

MCKEE MEMORIAL ADDRESS

The Tasman Joseph McKee Memorial Address was initiated by the New Zealand Branch of the AusIMM in 1973 to commemorate the life and work of Tas McKee (1911-1973). The address is presented at the Annual Conference of the New Zealand Branch, usually by the President of the AusIMM.

Tas McKee was perhaps the most important and influential person in the New Zealand minerals industry during the 20th Century and was also a committed member of the AusIMM. He was elected as a Member on 4 July 1960 and was Councillor for New Zealand from 1965 until his death in 1973. Tas was the driving force behind the establishment of the New Zealand Branch of the AusIMM in 1966 and was the first Chairman of the Branch from 1966 to 1967.

Tas was educated at Tasman and Mapua schools, Wellington's St Patrick's College, Motueka District High School, Nelson College and Victoria University College, completing a BSc in chemistry and geology in 1931. He worked part time for the Shell Company of New Zealand.

In 1932, with his father Arthur and brother Guy, Tas established Fruitgrowers Chemical Company at Port Mapua, producing colloidal sulphur fungicide and other agricultural chemicals. In 1938, the three McKees established Lime and Marble Limited to mine the marble deposits on Takaka Hill and produce high-grade lime for the Auckland glass works and burnt lime for local industry. This led to the production of industrial fillers for many New Zealand paint, rubber, plastic, glass and chemical manufacturing companies. Tas expanded the company's interests into the exploration and, in some cases production, of a number of other non-metallic minerals including diatomite, talc-magnesite, dolomite, serpentine, barite and fluorite. The discovery of uranium in the Buller Gorge, Westland, in 1955, sparked his interest in metallic minerals, which eventually involved the company in exploration for uranium, gold, silver, copper, lead, zinc, molybdenum and other metallic minerals during the 1960s, boosted by a joint venture with Asarco from 1967. The company also diversified into Oil exploration with the formation of L&M Oil (NZ) Ltd (54% owned by Lime and Marble) in 1969. Although unsuccessful in the offshore Nelson - Taranaki area, this company discovered gas and condensate at Urenui, Taranaki in a joint venture with Aquitaine Petroleum and Shell BP and Todd. A promising nearby structure was named in McKee's honour following his death. Casing was purchased for a well to be drilled on the structure, but the licences were passed to the newly formed Petrocorp before the well could be drilled. Commercial quantities of oil were discovered in the McKee structure in 1980. In 1966, Tas was awarded an OBE for his pioneering work in mineral exploration and development. His work was also acknowledged by Gordon William's dedication of the second edition of the book "Economic Geology of New Zealand" as the "T J McKee Memorial Volume".

Tas was supportive of education and established a Travel Award to assist university lecturers to visit Australian mining centres, and a scholarship at the Otago School of Mines to help students go overseas in the vacations for practical work. The McKee Post Graduate Scholarship was also established to fund tertiary-level research.

Tas enjoyed a number of interests outside of work including tramping, skiing, mountaineering, rock collecting, watercolour landscape painting, photography and cinematography. He married Freda Redding in 1940 and together they raised three daughters and three sons. Freda died in 1969 and Tas married Margaret Luoni in 1973, less than one month before he died.

Main source: Dictionary of New Zealand biography volume 5, 1941-1960.

McKee Memorial Address List

1973: C.H. Benny, I.S.O. in Auckland.

1975: Sir Frank F. Espie in Dunedin.

1979: W M Lonie (President, 1979) "The mining industry in national development", in Dunedin, 3 May.

1981: John P. Morgan (President 1981) "Forecasting for Mining and the Environment", in Thames, 19 August.

1983: Sir James Foots (President 1983) "Trends in the non-ferrous metals", in Invercargill.

1985: David Tennent (President 1985), in Christchurch.

1987: D.O. Zimmerman (President 1987) "Multiple land use" in Nelson, 3 September.

1992: Sir Bruce Watson (President 1992) "Opportunities for mining industry professionals in a changing world", in Dunedin, 19 August.

1994: Dr John Hamdorf (President 1994), in Wairakei, 17 August.

1996: Jock Braithwaite "Forty years of West Coast mining", in Greymouth, 21 August.

2001: Rod Elvish (President 2001) "Professionalism, the AusIMM and the community", in Dunedin, 29 August.

2002: Ian Goddard (President 2002) "The AusIMM - the future", in Auckland, 2 September.