

# Memorial to Harold W. Hoots

## 1899–1979

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It's no exaggeration to say that Harold Hoots is "legendary" because everyone who remembers him has a Harold Hoots story to tell. Hoots was a man who never did anything halfway.

In the oil industry, Hoots was renowned as a finder of oil fields. As a scholar, he wrote a U.S. Geological Survey bulletin on the Santa Monica Mountains that is still a "bible" of Los Angeles County geology. As a rancher, he became an authority on the breeding of black Angus cattle. As an investor, Hoots made a fortune in oil leases—and as a Stanford alumnus, he shared his resources with the university in many different ways. Mason Hill, who worked for Harold at Richfield, always remembers a quote from Harold: "Everything I do I consider very important."

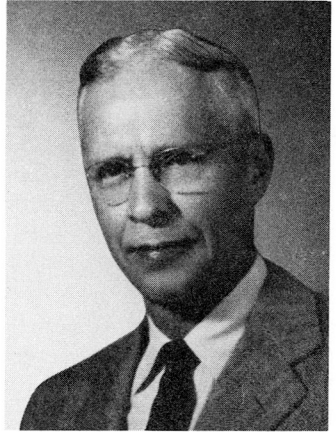
In his sixties and seventies, Hoots was still involved in training young geologists in the field. He told Ted Bear, his partner in a Los Angeles consulting firm, "I'd rather die walking them into the ground than ever admit that I'm tired."

The indefatigable Hoots was a Kansas boy, born in Winfield in 1899, and became interested in oil as an undergraduate at the University of Oklahoma. After receiving his B.S. degree in 1921, he married Thelma Dobson of Kansas, studied at the University of Kansas, and worked for the U.S. Geological Survey. Wherever he went, he met Stanford University alumni who kept alive his interest in oil. Hoots enrolled at Stanford in 1923, received his Ph.D. in geology in 1925, and left the Survey in 1928 to launch his career in the oil industry.

For the next two decades, Hoots explored oil fields from the Los Angeles basin to Carbon County, Wyoming, for Union Oil (from 1928 to 1937), then for Richfield (1937 to 1946), and finally as a consultant, primarily for Humble (Standard Oil of New Jersey; 1948 to 1959). In 1948, Humble Oil and Refining Company hired Hoots and Bear to study all the sedimentary basins in California.

Richard Jahns, a former dean of the School of Earth Sciences at Stanford University, remembered Hoots as "very able, very tough-minded, the survivor type, an unusual combination of practical oil finder and scholarly geologist." On the practical side, Hoots was largely responsible for discovery of oil fields such as North Coles Levee, Rosedale, Pleito Creek, Honor Farm, Santa Maria Valley, Wheeler Ridge, and others in California. On the scholarly side, he was one of the foremost authorities on the geology of the San Joaquin Valley. As author or coauthor, Hoots imprinted his trail in the geological literature: *Geology of the Wheeler Ridge Area, Kern County, California* (dissertation, 1925); *Coal and Oil Resources of the Hanna and Carbon Basins, Wyoming* (1929); *Oil Resources along the Southern Border of the San Joaquin Valley* (1930); *Geology of the Eastern Part of the Santa Monica Mountains* (1931); *Marine Oil Shale in the Playa del Rey Field* (1935); *Discoveries and Recent Additions to Oil Reserves in California* (1936, 1937, 1938, 1939); *Origin, Migration, and Accumulation of Oil in California* (1943); and *Paleogeographic Setting for Oil Accumulation* (1947).

The Hoots bibliography tapers off in the 1950s. In the *Stanford Review* of December 1957, David S. Jacobson wrote: "Oil men are unpredictable. You never can tell what they are likely to do or



say. Take Harold Hoots, for instance. A little over a year ago he was a consulting petroleum engineer in Los Angeles. Then suddenly he turned to beef. Now you find him at Hoots Angus Farm in Grants Pass, Oregon. From black gold to black beef in a year. The transition seems complete . . . Harold and Thelma were down for a Western states livestock show at the Cow Palace. A young bull of theirs had just been judged Reserve Champion of the show."

When Harold had his office in Los Angeles, he always worked on Saturday morning and always looked forward to lunch at the University Club, followed by a lively game of dominos with old friends such as Rick Templeton, J. R. Pemberton, Army Armstrong, W. J. Travers, and others. When relaxing with his many geologist friends, he often regaled the group by walking on the bar on his hands.

As one of the nation's foremost oil finders, Hoots knew where and when to invest his capital. But although he became very wealthy, he didn't stop working. Instead, he invested his boundless energy in "hobbies" such as breeding cattle and promoting Stanford. "Harold led three lives," Jacobson recalls, "as a geologist, a black Angus breeder, and a Stanford alumnus."

But despite his penchant for work, the Hootses were fun-loving people who entertained a steady stream of visitors in their guest house at Grants Pass. At parties, Thelma played the piano—she could play any tune by ear—and Harold often sang in a hoarse voice.

The Hootses had another residence in Menlo Park, and from this location Harold was able to serve as a consulting professor in the Stanford geology department. In 1952, Hoots was enlisted as a volunteer fund raiser for the university. He threw himself into the job with his usual vigor, but the Stanford Development Office was startled by the imagination of Hoots's approach. He wanted the university to invest in producing oil and gas royalties—a common practice now, but rare among universities in the 1950s.

Hoots served as an officer in all the American Association of Petroleum Geologists Pacific Section offices and was vice-president of the national AAPG in the 1930s. He was awarded honorary membership in AAPG in 1974.

Harold lived the life of a respected and loved geologist. His profession was number one in his life after his family. Those of us who worked with him and for him will always remember his advice and optimism.