

EARLY HISTORY OF PETROLEUM IN WYOMING

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Captain Bonneville, in his explorations in what is now the State of Wyoming, was probably the first white man to give to the world the news that petroleum deposits existed here. In 1833, this famous explorer found an oil spring near where Lander now stands and in what is now the Dallas Field. The Captain was directed to the seep by Indian guides who stated that they used the seeping petroleum for anointing the joints of their ponies to make the animals go faster, they also used it as a medicine.

Captain Bonneville recorded the location of this oil seep in his report to the War Department. There the report was pigeonholed until after the Civil War days and in 1866, General Connor sent a man named John C. Fiere to Fort Bridger to confer with a Judge Carter at Fort Bridger, Judge Carter being the Post Trader. Judge Carter had reported that petroleum seepages were noticeable near the Fort. Fiere had had some experience in Oil Creek Valley in Pennsylvania before coming West and for this reason was selected by General Connor to examine the seep near Fort Bridger.

Fiere approved the findings of Judge Carter and these two men formed a company to put down the first well in what is now the State of Wyoming. Crude tools of the churn drill type, patterned after the Drake equipment in Pennsylvania as best as Fiere could recall, were hammered out on a blacksmith's anvil and the drilling commenced.

At a depth of 50 feet, the tools entered a crevice and the bailer came up full of oil at every run. The work was all done by man power, the old spring pole method of kicking down a well being used and the bailer was raised by hand.

So far as the meager records go, this well produced about 150 barrels of oil before it caved in. This oil sold from \$20 to \$25 per barrel and it found its main market on the Union Pacific Railroad and in the machinery of the Black Butte Coal Mining Co.

Judge Carter died shortly after and Fiere sold his share to the Car-

ter heirs, these later cleaned out the old well and continued the drilling down to 100 feet with an increase in the production. This oil was marketed locally and to the railroad without any attempt at that time to refine it. Later it was heated to drive off the lighter naphthas as these highly inflammable vapors and gasolines were useless in the economy of the West at that period.

The sale of the crude oil from this well began to interfere with the shipments of oils from the Pennsylvania regions and an agent for an eastern oil company came west and succeeded in buying the well. It was immediately closed in and, as no more work was done towards cleaning out, the cavings that were continually dropping in from the walls of the hole, soon filled it up and ceased production altogether.

In the meantime, the Mormon caravan passing through what is now known as the Bessemer Bend country, found some oil seeps there that yielded some oil for their wagons. Later travelers enlarged the seeps by digging pits and some of these were put down 30 to 40 feet, being about six or eight feet square. Later the town of Bessemer was started and a well drilled that failed to find any production whatever. All that remains of Bessemer now is the faint outline of the streets through the sage brush and the cellars where the houses stood.

The French Oil Co., composed of French capital in the main, drilled a well on Dagout Creek that also came in dry.

In 1881, a Dr. Graff of Omaha, Nebraska, formed a syndicate and purchased the oil seep discovered by Captain Bonneville, in the Popo Agie Valley and called the Popo Agie oil spring. The product was marketed for medicinal purposes and also for lubrication. This not proving very remunerative, the Doctor and his associates then decided to drill some wells and in 1883 and 1884, three holes were put down with tools made locally and patterned after a set that had been purchased in the Pennsylvania oil fields and shipped to Rawlins, then hauled across to Lander.

The production from the three wells was marketed at the stations along the Union Pacific Railroad and hauled to the shipping points with string teams. Later the refined oils from the Pennsylvania refineries gradually drove the heavy black oil from the market. The wells near Lander were banked up with

dirt and abandoned for the time being.

In 1886, P. M. Shannon, an oil operator from Bradford, Pennsylvania, traveled west on a trip of pleasure in the main. He left the railroad at Laramie and journeyed over the trackless plains northward, expecting to reach the Northern Pacific in Montana and journey back to his eastern home by that route.

A cowboy described an oil seep to Mr. Shannon and interested the oil operator to an extent that he went off his course to view the seep. He immediately became interested and the rest of the hunting trip was abandoned. He returned to Bradford after negotiating for various holdings in what is now the Salt Creek Field, then Mr. Shannon moved a drilling machine by rail to Laramie and hauled it by horses some 200 miles across to the present Salt Creek area. The drilling crew was also brought from back in Pennsylvania and when these men saw the white incrustations of alkali along the banks of the stream that cuts the Salt Creek field area, they erroneously called it salt without investigating it very closely and thus the name "Salt Creek" was evolved.

Mr. Shannon hauled his drilling machine across one of the greatest oil fields the world has ever known, to drill for the small wells in the Shannon pool at the north end of the field. The first well reached a depth of about 500 feet in the fall of 1889 and found oil. By 1893 the production amounted to 2,300 barrels per year and was being hauled by string teams to Casper and shipped from that point.

The deepest well in Wyoming was drilled in the Simpson Ridge Field, in Carbon County, by the Producers & Refiners Corporation, with cable tools. This hole reached a depth of 6,941 feet but failed to find any producing sand and was abandoned as a dry hole. Location Section 20-21-60.

The largest oil well found in Wyoming was the No. 301 well of the Mammoth Oil Co. on Teapot Dome. This well found a shale pocket at 1,520 feet and produced at the rate of 28,000 barrels daily for six days and then bridged. It was drilled with cable tools and was located on Section 2-38-78. It is shut down at present but was capable of a nominal production at the time it was shut in.

The largest gas well was probably the Midwest Refining Co.'s big gasser in the Little Buffalo Basin Field. This well was estimated at 130,000,000 feet daily when it came in and it is located on Section 12-47-100. It was drilled with cable tools.

The Wertz No. 8, drilled by the Producers & Refiners Corporation in the Lost Soldier Field, may also have been the largest gasser in Wyoming. It is located on Section 7-26-89.