Our Mission in Petroleum Research

Oklahoma is situated in the center of the greatest oil producing area known. Tulsa boasts of being the oil capital of the world and the balance of the state takes great pride in the merits of Tulsa's claim. Oklahoma and the adjoining states, known commonly as the Mid-Continent area, are unsurpassed anywhere in the production of crude petroleum and allied products.

In practically the geographical center of the Mid-Continent area and less than four hours drive from the most prolific crude oil field ever discovered, the University of Oklahoma stands as the highest educational agency within the state. For thirty-six years the university kept its easy gait with the greatest high grade oil pool in the world. But when the black gold finally poured forth, it was not left unattended. It was not left alone. New York, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Indiana, and other states where lives the stockholder of those few major companies which held the greater part of the Seminole area.

Of course, in this as in all other matters, the university can perform only those functions assigned to it by the state.

Certainly, a good part of the thirty-six years, the university spent in swaddling clothes. But it has since grown up. It is past that stage where the paddle is considered a proper implement or education or a necessary piece of laboratory equipment. But as a thing apart from the life of the citizens of the state, the university can never take its proper place as a great state agency, nor can it ever attain its full merit until it has made that personal contact with the community interests and tie its work up with the community life of this commonwealth. If it is to grip the heart of this people, it must tie into the industrial and the economic life of the state, stepping out ahead and pointing out the way.

Some years ago the university attained an eminent position in the field of petroleum geology, pioneering and bearing the brunt of new theories against the opposition of the practical oil producer. Its usefulness in that field was limited only to the narrowness of its vision. Many of those who went out from the university as excellent "rock hounds" now find themselves in a very restricted field of endeavor and look with great regret to the limited training offered to them in the form of petroleum geology. The scope of geology as taught and applied fifteen years ago is almost a primitive science in the light of present day methods and today's methods fifteen years from now will only compare as the twig to the monoplane.

Nothing had done more to develop the petroleum resources of the state than petroleum geology, and no agency deserves greater credit in pioneering this science than the University of Oklahoma. And just as we stood twenty years ago upon the threshold of applied geology, we are today at the very beginning of petroleum research. Trained geologists, physicists, engineers, chemists accountants, and other scientists and professionals, will be marshalled to develop to the utmost the uses, the economics, and the possibilities of the state's natural resources in petroleum. But why wait until after the greater portion of those resources are spent or exhausted? And why wait until the industry has pushed on ahead and then trail a decade behind?

I would like to see the University of Oklahoma step out today—not in 1929, nor even tomorrow, but today— with a department of petroleum research or a school of research, equipped with the best men in the United States, whoever or wherever they may be, and irrespective of salary schedules, to pioneer again the petroleum industry of the Mid-Continent area, this time in the field of research.

We are witnessing the rapid exhaustion of the state's resources in oil and gas, knowing full well that when these pools are abandoned under present methods there will still remain in the ground unrecovered approximately four-fifths of the oil, possibly more. Daily we see old wells plugged and pulled because they can no longer be operated at a profit. We see processes of development, operation, and of refining, so expensive that they can be used only in the more prolific areas, and other areas must of necessity go undeveloped or be abandoned at a premature period in their production. We see the small operator of a decade ago pushed out of the field and the big companies confidently set in his place. We see operators and refineries groping for scientific facts on which to base their operations, and no consistent effort to collaborate or correlate the great mass of scientific data available within the state. We see even the major companies accepting, and satisfied with it, only a fraction of the net profits available within a given area, and the land owner neither knowing nor concerned with whether he will get his royalty on only approximately one-fifth of the oil within his land areas.

Just as the University of Wisconsin has gone into the industrial life of that state to take the lead in the development of the butter and cheese industry of that commonwealth, the University of Oklahoma should step into this breach with a department of petroleum research to develop the petroleum resources of Oklahoma and to train capable scientists to meet the call that will soon come from the industry for agencies to carry on their proper research.

And the state of Oklahoma with a present income averaging around $9,000,000 a year from its gross production tax on oil and gas, could well afford to set aside three mills out of its thirty mill production tax increase and perpetuate its income from this source.

Budget Officer Pares

When Ben Harrison, state budget officer, got through with his scissors on the university's budget, he left it in this state: $1,185,000 for salaries for the biennium; $23,000 for maintenance the first year and $350,000 for the second year; $54,000 for summer session salaries; $75,000 per annum for extension work; $300,000 per annum for building appropriations.

The university had asked $610,000 for buildings the first year and $550,000 for the second year. Both demands were far under the urgent needs of the university, and the reduction in amount is a serious blow to the university.