DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
STEPHEN EDMUND CLABAUGH

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Stephen Edmund Clabaugh, professor emeritus, geological sciences, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger
Secretary
The General Faculty

IN MEMORIAM
STEPHEN EDMUND CLABAUGH

Steve Clabaugh, F. M. Bullard Professor of Geological Sciences Emeritus, was born in Carthage, Texas, on April 2, 1918, and died in Austin on December 22, 2010. He arrived at The University of Texas campus in the fall of 1936, intending to major in chemistry, but Arthur Deen's introductory course led him into a long and influential career in geology at UT. After earning his bachelor's degree in 1940, he immediately began research for a master's degree under the supervision of Fred M. Bullard, which he completed in 1941. Steve was awarded a fellowship at the University of Wisconsin and started his doctoral work there before World War II intervened. He was then recruited by the United States Geological Survey (USGS) in the search for strategic minerals critical for the war effort after supplies from Europe, Africa and Asia were cut off. While working for the USGS from 1942 to 1946, he met and married Patricia Sutton, a geologist colleague recently graduated from Smith College. He then started Ph.D. work at Harvard University.

In 1947, Steve and Pat moved to Austin, where he began a thirty-three-year teaching career that was to leave an indelible mark on what is now the Jackson School of Geosciences. In those first postwar years, many veterans crowded into the University. Because petroleum companies were hiring "anyone who was breathing and holding a geology degree," the Department of Geology experienced the first of several booms in enrollment. Steve had to face the prospect of teaching a class of eighty students with only five microscopes, until President T. S. Painter provided funding for additional equipment (a fellow member of the National Academy of Sciences had advised Painter to keep an eye on young Steve Clabaugh).

Steve was awarded his PhD from Harvard in 1950, for USGS research done in Montana. He continued teaching a heavy course load, as did the other faculty in the small and under-funded department. He taught introductory geology, mineralogy, petrology, a field course, and graduate metamorphic petrology. His enthusiasm, clarity of presentation, and empathy with his students resulted in his receiving the UT Students Association Award for teaching excellence in 1957, the Minnie Stevens Piper Award for "outstanding academic, scientific, and scholarly achievement and for dedication to the teaching profession" in 1958, and the Carolyn G. and G. Moses Knebel Distinguished Teaching Award in Geological Sciences in 1974 and 1978. He supervised eleven Ph.D. and thirty-three master's students doing research on igneous and metamorphic rocks in Texas and Mexico.

Throughout his teaching career, he served quietly and effectively on many important committees for the Geological Society of America, but he would never stand for elected office. With this professional interaction, Steve earned the respect of his colleagues over all of North America, countering a perception that the University was "a diploma mill for petroleum geologists." Steve emphasized the high quality and diversity of research in the department. He served as departmental chairman from 1962 to 1966 and instituted a program that was to have great impact by bringing in internationally known scholars to teach three-week graduate short courses in their specialties. These visitors left with higher regard for the University and its students and sent their better undergraduates our way.

While he was chair, Steve was phenomenally successful in raising money for a new geology building, occupied in the fall of 1967. He also worked day-to-day with the architects and engineers to ensure that the building was a state-of-the-art research and teaching facility. For the building dedication, Steve organized a full-day
symposium titled “Limitations of the Earth,” and the published contributions addressed problems confronting all inhabitants of the planet today.

As colleague and chairman, Steve tried to bring out the best in his faculty. When you were chastised, you knew it, then immediately resolved to improve your performance, if for no other reason than that Steve was a friend you could not let down. He was always a congenial and imaginative coworker.

Through the years, Steve and Pat graciously hosted an annual fall picnic for the large UT geological sciences community, at their Lake Place on the Pedernales River. This was always eagerly awaited by everyone, from children to emeritus faculty, as an opportunity to get acquainted, play sports, commune with many cats, dogs, and a horse, swim, and eat Steve’s famous chili with the Mystery Meat of the Year (once it was skunk). Steve delighted in showing native plants and animals to those people newly arrived in central Texas.

After his many years as an administrator, Steve wanted to return to his beloved geology. He led an epic research project on rocks of the Sierra Madre Occidental in Mexico, one of the largest volcanic provinces on the Earth. A much-cited paper co-authored with Fred McDowell in 1979 summarized findings up to then and emphasized the many questions still to be tackled.

Pat’s health began to fail in 1980, so Steve decided to retire at sixty-two. At the Lake Place, they continued cherishing each other’s company, gardening, adopting cats and dogs, and entertaining visitors. After Pat’s death in 1997, Steve continued to live on the Pedernales and travel whenever he could. Since 2001, he lived in a mobile home next to a house built by their daughter and son-in-law, Cathy and RickDavey. Colleagues from the University continued to consult the guru who claimed to have abandoned geology for plants and animals but who remained a lucid source of geological insight into his final year. In 2006, he was inducted into the Hall of Distinction of the Jackson School of Geosciences. Steve shared a broad vision of the earth sciences with his 1940 classmate, John A. Jackson.

He is survived by his three daughters: Catherine Davey and spouse, Richard Davey, of Spicewood, Texas; Cynthia Frederick and spouse, Steve Hempell, of Lillooet, British Columbia; and Deborah DeWig and spouse, Michael DeWig, of Portland, Oregon. In addition, he is survived by six grandchildren and five great-grandsons.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Daniel S. Barker (chair), Leon E. Long, and Fred W. McDowell.

Distributed to the dean of the John A. and Katherine Jackson School of Geosciences, the executive vice president and provost, and the president on February 18, 2011. This resolution is posted under “Memorials” at: http://www.utexas.edu/faculty/council/.