Wallace E. Pratt: An Amazing Figure of 20th Century American Life and a True Petroleum Geologist*

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Abstract

Dr. Pratt played a critical role in the growth and success of the petroleum industry during its early evolution. His name and story are familiar to many AAPG members and he is well known outside of our industry for his wide-ranging interests and generosity to society. One of the founders of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists, Pratt was elected fourth president of the association in 1920. He was the first recipient of the AAPG’s Sidney Powers Memorial Award in 1945. As a leading petroleum geologist, businessman, thinker and visionary, Pratt encouraged geologists, geophysicists and engineers to explore for and develop oil and natural gas resources with optimism, knowledge, energy, talent and the tools of science and technology. In the later stages of his career, as a reflective man, Pratt came to the realization that those engaged as geologists in the field of petroleum exploration and development have a responsibility to the oil and gas producing industry and to greater Society beyond our scientific contributions and advancements. He clearly believed that it is our responsibility to discharge social and civic responsibilities as professional men and women, to work for the greater good of our society through our participation as professionals within our industry and in civic life.

Well, how do we know that this was his belief? In 1965, Wallace E. Pratt, a long standing member of the AAPG also sought membership in the American Institute of Professional Geologists (AIPG), an organization still thriving today, which was and is dedicated to promoting geology as a Profession. In 1965, the AIPG chairman personally asked Pratt to speak to its Texas Section at their Annual Meeting in San Antonio. Pratt chose to speak on the subject of what it means to be a geologist, not only as a scientist, but in terms of what it means in terms of our professional responsibilities. He cast his subject matter in the form of an affirmation and entitled his speech: “Petroleum Geology Is a Profession”. It is an insightful, perceptive and engaging speech that speaks to us even today, more than 50 years after its presentation! Wallace E. Pratt did indeed have a perceptive mind and clarity of vision that we can still learn from as professionals of the 21st century. An original typed written manuscript of his 1965 speech was recently located at U.T. El Paso and has been donated to the AAPG for professional curation and re-publishing.
Wallace E. Pratt
An Amazing Figure of 20th Century American Life and a True Petroleum Geologist

Dana M. Jurick*
G. R. Keller
Presentation Outline

- **Recall**
  - Who was Wallace E. Pratt? What is his background? Where did he come from? What is his association with AAPG and the Oil and Gas Producing Industry?

- **List**
  - Examine his legacy of thought, ideas, innovation and expressions of optimism through his writing

- **Identify**
  - A special paper, the subject of this presentation
  - The Subject?
    - A 1965 unpublished speech that reflects upon the assertion that “Petroleum Geology is a Profession”

- **Define**
  - The context within which his speech was written and presented: Stage, Experience, Motivation.

- **Describe**
  - Thesis of the presentation
  - Main ideas presented to support his thesis
  - What are the take-aways

- **Explain**
  - Why his ideas are still relevant
  - What actions can we take in 2017? Some current issues of importance where we can have IMPACT.
April 17, 2017

American Association of Petroleum Geologists | ACE | 2017 | History of Petroleum Geology

Recall: Education and Field Work – Bondoc Philippines 1911 - 1913

January 1911 – 2 weeks
Eddingfield and Pratt spent two weeks in a geologic investigation of the southern part of Bondoc Peninsula, and a short discussion based on this work was published later in that year.

Summer 1912 – 3 months
Pratt and Dalburg were engaged for nearly three months in geologic and topographic field work on Bondoc Peninsula.

February 1913 – 3 weeks
The results of this work were confirmed and amplified in three weeks of field work by Warren D. Smith and Wallace E. Pratt.

4+ Months of Field Work – The way it was in Bondoc Peninsula
“The time spent in the field would scarcely permit the detailed study of the area covered—700 square kilometers... even if the country were easily traversed and the geology clearly defined.”

“As it is, the lack of an accurate map, the absence of trails, the prevalence of jungle along the streams, and the heavy growth have made it impossible to include detailed or complete information in this report.”

... The mere physical effort of cutting through a jungle or of “breaking trail” in the open, where the process involved is one of literally burrowing through the tall rank grass, frequently leaves the observer inefficient through exhaustion before his day’s work is fairly begun.

Wallace Pratt, ever the optimist.... However, the present work should serve as a basis for future investigation.

Source: https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/handle/1808/16198
Recall Milestones in the Life of a Distinguished Leader

- 1917 – A founder of the Southwestern Association of Petroleum Geologists (a predecessor of AAPG)
- 1918 – Joined Humble Oil and Refining (First Geologist)
- 1920 – 4th President of AAPG
- 1946 – AAPG Distinguished Lecturer
- 1957 – Elected Honorary Member of AAPG

- 1945 – 1st recipient of Sidney Powers Medal
- 1948 – Anthony F. Lucas Medal from American Institute of Mining and Metallurgical Eng.'s. - Distinguished Achievement in Petroleum Engineering
- 1950 – James Forman Kemp Medal from Columbia University, bestowed by President Eisenhower
- 1954 – API Gold Medal Award for Distinguished Achievement
- 1969 – Inductee to Hall of Fame of Permian Basin Museum in Midland
- 1972 – AAPG Human Needs Award
- 1976 – Named a “Grand Old Man” of Exploration by Tulsa’s Int’l Petroleum Exposition

• And numerous other recognitions and awards …
“Wallace Pratt wrote very well – lucidly, gracefully; he had the unusual ability of treating the most scholarly subjects in simple, direct and understandable prose.”


“Where oil is first found, in the final analysis, is in the minds of men”. WE Pratt, AAPG, 1952
Identify and Define a Work of Great Interest: Petroleum Geology Is A Profession

By Wallace E. Pratt

A paper read before the Texas Section, American Institute of Professional Geologists, at its Annual Meeting, September 17 and 18, 1965, San Antonio, Texas

ABSTRACT

Although they have long devoted themselves zealously to their scientific society, American Association of Petroleum Geologists, many geologists employed by the oil industry have remained indifferent in their attitude toward their profession. Only within recent months, with the semi-centennial of the founding of AAPG almost upon them, have these geologists begun to realize that they also constitute a profession, the welfare of which is of paramount importance to them, and so merits their ardent support.

In some part at least, this unfortunate dereliction has grown out of the reluctance of the geologist to subject himself to the government regulations membership in a legally organized profession must involve. The tendency of the petroleum geologist to avoid, so far as possible, government

Context: 1965 Invited Presentation in San Antonio, Texas
To: American Institute of Professional Geologists
Original type written manuscript located at U.T. El Paso
Manuscript donated for curation and re-publishing

Authorship: Wallace Pratt was 80 years old & retired for 20 years.
He was living in McKittrick Canyon, Guadalupe Mountains
A Consulting Geologist in Carlsbad NM
(He often flew to work in his private plane!)

Theme: “Let us (as Petroleum Geologists) render to our Profession the same allegiance that we do to our Science.”

Thesis: “In the past, petroleum geologists have not adequately discharged their responsibilities to their profession or to the oil producing industry.”
We have responsibilities larger than applying our science to an industry.
Describe Pratts’ Thesis that “Petroleum Geology is a Profession”

- Ethics matter & are a matter for Professionals and Professional Societies to address
- A petroleum geologist is not purely a scientist. Inherent in the Profession are other responsibilities
- His speech strongly affirms the idea that “Geology is also a Profession”, not merely an application of Science to Industrial purposes and Business.

Pratt argues that in the current setting of the day - 1965, that there is a reluctance towards organized and/or government regulated professional licensing, certification or registration as a Professional Geologist. Why?
- Early 20th Century oil industry composed of people with a spirit of “rugged individualism”; history prevailed in attitudes
- Industry often held a 20th century perspective on the pursuit of “Unrestricted free enterprise”
  - Provides examples of industry opinions on Government regulations & law: gas flaring; field unitization; 27 1/2 % depletion allowance; taxation; tariffs and protectionism and Interstate Oil Compact (anti-trust issues).
- Public Image- “Frightening to Contemplate”. An issue for Professionals to “fix” through action and attitude.
  - Example: Establishment of Guadalupe National Park – only public opposition was by an Oil Industry (company) representative. This presented a poor public image of oil companies.

His analysis on the Upshot of Oil Industry Actions and Attitudes of 1965:
- “Achievement of short term political objectives may become a barrier between it and its longer term social and economic welfare.”
Upon reflection.... Wallace Pratt made these key observations

• Social, Political, Economic, Business Conditions in 1965 were “vastly different” than when the oil industry was young and in its early days. Thus,

• Now, he argues that “some” government mediation appears to be imperative.

• As to the participation and contribution of Professional Geologists to National Issues, Government Affairs and Public Policy:

  • …After all, it is our government (US). Let us make it a government worthy to lead and to administer the most advanced, the most enlightened nation on earth.

  • …Let us who are in the oil industry, then, assume the appropriate share of responsibility that devolves on big business...

  • …Let those of us in industry, concern ourselves more extensively than we have with our social and civic responsibilities....Let us do our part ....
Final Reflections

• In summary, petroleum geologists confront many issues - professional, social, ethical, political and industrial.

  • The solution to these problems is more properly the concern of geologists as a profession rather as a scientist.

• “At long last I have come to realize that I have a profession to cherish as well as a science .... And

• Upon reflection, I chose to cast my thoughts on this subject as an affirmation

  Petroleum Geology is a Profession.”
Pratt encourages Petroleum Geoscientists to recognize that beyond the love of their science, they have responsibilities to the Profession of Petroleum Geology.

Wallace Pratt speaks to us today, clearly and with relevance, 132 years after his birth, 100 years after the founding of AAPG and 52 years after penning his important speech; INDEED we need to recognize and act upon the many opportunities for ENGAGEMENT that lay before us and to act upon those as Professionals.
Closing: Issues the Petroleum Geologist Can Potentially Impact in 2017

- Energy Abundance – Supply
- Groundwater Aquifer Protection
- Fresh Water usage in HF Operations
- Onshore Well Integrity
- Triggered Seismicity
- GHG Emissions from flaring and Fugitive methane
- Smart Unc Reservoir Development
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Sustainable Environmental Solutions
- Onshore US Oil and Gas Regulation