MEMORIAL TO BENJAMIN LEROY MILLER

BY GEORGE H. ASHLEY

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Benjamin LeRoy Miller will always be thought of by his students now scattered all over the world as a prince of a teacher, whose interest in his boys was not confined to the field of their studies. Not only during their college days, but wherever they went, he continued to keep in touch with them, entertaining them when they returned to college or being entertained by them if his travels took him into their neighborhood. His modesty and this friendly human interest were striking characteristics of the man.

Miller taught for nearly half a century and at the same time was active as a field and consulting geologist, as is witnessed by his bibliography. His professional work covered a wide range of subjects from pre-Cambrian to Pleistocene. He, however, specialized in the field of mining and especially in the line of industrial minerals, though his interest in pure science never lagged. He traveled widely and was much in demand as a lecturer. His death came at the University without warning, while he was still actively in the harness.

Miller was born at Sabetha, northeast Kansas, April 13, 1874. His father, Jacob James Miller, was born in Wurtemberg, Germany, but came to this country while a young man and became a citizen shortly after arriving here. His mother, Mary Morehead, came from Indiana. He was brought up on a farm near Sabetha and attended the local typical one-room country school. His interest in nature seems to have stemmed from his grandmother Morehead, who lived with the family and who imparted to him some of her love of nature. Together they wandered through the countryside collecting fossils from the Pennsylvanian limestones, observing birds, flowers, and insects. He never lost his early love of flowers and nature in general, nurtured by these early walks and his own mother’s passion for them. His first interest in geology began with collecting fossils on these walks with his grandmother, as he sometimes expressed it, “from stubbing his bare toes on the fossiliferous ledges.”

He showed so much ability in high school that his family decided that he should go to college, the only one of two boys and three girls who did go. At the University of Kansas he studied geology under Professor Williston and decided to make that his career. He accompanied Williston on vertebrate-collecting tours as a field assistant and during one summer collected for Williston independently, probably getting expenses but not a salary. Williston tried to get him to specialize in vertebrate paleontology, and had he stayed at the University of Kansas for his graduate work he probably would have landed in that branch of geology.

After graduating from college in 1897, he taught for a year in a one-room country school in Namaha County, Kansas, and then was appointed Professor of Chemistry and Biology at Penn College, a small Quaker school at Oskaloosa, Iowa. He remembered his several years there with keen pleasure because of his fine associations,
especially with the Rosenberger family, the eldest of whom was the president of the College. Although a non-Quaker originally he was much taken with the dignity and modesty of the religion and later, on marrying, he joined the Society of Friends.

In 1899–1900 he was an assistant on the Iowa Geological Survey. Then, deciding to get an advanced degree in geology, he went to Johns Hopkins where a scholarship assisted financially. While there he lived with two elderly maiden sisters. They were wealthy but infirm, and he enjoyed escorting them to the theatre and other functions in Baltimore.

At Hopkins, 1900–1903, he was most closely associated with Professor William B. Clark with whom he worked in the field on Coastal Plain geology for the Maryland Geological Survey, of which Clark was Director. Later he worked independently for the Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina surveys on the Tertiary problems of the coastal region. Sometime later he went to the Bahamas with George B. Shattuck with whom he published a book on the geology of those islands.

Obtaining his doctorate at Hopkins in 1903, he accepted an offer to teach at Bryn Mawr College with Dr. F. Bascom under the presidency of M. Carey Thomas. During his four years there he met and married Mary Meredith, a former student at Penn College, though of a later date than Miller. Miss Meredith was working for an M.A. in languages. In his spare time he worked with the U. S. Geological Survey as a field assistant, 1904–1907, and as assistant geologist, 1907–1913.

In 1907 Miller accepted the chairmanship of the Department of Geology at Lehigh University, succeeding Edward H. Williams, who was retiring. He continued in that position for 32 years or until at the age of 65, when he was relieved of his administrative duties in accordance with the practice of the University. His death came less than a month before his seventieth birthday when he would have gone into full retirement.

During his years at Lehigh he first of all built up a strong department, usually consisting of himself and three associates, including such men as Hintze, Turner, Behre, Fretz, Fraser, Whitcomb, and Butler. Because of his background and its nearness to the anthracite and other industrial areas, engineering and economic geology dominated the department.

From the beginning, Miller interested himself in the local geology and in the geologic problems of eastern Pennsylvania. The results of this work were published in detailed reports on the immediate counties and in papers in The Geological Society of America and other society bulletins. In 1920 he began doing considerable consulting work, especially for the cement and slate companies, with some work on coal, lead and zinc, gold, and on many water problems, no small amount of it gratuitously for clubs, churches, charitable institutions, or private individuals who were in trouble. The number of wells he has located in eastern Pennsylvania is legion. In recent years he was geologist for the city of Bethlehem in connection with its water-supply problems. Several of the cement plants of eastern Pennsylvania were located on his advice.

Miller became a co-operating geologist of the present State Geological Survey when it was established in 1919, contributed extensively to its reports, and was often consulted as to its policies.
Miller was a frequent traveler, having circled the globe twice and visited Europe several times as well as Mexico and South America. His first trip to South America was with J. T. Singewald, Jr. They visited all the important mining regions and published a 598-page book titled, *Mineral deposits of South America*. This trip was in lieu of a trip planned to Europe that had to be given up because of the first World War. One trip to Europe, in 1924, was with a group to study student-relief problems arising from the World War. Some of these trips were for consulting work on mineral deposits or mining ventures, others to satisfy his interest in the world and its people. He lectured widely on his travels and was in great demand as a speaker among the service clubs and other groups in the Bethlehem region. The breadth of his interest and of his work is well revealed in his bibliography. He was highly civic-minded and was a founder and president of several local clubs, such as the Tuesday Evening Club, a current-events club, Torch Club, and Rotary. Among the larger organizations he was a member of The Geological Society of America, Geological Society of London, Society of Economic Geologists, American Institute of Mining Engineers of which he served as Chairman of the Industrial Minerals Division, Mineralogical Society of America, a charter member and early president of the Pennsylvania Academy of Science, a member of the Iowa Academy of Science, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Sigma Xi, Tau Beta Pi, and possibly of others.

As a geologist he believed that the best work could be done afoot and even after taking to the use of a car he still believed that head, hand, and foot worked together best. He was tireless in searching out details.

For many years he lived on the Lehigh campus. His wife died in 1929 after a long illness. In recent years he lived in a house in Bethlehem adjoining that of his daughter, Mrs. Otto H. Spillman. He is survived by his daughter and her three sons, his son Ralph L. Miller, a sister Belle Miller, and a brother Paul Miller, the two latter of Sabetha, Kansas.

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