

# Memorial to Oliver Duncan Blake

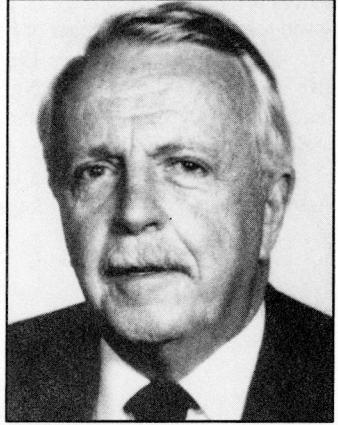
## 1910–1986

SIEGFRIED MUESSIG  
*Pasadena, California*

BETTE ELLIS-BLAKE  
*Laguna Beach, California*

Oliver (O. D.) Blake was born July 28, 1910, at Gloucester, Massachusetts, the third child of C. D. and Charlotte Stimpson Blake of St. Louis, Missouri. His boyhood was spent in St. Louis and New England, where he graduated from the Gunnery Preparatory School in Massachusetts. His early college years were at Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio, whose innovative work-study program attracted him. His interest at this time was English literature.

Although O. D. was quiet and introspective, his intellectual inquisitiveness brought with it a spirit of adventure; on one of the intervals away from study, O. D. and friends built a raft and floated down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. Adventure called again when he withdrew from Antioch and went to China, where he remained for a year studying Chinese and traveling into the interior. While living in Peking, O. D. met and became friendly with the well-known American paleontologist A. W. Grabau, who had gone to live in China in the 1920s. This association was to have a lasting influence on O. D.'s future; he became interested in paleontology. His interest in English literature remained as a deeply loved lifelong avocation.



As war clouds were forming on the horizon, Professor Grabau advised his young friend to return home and continue his education at the University of Wyoming, which had an excellent geology department. Thus, just before the Japanese invaded Manchuria, O. D. hurriedly took Grabau's advice and booked passage on the Trans-Siberian railway across Manchuria and Russia and on to Germany, where he boarded the steamer *Bremen*, which took him to New York. Niels Bohr was one of his traveling companions on this trip, and O. D. spoke often of this intellectually fascinating interlude in his life.

Following his return to the United States, he worked briefly at the Yale Peabody Museum, and then, in 1938, he entered the University of Wyoming. His main interests there were the fauna of the Phosphoria Formation, and the many hours he spent collecting specimens in the Wyoming mountains were among the happiest of his career.

In 1939, he married Bette Ellis of Fort Laramie, and in early 1940 he entered Columbia University to begin his graduate studies. The outbreak of the war, however, put an end to study, and in 1942 he enlisted in the U.S. Navy. He saw action in several battles, the most notable of which was at Iwo Jima.

At war's end, the family, which by now included two children, moved to Marietta, Ohio, where O. D. taught geology to the returning veterans in the local college. Desiring to further his career, he entered Ohio State University at Columbus to complete his studies for the Ph.D., which he received in 1952. The years in Columbus were fruitful ones; his peers and instructors were most compatible, and the relationships he established there sustained him for the rest of his life.

Upon attaining his degree, he moved west to teach at the Montana School of Mines in Butte. Three years later, he took a leave of absence to establish a core library and field station for the Montana Oil and Gas Commission. This effort was successfully completed and was of great benefit to the then youthful industry in the state.

In 1960, the family moved to southern California, where for a year, during the sabbatical of the permanent head, O. D. was acting head of the geology department at Redlands University. During this time he served on the state accreditation board for new community colleges.

This service introduced him to geologists and educators throughout the state and resulted in his last professional position. In 1967 he helped establish the new community college at Campbell, California, and became head of the geology department, where he stayed until shortly before his death. While there he also established a new and popular course in oceanography. He loved teaching, and a number of his students went on to become professional geologists.

O. D. retired in January 1985 and died on May 21, 1986, after suffering a stroke. He left five children: Melissa, Marc, Nicholas, Jennifer, and Eleanor. Although he published little, he leaves a legacy of students who have become geologists and colleagues whose lives were enriched by his friendship.

O. D. was a Fellow of the Geological Society of America and a member of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists.