

William Otis Hotchkiss (*Wisconsin*)

James M. Robertson (*Wisconsin State Geologist*)

William Otis Hotchkiss was born in Eau Claire, Wis., on September 17, 1878, the son of Lyman Palmer and Almeda (Smith) Hotchkiss. He was graduated from the University of Wisconsin with a B.S. in general engineering–geology (1903), a C.E. (1908), and a Ph.D. in economic geology (1916). He began his career in 1902 while still an undergraduate; his early professional work included mining engineering in Minnesota, construction engineering in Wisconsin, and minerals exploration in Ontario, Canada.



In 1906, Hotchkiss began work at the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey, where he was put in charge of economic geology. From 1904 until 1907, Hotchkiss held a joint appointment as an instructor of mineralogy and petrography in the University of Wisconsin's Department of Geology. In addition to his economic geology responsibilities, Hotchkiss became chief of the Wisconsin survey's newly established Highway Division in 1907, and assistant state geologist in 1908. Hotchkiss was appointed state geologist in 1909, although E.A. Birge continued as director and superintendent. In 1919, Birge resigned from the Survey to take the job of president of the University of Wisconsin. Survey leadership responsibilities and titles were then consolidated, and Hotchkiss became state geologist, director, and superintendent.

During Hotchkiss's tenure at the Wisconsin survey, he was instrumental in the creation of a separate State Highway Commission that was formally created by the state legislature in 1911. He served on the commission from its inception and was secretary from 1911 to 1922 and chairman from 1923 to 1925. Hotchkiss supervised the writing and publication of many bulletins that dealt with the state's natural resources. He co-authored statutes directing the Survey to collect data for the evaluation of mines and mineral lands and to specifically assess the lead and zinc deposits of southwestern Wisconsin. He secured increased funding for topographic mapping. Hotchkiss authored or co-authored numerous Survey publications, including *Rural Highways of Wisconsin*, *Limestone Road Materials of Wisconsin*, *Geological and Road Map of Wisconsin*, *Mineral Land Classification*, and *Mineral Lands of Northern Wisconsin*.

Hotchkiss served on many state and federal committees and was a member of numerous professional societies. During World War I he was a member of the War Minerals Committee and spent considerable time in Washington, D.C., planning for the development of strategic and critical mineral supplies. He participated in the founding meeting of the Association of American State Geologists in May 1908. He was secretary-treasurer of AASG from 1915 to 1917, and served as president of that organization from 1918 to 1920. He was vice president of the Geological Society of America in 1937, and treasurer from 1945 to 1948. He also served as president of the Society of Economic Geologists in 1946.

In 1925, Hotchkiss resigned from the Wisconsin survey to accept the position of president of the Michigan College of Mining and Technology. Hotchkiss left Michigan in 1935 to become the president of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y. He retired from Rensselaer in 1943. He remained actively engaged in consulting work throughout North America until his death.

Hotchkiss married Edith Rachel Balsley on September 20, 1904, and they had three children. He died on June 20, 1954, while doing consulting work for the New Jersey Zinc Exploration Co. in Franklin, N.J.