

## THOMAS WILSON DIBBLEE, JR. (1911-2004)

*Dorothy L. Stout (Condensed from May 1992 Geotimes)*



In over 60 years of active mapping, Tom Dibblee has created a true California legacy for his geologic maps and reports. His knowledge of regional stratigraphy, structure, and paleontology has been basic to understanding much of California's geology. The magnitude of Dibblee's geologic mapping of one-fourth of the state is unprecedented and legendary.

Tom's Spanish and English ancestry embodies the rich history of California. Captain Jose Antonio De la Guerra y Noriega in 1800 became Commandante of the Presidio at Santa Barbara and Resident General of Upper and Lower California. An English ancestor, Ebonezer Dibblee, immigrated to Massachusetts in 1635, and his descendants came to California in 1859. Tom's father, Thomas Wilson Dibblee, and his mother, Anita Orena, were both descendants of Captain De la Guerra. Tom was the first of our children, and was raised on 20,000 acres of Rancho San Julian, west of Santa Barbara, part of the original 1837 Mexican land grant to Captain De la Guerra.

Tom's father, having taken a class in geology from Joseph LeConte at UC Berkeley, hired consulting geologist Harry R. Johnston to map the Ranch for its oil potential. As a high school student, Tom accompanied Johnson, and this initiated his life's career in geology.

Upon graduating from Stanford in 1936, Tom worked a year for Union Oil Company, then was hired by Richfield Oil Company through Harold Hoots. Major oil finds for Richfield resulted from Tom's geologic mapping from 1937 to 1952. Tom often mapped alone in remote areas, camping out with enough food and water for a week, sleeping each night sheltered from the wind on the car seat with one door open and a board extending outward on which to rest his long legs.

In 1953, after many years of collaboration with his Richfield boss, Mason L. Hill, Tom and Mase wrote a paper titled "San Andreas, Garlock and Big Pine Faults, California: A Study of the Character, History, and Tectonic Significance of Their Displacement." This paper, the first to propose right-lateral displacement along the San Andreas fault of more than 350 miles, is considered fundamental to plate tectonics theory.

While working at Richfield's Bakersfield office, Tom met Loretta Escabosa, who was secretary of the Exploration Department. They were married in 1949.

In recognition of Tom's numerous geologic contributions, he has received many prestigious awards, which include the USGS Distinguished Service Award (1967), the American Association of Petroleum Geologists Human Needs Award (1981), and Honorary Membership (1996), and the Presidential Volunteer Action Award from President Ronald Reagan in 1983.

The Thomas Wilson Dibblee Jr. Geological Foundation was formed by his admiring colleagues as a non-profit corporation. This group realized that his many unpublished geologic maps should be preserved for their scientific and educational value and that as many as possible should be published. These maps are still being produced through a unique low-cost color technique devised by Helmut Ehrenspeck of the Foundation. They are in demand by not only geologists, but by planning agencies, oil companies, Forest Service, students, archeologists, realtors, and developers.