

Problems of urban hazards posed by unreported and forgotten old wells became apparent in nearby Hutchinson, Kansas early in 2001 when fires and brine geysers erupted within the city. Thus, a search in old newspapers may prove useful to environmental geologists in finding pollution sources, potential hazards, etc. in urban areas.

THE LOST HISTORY OF OHIO'S GRAND RESERVOIR OIL BOOM

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In 1984, citizens of Caddo Parish Louisiana proudly placed their new historical marker identifying the location of the “world’s first over water oil well”. The referenced well was the Ferry Lake #1, completed in 1911. Sources cited in making this claim included:

Franks, Kenny A. and Lambert, Paul F. Early Louisiana and Arkansas Oil: A Photographic History, 1901 – 1946. College Station, Texas: Texas A & M University Press, 1982; and Shreveport Times, September 19, 1960.

Once stated, the claim of “world’s first” was perpetuated in later articles and works. But, is it a valid claim? While certainly a significant achievement, with continuing commercial production to this day, Caddo Lake oil was not the first. Somewhere, lost in the archives, is the story of the oil boom in the Grand Reservoir located between Celina and St. Marys, Ohio. An article in the Celina Ohio Daily Standard of June 3, 1995 tells of the production from the 17,000 acre artificial lake that began in 1891. This allegation is substantiated by the 1903 volume of the Geological Survey of Ohio: “By 1890 the productive territory had been pushed to the eastern border of the Grand reservoir, and a year later wells were being drilled in that body of water.” By 1908 production had waned and many of the wells had already been abandoned, but in between, 200 – 300 wells were drilled in the lake. It is claimed that “hundreds of thousands of barrels of oil” were produced.

How did we lose this bit of history? Perhaps it was because the oil companies and operators were small businesses from the local area, and because the venture lasted only a short time. Possibly it was kept from the public eye because the experiment was viewed as a failure by locals. Also, oil was just a brief side-bar in the history of this man-made reservoir that was the “largest man-made lake in the world” at its completion in 1845. It had been constructed originally to provide water for the Miami – Erie Canal.