

Henry William Menard Biography



Henry William Menard was born in Fresno, California on December 10, 1920. He earned a B.S. and M.S. from the California Institute of Technology in 1942 and 1947, having served in the South Pacific during World War

II. In 1949, he completed a Ph.D. in marine geology at Harvard University. Menard is perhaps best known for his promotion of the theory of plate tectonics before it was widely accepted in the scientific community. Menard served many roles during his career as a marine geologist. Field worker, theorist, educator, popularizer, entrepreneur and statesman, Menard's historical and sociological writings are respected by historians of science.

Menard began his professional career in 1949, in the Sea Floor Studies Section of San Diego's Navy Electronics Laboratory. He joined the Scripps Institution of Oceanography (SIO) in 1955 as associate professor of geology. Menard's field work was extensive, involving 1,000 aqua-lung dives and 20 oceanographic expeditions from 1949 until 1978 when he became Director of the U.S.G.S. His research focused on the morphology of the ocean floor. During the 1950s, Menard also started a scuba-diving business with a few colleagues that included consulting for AT&T on the laying of cable.

He became a full professor of the University of California, San Diego in 1961. Two years were spent at Churchill College (1962 and 1970-71). Following a year in Washington, D.C. as technical advisor in the Office of Science and Technology (1965-66), Menard served as Director of the University of California's Institute of Marine Resources, headquartered at SIO. During the 1960s he wrote his first text book (*Marine Geology of the Pacific*, 1964), and his first historical account of oceanography (*Anatomy of an Expedition*, 1969) in which he described the operation of a major expedition. He was elected to the National Academy of Sciences in 1968, and served on several NAS committees reviewing environmental issues from 1969 to 1974.

In the 1970s, Menard's career focused on teaching marine geology and serving as a statesman of science. During the height of the plate tectonic "revolution," Menard wrote, but never published a text book on marine geology. He devoted his attention to another book at this time as well, *Science: Growth and Change*, which was published in 1971. For this book he drew on quantitative research he had done while he had worked for the OST in Washington, D.C., using it to create a sociological account of science with an emphasis on oceanography and variables affecting career 'success.' The book was favorably reviewed by historians of science. His other writings relating to sociology examine the factors affecting oil exploration and the discovery of reservoirs. In 1974, while teaching classes at the University of California he wrote, and this time published, a second text book, for a less advanced audience than his 1964 work, *Geology, Resources, and Society*.

Menard served as director of the U.S.G.S (1978-1981). He travelled extensively as director, attending meetings of state geologists, visiting university geology departments, laboratories, and U.S.G.S. offices throughout the nation. In addition, he visited foreign nations, including China and Saudi Arabia. After his return to SIO in 1981, Menard continued to teach, write, and do research. Two of Menard's books were published posthumously, both in 1986; *Islands*, a popular book on the formation of islands, and *Ocean of Truth: A Personal History of Global Tectonics*, in which he discusses the evidence and heated debate surrounding the plate tectonic "revolution." Menard's personal involvement, as well as his close familiarity with the key people in the debate, make his account unusually well-informed and personal. He died in La Jolla, February 9, 1986.