

PETROLEUM INDUSTRY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: F. A. Hale

INTERVIEWER: David Finch

DATE: September 2000

DF: Today is the 18th day of September in the year 2000 and we are conducting an interview over the telephone with Mr. F. A. Hale regarding his career as a geophysicist and the time he spent on the executive of the Canadian Society of Exploration Geophysicists in Calgary. My name is David Finch. Before we get started, Mr. Hale, I need to read you a statement and get you to agree to the conditions under which we are doing this interview. Is that okay?

FH: That's fine.

DF: There is some legalese, I'll warn you. You have been asked to participate in an oral history project sponsored by the Petroleum History Society in order to preserve the memories and experiences of significant individuals in the Canadian petroleum industry. This project is financed in part, by several organizations including the Canadian Society of Exploration Geophysicists, the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, the Petroleum History Society, the Glenbow Archives and Oilweek Magazine. The Petroleum History Society will deposit the recordings and transcripts made in the course of the project with the Glenbow Archives in Calgary, where they will be available for use by anyone interested in the history of the petroleum industry. Do you, Mr. F. A. Hale, hereby agree to the recording of an interview by the Petroleum History Society and donate, transfer and assign, absolutely and forever your rights, clear deed and universal copyright, ownership, estate and interests in this recording to the Glenbow Archives. If so, please state clearly, "I do."

FH: I do.

DF: Okay, that's the hard part. Now, can you start by telling us when and where you were born?

FH: I was born in Woonsocket, Rhode Island in the United States. It was November 28th, 1911.

DF: What were your parents doing there?

FH: My father was a rubber chemist. I think he was working with the U.S. Rubber Company at that time, I'm not 100% sure about that but I think that's correct.

DF: Tell us about your education?

FH: Well, starting when and ending where?

DF: What got you interested in the sciences and how did you work into geophysics?

FH: Okay, just very quickly, I went to grade school in the state of Ohio, in the northeastern part of Ohio. I mentioned that my father was a rubber chemist, so we were in northeastern Ohio in the Akron, Ohio area. I went to high school in the little town of Chester, West Virginia, graduated from there. We moved to Mexico City right after my graduation from high school. That was the home of my parents, he had a job with a rubber company in Mexico City. I was in Mexico City for one year and then came up to the University of Texas, in Austin, in the fall of 1930. During the course of college there I got interested in the Physics department and at the end of six years there, including four years to do a Bachelors and two years for a Masters degree, it was at a time when oil companies were looking for people with educations in physics and math and geology and so forth, to work in geophysics. It was something I didn't have any idea I was ever going to get involved in when I went to college but there I was. I wound up spending 40 years in geophysical exploration for petroleum. I don't know whether that answers the question completely but it was a degree in physics and mathematics that got me introduced into Geophysical Service Incorporated, starting in September of 1936. I worked with GSI for 10 years in Louisiana and California. About 1946 or so, Standard of California was interested in starting its own geophysical department and I think I was the second one hired into that particular area in Standard of California's operations. My first work with them, with Standard of California, was in Venezuela and we came back, after 4 years there, in Caracas and Maracaibo, into Las Angeles for a little bit, with the California Research Corporation, which was involved in researching for geophysics amongst other things. Then I was asked to go up to Calgary on a project that Chevron had there. . . I say Chevron, at that time it was not Chevron, it was California Standard Company. I was asked to go up there for four months and we stayed for eleven years. After I had been there for a couple of months I was appointed Chief Geophysicist on the resignation of Philip Gaby who was my predecessor in that position at what was then California Standard Company.

#049 DF: So you were here when the CSEG was formed then?

FH: Well, yes I was, practically.

DF: Do you remember anything about the formation of it?

FH: We got there in 1951.

DF: Oh, I'm sorry, I thought you were there just before that. Okay. It was formed in '50 but you were here very early.

FH: I was here very early. I had been up here in Calgary in 1949 I think, out of Maracaibo, for some special project that was going on and I worked on that with Standard of California, went back to Maracaibo. But it was later than that, that I came up, as I say, for four months and we stayed for eleven years. I think that was a time when the company I think, was anticipating the fact that Phil Gaby was going to retire from them and that I might. . . I guess they had it in mind that I might join them, which I decided to do after I got up there. It just kind of happened.

DF: What were your different duties here in Canada then?

FH: It was as Chief Geophysicist of Chevron. . . I keep saying Chevron, excuse me, of California Standard Company. I was Chief Geophysicist of those 11 years up there,

starting I guess the first of July. We moved up there on the first of May and starting the first of July I assumed that job of Chief Geophysicist for California Standard.

DF: Any stories about your time up here?

FH: Any stories about it?

DF: Sure.

FH: I tell you, it was a very pleasant 11 years in Canada. From a family standpoint it was a good place to bring up our two sons. And from another standpoint just the people to work with. I would up during the course of work up there visiting all the colleges from UBC, clear over to Dalhousie, looking for potential geophysicists. And I guess if I had to say it, I think maybe my major contribution to SOCAL or California Standard up there, one of my main contributions was the people that I hired. In that I think that they did a very good job after that. What surprises me is that the people who I hired have now retired by this time. And that kind of shakes me up a little bit at age 88.

#072 DF: It makes you feel maybe a little old.

FH: Yes, just a little bit.

DF: Now, what was the reason that you left Canada?

FH: I was again transferred. I was asked to go over to Tripoli, Libya on an assignment there, again a loan assignment out of Calgary, to work with what was then Amocees???, it was called Amocees, it was a combination of Standard of California and Texaco, for work in Libya. So I was to go over there to spend one year and I spent two years there, strictly a company transfer or a loan by the company of me to them over there.

DF: What was the state of the CSEG when you first arrived, what do you remember of it?

FH: I remember it as a very small society, mostly people that I knew really or a lot of them. Not the Canadians, I didn't know them but there were a number of Americans, United States people, who were up there working, that I had known and worked with before. That is, in my own company and even in some of the others, in the contract companies, like GSI. I kind of knew them up there because I had been acquainted with them elsewhere. Going to Calgary was not like moving into a strange place, geophysically, because there were people there that I knew to start with. So it was friendly from the standpoint of that. I don't know whether that answers you question or not.

DF: That's good. How did you come to be associated with it and end up serving on the executive.

FH: It was just that was the society that you belonged to up there at the time in terms of geophysics. There was a local geological society there and the local well logging society, so sure, I joined the geophysical society.

DF: How did you get to be on the executive?

FH: That I don't know, aside from the fact that I was one of those people I suppose that. . . I was interested in what the society was doing and so forth. I don't know how that happened. I was interested in it and I took an active part in the meetings and so forth. I didn't contribute anything in the way of papers to it, let's put it that way.

DF: I'm looking here at notes from your Presidential address, the year you were President. .

FH: Really.

DF: And it mentions here, something about the first annual spring dance, how did that come to be?

FH: Good lord, I don't even remember that. A spring dance?
DF: Yes, that happened under your tenure. How about the Doodlebug Golf Tournament?
FH: I was never a golfer, so that was kind of carried out by men in the society who were golfers, I was not personally a golfer. But it was one thing that a lot of men enjoyed. You say you've got a copy of my talk or something.
DF: This is an Annual Report of the President of the CSEG, February 1959, at the end of the year you were President.
FH: Gosh I'd like to see a copy of that, I don't know what I said.
DF: Well, I'll pop one in the mail to you, for sure.
FH: That would be lovely, thank you.
DF: While you were here there was a fairly severe economic downturn in the early 1960's, what do you remember about that?
FH: I left in '61 and that was beginning a couple of years before that really.
DF: What caused that downturn?
FH: I guess it was just the normal nature of the oil business. I mean that it has its ups and downs. I don't really remember the details of that, as to why we cut back on crews, it was just because the major companies had to do so. The details of why that took place, I must confess, I don't really remember, it's been so darn long ago.
DF: And you were transferred out shortly thereafter, so maybe you were part of the movement.
FH: I don't know that necessarily, I don't recall that because I was replaced. It wasn't a case of there being no job for a Chief Geophysicist, I remember a chap from Denver came up to take my place. And then it went on from there.
DF: I also have a page here from the Daily Oil Bulletin in February of 1961, I suppose you left a little bit after that.
FH: Yes, February of '61 is about the time that the Glencoe Club burned down. Then we left, I think around the first of May or the first of June, at least I did and my wife followed and my sons followed later.
DF: Okay, because in February of '61, you were the Chairman for a session of something called, Exploration Geophysics, Today and Tomorrow. The afternoon session, you were in charge of that one and personnel problems was listed as one of the topics, Statistics on Employment of Exploration Geophysicists, that was presented by Colin Campbell. Alternative Employments for Geophysicist in the Oil Industry by D. C. Jones, do you remember him?
FH: I remember Colin Campbell, he was Executive Director of the CSEG in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Now the name Jones, D. C. Jones.
DF: He was with HBOG, Hudson's Bay Oil and Gas.
FH: I don't really remember the name or the individual, I'm sorry.

#128 DF: And then the third paper presented was Impact of Present Slump on Geophysical Education, John Hollister of the Geophysics Department. . .

FH: John Hollister. . .

DF: At School of Mines.

FH: At School of Mines, yes. And he was Vice-President of the CSEG during the year that I was Secretary Treasurer. . . . SEG, I'm sorry. Yes, I was elected to the Secretary

Treasurership of the SEG, in I think, 1960, something like that. I think I was the first one from the Canadian SEG to be on the executive of the SEG in Tulsa.

DF: Is there anything else you remember from the years that you spent in Canada?

FH: Not really of real technical significance to what I know what you're trying to do. I mean, we were working at that time all the way and looking all the way up to the Arctic Circle practically. I remember a trip that I and the Chief Geologist, I was the Chief Geophysicist and the Petroleum Engineer and our pilot flew all the way up the Mackenzie River, clear up to Aklavik I think it was or Inuvik, I forget which one it was at that time. We went all the way up there just looking at the territory and coming back again, getting some feel for what we would do once we had to get up there.

DF: And what did you see, were you doing any. . . .

FH: It was just a case of flying over the country. Yes, in later times I know that during the later 1950's our work expanded up into the Yukon and northern British Columbia and northern Alberta. We kept going farther north with our work. It was a case of the geologists and the geophysicists and everybody else getting together for exploration in general.

DF: You'll be glad to know Chevron found a good gas well there last year.

FH: Good.

DF: Yes, up on the Liard???

FH: I do continue to keep a membership in the CSEG, let's say just an emeritus membership in a sense because I'm not there to participate directly in anything but I just like to keep contact with them.

DF: That's right. Which of your contributions to the geophysical industry here in Canada do you consider most significant?

FH: My contributions?

DF: Well, you said one of them was hiring good people.

FH: That's right. And the fact that . . . those people incidentally, having just a sense of mathematics and physics and what not, were the ones that got into the change over from analogue to digital. Digital technology came along around 1960 I guess it was. Mostly it was with GSI for one and I forget what the other companies were but a lot of the people that I hired got really involved in that and made a lot of contributions within the company, within SOCAL company. So that's why I was saying, that's when the turnover came. . . or the start of it came, between analogue and digital. Which leads to computers being used to do practically everything these days, recording and processing and all that.

DF: What did you enjoy most about your career up here?

FH: Well, as I mentioned earlier, it was a good place to bring up young boys in a family because Canada was not as, shall we say, not as advanced, it was a little more quiet up in Canada during our years there. It was just the people I worked with. In fact today, believe it or not, I was at lunch here in our community and there was one of our lady residents, with her husband and she said, well I just talked to Bob Flowers??? up in Calgary and his wife who is my sister and they said hello from Bob Flowers to Francis Hale. This was just today at lunch time. As I say it was the people that I met up there and that I haven't kept close track of really but they were a pleasure.

#174 DF: Any regrets?

FH: None at all, no. In fact one of the things that I do kind of remember. When I was leaving to go to Tripoli, Libya, there was somebody up there and I forget now who he was. But he said that he didn't realize that I was not a Canadian. And I thought, well, not that's interesting. So apparently I had conducted myself reasonably well. But I thought that I had done well in dealing with people in that they didn't know that I was not a Canadian. I don't know whether that means anything to you or not but it means something to me. It means something to me because I think Americans and I'm talking about U.S. people, often have a reputation for not being very good when they're abroad somewhere.

DF: Sometimes that can happen, yes. I grew up in Maracaibo??? myself and so I know what you're talking about.

FH: You did, what were you in Maracaibo?

DF: My parents were missionaries down there.

FH: What missionary, you were a Mormon or. . .

DF: No, Evangelicals.

FH: Yes, and there were a number of them down there too, back in the Montiloni??? country.

DF: Yes, but my folks were right in Maracaibo. Well, is there anything else you'd like to tell us about Canada and the CSEG.

FH: Nothing that I can think of. I realized that as of today, I think I'm probably the oldest. . . not oldest, that's not the way to put it. . . . I'm the earliest President of the SEG who is still living. Let's put it that way. I think all of those that preceded me as Presidents have unfortunately gone away.

DF: Of the CSEG you mean.

FH: The CSEG, yes. And my successor, Jim Kidder, who was a good friend of mine anyway, completely apart from the part that he was with Mobil and I was with SOCAL, he too, I think is still alive in Dallas, Texas.

DF: I just talked to him an hour ago.

FH: You did, well how was he incidentally?

DF: He's very good. Well, I wish you all the best and good health.

FH: Does this do you any good, do you think?

DF: It does very much. Thank you so much for spending these moments with us.

FH: Well, I realize it's been on your nickel.

DF: No problem. So on behalf of the Petroleum Industry Oral History Project and the Canadian Society of Exploration Geophysicists, I would like to thank you for helping us out this afternoon and we'll end the formal part of the interview at this time.