

Joe Walter: An Appreciation

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Geosciences alumni of the University of Texas from the late 1940s and early 1950s were a remarkable cohort. They were brought up in a Texas transitioning from “cows and cotton” to industry and petrochemicals. They were forged in the twin crucibles of depression and war, and whether or not they were directly touched by those events, their characters and values were guided by broader historical lessons. They were trained by excellent faculty and mentors to think about geology with precision, preparation, persistence and innovation - particularly the latter. Geology at this time was in the midst of a major transition as well - from an observational to an analytical science, and new technologies (another unintended consequence of war) would soon enable major theoretical and practical breakthroughs.

Joseph Charles Walter, Jr., or Joe as he was widely known, was a Houston native, the son of Gladys Hoskins and Joseph Charles Walter, Sr., an oil and gas landman. From a petroleum geology perspective, he started with certain advantages. Born on October 7, 1927, he graduated from Lamar High School and UT Austin with a Petroleum Engineering BS degree in 1949, and an MA in Geology in 1951.

His thesis, done under R.K. DeFord, was titled *Paleontology of the Rustler Formation, Culberson County, Texas*, and identified Permian invertebrates, among which was *Derbya sulcata* Walter. *n. sp.*, now the image on the bookplate that bears his name.

Combining his petroleum engineering background with a paleontology study demonstrated the acuity of Joe’s analytical foresight. It led him to an expertise in both hydrocarbon fluids and the unique rock materials that contain them as specific products of spatial, temporal, and biological processes.

Early Career and Success

Joe did a six-year apprenticeship with Jersey Standard/Humble, honing his analytical skills further in evaluating oil reserves - crucial training for his later successes. During this period, he made two significant life changes, marrying Elizabeth Cowden from Midland (BS, UT Austin, 1951), and deciding that he did not want to spend his life behind a desk in a huge company.



In 1957, after daughter Carol Walter Looke and son J. C. Walter III (Rusty) were born, Joe set up shop in association with his father's business, Houston Royalty Company. Within the span of a few years, Joe Sr. and his partner Irwin Smith died, Joe (Jr.) and his partners bought controlling interest in, and later merged with, Royalties Management Co. from Tulsa. This gave him the capital base to begin his real enterprise - exploration for oil and gas.

As detailed by Jack Donahue in *The Finest in the Land*, Joe's excellent skills and preparation in assessing reserves served him well. His new company, Houston Oil and Minerals, went public in the late 1960s. After flirting with the refining business, Joe took a long shot on a gas play in the Frio of Galveston Bay and got a big boost, permitting the company to go international. Again, Joe was successful, working the

North Sea, Africa, Middle East, South America and Australia, where he got into and out of the coal business. At the same time, writes Donahue, Houston Minerals Corp., a subsidiary, was building the fourth largest mineral position in the US. Meanwhile, the company got into and out of the Baltimore Canyon play without losing money, and the little startup now had five divisions and 1400 employees. Joe Walter, by this time suffering from heart disease, was stuck behind a desk at a big company, and exactly where he did not want to be. In 1981 he arranged a merger with Tenneco, had a heart transplant at Methodist Hospital performed by Dr. Jimmy Howell, and attempted to retire, but within two years, as head of Walter Oil and Gas and president of the Petroleum Club in Houston, he was back making deals.

Beyond Career Life

For the rest of his life, Joe continued his business interests with Walter International and Walter Oil and Gas International, but he also had time for other pursuits. He has been widely acknowledged as a major force behind Houston's Methodist Hospital and Methodist Health Care system, and St. Luke's United Methodist Church. He loved to hunt birds on his "farm" near Brownwood; he was an avid woodworker, and, most crucially, was a great friend of the University of Texas at Austin. Joe received many honors from The University of Texas and has given us many as well. He died on June 14, 1997.

Awards, Honors, and Donations

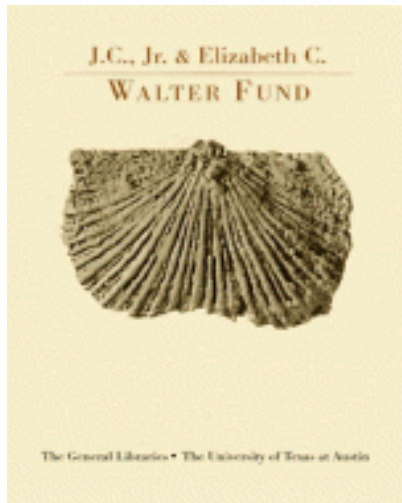
University of Texas at Austin Awards and Honors

- Distinguished Graduate (Engineering) 1977
- Distinguished Graduate (Geology) 1984
- Distinguished Alumnus 1985
- Hall of Honor (College of Natural Sciences) 1995
- Hall of Distinction (Geology) 2006

Walter Family Donations

- Seven endowed chairs, professorships, and scholarships in Engineering and Geology
- Houston Oil and Minerals / Walter Faculty Award

- J.C. Walter Jr., and E.C. Walter Geology Library Endowment
- Renovation funding for Walter Library from the Walter Family



Walter Fund Bookplate

It is the last two items that deserve special attention here. In 1984, when the Walters endowed the Geology Library, the collection was strong, but the worlds of geology, publishing, and academic libraries were poised on the brink of enormous changes. The Walter gift gave the Library the opportunity to reach for excellence and growth at the very time when market forces caused the geological sciences and most university libraries, including The University of Texas, to begin to shrink. The late 1980s and early 1990s were a hard time for libraries in particular, with prices rapidly rising, expensive technological developments, constricting budgets, and painful decisions to be made in every budget cycle. The Walters' foresight allowed their namesake collection to forge ahead into new thematic areas and wider coverage, and these ambitions drew more resources, particularly from the Barrow family, the Chernoff family, and many alumni who benefited from this great information resource and wanted to give back.

In 2001, when Jack Jackson's initial gift was put to work to add on to the Geology Building, Elizabeth C. Walter Keeney, Carol Looke and J.C. (Rusty) Walter III stepped forward again with funding to renovate and refurbish the Walter Library, further positioning it as a leading earth sciences information source for the 21st century.

Joe, described by his peers as the archetypal wildcatter, made his own luck one last time, with the quiet foresight and thoughtful generosity that were his trademarks. We who benefit daily from this library are thankful to Joe, his family, and his friends - our alumni and supporters, for all they have done.

References

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