

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

COLIN OSBORNE HUTTON (1910 – 1971)

Colin Osborne Hutton, Professor of Mineralogy in the Department of Geology, died on December 13, 1971, in the twenty-fourth year of his service on the faculty of Stanford University.

He was born on January 10, 1910, in Dunedin, New Zealand, the son of Early Settlers of the Southland region. He completed his school education in Dunedin, distinguishing himself as both Senior Science Prizeman and Senior Athletic Cup winner, and read for his B.Sc. degree at the University of Otago, graduating in 1933 as Senior Scholar in both Chemistry and Geology. In 1934 he obtained his M.Sc. degree in Chemistry and Geology, with First Class Honours; he was again Senior Scholar in Geology, winning the Duffus Lubecki Research Scholarship and the Sir Julius von Haast Prize. He became a lecturer at the University of Otago, and in 1936 was awarded a Shirtcliffe Fellowship and an External Research Studentship at Emmanuel College, Cambridge University. He became Senior Scholar in Emmanuel, and graduated Ph.D. in Mineralogy and Petrology in 1938. In the meantime he was awarded the Hamilton Prize of the Royal Society of New Zealand.

Hutton returned to New Zealand in 1938, and in 1940 married Mary (May) Piggot, Colin and May were devoted to one another, and May offered constant admiration, understanding, and encouragement through the years.

From 1938 to 1946, Colin Hutton established and supervised the Section of Mineralogy and Petrology of the New Zealand Geological Survey. During this period he made valuable contributions to the study of refractory materials and directed an extensive program of research on rare-earth and radioactive minerals. He founded the New Zealand Association of Science in 1942, was an honorary lecturer at Victoria University from 1943-46, and served as Scientific Subjects Broadcaster for the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation from 1943 to 1947. In 1946 he became Senior Lecturer in Geology and Mineralogy at the University of Otago, and in 1947 he was appointed to the Executive Council of the Royal Society of New Zealand.

Colin Hutton came to Stanford in 1947 as Associate Professor of Mineralogy, and he became Professor of Mineralogy in 1948. He was a dedicated and conscientious teacher whose standards were unusually high. He firmly believed that the students were here to learn and that the faculty was here to teach. To this rule he could permit no exception. His laboratories were immaculate and the equipment was always maintained in excellent operating condition. It was always available to students with the understanding that it be left in the same condition as found. The extensive mineral collections, to which he had added his own personal materials, were his pride and joy. He thoroughly enjoyed working with this material and the organization of the collections was the envy of everyone who has worked with similar materials. His organization was such that individual specimens among the thousands he had classified could quickly and easily be located.

Dr. Hutton's lectures and laboratory instruction were also superbly organized and there was a use for every minute. His manner was somewhat reserved, probably because of innate shyness. In spite of this he was always available to serious students, and was regarded as a virtual oracle. He was a rigorous, exacting teacher, but he was anxious to help young people wherever and whenever he could. Under the reserve, students found a warm, pleasant person who could be relied upon to help. Those who have taken Dr. Hutton's courses have had to work long and diligently, but they are unanimous in their praise; they all agree that they learned a great deal.

Professor Hutton was a specialist in mineralogy and mineral chemistry, with a particular interest in the less common minerals of beach sands and stream sands. Part of his work on sands was an exploration of possible concentrations of radioactive minerals on California beaches and in placer deposits of several western mountain ranges. An accomplished field geologist as well as mineralogist, he was interested in the conclusions he could draw about the origins of rocks and rock structures by correlating natural occurrences with mineralogical data. At the time of his death he had nearly completed a ten-year study of a volcanic island in the West Indies, a study that involved both arduous field work and painstaking laboratory investigation. His mineralogical work was characterized by meticulous attention to detail and by a continual effort to refine both the complex interrelations among minerals and the meaning of these relations for the larger problems of geology.

His scientific reputation is international. He wrote some eighty-three papers, which were published in at least three countries, and many of his articles are cited repeatedly. He was affiliated with the Royal Society of New Zealand, the Geological Society of London, the Geological Society of America, the Mineralogical Society of America, the California Academy of Sciences, the Cambridge Natural History Society, the Mineralogical Society of Great Britain, the Mineralogical Society of Canada, and the Mineralogical Society of Japan. Among his many honors, one of the most exceptional was the Sc.D. Degree conferred upon him by Cambridge University in 1952, this being the highest of Cambridge's postdoctoral awards in science. In addition to academic renown, Professor Hutton gained recognition in government and industry, and he became a consultant to many corporations and to the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission. His services to science continued until his death. From 1953 to 1956 he was a member of the Council of the Mineralogical Society of America, and he remained an external examiner of D.Sc. theses in the University of New Zealand. Among his many activities he served unflinchingly as judge of the Counties Mineral Exhibits at California State Fairs.

Outside his professional activities, Colin Hutton was a man of remarkably catholic interests. His early experiences in mountaineering in the Western Otago and Southland regions of New Zealand led to a life-long love of hiking, characteristically in some of the more remote areas of the globe. In 1954 he walked through Northern Malaysia and Southern Thailand, and in later years spent much time in thoroughly investigating the islands of the Lesser Antilles in conjunction with his geological studies.

His love of nature began at his own door. His intense interest in gardening is mirrored in the beautiful surroundings of his home, achieved entirely without professional assistance. When the garden did not claim his efforts, he and May relaxed in the enjoyment of music, particularly that of the 17th and 18th centuries.

Following a visit to Fiji, he developed a strong interest in the life, history and art of the Polynesians, with particular reference to New Zealand, the Chatham Islands, the eastern part of the Fiji Archipelago, and the Cook Islands. In his usual fashion he developed this interest into a knowledge little short of authoritative.

In all aspects of his life and work, Colin was marked by a strong sense of responsibility and by the most careful attention to detail. He was devoted to his students; although his illness had begun in early summer and was advanced by the time Autumn Quarter began, he insisted on teaching a regular schedule which must have taxed his physical strength enormously. There was no way to deter his indomitable will or to prevent him discharging what he regarded as an obligation to his students and to the University.

Colin Hutton is survived by his wife, May, and a sister, Mrs. Tui Todd of New Zealand. He will be missed not only by them, but by students, faculty members, and fellow scientists.

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