

Allen F. Agnew (1918–2012)

Sixth State Geologist of South Dakota

by Derric Iles



Allen F. Agnew, age 94, of Corvallis, Oregon, passed away on September 12, 2012, of causes related to age and cancer. He was born in Ogden, Illinois, on August 24, 1918, to that town's doctor and his wife. He was preceded in death by his favorite (and only) wife, Frances, who passed away on October 26, 2010, after 64 years together.

Allen was Ogden High School Valedictorian and graduated from the University of Illinois in 1940 with highest geologic honors. His bachelor's and master's theses at Illinois in micropaleontology were published in professional journals. He also played semi-pro baseball, his favorite sport.

On September 5, 1946, he married Frances M. Keiffer in Cleveland, Ohio. Allen and Frances moved to Palo Alto, California, where he worked toward his Ph.D. in geology at Stanford (received in 1949). Allen and Frances began their early married life sleeping on U.S. Army cots in Death Valley, California, as he performed geologic map-

ping of that area for the U.S. Geological Survey.

The family grew with the addition of four children while they lived in various places: Alabama (U.S. Geological Survey), Wisconsin (U.S. Geological Survey), South Dakota (State Geologist and Professor of Geology at the University of South Dakota), Indiana (Director of the Water Resources Research Center at Indiana University), and finally to Pullman, Washington (Director of the Water Resources Center at Washington State University). After the children left home, Allen and Frances moved from Pullman to Washington, D.C., where he spent eight years as the Senior Specialist in Mining and Minerals at the Library of Congress before retiring to Corvallis, Oregon, in 1982 to be close to their children's families. He taught part-time at Oregon State University starting in 1983, finally retiring from teaching for good in 1988 at age 70.

Allen was the State Geologist of South Dakota from 1957 to 1963. His efforts resulted in more than doubling the appropriations received from the state legislature during his tenure. Twenty publications of the South Dakota Geological Survey bear his name, with perhaps none more significant than one titled "A guide to the stratigraphy of South Dakota," which is still regularly used. Geologic mapping; cooperative projects with federal, state, and local agencies; and studies of groundwater were three priorities that he emphasized. The groundwork laid by Allen has continued to serve as a guide for much of the Survey's subsequent work.

Allen maintained memberships in many professional organizations and groups, and he played active roles in them for much of his career. As he was a member of Alpha Kappa Lambda fraternity in college, he aided them by becoming a Chapter Advisor at the local AKL chapter at Oregon State University in Corvallis. He and Frances traveled to yearly AASG meetings in their retirement, renewing friendships made over his years as a geologist and teacher. He and Frances finally were able to enjoy a wonderful 10 years as "snow birds," spending a month or two each winter in Arizona, where they hosted friends and family and Allen led day trips to local geologic and historical sites.

Allen is survived by two daughters, two sons, 11 grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren. He is also survived by two sisters along with numerous nieces and nephews and their families scattered across the United States.

Interment was at Oaklawn Memorial Park in Corvallis, Oregon.

