

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WYOMING GEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

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POSTER PRESENTATION

The Wyoming Geological Association (WGA) was initiated on December 15, 1943 with a letter from C. J. Hares to twenty-four other geologists residing in the vicinity of Casper, Wyoming. This letter was an invitation to meet at Mr. Hares home for a luncheon and discussion of matters of geological significance.

These meetings advanced towards the serious dialogue of forming a local geological society. Arrangements were made to have regular Friday luncheons at the Townsend Hotel, with an average attendance of 24 geologists. This tradition of noon luncheon talks and meetings has continued since January 7th, 1944. The first chalk-talk, geoscience movie, and field conference were held that same year. From 1968-1988 the WGA also published a quarterly publication featuring additional scientific papers with over two-hundred total.

To say that the WGA was responsible for establishing a scientific base for the geology of Wyoming as well as the Rockies is an understatement.

These traditions set forth 73 years ago continue until today, being one of the only organizations to hold weekly meetings, maintaining an annual field conference, and continued geological publication. This translates to over 2,800 luncheon meetings and technical talks, over 80 WGA field conference guidebooks with scientific papers covering the rocky mountain region, road logs, and a current membership base of approximately 500 individuals residing internationally.

TEAPOT DOME – A PAINTING

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POSTER PRESENTATION

The painting (24 inches X 48 inches), by Mike Kapriva in 1981, compresses 50 miles of landscape, Casper Mountain in the background, 20 Mile Hill at Burke Ranch and the drill site for the discovery at Teapot Dome. Teapot Rock has been rotated East-West to tie the outcrop to the field's name. The Shannon Sandstone outcrops are compressed East-West to show the large surface anticline. Front center shows the delivery of freight from the Casper railhead. Four wagon 16 mule trains delivered casing and supplies. The steam powered drilling rig has a wood standard derrick.

IN PURSUIT OF PETROLEUM RICHES: LAMAR UNIVERSITY'S OIL RELATED SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

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Lamar University's Special Collections are a rich, and largely untapped resource for oil historians, especially for those researching the colorful past of Southeast Texas, a region whose way of life is closely intertwined with the oil industry. The university, located in Beaumont, Texas is a leisurely ten-minute drive from Spindletop, where in 1901 the famed Lucas Gusher erupted, which some scholars believe began the modern liquid petroleum age.

The collections at Lamar document that even though Beaumont unleashed the boom into utilizing petroleum, it was believed to have been quickly tapped out, and oil speculators quickly moved to other locales including Batson and Saratoga. The gritty reality of these oil boom towns is revealed in several of Lamar's collections. The Wanda Landrey collection has a wealth of oral histories which provide an intimate glimpse of life in the oil fields. One with particular charm and pathos was a 91 year old woman who recollected the dangers of life in Batson in 1904 including rowdy characters committing murders and oil wells that spewed dangerous fumes making people ill. Another interview in the Landrey collection is with a man who recollected the Rio Bravo Oil Strike which took place during World War I. Although the man interviewed

was the child of a striker, he recollected the violence and prejudice practiced by both labor and management.

Another rich resource on oil field life are the photographs of Larry Jene Fisher whose collection spans Spindletop in 1901, through the oil booms in Batson and Saratoga to oil drilling rigs on the barren Permian Basin in the early 1950s.

Although many so-called experts said that Spindletop's day as a working oil field was gone by 1903, Lamar's collections reveal that Spindletop roared to life again in 1925, when an astute oil man, Frank Yount, had the vision to drill deeper at Spindletop in search of black gold. The Schultz-Sparks Collection reveals in original, mint-condition photographs and correspondence the activities of the Yount-Lee Oil Company at Spindletop which made Yount and other owners of the oil company billionaires.

A related collection, is the Yount-Manion film collection which documents the wealth created by the oil boom including the vast tank farms of the region, a new building boom in Beaumont and the lifestyle of the Yount family which included servants, Duisenberg automobiles, and a summer home in Colorado.

While Lamar's collections reveal the financial bonanza that petroleum can produce, the records of Rufus Hooks, a pioneering geophysicist, who drilled for oil across Texas and into Louisiana reveal the problems of wildcatting in the mid-century including labor issues, equipment breakdowns, and inclement weather. The collection contains a wealth of records including maps, correspondence, and index cards documenting successes and failures of drilling.

Rolfe and Gary Christopher Collection (which contains over one million negatives) provides thousands of negatives of Beaumont oil companies from the late 1940s into the early 2000s. Mobil is especially well documented, with hundreds of thousands of images including step-by-step photos of all aspects of the refining business. The collection also documents the lavish lifestyle achieved by success in the oil industry including photographs of the mansions of Second Spindletop aristocrats.

Lamar University's Special Collections is committed to making these resources available to researchers around the globe. We are identifying and processing collections, creating finding aids, and uploading images to the Internet. By giving a presentation at the Petroleum History Institute's 2016 Annual Symposium, we could offer oil historians and enthusiasts to learn about—and hopefully utilize—our unique collections.

OIL AND GAS HISTORY OF UTAH: HIGHLIGHTS OF THE EARLY YEARS

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The first documented report of an oil seep in what is now Utah can be found in the report of Howard Stansbury's (U.S. Army Corps of Topographical Engineers) 1849-1850 expedition to explore the Great Salt Lake. While exploring the area around Rozel Point on the northeast shore, Stansbury mentioned finding "bitumen" at the edge of the lake on May 4 and May 7, 1850. Although the expedition did not include a geologist, Stansbury had been schooled intensively by the eminent Yale geology professor James Dana in preparation for leading his expedition.

While it would be nearly 100 years before the establishment of sustained commercial oil production in Utah, that period included the discovery of two commercial natural gas fields and numerous exploration drilling attempts, some of which encountered significant oil and gas resources. Undoubtedly, several of these would have been commercial had they been located in less remote and rugged places. The story of these efforts is both interesting and little known.

Proof that oil was retorted from Green River oil shale near Levan in Juab County before the drilling of Drake's well on Oil Creek in Pennsylvania in August 1859 remains elusive. However, a circumstantial case for this claim can be made based on the evidence provided by a USGS geologist in 1916 (USGS Bulletin 961) and a subsequent effort made by Utah Geological and Mineral Survey director Arthur Crawford in 1961. Both men cite the presence of an old retort in close proximity to a small excavation in a nearby oil shale outcrop. Interviews were conducted with elderly residents of the area and it seems quite possible that the activity dates back to the period of 1855-1859, a period bracketed by the Walker War and before the Blackhawk War, two Indian uprisings that effectively limited any remote work by Mormons in the area of the retort while they were in progress. Supposedly, about one barrel of oil per day was produced and used as leather harness dressing. Even if true, no significant economic activity took place and Pennsylvania's claim to the first oil well is unchallenged. The Utah occurrence simply adds to a number of other footnotes with respect to pre-1859 oil discoveries.

The first attempt to drill for oil in Utah was the Bamberger & Millis #1, located about one-half mile south of Green River. The well was drilled on an oil placer mining claim through the