

JIMMIE PIGG, AREA CONSERVATIONIST & TEACHER REMEMBERED

“You wouldn't think being up to your neck in ice water was very much fun, but he made it fun,” Tammy Patton said of the man who taught her a love for science. Patton, who teaches science at Moore High School, describes Jimmie Pigg, an award-winning teacher and conservationist, as innovative and caring. Jimmie died February 24, but his influence on the lives of those who knew him will not fade, his friends, family, and former students say (1).

“As a sophomore, I can remember getting up at five in the morning to stand in ice water,” Patton said. “He used to take us on camping trips and we'd string nets across a river to study the fish. He'd stand there, with a pancake rolled-up in one hand, talking about the fish we'd caught. He called them ‘feesh.’” Patton's voice betrays the emotion she feels for the man who played an important role in her career and her life. “He was a great influence on my decision to be a teacher,” she said. “He had a great heart. He would spend his own money to help students with projects. He came to my wedding and sent cards when my children were born (1).”

Jimmie's generosity didn't end when he retired from the Moore School District in 1987. “He was very active, even in retirement,” Patton said. “He helped find resources for students this year.” Patton said, “Mr. Pigg encouraged students to use their knowledge by entering the science fair contests he loved.” But, “He would tell us, ‘I'm proud of you even if you don't win (1).’”

Jimmie was born August 28, 1930, in Bartlesville. He studied chemistry and French at Bartlesville Junior College for one year before attending Oklahoma A&M College, where he earned a bachelor of science degree in biology and health and physical education in 1953. He earned his masters of science from the same university in 1962 (2).

He began a 34-year teaching career in 1953 at Greenfield, Oklahoma, where he was a science teacher and the coach for all junior high and high school sports. From 1954 through 1956 he was the science chairman and football and baseball coach at Durant High School. He was Quinton High School's athletic director and science teacher from 1956 through 1959, also coaching boys and girls sports. For the next ten years, he was the science chairman at Pauls Valley High School where he taught biology and chemistry. He also coached football and the boys basketball and track teams. In 1969, he went to Moore High School and served as science coordinator until his retirement from classroom teaching in 1987. After his retirement, he was elected to the Moore Board of Education, serving from 1988 to 1997.

A member of the Oklahoma Academy of Science since 1964, Jimmie served on the executive council for 12 years as section chairs for biological science, wildlife conservation, and science education. He was the director of the Oklahoma Junior Academy of Science from 1982-1992. OJAS provides a means for middle, junior, and high school students to follow their interests in the sciences with original research projects. Jimmie was instrumental in raising funds from business, industry, and governmental agencies to conduct workshops for students and teachers on how to prepare scientific research papers, to provide regional and statewide forums for students to present their research findings, and to provide sub-



*Jimmie Pigg and unidentified students,
Lake Murray, OAS, Spring Meeting, 1991*

stantial awards to outstanding student participants. Near the end of his term as OJAS director in 1990 the Academy awarded him an outstanding service award for sixteen years of steadfast pursuit of its objectives. Jimmie was a prodigious author of scientific articles in the *Proceedings of the Oklahoma Academy of Science*. At last count he authored or co-authored 31 articles in *POAS*, including two in this volume, as well as more than 27 in other scientific journals (3).

Jimmie began working for the State of Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality in 1974 as a part-time research biologist. During his tenure, he worked as the biomonitoring director and was a senior environmental specialist. His research provided valuable information on the state's lakes and streams. For 19 years, Jimmie was involved in the Biotrend Monitoring Program and was also an expert on the biology of various fish, from the popular crappie to the seldom seen speckled chub. He prepared many reports on the changes in Oklahoma's waterways and compiled the only data on several rare and endangered species (3). Michael Dean, with the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality, said, "He compiled volumes of information in the form of pictures, maps, charts and reports on the status of fish in Oklahoma. He never missed an opportunity to share his knowledge of Oklahoma's fish population and spent thousands of hours answering questions and encouraging the protection of Oklahoma's outdoors" (1). He was honored as Conservationist of the Year in 1996 by the Oklahoma Wildlife Federation.

This valued member of the Academy was taken from us by a massive coronary infarction at the international Airport in Memphis, Tennessee, on February 24. He was on his way to the midyear meeting of the Southern Division of the American Fisheries Society in Chattanooga, where he was to present a paper on fisheries. Jimmie was one of Oklahoma's best-known ichthyologists. At the time of his death, he was an ichthyologist for the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality

Jimmie's death marked the loss of a good man and a valuable state resource, Mark S. Coleman, executive director of the DEQ, said in a prepared statement. "Jimmie Pigg was my friend, and I will miss him. But much more than that, a living expert on Oklahoma's fish and lakes is gone and we will probably never be able to replace the expertise that Jimmie brought to the state of Oklahoma," Coleman wrote (1).

Robert Gibbs was one of Jimmie's students and later one of his employees at the environmental agency. "He caused students to raise the bar of excellence and do more than they thought they could," Gibbs said. "Every day I was with him I learned something new. He could talk about anything." Gibbs said it was because of Jimmie that he, too, eventually became a teacher at Moore High School. He said the lessons Jimmie taught him led him to his work in the Oklahoma City Zoo's education department (1).

Pigg's son, Phillip, said his father was very dedicated to teaching and to the state's environment. "He won all kinds of environmental awards, but the award he was proudest of was the outstanding science teacher award," Phillip Pigg said. The students of Moore High School nominated Jimmie for the Presidential Award of Excellence in Science and Mathematics Teaching in 1983. President Ronald Reagan presented Jimmie with the award on October 19, 1983, in Washington, D.C. Phillip said that the award meant so much to his father because he had been nominated by his students and the Oklahoma Academy of Science (1).

"He was a good teacher," said Gene Burr, Moore High School principal and longtime friend of Jimmie's. "He worked really well with kids. He was a very strong advocate of science and the science program in the Moore district. He was an advocate of students, an excellent person and teacher." Jimmie leaves behind a legacy of teaching and research that admirers like Tammy Patton, Robert Gibbs, Michael Dean, Mark Coleman, Gene Burr, and the many OAS members who knew him know that will be hard to emulate (1).

*Edward N. Nelson,
Executive Secretary - Treasurer*

1. Wedel S, Daily Oklahoman 05 March 1999.

2. Leach FR: Jimmie Pigg: OAS Tenure Service Award 1990. Proc Okla Acad Sci 1991; 71:61-62.

3. [Anonymous] Daily Oklahoman 26 April 1996.