

MEMORIAL TO HORACE DAVIS THOMAS  
(1905-1967)

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Dr. Horace Davis Thomas, perhaps better known as Bill Thomas, died May 14, 1967. He was State Geologist of Wyoming, Director of the Geological Survey of Wyoming, and Professor of Geology at the University of Wyoming.

Bill was born March 25, 1905, in Laramie, Wyoming. He was the son of William C. Thomas and Dulci Davis Thomas, prominent pioneer ranchers on the Laramie plains. His pre-college education was at the University of Wyoming preparatory school. He enrolled at the University of Wyoming in 1922. His love of the outdoors prompted him to become a geologist. He received the Bachelor of Arts degree in 1926 and in 1928 received one of the first Master's degrees in geology to be given at the

University of Wyoming. From 1928 until 1931 he attended graduate school at Columbia University and received his Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1935. In 1929 and 1930 Bill taught at the University of Wyoming Summer Science Camp, and in 1931 he became instructor of geology at the University of Wyoming.

He began his research career by studying the complex relationships of the Phosphoria-Dinwoody and Chugwater Formations of Wyoming. By tracing marine tongues from the Wind River Mountains to the west into the Chugwater Formation to the southeast he was able to establish correlations that have withstood the test of time and prolonged study (AAPG, v. 18, 1934). His interest in these relationships was retained and as late as 1956, he, along with one of his students, described the Goose Egg Formation, a southeast facies of the Dinwoody-Phosphoria marine deposits.

During the late 1930's his studies revolved around Pennsylvanian and Permian invertebrates and regional biostratigraphy. He published on the Frontier-Niobrara contact in the Laramie Basin, the Casper Formation of Wyoming and its cephalopod fauna and the Park City (Pennsylvanian) beds of the southwest flank of the Uinta Mountains.

In 1941 he was appointed State Geologist and Director of the Geological Survey of Wyoming, a position that under Wyoming statutes was to be held by a Professor of Geology at the University of Wyoming. His responsibilities as State Geologist, along with his teaching, necessitated curtailment of active research. His added responsibilities are reflected by the titles of his subsequent published papers: 1943, Oil and Gas Fields of Wyoming; 1945, Wyoming Mineral Industries; 1948, Geology and Petroleum Resources of Wyoming; 1951, Wyoming Oil Possibilities Enhanced by Variety of Oil Traps; 1954, Uranium in Wyoming; 1956, Geological History and Petroleum Geology of Wyoming; 1958, Wyoming Oil Prospects.

Although his research and publications were important contributions to geologic knowledge, perhaps his greatest contributions were in the classroom. His students have an

exceptional record of achievement both in academics and industry. The respect and affection that he maintained from his hundreds of students testify to his thorough, well-organized courses in stratigraphic principles and Paleozoic-Mesozoic Stratigraphy.

Bill Thomas was an active member of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists. He was Distinguished Lecturer in 1949 and Vice-President in 1955. He received the Matson award for the most outstanding scientific paper given at the National Meeting in 1962.

He was a member of the Committee on Stratigraphy of the National Research Council; Collaborator in Seismology with the Coast and Geodetic Survey, a member of the Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, member of the American Committee on Stratigraphic Nomenclature, member of the Public Relations Committee of the American Geologic Institute and member of the Sub-Committee on Development of Natural Resources of the Columbia River Interagency Commission.

His society affiliations included The Geological Society of America, American Association of State Geologists, American Association of Petroleum Geologists, Paleontological Society, Rocky Mountain Association of Geologists, Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Xi and Honorary Member of the Wyoming Geological Association.

From 1926 until his death, Bill taught at the University of Wyoming Science Camp. It was there in 1941 that he met Miss Maxine Nelson who became his wife in 1942.

In his daily activities as well as in his teaching and research, Bill was a perfectionist. He left 20 of his geologic field books and the notes and sketches therein are models of perfection. This marvelous attention to detail began at an early age. His father taught Bill how to shoot and fly-cast as a mere youngster. Most kids would consider the fun over when the fish were in the creel or the ducks in the bag—but not Bill. He kept a complete and accurate record of every fish caught and every duck killed. For example, the notebook he kept as a 15-year-old tells us that during the summer of 1920 he caught 262 trout; 183 on flies and 79 with bait. These included 220 brook trout, 39 lochleven, 2 cutthroat and 1 rainbow. The average catch per trip was 6.4, 2.7 less than caught during the summer of 1919. He learned to recognize every bird by the slightest mannerism or chirp. More than once he excitedly called me to his office to share with him the joy of watching the cedar waxwings feeding outside his office window.

Bill is survived by his wife, Maxine Nelson Thomas, his son, Tom Nelson Thomas, and a sister, Mrs. Margaret Thomas Linville.

His passing is a great loss to the University of Wyoming and the oil industry as a whole, but even more to those individuals who knew him and associated with him.

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