

A.F. Chestnut - Honored Life Member

By: Jenny Shinn



Alphonse (Al) F. Chestnut was born in Stoughton, Massachusetts on November 20, 1917 to parents of Lithuanian descent. The first in his family to go to college, he graduated from the College of William and Mary in 1941, where he played basketball and football as an All-American, which led to his later induction into the Athletic Hall of Fame. He worked summers for the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Chesapeake Corp. of Virginia as an oyster biologist. He remained at W&M after graduation to coach freshman football, but soon received the offer of a graduate assistantship at Rutgers University, where he received his MS (1943) and PhD (1949) in zoology. He was a research associate at the Rutgers Oyster Research Laboratory, and then moved to The University of North Carolina Institute of Marine Sciences in Morehead City where he ultimately served as director from 1955-1980. During this time, he was also a professor of zoology. He served North Carolina on its Marine Fisheries Commission until 1985 and its Marine Science Council until 1989. He was active in regional fisheries management as well, serving for an extended period on the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and on the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council.

Chestnut held nearly every position on the executive board of the National Shellfisheries Association at one time or another including, Secretary, Treasurer, Vice-president, and finally, President from 1953-1955. Chestnut was awarded an Honored Life Member to NSA in 1980. Involved in many other professional activities, he was also on the Editorial Board of Chesapeake Science, 1960-61. He was the host of the first AERS meeting in 1949 in Beaufort, NC, and a member of the AERS Board as Secretary-Treasurer from 1952-53. He was awarded Honorary Membership in 1981, and was a featured speaker at the AERS 50th Anniversary. Chestnut was a guest lecturer at seven colleges and universities in North Carolina and Mississippi, including Belhaven University, where his son would become a tenured professor many years later.

I had the pleasure of speaking with Chestnut's son, Al, to gather personal details about his father for this biography. Chestnut was married to his wife, Janet Wood Chestnut for 58 years and had three sons. Al, who followed in his Dad's footsteps as a biology professor, emphasized the strong role his father played in his community. He was chairman of both the Morehead City School Board (1955-1960) and Carteret County Board of Education (1961-1966) in Morehead City, NC. Furthermore, Chestnut was awarded an Outstanding Citizen Award by the N.C. Education Association in 1968. He was a devoted husband, father, and active member of his church serving as an elder for many years. He died April 18, 2001 at the age of 83.

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