

Adair County News

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OIL AND GAS

Adair—Cumberland—Russell Counties, Ky.

(By E. T. KEMPER)

The tri-county territory, embracing the counties of Adair, Cumberland and Russell, Ky., is now receiving so much attention from Oil and Gas people in all parts of the country that I deem it an opportune time to give in detail such information regarding this section as will be helpful to all parties interested, thereby assisting them in arriving at definite conclusions as to the advisability of spending their time and money in developing the territory.

Columbia, the county-seat of Adair County, a substantial and flourishing town of nearly two thousand inhabitants, is the natural headquarters for, and gateway to, the tri-county territory. Its location is a little less than seventy miles on an air line south and slightly east of Louisville, and is reached by rail to Campbellsville, on the L. & N. Railway system, and thence by auto twenty miles over a good macadamized road over which the largest touring cars, trucks, etc., travel with ease. By auto from Louisville the route is over good roads thru Bardstown, Springfield, Lebanon and Campbellsville; from Cincinnati and the bluegrass section of Kentucky, over the noted pikes of that section via Lexington, Danville, Perryville, and Springfield, and thence over the same route as from Louisville. Passengers are transported promptly, rapidly, comfortably and at reasonable rates between Campbellsville and Columbia by a line of autos meeting all trains. Daily mails are received and dispatched with regularity, and freight and express matter is received and forwarded promptly by fast trucks. Columbia has first-class hotel accommodations, and telegraph and long distance telephone connection.

Oil and Gas Offices and Representatives in Columbia.

That Columbia is becoming an Oil and Gas center is evidenced by the fact that so many parties connected with the development of the territory are already located here, and more are coming at an early date. Among those maintaining offices here, are Richardson and Goff, operators, contractors and dealers in leases; O. C. Fink, contractor and dealer; and agent for Armstrong drilling machinery; the Kemper Company, making a specialty of acreage; the Palmer Oil & Gas Company, operators formerly of Cleveland, Ohio, managed in person by Mr. Geo. H. Palmer, president; one large operating concern from Cincinnati, name omitted by request, with general headquarters here for field operations;

the Ginter Brokerage Company, managed by S. L. Ginter, operators and dealers.

Among those making headquarters here are Mr. J. B. Doolittle, Worcester, New York one of the prominent operators of the county; Mr. Bee Whittis, formerly field manager of the Carnahan Oil Company, Canton, Ohio, now operating independently.

History of Adair County Development.

No real systematic development for Oil and Gas has been done in the county until within the past few months, but several "strikes" have been made thru what might be termed accident. In years of long ago, beginning back in the sixties, a number of shallow wells were sunk in the county to secure supplies of salt, and in many instances Oil and Gas were found in small quantities, but the only wells of consequence reported at that time, a little over fifty years ago, were one drilled on the east side of town near the old fair grounds, which was reported to have been a "gusher"; one on the Mose Campbell farm in the southern part of the county on what is known as Harrod's Fork of Crocus Creek; this well was reported as "extra good", and Oil was secured from it as late as 1907, at which time the flow became obstructed by overflows from the creek; the Moss well, near Gradyville, was drilled in about the same time, with a very superior grade of Oil which tested 55 gravity. Oil can still be obtained from this well; two wells on the Matthew Armstrong farm, located in the southern part of the county on Crocus Creek, near the mouth of Harrod's Fork. These latter wells were reported to have been good ones, one of them flowing for quite a period. Nothing more in the line of development was reported for over thirty years, when in 1902 a well was drilled just outside of Columbia on the Conover farm, located on the Burkesville road and Pettis Fork Creek, where a good flow of Gas was encountered at a depth of something near 700 feet. The well, after being on fire for some time was finally plugged and abandoned, and notwithstanding it has been filled with mud and rocks for years Gas still escapes from it to such an extent that it can be lighted at any time. The next period of the suspension of the development work covered sixteen years, when in 1918 a well was drilled on the Jeffries farm, located a little less than two miles southeast of Columbia. A fine sand was encountered at a depth of 600 feet, and a good show of Oil was found; in the

same year two good Gas wells were brought in on the Hadley farm in the extreme southern part of the county.

While the results named above were not of a very substantial nature, still enough information was secured to warrant the expenditure of time and money in development work, and within the past few months an aggressive drilling campaign has been inaugurated and is being prosecuted very systematically and intelligently. The operators who are now engaged in development work in the county, are: The Roy Petroleum Company, of Covington, Ky., G. A. Roy president and general manager, drilling on the John Rector farm, Damron's Creek, seventeen miles northeast of Columbia; The Palmer Oil & Gas Company, of Cleveland, Ohio, Geo. H. Palmer president and general manager, drilling on the J. S. Roysse farm, two miles east of town; the Columbia Development Company, Fink & Heilman, drilling on the Bob Rowe farm, just north of the corporate limits of town; J. B. Doolittle, Worcester, New York, drilling on the Geo. Powell farm located on Cedar Creek, near Joppa post-office, six miles southeast of town. All of these operations are progressing as fast as existing conditions will permit, and some very fine formations are being encountered; also, some good showings of both Oil and Gas have been found in the shallow sands, but deeper drilling is being done to fully test the lower sands, these being held by geologists who have made surveys of this section as promising better returns than the shallow sands. During the past summer the Carnahan Oil Company, Canton, Ohio, drilled a well on the E. G. Flowers farm, near Zion Church, four miles southeast of town, to a depth of about 800 feet to the pencil cave formation, but could go no further on account of having exhausted the capacity of the drilling rig. This well was left so that it can be completed later on. At a depth of some thing over 200 feet a good flow of Gas was encountered, and the supply has been piped to a near by farm house where it is being utilized for heating purposes. At this writing no wells have been completed by the concerns referred to above, but the operations are being pushed to the limit, "double towers" being run in some instances, very encouraging formations are being encountered, and good shows of both Oil and Gas have already been found. The general supposition is that it will require a little deeper drilling for the best results in Adair county, than is found necessary in some other near by sections, but it is believed that the sands found here will be both more productive and more lasting than the shallow sands of other fields. The Palmer Oil & Gas Company expect to install an up-to-the-minute Standard rig on a location near Columbia, at an early date, which will enable them to go to the lower sands and make a complete and intelligent test of the field.

Cumberland County Development.

The first real Oil well ever recorded in Cumberland was the "Old American" or Burkesville Well, drilled in the year 1829, to a depth of 171 feet, on Renox creek, a short distance from where it empties into Cumberland River, some three miles north-east of Burkesville. This well was purely an "accident", as the drillers were looking and drilling for salt, using a very primitive drilling outfit, consisting of a treadle and sweep pole. Reliable reports, including the U. S. Census of 1880, credit this well with having flowed fully 50,000 barrels before being put under pump. The Oil from this well ran down the creek and into the Cumberland River in such quantities that the water was coated with Oil for a distance of forty miles, and catching on fire it presented the unusual sight of a "burning river" which extended for miles, and which created intense excitement among the natives. Such was the beginning of the Oil business in Cumberland.

Nothing further in the drilling of wells is authentically reported until the year 1865, when a "gusher" was reported from Biggerstaff's Bottom, but of which nothing authentic is known, followed by the English well. The latter was located near the mouth of Crocus Creek, a short distance from Bakerton, on the Cumberland River. This well was 190 feet deep, and it was reported producing 1200 barrels daily for a period. Just how long it continued to be such a wonderful producer is not known, but ten years later it was credited with a daily production of 40 to 50 barrels. Other good wells reported along in the sixties were—the Strange well, in the north center of the county, on Renox Creek, which flowed a large quantity of a very superior grade of Amber Oil—depth unknown; the Ebbert well on the Collins farm, located in the north east section of the county, 270 feet in depth and credited with a daily production of 1200 barrels; the old Sherman well 276 feet deep, located on the Butler farm, on the north side of Cumberland River, near Cloyd's Landing, a few miles south-west of Burkesville, credited with a daily production of 250 barrels; the Matthews well, located in the extreme north-eastern part of the county, on Sand Lick Creek, and near the Russell county line, 267 feet in depth and credited as a flowing well, producing a fine grade of Oil of 42 gravity. A number of smaller Oil wells were brought in about this time, most of them being of a shallow depth and occasionally a good flow of Gas was encountered, but no attention was paid to the latter as it was considered worthless at that time.

Over thirty years elapsed before another systematic drilling campaign was inaugurated in Cumberland, and then in the period from 1900-1903 a goodly number of wells were reported, some of them showing up unusually fine as producers. Among some of the more promising ones

were such wells as—one on Oil Island, in the Cumberland River, opposite Salt Lick Bend, where the "Old Burning Well" was located, rated at 250 barrels daily; the J. E. Taylor well, located on the north side of the River some three miles south-west of Burkesville, near the mouth of Marrowbone creek, 248 feet deep and credited with a daily production of 700 barrels; the Potts well in Irish Bottom, flowing freely for quite a period, 720 feet in depth; and then the "Old Burning Well", fully described and illustrated by special notice and cut appearing elsewhere in this issue. Some good "Gassers" were also struck during this period, but nothing ever came of them, for the reason as stated above.

The outlook for production was so encouraging that the Cumberland Pipe Line Company proceeded to build, and completed, a four inch extension from Wayne county, a distance of forty miles. In the latter part of the year 1903 the price of crude Oil was down to sixty cents per barrel, delivered at Somerset, and it was costing the operators not less than thirty cents per barrel to produce it; also about this time immense fields were being discovered in the great southwest, and the men who were developing the Cumberland field became infected with the "Western fever" so it was not long until the territory was practically abandoned. After the abandonment of the field by the operators, the pipe line was a "dead number", but the Cumberland Company let it lie unused for a few years, and it would probably be there today had it not been for the arbitrary and excessive assessment levied against them for taxation by the counties of Clinton and Cumberland. With no income on the line at the time, and no immediate encouragement for the future, they figured it would be cheaper in the end for them to remove the line and rebuild again when production in the field warranted the expense. Cumberland county is still without a pipe line, but more than one company or corporation are investigating the situation at present with a view to building a line to the fields on both sides of Cumberland River, and extending for several miles along that stream. Several good wells have recently been drilled in along the river—see further mention of these later on in this article—and production is ready for the market to such an extent that in advance of pipe line facilities operators will be compelled to resort to the old-fashioned, crude way of shipping by barges either up the river to Burnside on the Southern Railway, or to Nashville where they will come in touch with refineries and the open market.

The Cumberland field was practically ignored for a period of some fifteen years, following removal of the pipe line from the county. The years of 1918 and 1919 saw a slight revival of interest being shown in the field, but it was not until 1920 that active operations were revived to the extent of creating more than

passing interest, and the close of the year finds a number of good concerns operating in full blast. Among the principal ones are—The Southern Oil & Refining Co., Denver Col., Dr. Frank D. Hines, president, operating on the Russ Gilbert farm, located on Brush creek, south side of Cumberland River near Bakerton. They have already brought in four fine wells at depths varying from 165 to 190 feet, and they have contracted for the drilling of six additional wells on the same farm. Three of the completed wells flowed for several days, and they bid fair to be good producers. Wells are now equipped for pumping, tanks are in position, and the marketing of the product will begin soon. Richardson & Goff, contractors of Columbia, are in charge of drilling operations. Kash, Rice & Kash, Frankfort and Lexington, Ky., are drilling on the Jake Radford farm, which adjoins the Gilbert farm on the east. The Daniel Boone Oil Company, Lexington, are actively engaged in drilling at a point south of Burkesville, near Peytonsburg. Dr. Lang and associates, of New York City, are drilling on the Bud Huddleston farm, Bear Creek, some five miles south-east of Burkesville. The Body Oil Company, of Philadelphia, are pounding away in Salt Lick Bend, near where the famous "Burning Well" was drilled in 1902. This covers the real active operations in the county at the present time, but the next few months will no doubt witness many new concerns at work in the field, among them being operators from Oklahoma and Texas, who have already expressed their intention of coming at no distant date.

Russell County Development.

The first Oil wells reported in Russell County were drilled in the year 1868 when a group of four wells were brought in on the south side of Cumberland River, about one mile from Creelsboro, and near the Clinton county line. These wells came in at a little less than 300 feet in depth, and all of them were reported as "Good Wells". The best of the group was the famous "Old Gabbert Well". Some accounts state that there were two of the Gabbert wells, estimated at sixty barrels per day production. Soon after the wells were drilled in, parties owning them erected a refinery and undertook to ship the product to Nashville, Tenn., using barges and rafts, but Oil was then only bringing fifty cents per barrel, and the venture proved so unprofitable that the wells were plugged and the operations ceased at that point. About the same time two wells were drilled in the eastern part of the county, one of them on a prong of Wolf Creek, to a depth of 600 and 800 feet respectively, and both were credited with a "Considerable amount" of a fine grade Oil. About the years 1900-1902 some six or seven additional wells were drilled in the county, three of them being near the town of Creelsboro, on the north side of Cumberland river, and they were credited