

Charles J. Mankin (1932–2012)

Eighth State Geologist of Oklahoma

By Kenneth Johnson

The geologic community, AASG, and the State of Oklahoma lost a gentleman, a true friend, and an advocate with the death of Dr. Charles J. “Charlie” Mankin on November 13, 2012. He died peacefully at home in Norman after 80 years of a fulfilling life. He is survived by his wife, Betty Bellis Mankin; their five children; and eight grandchildren.

Charlie was born in Dallas, Texas, on January 15, 1932. His parents moved to Stony, Texas, about 40 miles north of Fort Worth, where he attended grades 1–3 in a two-room school house. The family then purchased a ranch near Ozona, in West Texas, where he learned the lessons and benefits of hard work. He often spoke fondly of digging post holes in rocky ground and stringing 22 miles of three-strand barbed-wire fence along with the ranch hands. Maybe his living in “Stony,” and his early digging into rocks near Ozona, helped guide him into the field of geology?

He attended the University of New Mexico (UNM), earning a starting position on the basketball team as a walk-on. But an injury caused him to drop basketball, leave UNM, and attend the University of Texas (UT) at Austin. Charlie had some excellent mentors: Sherman Wengard at UNM, and at UT-Austin he studied under Robert Folk, Ronald DeFord, and Bill Muehlberger, among others. He received his B.S., M.A., and Ph.D. in Geology at UT-Austin in 1954, 1955, and 1958, respectively, and a post-doc at Cal-Tech in 1958–1959.

Despite his growing up and education in Texas, Charlie ventured north of Red River to the University of Oklahoma (OU) in Norman. He arrived as Assistant Professor in 1959 and quickly advanced: he became Associate Professor and Director of the School of Geology and Geophysics (SG&G) in 1963 (Director until 1977); became full Professor in 1964; and was appointed Director of the Oklahoma Geological Survey (OGS) from 1967 to 2007.

Charlie was never satisfied with just one job or position. Most of the time he had two full-time jobs at OU and also served on, or chaired, more than 100 state or national boards, commissions, councils, and committees. Full-time administrative jobs at OU were: director, SG&G (1963–1977); director, OGS (1967–2007); executive director, Energy Resources Institute (1978–1987); and director, Sarkeys Energy Center (2000–2006). He managed all these jobs with a minimum of sleep. Charlie got to work about 7 a.m., worked till about 9 p.m., had dinner about 10 p.m., and would finally sleep from about 2 to 6 a.m.—a tough schedule for anyone to maintain.

Charlie served as OGS director under eight Oklahoma governors, and his 40 years in that position make him the longest-serving state geologist in the history of all state surveys. Under two governors, he served on several committees and commissions dealing with petroleum and energy resources of Oklahoma. During the presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, he was appointed to three Federal commissions assessing the nation’s energy resources and royalty-management problems.

He chaired, or served on, nine National Academy of Sciences boards or commissions dealing with oil and natural gas, energy resources, mineral resources, geologic mapping, scientific drilling, and public policy. His work on these boards and commissions, and other national commitments, required numerous trips to Washington, DC. He rented an apartment in Washington and made it available to other state geologists on their trips to D.C.

Charlie was very active in professional societies, both local and national. He was a member of 20 societies, associations, and institutes and served terms as president of the AASG, American Institute of Professional Geologists, American Geological Institute, Midcontinent Section of the Society of Economic Paleontologists and Mineralogists, and Oklahoma Academy of Science.

“Service to the public” was Charlie’s creed. When he said “We’re from the government, and we’re here to help you,” he really meant it. Everyone working with or for him was imbued with his desire to freely and eagerly provide information and service to industry, government, and the public. This can be seen in his many professional contribu-



tions and the many awards and honors he received. Major awards that Charlie received were:

- *U.S. Department of the Interior*—Conservation Service Award (1983).
- *American Geological Institute*—Ian Campbell Memorial Award (1987).
- *American Association of Petroleum Geologists*—Public Service Award (1988); Honorary Life Member (2002).
- *American Institute of Professional Geologists*—Martin van Couvering Memorial Award (1988); Honorary Life Member (1995); Ben H Parker Memorial Medal (1999).
- *International Association of Energy Advocates*—Energy Advocate of the Year (2000).
- *University of Oklahoma Board of Regents*—Regents' Professor (2006).
- *Oklahoma Higher Education Hall of Fame*—Induction (2007).
- *Association of American State Geologists*—Distinguished Service Award (2007); Honorary Life Member (2007); Lifetime Achievement Award (2008); Established an award in Charlie's name for excellence in state survey publications in fields that he championed, such as geologic mapping and energy (2012).

He enthusiastically supported petroleum exploration and development in Oklahoma and in the nation. He started the Oklahoma Petroleum Information Center at the OGS, which now houses more than 100 miles of core from about 10,000 Oklahoma wells, samples from 50,000 wells, production reports, and other material vital to petroleum exploration and production. He also organized the Energy Resources Institute at OU. The OGS, under Charlie's leadership, conducted several petroleum-oriented workshops and symposia every year, beginning in 1988.

One of Charlie's signature AASG achievements (beneficial to all state surveys, to the USGS, and to the nation as a whole) was spearheading passage of the National Geologic Mapping Act by the U.S. Congress. His knowledge of the ins and outs of Congress and the federal bureaucracy, and his close relationship with the USGS and most of the national geological societies and associations, enabled Charlie and AASG colleagues to effect passage of the act in 1992 (Public Law 102-285, 102nd Congress). He also worked on reauthorization of the act in subsequent years. All state surveys and the general public have benefitted from his efforts.

Activities with, and on behalf of, AASG were among the highlights of Charlie's professional and personal memories. He eagerly looked forward to annual AASG meetings, which he and the OGS staff hosted in Oklahoma City in 1989. In these friendly and collegial settings, he enjoyed discussing the various problems common to many or all state surveys with his long-time friends and colleagues—while sharing modest amounts of “Wild Turkey.”

Charlie authored or co-authored more than 70 publications. Most publications dealt with petroleum and other energy/mineral resources, including reserves, policy matters, technology transfer, and environmental issues. He also co-authored a number of articles on clay mineralogy, clay petrography, and clay geochemistry with his many graduate students at OU. Other publications covered geologic education and the value and uses of geologic maps. He was coordinator for the “Texas-Oklahoma Tectonic Region” chart of stratigraphic units in Texas and Oklahoma for the AAPG-sponsored COSUNA Project.

His dedication to the future of geology included long service as secretary-treasurer of Sigma Gamma Epsilon (SGE), the national student honorary earth-sciences society, and his mentoring of students at OU. He served SGE as secretary-treasurer from 1967 to 2007, and carried it out for so long only because his wife, Betty, maintained all the records and correspondence; she was the backbone of his service to the nation's brightest geology students. As a professor at OU, he directed about 40 M.S. and Ph.D. students, all of whom went on to productive careers in geology or related fields.

Charlie always reached out to help and serve his students, his staff, his State, his Nation, many professional societies, AASG, and the geoscience community. At his induction into the Oklahoma Higher Education Hall of Fame in 2007, Charlie was called “an enrichment to the State and the Nation.” That quite accurately sums up Charlie's life as a spokesman for the geologic community to his state and nation. We will all miss him—his lifetime contributions mean that we, and future generations, will benefit greatly from his having passed this way.