

Dr. James E. Christopher

James Ellis Christopher characterizes many Saskatchewan citizens; he came from humble beginnings, arrived in Saskatchewan mainly out of necessity and stayed by choice to gain prominence in his field. Chris, as he is known to his friends, was born in Philadelphia, PA, but at a young age he was sent to live with his maternal grandparents in Jamaica. He received his elementary and secondary schooling there and sat the Cambridge university entrance exams, but family finances being what they were, university would have to wait.

He returned to the States and worked as a migrant farm labourer before joining the U.S. military, and he arrived in the European theatre of war in time to become a member of the U.S. Army of Occupation. After demobilization, Chris worked as a civilian employee with the U.S. Army Map Service in Washington D.C., but eventually returned to his family home in Jersey City where he took employment in the manufacturing industry. At the same time, he began university night classes at the community college level and moved on to Columbia University, graduating with a B.S.A. degree in geology. Armed with his bachelor's degree and scholarship funding, including the John Hay Whitney Fellowship, and John A. Bownocker Scholarship, he proceeded to Ohio State University to continue his geological training toward M.Sc., and Ph.D. Degrees.

Dr. Christopher graduated from Ohio State with his Ph.D. in 1959, at a time when "equal opportunity" and "affirmative action" practices were not in effect. It was also a time when the major employer of geologists, the oil industry, was in one of its depressed economic periods. After sending out two hundred resumes and receiving as many rejections, Chris eventually turned north and accepted a position as a research geologist with the Saskatchewan Department of Mineral Resources. He loaded his personal belongings, his wife Dora, and baby son John into his 1953 Dodge and began the long trek from Columbus Ohio to Regina, arriving in the summer of 1959. Thus began a long and distinguished career in the Saskatchewan public service.

Chris moved through the professional and administrative ranks of the Saskatchewan civil service, rising from senior research geologist to principle research geologist in charge of the research section and on to chief geologist of the sedimentary geology division and eventually to director of the Saskatchewan Geological Survey. During his years in the research section, he produced three landmark monographs. 1961 on the Devonian-Mississippian transitional beds, in 1964 on the Middle Jurassic rocks of western Saskatchewan, and in 1974 on the Upper Jurassic and Lower Cretaceous of western Saskatchewan. Each is still widely accepted as the definitive work on the subject. In addition to the monographs he has published extensively on topics related to his research and to the petroleum geology of Saskatchewan. Even after his appointment as director, he used every spare minute of his time to continue his research on the Lower Cretaceous rocks of Saskatchewan. He also maintained a close relationship with rocks of all ages through frequent visits to field parties in northern Saskatchewan, as well as by direct involvement in a field mapping project on the Clearwater River in north-western Saskatchewan.

Dr. Christopher has also taken an active role in the geological community. He is a former two-time president of the S.G.S. (1967, 1980), as well as being a contributor and editor of several S.G.S. special publications. He is now an emeritus member of the society. He is also a honorary member of the C.S.P.G., and has contributed to its conferences and publications. His most recent contributions will be found in three chapters of that organizations geological Atlas of Western Canada Sedimentary Basin. While carrying out his administrative duties with the geological Survey, he was an active organizer for the annual mines minister's conferences. Internationally, he served several terms as the Saskatchewan district representative to the A.A.P.G.

In 1989 his contributions to the Saskatchewan petroleum industry were recognized through his election to the Saskatchewan Oilmen's Hall of Fame, and in 1990, the Geology alumni of his alma mater honoured him with the Orton Award as a distinguished alumnus. He was a lecturer at the U of A's prestigious Banff Earth Sciences Conference, an annual state-of-the-art seminar to which eminent

geologists from around the world were invited to present their views on the seminar topic for that year. He was the only Saskatchewan geologist invited as a presenter to that seminar.

Chris took early retirement in 1987 but continued to work with enthusiasm on his favourite topic, the Lower cretaceous rocks of Saskatchewan. That work reached fruition in 2003 with the release of S.I.R. report 223 – “Jura-Cretaceous Success Formation and Lower Cretaceous rocks of Saskatchewan”. Seventeen years after his retirement, he continues to act as a geological consultant to oil and potash companies, and is presently involved in two regional mapping projects, the Weyburn CO₂ Storage and Sequestration Project, and TGI. There is little doubt that Dr. James E. Christopher has made, through forty years, significant contributions to geoscience in Saskatchewan and is a fitting nominee to the S.G.S. Honour Roll.



Dr. Kent and Dr. Christopher accepting the Honour Roll plaque, AGM, 2004