

## WHO WAS FIRST?

Ray Sorenson  
1912 S. Cheyenne Ave.  
Tulsa, OK 74119  
sorensonrk@sbcglobal.net

2009 marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Drake well in Titusville, Pennsylvania, an event which triggered the rapid development of the modern petroleum industry. By 1859 oil and gas had been used commercially for centuries at many locations, from seeps, hand-dug wells, and as a byproduct of brine production, but Drake arguably drilled the first commercially successful well that intentionally targeted oil. There will never be a consensus regarding this claim, due to rival candidate wells from other geographic regions, but Drake stands alone in terms of economic significance and the level of historical documentation and publicity.

Being first to conduct an activity or define a theory provides geographic, cultural, or personal bragging rights that can spark enthusiastic debate. Competing priority claims can exist due to variations in the precise definition of terms, poor documentation of historical events, inadequate research, or biased promotional materials. Historical errors and omissions are common in the published literature, and are routinely propagated by subsequent authors who accept this information as accurate and complete. For these and other reasons, priority controversies within the petroleum industry extend beyond the Drake well to include several topics such as the first giant oil fields, the first offshore drilling and production, the first giant gushers, and the origin of scientific theories.

## GEORGE BERNARD REYNOLDS A FORGOTTEN PIONEER OF OIL DISCOVERIES IN PERSIA AND VENEZUELA

Rasoul Sorkhabi  
University of Utah, Energy & Geoscience Institute  
Salt Lake City, UT 84108  
rsorkhabi@egi.utah.edu

This paper pieces together scattered and hard-to-find information about the life and oil discoveries of George Bernard Reynolds (1853-1925), a forgotten figure in the oil industry but one whose discoveries of oil in Persia (1908) and in Venezuela (1922) opened two important regions for the international petroleum ventures. He was born on 5 April 1853 in Sussex, England to George Stewart Reynolds (a Vice-Admiral in the British Royal Navy) and Eliza Susanna. In 1873, he attended the Royal Indian Engineering College at Coopers Hill, Windsor, which then trained engineers for

the Indian civil service. He served in British India's Public Works Department (posted to State Railways which were then fueled by coal) from 1875 through 1897, when he was retired as Executive Engineer and a Certified Mine Manager. In 1895, he married Lavinia Jane Baker in England, and after retirement, Reynolds went on to work on Dutch oil wells in East Indies (Indonesia). Reynolds appears in history in 1901 when he was hired by William Knox D'Arcy to lead his oil exploration in Persia (Iran). R.W. Ferrier, author of *The History of the British Petroleum Company* (volume 1, 1982) describes Reynolds as, *...self-reliant, adaptable, a passable linguist, a competent horseman, physically tough, mentally alert, a loner, contemptuous of office 'wallahas' but generous to those who shared with him the discomforts of the scorching sun, the freezing nights and the barren landscape.* Reynolds literally lived in the Zagros basins of western Iran from 1901 through 1911. After drilling several wells in three different areas, his efforts paid off. On 23 January 1908, a gusher of over 50 feet at the Masjid Sulaiman oil field marks the first oil discovery well in the entire Middle East, and led to the formation of the *Anglo-Persian Oil Company* (APOC, later *British Petroleum*). In 1911, the new APOC management fired him politely, and Reynolds left the company to work for the *Royal Dutch-Shell* in Venezuela. *Dutch-Shell* was then competing with the *Standard Oil Company of New Jersey* (later *Exxon*) in Venezuela. Leading a team of geologists and engineers, Reynolds discovered his second gusher. On 14 December 1922, the Barros No. 2 well at the La Rosa field, near Lake Maracaibo, erupted. This put Venezuela on the world's petroleum map and changed the country forever. The Masjid Sulaiman oil was light crude (API 39°) from the Asmari limestone reservoir; while the La Rosa oil was heavy (API 16°) produced from the La Rosa siliciclastic rocks. However, both reservoirs were Oligocene-Miocene sediments deposited in a foreland basin atop a Cretaceous carbonate platform. Reynolds and geology linked these two far-apart oil discoveries. Reynolds died on 23 February 1925 in the Hotel de Inglaterra in Seville, Spain.

## THE 1906 KANE GAS WELL MCKEAN COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

Jeff A. Spencer  
675 Piney Creek Road  
Bellville, TX 77418  
spencerj320@gmail.com

Natural gas wells, or *gassers*, of the late 1800s and early 1900s often resulted in impressive displays of roaring gas that owners would ignite to impress investors or attract new industries to an area. During the gas boom days of the Lima-Indiana trend of northwest Ohio and eastern Indiana, excursion