
John A. Bownocker (*Ohio*)**Thomas M. Berg** (*Ohio State Geologist, Honorary*)

John Adams Bownocker, fifth state geologist of the state of Ohio, was among the founders of the Association of American State Geologists. His participation in the 1908 founding of the Association came early in his 22-year career as state geologist (1906–28). He had considerable prior experience in the geology of Ohio, having come under the tutelage of Dr. Edward Orton Sr. at Ohio State University. After receiving his B.Sc. degree at Ohio State in 1889, he studied at the University of Chicago and at Yale, and returned to Ohio State, where



he served as an assistant to Dr. Orton, Ohio's third state geologist. Bownocker received his D.Sc. from Ohio State University in 1897. He advanced along the academic track to the position of professor and chairman of the Department of Geology, a position that he held from 1918 to 1928. During his academic progress, he served as a geologic assistant for the Ohio and New Jersey surveys, and was appointed Ohio's state geologist in 1906.

John A. Bownocker was born near St. Paul in Fairfield County, Ohio, on March 11, 1865. Raised on the family farm 15 miles south of Columbus, he demonstrated a great thirst for knowledge. On hearing a lecture in his community by Dr. Edward Orton Sr., he resolved to attend the state university. After saving his money, he entered the preparatory department of Ohio State in the fall of 1883. Under the influence of Dr. Orton, Bownocker decided to enter the field of geology, and spent the rest of his career at OSU.

As state geologist of Ohio, Bownocker was clearly dedicated to unraveling as many aspects of the state's geology as he could for the people of Ohio. He accomplished a great deal in this quest—without sacrificing concerns for OSU and its students. This was a balancing act that many state geologists have had to face, but he did it well. In addition to balancing his academic and research activities, Bownocker gave significant and important attention to the relationship between the Ohio Geological Survey and its sister state surveys. In 1906, the very year he was appointed state geologist, he attended a seminal meeting of central U.S. state geological surveys at the University of Chicago, to help form an organization of Mississippi Valley state geologists, with the objective of collaboration and mutual support to advance the work of the surveys. In May of 1908, Dr. Bownocker traveled to Washington, D.C., to participate with 21 other state geologists in formation of the nationwide Association of American State Geologists.

In examining the early records of AASG, it appears that Bownocker was usually faithful in attending the meetings of the association, although he did miss a few gatherings. It does not appear that he ever served as an AASG officer—again a reflection of his pursuit of proper balance in his professional life. In 1923 and 1924 in particular, he worked very actively through AASG in support of the congressional Temple Bill on topographic mapping in the United States (HR 10057, introduced by Rep. Temple of Pennsylvania). He contacted members of the Ohio delegation seeking strong support of the Temple Bill and its appropriations for this important national effort. The hard work of Bownocker and his fellow state geologists is very reminiscent of AASG's efforts during the late 1980's and early 1990's in support of the National Geologic Mapping Act. Bownocker continued his strong and leading efforts for national topographic-mapping legislation until his death in 1928.

Dr. Bownocker devoted his professional career to teaching geology at OSU beginning in 1895, and administering the Department of Geology as its chairman from 1918 to 1928. Equal devotion was given to administering the Ohio Geological Survey and the work and contributions of students, former students, OSU faculty, and faculty from other universities. During much of his time as state geologist, Bownocker employed the services of Wilber Stout (who succeeded Bownocker as state geologist) and Raymond E. Lamborn—both outstanding Ohio geologists in their own right. In his memorial of Bownocker published by the Geological Society of America, Clinton Stauffer said,

Much detailed work was planned and accomplished during his tenure as State Geologist. The results of this work were published in a series of twenty-five bulletins and several state maps. These publications deal with nearly every phase of geology and are particularly valuable in their dealings with the mineral resources of the State.

It is axiomatic that a good state geologist should be familiar with almost every aspect of his or her state's geology. Bownocker's list of publications shows very clearly that he was well armed to speak on almost any aspect of Ohio geology. Early on in his geological career, however, he became fascinated by oil and natural gas resources, Ohio's subsurface stratigraphy, and petroleum genesis. The majority of his publications focus on these subject areas. He also published on Ohio's glacial geology, paleontology, geomorphology, coal resources, industrial minerals, salt occurrences, building stones, molding sands, glass sands, and of considerable importance, geologic mapping of all kinds. The latter subject held high value for Bownocker, as it should for any state geologist. It was not until 2006 that Bownocker's 1920 statewide bedrock geologic map of Ohio was finally revised—a testimony to its high quality and lasting value.

Stauffer described John Bownocker's passing:

In the latter part of February 1928, Dr. Bownocker underwent a serious operation, from which he only partially recovered. He was able to be at his office in Orton Hall part of the time, but he never resumed his teaching. During the late summer he grew steadily worse and died at his home on October 21, 1928.

It is a strange oversight that Stauffer does not mention AASG and Bownocker's activity in that association. Bownocker traveled to the AASG meeting in Washington, D.C., in late April of 1927. The number-one topic was appropriations for the Temple Bill. Bownocker also attended the December 30, 1927, meeting of the Association held in Cleveland, Ohio, and no doubt assisted in planning that meeting.

All can look to Bownocker in AASG's history as an outstanding state geologist who helped found the Association, and struck an exemplary balance among teaching, researching the geology of his home state, and service to AASG.