

At right on this page is shown Oklahoma's first oil well which is still pumping oil at Bartlesville. On the opposite page appears a photograph of Oklahoma's first oil field, developed in 1904, the Bartlesville townsite.

Oklahoma's first oil well

BY JOSEPH A. KORNFELD, '30

OKLAHOMA'S oil history dates back to a decade before statehood—back to 1897—to the townsite of Bartlesville, where the State's first commercial oil well was drilled in what was then Indian Territory, the domain of the Five Civilized Tribes. Certain surprising facts and sidelights are revealed from a search of old records.

Ordinarily, one would expect that a boom of tremendous proportion would immediately follow discovery of oil in Indian Territory. But little attention was paid at the time to that well standing on the Cherokee reservation. This apparent indifference was due to strong legal obstacles, inadequate transportation and the then prevalent cheapness of crude oil. But the well was important since its existence precipitated the allotment of the Five Tribes, accelerating Sooner oil history several years.

As the pages of Sooner history are turned back to the pre-statehood days, one can see an infant oil industry developing nearby in the eastern Kansas region between Paola and Neodesha. As early as 1892, a Kansas oil "wildcatter," E. P. Galey, was looking for oil structures south of the state line. One can envisage his examining the mounds of rock west of Bartlesville at the time and his reasoning to William Johnstone and George Keeler that:

"These mound rocks are rough. These must have been thrown up by gas in some prehistoric time. If it was caused by sea action, these rocks would have been smooth."

However unscientific these petroleum postulations were, Kansas oil men had developed some crude ideas on oil geology that proved practical to their purposes, such as "trends" and "looks like oil land" and "catching it high." There were those who had their "oil magnets" and forked twigs, utilized to avoid drilling dry holes. It was a couple of decades before

the use of the seismograph, the torsion balance and the magnetometer was to become general in oil exploration. A science was to emerge from superstitious notions!

At any rate, Keeler and Johnstone became "sold" on the idea that the locality would be productive of oil. A friendship existing between Keeler and "Mike" Cudahy of the Cudahy Oil Company was responsible for the latter concern becoming interested and taking a lease in July of 1892 on what is now the Johnstone park in the north part of the Bartlesville townsite. By 1894, 200,000 acres had been leased by that company in the vicinity of the town, then an Indian village. But it was not until 1897 that the well was drilled. The world moved slowly in those days!

Convenience guided the owners' choice of a well location, which was made near the south end of the bridge over the Caney river. A ferry crossed only a short distance south of the well. Proximity of the road for transporting equipment and the nearness of water for drilling, determined the eventful spot.

No ceremonies nor curiosity crowds witnessed the "spudding in" of the destined discovery. No two shifts of drilling crews were used—only dawn to sunset marking the regular drilling duration. Drilling proceeded leisurely until the bit pounded its way through caprock one April day in 1897. At a depth of 1,340 feet "it came in" for 150 barrels a day tapping the same sand that was to prove a market-breaking field at Glennpool not too many years later. Oil had been found in Indian Territory!

Like the Drake well, the discovery at first attracted little attention. Even the prominent Mister Bartles did not have an interest in the well, paying no attention to oil until after allotment was made. Nevertheless, the Cudahy discovery was the stimulus for governmental action that was to make the Cherokees, Osages,

Seminoles, Creeks and the Chickasaws, the wealthiest Indians on the Continent in the ensuing quarter century of Sooner oil development that surmounted spectacularity. Had these Red Men known of the vast riches that awaited them at their newly-acquired reservations, their journey from Georgia and Florida might have been a road of triumph instead of a "trail of tears."

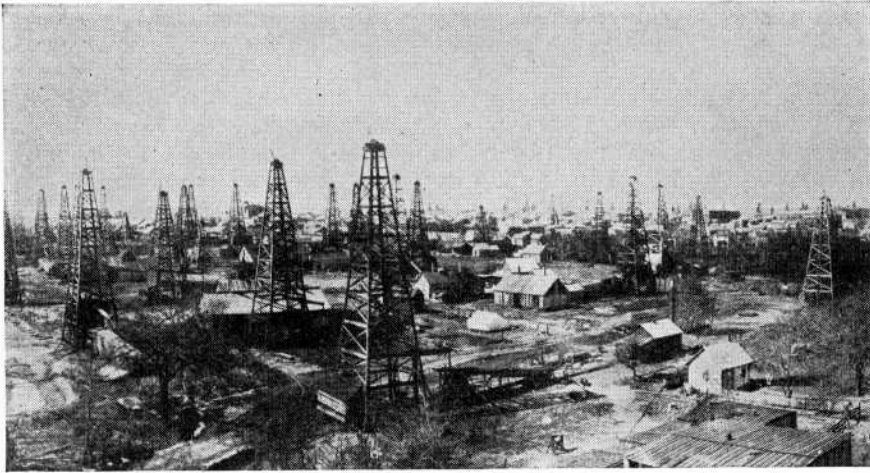
Cherokee chieftains were against the proposed allotment. The idea of individual ownership by means of allotment (usually a grant of 160 acres of each Indian of age) was not grasped by the average full-blood, let alone the tribal elders. The Indian's perspective of land ownership was the right of occupancy. Under their tribal code, it was a life tenure, passed on from one generation to the next, never to be alienated. In case of removal, it again reverted back to the tribe. Title to the land, however, was held in common as the perpetual property of the tribe. Having no conception of owning land, in the commercial sense of the word, the Cherokees could not understand selling it. No small wonder that they contended that the government was not right in proposing the new legal status of tribal lands. Uncertainty as to the outcome of the question prevailed until 1901 with the passage of the Curtis bill (introduced by Charles F. Curtis) and the subsequent treaty with these tribes.

It was the dawn of the twentieth century. With the Cudahy well already drilled, the secretary of the interior approved a lease on the entire section 12 in township 26 north 12 east, Washington county, where the well was located. The Santa Fe built a railroad through Bartlesville from Independence about that time. By 1904, oil was produced from the discovery well and shipped by tank car north to Kansas refineries.

Allottees' leases were henceforth granted immediate approval. Crude prices were



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on a higher level, bringing \$1.16 a barrel at the wells. Means of transporting the oil were existent. So the boom was under way. By the close of the year 1904, nearly 100 wells were producing on the Bartlesville townsite, marking the State's first oil field. Development in some portions of the town was as close as 140 wells to the square mile. Imagine a well to every five acres!

Bartlesville was then the center of a nearby boom, which spread at first northward to the Dewey, Alluwe and Chelsea vicinities, then southeastward to the Hogshooter field. The area was not without its gushers, some of which produced as much as 1,000 barrels a day. Accompanying gas volumes would reach, in some cases, thirty million cubic feet daily with rock pressure mounting to 500 pounds. But the wastage of gas was enormous. Lacking a market, it was blown into the atmosphere or burned through jets extending above the tree tops.

Removal of legal obstacles was the signal to develop in other sectors of the Sooner oil frontier. In 1901, Bland and Clinton had discovered oil in paying quantities on the townsite of Red Fork, noted cattle shipping point in the Creek Nation. Just across the Arkansas river was the Creek Indian village of Tulsa which received the influx of Kansas oil men attracted by the Red Fork development in 1904. The oil frontier had been extended thirty five miles southward.

The same year, the Muskogee townsite was in throes of a small boom as forty wells were brought in near the Katy railroad tracks there, mainly by the Cudahy company which had been so active at Bartlesville. They erected there the following year the state's first oil refinery. It was built to handle 1,000 barrels daily and the installation included a lubricating oil plant.

Still another townsite was experiencing oil activity. At Cleveland, out in the Paw-

nee Indian country, 1000-barrel gushers were brought in at the backdoor of that town in September of 1904.

Further legal obstacles were removed with the passage of a congressional act on April 21, 1904 which provided for the cancellation of all restrictions for allottees of the Indian lands, who were not of Indian blood (except minors and except as to homesteads).

Westward flung the course of oil empire! The Chickasaw Nation was invaded successfully by the drill the next year with the discovery of the Wheeler field, northwest of Ardmore. South of Tulsa, Chesley and Galbreath were bringing in the discovery well in the Glenn Pool in November of 1905. The latter field was to be a market-breaker a couple of years afterwards. Sooner drilling activities were developing on a big scale. Whereas only 361 wells were completed in 1904, 2,510 wells were finished during 1905. And the state's oil production for the year 1907 reached seven million barrels. The Oklahoma oil industry was full-fledged!

It was a half-decade later that the famed Cushing field was opened at Drumright. That was in March of 1912. By this time, the fields in Soonerland had attracted nation-wide interest. A decided migration of Ohio and Pennsylvania oil men began immediately. To the Easterners the stories of vast riches lying 'neath the Oklahoma prairies stirred the smouldering pioneer spirit once again. It was like the stories Bret Harte told of California gold. And the destination of these Easterners was Tulsa, then with a population of 20,000.

Ever since, the annals of Sooner oil history are no less prominent with the subsequent, sensational discoveries of Burbank (1920), Tonkawa (1921) Garber (1923), the Seminole area (1923) and more recently Oklahoma City (1928).

Today, the grand veteran of them all is still pumping several barrels daily, after

a quarter century of active existence. What a history it has witnessed! Near its mooring, a sign denoting its significance, sets off the site like an Exposition exhibit. The town people refer to it as "the well out in the park." But it was Destiny's prologue in a quarter-century drama of transformation—from Indian reservation to a world-beating oil state.

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WILLIAM PETER HASEMAN, PHYSICIST

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became interested in the subject. Later while working for his doctorate at the University of Pennsylvania, he continued his researches. While teaching at the University of Oklahoma and busy with the multitudinous demands of teaching and administration, he continued his studies along these lines. He was already a marked man, so that when our nation needed men of training and ability, he was one of a group of physicists selected from various universities called to Washington to work on sound ranging.

Along with other scientists, he also worked on submarine acoustics and methods of locating enemy submarines. Associated with this line of research was deep sea soundings by means of reverberated sound waves, the method which has in a great part superseded the old method of sounding the depths of ocean by means of piano wire. Many of these data worked out by Haseman and his associates, being in the nature of official secrets, have not been made public.

It is probable that Doctor Haseman will be longest remembered by the scientific world on account of his pioneer work in connection with the seismograph in the location of subsurface structures. His fertile mind, trained in the best schools of the country, and augmented by contacts with other similar minds with which he was associated while in government service in connection with sound ranging and submarine acoustics, was among the first to grasp the possibilities of its commercial application to subsurface geophysical prospecting.

In 1920, soon after resigning from the University of Oklahoma, Doctor Haseman, along with several former professors at the university, organized a company known as the Geological Engineering Company, of which he was the moving spirit. This company conducted the first active research work in America by means of geophysical methods for the location of subsurface geological structures. Later when Doctor Haseman joined the Marland Company in the capacity as chief of the research department, much of his time was taken with administration and supervision of all sorts of research problems, but he never lost sight of geophysical prospecting. After his resignation from