



James Hansen

JOHN C. CALHOUN JR.

1917–2012

Elected in 1985

“For outstanding contributions to the art and science of petroleum recovery, to the development of engineering education, and to the use and understanding of engineering in the public arena.”

BY AKHIL DATTA-GUPTA

On November 29, 2012, JOHN C. CALHOUN JR. passed away peacefully at his Texarkana home with his wife of 71 years and family. He was 95.

Born March 21, 1917, in Betula, Pennsylvania, the fifth child of John C. and Mattie Rowe Calhoun, he grew up with seven siblings, and worked with them to support the family grocery store. He graduated valedictorian of his high school and attended Pennsylvania State University, where he earned a BS in 1937 and a master’s in 1941, both in petroleum engineering. While there he met fellow student Ruth Elizabeth Huston and they married in June 1941. In 1946 he received his doctorate in petroleum and natural gas engineering from Penn State—one of the first three petroleum engineers in the United States.

That year he began his career in engineering education at the University of Oklahoma as an associate professor, and by 1950 he was named professor and chair of the School of Petroleum Engineering. In 1950 he returned to Penn State as head of the Department of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

From 1955 to 1987 he served Texas A&M University in various capacities: dean of engineering, director of the Texas Engineering Experiment Station and of the Texas Engineering Extension Service, dean of geosciences, and vice president for academic affairs. He also served the A&M system as

executive vice chancellor for programs and deputy chancellor for engineering. Upon retirement he was honored with the designations Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Petroleum Engineering and Deputy Chancellor for Engineering Emeritus. Texas A&M President R. Bowen Loftin described his work as “instrumental in helping lay the groundwork for enhancement of the academic and related developments that made possible Texas A&M as we know it today.”

Inducted into the National Academy of Engineering in 1985, Dr. Calhoun considered himself a “resource specialist” and routinely consulted with the federal government on the nation’s marine resources. In 1963–1965 he was assistant and science advisor to the US Secretary of the Interior and acting director of the Office of Water Resources Research. He chaired the National Academy of Sciences Committee on Oceanography (1967–1970) and Ocean Affairs Board (1970–1973), and served on a number of NAS/NAE panels related to energy, the environment, and natural resources. He was a presidential appointee to the National Advisory Committee for the Oceans and Atmosphere (1972) and a member of the Advisory Committee on Mining and Mineral Resources Research, Department of the Interior (1987–1995).

Dr. Calhoun was president of the Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE; 1964) and received its DeGloyer Distinguished Service Medal (1982) as well as the Anthony F. Lucas Gold Medal (1997), the highest SPE technical award. He was president of the American Society for Engineering Education (1974) and in 1993 received the ASEE Centennial Medallion. He was designated an honorary member of both ASEE (1978) and the American Institute of Mining, Metallurgical and Petroleum Engineers (1976).

He authored over 150 technical papers and reports as well as one of the earliest and most influential textbooks on *Fundamentals of Reservoir Engineering* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1976). On various aspects of oil and gas reservoir engineering, his work set standards that are still widely practiced by petroleum engineers worldwide.

Throughout his life, Dr. Calhoun joyfully shared with others not only his love of learning but also his gift of music. He took special delight in the power of words, especially those expressed in song. He knew that life is lacking “without a song,” and he wrote many of his own that he dedicated to his four much-loved granddaughters. He leaves all who knew him with treasured memories of melodies rendered in his beautiful baritone.

His daughters remember an address he delivered at a high school commencement, with his theme taken from the Rodgers and Hammerstein lyric: “You gotta have a dream. If you don’t have a dream, how you gonna have a dream come true?” Dr. Calhoun reminded the graduates that dreaming “comes from an optimistic spirit.” These words perfectly capture the beliefs and heart of this father, grandfather, and educator who devoted his life to family and to others.

Dr. Calhoun was preceded in death by his son, John Huston, his seven brothers and sisters, and his parents. He is survived by three daughters and their spouses: Emily Calhoun and Robert Kerr of Boulder; Mary Beth and Larry Towles of Maryville, TN; and Ruth Ellen and David Whitt, of Texarkana, TX; four granddaughters and their spouses; and ten great-grandchildren. His wife and lifelong intellectual partner, Ruth, survived him by six months, passing away June 1, 2013.