



LIVING LEGEND

Harrison L. Townes is a petroleum geologist and oil producer in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He was born in Wauseon, Ohio where his father was employed at the local electric utility company. Living during the Depression Era of the 1930's, times were so bad that by 1936, his father was laid off. Unable to find a job locally, the family moved several times looking for work elsewhere. Harrison went to three different grade schools before finally ending up in Fort Worth, Texas where his mother had family.

When he was in the eighth grade an uncle who was a professor at Texas Christian University took an interest in Harrison, who was a good student and exceptionally interested in art and science. His uncle, though not a geologist, happened to bring Harrison a college geology textbook to look at. Geology was a science of which he was barely aware; however, it looked so interesting (especially the Wegener Theory of continental drift) that he wanted to look into geology further. His uncle took him to see Dr. Leo Hendricks (Head of the Geology Department at TCU), who told him that if he wanted to study geology in college, he should take all the difficult courses he could in high school. By the end of eighth grade, Harrison was determined to be a geologist.

He graduated fifth in his class at high school, and after finishing his summer job of sacking groceries at a Latino supermarket (where he quickly learned the Spanish language), he enrolled at Texas Christian University. This was during the time that all eligible men were going to college under the G.I. Bill. It was a unique time, but also a sad time, as his elder brother had been killed in Germany.

Harrison lost his father when he was a Freshman in college, but he was able to work part time to pay his tuition of \$6.00 per semester hour. His part time work included selling housewares in a department store, running a TV repair truck, working on a rod and tubing gang in a West Texas oilfield, and making illustrations for test material for the university. In 1956, he joined the U.S. Navy as a Reservist, but he never saw full time active duty. During his annual two weeks of active duty requirement, he chose to go as far away from home as possible because he wanted to travel, something his family never was able to do. He served on ships as an Yeoman (or clerk) and learned to play cribbage with junior officers, fire pom-pom guns, and be on a medical emergency team.

Upon graduation in 1952 from TCU, where he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Geology, Harrison secured a junior geologist position in Ft. Worth with a small oil company. His job consisted mainly of bringing maps up to date (where his drawing ability was an advantage). Being employed by a small company, he had excellent training in how oil companies were run, which would prove to be very useful in his future career. It was during this time that he married Eleanor Jeffrey of Amarillo, Texas, whom he had met at TCU. This was also the year that he joined the American Association of Petroleum Geologists (AAPG) as a Junior Member.

After three years, Harrison decided he needed more knowledge and experience in exploration geology. He was able to secure a position in Midland, Texas as a well-sitter for White Eagle Oil Company and he, Eleanor and their two children moved there in 1954. These were "boom" years in Midland because of the Spraberry Trend (which was similar in economics to the Oklahoma Sooner Trend play of the 1970's). Proration by the State of Texas and import limits by the U.S. Government kept the price of oil in the \$30 range and payout of the wells

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took three to four years. Producers and investors were able to accept these economics because income tax rates at the time made oil investments attractive as a tax write-off.

Within a couple of years, Harrison began developing drilling prospects for the company and was quite successful, enough that after six years he was asked to become the Exploration Manager for Helmerich & Payne, Inc. He and his family, which now consisted of his wife and three children, moved to Tulsa. Harrison became a full Active Member of AAPG and held memberships in the GSA, SPE, TGS, OCGS, and the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Even though he now had a staff to manage, Harrison still developed drilling prospects, learned how to put drilling deals together, and to find joining partners. From Texas to North Dakota, he worked in areas where Helmerich & Payne had drilling rigs available. He did property acquisition work, securing two producing properties for the Company while he learned about banking and taxes. During this time, he enrolled at the University of Tulsa, taking evening classes to work toward acquiring a Master's Degree. However, due to the severe illness of a child, he dropped out after one year. Their child, a daughter, died at the age of six from leukemia.



In 1966, Harrison decided to go in business for himself and was able to secure enough consulting work to make a living, as will as beginning to put his own drilling deals together.

Unfortunately, his wife Eleanor died of cancer in 1970, creating an almost impossible situation for him. With two children to raise and not having a regular paying job, he had to make a living as there was no alternative.

In 1971, he was introduced to Terry Tilman Lackey, a native of Virginia. They were destined to be together and were married later that year. Terry had three children and Harrison had two, all being nearly the same ages. The families were successfully combined and all of the children (now older adults, two of which are retired) are still family.

On his first drilling venture, Harrison unintentionally became an operator. The well was successful, and after numerous drilling ventures he had to acquire more office staff. Thereafter, Harrison operated as an independent oil producer for fourteen years.

One of his drilling partners suggested he go to New York and raise some drilling capital, which he did, obtaining ten partners from a well-known investment firm. After a successful meeting with the firm, one of the partners complimented Harrison on the suit he was wearing. Fortunately, he didn't ask where it came from, which was J.C. Penney.

The partner's attorney in New York called Harrison wanting to know, "what the law was out there in Omaha?" He replied, "It is Oklahoma, not Omaha." The lawyer did this twice, so he really didn't know the difference. After drilling several wells, the deal arrangement proved to be awkward and Harrison had trouble with certain partners not paying attention to things like operating expenses. The properties were evaluated and sold, one of which was a seven billion cubic foot gas well. Harrison decided then and there to seek only partners that were in the oil business.

By 1970, Harrison became very interested in political affairs, serving in the campaign efforts of his Congressman and Legislators. At the time, independent oil operators in Oklahoma were not particularly well thought of. In fact, the Oklahoma Legislature under Governor David Hall raised the gross production tax from five to seven per cent. Harrison decided to become very actively involved in creating change in the attitude of the Legislature by joining the Oklahoma Independent Petroleum Association (OIPA), an organization representing the independent oil producers. His interest in Oklahoma politics resulted in an appointment to Chairman of Governmental Affairs for the Tulsa Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce.

In 1972, Harrison was asked to be Chair of the AAPG Mid-Continent Section meeting in Tulsa. The event was very successful, and he became interested in the affairs of AAPG because the headquarters are located in Tulsa. He joined the AAPG Division of Professional Affairs, and later was elected President of the DPA.

Harrison formed a drilling partnership with a major utility company in 1975. The utility company had purchased several thousand acres of leases in the Oklahoma Panhandle and they needed an Operator. Harrison was able to do so and retain a working interest. Anadarko Petroleum had an interest in the area and a joint development took place. Many deals for joint participation were made over the telephone, but everyone ultimately did what they agreed to do.

Harrison was elected to be President of the OIPA in 1981. During his tenure, OKIEPAC and the Wildcatter's Club were formed to raise money for Legislative candidates that were friendly to the oil business. This effort proved to be very effective.

In 1982, Harrison formed a public company with his assets called Toklan Oil Corporation. The name came from an old Tulsa company that had gone out of business and reflected the various states that he had leases in. The stock was traded on the NYSE under the symbol TKLN and by 1984 had a million dollars of annual cash flow. Unfortunately, by 1987, the oil "bust" of the 80's caused a terrible downturn in the oil business. Harrison elected to sell his controlling interest in Toklan and left in 1989 to become just an independent geologist. Toklan is still in business as a private company.

Just prior to leaving Toklan and during the drilling of a deep well in Roger Mills County, Harrison was informed that the annual delay rentals had not been paid on a Federal lease farmout he had obtained from a major company, thus making the lease invalid. Furthermore, the company refused to take responsibility for the loss. Fortunately, with the aid of Congressman James Jones (whom Harrison had supported strongly in his election), Senator Boren, and the Bureau of Land Management, an Act of Congress was passed which gave the BLM Director

discretion to restore a Federal lease if lost due to such clerical errors. The lease was restored and the well was a successful venture.

In 1992, AAPG President Bruno Hanson asked Harrison to be a candidate for AAPG President-Elect and he was successful in being elected and would soon be in charge of the World's premier geological organization. During his Presidency, the first AAPG-sponsored meeting outside of the United States was held in Caracas, Venezuela. Harrison traveled to Norway, England, Egypt, Australia, and Canada to help further the International character of AAPG. He also made all of the AAPG Section meetings, and his wife Terry was able to travel with him on many occasions.

Harrison did consulting work until 2016, when he closed his office in Tulsa. He is currently "mostly" retired; however, he has taken an active interest in preserving the Oklahoma Well Log Library in Tulsa, which has recently been successfully reorganized. For years he played tennis and did white-water canoeing, but these are now just fond memories. He and his wife learned to sail, which proved to be a very eventful sport on Oklahoma lakes.

Harrison is a proud member of the Tulsa Geological Foundation, a Trustee Associate of the AAPG Foundation, and was a Fifty Year Member of the Oklahoma City Geological Society.

