Memorials

John E. (Brick) Elliott, independent oil man and inventor-manufacturer of the Elliott rotary core and wire line core drills, died on June 6, 1980, in Austin, Texas. He was born in Bozeman, Montana, May 31, 1887. The nickname, Brick, stemmed from his shock of red hair. The Elliott family moved to the Monterey-Salinas area of California in 1897. Brick attended the public schools and graduated from Monterey High School in 1906. He spent the next year working as a surveyor in the High Sierras for the Western Pacific Railroad, saving all the money he could toward a college education. He entered Stanford University in the fall of 1907 where he waited tables, played football, and completed work for the bachelor’s degree in geology and mining in January 1912 after having worked from May to December 1911 as chief statistician and scout for the Associated Oil Co. at Taft, California.

Near the end of 1911 Brick received an offer from Ralph Arnold, well-known petroleum geologist, to move to Venezuela as his assistant chief geologist for the Caribbean Petroleum Co., a subsidiary of the Barber Asphalt Co. Headquarters were established in Caracas in March 1912. His outstanding work in Venezuela was the assembly and compilation of the first complete map for geologic use ever made of northern Venezuela. In July 1913 Brick resigned his position in Venezuela and returned to the States, arriving in San Francisco in August at just the right moment from a career standpoint.

Ben van der Linden had been assigned by the Royal Dutch Petroleum Co. to look over the oil situation on the Pacific Coast of the United States; he needed help and advice and checked with an associate, W. R. Hamilton, who had once been Brick’s boss. Thus, Brick became one of the first, if not the first geologist to be employed full time by the Royal Dutch-SHELL group in the United States. He stayed with Shell for 7 years, becoming chief geologist in California. In late 1918 or early 1919 Brick took over the direction of surface core drilling for Shell in southern California, reporting to Ben van der Linden.

At the end of 1920 Brick accepted a position as associate professor of petroleum technology at Stanford University. He spent only the spring semester of 1921 at Stanford and then moved back to Los Angeles. He learned fast that the oil companies in southern California were not then interested in hiring him or financing his idea of designing and building a core drill. He decided to risk his own small savings, drawing his own specifications, and having the drill manufactured. The first attempt to obtain a core was made in a well in the eastern part of the Huntington Beach oil field, the Ashton 1, in August 1921. It was successful and the Elliott Core Drilling Co. was born. It became an incorporated entity in 1922. As president of the company, Brick supervised continuing improvement in core drill tools and machinery, services, and personnel.

Before selling the company to Byron Jackson in 1938, Brick was engaged in several other business