

Eocene Paleotectonics and Sedimentation in the Rocky Mountain-Colorado Plateau Region

The Laramide orogeny (c. 80 to 40 m.y.B.P.), which culminated during early Eocene time, resulted in the development of numerous uplifts and basins in the foreland of the western United States. Uplifts are assignable to three general classes: (1) Cordilleran thrust belt uplifts, (2) basement-cored, fault-bounded uplifts of the classic Laramide Rocky Mountains, and (3) monocline-bounded uplifts of the Colorado Plateau. Basins were also of three types: (1) Green River type—large equidimensional to elliptical basins bounded on three or more sides by uplifts and commonly containing lake deposits, (2) Denver type—asymmetrical, synclinal downwarps with a related uplift along one side, and (3) Echo Park type—narrow, highly elongate basins with through drainage and of strike-slip origin. Green River-type basins exhibit quasiconcentric zonation of facies, in contrast to the unidirectional, proximal-to-distal facies tract of Denver-type basins. Facies distribution in Echo Park-type basins is complex and often difficult to reconstruct due to faulting, erosional truncation, and cover.

The prevalence of an echelon structures in the deformed zone east of the Colorado Plateau, and evidence for significant crustal shortening north of the plateau, suggest that the major structural features of the Laramide foreland were produced by large-scale, north-northeastward translation of the relatively rigid Colorado Plateau block. The magnitude of this motion, as indicated by dextral offset of lineaments which cross the eastern margin of the plateau and by the amount of crustal shortening in the Wyoming province, may be as great as 65 to 120 km (40 to 75 mi). This translation probably resulted from the interaction of relatively competent Colorado Plateau lithosphere with the underlying, gently dipping Farallon plate, which was being overridden by the western United States in Laramide time.

Evidence for increased strain rates in early Eocene time includes: (1) markedly higher rates of deposition and sand/shale ratios in the Gulf Coast geosyncline (Wilcox Group), (2) formation of several new basins in the southern Rocky Mountains in which Eocene deposits rest unconformably on pre-Cenozoic rocks, and (3) the generally coarser and more arkosic nature of Eocene sediments, as compared to older Laramide deposits, in many areas throughout the foreland. The early Eocene culmination of Laramide tectonism appears to result from two factors. First, the subducted Farallon plate achieved its shallowest dip at about 55 m.y.B.P., resulting in increased viscous coupling with the overriding continental lithosphere. Second, changing spreading-center geometries in the Labrador Sea, Norwegian Sea, and Arctic Ocean caused the maximum horizontal stress direction to shift to a northeasterly orientation, causing the Colorado Plateau block to increasingly decouple from the craton along north-trending wrench faults in the southern Rocky Mountains. Translation of the Colorado Plateau to the north-northeast during Laramide time resulted in a series of transpressive uplifts and basins along its eastern margin and large-scale crustal shortening in the Wyoming province to the north.

CHIMNEY, PETE J., and MARTY D. WITTSTROM, Gulf Oil Exploration and Production Co., Casper, WY

Relation of Lithofacies and Diagenesis to Porosity Development, Mississippian Mission Canyon Formation, Eastern Montana and Western North Dakota

The ability to map lithofacies trends suitable for hydrocarbon reservoirs is critical for a successful exploration program. In exploring basins with carbonate reservoirs, diagenetic alterations must also be understood in relation to porosity development. The Mississippian Mission Canyon formation of the Williston basin provides an excellent example of the need to understand the lithofacies/diagenesis relation.

During the Mississippian the Williston basin was the site of subtidal to supratidal carbonate deposition. In general, depositional environments became more restricted from Montana eastward into North Dakota. Subsurface mapping suggests a strong relationship between the degree of marine restriction and diagenesis and porosity development in carbonate sediments. Two fields that produce from the Mission Canyon interval illustrate this relationship.

MonDak field, situated on the Montana-North Dakota border, lies west of the limit of massive Mission Canyon anhydrite in a sequence of

normal marine sediments. Reservoir porosity is due to fracturing of tight, fine-grained limestones. Low matrix porosity and sparse, erratic fracturing are responsible for low daily production rates.

The Billings Nose-Little Knife trend (Billings, Dunn, and McKenzie Counties, North Dakota) is well within the limit of massive anhydrite. Reservoir porosity consists of a thick sequence of intertidal-supratidal sucrosic dolomites which are sealed by 20 to 25 m (65 to 82 ft) of massive anhydrite. Reflux of magnesium-rich brines is believed to be the process leading to dolomitization.

Good matrix porosity and permeability allow for higher daily production rates. Regional mapping indicates that the presence or absence of anhydrite correlates directly with the development of good matrix porosity.

CLEMENT, JAMES H., Shell Oil Co., Houston, TX

Cedar Creek—A Significant Paleotectonic Feature of Williston Basin

Cedar Creek is the major anticlinal structure demarcating the southwest flank of the Williston basin. This pronounced fold developed through a geologic history of recurrent tectonic movements along a northwest-southeast striking fault zone. The four major periods of tectonism documentable in the Cedar Creek area from early Paleozoic through mid-Tertiary affected the local and regional distribution, erosion, and/or preservation, and, though moderately, the depositional facies of sedimentary strata since Ordovician time.

Post-Silurian-Pre-Middle-Devonian.—Uplift and fault movement accompanied north and east tilting of the main Cedar Creek block. Several hundreds of feet of Silurian strata were eroded prior to Middle Devonian time, and a karst plain developed on the Silurian surface. Middle and Upper Devonian sediments progressively overlapped and infilled the uplifted, northwest plunging element.

Late Devonian-Pre-Mississippian.—During latest Upper Devonian—possibly earliest Mississippian—pronounced fault movement occurred along the major fault zone. The Cedar Creek block was uplifted and tilted north and east; maximum displacement along the zone appears to have occurred in the vicinity of the Pine-Gas City-Glendive oil fields. Extensive erosion resulted in the near penplanation of the structure and significant truncation of Upper Devonian strata. Continued paleostructural influence during Mississippian time is indicated by the distribution and facies of early and middle Mississippian rocks.

Late Mississippian (Chester) through Triassic.—In late Mississippian (Chester) and early Pennsylvanian time, the central and northern portion of the Cedar Creek area underwent gentle downwarping, and periods of subsidence occurred with relative down-to-the-east fault movement along parts of the ancestral master and subsidiary faults. Similar fault movement(s) and subsidence which continued to occur during the Permian and Triassic periods significantly influenced the deposition and preservation of these evaporite rich, red-bed sequences. Relative tectonic stability was attained by the Middle Jurassic and essentially maintained until post-Paleocene time.

Post-Paleocene.—The Cedar Creek block underwent its greatest magnitude of uplift during the post-Paleocene; younger Tertiary beds are not present in the area. This uplifting was accompanied by major flexuring, the extensive linear belt of asymmetric drape-folding generally aligned with the ancestral fault zones, and deep fault adjustment. Northwest plunge along the crestal portion was significantly increased. The entire area was subsequently uplifted during epeirogenic phases of the mid-Tertiary in the northern Rocky Mountain region and about 1,500 ft (460 m) of Paleocene and Upper Cretaceous strata eroded along the axis of the present structure.

COUGHLAN, PATRICK, AGAT Consultants, Inc., Denver, CO

Depositional Environment and Diagenesis of Teapot Sandstone (Upper Cretaceous), Converse and Natrona Counties, Wyoming

The Teapot Sandstone forms the upper member of the Upper Cretaceous Mesa Verde Formation in the Powder River basin. Previous interpretations of the Teapot based on outcrop or subsurface data range from nearshore marine to fluvial. Integration of outcrop data with subsurface data from cores provides a more complete interpretation of depositional