

## **WILDCATting IN COLORADO - A LOT OF EXPLORATION, NOT A LOT OF PRODUCTION.**

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### **POSTER PRESENTATION**

What could be more fun than a buggy ride to the new oil well just 16 miles from town? Perhaps a ride in your friend's jalopy? Don't forget the picnic basket because the oil company has promised free lemonade and coffee to enjoy while you watch the drilling operation in progress. At least in the summer of 1918 it was a chance to forget the chores and the war overseas for a while.

Opportunities like this were common in Colorado from the earliest days until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Small operators and wildcatters used variations of the social, public relations and fundraising events to great success. In some cases the whole community would pitch in dimes to support the venture, in hopes that this well would come in.

Newspaper accounts, historic photos, postcards and other records provide a unique look at the place of the wildcatter in the social history of rural Colorado.

## **BOOM, BUST, AND AFTER: LIFE IN THE SALT CREEK OIL FIELD**

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Prospectors first struck oil in the Salt Creek Oil Field in northern Natrona County, Wyo. late in the 1880s. The first gusher came in in 1908. The subsequent boom lasted until the late 1920s, peaking in 1923, when the field produced more than 35 million barrels of oil. Tom Wall, who went to work in the field in 1917, stayed for decades and in the 1970s wrote out his memories of life in the oil patch through boom and bust. After 125 years and thanks to new technologies, the Salt Creek Field continues to produce today.

**Editor's Note:** See the full article at: <http://www.wyohistory.org/essays/boom-bust-and-after-life-salt-creek-oil-field>.

## **BE THERE OR "BE SQUARE" – THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF THEODORE NEWTON BARNSDALL**

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Born and raised in the shadow of Edwin Drake's landmark well in the Oil Creek Valley of Pennsylvania, it may have been no surprise that Theodore Barnsdall followed with dreams of his own petroleum ventures. Indeed, by the end of his relatively short life at age 66 in 1917, "Theodore" Barnsdall was an oilman well-known to the American public, and the companies he created and held interests in were often reported to be the only formidable rival to Standard Oil. However, while "the Standard" and John D. Rockefeller are names still widely recognized today, it seems that Barnsdall's role in the early exploration and development, transportation and refining of petroleum products has faded in U.S. petroleum history.

Theodore Newton Barnsdall was born in the summer of 1851 in Titusville, PA. His father, William Barnsdall, had emigrated from England and was a shoemaker-turned-petroleum pioneer in his own right. William partnered in the drilling of the second Oil Creek Valley well (Barnsdall, Mead, Rouse & Co. well no.1) following Drake's success, and is credited with building the first multiple-still kerosene refinery in Pennsylvania in 1860. Theodore reportedly learned his trade as a young teenager by first assisting with a well in Pithole, Pennsylvania, owned by his father.

Theodore Barnsdall later amassed numerous interests in coal, gold, silver, copper and silica mines; railway companies; and oil and gas companies within the U.S., Canada and Mexico. He both competed against and, reportedly, collaborated with Standard Oil. One of his most contentious business dealings involved allegations that he acted as a front man for Standard Oil's acquisition of the Osage Indian Territory lands in northern Oklahoma in the early 1900s. Following Barnsdall's death in 1917, his son-in-law, Robert Law, Jr., took over all of Barnsdall's interests and consolidated them into the Barnsdall Corporation.

In 1920, Barnsdall Corporation merged with the Bigheart Producing and Refining Company in Oklahoma, to create the Barnsdall Refining Company, which marketed its line of lubricating oils and other products under its "Be Square" and "Be Square to Your Motor" slogans. The International Barnsdall Corporation was incorporated in October 1921, with the Barnsdall Corporation owning a majority interest of its stock. In the early 1920s the company provided drilling equipment and personnel to improve development of the Baku oil fields under an agreement with Soviet Russia. In mid-1922, control-

ling interest in the Barnsdall Corporation was bought out by the Atlantic Refining Company. Barnsdall Oil Company survived until 1950 when it was acquired by Sunray Oil Corporation. Barnsdall Oil Company's west Texas properties were reportedly bought by Amoco. Cities Services Company (a Citgo predecessor) had previously bought certain Barnsdall holdings in 1912. The Barnsdall Refining Company was renamed "Bareco" in 1940 and in 1946 it ceased refining operations in order to concentrate on the manufacture of specialty waxes. That company later became Bareco Wax Company, was eventually bought by Petrolite Corporation, and is now owned by Baker Hughes, which manufactures wax products using both the "Bareco" and "Be Square" trade names.

Vestiges of Barnsdall and ties to Pennsylvania remain scattered across the country. The town of Bigheart, Oklahoma was renamed Barnsdall in 1922 after the company's numerous wells and refinery located there. In California, the Potter Sand was named after the Potter Oil Company, controlled by the Potter Natural Gas Company of Potter County, PA. Oklahoma hosts both a Barnsdall Formation and a Barnsdall soil series, while the Barnsdall Sand is located within the Premont field of Texas. And Barnsdall Park outside of Hollywood is named after the family. Barnsdall's younger daughter, Aline, used her inheritance to commission Frank Lloyd Wright to design a home for her there in 1919. The home and grounds were eventually donated to the city of Los Angeles and are used to host arts and theater events; "Hollyhock House" was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2007.

So while Theodore Barnsdall may not be a well-known name, he certainly left his mark on the oil and gas industry of the United States, and his legacy lives on in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **HISTORY OF OIL SPILLS PROJECT: A PROGRESS REPORT**

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From the very beginnings of the modern industrial petroleum era, interest in the historical overlap of humans and oil has been robust and frequently fascinating—as reflected by the strong participation and attendance at the annual Oil History Symposium sponsored by the Petroleum History Institute. Human history has been inextricably intertwined with oil dating back tens of thousands of years, beyond biblical and more ancient references into archeological prehistory. The

history of oil *spills*, however, is much more modern yet poorly documented.

Why does this matter? Beyond the underlying desire to document what has transpired before the present that characterizes any historical initiative, the history of oil spills potentially provides practical lessons for the specialized community of first responders and environmental researchers who are charged with understanding remedial approaches, ecological effects, and trajectories of recovery. While it is common for oil spill responders to acknowledge the complexity of assessing impacts and remediation by repeating the adage, "I've never been to the same oil spill twice," it is also true that circumstances surrounding different spill incidents can be eerily and ironically similar.

This presentation updates a long-term project supported by the Emergency Response Division of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which provides scientific support to the U.S. Coast Guard and other agencies during spills of oil and hazardous chemicals. This effort was initially described to this symposium in 2012; the 2016 presentation will provide a progress report/update and will include examples of early and mostly obscure oil spill incidents from the U.S. and other countries. Germane to the Oil History Symposium is the fact that the history of spills is completely and inseparably linked to the history of oil use, production, and transportation. A key finding has been that the negative connotations associated with the term "oil spill" are relatively recent phenomena, and help to explain the dearth of information in the existing historical petroleum literature. That is, spilled oil has not always been viewed as a bad thing.

Documentation of past oil spill events provides more than esoteric factoids and happy hour trivia fodder (although there is no denying their immense entertainment value in these settings). Insights into cleanup practices (i.e., what worked and what did not?) are particularly useful, as are the long-term consequences of spilled oil in sensitive habitats. For example, an extensive international scientific research effort comparing the fate and effects of a 1979 Mexican well blowout in the Gulf of Mexico to the 2010 BP/Deepwater Horizon spill is currently in progress. Oil spills into marshes in Massachusetts in 1969 and in the Strait of Magellan in 1974 provide important information about persistence and impacts into a habitat type that we consider to be among the most sensitive.

We hope that members of the Petroleum History Institute will continue to offer new information, references, and contacts that can provide a more complete and robust record for the project. Further updates will be provided to this group over the life of the project and/or author.