

# Memorial to Ira S. Allison

## 1895-1990

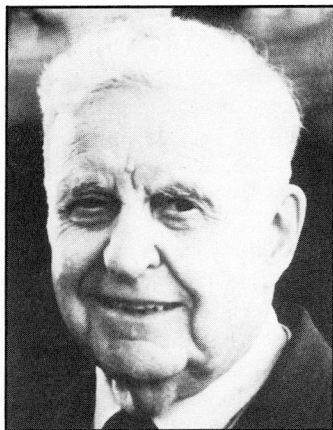
LEHI F. HINTZE

*Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah 84602*

Ira Allison, emeritus professor of geology at Oregon State University, died at his home in Corvallis on May 31, 1990.

Born in Gardner, Illinois, 50 miles southwest of Chicago, Ira spent the first third of his life in the midwest. He was valedictorian of his high school in Eldorado, Kansas, and valedictorian of his graduating class at Hanover College, Indiana. He then attended the University of Chicago for a year.

In 1921 he married Sadie Gilchrist, who shared his life for the next 65 years. They began married life at the University of Minnesota, where he obtained his Ph.D. degree in 1924 with a brief dissertation on the Giants Range batholith of Minnesota. That same year he took a position as a geologist with the Minnesota Geological Survey. He worked during summer months on mineral resources and weathering of Precambrian rocks and concurrently held an assistant professorship at the University of Minnesota.



In 1928, Ira and Sadie, now with three children of ages one, three, and six, moved to Corvallis, Oregon, where Ira had accepted an appointment as professor of geology at Oregon State Agricultural College, a position he maintained for 37 years, until he reached mandatory retirement at age 70.

Ira Allison is most widely known as an author of one of the most popular physical geology textbooks of its day. At first written in collaboration with W. H. Emmons, G. A. Thiel, and C. R. Stauffer, all professors at the University of Minnesota, the Emmons-Thiel-Stauffer-Allison text went through seven editions (and innumerable printings) between 1932 and 1980. The first edition was entitled simply *Geology*. The next four editions were called *Geology, Principles and Processes*. Because of the plate-tectonic revolution, the sixth edition, published in 1974, underwent a complete transformation and was called *Geology: The Science of a Changing Earth*. For this edition Allison was listed as senior author, and he enlisted the help of the several younger co-authors. Allison was over 80 when he prepared the last edition, published in 1980.

It was important to Ira Allison that his textbook be accurate and up-to-date, and he devoted a large part of his professional energy to preparing the revisions that kept it that way. As the original senior authors retired from the field, responsibility fell entirely on his shoulders, and he assiduously attended geological meetings and read voluminously to stay abreast of current ideas in geology. Late in life he readily adapted to plate tectonic dogma, his inquiring mind always open to new trends in geology.

Allison's research interests focused on Pleistocene events in both eastern and western Oregon. In the early 1930s he reported finding erratic glacial dropstones, derived from sources in the Rocky Mountains, scattered in many places in the Willamette Valley. He delighted in showing field trip participants that you could slice with a pocket knife through some of the weathered granitic cobbles in these exotic deposits. He supported the then-outrageous hypothesis of a University of Chicago geologist, J Harlan Bretz, that the Channeled Scablands of eastern Washing-

ton had been produced by catastrophic floods of late Pleistocene age. Allison found support for Bretz's hypothesis not only in the far-traveled erratic rocks, but also in a veneer of lacustrine silts that convinced him that a late Pleistocene lake had occupied the Willamette Valley as far upstream as Eugene. In 1935, Allison published a map of the erratic boulders of the Willamette Valley, and in 1953 he described the Willamette silt, the lake deposits related to the Spokane floods. John Eliot Allen, a professor of geology at Portland State University, proposed that the 3000-square-mile lake in which the Willamette silt was deposited be called Lake Allison, now the commonly accepted name.

In 1939, Allison began his study of the Pleistocene lakes of eastern Oregon. These studies included stratigraphy; chronology of interbedded volcanic ash beds; interpretation of climatic fluctuation based on pollen studies by Henry Hansen, then dean of graduate studies at Oregon State; and identification of Ice Age mammal bones, the latter done in conjunction with Earl Packard, a long-time associate in the Department of Geology. His monograph on pluvial Fort Rock Lake was published in 1979, and that on pluvial Lake Chewaukan in 1982. Both are landmark studies.

In 1949 I went to Corvallis with my young family, as a green Ph.D. fresh out of Columbia University. The Department of Geology then consisted of the retiring chairman Earl Packard, a paleontologist; Edwin Hodge, an engineering geologist; Don Wilkinson, a mineralogist-petrologist; and Ira Allison, geomorphologist and new department chairman. Ira and Sadie Allison couldn't have been more gracious and helpful to us newcomers. Perhaps they identified our arrival as being similar to their own 20 years earlier. They were like parents to my wife and me and like grandparents to our two young children. They helped us find a home, included us in social activities, and eased our integration into the community and university. I taught at Oregon State for six years while Allison was chairman of the geology department. I would describe Ira Allison as ethical, helpful, courtly, reserved, meticulous, dependable, patriotic, inquisitive, well-organized, charitable, occasionally irascible, modest, and even somewhat shy. I well remember Ira and Sadie taking me with them on a ten-day trip from Corvallis to Tucson to attend the 1952 meetings of the Cordilleran Section of GSA. The meetings were held in April to take advantage of spring break on the Tucson campus, and we took advantage of the good weather by visiting the Grand Canyon, Meteor Crater, Petrified Forest, several open-pit copper mines, and the other bright southwestern desert sights that were so different from the drab geology of the Pacific northwest. The Allisons were easy-to-get-along-with travelers, and we enjoyed the comforts of the new 1952 Ford V-8 sedan that they had bought just before our 4000-mile trip.

Throughout his life Ira Allison was willing to engage in new experiences. He spent the year after he graduated from high school as a teacher in a one-room school in Butler County, Kansas, in order to earn money to go to Hanover College. He was YMCA secretary at Camp Taylor, Kentucky, during 1917–1918. He served as a medical sergeant in the U.S. Army Hospital at Rahway, New Jersey, during 1918–1919. During World War II he volunteered for army service again but was not accepted for active duty. However, in 1945 he was appointed as a department head at the U.S. Army University at Shrivenham, England, which was established to give college courses to soldiers awaiting return from Europe after VE Day. He spent from 1954 to 1956 in Thailand as Chief-of-Party of an Oregon State University contract to improve education at Kasertsart University in Bangkok. For a number of years he served as consultant to the Oregon Portland Cement Company to help them find minable limestone deposits in a limestone-poor state. Oregon's economic limestone deposits are in easternmost Oregon, almost in Idaho.

Ira Allison was a joiner. He was a Fellow of the Geological Society of America, Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, member of the American Institute of Mining and Metallurgical Engineers (serving as secretary and chairman of the Oregon section), Oregon Academy of Science (serving a term as president), and member of honorary societies

Sigma Xi, Phi Kappa Phi, Delta Epsilon, Sigma Kappa Epsilon. In 1958, Ira was named *Alumnus of the Year* by Hanover College at their commencement exercises. In 1988, the Department of Geology at Oregon State University honored him by reestablishing a professorship in his favorite field, geomorphology, and by naming a series of lectures after him.

Sadie Gilchrist Allison was the daughter of a Presbyterian minister, and Ira and Sadie were married in his church in San Francisco. Their oldest child, Margaret (Mrs. James Clauss), born in 1922, served as a librarian for the city of Palo Alto, California, for many years. Their son David, born in 1925, was an Air Force navigator, then went into medical administrative work in California. Their youngest child, Frances (Mrs. John Sunderland), born in 1927, followed her husband, an Air Force pilot, through many places during his 23 years of active duty. These three children provided Sadie and Ira with 14 grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren to date.

Ira was a devoted member of the First Presbyterian Church in Corvallis from his arrival there in 1928 until his death 62 years later. He served that congregation in many capacities, the most notable of which was as Clerk of Session for more than 30 years. When, at age 85, he was no longer able to drive at night to attend Session meetings, he was honored at a worship service for his many consecutive years of service, a record unlikely to be matched.

An inoperable tumor impinging on his spinal column deprived him of the use of his legs in 1987, and gradually caused his physical deterioration. He accepted this with grace and was blessed with a keen mind through his last days.

**Acknowledgments:** I am indebted to Cyrus Field and Robert Yeats of the Department of Geology at Oregon State University for providing information from their files. Sam Bailey, former director of news and communication services at Oregon State, also provided material from the university archives. David Allison provided family background material, and Mrs. Frances A. Sutherland furnished the photograph of her father.

### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF I. S. ALLISON

- 1932 (with Emmons, W. H., Thiel, G. A., and Stauffer, C. R.) *Geology*: New York, McGraw-Hill, first edition, 514 p. This textbook went through four more editions (1939, 1949, 1955, 1960) under the title "Geology: Principles and Processes" to a fifth edition, 1960, 638 p.
- 1935 *Glacial erratics in Willamette Valley*: Geological Society of America Bulletin, v. 46, p. 615-632.
- 1936 *Pleistocene alluvial stages in northwestern Oregon*: Science, new series, v. 83, p. 441-443.
- 1940 *Study of Pleistocene lakes of south-central Oregon*: Carnegie Institute of Washington Yearbook, v. 39, p. 299-300.
- 1945 *Pumice beds at Summer Lake, Oregon*: Geological Society of America Bulletin, v. 56, p. 789-807.
- 1946 *Pluvial lakes and pumice, Early man in Oregon* (symposium): Scientific Monthly, v. 62, p. 63-65.
- 1952 *Dating of pluvial lakes in the Great Basin*: American Journal of Science, v. 250, p. 907-909.
- 1953 *Geology of the Albany quadrangle, Oregon*: Oregon Department of Mines and Mineral Industries Bulletin 37, scale 1:62,500, 18 p. text.
- 1966 *Fossil Lake, Oregon; its geology and fossil faunas*: Oregon State University Press, Studies in Geology no. 9, 48 p.
- 1974 (and Black, R. F., Dennison, J. M., Fahnestock, R. K., and White, S. M.) *Geology: The science of a changing Earth* (sixth edition): New York, McGraw-Hill, 498 p.

- 1979 Pluvial Fort Rock Lake, Lake County, Oregon: Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries Special Paper 7, 72 p.
- 1980 (and Palmer, Donald R.) Geology: The science of a changing Earth (seventh edition): New York, McGraw-Hill, 579 p.
- 1982 Geology of pluvial Lake Chewaukan, Lake County, Oregon: Oregon State University Press Studies in Geology no. 11, 70 p.