversity and yet was a productive, original scientist in spite, or maybe even because, of that adversity. His professionalism and drive will be missed; he was a unique individual, and it is fair to say that there will not be another Glen Merrill.

Acknowledgments

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person; Phillip Anz-Meador, Houston, Texas, for pictures of Glen and help with his military career and aviation interests; Charles Hart, Columbus, Ohio, for information regarding their joint business venture and Glen's passion for aviation history; and the late Joan Burke, Toronto, Ontario, for sharing her recollections and memories of Glen and Stina's many visits to Toronto, and for help editing this remembrance.

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