

## **Nathan Wood Bass**

### **1893 - 1979**



Nathan Wood Bass was born June 8, 1893, at Fort Scott, Kansas, to Mary Hughes and Nathan Woodford Bass. He was the seventh and last member of the Bass family to bear the name Nathan Woodford. Like his father, he opted to delete the “ford” and to be known as Nathan Wood Bass, or preferably, Wood Bass.

During summer vacations from grammar and high schools, Wood worked on his uncle’s farm - where he learned about horses and handling and maintenance of Model T Fords - in the Fort Scott yards, roundhouse, and the office of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad. His love of the outdoors and interest in rock outcrops were the principal factors in his decision to study geology at Kansas State University, where he received a B.S. degree in Geology in 1917.

Wood joined the U.S. Geological Survey in 1917 for classification of public lands in the Rocky Mountain States, beginning in northwestern Colorado. He had the exceedingly good fortune to begin his career under the successive supervision of several “giants” of the Survey. Thus began Wood’s distinguished professional career that spanned a period of 60 years, mostly with the Geological Survey but

partly with private companies or as a consultant. Mr. Bass took time to earn a M.S. degree in geology from George Washington University in 1922.

In 1924 the Kansas State Geological Survey began cooperative investigations of the oil and gas possibilities of selected areas with the Mineral Fuels section of the Federal Survey, and Wood was assigned to the project, the first phase of which covered the years 1924 through 1926. Wood was a hard, fast, and accurate worker. This is evident from his prodigious accomplishments during the field season of 1924, the results of which were published in Kansas State Geological Survey Bulletins 10 and 11. After the important discovery of oil in Russell County in 1923, which was more than 100 miles west of other Kansas oil fields, Wood and William W. Rubey mapped the geology of Russell County. Then Wood mapped the geology of Ellis County, Hamilton County, and went on to name seven members of Cretaceous formations. One of the formations, Codell sandstone member of the Carlile Shale, and its equivalents later became important oil producers in parts of eastern Colorado and southeastern Wyoming.

Mr. Bass continued his education further and did additional graduate work in geology at the University of Wisconsin in 1927. He was an internationally recognized petroleum geologist. His most notable contribution concerned the shoestring sands of Kansas and Oklahoma. Mr. Bass was among the first to develop the theory of oil and gas in stratigraphic as well as structural traps. Practical applications of his theories helped develop the Kansas oil industry.

After his "retirement" in 1957, Wood began an arrangement with the Carter Oil Company whereby he would spend about half of each year measuring designated stratigraphic sections and the rest of the time serving as a consulting geologist. In 1961, the Conservation Division of the U.S. Geological Survey expanded its mineral classification program for the leasable minerals on federal lands. Wood agreed to return to the Survey as a rehired annuitant. In 1965, he took a temporary leave of absence and served as chairman of the Institute of Petroleum Research and Geophysics of the government of Israel. After a year, he returned to Colorado and resumed his Survey work on mineral classification. Due to failing health, he retired from the Survey in 1977.

“Wood Bass was loved and admired by family and friends alike and is highly respected for his many and fundamental contributions to the science of geology. All who knew him were well aware of his towering mentality, colorful personality, highly developed and sometimes biting wit, and his deep love of life and humanity.” – S.W. Lohman, U.S. Geological Survey

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