

Memorial to Alexander Stoyanow 1879-1974

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On November 18, 1974, Alexander Stoyanow, stratigrapher-paleontologist and Fellow of the Geological Society of America, passed on. He was known to his many friends and colleagues as "Stoy." His professional career was divided into four phases—study and preparation, economic geology, teaching, and research.

He was born on August 7, 1879, near the Black Sea village of Jelesnovodsk. His childhood was marked by a fervent interest in rocks, fossils, and minerals. His father, a prosperous tea grower, concurred in Stoy's interest by backing his son's education at St. Vladimir University in Kiev. Stoy graduated with honors in 1899, majoring in geology, and two years later he received the equivalent of a master's degree in geology from the University of Moscow.

In further pursuit of his scientific goals, Stoy paused along the academic highway to study medicine, which was then required in czarist Russia of candidates for the Ph.D. in most sciences. Stoy was granted his Ph.D. from the University of Moscow in 1906.

His career in field geology really began as a graduate student in 1904, while mapping areal geology on both slopes of the Caucasus Mountains. During this period, he became intensely interested in Cambrian trilobites and younger brachiopods—this fascinated him for the rest of his life. Stoy's doctoral thesis was followed by years of enlightening field studies (mostly under sponsorship of the Imperial government) of auriferous mineralization and nonferrous mineral deposits in northern Persia, the trans-Caucasus near the Russian-Chinese border in the Tarbagatoui and Saur Mountains, and along the Irtysh River and nearby Kalbin Range.

On the eve of World War I, Stoy was assigned the intriguing task of studying the stratigraphy of Mount Ararat and possible petroliferous structures and sediments in the northwest Caucasus. During this period, he led an expedition for the Chinese government to study gold deposits of the Kwen Lun Mountains between the Gobi Desert and Tibet.

As a member of the Imperial Geological Survey, Stoy continued his search for oil during the war years in Kurdistan and eastern Turkey, near headwaters of the Euphrates River. His Middle East, Siberian, and Asiatic studies were abruptly terminated by the Bolshevik Revolution when, with other scientific and upper class Russians, he and his family, wrapped in white sheets for camouflage, fled to Finland across frozen Lake Ladoga.

Prior to this episode, Stoy had cultivated a warm friendship and mutual respect with Dr. Fritz Schuchert of Yale University. After leaving strife-torn Russia, Stoyanow's first work was a paleontological study under Schuchert of the Gothland Islands of Sweden.

This interlude was followed by extended field work for a major oil company in Timor, Dutch East Indies.

Shortly after the Indonesian assignment, Schuchert recommended Stoyanow as a candidate for stratigrapher-paleontologist with the Darton survey, then being organized for study and mapping of Arizona geology. Stoy was appointed to this post, with headquarters at the University of Arizona. In 1923 he was appointed professor of geology at the University of Arizona, where he continued in teaching and research until 1950.

During the 1950s he accepted a temporary post as research fellow in paleontology at the California Institute of Technology. Two years later, with a GSA grant, he moved to his final paleontological laboratory at the University of California at Los Angeles. He continued his studies and publications through his eighties, and his ninetieth birthday was celebrated with a staff party. Finally the infirmities of old age terminated a long and brilliant career.

Alexander Stoyanow lives on through his fossil collections at UCLA and through his numerous contributions to the international literature of stratigraphy and paleontology. Of all his work, Stoy was the proudest of his age-relationship studies of calcareous sediments assigned to the Cretaceous Commanche group near the international border with Mexico, south of Bisbee, Arizona. This episode led to the burning interest in ammonites that was to mark much of his final work. He survived both his wife and his son, Major Victor Stoyanow, USMC (ret.).

We are proud to have worked with Stoy, first as students and later as colleagues on various assignments.

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