

James Dabney Burfoot, Jr.

October 18, 1896 — February 27, 1966

Professor Burfoot was born in Richmond, Virginia, the son of James Dabney, Sr., and Minnie Elbridge Burfoot, of English ancestry. He attended the public schools in Richmond and graduated from Petersburg High School in 1914. Although he had won several scholarships he decided to work; and for several years he was employed in a bank until enlisting in the Navy in 1918. After the war he went to William and Mary to study accountancy but soon found that his forte was science. In 1922 he received a scholarship at the University of Virginia. There, after taking one course in geology, he was given an assistantship by Thomas L. Watson, a well-known economic geologist. A year later he received the B.S. degree, followed by the M.S. in 1925. In the fall of that year he came to Cornell for more graduate work with Professor Heinrich Ries in economic geology and Professor A. C. Gill in mineralogy and petrography. In 1926 he served as Assistant Professor at Washington and Lee, and in 1927 was back at Cornell as instructor, receiving his Ph.D. in 1929. He was Assistant Professor from 1935 to 1946, Associate Professor from 1946 to 1952, and Professor of Geology from 1952 to his retirement as Professor Emeritus in 1964.

Dan Burfoot was primarily a teacher, and to his courses in elementary geology, economic geology, clay mineralogy, optical mineralogy, sedimentary petrography, and metamorphic geology, he gave unstintingly of his time. In the laboratory he was a perfectionist, and students were expected not only to learn but also to think; they groaned at the work but eventually recognized the thorough grounding they were given.

Professor Burfoot was always interested in students and their problems, not only in his department but in the University at large. Many a graduate owes his degree to Dan's sound counsel. In 1946 he became Assistant to the Dean and Chairman of the Advisory Board for Undergraduates, College of Arts and Sciences, while still teaching part-time in the Department of Geology. In 1952 he was appointed Assistant Dean of the College where he devoted himself to the counseling of upperclass students until his retirement. He was Secretary of the University Faculty, 1950-53.

In the summers from 1924 to 1939 he worked in the field for the Virginia Geological Survey, at first as a field assistant, then as assistant geologist and as geologist, investigating the talc, soapstone, and slate resources of the state. He also taught in the Cornell Summer Sessions in 1930, 1932-34, and 1940-43. Upon the retirement of Professor Ries as head of the Department of Geology in 1937 he was executive secretary of the Department for two years. During the war years he worked with the ASTP program.

At William and Mary, Dan Burfoot was elected to Theta Delta Chi and the Flat Hat Club. For many years he helped and advised the Cornell chapter of his fraternity. He was elected to Phi Beta Kappa at the end of his first year at the University of Virginia, later to Phi Kappa Phi and Sigma Xi. He was a fellow of the Mineralogical Society of America and member of the Society of Economic Geologists.

On January 19, 1924, (Robert E. Lee's birthday) he married Marion Elizabeth Wiant of Charlottesville, Virginia, who survives him and who for many years was the secretary of the Department of Geology. Both Dan and Marion will long be gratefully remembered by generations of graduates of the Department they served so long and faithfully.

With the passing of Dan Burfoot, Cornell lost not only a devoted teacher, friend, and counselor of students but a genuine example of that vanishing type, a gentleman.

G. Ferris Cronkhite, Douglas C. Darling, John W. Wells