

# W. Storrs Cole

*July 16, 1902 — June 14, 1989*

Professor W[illiam] Storrs Cole, a long-time student and professor at Cornell, died in Arizona on June 14, 1989, a month short of his 87th birthday. Storrs liked to tell people that he was raised on an Albany “poor farm,” a county home, and technically he was correct; but what he didn’t say was that his father was the chief administrator there. Storrs first came to Cornell in the early 1920s to study entomology in the College of Agriculture (where there was no tuition for New York residents); he received his bachelor’s degree in 1925. As an undergraduate, he took several geology courses. The summer after graduation, he started working with the Federal Bureau of Entomology on Japanese-beetle control; he described the experience as wandering the streets and backyards of Yonkers, New York, counting Japanese beetles and dodging goats. After about a month, he sat on a railroad track one hot afternoon staring across the Hudson at the Palisades, thinking there must be something in science that doesn’t move, fly, or chase you. These thoughts led him back to Cornell to pursue graduate work in geology, after an intervening year spent working on a farm.

One day in the spring of 1927, Professor G.D. Harris gave Storrs a small bottle of what looked like large grains of sand and told him that these were *foraminifera*, the coming thing in paleontology. Storrs was assigned to go to the library, dig out the report of the *Challenger* expedition (a famous oceanographic expedition in the late 1800s), and use this to identify as many of the samples as he could. That small bottle of samples started him on a life-long involvement with micropaleontology and the larger *foraminifera*. Only a month or so later, Professor Harris advised Storrs to get a train ticket for New York City at once: the Pan-American Petroleum and Transport Company was looking for a micropaleontologist to work in their Mexican operation, the Huasteca Petroleum Company of Tampico.

As Storrs recalled it, the job interview was conducted by two men, one of whom did most of the talking. After an hour or so he told Storrs he could have the job at \$250 a month plus transportation and a month’s vacation. This very generous offer left Storrs speechless, and during the ensuing silence, as he was getting his wits together, the quiet member of the pair said, “Offer him \$300 a month.” Storrs quickly accepted.

His Mexican activity was brought to a sudden halt about a year later by a serious attack of malaria. Storrs almost died, but after a six-week recovery and his month’s vacation, he was back at Cornell in late 1928 to finish work on his doctorate. He had completed all the course work before he left, and only had to write the thesis, which he based

on *foraminifera* he had collected in Mexico. Storrs remembered setting the type for his title page and printing it on Professor Harris' press on the third floor of McGraw Hall.

Having accepted an assistantship at Cornell, Storrs found himself working both for Professor Harris in paleontology and Professor von Engel in geomorphology. Aside from the one undergraduate course in glacial geology, he had no background in geomorphology, and yet he was now teaching all the laboratory sections for Professor von Engel. The work with Professor von Engel resulted in a well-known paper on Coy Glen (*Journal of Geology*, 1930, v. 38, pp. 423-36). At the same time, he was working on fossils from Florida and Maryland that resulted in several papers—one coauthored with Joseph A. Cushman, one of the pioneers of *foraminifera* study. These *foraminifera* papers, plus the Coy Glen work, were accepted by the department as his thesis and Storrs received his Ph.D. in 1930.

In 1931 Storrs became an instructor at Ohio State University. His primary responsibility was to teach geomorphology, but he also kept his work with *foraminifera*, making thin sections at home in the evening, literally in the kitchen sink. Eventually he became a full professor and acting head of the department. In 1946 he left to accept a position at Cornell, where he was the departmental chairman for 15 years.

In the late 1940s and through the 1950s, Storrs was associated with the U.S. Geological Survey, working on aspects of the Bikini Atoll Atomic Bomb Project. He was also a member of a team that was studying Guam, Saipan, Eniwetok, and Fiji during the 1950s. Part of these studies involved examining cores from holes that were drilled completely through the coral cap of Bikini and Eniwetok to the underlying basalt. Later, in 1966, he participated in the MOHOLE project on Midway Island; his task was to identify the *foraminifera* in the well samples as they were brought up.

Storrs retired in 1968 after twenty-two years on the faculty. He received much recognition for his professional achievements and leadership; he was a fellow and former vice-president of the Geological Society of America, and served as president of both the Paleontological Society and of the Cushman Foundation for Foraminiferal Research. In 1983, Storrs received the Cushman Foundation Award in recognition of his work. He published 100 papers during his active professional life.

In 1980 after the loss of his beloved wife Gladys, Storrs established the Gladys W. Cole Memorial Research Award of the Geological Society of America, to be used to support geomorphologic field work in the southwestern United States and adjacent Mexico. In their later years, Storrs and Gladys Cole spent most of their free time in the Arizona desert, where she painted while he collected *Kachina* dolls and studied Hopi Indian life.

Note: Much of the description of Stores' early years has been extracted from the recently published "Cornell Geology Through the Years" (Cornell Engineering Histories, v. 2, 1989) by William R. Brice.

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