

Historical Overview of the Colorado School of Mines Oil Shale Symposia

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Abstract

The first Oil Shale Symposium sponsored by the Colorado School of Mines was held in 1918 and was the first of a series of seven. The last symposium in this series was held in 1924. The first of a second series was held in 1964. There were 25 symposia in the series with the last held in 1992. Today's symposium is the first of a third series and is actually Symposium Number 33 if counted from the first one in 1918.

Oil shale and the Colorado School of Mines have a long and strong link starting in the early part of the Twentieth Century. Even though the first oil shale symposium sponsored by the Colorado School of Mines was not held until 1918, the roots go back to 1903 when the Board of Trustees hired Dr. Victor C. Alderson as President (actually at that time the title was Principal Professor). When hired, Dr. Alderson was Dean of Engineering and Acting President of the Armour Institute of Technology in Chicago (now the Illinois Institute of Technology).

Dr. Alderson had the unique experience of being the only Mines President who was fired twice and then later honored by having an academic building named for him (Alderson Hall, housing the Petroleum Engineering and Chemical Engineering Departments).

Upon coming to Mines, Dr. Alderson became very interested in the oil shale deposits in Western Colorado and became active in working with oil shale interests there. The Board of Trustees became concerned with this outside work as they believed the President should devote his full time efforts to CSM. This, along with Dr. Alderson's history of friction between him and the students, faculty, and Board of Trustees, caused the Board to fire him in 1913.

During the next four years, there were three presidents of CSM. The first served for two years and the next two for one year each. In 1917, Dr. Alderson was again hired as President and during his second term Dr. Alderson was very active in oil shale work and gathered papers for a Colorado School of Mines sponsored symposium. As there were no buildings on campus that were large enough to house such a meeting, Dr. Alderson made arrangements with American Mining Congress to hold the symposia in conjunction with their annual national meetings. The first CSM sponsored Oil Shale Symposium was held jointly with the American Mining Congress in 1918.

As early as 1920, faculty in the Chemistry Department and personnel in the Experimental Plant were engaged in oil shale and shale oil research. A number of papers by Dr. Alderson and CSM faculty were presented at the symposia and published in the CSM Quarterly. In a paper given at the Oil Shale Symposium by Dr. Alderson and published in the October 1920 CSM Quarterly, Dr. Alderson listed 16 retorts in operation in Colorado. Dr. Alderson also wrote a book entitled "The Oil Shale Industry".

Dr. Alderson was fired again in 1923 and the last Oil Shale Symposium in this series was held at the Colorado Mining Congress meeting in 1924.

In 1920, the a synthetic fuels program on the naval reserve deposit of oil shale in western Colorado was started. This was a joint operation of the Bureau of Mines, the Department of Nave, and later, the Department of Energy. After the start of World War II, they developed an experimental mine and processing equipment at Anvil Point near Rifle with the intention of` developing the background information to permit building a commercial size plant to supply fuel needs for World War II. In 1964, The CSM Research Institute was awarded a contract to administer and operate the Anvil Point facility.

In the same year, the second series of oil shale symposia was initiated by the Colorado School of Mines. There was no place on campus sufficiently large to accommodate such a meeting so the first meeting was held in the Denver Hilton Hotel. Approximately 450 people attended this meeting. Until 1974 annual meetings were held in either the Denver Hilton or Brown Palace Hotels. In 1974, the Cecil and Ida Green Center opened and all subsequent meetings were held there except for the 1983 meeting which was sponsored jointly with the China Petroleum University and held in Beijing.

In 1986, the price of crude oil dropped from over \$30 per barrel to as low as \$20 per barrel. At that time, it was estimated that a synthetic crude oil produced from oil shale would cost about \$25 per barrel and interest, as well as funding, dropped dramatically. As a result, less and less work in the research and development area was done and fewer papers were available. There were insufficient quality papers available to have annual meetings so meetings were held every other year until 1992. In 1992, the final meeting in this series was held as the 25th Annual Oil Shale Symposium.

All of the papers presented in this second series of Symposia were published in the Colorado of Mines Quarterly and are available in the Tell Ertyl Oil Shale Repository at the Arthur Lakes Library. Heather Whitehead and Megan Torneo from the CSM Arthur Lakes Library are presenting a paper at

this symposium that will detail the wealth of information available here.

In summary, this is really the third series of symposia sponsored by the Colorado School of Mines and it's partners and, to be correct, this is actually the 33rd Oil Shale Symposium instead of the 26th. I hope this to be the beginning of the fourth annual series of the symposia.