

MEMORIAL TO HALBERT PLEASANT BYBEE

Halbert Pleasant Bybee died at his home in Austin, Texas on March 30, 1957, in his sixty-ninth year. He had been in poor health since he suffered a heart attack in the spring of 1952. He is survived by his wife, Ruth Woolery Bybee, three sons and one daughter, and by eight grandchildren. Two of the sons, Halbert H. Bybee and Robert W. Bybee, and the daughter, Martha Ellen Bybee, have followed their father in the geologic profession and are with major oil companies. The youngest son, Wilbur C. Bybee, is associated with the Woolery Stone Company in Bloomington, Indiana.

Halbert Pleasant Bybee, known as Hal to his associates and as Doc to his students, was, with the exception of a four-year period in the late "twenties", a member of the staff of The University of Texas for more than 40 years. To most of his students he was and will remain the personification of the great teacher. His contributions in other fields were substantial, but his influence for good in the lives of his students is a monument to his sterling character, which far outweighs his other accomplishments. Hosts of his students became life-long friends, and many continued to rely upon Dr. Bybee for advice and counsel long after graduation.

Hal was born on a farm near Rochester, Indiana on January 7, 1888, the only son of William Lawson and Martha Kessler Bybee. His early years on the farm were typical of farm life in the middle west near the turn of the century. He attended the Shellbark Grade School, a one-room

country school near his home, and Talma High School, a small community high school about one mile from the farm. After graduating from high school, he entered Rochester College, seven miles from his farm home, and in 1908 received a B. S. degree. He developed an interest in geology as a boy, because the abundance of gravel and boulders in the hilly, glaciated area in which he lived excited his curiosity. In later years he said that he studied geology in order to find an explanation for these deposits. It seems likely that he received some introduction to geology in a science course taught by Mr. Grover C. Mance at Rochester College, for when he entered Indiana University he knew that he wanted to major in geology. While at Rochester College Hal played as center on the basketball team which attained considerable fame in that section of the state. With a powerful frame and standing over six feet high, Hal was one of the star players on the team. He maintained an active interest in athletics throughout his life and regularly attended most of the football, basketball, and baseball games, as well as track events, at The University of Texas.

On graduation from Rochester College in 1908, Hal, then twenty years of age, became principal of a rural high school (Richland Center Township High School) for a year. In the fall of 1909 he entered Indiana University but, for financial reasons, left school at the end of the year to become instructor in science at Clinton College, Clinton, Kentucky. He returned to Indiana University in the fall of 1911 and received a B. A. degree in June, 1912. He continued in the graduate school at Indiana, serving as a fellow in geology, and received an M. A. degree in 1913 and the Ph. D. in 1915. Most of his training in geology

at Indiana University was under Dr. E. R. Cummins and Dr. J. W. Beede. Hal was devoted to both men, and they were life-long friends. Later, he was again associated with Dr. Beede, who joined the staff of the Bureau of Economic Geology of The University of Texas while Hal was teaching in the Department of Geology. When Hal left the University to work for an oil company in West Texas, it was the same company which had employed Dr. Beede a year or so earlier.

The year of 1914 was epochal for Hal; it marked his first connection with The University of Texas, and it was the year in which he was married. In January, 1914, Hal accepted an instructorship in geology at The University of Texas. At that time the Department of Geology at The University of Texas had a faculty of one professor and three instructors and an enrollment of 230 students in a freshman course and about a dozen students taking advanced courses. It was the beginning of an association which was to last for the remainder of his life and in which he played an important role in developing one of the major geology departments in the Nation. In the summer of 1914 Hal returned to Indiana to complete the requirements for his doctorate. His dissertation, which was "The Flood of 1913 in the Lower White River Region, Indiana", was completed during the following winter, and he was awarded the Ph. D. degree in June, 1915. On September 1, 1914, Hal married Ruth Woolery, a classmate at Indiana University, who received her B. A. degree in the same class with Hal in 1912. Ruth, who was a Phi Beta Kappa student, continued her studies in botany and was awarded an M. A. degree in 1914. However, she preferred married life to a teaching position offered by Wellesley College. Their married life was a happy one and was an inspiring model

to their many friends. Her calm, strong character, sympathetic understanding and fondness of young people made them an ideal team.

Although invited to return to The University of Texas in the fall of 1914, Hal chose to accept an offer as instructor in geology at Washington University, St. Louis, in order to be closer to his home and the home of his recent bride. However, a marked increase in enrollment in geology at The University of Texas caused Dr. F. W. Simonds, Chairman of the Department, to offer Hal inducements to return to Texas. Fortunately he was able to obtain a release from Washington University, and in November, 1914, he returned to Austin. He was promoted to Adjunct Professor in 1916 and to Associate Professor in 1920.

In his early teaching at Texas, Hal was concerned with beginning geology, mineralogy, and other basic courses. He was most interested in applied geology and insisted that his students get into the field as much as possible. To him the real value of geology was its use in the field. Although summer field camps were then being conducted by a few universities, the practice was not general. Bybee felt that students who were going to use geology as a profession must have field training. Overcoming some opposition, he inaugurated the first summer field camp in geology at The University of Texas in 1917. The first camp, as well as many subsequent ones, was held in the Llano region west of Austin, where a wide range of geologic features are to be found. Except for 1918, when due to World War I no camp was held, summer camps have been conducted continuously by the Department of Geology since that time. From the 11 boys, largely sophomores, who attended the first camp in 1917, the number has now grown until more than 200 students are enrolled in field courses each summer.

Although oil had been produced in Texas in some quantity since the discovery of Spindletop at the turn of the century, there was little or no application of geology to the search for petroleum in the Southwest until about 1912-14. As the oil industry mushroomed following World War I, there was a demand for geologists, and The University of Texas was one of the few schools in the nation where students were being trained to enter the petroleum industry. Dr. Bybee was on the scene and fully aware of the role geology could play in the oil industry, and he saw the opportunity which it presented. In 1916 he organized and taught a course in petroleum geology, certainly among the first of such courses to be taught in this country. Graduates of The University of Texas were soon in demand by the petroleum industry, and many attained high positions with major oil companies and in other branches of the industry.

Dr. Bybee was at his best in individual instruction in the field. The writer, as a student in the summer field camp of 1919--the second one given by Dr. Bybee--and later as a young instructor assisting Dr. Bybee on the summer field camp of 1924, can speak from personal experience about this phase of his work. Dr. Bybee would show the students by example how to interpret the complicated geologic features and then assign each student a problem and let him solve it in his own way. He insisted that the simplest explanation was the preferred one, and he would keep a student on the problem until he arrived at the proper solution. Living with the students under the hardships of camp life and asking no favor for himself, he was just one of them, and the students of his summer field courses developed the greatest admiration and affection for him. Mrs. Bybee frequently went on the summer field camps and supervised the preparation of the food. She came to know the ~~the~~ boys almost as well as Dr.

Bybee, and in later years when these students returned to Austin with their children, they were always warmly greeted in the Bybee's home.

Dr. Bybee's summer activities, when not teaching the field course, were in petroleum geology. During the summers of 1915 and 1916 he worked for the Bureau of Economic Geology on the Thrall Oil Field. He was again on the Bureau staff during the summer of 1925 when he prepared a report on the Lytton Spring Oil Field. During the summer of 1918 and 1920 he was with the Oklahoma Geological Survey working on oil fields in that state.

Dr. Bybee was fond of young people and of teaching, but university salaries were low, and there was the temptation to accept a better-paying position with an oil company. In August, 1925, he resigned from The University of Texas to accept a position as geologist for the Dixie Oil Company at San Angelo, Texas. The unfortunate drowning of his oldest son, Henry, age 10, in the Y. M. C. A. pool in June, 1925, was undoubtedly a contributing factor in his decision to leave Austin. He approached his new work as an oil company geologist with the same enthusiasm which had made his summer field camps and his classes at the University so successful. Practical, straightforward, and frank to the point that occasionally he seemed blunt, he was soon recognized as a leader among the geologists of West Texas. He helped organize the West Texas Geological Society and served as its president in 1927. During their eleven years in San Angelo, as was true wherever they lived, Dr. and Mrs. Bybee were active in church work as well as in the various school and civic organizations.

The increasing oil activity in West Texas, where The University of Texas had 2,000,000 acres of land, made it apparent to the Regents that the University would have to set up an organization to supervise its

interests. Accordingly, the Legislature created the Board for Lease of University Lands and in March 1929, authorized an organization to be known as University Lands to collect geologic data and to advise the Board concerning lands to be offered for lease. On June 15, 1929, Dr. Bybee was appointed the first Geologist-in-charge of University Lands, a position he held until ill health forced him to give it up in 1954. In organizing the work of the office, which he established at San Angelo, it was Dr. Bybee's aim to protect the interests of the University and also to maintain the cooperation of the oil companies interested in developing University Lands. Many of the policies adopted by the Board for Lease of University Lands were based on Dr. Bybee's recommendations; and, further, he was able to administer the policies established by the Board to the complete satisfaction of all concerned. The magnitude of the job can better be appreciated if it is recalled that from 1929 to 1957 more than \$200,000,000 was added to the Permanent Fund of The University of Texas from oil and gas rentals, bonuses, and royalties.

In the fall of 1936 Dr. Bybee returned to the faculty of the Department of Geology as Professor of Geology while continuing to direct the work of the University Lands. He remained in this dual capacity until ill health forced him to relinquish active direction of the University Lands in 1954, but he continued as a Consultant to that organization and Professor in the Department until his death.

He served as Chairman of the Department of Geology from 1937 to 1941 and thereafter had an important role in all departmental as well as University affairs. During the war years, when the younger staff members were away, he took over a variety of courses, teaching at various times courses in historical geology, structural geology, subsurface

geology, and regional geology of the United States. With the emphasis on graduate work which followed the War, Dr. Bybee instituted a method of group supervision of Master's candidates who were working on field problems in the Trans-Pecos region--a program which has been continued with marked success up to the present time. As was characteristic of Dr. Bybee, he would frequently get a course or a program started and then turn it over to one of the younger persons on the staff. His satisfaction came in the success of the work, and no thought of personal glory ever entered his mind. He derived a great deal of satisfaction in helping the younger members of the staff to progress, and he never missed an opportunity to promote their interests with the administrative officials. Their advancement was of more concern to him than his own.

Although Dr. Bybee was interested in research, he found little time to devote to it. He was more likely to pass his ideas on to his students and encourage and assist them to work out problems. In a memorial to Dr. Bybee in the Bulletin of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists, L. T. Barrow (B. A. '21, M. A. '22), one of Dr. Bybee's students and life-long friend says:

"He would have enjoyed engaging in considerable research, but he placed people ahead of geology, and he thought his most important duty lay in the development of students. Much of the time he might have spent in geological research was devoted to listening, advising and helping students, associates, friends and even strangers. His greatest contributions to geology have and will come from the hundreds of geologists he trained and other geologists who came under his influence."

In the course of his life, honors and recognition came to Dr. Bybee from many sources. He became a member of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists in 1919, only two years after its founding. He took a great interest in the organization and rarely missed a meeting. On

taught map reading, use of aerial photographs, and methods of travel by night without light. He was an active member of the University Club, and in later years it was his custom to stop by the club in the late afternoon for a cup of coffee, perhaps a game of billiards, and a visit with old friends.

Dr. Bybee was a deeply religious man and one whose life was governed by his religious convictions. He was a deacon of the Baptist Church for over forty years and active in many church activities. His pastor, the Rev. Blake Smith, in a brief biographical sketch of Dr. and Mrs. Bybee in the University Baptist News of May 5, 1956, says in part:

"Dr. Bybee's knowledge of the earth, which he has got from science, has deepened and enriched his faith in God. Many times I have sent to him students who were troubled by the apparent conflict between science and religion. They always received a friendly, understanding hearing, and from his strong faith in God, their faith was renewed and strengthened."

Shortly after his death the "Hal P. Bybee Memorial Fund" was established to be administered as an integral part of the Geology Foundation of The University of Texas. Income from this Fund is dedicated for expenses of faculty members who attend scientific meetings and for other faculty needs for which no other funds are available. This Fund will fill a need which Dr. Bybee had long recognized and for which he had vainly sought a solution.

Scores of Dr. Bybee's former students sent tributes of which that by E. A. Wendlandt (B. A. '24) is typical:

As a man, as well as a teacher, Doc commanded the love and respect of all of his students. His words of encouragement and his knowledge of and enthusiasm for geology represented the role of the professional geologist in all of its finest

aspects. To me, he was considerably different from the average professor in that during all his classes, as well as on field trips, he always appeared to be "one of the group".

"In my contacts with Doc I found that he was a man of deep religious convictions, and his genuine love for his family had a definite influence on all with whom he came in contact. I believe that he can be compared, at least to some degree, with Will Rogers in that, regardless of the person, he could always recognize the good qualities of the individual. I believe that those whom Doc taught and who knew him through the years will feel as I do that his teaching and influence will continue to live throughout the years."

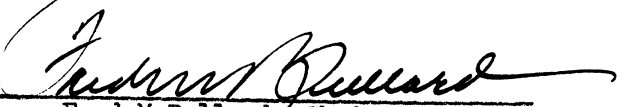
Dr. Bybee's pioneer work in the development of geology at The University of Texas and his influence and inspiration on the lives of his students is a monument of achievement which will endure and of which any man might well be proud.

Memorial Resolutions Committee

C.C.Colvert

Arno Nowotny

Ben C.Tharp



Fred M.Bullard, Chairman

January 6, 1958

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