Guillermo P. Salas passed away in Mexico City on June 29, 1990, after a year-long illness. He left behind his wife, Doña Josefina Pizá viuda de Salas; three daughters, Cristina, Patricia, and Yolanda; and three sons, Guillermo-Armando (a geologist), Rodolfo, and Alejandro. Guillermo Salas was born in Monterrey, Nuevo León, on October 19, 1912, about two years after the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution. Throughout his life, he was very proud of his “regiomontanas” roots. As was customary for many Mexicans born and raised in northern Mexico, Salas went to the United States to obtain his college training, attending the University of Oklahoma. His subsistence there was provided in part by his parents and in part by campus jobs. During those years, he participated actively in the varsity boxing team. He graduated in 1936, obtaining the B.Sc. degree in geological engineering.

After graduation, he secured a computer position with a crew of Seismograph Service Corporation, headquartered in Tulsa, which he held for one year. Between 1937 and 1938, he worked as a subsurface geologist with Carter Oil Company, also in Oklahoma. By 1938, the year of the nationalization of the Mexican petroleum industry, he decided it was time to return to Mexico. On his return, he was contracted by the Mexican Lumber and Transportation Company as geological party chief for work on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec; he held this position until 1939. That same year, he joined Petróleos Mexicanos (PEMEX), serving as a field geologist in Oaxaca, Tabasco, and Veracruz for eight years; between 1947 and 1949 he was chief geologist. In 1949, he resigned from PEMEX and founded the Rotary Engineering Company of Mexico (ROTENCO) to provide service to PEMEX; at the same time, he started a private practice as a general petroleum consultant. This practice included areas in Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Venezuela, and Cuba. In Havana, he opened an office during 1955–1957, and again in 1960–1963. In 1955, he founded another service company, Servicios de Nitrógeno para Pozos Petroleros, S.A., and was its president from 1962 to 1977. He founded a third company in 1960, Trailers Mexicanos, S.A., in which he served as president from 1960 to 1970.

Salas (or, as his close friends called him, “Shorty”—he was 6’1” tall) was an indefatigable person. In addition to the activities and responsibilities just outlined, he was professor of sedimentology (1951–1957) and of economic geology (1952–1957) in the Department of Geological Engineering of the School of Engineering, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). In 1955, he was appointed director of the Instituto de Geología, the geological research institute of UNAM, a position he held until December 1968. During this 13-year period, Salas took up other activities also. In 1956, he was in charge of all field trips of the 20th Session of the International Geological Congress, held in Mexico, and between 1957 and 1959, he acted as chief advisor of Consejo de Recursos Minerales No Renovables, the mining
exploration agency of the Mexican government. During the period 1962–1974, he also served as advisor of the Mexican Government’s Trust for the Exploration, Exploitation, and Treatment of Non-Metallic Minerals. In 1968, just before ending his appointment as director of Instituto de Geología, he had the responsibility of general chairman of the local committee of the Mexico City Annual Meeting of the Geological Society of America, during which he was supported by the expertise and full collaboration of the general co-chairman, the late Eduardo J. Guzmán.

Salas’s activities between 1969 and 1983 were centered on mineral exploration and general governmental mineral and mining policies, as director general of Consejo de Recursos Minerales (formerly Consejo de Recursos Naturales No Renovables). In 1983, he retired from government service and resumed his private practice. During this time, he served on the Steering Committee for GSA’s Decade of North American Geology (DNAG), and organized the volume Economic Geology of Mexico, first privately printed in Spanish and then translated as volume P-3 of the GSA Centennial set of volumes on the Geology of North America. He was working on the final editing and correction of the English version at the time of this death.

Aside from the activities and posts he held, Salas also devoted a substantial part of his time, and in a very dynamic way, to scientific and professional organizations. To mention a few, he was a member of the American Association of Petroleum Geologists since 1934 (he was later made an honorary member), the American Institute of Mining, Metallurgical and Petroleum Engineers since 1934, the Sociedad Geológica Mexicana since 1946 (serving as president from 1964 to 1968), the Asociación Mexicana de Geólogos Petroleros (founding member) since 1949 (he was president from 1952 to 1953), the Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística since 1950, the Geological Society of America (member from 1960 to 1965; Fellow since 1965; councilor from 1965 to 1965; DNAG coordinator for Mexico); the Asociación de Ingenieros de Minas, Metalurgistas y Geólogos de México since 1956, the Sociedad Mexicana de Geofísicos de Exploración since 1958, the Clay Mineral Society since 1962, and the Society of Economic Geologists since 1969 (regional vice-president for North America from 1980 to 1983).

Salas also served on the board of directors of Instituto Nacional de Investigación Científica (1962–1964), today the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACYT), and on the executive council of Instituto Mexicano del Petróleo since 1965. He was chief government delegate to the Governmental Conference of Experts for the International Geological Correlation Programme (1971–1973), and member of its executive council (1973–1976). Between 1976 and 1980, he was vice-president of the International Union of Geological Sciences, and since 1972, he had been vice-president and councilor for the northeast quadrant of the Circum-Pacific Map Project.

In recognition of his untiring efforts on behalf of the advancement of geology in Mexico, Salas received Les palmes académiques in 1964 from the government of France; in 1989 he was elected honorary member of Academia Mexicana de Ingeniería.

Without much effort, I could probably double the amount of space to enumerate the many other positions and responsibilities Salas had during his life. I would prefer instead to record some personal appreciations of Salas’s contributions to the Instituto de Geología of the UNAM, to the Mexican geological profession, and to Mexico’s presence at international geological events and organizations.

The appointment of Salas in 1955 as director of Instituto de Geología was of dual importance. He was the first formally trained geologist director in the history of the institution. Moreover, his appointment coincided with the start of the modernization of the university, and hence of the Instituto de Geología. Because of his strong and dynamic personality, he was able to persuade the late Dr. Nabor Carrillo, then Rector (President) of the university, of the importance of geology to the university and to the country. As a result, he obtained a very substantial increase in appropriations for the Instituto. This, in turn, permitted expansion of the
research staff, the financing of original field work, geologic mapping, stratigraphic and paleontological studies, and even the establishment of a modest geochronometric laboratory. Salas also helped to create the conditions for adequate publication of geologic maps in color and of monographs with good illustrations in the different disciplines of geology.

In the early 1960s, Salas was already aware of Mexico's offshore hydrocarbon and mineral potentials, and also of the fact that no scientific personnel were available in the country. He launched a marine geology program in the Instituto de Geología, and established cooperative research projects primarily for on-the-job training of young Mexican geologists. Thanks to those initial and modest efforts, the university today has an Institute of Marine Sciences and Limnology, equipped with two research vessels.

Beginning in 1957, while director of the Instituto de Geología, he also held a position as chief advisor of Consejo de Recursos Naturales No Renovables, where, traditionally, mining engineers carried out the exploration tasks. At the Consejo, Salas immediately reoriented the exploration to geological grounds and hired a great number of geologists and geophysicists to carry out exploration programs. As a result, Mexican mining companies that had only a few or no geologists employed began to establish their own exploration departments and also started to hire geologists; some even hired geophysicists. Salas lost no opportunity to address the public, whether politicians or technical administrators, to explain the importance of geology, both as a basic and applied science, in the future development of Mexico.

A strong nationalist, Salas nevertheless openly recognized Mexico's shortcomings in various fields of geology. As a result, he encouraged and even sought international cooperation, primarily to enable young Mexicans to be adequately trained. For that purpose, he succeeded in establishing cooperative programs with various universities in the United States where he sent young Mexican geologists for graduate training. At the same time, he encouraged American graduate students to come to Mexico to do their graduate field research and to offer Mexican undergraduates on-the-job training as field assistants.

Throughout the last three decades of his life, Salas participated in a great number of international geological and mineral resources events, many financed by himself, carrying Mexico's representation with great honor. Largely as a result of his efforts, several international events took place in Mexico, and during these he was a gracious host.

We were very fortunate for having been able to collaborate with this extraordinary and dynamic geologist, executive, and friend.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF G. P. SALAS

1938 Características de las rocas receptoras de petróleo, principalmente de las areniscas: Ingeniería (México), v. 12, p. 409–410.

------ Algunos datos sobre el problema de estimular la producción: Ingeniería (México), v. 12, p. 462–464.


------ Bosquejo geológico de la cuenca sedimentaria de Oaxaca: Boletín de la Asociación Mexicana de Geólogos Petroleros, v. 1, p. 79–156.


1959 Los depósitos de bauxita en Haití y Jamaica y posibilidades de que exista bauxita en México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Geología, Boletín 59, p. 9–42.


1977 Contribution of Mexico to the Metallogenic Chart of North America: Geological Society of America Map and Chart MC-13, scale 1:2,000,000.


Compiled by Margarita Lugo-Hubp, Instituto de Geología, Universidad Autónoma de México.