Geoscience Honour Roll Citation – F.H. Edmunds

Professor F.H. "Harry" Edmunds was born in the small town of Hawarden, Flintshire, Wales on January 27, 1898. His time of birth made him a fitting candidate for military service in World War I, and he served with the Special Brigade of the Royal Engineers from 1917 to 1919. An accident in which one of his legs was permanently damage forced him to leave the military and enter the University of Liverpool where he obtained a B.Sc. Honours degree in 1922 and a M.Sc. in 1923. His program of study gave him a combined degree in chemistry and geology. His geology studies were with P.G.H. Boswell, a distinguished pioneer in sedimentary geology. Following graduation he worked for a firebrick company as a geologist and chemist, but he had a desire to get into the petroleum industry, so he and his wife left the British Isles for Canada, taking a position with the Department of Soils at the University of Saskatchewan in 1925. He gave his first lectures in geology during the 1926-27 university year taking over from Professor W.G. Worcester, an engineering professor who gave the first classes in geology in the 1924-25 university-year. A first attempt at establishing a geology department ended with the departure in 1928 of Dr. Justin S. Delury who was hired in 1927 to partner with Professor Edmunds in the teaching of geology classes. The department was re-established a year later when Dr. J.B. Mawdsley, a McGill and Princeton graduate was hired to establish with Professor Edmunds a two-man geology department that operated until 1940 when a third faculty member was appointed.

Although much of his initial work from 1925 to 1930 was on soil surveys and his first publication in 1930 was focused on soil mapping as a means to interpreting bedrock geology, Professor Edmunds soon became the provincial expert on the near surface geology and fossil fuel potential of the province. The majority of his publications from the mid-1930s into the 1950s pertained to the oil and gas potential of local areas, such as Kamsack, Riverhurst, Melville-Lemberg, and Simpson as well as reports with a broader provincial perspective. His 1938 publication on the geology of the Simpson area became the main geological reference for that region. With the discovery of gas in the Lloydminster area in 1938 and at Lone Rock in 1940, he pioneered the geology of the Lloydminster area with his first publication in 1940 followed by others in 1946 and 1948. His 1940 paper contained detailed discussions of the stratigraphy and structure of the Lloydminster area and became the major reference for that region. In later years, because of his expertise in the Lloydminster area, he was able to obtain grant money to support M.Sc. research on various aspects of the geology of that region.

In spite of his apparent transformation to a petroleum geologist he did not totally lose his interest in the geology of soils, and in 1944 he wrote a chapter on the geological history of Saskatchewan that was published in a series of soil survey reports released by the Department of Soils at the University of Saskatchewan. In addition, due to his many encounters with the glacial deposits of central Saskatchewan through his early soil studies, he also published a paper on the recession of the Wisconsin glacier in that area.

Because of his wide experience with the oil and gas occurrences of the province he was appointed to the Oil and Gas Conservation Board in 1952 and he served faithfully on that

board until his death in 1965. Probably his greatest legacy to geoscience in the province was his behind the scenes activity urging the government of the day in the early 1940s to enact a regulation requiring the archiving of all well information. This included drilling records, geophysical well logs, cores and drill cuttings. The accumulation of this paper data and rock information eventually led to the construction of the Subsurface Geological Laboratory, which opened in April of 1958 as the first core library in North America. Secondary to that accomplishment would be the numbers of geologists he educated in his many years with the Geology Department of the University of Saskatchewan. He was well recognized by his peers as he was accepted as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, a Fellow of the Geological Society of London and a Fellow of the Geological Society of America. He was a member of councils of both the Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy and the Geological Association of Canada. In 1961 he became head of the Department of Geological Sciences at the University of Saskatchewan and remained in that position until his death.

I’m sure that you will agree that Professor F.H. “Harry” Edmunds contributed significantly to geoscience in Saskatchewan and fits all the criteria for induction onto the Geoscience Honour Roll.