

VERNON EDWARD SCHEID
1906-1987

Vernon E. Scheid, Dean Emeritus and Professor of Mineral Economics of the Mackay School of Mines, University of Nevada, Reno, succumbed on June 6, 1987 to a cancer which had been diagnosed only 75 days previously. He was 80 years old and he had been active until the final month of his life, holding oral examinations in his home for the members of his last class.

He was the fourth child and third son born to Blanche and Charles Scheidt of Baltimore, Maryland, on September 5, 1906. A fourth brother was born subsequently. Charles Scheidt was a masonry contractor and worked principally with the Cockeysville marble, participating in the spread of this locally known stone which provided Baltimore with the sobriquet of the "City of Little White Steps."

The four boys and their sister grew up in an atmosphere of continuing rivalry, both in academics and athletics. Vernon was interested in track, competing in both cross country and the mile while a student at Baltimore Polytechnical Institute and as an undergraduate at The Johns Hopkins University. He earned his Eagle Scout badge, commencing an enduring interest in scouting.

As an undergraduate at Johns Hopkins, Vernon studied with Professors E. W. Berry, Frank Swartz, and Joseph T. Singewald, Jr. His interest began to point towards Economic Geology, both the metals and the nonmetals. Graduating from Johns Hopkins in 1928, he stayed on as a graduate student. Summers were spent with the USGS in Arkansas with C.P. Ross. One summer he worked for the Arkansas Geological Survey. Primarily, he assisted in quadrangle mapping. In the 1933 International Geological Congress, Professor Singewald was the leader of the Economic Geology Field Excursion of the Eastern United States, and Vernon was his right-hand man in this project.

In 1934, he was offered an assistant professorship at the University of Idaho. He left Baltimore with no advanced degree; but with his new bride, Martha Helm Schied, by his side he drove west to assume his duties. Summers were again spent with the USGS, mapping in various parts of Idaho. From 1938 to 1939, he held a joint appointment with the Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology as a mineralogist. While at the University of Idaho, he was permitted to take classes and earned his master's degree in geological engineering in 1940. He had been appointed Idaho Collaborator for the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey in 1939, a position he held for three years. He was reappointed in 1947 and served until 1951.

With the advent of World War II, Vernon took leave from the University of Idaho and joined the USGS as Associate Geologist in Charge of Field Party. His party worked in strategic minerals investigations, principally high alumina clays of the Idaho batholith and surrounding areas. They were often isolated in the summer months, receiving supplies and mail twice a week via air drop. He was granted his Ph.D. by The Johns Hopkins University in 1946 with a dissertation entitled "High Alumina Clays of Spokane County, Washington." He returned to the University of Idaho in 1947 as full professor and chairman of the Department of Geology/ Geography.

In January 1951, Vernon commenced duties as the Dean of the Mackay School of Mines at the University of Nevada, Reno. This was to become his major interest, demanding application of his many skills. Until his appointment, the Mackay School of Mines had been one of four schools within the College of Engineering, and consisted of three departments: Geology/Geography, Mining Engineering, and Metallurgical Engineering. Vernon was the first Dean of the newly created independent college. Also within his domain was the Directorship of the Nevada Bureau of Mines and Geology and the Nevada Mining Analytical Laboratory, two State of Nevada agencies housed on the campus and funded via the University Regents. The teaching faculty totaled approximately 12, while the staff of the Bureau and the Lab were four, three being joint appointments with professors. He had arrived at a college which had been underfunded, was sadly out-of-date with respect to equipment, and fairly inbred with respect to personnel. He was confronted immediately with four resignations in the teaching faculty, requiring the recruitment of replacements by the end of his first semester. In the second year, the Board of Regents adopted a policy of retirement at age 65 and thus two additional professors had to be replaced. As a result, he suffered an academic turnover of 50 percent in his first three semesters.

In addition, the Deans in those times were responsible for such things as the maintenance of their buildings, for branch libraries (Mines had one of three), and for the college motorpools (Mines had one of two). Budgetary constraints precluded the appointment of any senior personnel, so Vernon's replacement faculty members were invariably entry-level assistant professors.

With hindsight, it is remarkable how rapidly and how carefully he went about solving the problems confronting him. In the Nevada Bureau, he initiated cooperative programs with the USGS which gave him a bigger bang for his bucks. Since the Survey generally provided the personnel for the cooperative projects, it was possible to move ahead at an accelerated rate. One of the most important projects was to produce more topographic maps of the State. Numerous areas were covered only by the old one-degree (1:250,000) quadrangles dating back to the turn of the century. High on his list of objectives was the creation of the first geological map of the State. Vernon's leadership role in these cooperative programs was quickly recognized and appreciated by the USGS. Shortly, the Survey informed him of its desire to expand the cooperative program if Nevada could contribute additional funds. Vernon succeeded in arranging for the creation of the Governor's Mining and Mapping Advisory Board through the Nevada Legislature and thus the cooperative projects expanded and increased. His long term view of producing first quality geologic maps county by county at the 1:250,000 scale gave direction and logic to the program. Subsequently these county maps were to be combined to form the first reliable geologic map of the State of Nevada.

I was one of the first hired by Vernon in the spring of 1951, being offered a split appointment to teach in the Department of Geology/Geography and to perform research in the Nevada Bureau of Mines. Over lunch on the day of my arrival, he asked if I could prepare draft legislation for an oil and gas conservation statute. The summer of 1951 had witnessed the first drilling program in Nevada by major producers, which, unfortunately, had resulted in three dry holes or "dusters". Vernon knew the companies would be back, and that it would be simpler to see such a law enacted prior to the discovery of commercial petroleum in the State. The 1953 Legislature enacted the bill, and thus the petroleum companies knew the ground rules under which they would be operating if and when oil was discovered. One year later the Eagle Springs Field confirmed Vernon's foresight.

In his second year, Vernon brought the first contract research to the University of Nevada with an agreement to attempt beneficiation of Nevada's low grade uranium ores for the Atomic Energy Commission. The overhead from this multiyear contract provided sorely needed extra funding over the legislative appropriations for the college. The highest priority went to upgrading the Mines Library in the Mines Building. An experienced librarian accustomed to working with maps as well as books had been hired previously and she was to be provided with a centrally located facility adequate for a growing faculty and an increasing student body. There were approximately 75 students in the college when Vernon arrived, but this number was increasing constantly as veterans from the Korean conflict returned to the United States. Vernon had read Thomas Carlyle, who had written: "A true university is a collection of books."

By the middle 1950s, the Geology Department had been sufficiently upgraded with vigorous professors, new lab equipment, and the revitalized library that it was ready to embark upon graduate education. Graduate education at the University of Nevada had been a hit or miss affair for many years with master's degrees awarded sparingly by relatively few departments. There was no true graduate program. With the approval of the Geology Department's proposal, a full-fledged graduate program was instituted. Students quickly began to enroll, and graduate education at the University of Nevada was forever changed. A decade later, the Geology Department submitted plans for a doctoral program which were accepted by the Regents and the University's Ph.D. program came into existence. Mining and Metallurgy, as well as departments in other colleges, followed with master's and in time doctoral programs. Today, the University enrolls several hundred students in graduate degree programs.

In 1952 Vernon was the only Dean whose college possessed an endowment. These were two or three relatively small funds which Vernon managed. His initial policy was one of reinvestment to allow the funds to grow. Eventually, he was pressured by higher administration to follow other paths. He thereupon prepared proposals which were accepted by the Board of Regents providing for new procedures and which increased the yields of the investments. This policy stood for more than two decades.

About 1960, Vernon initiated the concept of the Distinguished Visiting Professor to the campus. His appointment of post-retirement professors from other campuses provided the School of Mines with well-known senior professors at relatively low cost, as modest salaries were appended to their retirement stipends.

Although he taught very little during his years as Dean, he was never out of contact with the students. He cared deeply about the students and often worked with them on a one-to-one basis. He would work very diligently with a student who was doing poorly in his studies if the student exhibited any spark of special merit. And this loyalty to the student was frequently repaid as the student progressed rapidly in his profession after his graduation. There probably exists no record anywhere of the money Vernon advanced from his own pocket to student he believed were worthy.

In 1971, the 1952 ruling of retirement at age 65 caught up with Vernon. Although the rule had been selectively enforced, he was informed that he would not be continued as Dean. He stepped down at the end of June 1972, but did receive post-retirement contracts as professor of mineral economics in the Department of Mining Engineering, an arrangement which continued until his death. He usually taught one class one semester each year.

Retirement brought a great pleasure to Vernon and his family. He had always enjoyed traveling and now more opportunities came to him. He had attended a large number of meetings over the 22 years of his deanship. When the meetings were scientific rather than

policy or administrative, he had taken every opportunity to participate in the field excursions which he thoroughly enjoyed. Especially he liked meeting colleagues in this fashion as longer periods of time were spent together; allowing new friendships to deepen. He served as a delegate to the International Geological Congresses in Mexico City (1956), Prague (1968), and Montreal (1972). In retirement he became affiliated with the People to People Programs. He organized and led three delegations of minerals-oriented people for them to China (1982), South Africa (1983) and Brazil and Peru (1985).

In 1973, he had received an appointment from the United Nations to consult in the Philippines. His project concerned mine waste disposal and was of three months' duration. In 1975, he was appointed to the Advisory Board of the Alaska School of Mines in Fairbanks. This provided at least two opportunities each year to visit the most northern State. He always extended these trips to explore additional areas of interest.

Vernon was named to the Robert Earll McConnell Award by the American Institute of Mining, Metallurgical, and Petroleum Engineers. The citation reads: "Distinguished Educator and long-time forceful advocate of realistic national policies in the management of mineral resources to insure the security and economic well-being of America." In 1982 he was named by President Reagan to a term on the National Advisory Committee on the Atmosphere and Oceans. He returned from his first meeting in Washington somewhat upset that he alone of the committee had any background in earth sciences; all others were attorneys.

His activities in mineral resource management go back to his days at Johns Hopkins. World War II reinforced his concepts with respect to strategic minerals. When President Eisenhower created the first Council of Economic Advisors in the early 1950s, Vernon wrote its first chairman, Arthur Burns, pointing out that the omission of a minerals-oriented person to the Council was a serious mistake. He worked as forcefully as he could at the state level to bring a succession of governors, senators, congressmen and assemblymen to the awareness of the necessity of a national minerals policy. He was especially successful with Governor (later Senator) Paul Laxalt and Congressman Jim Santini- The latter became known in Washington as "Mr. Minerals." Vernon was his trusted mentor. Vernon worked with the Nevada leadership for the creation of a state Department of Minerals which came into existence just a few years ago, tying together various mineral-oriented regulatory agencies. As a member of the Washoe County Republican Central Committee, he authored the plank on minerals policy, which was always incorporated into the Nevada State Republican Platform.

In the summer of 1934, Vernon and Martha Helm were married in Baltimore. They had met in drama productions on the Johns Hopkins campus. Their honeymoon trip to Moscow, Idaho, in an elderly car got him to his first teaching appointment. Martha was his constant companion for over fifty years, as she enjoyed travel as much as he did. Even the forced departure from Prague to Vienna in 1968, when the Russians moved into Czechoslovakia, was an adventure she relished. Their marriage was enriched by two children. Donald Edward Scheid is a faculty member in Philosophy at the University of Minnesota in Winona. Margaret Kathryn Scheid enjoys a career in finance and currently is with the Nevada State government. Theirs has been a close, warm, loving family. One year Vernon listed as his hobbies: tennis, ice skating, skiing, travel, reading, and bridge. Skiing and skating were most commonly family affairs and he was especially pleased when he could skate with his daughter. The Scheid home was the scene of a multitude of parties and receptions - always carried out with charm and eclat. Dinner and two tables of bridge were especially frequent events.

He was a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science; American Geophysical Union; American Institute of Mining, Metallurgical and Petroleum Engineers; Association of American State Geologists; Geological Society of America; Geological Society of Nevada; Mineralogical Society of America; National Society of Professional Engineers; Nevada Society of Professional Engineers; Phi Kappa Phi; Sigma Gamma Epsilon; Sigma Tau; Sigma Xi; and the Society of Economic Geologists. He was a Registered Geological Engineer in Nevada and a Registered Geologist in California. He was also a member of the Reno Rotary Club, Elks Club, Reno Little Theater, Reno Tennis Club, The Eagle Scout Association of Reno, and the Washoe County Republican Central Committee.

Vernon was a gentleman of the old school - never courtly, but direct, open, and friendly. He will be sorely missed for his analytical and leadership qualities. In 36 years of association, I cannot recall ever having heard him raise his voice to anyone. Our sympathies go to his family and multitude of friends.

-Joseph Lintz, Jr.

Mackay School of Mines