

Victor Oppenheim, #83
Dallas, Texas
1906 – 2005



Victor Oppenheim died on October 30, 2005, one day before his 99th birthday. He was born in Riga, Latvia, the son of a civil engineer who was murdered by brigands while on assignment for the railroad in the North China city of Harbin. Returning to Europe with his French mother, Victor attended the University of Caen. After completion of his studies, he went to work for the mining and engineering consulting firm of Ludovick Barreau in Paris, who promptly sent him to Argentina. From 1929 through the mid-1940s, Victor was employed to search for oil and mineral wealth in all of the major countries of South America. In the process, he made a geologic map of each country, by foot, in canoe, on horseback, or astride a mule. His composite map of South America was published in 1944, making him the only 20th Century geologist to have single-handedly mapped an entire continent. In those days, before continental drift was widely accepted, he studied Gondwana rocks of Brazil and published the important monograph *Rochas Gondwanicas* (in Portuguese), which was extracted as “Petroleum Geology of Gondwana Rocks of Southern Brazil” for the *AAPG Bulletin* in 1935. He explained the politically charged conclusion that petroleum would not be found in Gondwana rocks and thus steered exploration in Brazil in the right direction. In Columbia, he discovered the El Cerrejon coal deposit with over 40 billion tons of reserves. However, Victor was interested in more than just economic geology. He discovered fossils and artifacts, melding his interests in the history of Earth, of life, and of people. He wrote an ethnography of the indigenous people of remote Peru. He was fluent in at least seven languages and published scientific papers in most of them. He published a study of the Tunebo language of Columbia. His 1958 book, *Explorations East of the High Andes*, recounts some of his adventures, but it is particularly notable in its empathy and understanding of the people of remote South America with whom he spent so many years. In his later years before retirement, he turned his attention to the economic geology of North America and Africa. Victor was a member of many societies and the recipient of numerous awards. In addition to

SIPES, Victor Oppenheim was a member of AAPG, AIPG and the Explorer's Club. He received AAPG's 1988 Human Needs Award, and an Outstanding Geologist award in 1991 from AIPG. His notes and records are archived at the University of North Texas Library.

Victor Oppenheim was predeceased by his wife, Dorothy.