

ROBERT H. DOTT, JR.

**ROBERT NATHAN GINSBURG, CARBONATE SEDIMENTOLOGIST  
(1925–2017)**

ROBERT H. DOTT, JR.

*Department of Geoscience  
University of Wisconsin  
Madison, WI 53706  
USA*



Bob Ginsburg in characteristic field attire (from Swart *et al.* 2012).

Robert Nathan Ginsburg, creator of the *Rock Stars* series of profiles of important geoscientists and distinguished carbonate sedimentologist, died 9 July 2017. The son of a Texas oil man, Bob attended the University of Chicago, receiving the PhD in 1953. He then joined the University of Miami Marine Laboratory, but from 1954 to 1965 he led a Shell Development Company carbonate sediment training program in Coral Gables, Florida. He next became Professor of Geology and Oceanography at Johns Hopkins University from 1965 to 1970. From 1970 to 1991 Bob served as the head of the T. Wayland Vaughn Laboratory for Comparative Sedimentology headquartered in an old U.S. Quarantine Station at Fisher Island,

Florida. In 1991 the program moved to the Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences of the University of Miami at Virginia Key. His program emphasized comparisons between modern and ancient carbonate sediments and was generously supported by the petroleum industry. In the 1980s he discovered a 3 million-year-old coral atoll and also a mile-deep sediment-filled trench beneath the Bahama Banks. Bob dedicated much of his career to the study of modern coral reefs and was a leader in the international assessment of reef decline.

Like many of us, Ginsburg became interested in the history of his science and joined the then History of Geology Division of the Geological Society of America. When he became Chair of the Division, he proposed the idea that a series of brief profiles of important past Earth scientists could inspire young, upcoming scientists as he remembered being so inspired. He proposed to the Division a series of such profiles to be called *Rock Stars*. The idea was accepted. He wrote this introduction to *Rock Stars*:

Bernard of Chartres, an 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century philosopher and teacher, said that we are like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants, so that we can see more than they and for a greater distance, not by any virtue of our own but because we are carried high and raised aloft by their status.

All of us have our geological heroes, those giants on whose shoulders we stand. To encourage recognition of these luminaries and to provide inspiration for students and young professionals, the GSA History of Geology Division presents *Rock Stars*, brief profiles of our geological giants. Here is the first one.

Bob wrote this first profile published in 1995 about the career of T. Wayland Vaughn (1870–1952), American pioneer in the study of corals and coral reefs, which had been a great inspiration for Bob. Thirty-five more profiles have been published since.

## ELOGÉ FOR ROBERT N. GINSBURG

Bob Ginsburg was regarded by sedimentologists as one of the most influential thinkers in his field. He was a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, a Fellow of the Geological Society of America, and he was awarded the Twenhofel Medal by the Society for Sedimentary Geology in 1985 and the Sorby Medal of the International Association of Sedimentology in 1998. His unusually creative mind led to the formation of Research Groups when he was President of the Society for Sedimentary Geology and brought to GSA the idea of *Rock Stars*. Not only was Bob himself inspirational, he was also persuasive. I can personally attest that he had a remarkable talent for recruiting others to help bring his ideas to fruition. He was such a delight to work with, however, that it was a pleasure to join his initiatives.

### Selected Bibliography

- Eberli, G. P. and R. N. Ginsburg. 1989. Cenozoic progradation of northwestern Great Bahama Bank, a record of lateral platform growth and sea level fluctuations. In: *Controls on Carbonate Platform and Basin Development*, edited by P. Crevello *et al.* S.E.P.M. Special Publications, No. 44.
- Ginsburg, R. N. 1991. Controversies about stromatolites: Vices and virtues. In: *Controversies in Modern Geology*, edited by Daniel W. Muller and Judith McKenzie, pp. 25–36, Academic Press.
- Ginsburg, R. N. 1995. Formative years of the scientific career of T. Wayland Vaughn. In: *Rock Stars, GSA Today* (November 1995), pp. 233–234.
- Swart, P. K., Eberlie, G. P., and McKenzie, J. A. (editors). 2012. *Perspectives in Carbonate Geology: A Tribute to the Career of Robert Nathan Ginsburg*. Special Publication Number 41 of the International Association of Sedimentologists. Wiley-Blackwell.