Science Societies

In memoriam

By Peter W. Birkeland

June 20, 2022



Peter W. Birkeland



Peter W. Birkeland

Peter Wessel Birkeland, a 40-year member of ASA and SSSA, died of natural causes in Boulder, CO on 25 Jan. 2022. He was born in 1934. He completed a Ph.D. in Geology from Stanford University in 1961. In his first academic position, he taught geomorphology to soil science students at the University of California–Berkeley. In 1967, he took a position in at the University of Colorado–Boulder where he taught and conducted research in soils and Quaternary geology until retirement in 1997.

A key innovation in his research came from his Berkeley colleague Hans Jenny, the eminent pedologist who framed the well-known "equation" for soil formation as a function of five factors: climate, organisms, relief, parent material, and time, famously expressed as "S = f(cl, o, r, p, t)." Dr. Birkeland recast the "clorpt" approach to establish a research paradigm for addressing questions regarding soil–landscape relationships. The result was publication of *Pedology, Weathering, and Geomorphological Research* (1974), which systematized the use of soils in understanding stratigraphy, landforms age, landscape evolution, and paleoclimate. His work evolved into a global view of soil genesis and landscape evolution that inspired professionals and students around the world. The resulting data and interpretations were synthesized in 1984 and 1999 editions of his book, retitled *Soils and Geomorphology*. It earned Birkeland the Kirk Bryan Award (Quaternary Geology and Geomorphology Division of the Geological Society of America) for the most significant publication in the preceding four years. He also won Distinguished

Career Awards from both the Quaternary Geology and Geomorphology Division and the American Quaternary Association.

Few faculty members of any generation had as profound an effect on their students as has Dr. Birkeland. He held high standards for academic performance and scientific rigor and took special interest and pride in the development of his graduate students as budding scientists and as people. He taught by example how to balance family and profession, research and teaching, and seriousness and fun. We are all better professionals and better people as a result. A full professional memorial with bibliography is available online at **https://bit.ly/3x3397U**.

—Prepared by Vance T. Holliday, University of Arizona

John Joseph Meisinger



John Joseph Meisinger

John Joseph Meisinger, a member of ASA and SSSA for 49 years, passed away surrounded by loved ones on 8 Nov. 2021 after experiencing a stroke while conducting research at the Agricultural Research Center in Beltsville, MD.

He was the son of John Julian Meisinger and Catherine Groesch Meisinger of Naperville, IL, now deceased. He is survived by two sisters, Ann Kuhn and Rose Cowan, and his wife, Julianne Schlachter Meisinger.

Meisinger graduated from Naperville High School in 1963 before attending Iowa State

University where he majored in Agriculture. He served as an officer in the United States Coast Guard and was stationed in St. Louis, MO and Wilmington, NC. He went on to earn his master's and doctorate degrees from Cornell University in Agronomy. He began his career with the USDA in 1975, kicking off a 45+ year career as a research scientist and mentor for many.

In 1966, he met and married Julie, his wife of 55 years. Together they raised three daughters in Columbia, MD: Amy Ann Meisinger (Robert Barrett), Faith Elizabeth Meisinger-Petit (Fritz Petit), and Hope Catherine Meisinger. He loved his four grandchildren and enjoyed being outdoors, especially spending time with his dogs over the years. He was an avid softball player and coached a number of his daughters' teams. In retirement, he enjoyed Sudoku puzzles, hikes, feeding the birds, and continuing his research in Beltsville.

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