

ROLLIN ECKIS (1905-1999)

J. David Rogers



Rollin Eckis was born in Oakland, California on June 26, 1905, 10 months before the San Francisco earthquake. The family moved around the state while his father searched for gold, eventually settling in San Diego. After high school, he attended San Diego Normal School for two years before entering Pomona College. At Pomona he came under the tutelage of Professor A.O. Woodford, and graduated in 1927. His senior thesis topic was "The Alluvial Fans of the Cucamonga District," which became a classic work on alluvial fan development when published in the *Journal of Geology* in 1928.

Eckis pursued graduate studies at the California Institute of Technology, earning his masters degree in 1929. He decided to remain at Cal Tech to pursue his doctorate, but the stock market crash of late 1929 and the general economic depression which followed forced him to

withdraw from his studies. He received a post-graduate research fellowship at Pomona College, where he continued his work on the geology and groundwater storage capacity of the South Coastal Basin of Los Angeles, which was subsequently published by the newly-formed State Division of Water Resources as Bulletin 45 in 1934. This became one of the seminal documents on understanding groundwater resources in southern California.

In 1934 he accepted a position as field geologist with the Texas Company, working in the San Joaquin Valley. After 3-1/2 years he joined the exploration department of the Richfield Oil Company as their district geologist for the San Joaquin Valley. Using new geophysical techniques, Eckis discovered the North Coles Levee Oilfield near Bakersfield in 1938, which produced 132 million barrels of oil and 72 billion cubic feet of gas. From that point onward, he succeeded in making major oilfield discoveries about every 10 years, including: the Wheeler Ridge Eocene pools in 1946, Cuyama Valley in 1948, the Cook Inlet area of Alaska in 1958, and the Prudoe Bay, Alaskan North Slope oil field in 1968. Mr. Eckis was appointed Chief Geologist of Richfield in 1948, Manager of Exploration in 1954, and President in 1962. He became Executive Vice President of Arco when Richfield merged with Atlantic Refining Company in 1966, where he served at their Los Angeles headquarters until his retirement in 1977.

After retirement he moved from Duarte to the Pauma Valley north of San Diego. He received an honorary doctorate of science from Pomona College in 1968 and endowed a chair in seismology at San Diego State University and the Woodford-Eckis Lectureship at Pomona College. He died of complications of Alzheimer's on November 12, 1999 in la Jolla at age 94.