

[Speech by Hugh D. Miser, given at the 800th meeting of the Geological Society of Washington, April 8, 1959. Scanned from a typewritten copy in the GSW archives.]

## OUR SOCIETY - RETROSPECT AND PROSPERITY

by  
HUGH D. MISER

This the 800th meeting is another epochal milestone in the history of the Geological Society of Washington.

The Society was founded in 1893 with 109 members; it is now 66 years old. These years have witnessed the passing of all the founders, the last, T. W. Stanton. Also they have witnessed the acceptance of geology in peace and in war as an essential part of our civilization.

The history of our society – its 799 earlier meetings and its other activities – constitute a rich heritage to which we may point proudly. The name of the society bears the name of our Nation's capital which was named for the father of our country, George Washington.

The first president was C. D. Walcott, the third Director of the U. S. Geological Survey. The first speaker at the first meeting was Major John Wesley Powell, a remarkable, resourceful leader, pioneer, and explorer, and the second Director of the Geological Survey. This auditorium in which our meetings are held bears his name. The fame of his thrilling Colorado River expedition in 1869 was world wide; it reached me at Pea Ridge, Arkansas, in 1901 when I began the study of geology in high school. Brief mention and scenes of his expedition were given in the textbook I studied, James D. Dana's, "The Geological Story." I hold in my hand this textbook and also my notebook of high school days.

Many members of the society are employees of the U. S. Geological Survey; also, this has been true of the past. But since the early days, the ratio of Survey to non-Survey members has become smaller because the use of geology has expanded to numerous other governmental agencies and has grown in educational institutions and commercial activities in the Washington area. The members who were enrolled as founders at the first regular meeting on March 8, 1893, were 108 men and 1 woman. Florence Bascom, the first American woman to receive a doctorate in geology, was elected to membership the next month, April 26, 1893. The present roll of members contains the names of 100 women. The year 1958 was epoch making; the society then made insurance possible for its members and the membership roll has mounted by the addition of several hundred names. So, may we observe that the society's future seems to be firmly insured.

The meetings have displayed a wide range of human interest-- friendly association, inspiration, and the announcement and discussion of new knowledge and new conclusions. The eulogies of deceased members are occasions of respect and tribute to the memories of coworkers and friends. I seem to recall that humor has enlivened some meetings dating back to 1938. In that year, I told stories of my Uncle George and my home town and I interrupted my presidential address with the proud announcement of the birth, 24 hours earlier, of a grandson.

Geology is traditional in the families of many of our members. Doubtless, some scientific

problems are discussed, clarified, and resolved across the breakfast table in the morning and around the dinner table in the evening. An incomplete count shows that the number of living members in families of two or more geologists exceeds 120.

Two successive generations of geologists are represented in the following families: Bell, Berman, Bowles, Bradley, Byerly, Cerkel, Chamberlin, Conant, Eckel, Elias, Heroy, Horton, Kinkel, Larsen, Leith, Lovering, Marble, Matson, Miller, Milton, Reed, Ross, Stringfield, Sears, Swartz, Weissenborn, Willis.

The husband-and-wife couples both of whom are geologists exceed 40. Those living in the Washington area include:

Harlan and Wenonah Bergquist  
Alfred and Caroline Bush  
Henry (III) and Ruth Bell  
Arthur and Josephine Cooper  
Louis and Georgianna Conant  
Anita and Jack Epstein  
Howard and Eloise Evans  
Janice and James Jolly  
Ken and Kathryn Lohman  
Elaine and Robert Luedke  
Adelaide Marble (John P. Marble deceased)  
Mary and Roger Miller  
Sherman and Virginia Neuschel  
Raymond and Helen Nace  
William and Beth Overstreet  
Mary C. Rabbitt (John C. Rabbitt deceased)  
Bryan and Catherine Skinner  
George and Anna Stose  
Peter and Marty Toulmin  
Ellen and James Trumbull  
Alice and Albert Weeks  
Walter and Dorothy West

Families in which there are two or more brothers and families in which there is a brother and a sister include: Baker, Duncan, Henbest, Hendricks, Heyl, King, Leopold, Lohman, Singewald, Swartz, Wright.

The faithful devotion of these families to the science is clear testimony to the high public esteem of geologists and to the significant contribution they are making to the culture and welfare of mankind. This testimony is also demonstrated by the noble lifetime service of some 30,000 other American geologists.

The opportunities of geologists in the future will increase. They have the responsibility to appraise our mineral and water resources; they must join in the conservation of these resources; also through discovery and research they will supplement, when necessary, our known usable

resources with new usable materials. Our geologists have another responsibility, namely the inspiration and training of our youth in scout work, in high schools, and in colleges and universities. Through competent and inspirational instruction and readable books, our most talented boys and girls, and young men and women, should be fired with enthusiasm to study geology and excel the present generation in knowledge and resourcefulness. I am happy and gratified that the present college graduates are equipped with a better education than I was 50 years ago.

The present generation of geologists and each succeeding generation will not exhaust mankind's geologic problems. To me, it seems that each problem I have worked on during the past 50 years is now receiving the scrutiny of many geologists - in fact too many for me to count. We should be philosophical about the increasing number of younger geologists who work on the things we do. If you and I of the present generation should solve all problems, the next generation of geologists would go hungry. I am optimistic about the future of geology and I estimate that the number of American geologists will increase more than 100 per cent by the year 2000.

The future years of our society will witness greater and more brilliant advances than those of the past. These advances doubtless will be achieved by a continuation of the increasing trend in joint endeavors. After my experience with the preparation of two editions of the Oklahoma geologic map, one printed in 1926 and the other in 1954, and after my experience with other cooperative studies, I firmly believe that the geologic mapping of the United States can be tremendously accelerated by responsible coordinated efforts of governmental geological surveys, universities, and colleges. Graduate students are eager to receive competent training in geologic mapping. An accelerated mapping program would lead to a tremendous volume of detailed mapping. This detailed mapping would be available for the compilation of 1:250,000-scale geologic maps which are now being introduced in response to great public demand.

I venture to predict that geologic mapping on a scale of 1:250,000 and of larger scales will cover the 50 States before the 1,500th meeting of this geological society. Also I venture to prophesy that this society will witness a geologic map of the moon before we reach the 1,000th meeting of the society. Geologic maps of Venus and Mars are expected to follow later. Word of the first proposed trip to the moon came to me from my grandfather Stephen Webb before I was 10 years old. He told me how, right after the Civil War, white-robed members of the Ku Klux Klan rode one night to his gate, hailed him to the front door, and asked him if the Pea Ridge battlefield would be a good place for the clansmen to jump off to the moon. His response was "I don't know but I reckon that would be as good as any place."

My prophecy is that the future generations of geologists will ever push forward the frontiers of our science. Geologists have the spirit of discovery, and they are keyed with hope and optimism. Their future, like the present, holds work and hope, because progress in geology and in other fields of scientific endeavor means new knowledge, new things, more jobs, better living conditions, longer lives, and other advances in human welfare.