Memorial to Charles Rudolph Kolb
1920–1982

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Dr. Charles R. (Rudolph) Kolb, a member of the Geological Society of America since 1951, died November 27, 1982, at age 62 years and 8 months.

Charlie Kolb, known familiarly to many of his friends as "Rip," a nickname derived from the effectiveness of his portrayal of Rip Van Winkle in a high school play, was a native of Vicksburg, Mississippi, as well as a lifetime resident of that city—a home-town boy who made good at home; who married a home-town girl, Bertha Mae Ragsdale; who, though widely traveled, always returned home; and who contributed his talent through the years to entertain the people of his Vicksburg and those who came to see the Showboat's "Gold in the Hills."

Few people utilize their talents as well as Dr. Kolb did. He was one of those rare individuals who lived life to its fullest, who had a natural talent for making people laugh, who was gifted as an entertainer, but who, most of all, was a dedicated and extraordinary scientist. We shall miss him in all respects.

The third of five children, Charlie was born 14 April 1920. After completing high school in Vicksburg, he attended Louisiana State University, receiving his baccalaureate and master's degrees in 1948 and 1949, respectively. He was awarded the Ph.D. in geology, with a minor in soil mechanics, by L.S.U. in 1959. In the period between receipt of his graduate degrees, he studied at George Washington University, Purdue, and the University of California, Berkeley. His dissertation, "Distribution and Engineering Significance of Sediments Bordering the Mississippi from Donaldsonville to the Gulf," was but one of a series of more than 100 articles and reports that bore his name on topics as varied as the entrenched valley of the Red River, the problems of Mississippi River diversion, the Atchafalaya (River) basin, pavement evaluation and soil-type areal ties for airfields, sedimentary framework of the Mississippi River and its modern and pre-modern deltas, sand forms of North African and Asian deserts, shoreline fluctuations, classification of landscape geometry for military purposes, permafrost and airfields, river engineering, the Alaskan earthquake, geologic aspects of the stability of clay-shale slopes, hard-rock silo prototype test sites, mudlumps, barrier islands, oyster reefs, sand boils along Mississippi River levees, comparison of the Mississippi and Mekong deltas, the utility of Gulf Coast salt domes for the storage or disposal of radioactive wastes, geologic and geotechnical engineering studies of the Atlantic and Gulf Coastal outer continental shelves, and so on. In these he collaborated from time to time with well-known geologists and engineers including H. N. Fisk, L. J. Wilbert, Jr., Edward McFarlan, J. R. Van Lopik, K. E. Jensen, William Dornbusch, W. B. Steinriede, Jr., P. R. Mabrey, W. G. [illegible] W. J. Turnbull, R. T. Saucier, J. D. Martinez, D. N. Kupfer,

R. L. Thoms, J. M. Coleman, C. G. Smith, M. B. Kumar, and R. E. Wilcox. The breadth and quality of these contributions are testimony to his ability and public conscience.

Charlie gave freely of his time and talent to his chosen discipline as well as to problems and activities of public concern. His sage philosophy and deliberate analytical style were molded by his experiences and by the role models he observed at L.S.U., particularly H. N. Fisk, H. V. Howe, and R. J. Russell. Especially illustrative of his approach are two quotes from a feature article on Charlie in the *L.S.U. Alumni News*, April 1979. In reference to the problem of a planned or accidental diversion of the Mississippi River down the Atchafalaya he advocated ". . . that a comprehensive study of *all* implications of *all* alternative methods be made *before any* costly action is taken. [And] any action will be costly, not just in the undertaking but in the maintenance and consequences.)" Those words from the geologist who at that time knew more than anyone about the Mississippi/Atchafalaya diversion problem should provide a legacy of caution and conservation for future generations. If Charlie Kolb never stated nor published anything else, his plea regarding the Mississippi/Atchafalaya diversion, "Let's please explore all the ramifications of any action we may take before we take that action," preserves his place in history.

How did this seemingly carefree, ebullient, generous man achieve such a stature in his chosen discipline of geology? He did so by being born of and reared by sturdy, solid Germanic stock from whom he learned the wisdom of hard work and devotion. He did so by choosing to attend Louisiana State University at the time the geology faculty there included such giants as H. N. Fisk, H. V. Howe, R. D. Russell, R. J. Russell, and C. J. Roy. Fred B. Kniffen in geography/anthropology and B. C. Craft in petroleum engineering were closely allied. Fisk, Howe, and R. J. Russell had particular influence on him during his collegiate years. Equally significant, Charlie was a keen observer and a good learner. His success reflects that he learned well, not only from those at L.S.U. but also from the numerous peers and associates at the Waterways Experiment Station (WES) at Vicksburg, Mississippi.

Dr. Kolb's work was almost exclusively as an engineering geologist and as a supervisor of engineering geological activities and personnel for the WES, the largest research installation of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. He was first employed by the WES in 1945, while still an undergraduate student at L.S.U., where he worked under the direction of H. N. Fisk on various problems of navigation, flood-control, and alluvial activity of the Mississippi River. After completion of his master's degree in 1949, he spent a year in Chile working on dam sites and ground water for the Snare Corporation of New York. He returned to the WES in 1950 as a geologist, devoting attention primarily to various projects related to the Lower Mississippi Alluvial Valley and the problem of the Atchafalaya Basin and Mississippi River diversion. In 1953 he was appointed assistant chief of the Engineering Geology Branch, WES, functioning in that role as supervisor of various projects, mainly within the United States. By 1956 he was chief of the Engineering Geology Branch with worldwide responsibilities. From 1962 through 1964 he worked in Alaska on a loan basis as chief environmental scientist for the Army Research and Development Office at Fairbanks. He returned to the WES in January 1965 as chief of the Engineering Geology Division, a position he held until his retirement in 1973. During this period he participated in and supervised worldwide and highly variable, extensive studies for the Corps of Engineers. In July 1973 he retired from the WES and became a consulting geologist for McClelland Engineers, Houston, Texas, working on power plant sites in Ohio and North Dakota, on construction materials assessments, and on foundation problems for offshore drilling rig sites on the Atlantic and Gulf Coastal continental shelves. In 1975 he was appointed a consulting professor in the Environmental Studies

Institute, Louisiana State University, primarily conducting research on North Louisiana salt domes as possible repositories for nuclear wastes. He continued the salt-dome studies; his consultancies with McClelland Engineers, the WES, and others; and his expert-witness activities involving litigation related to boundary disputes and property ownership along lakes, rivers, and shorelines until his final illness.

Perhaps the single most important factor that contributed to Charlie's success was his marriage to Bertha Mae Ragsdale; though obviously of different sexes, they were as two peas in a pod. If ever a man and a woman were meant for each other, these two were. From school days to marriage in 1951 and through 31 years of blissful wedlock, they were a joy to each other and a pleasure to all of us who knew them. Who but Charlie Kolb would drive until midnight, after his wedding in Vicksburg, Mississippi, to reach the Suwannee River, Florida, in order to get down on his knees and sing "Way Down Upon the Suwannee River" to Bertha Mae in the moonlight? Thank goodness it didn't rain, but if it had, I know Bertha would have made the best of it! In any event, they spent their first night of marriage at a motel just past the Suwannee River. In many respects, this whole episode epitomizes their marital bliss and the vigor with which both approached life. Typically, they represented Vicksburg at the Seattle World's Fair, replete in Confederate costumes, pictured nationally by the Associated Press.

Charlie Kolb had a marvelous zest for life. His geological and engineering work took him to many parts of the world and continually generated new interests and vistas for him and for Bertha Mae who accompanied him on many of the journeys. As a result, he was affiliated with and active in many organizations and committees:

Member, American Association of Petroleum Geologists
Fellow, Geological Society of America
  Chairman of River Engineering Group, Engineering Division
  Chairman, Engineering Division Program 1967
Member, Photointerpretation Group (Geology), Society of Photogrammetry
Fellow, American Association for Advancement of Science (AAAS)
  Chairman-Organizer of Quantitative Geomorphology Symposium (1957)
  Chairman-Organizer of Military Problems in Cold Regions Symposium (1964)
Member, Sigma Xi Honorary Society
Member, Alaska Division, AAAS
Member, Baton Rouge Geological Society
Member, Mississippi Geological Society
Member, International Association of Sedimentologists
Registered Member, American Institute of Professional Geologists
Member, American Geological Institute
President, Engineers Club of Vicksburg
President, Lions Club of Vicksburg

Among the awards and honors that came to him were:

Best Paper Award, Journal of Sedimentary Petrology, 1954
Best Paper Award, Gulf Coast Association of Geological Societies, 15th Annual Meeting, 1965
Outstanding Performance Award (Department of Defense), 1958
Outstanding Performance Award (Department of Defense), 1964
Air Medal with five oak-leaf clusters (World War II)
Distinguished Flying Cross with two oak-leaf clusters (World War II)
Presidential Unit Citation with one oak-leaf cluster (World War II)
Outstanding Performance Commendation (Department of Defense), 1971

He was listed in the *Dictionary of International Biography* in 1973, *Personalities of the South*, *American Men of Science*, *Who's Who in the South and Southwest*, and was

nominated the month before his death for *Who's Who in Frontier Science and Technology*. I think, however, he was proudest of being named to the *Gallery of Distinguished Employees of the U.S. Waterways Experiment Station*.

In addition to his scientific engineering and civic/public contributions to his country, Dr. Kolb served 4 years in the U.S. Army Air Corps in World War II as a bombardier-navigator in the South Pacific; he engaged in 48 combat missions and was in the first raid over Tokyo. He continued active in the Air Force Reserves after the war, flying missions with the Mississippi Air Guard to Europe, South America, and Southeast Asia. He retired as a colonel.

Active in civic and public affairs, Charlie was a Distinguished Lecturer on "The Mississippi River," aboard the *Delta Queen*, for the University of Nebraska and Stanford University. He served on the Red Coat Welcoming Committee of the Vicksburg Chamber of Commerce; was the only geologist ever to be elected president of the Vicksburg Engineers' Club; and sang and danced his way through such Theatre Guild productions as "My Fair Lady," "The Boyfriend," "Little Mary Sunshine," and "Brigadoon." But his favorite roles were in "Gold in the Hills," the longest running melodrama in the world, in which he played for more than 25 years. And who else but Bertha Mae played with him in most of them!

Dr. Kolb was an avid field geologist and field tripper. Most of us who worked with Hal Fisk either became so or got lost somewhere along the way. One of Charlie's typical characteristics was to be in the field before and after the younger geologists or drill crews. Consequently, it is not surprising that he authored or co-authored various guidebooks and led field trips to areas of geologic interest, such as the Atchafalaya Basin–Avery Island–Jefferson Island, Louisiana; Vicksburg National Military Park, Mississippi; Vicksburg to Natchez, Mississippi; Jackson to Vicksburg, Mississippi; the Mississippi River—Vicksburg to Bonnet Carre, Louisiana; classic Tertiary and Quaternary localities and historic highlights of the Jackson-Vicksburg-Natchez area, Mississippi; and Tertiary of Mississippi—Yazoo City to Lafayette. He was a frequent lecturer to public, civic, and professional groups. Charlie's typical response to a request to lecture or to prepare and lead a field trip was "I would have been disappointed if you hadn't asked me."

Speaking to local civic clubs and garden clubs, singing as soloist at weddings and in St. Michael's Catholic Church Choir, being father to their son, Charles H. (Chuck) Kolb of Orlando, Florida, being grandfather to Chuck's two little girls, and playing Santa came as naturally to him as swimming to a duck.

Charlie Kolb was a happy person, and he made people around him happy. One of his noted qualities was his ability to tell a story and to make people laugh. He could mimic virtually any accent or dialect, and he spoke French, German, Spanish, and good Cajun, in addition to English. For these and reasons cited earlier, he had a host of friends, admirers, acquaintances, and colleagues, all of whom will miss his wit and charm, to say nothing of his scientific and engineering abilities and contributions.

Gentleman, scholar, teacher, geologist, engineer, soldier, entertainer, civic and public servant, raconteur, father, grandfather, and husband superior constitute the legacy Charlie Kolb left the world, his family, and his Vicksburg.

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