

Presentation of the Distinguished Public Service Medal for 1993 to Paul H. Ribbe

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Paul H. Ribbe's life as a scientist and moralist has required extraordinary personal commitment to several communities of interests, a sustained high level of energy, and a great concern for the public good. He is best known as a professor of mineralogy at Virginia Tech, where he has taught for most of his career. Probably not known to many of you is that he was a founder of the nondenominational Blacksburg Christian Fellowship, where he has served as an elder with the full range of pastoral responsibilities for 25 years. Although he is a gentleman of many parts, today I will speak only of his distinguished service to the Mineralogical Society of America and especially of his contributions that facilitate the work of the broader scientific community, including scientists, librarians, and educators.

Paul's efforts on behalf of our Society have been no less than heroic. He has served the Society in elected offices, most notably as president in 1987. He has also served on many committees, most importantly those on short courses and management. He first became involved with short courses in 1965 for the American Geological Institute. He is now in his 15th year as MSA's indefatigable editor of the *Reviews in Mineralogy* series, with a 28th volume and more than 130,000 copies in print, not counting the Russian and Chinese translations. This task has included being the principal editor for six volumes and a coeditor for another. He has written 22 chapters in the various volumes, and been copy editor for 25 volumes. More important, he has been a counselor for the conveners of the short courses for which most of the volumes were prepared. The *Reviews* series authoritatively elucidates complex mineralogical, petrological, and crystallographic topics and, by facilitating communication and the education of scientists, makes possible the rapid development of new research fields. Revenues generated by sales, even at bargain prices, have supported the short courses and some of the publication costs of the *American Mineralogist*. As if all this were not enough, Paul has recently undertaken the editing and preparation of the Society's new series, *Monographs*. There is no doubt in my mind that few have ever served this Society so well. For the extent to which *Reviews in Mineralogy* has advanced our science and the work of all who make use of it, from industrial ceramist to public health scientist, Paul Ribbe deserves much of the credit.

Paul produced a remarkable series of MSA presidential addresses during and shortly after his term in office. It is much easier for me to discuss these now than it would have been during my year as president, which immediately followed his. At that time, I had many concerns for

our Society about what actions our sister societies and various publishers might undertake in response to his carefully reasoned and critical assessments of how well serials fulfill their stated purposes in the advancement of science and technology and in education. Much of the incentive for Paul's analysis of publications in mineralogical journals was the recognition that perpetual growth for any science is unlikely and that this realization should force us to confront questions about our true role in society. When one considers Paul's thinking as a moralist about why people do what they do, it was not surprising that he wanted to know if authors have any concerns other than their own interests when they choose a journal for their papers. Do they care at all how libraries (and university officials and taxpayers) will cope with the ever-increasing costs of journals? Do authors even care about circulation figures and the widest availability of their results? Paul understood that within the concept of journal quality there are ethical and moral dimensions, along with cost effectiveness and citation impact, to be considered. He spelled out the responsibility that authors should take to utilize nonprofit journals, and he explained that faculties have to seek quality rather than quantity in promotion considerations. In 1989 Paul made some midcourse corrections in his assessment of mineralogy-petrology journals as better data became available. At the request of other geological specialty groups, he since has extended his analyses to serials covering geology, paleontology, and geosciences. He has been a frequent participant in panels of librarians, publishers, and other information specialists discussing how to cope financially with the ever-increasing flood of publications. He also has published his work for serials librarians and for geoscience information specialists. One can be certain that when push comes to shove in hard-pressed library committees these days, the methodology he devised and the conclusions he reached are factored heavily into their decisions. One hopes that authors and faculty committee members are also getting the message.

In the second half of his presidential assessment of rewards, prestige, and banishment in geological research, Paul made a careful assessment of the funding of basic research in American academic departments of Earth science. Using authoritative data on the scholarly quality of departments, he evaluated figures supplied by program directors for the NSF's Earth Science Division, along with an exhaustive compilation of the institutional affiliations of the authors of published geological literature. He then made several specific recommendations about how research funds ought to be distributed. Although they are

a response to Jesus' Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25: 14–30), in retrospect some of these suggestions may have had the flair of Robin Hood. Nevertheless they still make valuable occasional reading for NSF panelists and others who grant research funds.

President Navrotsky, I take great personal pleasure in

presenting to you an industrious and faithful servant of both God and humanity, a keen and helpful observer of what makes each of us, our publishers, and our Society work to achieve our stated purposes, to receive our Distinguished Public Service Medal.