Digging Up the Past

from June 7-July 14, 1927. Dr. Leroy Thompson Patton took several students to survey areas such as the Guadalupe Mountains, Carlsbad Caverns, Ruidoso, Sierra Blanca and the San Andreas Canyon. The students included J. F. Clingingsmith, Percy Denton, J. T. Gist, John McElroy, Henry Mobley, Lloyd Prett, Eldon Thorpe and W. T. Reed. Later, field geology specimen gathering expeditions included a 1929 trip to Carritzno, N.M., and the Sierra Blanca Mountains; a 1930 trip to the south end of the Sandia Mountains of New Mexico; and a 1931 three day trip to Railroad Mountain Dike.

Patton, a graduate of the University of Iowa, came to Lubbock in 1924 to survey the geology of the area. In a letter to Paul Whittfield Horn, Ph.D., Patton assured the newly elected Texas Technological presidential that water was definitely present underneath the campus and surrounding area. He also suggested that thorough logs be kept on the well drilling to provide an overall picture of the campus’s true underground conditions and future well availability. The letter closed with Patton’s reply that he would be glad to give Horn a detailed account of how to establish geology coursework at the new college as it would give him “…an opportunity to demonstrate my fitness for an appointment.”

Impressed with Patton, Horn eventually offered the enthusiastic young man a position. “At the time I applied for a job Dr. Horn hadn’t planned to have a geology department. I had to sell him on a geology department and on myself,” Patton stated, adding that he had agreed to Horn’s request that should not enough students apply to take geology that Patton would then teach chemistry. “Incidentally, I never have taught chemistry,” he proudly boasted.

So beloved by his students was Patton that they wrote up a plan of action to support him when rumors circulated that Patton was being considered for the next Texas Tech president. The plan outlined why his students and former students believed Patton was qualified for the job and how he had shaped the geology department into being “one of the largest if not the largest in the U.S.” Unfortunately, their efforts did not come to fruition but Patton went on to spend 25 successful years with Texas Tech. He was a strong advocate for the Seismological Observatory and served as its director. His retirement in 1951 sadly marked the decline of the observatory, which was finally demolished in December of 1998.