

Memorial to Alexander Rankin Cameron

1927–2000

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As we move forward in our chosen professions, we become acquainted with many colleagues who become friends, professionally and oftentimes socially. By their very nature, geology and closely allied fields attract a large number of individuals who are in their chosen field because of the great satisfaction that stems from learning about Earth and its evolution. In turn, they enjoy imparting their knowledge to others—sometimes in a formal fashion through teaching and in publications, and sometimes through informal discussions, which may be spontaneous in origin. Every once in a while we meet a colleague who displays all of the traits to which everyone aspires. A human being that we just know makes life a little better for all of us, and by their very presence, makes the world a better place. Such a person was Alex Cameron.



Alexander Rankin Cameron was born on January 24, 1927, in Toronto, Canada. At an early age Alex and his family moved to Cape Breton Island in the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. He received his bachelor of science degree from St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, in 1952. He spent the following summer at the Coal Research Laboratory of the Geological Survey of Canada in Sydney, Nova Scotia, under the guidance of Peter A. Hacquebard. In the fall of 1952, he joined the staff of the Coal Research Section at Pennsylvania State University as a research assistant and graduate student in the Department of Geology and Geophysics. His unusual research talents, his dedication to coal science, his clarity of thought, and his tireless efforts quickly made him a member of the Coal Research Section team that soon gained international recognition. He quickly and effectively assumed responsibility for industry- and government-sponsored research and for a program specifically aimed at elucidating the potential of certain West Virginia coal seams. For his doctoral research he undertook a pioneering petrographic investigation that revealed a heretofore unrecognized array of compositionally distinct entities that determine coal seam characteristics and industrial coal properties. The significance of this research has yet to be understood and appreciated by science and industry. His efforts at Penn State resulted in the awarding of his master of science degree in 1954 and his Ph.D. degree in 1961.

While at Penn State, Alex maintained his relationship with the Geological Survey of Canada, spending summers at the Coal Research Laboratory in Sydney and later in Ottawa. Upon completion of his Ph.D. degree he was awarded the appointment of research scientist with the Geological Survey of Canada, and except for two years, his entire professional career was spent with the Canadian Survey. Upon special invitation, he spent one-and-a-half years as a visiting professor at Southern Illinois University and as a visiting scientist at Penn State for a six-month period. During

the late 1960s and early 1970s, he vigorously pursued a wide variety of coal petrology studies, first in Ottawa and later in Calgary. In 1976 he was appointed head of the Coal Technology Section at the Institute of Sedimentary and Petroleum Geology, and in 1989 he was placed at the helm of the Coal Geology Subdivision of the Institute. In 1986 he was invited to go to the University of Newcastle at Newcastle upon Tyne in the United Kingdom as visiting scientist and lecturer. When he retired, Alex was head of the Coal Geology Subdivision of the Geological Survey of Canada. He retired with the rank of emeritus scientist at the Geological Survey of Canada.

Dr. Cameron was a field geologist as well as a laboratory scientist and his investigations carried him to a wide spectrum of sites in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, as evidenced by the numerous resource descriptions and investigations reported in his publications. His forays into coal-bearing regions carried him into wild and diverse areas where he encountered both friend and foe. His accounts of meeting with raw nature include one episode in which a grizzly bear developed an enormous interest in their helicopter and their return trip was delayed while they waited, downwind and at some distance from the curious beast. After a seemingly long period the bear departed leaving the craft unharmed, and they were able to return to base camp.

While coal was the focal point of his geological efforts, his interests were wide-ranging and varied, including topics that ranged from geochemistry, paleogeography, and coal resources to coal carbonization, coal preparation, sampling techniques, and palynology.

Alex was pleased to share his knowledge and expertise with students at many colleges and universities. He served on graduate committees and worked with industrial representatives who were anxious to seek his help and insight regarding their problems. He did this willingly and effectively. His expertise and talents were recognized by many people and their organizations. From 1984 through 1989 he served as president of the Canadian Society of Coal Science and Organic Petrology. He was associate editor of the *International Journal of Coal Geology* from its inception in 1983 through 1995. In 1998 the Canadian Society of Coal Science and Petrology awarded the Hacquebard Medal to Alex. The International Committee for Coal Petrology presented Alex with the Thiessen Medal and the Coal Division of the Geological Society of America honored Alex with the Gilbert H. Cady Award in 1997.

The Canadian Society of Coal Science and Organic Petrology established the Cameron Award in honor of the outstanding contributions Alex made to his profession. Further recognition of Alex Cameron's contributions came with the special symposium held in his honor upon his retirement from the Geological Survey of Canada. The proceedings of this meeting were published as the Cameron Volume of the *International Journal of Coal Geology*, v. 24, 1993. In addition, Alex was editor of the Hacquebard Volume of the *International Journal of Coal Geology*, v. 19, 1991.

In 1955 Alex married Catherine McDonnell of Sunbury, Pennsylvania. Alex was a devoted family man—very proud of all the family but never one to bore a group with tales of accomplishments. Alex Cameron was a special person—anyone who knew him misses him.

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