



*Claude R. Hoott*

# CLAUDE R. HOCOTT

1909–2001

Elected in 1974

*“For contributions to increased oil recovery through petroleum reservoir engineering, including fluid dynamics, phase behavior, and geochemistry.”*

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CLAUDE R. HOCOTT, a pioneer in research to improve the discovery and production of oil and gas whose career spanned the modern oil industry, died in Austin, Texas, September 9, 2001. He was born in Excelsior, Arkansas, in 1909. After his family moved to the Rio Grande Valley, he lived the remainder of his life in Texas. He attended Edinburgh Junior College and later transferred to the University of Texas at Austin, where he studied chemical engineering, at the time a relatively new discipline in the College of Engineering.

Hocott's studies were interrupted when he had to leave college for a semester to earn money. He lived with his brother and sister, both of whom attended the university, and he needed to pay his share of the expenses, so during the semester he grew an onion crop. But when he harvested the onions, he discovered that the large produce buyers had no need for them. A very resourceful individual, he loaded the onions into a truck and went from town to town and house to house selling onions until he had sold the entire crop. The proceeds financed his remaining undergraduate studies. In subsequent

years, whenever the Great Depression and the hard times it engendered were mentioned, Hocott enjoyed telling the story of this enterprise. Based on his experiences, he always disagreed with the proposition that the many Americans who joined the Communist Party during the Depression were hungry intellectuals. He was one of the rugged individualists so prominent in Texas in the Depression years.

It was because of his South Texas background that Hocott retained a lifelong interest in Latin America, traveling there frequently and learning to speak Spanish.

When Hocott graduated with his bachelor's degree in 1933, E.P. Schoch, a chemistry professor of great vision who founded the Department of Chemical Engineering, persuaded him to enroll in graduate school. Hocott taught classes in chemical engineering and helped with Schoch's pet research project—the production of acetylene by passing an electric arc through natural gas. Schoch was greatly disturbed by the sight of the massive flares lighting the Texas Gulf Coast that burned unwanted methane coproduced with the crude oil; he considered this a great waste of an important Texas resource and resolved to do something about it. Hocott stayed to research the Schoch process and earned his PhD in chemical engineering in 1937.

At about the same time, Humble Oil Company, on the recommendation of W.K. Lewis, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, had formed a research laboratory entirely devoted to researching methods for finding and producing oil and gas. Hocott was hired as a research engineer to work in this new laboratory. Since the laboratory was the first of its kind in the world, there was no shortage of interesting and important problems to be researched. Researchers did pioneering work that was to become the basis for modern exploration and production technology; Hocott's early publications related to issues of crucial importance for reservoir engineering. The success of the production research laboratory is perhaps best measured by noting that, by 1948, every major oil company in America, and many outside the United States, instituted laboratories similar to Humble's.

Hocott was appointed director of the Humble Laboratory when Stuart Buckley, codiscoverer of the Buckley-Leverett theory, retired. When Humble was merged with Esso to form Exxon Production Research Co., Hocott was named executive vice president of the newly created company. He served in that capacity until he retired in 1974. During his years at Humble, he became an important spokesman for the oil industry, serving as an oil and gas advisor to the Carter administration and appearing on the McNeil-Lehrer Report.

Hocott held many offices in the Society of Petroleum Engineers, including president in 1952, director in 1954, and distinguished lecturer in 1963 and 1987. He was an American Institute of Mining and Metallurgical Engineering director and served on many national committees.

Hocott helped to found the Gulf Universities Research Consortium, a group of universities in states bordering the Gulf of Mexico with faculties in marine science and geology. He served as vice president of this consortium from 1979 to 1983.

When Hocott retired from Exxon, he elected to devote his time to higher education, which he valued as the most important activity to ensure the future welfare of Texas. He initially commuted between Houston and Austin, where, in addition to teaching classes in chemistry and chemical engineering, he helped to found the Institute for Christian Studies, now the Austin Graduate School of Theology. Hocott supported the institute through advice and financial support for more than 30 years, and was chancellor at the time of his death. He was very interested in theological studies that encompassed a profound respect for both Biblical studies and scientific truths. His primary goal at the institute was to promote high-quality research through research and travel grants.

His dedication to higher education was severely tested when the then dean of the College of Engineering, Earnest Gloyna, asked him to come out of his partial retirement to chair the Department of Petroleum Engineering. Hocott reluctantly agreed to take on this challenge, saying his first and most important task was to identify his successor. He was

appointed professor of petroleum engineering and chaired the department in 1974–1975.

Once a successor was found, however, Hocott did not return to full retirement. He became director of the Texas Petroleum Research Committee (TPRC), a group under the auspices of the Texas Railroad Commission that funded petroleum engineering research at both UT Austin and Texas A&M University. He was the director of TPRC from 1975 to 1979.

Hocott's commitment to higher education, and to good applied research and the benefits it provides, was profound. It was a passion, truly worthy of his time, energy, and financial support. Claude and his wife, Billy, who died in 1979, endowed the Billy and Claude R. Hocott Distinguished Centennial Engineering Research Award as well as the Hocott Lectureship in petroleum engineering.

Hocott received considerable recognition for his efforts on behalf of the oil industry, his profession, and higher education. He was named a distinguished graduate of the University of Texas College of Engineering in 1971, elected to the National Academy of Engineering in 1974, and named an honorary member of the American Institute of Mining, Metallurgical, and Petroleum Engineers in 1975. He received the DeGolyer Distinguished Service Medal (1980) and the Anthony F. Lucas Gold Medal (1981), both awarded by the Society of Petroleum Engineers.

Claude R. Hocott was dedicated to his country, his state, his profession, his religion, his two universities, and, above all, his family. He is survived by his second wife, the former Judy Mathews, whom he married in 1983; two daughters, Elaine Gainey and Gail Hancock; five grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren. A brother, Dr. Floyd Hocott, and a sister, Mable Ogle, survived him, but are now deceased.

His stepson wrote that

Dr. Hocott had a fine library on the history of Texas and the Southwest. He had particularly fine memories of the historians and naturalists around the University of Texas. He was also very fond of the artists of the Southwest. Dr. and Mrs. Hocott developed a love of the Texas coast around Corpus Christi and spent much time there during his retirement.

