

Don H. Baker, Jr. (1924-1996)



Don H. Baker, Jr. served as Director of the New Mexico Bureau of Mines and Mineral Resources from July 1969 until July 1973. He came to us from the University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, where he taught and set up the metallurgy curriculum. Prior to Waterloo, he worked for the U.S. Bureau of Mines for 22 years, receiving the Arthur Fleming Award for his extractive metallurgy process to produce high-purity titanium, along with eight patents for processes in purifying other metals. In 1973, he rejoined USBM and retired from the federal bureau in 1977. He then moved back to Socorro and established Don Baker Associates consulting firm, which did a number of projects for New Mexico Energy Department, including an inventory (with NMBM&MR) of abandoned coal mines, and helped with regulations for New Mexico's coal surface-mining oversight for the Federal 1977 SMCRA Law.

As Director, Don (supported by NMIM&T's President and Board of Directors) obtained funding increases from the Legislature, allowing hiring of additional staff, increased field work, and services to the public. In 1971, Governor Bruce King appointed Don (as Director of NMBM&MR) to chair a committee to recommend a New Mexico Coal Surface-Mining Act to be presented to the Legislature. The committee included members from the coal industry, environmental groups, and pertinent state agencies. Working together in a harmony not often present in today's litigious atmosphere, guided by Don's firm leadership, the committee's proposed Act was approved by the New Mexico Legislature as the 1972 Coal Surface-Mining Reclamation Act. Thus the state preceded the national coal surface-mining law by five years. Don served on the Coal Surface Mining Commission in early formative years.

Don especially enjoyed his participation in the Association of American State Geologists, meeting with and exchanging ideas and program results with the state geologists from the other 49 states. Although he was a metallurgical engineer and fostered extractive metallurgical research, he emphasized geologic and mining engineering field work to gather data on the mineral and petroleum resources of the state, and stressed providing the information and interpretation to the general public, the mineral industry, and other governmental agencies.

Don established an advisory group of geologists and mineral industry leaders; they aided NMBM&MR by suggesting practical projects and by contacts with the legislature. In a somewhat unique manner to create an awareness and understanding of New Mexico's mineral resources, a "MineralMobile" was built. It was a three-sided trailer stocked with mineral and rock specimens, maps, photographs and brochures illustrating our mining and fuel resources. This traveling mineral museum was exhibited at schools throughout the state.

Don encouraged contacts with geologists from our southern neighbors in Mexico, particularly with Pemex geologists for the northern part of Chihuahua and northeastern Sonora. He ramrodded a small field conference to examine the small, sporadic, tantalizing tin deposits of New Mexico's Black Range and those in Mexico near Durango and Zacatecas with participation by Guillermo P. Salas, Director General, Consejo de Recursos Minerales and Richard H. Jahns, Dean of Earth Sciences at Stanford University.

To provide our scientific technical data, he encouraged many presentations by staff (and by Don) at professional meetings and civic organizations, stepped up publication of geologic and mineral reports (84 in four years) and with the State Parks Department, issued brochures on the geology of each state park. As he noted, the Bureau was a true helpmate to New Mexico's mineral industries, the public, and other state agencies – and the professional staff (and Don) grew in stature, reputation, and recognition in the state and nationally.

Don was born in Lawrence, Kansas, on March 15, 1924. He served in the U.S. Marines during World War II. While recuperating at the Naval Hospital in San Diego, he met his Hoosier wife, Tiny, who was working with the medical corps. They were married on July 14, 1945 and moved to Tucson, where Don completed his degrees in metallurgical engineering at Arizona University. Shortly thereafter, he began his career with the Bureau of Mines. In Socorro, he was active off-campus, serving the Chamber of Commerce and leading the NMBM&MR's participation in parades and exhibits. He enjoyed being with his two sons, Don H. Baker, III and Kevin C. Baker, and his three grandchildren. In both his personal and professional contacts, his attributes were best expressed by his closest companion, Tiny ... "robust, vital, intelligent, kind and strong".

-Frank Kottowski