

# Sooner Nation

## Technology Rebel and Early-Day Wildcatter Stands on Solid Ground

The oil business has changed a lot since Robert Allen discovered his passion for rocks more than 70 years ago.

Today's oil wells cost millions to drill, and today's geologists lean on computers and other digital advancements, like three-dimensional seismic technology and visualization rooms with rainbows of geological strata splashed across giant screens.

Allen has no problem with that, just as long as he doesn't have to use it. He's happy in his Ardmore office, plotting the complexities of southern Oklahoma geology with paper and pencil, just as he's done for decades.

"I have not come along with technology," says the 95-year-old petroleum geologist. "I'm computer illiterate, totally. When they first came out, computers didn't know capital letters, and they didn't even put spaces between words. I decided I'm not going to put up with it.

"I don't even know about 3-D. I don't pay attention to that stuff. I'm stupid when it comes to 3-D seismic, but I think I understand the subsurface."

Allen earned his geology degree from the University of Oklahoma after serving in Europe during World War II. He began his career with Globe Oil and Refining Co. in 1949 and moved to Continental Oil Co. in 1954. He left Continental in 1962 and has been an independent geologist ever since.

Despite his rebel stand against technology, he has earned the admiration and respect of petroleum geologists from all over Oklahoma and the country.

Accolades include the 2010 Distinguished Service Award from OU's Mewbourne College of Earth and Energy and the 2010 Legends Award from the Oklahoma City Geological Foundation. That same year, he was recognized with a special award from the American Association of Petroleum Geologists. He was also honored with a certificate of merit from the Mid-Continent section of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists in 2005 and has been given an honorary lifetime membership in the Ardmore Geological Society.

Allen is beloved in the geological community, says David Brown, associate director of the Oklahoma Geological Survey on OU's Norman campus.

"He's just a nice guy, and such an unselfish person, always willing to take the time to teach people about Oklahoma geology."

Brown was an OU geology student when he first met Allen nearly 40 years ago. Brown was hiking alone through

the Arbuckle Mountains, getting a first-hand look at the rocks he was studying in class when he encountered Allen, leading a small group tour.

Since then, Brown has bumped into Allen and his Arbuckle tours on several occasions.

Allen gave up leading the groups a few years ago, but he still comes into the office every day to identify potential drilling prospects for clients and to help manage the Ardmore Sample Cut and Library, a massive collection of geological information comprising more than a century of Oklahoma's drilling history.

Located in downtown Ardmore, the library contains information on every well drilled in Oklahoma to 2016, when Allen stopped keeping track. Though much of the information is now available online through other libraries, geologists still search through stacks of carefully organized boxes, combing through card files by hand.

Allen takes pride in doing things the old way. To him, there's a personal connection to the rocks. His years as a field geologist were spent on hundreds of drilling sites across Oklahoma, where he would study rock cuttings as they emerged from the hole and visualize where the drill bit was digging. Electronic logging data was important, but the big decisions came down to the rock samples he could hold in his hands.

He still goes back to the first well project he ever worked on in 1949, the Patty No. 1, just east of Comanche in southern Oklahoma. He loves to tell how he and his team were evaluating marginal well log results, trying to determine whether to complete the well or simply plug it and move on.

Pointing to oil-laden sandstone cuttings recovered from the bottom of the hole, Allen thought the well had promise. Others pointed to the well log, which gave narrow indications that hydrocarbons were there. The decision was risky, and the completion operation was costly, but Allen's argument was convincing, so the team acquiesced and set the pipe.

As it turned out, the well was a big producer, and it's still pumping oil 68 years later, Allen says with a smile.

"The samples proved to be right. The log wasn't," he says.

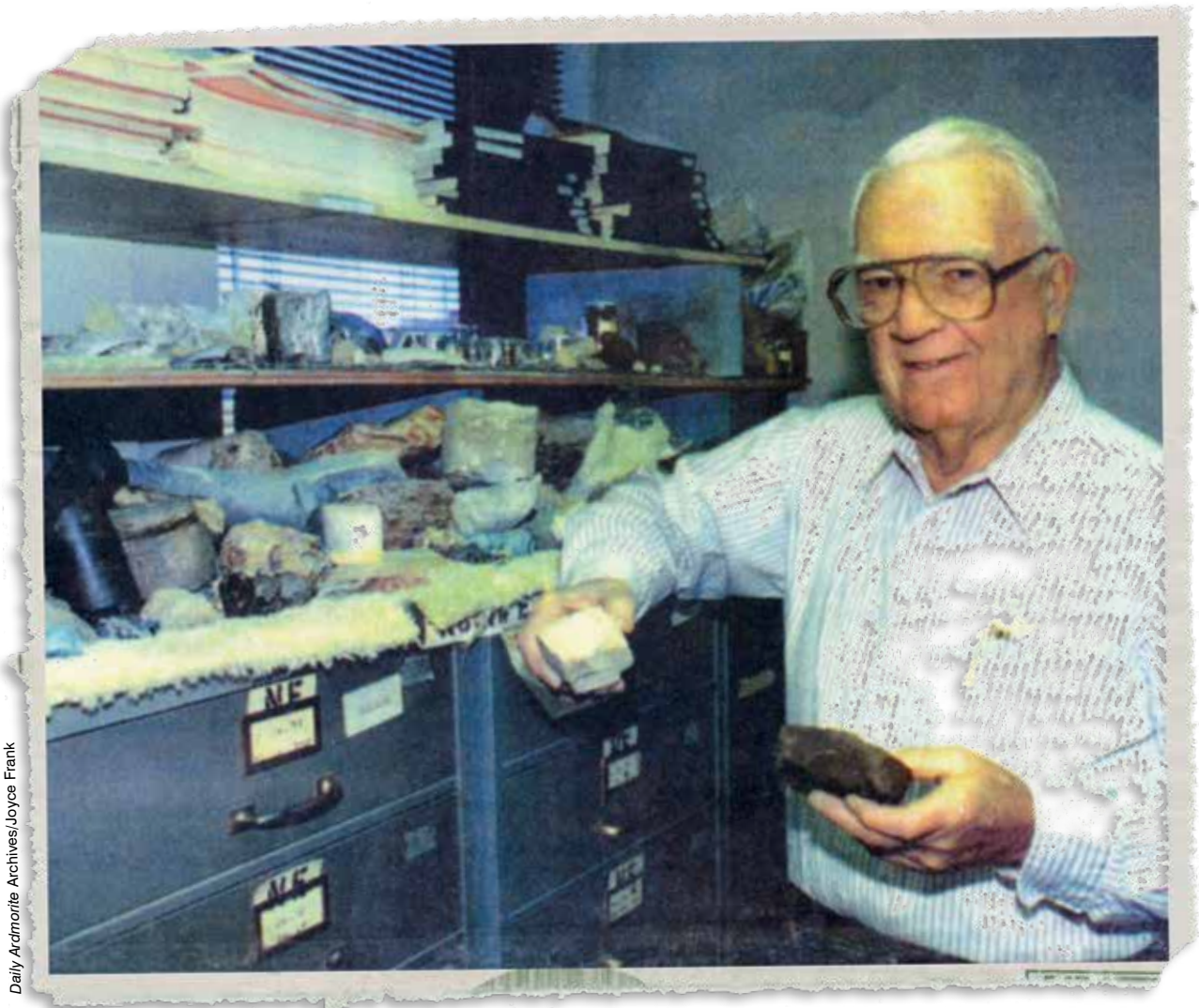
Allen likes that story because it illustrates a truth about geology that has never really changed through the years: When there's doubt, you can trust the rocks more than the technology.

"That's just the way it works," Allen says.

Brown could not agree more. "The good ones like to see the

# Rock On

BY CHIP MINTY



Daily Ardmore Archives/Joyce Frank

A newspaper clipping from the *Daily Ardmore* features OU alumnus Robert Allen showing off two of his favorite rock samples from a collection of thousands. Allen has a vast knowledge of and passion for interpreting rocks that has led to many productive oil wells over the years.

rocks because, at the end of the day, that's where the truth is."

Technology plays an important role in modern geology, Brown says, but Allen's intuitive understanding of rock structures, folds and faults is a lost art.

"He has it in his head. He's the geologist's geologist, that's what Bob is. He didn't have a lot of technology when he was young. Using a flying analogy, he's a stick-and-rudder kind of guy. He's the real deal."

Petroleum geologist Bob Davis has known Allen for 10 years and considers him a true wildcat explorer who has made new discoveries in areas outside of established fields.

"There are not that many wildcatters left because the business is pretty risky," says Davis, a retired engineer and petroleum geologist with Schlumberger.

Allen says his life's work is driven by his passion for the geology of southern Oklahoma and his love for teaching others.

"People don't understand how complex and how beautiful this geology is," Allen says. "You just don't find it everywhere in the world. I've taken hundreds of people on field trips to the Arbuckles because I want to tell people what we have in southern Oklahoma. They don't understand it all, but that's OK."

In the Arbuckles, visitors can stand on rock that's more than 300 million years old, he says, and they can see ancient outcrops that pose wonders of fantastic proportions.

"When you look at the Cretaceous period of southeast Oklahoma, and you compare it to the White Cliffs of Dover in England, it's the same rock! How'd it get there?" Allen says.

"Rocks are beautiful, and geology is important for everyone to understand, not just geologists."

*Chip Minty is a Norman-based writer and the principal of Minty Communications, LLC.*