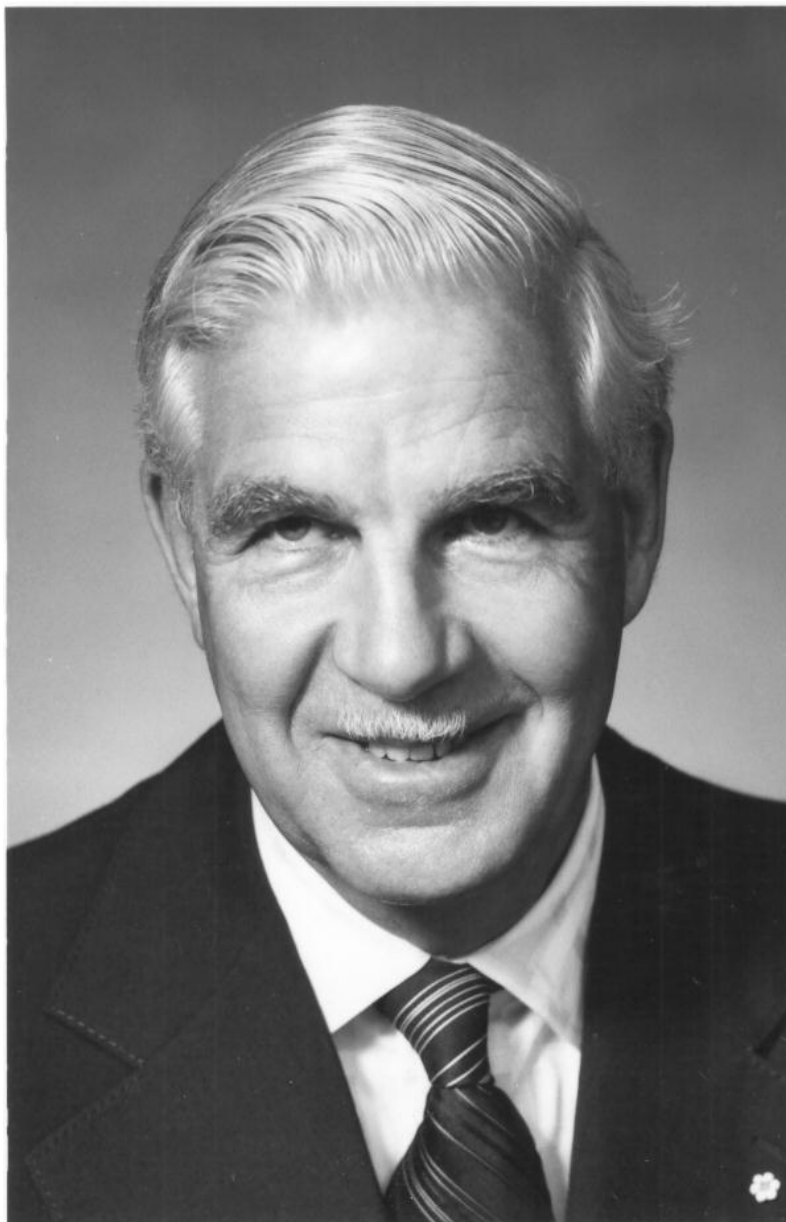


R. D. MORTON

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**Robert E. Folinsbee**  
**1917-2008**



Robert (Bob) Folinsbee was born and raised in Edmonton, Alberta, and was son of Dr. Francis John Folinsbee, a local General Practitioner, and Elizabeth Woolverton.

In the mid-1930s Bob registered at the University of Alberta to study law, but stimulating undergraduate geology lectures by Dr. P.S. Warren and chats with his fellow student Charles Stelck, during walks over the High Level Bridge in Edmonton, rapidly converted him to the pursuit of a career in geology at the University of Alberta under Professors Allan and Warren. In 1938 he received his B.Sc. from the University of Alberta. Bob then moved to the University of Minnesota where he was awarded a M.Sc. degree in 1940 and a Ph.D. in 1942.

In the summers of the late 1930's to the late 1940's Bob worked as a field geologist with the Geological Survey of Canada in the Precambrian terrains of the Northwest Territories and in northern Ontario. During mapping of the Lac du Gras area of the Northwest Territories, he collected mafic minerals and garnets from esker deposits that indicated the local presence of as-yet-undiscovered ultramafic igneous rocks. These indicator minerals eventually provided clues that helped in the discovery of Canada's first diamondiferous kimberlites in that area during the 1990's. Today the University of Alberta is the site of the De Beers Laboratory for Diamond Research.

During World War II Bob became a pilot with the Royal Canadian Air Force and was training for active service in the Pacific arena when the war ended in 1945. After his demobilization from the RCAF, Bob spent a post-doctoral year at Harvard University (1945-46) under Prof L. C. Graton. In 1946, he joined the University of Alberta as an Assistant Professor. He became an Associate Professor in 1950 and a Full Professor in 1955.

In 1954-55 Bob spent a sabbatical year at the University of California, Berkeley, performing research in isotope geology and geochemistry. Upon his return to the University of Alberta, filled with enthusiasm for the new innovations in geochemistry and geochronology, Bob was elected Chairman of the Department of Geology. During his time as Chairman from 1955 to 1969 Bob strove to build the Department of Geology into a well-staffed and enviably equipped centre of excellence that gained international stature.

Bob had a plethora of eclectic research interests and as a result he was a prolific publisher of scientific papers. His earliest papers focused mainly on mineralogy and regional geology published by the Geological Survey of Canada. His later publications reflected his interests in the fields of geochronology, ore deposits, and meteorites. Bob made important contributions to all three of these fields.

The research that he performed in Berkeley in 1954-55 with J. H. Reynolds and J. Lipson made three fundamental contributions to the then emerging science of geochronology: firstly, it gave the initial indication that micas would be the most useful minerals for potassium-argon dating; secondly, it yielded the first accurate K/Ar dates for the Canadian Shield; and thirdly, it produced the first K/Ar dates for pyroclastics (bentonites) in the sedimentary sequence, (a work which had its culmination in a volume produced by the Geological Society of London, Phanerozoic Time Scale (1964)). The age dating by Bob and his co-workers on the rocks of the Precambrian Shield and of the Cordillera provided a major advance in our understanding of the problems of the timing and nature of granitoid intrusions and orogenic phases. Furthermore, the early successes

of Bob and his colleagues in dating Precambrian rocks by the K/Ar method had a considerable influence on the decision of the Geological Survey of Canada to establish a program of K/Ar geochronology for the Canadian Shield.

The second of Bob's interests, meteorites, stemmed from his study of Canada's largest known meteorite, the Bruderheim, which fell near Edmonton in March 1960. The detailed studies and descriptions by Bob and his colleagues of the fall and recovery and of the geochemistry of this meteorite stimulated Canadian interest in meteorites, leading rapidly to the recovery and study of other meteorites in Canada - the Peace River and the Revelstoke - and probably to the formation of the National Research Council's Associate Committee on Meteorites. Today, the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences in the University of Alberta is blessed with one of the world's better collection of meteorites, thanks to Bob's enthusiasm.

Later in his career Bob developed an avid interest in the application of isotope geochemistry studies to ore deposits. His first major isotope investigation was directed towards the sulphur and lead isotopes of the carbonate-hosted Pb-Zn deposits at Pine Point in the Northwest Territories. The results of these studies were a major contribution to our understanding of the nature and movement of reservoir fluids and gases in carbonate sequences and their role in the genesis of sulphide mineralization.

Today, many of Bob's former students occupy senior positions in academia and industry. His enthusiasm and knowledge were passed on to many successful exploration geologists in the spheres of base metals, gold, uranium and diamonds. Many of his students will remember how he forecast the current oil and gas shortages whilst society carried on in a dream world naively presuming such resources were infinite.

In recognition of his accomplishments Bob was awarded the Royal Society of Canada's Willet G. Miller Medal in 1967, he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and he was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 1973. Bob was elected President of the Geological Society of America (1975-1976) and President of the 24<sup>th</sup> International Geological Congress in Montreal in 1972. In 1977-1978 Bob was President of the Royal Society of Canada.

Bob retired in 1977 and started a second career as a hobby farmer from his family cottage at Fallis on Lake Wabamun, west of Edmonton.

Bob married Catherine Terwillegar in 1942. They had four children: Allin (Alice), John (Peggy), Terry (Peter) and Catherine (Tarjei). He has seven grandchildren and two stepgrandchildren. His wife Catherine died in 1994. In 2001, Bob married Mary Jean McBride and moved to the warmth of southern Ontario where he spent the remaining years of his life.

Robert Edward Folinsbee was a giant in the geological community of Western Canada. He was a man, born in the pioneering days of Alberta's resource industries, who lived an enviably full life to witness the truth of his foresight and the fruits of his long scientific labours.