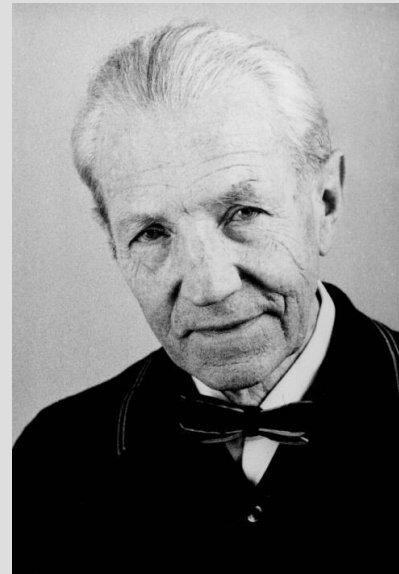


History of Geosciences

Ott Christoph Hilgenberg (*01-18-1896 in Grebenstein, Hessen; + 09-21-1976 in Berlin) was a German geophysicist and engineer with doctor's degree and a contemporary of [Alfred Wegener](#). His father Hermann Hilgenberg, the director of the Raiffeisen Grainary in Hanau, died in 1902. In 1914 after Ott Christoph's matura examinations the First World War broke out. He was a soldier in front lines until the war ended, leaving him with a hearing loss on one ear and a shot through one knee having healed quite well. Since 1919 he studied electro-mechanical engineering at the [Technische Universität Berlin](#). After his diploma he was employed as an assistant to the same faculty until 1924. In the following years Hilgenberg found his true destination: [Geophysics](#).



Ott Christoph Hilgenberg in 1970

As leader of a survey-section with geophysical instruments first in Texas, USA, and later in New-Mexico he worked with geologists and geophysicists to interpret the signals from the depth in finding of oil-bearing strata. In doing so he encountered extraordinary difficulties because they didn't have assured means of distinction. These experiences were the main cause for him to begin experimenting with the behaviour of rock and various materials when he came back to the TH Berlin in 1929. His work was supported by TH-Professors, who understood the importance of his research improving the methods to find natural resources.

[Roberto Mantovani](#), [Ott Christoph Hilgenberg](#) and later [S. Warren Carey](#) were the founders of the theory of the Expanding Earth. Ott C. Hilgenberg had started writing his publication „Vom wachsenden Erdball“ (The growing globe) during the lifetime of [Alfred Wegener](#). This was meant to supplement Wegener's Theory of Continental Drift. In 1930 Wegener died in Greenland at the age of 50. Hilgenberg posthum dedicated his own work „Vom wachsenden Erdball“ to him [download pdf](#). With four model globes Hilgenberg was the first to show how all continental shelves would fit neatly together, if the Earth's diameter were about half the size of today. Alfred Wegener had shown it for the Atlantic. Hilgenberg proposed the same applies for the Pacific. The fact that the oceanic crusts of Atlantic and Pacific have the same age (http://www.ngdc.noaa.gov/mgg/ocean_age/) was still unknown at that time.

In 1929 he got acquainted with Hanni Drewer who would be his life-companion for 46 years. In 1932 their daughter Helge was born. From 1934 to 1938 Hilgenberg was appointed regular assistant to the [Technische Universität Berlin](#) (TH Berlin) Institute of Kinetics. He was in charge of basic lectures. By refusing to join the Nazi party NSDAP Hilgenberg relinquished any possibility of an academic career. His thesis „Über Strömungsversuche mit Senken und Quellen, die das Wesen der Schwerkraft grundlegend erklären“ was rejected by the faculty, mainly because the idea of ether and gravitation disagreed with Einstein's special theory of relativity.

During World War II Hilgenberg worked at the library of the TH Berlin. In 1945 he kept watch over the buildings of the TH during the battle of Berlin and received a bullet in his left arm. After the war he alone - with a truck - brought back from the Soviet Zone thousands of evacuated books belonging to the TH Berlin now called Technical University (TU). He succeeded in retrieving valuable books stored on ground occupied by the British army. Since 1947 he was employed as head librarian at the former State Library in the Eastern Sector of Berlin. He finished his thesis „Die Bruchstruktur der sialischen Erdkruste“ and in 1948 promoted to Dr. Ing. at the TH. Due to his living in Westberlin the employment in Eastberlin ended in 1950. Up to the end of his life he was a free-lance scientist. He was granted his own office for his scientific work at the Berlin TU Institute of Geology and Palaeontology. During his activity at the TH and later TU he was always supported by the Professor of Geology [Heinrich Quiring](#) and Professor of Geology and Paleontology [Werner Zeil](#) a long-standing friend of Earth Expansion. Hilgenberg published numerous papers, e.g. „Vom Wachsenden Erdball“ in 1933 and his principal work „Geotektonik - neuartig gesehen“ in 1974. At the age of 80 he died of heart-failure on September 21, 1976.



The original globes from Dr. Ott Christoph Hilgenberg do not exist any more. Dr. Giancarlo Scalera reconstructed model globes. They can be seen at the Museo Geofisico of Rocca di Papa near Rome, Italy.

Vom wachsenden Erdball. Giessmann & Bartsch, Berlin 1933, 56 pages ([online](#)). Die Bruchstruktur der Erdrinde, insbesondere von Grönland, verglichen mit dem Schwächenetz von spröden Prüfkörpern. [Dissertation](#), Technische Universität Berlin, January 1948, published as: Die Bruchstruktur der [sialischen](#) Erdkruste. [Akademie Verlag](#), Berlin 1949, 106 pages.

Geotektonik, neuartig gesehen. E. Schweizerbart, Stuttgart 1974, 194 pages [ISBN 978-3-510-50011-6](#) ([Inhaltsverzeichnis](#))

[Kurz-Biografie Hilgenbergs](#), [TU Berlin](#) from K.-H. Jacob, May 2001, [archive.org](#)

[„Ott Christoph Hilgenberg in twentieth-century geophysics“](#) from G. Scalera and Thomas Braun (Biografie, [PDF](#) , 17 pages with photos and bibliography, [Abstract](#); 397 kB