

## Memorial of Horace R. Blank August 8, 1898–January 22, 1984

ROBERT K. POPP

Department of Geology, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas 77843, U.S.A.

Horace R. Blank, a Life Fellow who joined the Mineralogical Society of America in 1926, died suddenly in Bryan, Texas, on January 22, 1984, at the age of 85.

Horace was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on August 8, 1898, the youngest child of David J. and Louisa Repholtz Blank, who were the operators of a family confectionery business that supplied fine restaurants. Horace's youth was marked by a great love of the outdoors and nature; he was a systematic collector of a variety of natural specimens, including, of course, rocks and minerals. He was also an avid swimmer, an activity he practiced throughout his life.

Horace received both his undergraduate and graduate education at the University of Pennsylvania, obtaining the B.S. in chemistry in 1919 and the Ph.D. in chemistry in 1924, after submitting a dissertation entitled "The Allotropy of Germanium Dioxide." Both his undergraduate and graduate programs included considerable course work in mineralogy and geology. He remained at the University of Pennsylvania as an instructor in the chemistry department, but his preference to be out-of-doors, over a career in the laboratory, led him to resign that position in 1926 in order to become instructor of mineralogy at Columbia University in New York. The instructorship at Columbia was a nine-month appointment, and during the summer months he was employed by the Board of Water Supply of the City of New York, in the construction and excavation of City Tunnel No. 2. In 1929, with his wife and two children, he left Columbia for permanent employment as Assistant Geologist with the Water Supply Board where he carried out engineering geology of boreholes and tunnels. Between 1934 and 1936 he held a variety of positions in the U.S. Geological Survey involving structural mapping and groundwater studies in New York State. He left the USGS in 1936 to work for the U.S. Soil Conservation Service in Washington, D.C., where he held the titles of assistant, and then associate geologist. At the Soil Conservation Service, he carried out studies of the geology and groundwater resources on experimental watersheds in Texas and Nebraska. His desire to return to teaching led him to accept a faculty position at Southwestern University, Georgetown, Texas, in 1943. In 1949 he came to the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas (now Texas A&M University). He retired from Texas A&M as professor of geology in 1968, and remained an emeritus professor until his death.

Horace's publications reflect his wide range of research interests and professional employment. He was first, and



foremost, a mineralogist, but he applied his expertise to a variety of problems in petrology, surface processes, and synthetic aggregates. While at Texas A&M, he was a consultant on ore deposits with the Texas Forest Service, on water quality with the Brazos River Authority, and on groundwater on the Edwards Plateau of Texas with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. He remained active scientifically and published regularly after his official retirement in 1968.

Horace traveled extensively, virtually throughout the world, during his career, usually in conjunction with international geological meetings and field trips. He collected systematically and left behind a large, well cataloged collection of rock and mineral specimens from classic worldwide localities.

He is remembered by his former university colleagues and students as a strict and demanding, yet concerned, teacher. He usually lectured with his grade book opened before him, so that as he lectured and led discussion, he was aware of each student's progress in the course.

Horace was an active supporter of geological societies, both professional and amateur. In addition to Fellowship in the MSA, he was a Fellow of the Geological Society of America and the Texas Academy of Science, for whom he served as Vice President for Earth Science in 1951 and 1958. He was a member of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists, the Geochemical Society, the American Geophysical Union, the National Association of Geology Teachers (president of the Texas section in

1960), and Sigma Xi. In 1966, he was a charter member, and first president of the Brazos Valley (Texas) Gem and Mineral Society.

Horace was an active member of the First United Methodist Church, Bryan, Texas, where he taught an adult Bible-study class for 30 consecutive years.

Horace Blank retained the excitement and enthusiasm of his youthful rock collecting and turned it into a professional career as a mineralogist that lasted sixty years.

He is survived by his wife of 57 years, Marjorie Ferguson Blank of Bryan, Texas; two daughters, Dr. Emily Bonwich of Columbia, Missouri, and Nancy Allen Kaesler of Dallas, Texas; a son, Dr. H. Richard Blank who is a geophysicist with the U.S. Geological Survey, Golden, Colorado; and eight grandchildren.

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