



10-15-1981

## Fifty Years of Oil Exploration in Beckham County

Donita Lucas Shields

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview>

---

### Recommended Citation

Shields, Donita Lucas (1981) "Fifty Years of Oil Exploration in Beckham County," *Westview*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 12.  
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol1/iss1/12>

This Nonfiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at SWOSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Westview by an authorized administrator of SWOSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu](mailto:phillip.fitzsimmons@swosu.edu).



# FIFTY YEARS OF OIL EXPLORATION

Many an early settler in Western Oklahoma dug his water well, which he desperately needed for his livestock and household, only to have it ruined by a black seepage of greasy oil. Several pioneers endangered their own lives when they breathed escaping poisonous gases while digging those water wells. Ranchers found oil oozing along Sandstone Creek in numerous places, making water unfit for cattle. Gas permeated one low-lying area with such force that, when set afire, the blaze reached a height of three feet.

Oil exploration in Beckham County began almost as soon as white man entered Oklahoma Territory in the 1890's. In those early days geologists knew little concerning the underlying strata of the Redbeds Plains of Western Oklahoma, but their unanimous decision seemed to be that all of Oklahoma was an oil field. Early pioneers sensed the abundance of oil and gas beneath the rolling redlands and immediately began searching. Yet their burning ambitions were not enough for oil discovery. They also needed financial and mechanical means of lifting the buried treasure to the surface.

Looking back into the early information provided by Lee Royse, we find that the first test well for Elk City was dug in 1899. While riding his horse along a canyon on the George Walker homestead southwest of town, Royse heard a peculiar chugging sound he had never heard before. Going down into the ravine to investigate, he found an elderly man digging away with a hand drill. Royse discovered that Walker had hired the old fellow to wildcat for oil. This first exploration was abandoned at sixty feet, some 10,000 feet shy of the later production zones of Elk City field, which were between 9,260 and 10,500 feet.

The next wildcat attempt in the early 1900's occurred when a private company formed by early settlers drilled a test well south of Elk City. The organization, known as Citizens Oil,

Gas, Mineral, and Coal Company, ran out of money when the well reached a depth of 900 feet. It was classified as a duster, and this abandoned wildcat later provided the water supply for Elk City. Portions of that old wooden derrick, the slush pit, and its pump house were still evident in the 1950's.

Between 1910 and 1920 two other wildcats were drilled northeast of Canute in Washita County, but still no petroleum deposits of any magnitude were discovered at either of these sites. Both locations reached a depth of 860 feet. Later, another attempt of a wildcat test was made southeast of Canute. Drillers abandoned it at 5,065 feet, the deepest test to that date. At this time all wildcatting activity ended in Western Oklahoma when big strikes were made at Cleveland, Red Fork, and Glenn Pool. As soon as Central Okla-

37

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF THE GREAT PLAINS, LAWTON



# ATION IN BECKHAM COUNTY

homa began its oil boom, drilling companies flocked to this new productive area.

During the 1920's oil and gas activity opened near Sayre and Erick when Parker Drilling Company discovered a sufficient amount of gas. According to old records, the first productive well encountered oil and gas shows at a depth of 2,026 feet. This first well produced 889,000 cubic feet of gas daily and could be heard blowing for several miles through its two-inch pipe. At that time oil men considered natural gas a nuisance and detrimental in procuring the much-valued flow of oil.

Another drilling site in the vicinity of Erick completed a gas well in 1922. Its depth was 2,770 feet with a production of 19 million cubic feet of gas. A short time later this well began spraying oil and soon had a production re-

cord of twenty barrels daily.

Other wells near Sayre and Erick followed, and then Sayre and Erick became boom towns. One well belonging to Carter Oil Company produced 1,500 barrels of oil in its first ten hours of production. Another flowed 500 barrels daily. Oil leases brought \$1,100 an acre with royalty selling even higher. Sand hills became covered with drilling rigs instead of cotton fields.

In the 1930's Erick Gas Field opened an entirely new territory. Wells produced from 12 million to 119 million cubic feet daily, the largest proven potential gas area in Oklahoma. At this same time Continental Oil Company drilled another wildcat southeast of Elk City in Washita County. This well set the record as the deepest wildcat in the world at 14,000 feet. However, it was abandoned as a dry hole even though it was later revived to become No. 1-A Proctor.

It was not until 1947 that Elk City Field came into being with production at No. 1 J. G. Walters, No. 1 G. G. Music, No. 1 J. I. Long, and No. 1 W. G. McKenzie. Other wells followed in rapid succession until more than 130 active producers developed within a few years' time. Oil companies considered the field the mightiest gas condensate reservoir ever discovered.

Ironically, one of the last productive wells drilled in Elk City Field in the 1950's on the Ed Kelly holdings adjoined the section where that first wildcatting attempt took place on the George Walker homestead in 1899. That pioneer wildcatter, whom Lee Royse heard pounding away in the canyon with his hand drill, undoubtedly knew his business. Yet today no one remembers who he was or where he came from. ■

— Donita Lucas Shields

A Burkburnett, Texas, rig building company shows how styles have changed.

