



William Paxton Hewitt (1909-1998)

William P. Hewitt, Ph.D., the second Director and the architect of fundamental changes in the Utah Geological Survey, died Saturday, April 11, 1998, in Austin, Texas. He was 89.

Born in Manila, The Philippines, in 1909, Hewitt earned his doctorate in geology at Columbia University. He was named director of what was then called the Utah Geological and Mineral Survey in 1961 by the University of Utah administration, succeeding Arthur L. Crawford. He also served as a professor of geology at the school.

As director, Hewitt was responsible for refocusing the survey's activities on economic rather than scientific geology, bringing it in line with the stated intentions of the State Legislature. In 1963, Hewitt succeeded in convincing the state to set aside a portion of mineral income to help fund the agency. With a strengthened budget assured, Hewitt instituted mineral appraisals of state-owned lands and detailed geologic studies of mining districts, coal deposits, oil-impregnated sandstone deposits, and oil and gas fields. In addition, he increased the agency's participation in a study of the brine chemistry of the Great Salt Lake, which led to the continuing development of mineral extraction industries.

While focusing on economic geology, Hewitt began to place more emphasis on the hazards that characterize Utah's unique geologic makeup. He created the Urban and Engineering Geology section to study foundation conditions, slope stability, landslide and flood hazards, and seismic phenomenon. Environmental issues were also addressed, with the agency acting as consultants to the state Division of Environmental Health. The survey concentrated on new residential subdivisions, hazardous wastes, and sewage lagoons.

Under Hewitt's leadership, the survey's publications grew to include 30 bulletins, three coal monographs, 48 special studies, nearly 100 reports of investigations, 19 water resources bulletins, 13 oil and gas field studies, an earth science series, and a quarterly newsletter. He also helped secure federal grants and contracts used to fund further coal and oil studies.

Work by the survey under Hewitt's direction helped Utah secure ownership of the Great Salt Lake, its waters, bed, shoreline, and relic lands. The survey continues to play a strong role as advocate for the state's interest in boundaries of national parks, monuments, recreation areas, proposed wilderness areas, and particularly the assessment of mineral value of state lands.

In 1993, the State Legislature transferred the administration of the survey from the University to the Department of Natural Resources, and Hewitt became the state's first official State Geologist. Hewitt retired from his post in 1974.

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