THE HISTORY OF OIL AND GAS EXPLORATION WELL DRILLING IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY AND CITY 1910-1953: THE UNTOLD STORIES OF AMBITION, CHALLENGES AND FLEETING PROSPECTS

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Abstract

I was drawn to investigate early oil and gas exploration wells drilled in San Diego as part of my study on the Early Eocene Mount Soledad Conglomerate, a lightly studied and poorly described part of the geologic history of the region. Due to the paucity of surface exposures of the Formation I hoped that there could be some additional subsurface records from exploration wells in the California Department of Conservation's on-line database. To my surprise there are records of 41 oil and gas exploratory wells drilled in San Diego County from 1910 to 1953. Although the records are sometimes incomplete or ambiguous there was enough geologic information to allow new insight into some important details of the Mount Soledad Conglomerate that assisted my studies.

Upon later refection I realized the story the well data had to tell was not only geologic facts and data but also the story about the people and the role the drilling of these wells had to play in the development of San Diego and the people it impacted.

From these well records, I came to learn San Diego during a large portion of the period of the early 20th century was much different place than the sedate and pastoral picture of farms, ranching and fishing that I imagined. Instead, it was a place of rapid growth, land speculation and hopes that the oil riches in the ground of Los Angles and Bakersfield to the North could be replicated in San Diego. While San Diego never rose to prominence as an oil hotspot like Los Angeles or Bakersfield, the efforts of those decades reflect a fascinating narrative of human ingenuity, ambition, and limitations.

Today there are roads, housing developments, parking lots and even schools built at top the old well locations. However, in a few locations the land has not been altered, and we still see a glimpse of the strange oil and gas history of San Diego.

Each of San Diego's 41 oil exploration wells has a unique backstory involving promoters, investor hopes and letdowns, and community impact Seven ventures through time highlight this dynamic era in the city's history.

The Early Years: 1910-1920 Otay Oil Company

Looking back, I wondered what prompted oil exploration in San Diego. Records show that the first major well was drilled in Otay Mesa in 1910, but I was curious why this area was chosen initially.

While reviewing historical records and newspapers, I found a brief note in the August 8, 1900, issue of the San Diego Sun regarding indications of oil and gas in a water well drilled by a local wine merchant, Mr. N. Denair. The article reported the presence of a gas odor and an oil sheen.

Perhaps it was this indication that got a local petroleum engineer Howard S. Culp interested in looking at the geologic conditions surrounding that water well. It appears Howard Culp may have been the first to recognize that the area around the well was a large uplift or “Dome”, that at the turn of the century was the type of structures of the large discoveries in California and elsewhere.

However, it came to pass it was Howard Culp that in 1910 joined forces with Walter H. Bentley and his brother John O. Bentley to form the Otay Oil Company and drill for oil on that land the company bought on Otay Mesa.

The Dream Beneath the Mesa: A Story of Failed Oil and Gas Drilling on Otay Mesa, San Diego, 1910

Introduction

In the golden light of Southern California’s dawn at the turn of the 20th century, the quiet mesas east of San Diego pulsed with promise. Long before the modern highways and the urban sprawl, Otay Mesa stretched out in gentle undulations, its sunbaked surface masking secrets deep below. By 1910, the state’s oil fever—kindled by discoveries from Los Angeles to the Central Valley—was at its peak. Yet San Diego’s hills remained largely undisturbed by the derricks and drills that marked regions to the north. That changed, however, when the curious mind of a local engineer, Howard S. Culp, seized upon the hope that Otay Mesa could yield untold riches.

This is the story of how San Diego, spurred on by Culp's analysis and encouragement, began its quest for oil and gas on Otay Mesa—a quest that would end in disappointment, but would also plant the seeds of the region's geological understanding.

The Spark: A Wine Man's Well and a Hint of Oil

Oil's story on Otay Mesa does not begin with a grand discovery, but rather with a curious happenstance. In August 1900, the San Diego Sun ran a brief note about a water well northeast of Otay Mesa, drilled by a local vintner known as Mr. N. Denair.

As the story goes, Denair—known for his grapes and wines—noticed a strange sheen on the water and the unmistakable smell of gas. At the turn of the century, such hints were enough to catch the attention of those dreaming of the next great strike.

It seems not improbable that Howard S. Culp, a petroleum and civil engineer living in San Diego saw in Denair's well not just a fluke, but a clue. He visited the site, spoke with Denair, saw the faint shimmer across the water's surface. To Culp, it was more than enough to warrant a closer look.

The Geologist's Eye: Culp and the Promise of the Dome

At the heart of the California Oil Boom were structures known as domes—uplifts in the earth's crust that often-trapped oil and gas below. Culp, with a practiced eye, began to study the terrain around Denair's well. By walking the crest of Otay Mesa, examining rock outcrops, and reviewing the scant geological surveys available, he became convinced that he had found just such a dome.

He reasoned that if the great fields of Los Angles City and Kettleman Hills owed their fortune to dome structures, Otay Mesa could be San Diego's answer. In a region hungry for industry and eager to join California's oil bonanza, Culp's words carried weight. He wrote letters to investors, presented his findings to businessmen in San Diego, and argued passionately for a drilling campaign.

Word of Culp's conviction soon spread beyond the circles of geologists and local dreamers, catching the ear of two notable newcomers to San Diego: William and

Figure 1; Bently Brother Lumber Company in 1908. Likely that the two gentlemen on the right are William and John Bentley. Small child likely William's oldest son Gilbert. Photo from California State Library.

John Bentley, brothers who had recently arrived from Kansas and quickly established themselves as leading figures in the lumber trade. The Bentleys, ever alert to opportunity, saw in Culp's theory a chance to diversify their growing West Coast holdings. Their business acumen and capital, paired with Culp's technical expertise and infectious optimism, created a partnership as ambitious as it was unlikely. The Bentley's invited their good friend William Rynerson to oversee the purchase of the rig; it's assembly and operation. The four gentlemen established Otay Oil in 1910 with William H. Bentley (President), his brother John O. Bentley (President and Secretary), Howard S. Culp (director), and William W. Rynerson (Director and Operations Chief). Despite limited oil industry experience among its leaders—except for Culp—they secured leases for 1,800 acres in Otay Mesa. Prior establishment of the Otay Oil Company there were two real estate ventures selling lots and parcels on Otay Mesa. The largest was Broderick-West which was

THE SAN DIEGO UNION: THURSDAY MORNING, JUNE 23, 1910

Opening Sale of Woodlawn Park

WOODLAWN

THE PLAZA

In one acre Villas or Small Farms at $250.00 per acre on Easy Terms, With Spreckels Mountain Water Piped in all streets

WOODLAWN PARK

COBURN GATE

DISCOUNT ON OPENING DAYS, JUNE 25, 26, 27, 10 PER CENT

This land adjoins our famous tract called **OTAY ACRES,** where every buyer has doubled their money in three months' time. This tract was sold at $250.00 per acre and every piece was sold on the opening day.

In Woodlawn Park we make the greatest offer of our business experience, and every purchaser will more than double their money.

An acre of fine land with all improvements in; in the most artistic laid out tract in the state: in a park having over four miles of beautiful drives, all lined with trees, nine small and highly improved parks, eight cobblestone entrances and a small lake, and located where you get the balmiest climate San Diego affords, with electric car line near and the Spreckels Mountain Water piped to every lot, for

$250.00 per acre, on Easy Terms, and a 10 per cent discount on the Opening Days, SATURDAY, SUNDAY and MONDAY, JUNE 25, 26 and 27

WOODLAWN PARK is the highest improved acre property that has ever been offered to the public. With over 4 miles of contour boulevards, 8 cobble stone gateways, 9 small and highly improved parks and a beautifnl lake at one of our entrances.

We have had the services of Mr. Vawter, the Los Angeles Architect and Mr. Elmer Weaver, the San Diego Architect, in laying this property out and they have taken advantage of every natural beauty of the land, and the results show what the skilled Landscape Artist can do with a magnificent location to start with.

We offer an acre of beautiful level land equal in size to 8 50-foot city lots, near the electric car line, with streets graded and Spreckels mountain water piped in front of all lots, all streets lined with trees and palms, and a building restriction covering the entire tract, for $250.00 per acre, on terms. And a special discount of 10 per cent on all sales made on the opening days, Saturday, Sunday and Monday, June 25, 26 and 27. We make this low price because we want you to boost for this section as you never boosted before and together we will make this the finest acre villa property in the state.

40 MINUTES FROM THE PLAZA BY ELECTRIC CAR

PACIFIC OCEAN

SAN DIEGO BAY

OTAY ACRES

OTAY has arrived and the quicker you realize it the more money you are going to make. The following are some of the new developments taking place here.

1. Our holdings are large. We are putting on this tract of 80 acres at prices which all buyers can double their money on, but we are keeping the wheel going that will make this section grow in leaps and bounds.
2. The electric cars have just begun running to Otay. Cars are run until midnight.
3. The Otay Oil Co., are drilling for oil on land near our tract. The opening of this Oil field will raise the price of land an hundred times or more. There are four other companies getting ready to drill for oil on land adjoining our tract.
4. The Otay Valley Water Co., a recently organized company, has a contract with the So. Cal. Mountain Water Co., for a 5,000-000 gallon flow of water. They are laying water mains here as fast as money and men can work. This means a water supply for Otay: a water supply for the first time in its history, which will improve this beautiful section as nothing else can.

Otay is the place to put your money, because it is sure to grow very fast.

The Otay Oil Co., who are drilling for oil on land adjoining us, have already struck a strong seepage of oil, and the bringing in of this well will advance land here an hundred times or more.

We are in Otay to stay and we want you to come with us. We realize that here are the greatest land values around San Diego.

WOOD LAWN PARK

EAST GATE

Take Electric cars at Third and D Streets and get off at our Branch Office at Otay,

Or Call

WOODLAWN PARK

EAST GATE

BRODERICK-WEST LAND CO., INC.

SUNSET PHONE 2826

529-531 GRANGER BLOCK

Figure 2: Page seven of the San Diego Union June 23rd, 1910. Similar adds appeared in the San Diego Sun.

run by Walter Sidney Broderick a wealthy real estate promotor in San Diego and his partner Sam West of Los Angles. The two had been very successful during the oil-driven real-estate boom in Los Angles ten years earlier. The other was J. Frank Cullen Company. The Cullen Company was owned by James Francis ‘Frank’ Cullen who was originally from Massachusetts but came to San Diego in the early 1900’s. Frank Cullen not only sold lots in Otay Mesa but also to went on in 1912 to establish the Community of Carlsbad. His home there still is at 2286 Oxford Avenue in Carlsbad.

The Broderick-West and L. Frank Cullen companies, owning land adjacent to Otay Oil Company's leases, promoted their properties by highlighting the possibility of

OTAY OIL TRACT

You have only one more day to secure this property at $50 an acre, $10 down and $5 per month. After Saturday you will pay $160 per acre. Grand free excursion Saturday, at 1 p. m. For further information see J. Frank Cullen Co., 6th and E Sts.

Figure 3: Ad in the San Diego Sun May 26th, 1910, promoting acreage sold by J. Frank Cullen Company

oil discovery. Previously, sales had been slow, but excitement over the potential oil well drove prices up and accelerated transactions. Buyers were assured that a successful oil find would greatly increase lot values.

Challenges at Depth: The Realities of Drilling

The romance of the oil hunt quickly yielded to the realities of the earth. Below Otay Mesa’s hardpan, the drillers encountered not the anticipated oil-rich sands but a complex tangle of rock and clay. Progress slowed as the bit struggled through layer after uncooperative layer. At 400 feet, the first sign of trouble: the drill struck a pocket of water, flooding the shaft and forcing the crew to halt while pumps were hastily brought in.

Undeterred, Culp assured the investors and onlookers that water was merely a sign of structural complexity—a good omen, even, according to certain geological theories. Drilling resumed. Weeks stretched into months. The machinery, never quite designed for the unique geology of Southern San Diego, broke down repeatedly. The costs mounted, and tempers frayed.

Still, Culp remained optimistic. He spent long hours poring over the samples, his hands stained with mud and oil. Each new layer was cataloged and studied, the data added to his growing map of the region's subsurface structures.

Disappointment: The Well Runs Dry

By late autumn of 1910, with the well approaching 1,000 feet, the mood had shifted. The daily gatherings of hopeful citizens dwindled. Investors, once animated by visions of wealth, now pressed for answers. The drillers had encountered nothing but brackish water and unyielding rock.

Culp made one last impassioned argument for pushing deeper, convinced that oil lay just below the next layer. The board, their finances exhausted and patience waning, refused. With a final groan from the pump, the drilling ceased.

The well at Otay Mesa was capped, the equipment packed up, and the site abandoned. For all the hope and effort, not a single commercial barrel of oil had been found.

Aftermath and Legacy

The result at Otay Mesa did not stop oil exploration from continuing in later years. Between 1910 and 1920, four more wells were drilled in San Diego County, yielding comparable outcomes. These wells were not located in Otay Mesa.

As for development in Otay Mesa, the sale of numerous plots led to residential development. Infrastructure such as roads, power lines, and water systems, originally installed to support Otay Oil, was later adapted for urban use. Drilling may have been the spark that created new optimism in developing the area.

William and James Bentley, members of the Otay Oil Company, were born in 1861 and 1866, respectively. By 1930, at the ages of 70 and 64, they had retired from managing the lumber company. Both resided in University Heights, with James living at 4501 Arizona St and William at 4560 North Avenue.

Howard Culp continued his contract petroleum engineering consultancy and lived in San Diego.

Real estate magnate Walter Sidney Broderick built a $250,000 home (equivalent to three million today) at 3402 Park Blvd. Meanwhile, Cullen moved to Carlsbad, becoming a notable founder and community leader.

The 1920s Boom of Optimism

The 1920s marked a peak in activity for oil and gas exploration in San Diego County, fueled by advances in drilling techniques and the rising demand for fossil fuels. During this time, several companies and independent prospectors began pursuing drilling projects with renewed vigor.

One of the most notable efforts was the drilling at Point Loma, where early 20th-century speculators believed oil deposits lay trapped in the region's sandstone formations. Multiple wells were drilled, some reaching depths of over 5,000 feet—impressive for the time. Despite the effort and investment, these projects yielded little more than minor gas pockets and oil seepages, dashing hopes for a major discovery.

Meanwhile, other areas such as El Cajon and Jamul saw sporadic exploration activity. However, the lack of significant findings and the economic pressure of maintaining drilling operations caused many companies to abandon their leases. The region also suffered from its lack of proximity to established oil infrastructure, making it costlier to transport any potential resources.

The Community Oil Syndicate

The Community Oil Syndicate was an effort backed by the mayor of San Diego from 1917 to 1921, Louis J. Wilde

Figure 4: Louis Wilde at the time of his campaign for Mayor in 1917

Louis Wilde, born in Iowa in 1865, relocated to California at the age of eighteen. Wilde made his initial fortune gambling on the real estate boom of the Los Angles area in the 1880's. Following this success Wilde moved to St. Paul, Minnesota, where he established himself in banking, and achieved substantial profits through speculative ventures in Texas oil fields.

Upon his arrival in San Diego in 1903, Wilde quickly built a prominent reputation by founding several banks, supporting the establishment of the local telephone company, developing the city's first modern apartment complex, and constructing the Pickwick Theatre.

He contributed philanthropically to the city by donating a fountain to Horton Plaza and financing the completion of the U.S. Grant Hotel.

Although recognized in San Diego as a successful entrepreneur and businessman Wilde's history was not without controversy. In 1910, his investment in Portland's Oregon Trust and Savings Bank culminated in embezzlement allegations; however, he was acquitted by a jury two years later. This should have been warning to potential investors in many of Mayor Wilde's investment schemes that he was potentially capable of "running fast and loose" with other people's money

In 1917, Wilde ran for mayor against George W. Marston, promoting industrial development and branding Marston as anti-development. With support from labor

and business and a dramatic campaign involving numerous displays of smokestacks, at the time the symbol of economic progress and success. Wilde was outspoken and brash, called his opponent "Geranium George" and drove around town in a truck with a large painted smokestack and the slogan “More Smokestacks”. Wilde won the election with the help of unions and business. Two years later he was re-elected.
Wilde was an exceptional orator but renowned for his hot temper and brash insulting language. As Mayor his unseemly business dealings and favoritism to supporters and punishment to detractors irked the City Attorney and Council Members. Simmering resentments and mistrust of the brash outspoken Mayor came to fisticuffs in 1920. During a council meeting the city attorney and Wilde got into an argument, Wilde over re-acted grabbing the gavel, and in the process of accosting said city attorney crushed his finger, twisted his knee and thereafter refused to enter city hall conducting city business by messenger from the U.S. Grant Hotel.

The Community Oil Fund and the “Jazz Cat” Gamble Controversy

In December 1919, San Diego Mayor Louis J. Wilde launched a fundraising campaign by placing full-page advertisements in local newspapers to support a major oil exploration initiative. Wilde asked San Diegans to invest $100 per share in a “Community Oil Company,” acknowledging it was a risky prospect and in half jest and half earnest called it the “Jazz Cat Gamble” but stressing that a $100 investment could potentially yield up to $20,000 should one of the wells strike oil. This proposal attracted considerable financial backing from residents. Many "gamblers" eagerly placed bets, with thousands participating. According to Shelley Higgins, then assistant city attorney, people lined up all day at the mayor's office to

The National City News

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Telephone National 352-W

A LEAF FROM OUR BOOK

Mayor L. J. Wilde and other men of affairs in San Diego have evidently taken a leaf from the book of the NEWS in regard to oil development in San Diego County.

Read the folowing article from the San Diego Union of Tuesday, July 8th:

CAPITALISTS SEEK LEASE ON PUEBLO LANDS OF CITY TO DRILL FOR OIL

Announcement Is Made by Mayor Wilde; Council Appears Favorable to Project; Outlay of $75,000 Planned.

Mayor L. J. Wilde sprung another welcome surprise on the council yesterday afternoon when he announced that a prominent San Diegan, backed by plenty of capital, is preparing to apply to the council for a lease on 3000 acres of the pueblo lands noth of the city to drill for oil. This application, the mayor said, probably will be filed with the council at its meeting Wednesday.

It is the purpose of those behind the movement, the Mayor said, to sink a well to a depth sufficient to ascertain absolutely if oil exists there. The petitioners have made investigations and firmly believe that oil can be found on the city lands. No stock would be sold, the mayor was informed.

In the lease the city would be given one-fourth of all the oil struck, which is the regulation Standard Oil lease. The city, the mayor said, would have everything to gain and nothing to lose.

Members of the council said they saw no reason why such a lease should not be granted. They declared an oil strike would be one of the biggest things that ever happened to San Diego.

"If oil is struck," said the mayor, "the city will profit enormously, not only from our share of the profits, but from the rise in value of the adjacent lands owned by the city. In a short time we should be rich enough to take up all our bonds, and oil in big quantities would eventually eliminate our tax rate. Of course, this seems almost too good to be true, but more wonderful things that that have happened in this world. I believe that oil exists in this neighborhood and I do not know of a better place to drill than on the pueblo lands. Former wells sunk in this vicinity have not been put down deep enough to decide the question of oil. Everything seems to be coming to San Diego at once and there is no reason why an oil strike should not be included."

Undoubtedly those who are behind the oil development project have excellent reasons for believing that fuel oil in paying quantities will be struck north of San Diego. An oil proposition to be financed privately—a "no stock for sale" proposition—must indeed be a good one in order to attract the necessary capital for development work.

Good as may be the prospects for an oil strike upon the pueblo lands of San Diego, it is doubtful if to it there attaches the surety of rich returns that would accompany the sinking of an oil well in the southern section of San Diego County, particularly in National City. It is, however, heartening to know that men of large vision coincide with our views regarding the possibility of fuel oil development in this vicinity.

At National City a community proposition is probably the most feasible means of financing the initial development. After the first well is brought in, the rest will be easy. Our greatest need at present is a leader in this project—a financial Moses to point the way.

We have faith in this proposition; a faith founded upon the rock of facts. The leader will be found, a well will be drilled and oil will come gushing forth from the bowels of the earth—then things will move with a rush and soon a thousand derricks and oil riggs will line the shores of our bay. From far and near will come a rush of people to our city to garner the riches of mother nature's harvest and, joining in the dizzying whirl of development, will build here our dream city.

Prosperity Is Shown In Semi-Annual Report

Fuel Oil Prospects Are Bright

ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT WORK EXPECTED SOON

Preliminary Organization for Oil Development Expected in the Near Future. Land Leases are Under Consideration

First steps toward the formation of a community fuel oil development company were taken this week and it is expected that the preliminary organization will soon be completed. Widespread interest in the development of the potential oil resources of this section has resulted from the publication in the National City News of facts regarding the probability of vast underlying oil bearing formations, together with editorials urging the development of the same.

Leases are now being considered upon several tracts of land, where an oil strike is considered likely. Upon one of these, comparatively close to the business district of National City, a reported oil seepage is being investigated. It is expected that first steps toward financing the development project will be taken in the very near future and work upon the drilling of the first well will then follow shortly.

The fuel oil agitation conducted by the NEWS has been strongly reflected in San Diego and it begins to look as though things must be brought to a head quickly in National City, or San Diego will take the lead in developing the oil resources of San Diego County. The following articles which appeard in the San Diego Evening Tribune of Wednesday, the 9th, is typical of the interest being taken in this proposition:

San Diego in Throes of Oil Fever

San Diego is in the throes of a mild oil excitement. Indications are that within a few weeks several wells will be going down. Leases are being signed and experts are said to be hunting over the local field for the best opportunities to prospect for oil.

Mayor L. J. Wilde declares that the oil fields extend from the California coast to San Clemente island and from the Orange county fields down the coast, up Mission valley and thence to Coronado and down to the Tia Juana river.

"Why send your money to Texas, when you can help develop oil right at home?"

This is the question being asked by Mayor Wilde to all who approach him on the oil question. The mayor is a firm believer in developing San Diego resources. He believes the oil is here. In his belief he does not say that all you have to do is to punch a hole down and get the oil. Far from it. He is an expert at oil. Thirty years ago the mayor says he and Los Angeles men brought in the first well of all California at Newhall, near Los Angeles.

Watches Developments

Since then Mayor Wilde has been more or less actively engaged in following the activity of derricks and drills. Right now he has extensive interests in both the Kansas and Texas fields that are paying him handsomely.

With this knowledge the mayor has been keeping his eye open for developments of the big oil companies. Now, he says, he finds them drilling at Tustin and as far as San Juan Capistrano, and he believes they are preparing to come on south, with perhaps Del Mar as the next objective point.

All of the mayor's spare time for weeks past has been taken up as an expert in examining possible locations for oil strikes. He is responsible for interesting capitalists who are to ask the city for a lease of city pueblo lands for oil prospecting purposes. He stated yesterday that the lease would be asked at a meeting of the council next Monday.

While the oil excitembent is raging elsewhere, it is a quiet campaign that is being carried on here at San Diegos very doorsteps. Agents are leasing lands and are tying up large tracts in all directions, and it is stated, that within a few weeks there will be an exodus of derricks from worked out fields to such an extent that an important payroll will be added to San Diego's industries before the people are aware of it. Several large tracts in Mission valley have been taken up this week, while one woman owning a ranch just outside the city limits, near the old Mission dam, has been asked for a lease by Los Angeles men who are suspected of being agents for one of the big oil companies.

Agents are now at work securing signatures to 3000 or more acres near Encanto, where some little excitement already has been stated over reported oil locations. In the vicinity of Del Mar, it is said the big oil companies have leases in such shape that they expect to begin drilling within a short time.

"What we want to do here is to take a chance, but the public does not want to get too excited and believe that oil will be struck in the first hole. What we want is to get four or five wells going down at once, and if we strike oil in one of them the future of San Diego as an oil district is made," said Mayor Wilde.

The mayor left yesterday afternoon for Los Angeles, where he will be several days on business and where he expects to talk San Diego oil development.

Charter No. 9512 Reserve District No. 12

REPORT OF CONDITION OF THE PEOPLES NATIONAL BANK AT NATIONAL CITY IN THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA, AT THE CLOSE OF BUSINESS ON JUNE 30th, 1919.

RESOURCES

Loans and discounts, including rediscounts, (except those shown in b and c)	$149,548.16		
*Total loans	149,548.16		
Overdrafts, secured and unsecured			None

SEWERAGE WE MUST HAVE

National City, or that portion of it within the more congested district which will be included in our first sewerage improvement district, must have sewer facilities. This city has practically reached the limit of its development in certain districts, unless sewerage is provided. Already we are faced with some unsanitary places under the very nose of the business section that smell to the heavens of the need of a change.

Fortunately, our Board of City Trustees is alive to the situation and has given the City Engineer the help necessary to enable him to rapidly complete the necessary plans and specification and lay out the assessment district, so that the work can proceed with dispatch.

All sewerage will be thoroughly treated before being emptied into the bay. Absolutely no pumping will be necessary in connection with the sewerage disposal. Each step in the sanitary district plans is submitted to the State Sanitary Engineers and approved by them. National City, owing to fortunate and economical conditions prevailing in connection with the proposed disposal of sewerage from the district, will not be put to the expense of constructing a costly outfall. Members of the City Board of Trustees are agreed that the sewers shall be put in under an act allowing the issuance of ten-year improvement bonds.

Nothing is more important to any city than proper sanitary conditions, and at present there is nothing more important to National City, with its excellent prospect of rapid growth, than the construction of the proposed sanitary sewers. Don't talk in your sleep about not needing sewerage—conditions have changed during the past thirty years. To every owner of a home or a tenement equipped with a septic tank, the sewerage will be a matter of real economy—one that will very shortly pay for itself in direct saving. To prospective builders, the new sanitary arrangements will be even more attractive. Only the large owner of vacant property can possibly have a kick against the improvement, because of its cost; and even this kicker will receive the benefit of increased valuation and better market for his property, in spite of himself. Yes, there is one other possible kicker, and he is the party whose property is equipped with neither septic tank nor sewers, but who maintains a real menace to the health of the community, and who is not deserving of consideration in this matter.

We talk of expected growth, but it is well to remember that not many people want to build fine houses, or to live in a town of questionable sanitary conditions. Suppose someone were found to construct the proposed fine hotel of upwards of a hundred rooms in National City, or who desired to build a large apartment house, don't you realize that such improvements are now practically barred in this city and will be until our sewer system is completed?

We must have the proposed sanitary sewers constructed with all possible dispatch to provide for the growth of this city, as well as a splendid means of aiding such growth. Get in line, find out, Mr. Homeowner, that the proposed improvement will not be a burden, that it will cost you relatively little, then join the boosters for a better, cleaner and more sanitary National City and encourage our City Trustees in their good work in this matter.

Proceedings of the Board of City Trustees

National City, Cal. July 8, 1919

Adjourned meeting of the Board of Trustees called to order by the President. Trustees present—Cordingly, Snook, Weisser, Crandall and Hertel.

Lights	245.19
James Marion, St. & Wharf Labor	15.00
F. L. Malcolm, St. & Wharf Labor	21.50
Rz. Wade, St. Dept. Labor	14.00
W. T. Cleghorn, St. Dept. Labor	25.00

Figure 4: Front page of the national City News July 11, 1919, touting the bright prospects for successful oil discoveries in San Diego. "Mayor L.J. Wilde declares oil fields extend from California Coast to San Clamente Island and from Orange County fields down the Coast up Mission Valley and thence to Coronado and down to the Tiajuana River".

contribute, including some who gave their last $10, an average full day's pay for many, in hopes of turning their fortunes around.

The plan was to drill up to drill five exploration wells. Geologists were consulted and they pointed to a number of promising areas that had analogs with successful

wells in the Los Angles and Bakersfield Counties. These include the east-west oriented structure along the border with Mexico, fault blocks on the Rose Canyon Fault and the last location drilled the Telegraph Canyon Anticline.
By February 1920, the mayor's oil rigs operated in Otay Mesa, near Tijuana, Mission Bay, and as far east as Moreno. The oil boom attracted Los Angeles investors, leading to the creation of the Linda Vista Oil Company and as the decade progressed many additional oil companies came to San Diego to prospect for oil. The excitement drew the attention of celebrities from Hollywood who not only investors but like Mildred Harris Chaplin wife of the comedian Charlie Chaplin participated in the promotion of these fledgling companies.
In the end none of the Community Oil Fund wells were finding any oil. Seeing the opportunity to capitalize on the misfortunes of the Mayor the San Diego Sun began publishing daily updates on Wilde's efforts and lack of success. Reporters also began questions about all the expenditure yet so few foot per well drilled, where did all that money go? The Sun even proclaimed that the "showing of oil" reported from the Community Well #5 was probably only the oil from leaks off the mayor's car.

The Sun stepped up the sarcasm on March 1 by publishing a letter from "a northern city" where Wilde was "only too well known". To quote the article in the Sun- "It is a shame that your lovely city must be the goat and suffer such humiliations. You are laughed at, but what can you expect with your jazz cat gambles." According to the letter, San Diego's northern neighbors— presumably Los Angeles—had been surprised at Wilde's election as mayor.

Feeling insulted, Mayor Wilde sued the Sun for libel, seeking $100,000 in damages. In court, he defended the his oil project and asserted critics would eventually support him once the wells "came in with big flows of oil".

The Sun requested access to Community Oil Company's financial records. After the court denied an audit, the paper published its own review, noting Wilde had raised over $120,000 from subscribers and spent about $48,000—mostly on Texas land and leases and not on wells in San Diego. Perhaps Wilde always knew his San

They'll Learn

The San Diego Sun

Home to Root

THIRTY-NINTH YEAR — WHOLE NO. 13,096 — TUESDAY, MARCH 23, 1920 — PRICE 2 CENTS — SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

Mayor Is Called In Contempt Proceeding

STRIKE SPREADS IN GERMANY; RADICALS INCREASE DEMANDS

The German situation is far from bright today.

The radicals are gaining ground, especially in the Ruhr and Westphalian industrial districts, according to the news dispatches. Under the terms of the peace treaty, President Ebert is forbidden to send troops there to quell the radicals.

Berlin is still in wild disorder.

The general strike, called by President Ebert when Von Kapp overthrew the old government 10 days ago, has gotten beyond all restraint.

The workmen, ordered to return to work when the Von Kapp regime was overthrown, failed to obey.

Instead they are using the strike against the Ebert government to enforce their own demands for more recognition.

Gustave Noske, minister of defense for Ebert, has been forced to resign, and the resignation of the entire cabinet seems probable.

The workmen demand representation on the new cabinet.

In Berlin and in other parts of the German empire there is rioting and fighting, with a toll of many lives daily. The militia and regular troops are battling the workmen and communists.

NEIGHBOR PREVENTS SELF END

Wife Dies Suddenly; Man Sees No Joy in Life, He Says

HIGH SPOTS IN THE MAYOR'S TESTIMONY

HIGH SPOTS in the testimony of the mayor:

He is planning to turn over the jazz cat gamble, lock, stock and barrel, to a big oil syndicate who will take over all assets and liabilities.

He took in as equal partners in the securing of oil lands in Riverside county, James McMullen, manager of the San Diego Union and Tribune, and Virgilio Bruschi, his friend on the council. The Community Oil fund owns a third interest in these lands, McMullen and Bruschi each a third, the mayor said under oath.

He also testified that nothing has been done in development work in this county except preliminary investigation and test holes, that no drilling is in progress now, that one outfit is partly at Tijuana and partly at Encanto, and the other was taken to the Spreckels lands at Morena, but that drilling has not started in either of the latter places. He is waiting on the casing, he said.

The mayor admitted that he put some of his own money in with Community Oil money in the purchase of at least one oil lease in San Diego county. He "couldn't remember" just how much was his money and how much the Community funds, he testified.

JAZZ CAT AFFAIRS TO BE 'SMOKED OUT' AS RESULT OF LIBEL SUIT

Mayor Wilde and his jazz cat gamble have been "smoked into the open." The white light of publicity, resulting from evidence in the suit for libel brought against The Sun by the mayor, has today resulted in a number of startling revelations.

The jazz cat gamble, started on a basis of "all cards on the table," apparently, but conducted along lines of secrecy, is about to be opened up, it appears.

First, the mayor is about to sell out to a syndicate.

Second, the mayor has resorted to his old custom of appointing a committee, and says he will present facts concerning the jazz cat gamble to this committee, that they may make a report to the public.

Third, the mayor revealed his connection with the San Diego Union and Tribune when he testified that James McMullen, their manager, is a partner with the Community Oil fund and with Councilman Virgilio Bruschi in certain oil lands in Riverside county.

Fourth, the mayor testified that he put some of his own money with Community Oil funds into at least one lease in San Diego county, and he "didn't remember" how much.

Fifth, the mayor on the stand, ordered to answer questions regarding the jazz cat gamble by Judge Jennings, "couldn't remember" very important details, and refused to answer through such excuses.

Faulty Memory of Mayor Works Overtime On Stand

AURORA BOREALIS SEEN IN CHICAGO; WIRE SERVICE HIT

MANY DEAD, HURT, IN DUBLIN RIOTS

STOCKS UNSTEADY ON EARLY MARKET

SIDELIGHTS ON THE SUN-WILDE CASE

DEMOCRATICS TRY TO CONFUSE SIMS

ASK COURT TO FORCE TESTIMONY

Sun Attorneys Appear Before Judge Lewis in Wilde Case

HEN'S NEST IN AN OIL RIG — ROOSTERS' CROWING IS HIT — LATE NEWS FROM THE MESA

CASE TO END

BOY BANDITS GET DIAMONDS

Bind Employes and Rob Jewelry Store of Gems Worth $10,000

PROBE PRICE OF GASOLINE

Federal Investigation of Earnings of Oil Company Is Urged

THE COMMITTEE

S. DAKOTA VOTING

DEMANDS EVIDENCE

JURY DISAGREES

MAN STILL LIVING

PEACE TIME ARMY

FEATURE DANCE

Figure 5: Front page of the San Diego Sun March 23rd, 1920.

Diego venture wouldn't work and needed to hedge the bet with a Texas play. After all he was an experienced oil man,

The mayor fought back with a letter to his shareholders published in the San Diego Union. Appealing to investors who were not "stampeded by the gusts and disgusts of illiterate journalism," he said he was anxious to weed out the quitters in his oil fund. "I want friends who have some dynamite and stick-to-it-ive-ness and less skim milk." But after a few weeks Mayor Wilde quietly dropped his libel suit against the Sun. His drillings had all come up empty and his patient investors lost everything in his Community Oil fund, which ended up as dry as the oil wells. Louis Wilde decided not to run in the election of 1921 and instead left San Diego for Los Angeles, where he renewed his career in real estate. He would die in Los Angeles in 1926 at age 61.

The Tecalote Dome Speculators: Wild Hopes Grown Anew

Oil speculation in San Diego reached another feverish pitch beginning in early 1920, as Mayor Wilde's operations slowed due to poor results and allegations of corruption. Several factors fueled this new optimism. The first was the discovery of coastal oil fields in the Los Angeles Basin from 1918 to 1920. The second were geologists Professors Arthur Lakes, E.M Skeats, and A. Broady who identified Mount Soledad—an anticline believed vital for oil accumulation—as a promising exploration site and "identical" with the discoveries of coastal oil fields in the Los Angeles Basin, specifically Signal Hill. These experts also pointed out deeper more attractive anticlines east of Mount Soledad and the Rose Canyon Fault, where today the communities of Claremont, Kearny Mesa and Linda Vista sit. Unlike previous ventures, this new round of speculation was endorsed by scientific experts, lending it more credibility. Many believed, as the speculators explained, the earlier failures were due to drilling in the "wrong locations".

Pitchmen and oil promoters quickly capitalized on the new excitement, advertising the "San Diego Oil Fields" East of Mount Soledad with aggressive newspaper ads urging immediate investment. This intense promotion eclipsed the earlier, more reserved efforts by oil speculators like Mayor Wilde, who had linked drilling exploration to real estate sales.

Today it's hard to understand the level of excitement in the community regarding the prospect of oil in the County. Folks looked to Los Angeles and saw tremendous wealth that was created in such a short time and dreamed that similar success could occur in the Southland. Perhaps the best modern example is a combination of the dot-com bubble in the late 1990's and the fracking revolution of the previous decade.

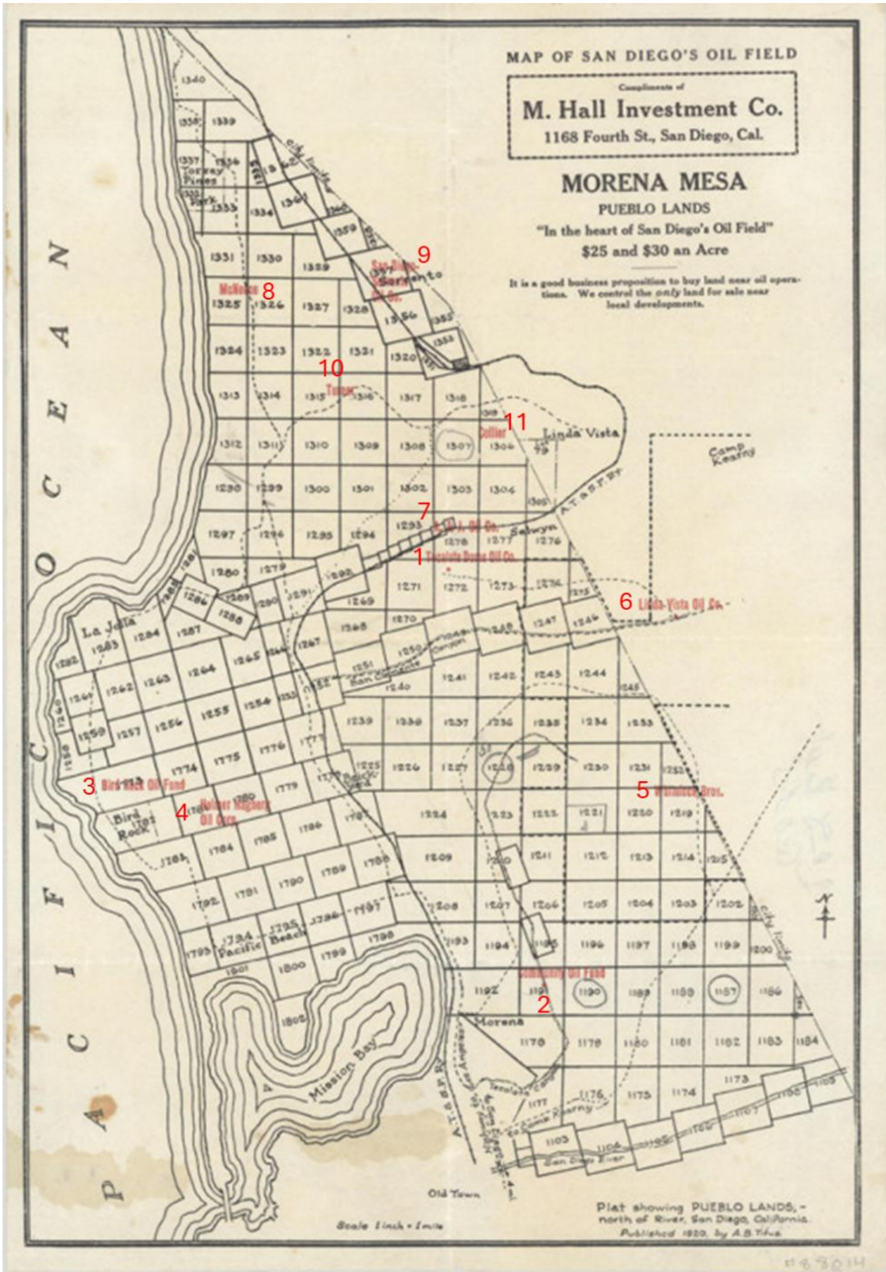

Figure 6 Map of San Diego's Oil Field Cartographer: Titus, A.B. Date of Creation:1920 courtesy of the la Jolla Map Museum. Shows actual and proposed oil drilling operations. The map's purpose is embodied in a tag line under the title: "It is a good business proposition to buy land near oil operations. We control the only land for sale near local developments." Of the 11 wells shown on the map only 4, 1: Tecalote Dome Oil Co. Well #1, 2: Community Oil Co. Well #5 3:

McNeece #1 and 4: San Diego Sorrento Oil Co. Well, 1 were actually drilled and all failed to find any oil or gas. The other 7 locations were land schemes based on the “promise “of oil.

The Tecalote Dome Oil Company

Seizing on all the excitement and eagerness to “get rich with oil” a group of wealthy entrepreneurs acquired oil leases in San Diego's Tecolote Canyon and


HURSDAY, JULY 1, 1920

Blasting, Building and Surveying Sound Activity at Tecalote Dome, Meaning Taxes May Vanish

Blasting and construction scenes at Tecalote Dome, San Diego's promising oil field, and, in the words of the eminent geologist, Skeats, "the best oil bet in the west"; (top, left to right), J. A. McCaddon, general manager; L. C. Turner, vice president; F. C. Turner, treasurer. (Below) Samuel Lang, president, snapped while at work on Tecalote Dome site.

Derrick Lumber on Ground; Electrical Drilling Equipment on Way; Oil Men Express Confidence That Gusher Will Be Brought In; Reservations for Stock Diminish Small Amount Left For Sale; Prospect of Tecalote Dome Ridding City of Taxes Brilliant.

The flare of the match, the sputtering of the fuse and then a deafening roar. Tons of earth were thrown into the air, then came the cloud of dust and the song of the pick and shovel of the workers.

This scene has been repeated many times during the past few days at Tecalote Dome, San Diego's brilliant oil prospect located just two and one-half miles west of the remount station, Camp Kearny.

Determined to rush construction work that everything will be in readiness for drilling with the arrival of the electrical equipment next week, the officers of the company are racing with time. The camp buildings are already finished—model structures according to oil men who say that good camp buildings are necessary if a company wants expert drillers and workmen, and J. A. McCaddon, general manager of the Tecalote Dome Oil Co., 330, 331 Spreckels Building, says the crews engaged for drilling work are among the highest salaried and most experienced men in this section.

Following on the heels of the completion of the camp buildings came the building of equipment

Figure 7: San Diego Sun July 1, 1920. Touting construction art the new wellsite and the four founders of the Tecalote Dome Oil Company.

formed The Tecolote Dome Oil Company. This group of “honest gentleman” who bravely put their own money into the venture were eager to share in their good fortune by the sale of stock in their new well at Tecolote with promises that $100 invested would yield $10,000 once oil was discovered. Maybe it should have been a cautionary note that the principles behind the company were not seasoned steely-eyed oil men but rather serial promotors, speculators and salesmen who depended heavily on the advice of their in-house petroleum expert the self-proclaimed "Professor" E. M. Skeats.

So, who were these entrepreneurs and where did they come from?

Samuel Louis Lang-President of the Tecalote Dome Oil Company

Samuel Lang was born in Red Oak, Montgomery County Iowa in 1877 and was raised on a cattle farm. At the age of 18 he took over farm operations in La Mars Iowa from his parents. The cattle operation was very successful due to the boom in commodity prices during and immediately after the First World War. When his

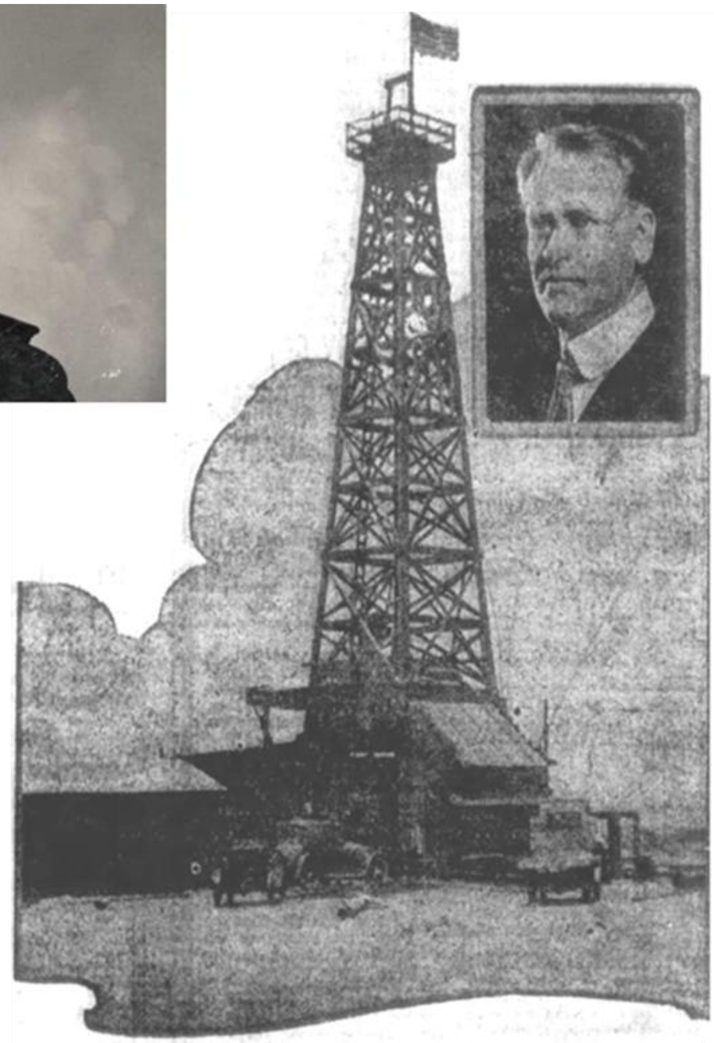

Figure 8: Samuel Lang. Pictured right at around age 18 in 1895 when he took over operations of the family farm in Iowa and right in 1920 when he was President of the Tecalote Dome Oil Company. Pictured here with Tecalote Dome #1

father died in late 1918 he sold the cattle operation for a hefty profit and moved to San Diego to retire at the age of 43.
He bought a house near his new friend and business partner James McCaddon in the Mission Hills neighborhood at 3956 Alameda Drive. In the San Diego Sun newspaper, he is noted as a "Capitalist and leading stockman of Le Mars Iowa" and from what can be gleaned he was one of the major investors in the Tecalote Dome Oil company

James Alfred McCaddon Manager
As the company manager, James, a long-time San Diego resident, leveraged his strong community ties to secure oil leases on city

Figure 9 James A. McCaddon and Mabel Rose Francisco McCaddon

lands, obtain low-cost advertising, and build goodwill for the growing organization. His connections with City Hall, newspapers, and the local Chamber of Commerce made him an influential figure and the public face of the company. James was born in Zanesville, Ohio in 1875 and grew up on a farm, where he handled much of the machinery maintenance. Around 1901, he moved to San Diego, became an auto mechanic and electrician, met Mabel Rose Francisco—a local resident five years younger—and married her in 1905.

Using a mortgage, they bought a house at 13B Kearvey Street in San Diego. Between 1908 and 1913, they had four children: Charlotte, Elizabeth, Mabel, and Lincoln.

Page Six — THE SAN DIEGO SUN: SATURDAY, JANUARY 6, 1917

ALONG AUTO ROW

HARD TO KEEP HIS TIRE STOCK FULL

That the three brands of tires manufactured by the Pennsylvania Rubber Co. are coming into their own is evidenced by the demand for these products in eastern markets and on the coast. The call for the tires in the east has been so strong that H. D. Grable, the local distributor, has had considerable difficulty in keeping the various sizes in stock. The Vacuum Cup brand especially has proven very popular here during the season when non-skid tires are demanded. Many motorists have found that with a pair of the ebony tread on the front and two vacuum cups on the rear the car not only rolls easier, but is perfectly safe from skidding. When one takes into consideration the order recently placed by an average sized city in Texas for 1000 Pennsylvania tires it is easily understood why the factory is working overtime to supply the demand.

MANY INQUIRIES ABOUT GRANT CAR

J. A. McCaddon, local Cadillac and Grant dealer, reports a good week. Many inquiring regarding the new Grant Six. A number of cars have been sold.

McCaddon, in speaking of the Grant, said: "It looks to me like the Grant would become one of the most popular cars on the streets in a few months. And it will be a well-deserved popularity. It is the sweetest running, moderate-priced car, you can find. The motor is exceptionally quiet, and develops great power and, greater than anything, it is economical. In tests, we have made as high as 25 miles to the gallon of gasoline. Owners report averages from 20 miles to the gallon up. The car rides very easily, a full floating rear axle accounts for much of the easy riding qualities. It is an ideal popular priced car."

TIJUANA FAIR

Bids for the new $135,000 casino, which is to be built at Tijuana, will be asked for about the first of the month, according to an announcement issued from the offices of the Tijuana fair in the American National bank building. It is the wish of the Tijuana officials that all materials and labor performed come from this city.

A special amusement program has been arranged for tomorrow, at which six beautiful women from San Francisco will assist Walker's ragtime demons. Following the entertainment, prize dances will take place, in which the public is invited to participate. Good prizes will be offered, it is claimed.

Figure 10: San Diego Sun January 27 1917. Near the time that McCaddon's Cadillac and Grant Automobile dealership was becoming very successful. Highlighted article from the automobile insert in the San Diego Sun Newspaper states "J.A. McCaddon, local Cadillac and Grant dealer, reports a good week. Many inquiring regarding the new Grant six. A number of cars have been sold. McCaddon, in speaking of the Grant, said: It looks to me like the Grant would become one of the most popular cars on the streets in a few months." Note by 1922 the Grant automobile company went out of business.

James shifted his focus to the auto industry and, with help from Mabel Rose's family, secured a Cadillac and Grant dealership. His sales skills and knowledge of automobiles helped the business succeed. By 1920, the McCaddon's bought a new house at 3920 Alameda Place with cash, and records indicate James also held an interest in a silica mine.

On arriving in San Diego Samuel Lang came into James's automobile dealership to purchase a new Cadillac. From this chance encounter the idea for the oil company sprung, no doubt fueled by the oil fever that was running through the city.

Lloyd Chester Turner and his brother Fridricum (Fred) Cleveland Turner: Primary Investors and Directors.

Lloyd and his younger brother Fred were wheat farmers in Nez Pearce County, Idaho. Like Samuel Lang, the Turners profited from the commodities boom around the time of World War I.

Figure 11: Lloyd Turner (left) and Fred Turner (right) San Diego Sun July 1 1920

Both brothers were born in Ellsworth, Iowa. Fred in 1885 and Lloyd in 1886. By 1911 Fred and Lloyd's parents Jesse and Loria Turner decided that better opportunities for farming lay to the west in Idaho. The Iowa operation was sold and with the help of their six children they switched from raising corn to wheat in Nez Pearce County.

The move and establishing a wheat operation took the collective effort of the entire Turner family and became highly successful. In around 1919 the oldest of the Turner boys, John Wilford Turner, took over day-to-day operations of the farm leaving Lloyd and Fred to move to San Diego to seek how the family's new-found wealth could be reinvested in other ventures. Soon after arriving in San Diego Fred and Lloyd became acquitted with James McCaddon and, swept up in the excitement of potential oil discoveries in San Diego, decided to become major partners and shareholders of the new company.

C.A. Gilbert-Investor

C.A. Gilbert, whose full name is Arthur Chester Gilbert, was born in Modesto, California in 1884 as the youngest of nine children of Isaac and Fannie Gilbert. Identifying him was challenging due to records listing only his initials. Only five of his nine siblings survived beyond the age of five.

He grew up with three surviving brothers and two sisters on the family's prosperous farm. After his father, a Civil War veteran, died in 1897, the eldest son Menard took over running the operation at the age of 26.

The family lived on the farm until about 1917, when they sold it for a handsome profit and moved to a rented townhouse in San Francisco's Ashbury district. In the city, Menard and Herbert worked selling dry goods while Arthur and Tessie completed school. After their father's death, the two older sisters soon married farmers in Stanislaus County. In the next few years, the family did extremely well and around 1917 moved into a townhouse in the upper-class section of Pacific Heights on Jackson Street. Where he lived with his mother Fannie and sister Tessie.

At the time of the founding of the Tecolote Dome Oil Company the newspapers in San Diego noted Arthur as the West Coast representative of the United Rubber Company. However, the research into his past reveals he was the West Coast manager for a women's corset company. A position he held for much of his working life. Why he was referred to a different position is a question that is not easily answered. Regardless, Arthur was single, highly successful and quite wealthy in the early part of the century and was keen to invest in the "San Diego oil boom."

E.M. Skeats-Employed as Contract Geologist/Specialist for the Company
The reputational powerhouse behind Tecalote Dome was the geologist, and in some sense, renaissance man, E.M. Skeates.

Edward Miall Skeats was born in England, in 1858 as the eldest of five children to Herbert S. and Louisa Skeats. His father, an academic, authored "A History of the Free Churches of England: From A.D. 1688-A.D. 1851." Skeats' grandfather, who died in 1881, edited a non-conformist newspaper and served as a prominent Liberal Member of the Imperial Parliament.

The family was affluent and lived in Croydon, Surrey, within the Parish of Wimbledon. Edward's mother and grandmother were active in social circles through frequent events that supported their status. He graduated with a degree in Chemistry from the University of London. Afterward, he lived with his parents, with no consistent occupation recorded. In 1889, while still residing on his parents' estate, he married Selina Harriet Chandler.

The Skeats family's financial situation declined over the years, with siblings moving from Wimbledon to the working-class area of 31 Littleton Street, Wandsworth. This downturn may have prompted Edward and Selina to immigrate to the United States in 1892.

Shortly after arriving in the United States, Edward and Selina relocated to New Mexico at the request of Charles B. Eddy—namesake of Eddy County—to assist in identifying suitable sites for water wells in Carlsbad, New Mexico. Skeats, whose expertise spanned engineering, chemistry, and geology, held various other contracts that leveraged his diverse skill set; he contributed to water and sewage projects in Buenos Aires, and was involved in ore assaying in New Mexico, worked on irrigation in the Pecos Valley, conducted independent research on ores in his personal lab, and served as a chemist for several Southwestern railway companies. His position of president at the El Paso Pure Water Company improved the family's financial situation and allowed a move to El Paso Texas where in 1910 they were living on Magoffin Avenue.

While in Texas Edward was especially recognized in the field of petroleum geology and exploration for his authorship of what were considered the best oil maps of Southwestern Texas. His mapping encompassed the then newly discovered Ranger Oilfield as well as other significant finds. Until his passing, Edward maintained that he had "discovered" the Ranger Trend, though substantiating this claim remains challenging.

Skeats was a gifted watercolor artist, known particularly for painting wildflowers native to New Mexico. In my mind the fact that some of his works are today exhibited at the University of New Mexico Art Museum, further strengthens the view of him as a "Renaissance Man."

Between 1904 and about 1919, Edward and Selina bought a house in Los Angles at 1547 Council Street with their son Andrew, who served in World War I. Edward worked as a self-employed irrigation specialist and chemist, taking contract jobs. The irrigation business declined around 1919 when the commodity boom ended, reducing demand for water projects.

After the war, the family moved to a rented house on B Street in San Diego. They were attracted to the area for its rapid growth and need for oil experts. Edward's Texas "oil man" reputation made him highly sought after, with advertisements promoting his involvement in many different oil ventures. He founded the company he founded with his son Andrew also worked on projects like the Fish Creek gypsum mine in Imperial County and water wells throughout the Southland.

How the Tecolote Oil Company Reignited the flagging San Diego Oil Boom

After the scandal that surrounded Mayor Wilde, the excitement of drilling for oil in the county was abated. The scandal, lack of success and uneasy feeling in the community that there were more scams than oil caused investors to back away for similar proclamations about sure-thing oil successes. Tecalote Dome Oil Company had the combination of self-made individuals as primary investors who were running the company and the articulate British scientist backing the science. These attributes impressed potential investors. Adding to reputational appearance was the financial outlay for a state art the electric-power cable-tool drilling rig capable of fast progress to great depth. To support the operation the company strung power lines and built roads out from San Diego, a distance of several miles. The investment in infrastructure cemented the view that, while speculative in nature, the company was so sure of success they were front-end loaded the project with the best rig, roads, water and electricity to support all those new oil wells soon to be drilling and producing. Unbeknownst to the casual observer, most of the dollars spent came not from the principles in the company but from selling stock.

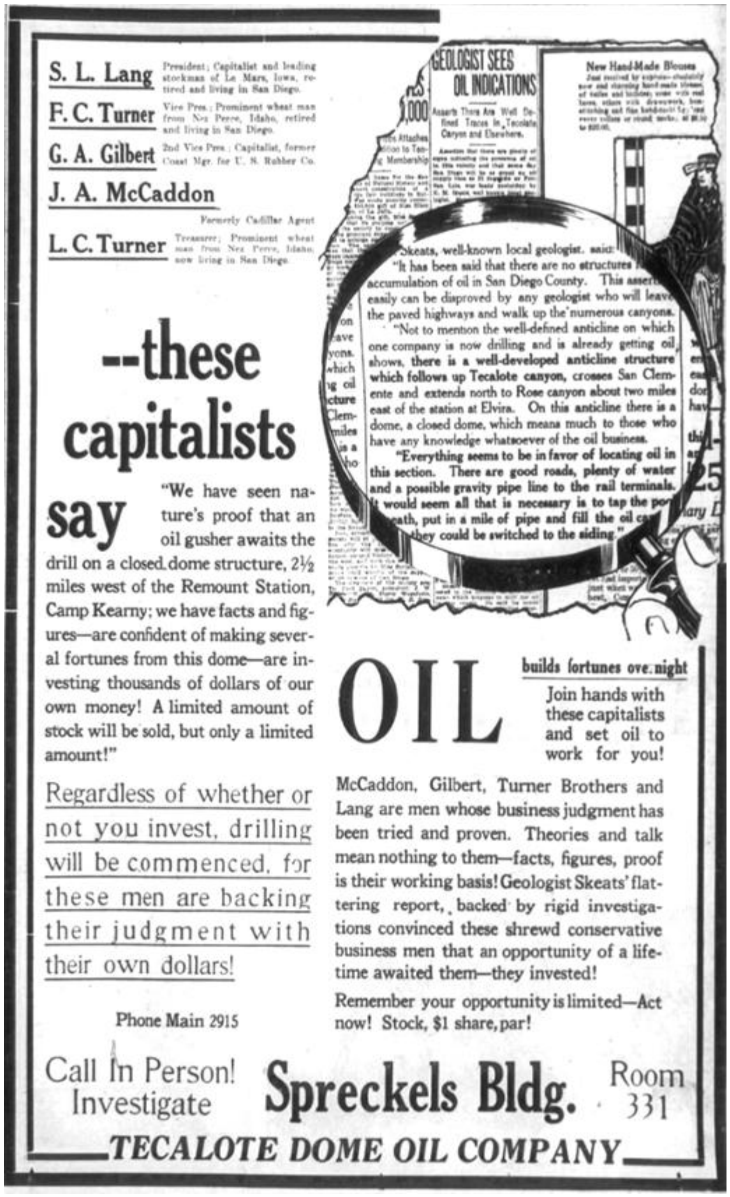

Figure 12: Typical advertisement from page 6 of the San Diego Sun. Emphasis was placed on the founders, "these capitalists", pitting their own money into the venture. "McCaddon, Gilbert, Turner Brothers and Lang whose business judgment has been tried and proven. Theories and talk mean nothing to them-facts, figures, proof is their working basis! Geologist Skeats flattering report, backed by rigorous investigations convinced these shrewd businessmen that an opportunity of a lifetime awaited them-they invested!" Looking back, one wonders about what "proof" and what "rigorous investigations" they were referring to as no evidence other than say-so of Geologist Skeats was ever produced backing up the oil potential of the well.

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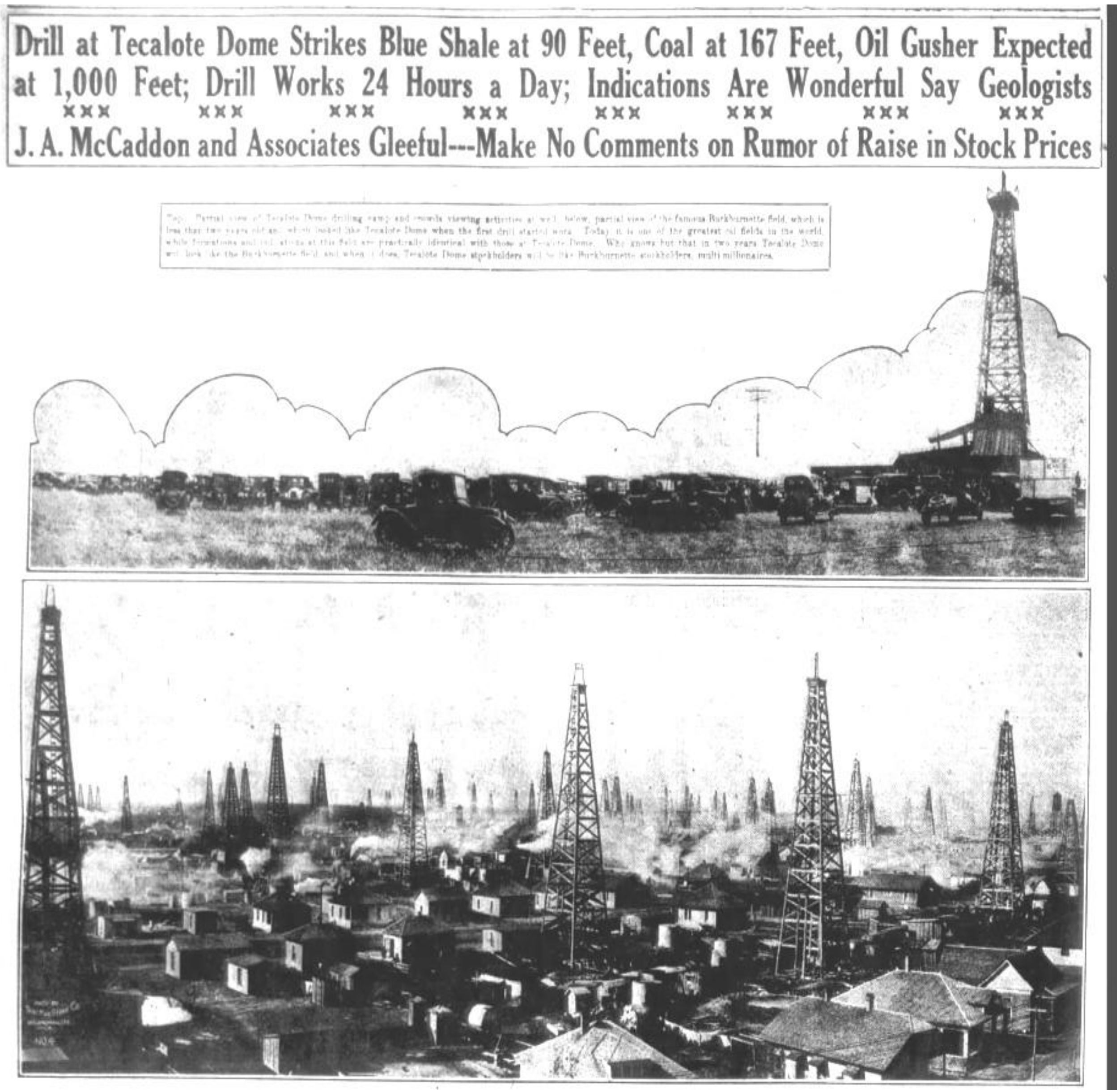


Figure 13; Page six of the San Diego Sun August 10 1920: Half news article and half advertisement. Upper panel shows the numerous visitors at Tecolote Dome on the day drilling started, the “Spud Party” and makes comparison to the Burkburnett Oil Field in Texas. A field that Skeats was very familiar with. Inset reads” Top: Partial view of the Tecalote Dome drilling camp and crowds viewing drilling activities at the well; below partial view of the Burkburnett field which less than two years old and which looked like Tecalote Dome when the first drill started work. Today it is one of the greatest oil fields in the world, while formations and indications at this field are practically identical to those at Tecolote dome. Who knows but in two years Tecalote Dome will look like Burkburnett field, and when it does Tecalote dome stockholders will be like Burkburnett stockholders, multi-millionaires”.

By the middle of 1920 excitement for Tecalote Dome was such a feverish pitch that several new oil company copy-cats were formed based solely on the fact they were adjacent to the operation. Yet not a drop of oil had been found. On the day drilling started, or the well "was spud", the company hosted a party at the drill site. Numerous dignitaries from across the County came out to see the start of the operation including a Fox News Reel outfit from Los Angles and most of the City Council. The size of the crowd who drove out from San Diego on those new roads was in the hundreds.

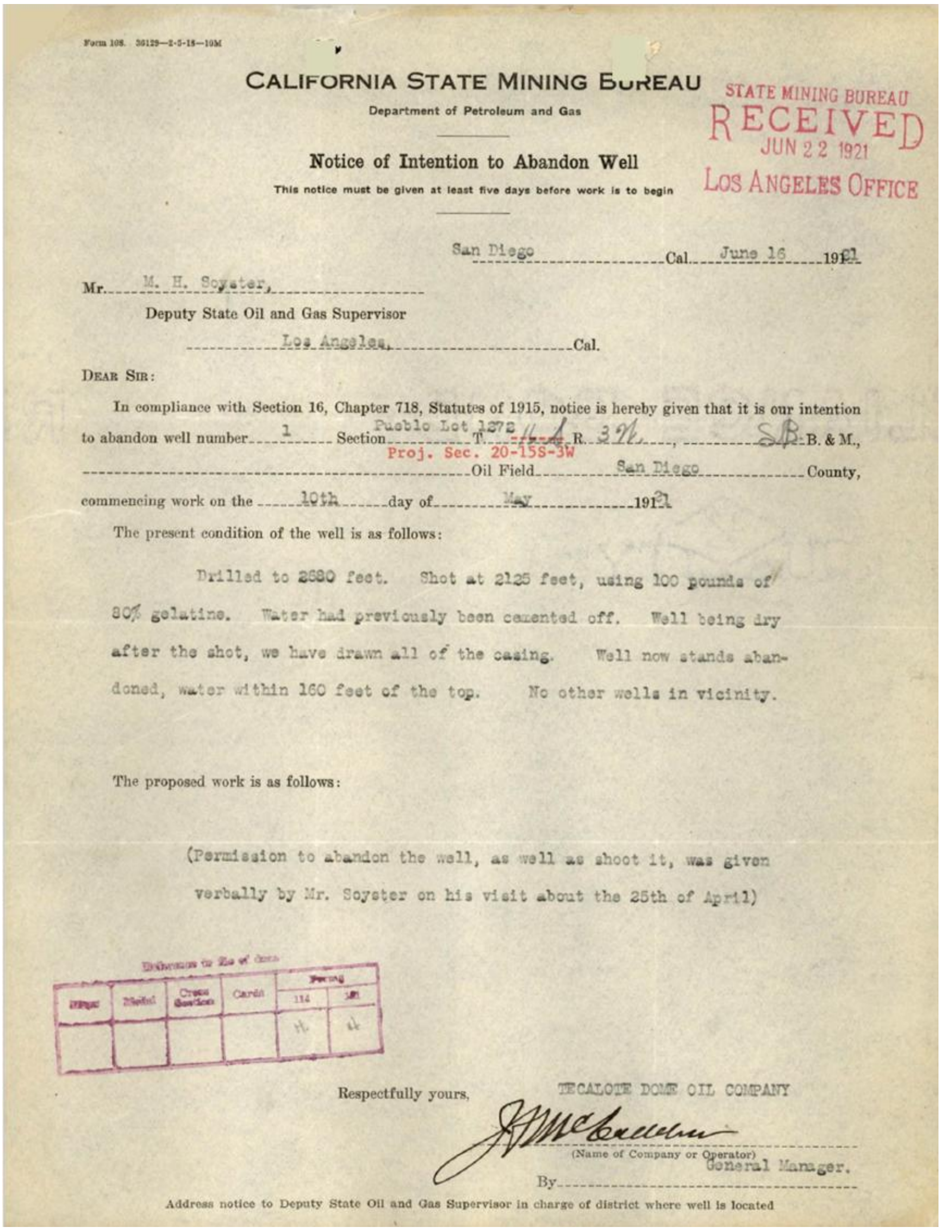
Early Wild Optimism Followed by hard reality of a "Dry" Hole

Drilling began on August 20, 1920, progressing twice as fast as previous rigs. Early reports were positive, noting that blue shale had been encountered, which according to the Company, was the same type found in oil-producing wells in Los Angeles. Newspapers frequently reported the growing depth of the well tapping an anticipated oil reserve. As drilling progressed, company stocks soared, doubling or tripling in value, bringing investors and stockholders closer to substantial profits. Significant problems arose when the well was around 300 feet deep- fresh water began flowing, halting progress. After weeks of costly attempts to stop water inflow, drilling resumed in early September. Soon new problems emerged, such as bore hole collapse, slow drilling through hard rocks, and frequent bit replacements. As progress stalled, updates from the rig dwindled and initial excitement gave way to concern over investment losses. The once "hot stock" dropped below its original offering price.

In December, Deputy State Petroleum Engineer F.D. Gore visited the well and reported that the Company's assertion of oil shows at a depth of 1050 feet were incorrect; testing showed no presence of hydrocarbons. Despite this report, geologist Skeats maintained that the well should be deepened to access an oil pool he projected would be found at a slightly greater depth.

In the spring of 1921, the drill bit hit hard volcanic rock—known in oil terms as "basement"—the layer that marks the limit of economically viable oil-bearing strata. Contract geologist H.I. Reynolds, working for McCaddon at his La Costa Oil well drilling North of Tecalote, was asked to provide an independent assessment of the well's prospectivity. To the strenuous objections from Skeats, Reynolds recommended the well be abandoned as uneconomic.

Despite previous setbacks, Skeats persisted in discussions with McCaddon and Lang, advocating that the well be given one final opportunity to produce oil. The proposed approach was to use dynamite—a method involving the placement of



Form 108. 36129—2-5-15—10M

CALIFORNIA STATE MINING BUREAU

Department of Petroleum and Gas

Notice of Intention to Abandon Well

This notice must be given at least five days before work is to begin

STATE MINING BUREAU
RECEIVED
JUN 22 1921
LOS ANGELES OFFICE

San Diego Cal. June 16 1921

Mr. M. H. Soyster,
Deputy State Oil and Gas Supervisor
Los Angeles, Cal.

DEAR SIR:

In compliance with Section 16, Chapter 718, Statutes of 1915, notice is hereby given that it is our intention to abandon well number 1 Section Pueblo Lot 1272 T. 14 R. 3W, S.B. B. & M.,
Proj. Sec. 20-15S-3W
Oil Field San Diego County,
commencing work on the 10th day of May 1921

The present condition of the well is as follows:

Drilled to 2680 feet. Shot at 2125 feet, using 100 pounds of 80% gelatine. Water had previously been cemented off. Well being dry after the shot, we have drawn all of the casing. Well now stands abandoned, water within 160 feet of the top. No other wells in vicinity.

The proposed work is as follows:

(Permission to abandon the well, as well as shoot it, was given verbally by Mr. Soyster on his visit about the 25th of April)

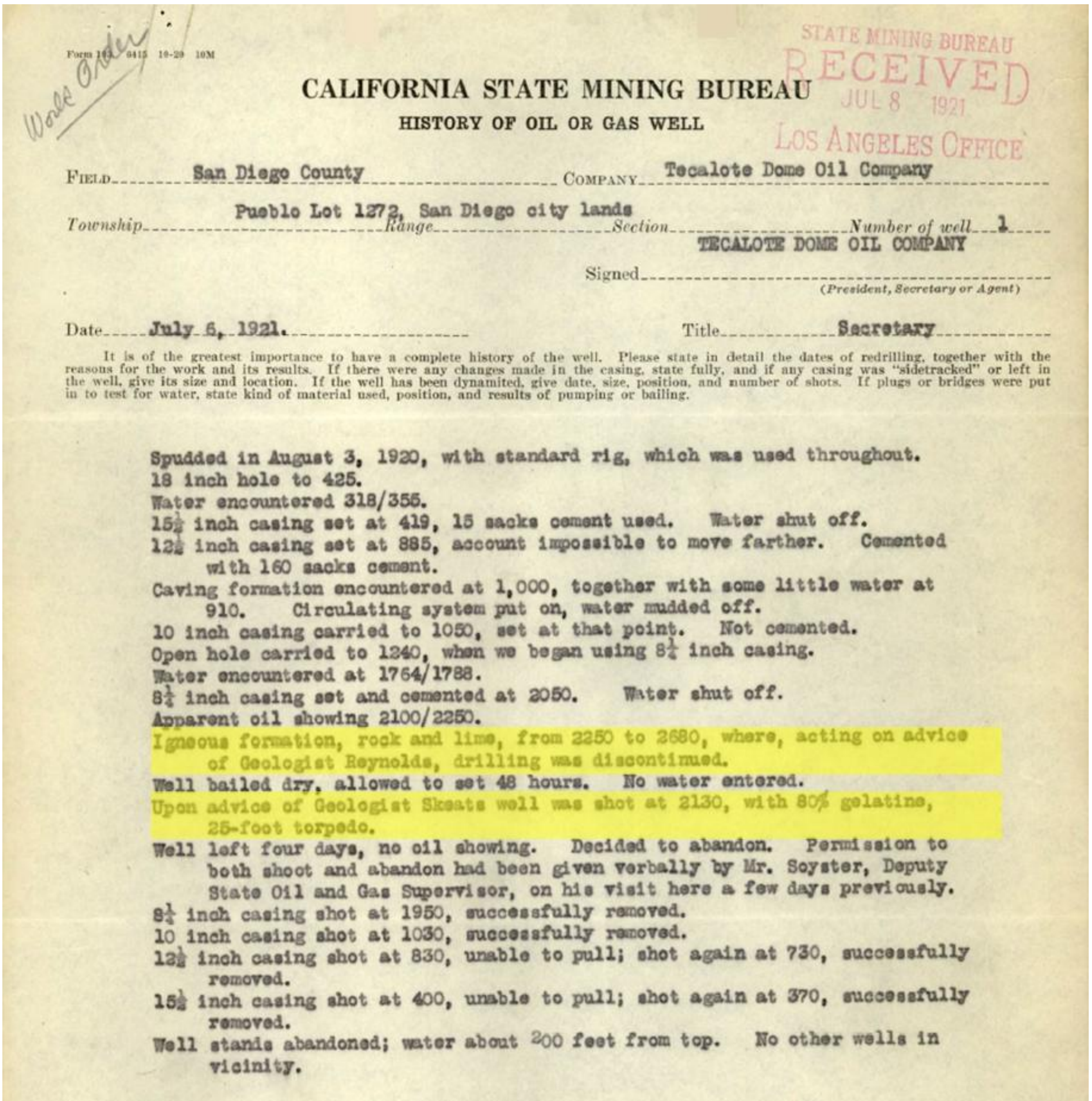
Respectfully yours,

TECALOTE DOME OIL COMPANY
(Name of Company or Operator)
By J. H. McCaddon
General Manager.

Address notice to Deputy State Oil and Gas Supervisor in charge of district where well is located

Figure 14: Notice to State Deputy Oil Supervisor Soyster from James McCaddon that the “last-ditch” attempt to get the well to produced oil by dynamiting the base of the well was unsuccessful and his request to abandon the well.

high explosives at the bottom of the well to fracture the surrounding rock and potentially stimulate production. Having witnessed the effectiveness of this technique on wells in Texas, Skeats believed it could yield results in this case.



Form 103 9415 10-20 10M

STATE MINING BUREAU
RECEIVED
JUL 8 1921
LOS ANGELES OFFICE

CALIFORNIA STATE MINING BUREAU

HISTORY OF OIL OR GAS WELL

Field San Diego County Company Tecalote Dome Oil Company

Township Pueblo Lot 1272, San Diego city lands Range Section Number of well 1

TECALOTE DOME OIL COMPANY

Signed
(President, Secretary or Agent)

Date July 6, 1921. Title Secretary

It is of the greatest importance to have a complete history of the well. Please state in detail the dates of redrilling, together with the reasons for the work and its results. If there were any changes made in the casing, state fully, and if any casing was "sidetracked" or left in the well, give its size and location. If the well has been dynamited, give date, size, position, and number of shots. If plugs or bridges were put in to test for water, state kind of material used, position, and results of pumping or bailing.

Spudded in August 3, 1920, with standard rig, which was used throughout.
18 inch hole to 425.
Water encountered 318/355.
15½ inch casing set at 419, 15 sacks cement used. Water shut off.
12½ inch casing set at 885, account impossible to move farther. Cemented with 160 sacks cement.
Caving formation encountered at 1,000, together with some little water at 910. Circulating system put on, water mudded off.
10 inch casing carried to 1050, set at that point. Not cemented.
Open hole carried to 1240, when we began using 8¼ inch casing.
Water encountered at 1764/1788.
8¼ inch casing set and cemented at 2050. Water shut off.
Apparent oil showing 2100/2250.
Igneous formation, rock and lime, from 2250 to 2680, where, acting on advice of Geologist Reynolds, drilling was discontinued.
Well bailed dry, allowed to set 48 hours. No water entered.
Upon advice of Geologist Skeats well was shot at 2130, with 80% gelatine, 25-foot torpedo.
Well left four days, no oil showing. Decided to abandon. Permission to both shoot and abandon had been given verbally by Mr. Soyster, Deputy State Oil and Gas Supervisor, on his visit here a few days previously.
8¼ inch casing shot at 1950, successfully removed.
10 inch casing shot at 1030, successfully removed.
12½ inch casing shot at 830, unable to pull; shot again at 730, successfully removed.
15½ inch casing shot at 400, unable to pull; shot again at 370, successfully removed.
Well stands abandoned; water about 200 feet from top. No other wells in vicinity.

Figure 15: Tecalote Dome Well History submitted to the State Oil and Gas Supervisor R. Bush. History describes the disagreement between Geologists Reynolds and Skeats as to the viability of the well to produce oil. (Highlighted) and course of action.

Although the explosion resulted in an exciting eruption of rock, sand, and water, no oil was produced. Following this final attempt, Skeats conceded, and the well was subsequently approved for abandonment by State Deputy Oil and Gas Supervisor.

After the failed attempt at oil drilling the leadership of the company and principal investors had mixed futures.

The Aftermath and Impact on the Founders

Lang

Sam Lang decided to continue his retirement in San Diego. As his wealth declined, he resumed active investing rather than just holding stocks. Deciding to return to his roots, the Lang family left San Diego for Minnesota to start a fur-farming business suppling the garment industry. The growth of the fur industry in the late 1920's and 1930's fueled the success of the new business, and his venture survived the 1929 stock market crash. By 1940, he with his wife were still living in Bigfork, Itasca, Minnesota. Samuel Lang died in Minnesota at age 70 in 1948.

McCaddon

James McCaddon had gone "all in" on the oil boom in San Diego. Not only was he running Tecalote Dome but he was also an investor in the Soledad Oil Company, drilling a well west of Tecalote called La Jolla #1 and other ventures in the north county, the Soledad, La Costa and Oceanside wells. All these wells started and completed between 1920 and 1922. And all of them were dry.

He was a long time San Diegan tied to the city not only by his successful auto dealership but also through his wife and her family who traced their presence in San Diego back several generations. The reputational damage by Tecalote and other failed drilling ventures was not easily erased. To restore his reputation he came up with a new scheme. Stockholders into his Tecalote Dome venture would be invited reinvest the same amount in his successful Santa Fe Springs lease in Los angles.

Before the Tecalote Dome started drilling, McCaddon, probably following Mayor Wilde's advice, bought a five-acre parcel in what became the Santa Fe Springs Oil Field in Los Angles as insurance against possible drilling failure in San Diego. By 1922, successful oil wells adjacent to the property made it very valuable. It was this asset that the new venture relied upon. While some considered reinvesting with McCaddon was "throwing good money after bad" his assurances did convince many former investors to throw down once again. In the newspapers it was reported "hats off to a man like McCaddon who puts personal gain secondary to the redeeming of the investments of his friends."

With reputation somewhat restored McCaddon did a few more attempts at acquiring oil leases in San Diego and promoting oil drilling. But by 1924 the lack of any viable well in the area had turned investors away from further participation in these schemes.
Sometime before 1930 the family sold their house in San Diego and moved to Los Angles buying a home at 7939 Hillside. He is shown as owning his own investigation business but died in 1931 one week before his 56th birthday.

Turner Brothers

Lloyd and Fred Turner stayed in San Diego for several years, mainly investing in real estate. Lloyd lived at 316 West Dongley with his wife Aressa and their son Jesse (born 1919). Fred resided on Alameda Place with his wife Clara and daughter Clarabell (born 1915), as well as Lloyd and Fred's parents, Jesse and Leoria. The family found San Diego's climate agreeable and enjoyed their time in the city.
Back in Idaho the Turner family's wheat operation in Nez Pearce county was run by the eldest son John Wilford and the two youngest sons Arthur and David. Through the 1920's the wheat farm did exceptionally well. In addition, the investment side of the families based in San Diego was similarly prosperous.
In 1928, Lloyd's wife Aressa died, and hardships worsened with the 1929 crash. The family lost their money from earlier farming success, prompting all the Turners in San Diego to return to the Idaho farm in 1930. Fred passed away at age 51 in 1936 and Lloyd three years later at age 56. Their lives were turbulent and difficult with all the adversity they faced, made none the easier by their encounter with the San Diego oil boom and bust.

Gilbert

Arthur Gilbert never moved to San Diego living with his sister and mother in San Francisco. He continued to be the Westcoast manager for the corset company. After his mother died in 1925 Aruther, spent more time as a salesman traveling up and down the coast of California. He often lived for periods with his sister Therese in San Francisco who was single.
Therese passed away in 1932 and Arthur, still prosperous, maintained a lifestyle of being on the road. In 1940 the 58-year-old traveling salesman, lived as a border in a San Francisco home owned by a Blanche B Burgess. The boarding house included 25 residents of various ages. Despite their differences, all shared life under one roof, with Arthur's steady income and single status adding to the group's

diversity. Arthur passed way at the age of 56 1n 1942 and is buried with his beloved sister at Hills of Eternity Memorial Park Colma, San Mateo County, not far from where they grew up in Modesto.

Skeats

Between 1919 and 1922, Edward Skeats was involved with four other oil ventures in addition to Tecalote Dome. The drilling locations he supported ranged from La Jolla in the west, Oceanside in the north, to areas further east in Imperial County. These ventures did not succeed, which affected his professional reputation as an oil geologist. After 1922, there is no record of him being consulted on new drilling projects.

Although unsuccessful in oil, Edward used his chemistry background to help establish a water company in Escondido and the Imperial Gypsum Company at Fish Creek, Imperial County. These successes and his savings enabled him to live comfortably in San Diego until his death at age 70 in 1928.

In the 1950s, his son Arthur, a World War I veteran, donated his father's paintings of New Mexico plants to the Museum at the University of New Mexico. I sensed reading all the records about Arthur that he aimed to contribute to his father's legacy as a renaissance man and address controversies surrounding the oil ventures, which were later criticized. That said Edward Skeats contribution to the understanding of the geology of San Diego should not be ignored as many of these observations regarding the stratigraphy of the region were the basis for future work.

Late Roaring Twenties and The Great Depression Era: 1927-1935

The Curious Case of George MacGregor: Oil, Land, and Lost Fortunes in the Late 1920s Del Mar. A Tale of Ambition, Speculation, and Illusion in Southern California's Golden Hills

The George MacGregor Group

In the feverish 1920s, Southern California was a land of promise—and nowhere was that promise more intoxicating than in the rolling hills above Del Mar, where wildflowers swayed in the breeze and the scent of the ocean mingled with the heady aroma of speculation.

George MacGregor was not born a wildcatter, nor did he grow up with oil under his fingernails. In fact, before his name adorned the letterhead of the MacGregor Oil Drilling Syndicate, he was a salesman of a more prosaic sort: peddling ledgers and accounting supplies for the Kardex Company, driving along the dust-choked roads in a jalopy with the company's logo stenciled on the side, his easy charm and quick wit trading rubber for greenbacks up and down the coast. In his role he was very successful and that combined with good fortune in the early 1920's stock market allowed George to amass a considerable amount of personal wealth. With his newfound position in life George decided to take a bet on the growing demand for real estate in San Diego as well as capitalize on the recent excitement surrounding the possibility for oil in the County. Could yesterday's stationary salesman become tomorrow's oil baron, or so it seemed. The region was abuzz with talk of oil. Rumors from the La Costa and Tecolote Dome wells, to the north and south, sent land values soaring and imaginations spinning. If oil could be found there, why not here, in the hills christened Overlook Heights, perched above Del Mar where Carmel Canyon Road now cuts through the chaparral? George was enlisted, not for his geological expertise, but for his gift of persuasion. The Overlook Heights scheme was simple yet seductive: buy land along with the mineral rights, subdivide the acreage into lots, sell them to eager investors, and stoke the flames of speculation with the promise that black gold lurked just beneath the surface. Oil at "no risk"—the phrase became a kind of mantra, repeated in advertisements, whispered in cafes, and delivered, with a reassuring smile, by George himself at packed hotel meeting rooms. With his dapper suits and preacher's cadence, MacGregor conjured visions of easy wealth and perpetual sunshine. He was the guiding spirit behind the syndicate in which he has a significant amount of his own money invested, selling not just land but the very idea of California dreamt anew. Slick prospectuses showcased panoramic views

Figure 16: Typical advertisement for Overlook Heights in the San Diego Sun December 19th 1925.

and imaginary pipelines. Buyers flocked from as far as Chicago and Kansas City, lured by the prospect of striking it rich on the Pacific's edge. Using lessons learned from earlier oil and land promotors George enlisted the assistance of "experts" regarding the prospect of oil on the acreage he was promoting. Leading his cabal of experts was a mysterious character the "renowned geologist" who "found more oil than any other man" Dr. F.D.T. Bickley.

Dr. F. D. T. Bickley

Famous geologist who is to supervise drilling of oil well at Overlook Heights. Dr. Bickley is said to have located more oil than any other man in his profession.

Figure 17: The somewhat mysterious Dr. Francis Daniel Tull Bickley in 1925 at the time of promoting Overlook Height's as having excellent possibilities for the presence of oil and right at the time of graduation from Central High School in Philadelphia, 1876.

The Methodist Minister and Geologist who backed the drilling at Overlook

Francis Daniel Tull Bickley was a Methodist Minister who came to San Diego after his retirement from the Ministry in 1922. His academic credentials include an A.B. from Central High School, Philadelphia (1876); a B.D. from Drew Theological Seminary (1879); and an A.M. from Central High School (1884). He later received a Doctor of Divinity from Drew Theological Seminary. In the 1880's Central High School in Philadelphia was a mix of a High School education as we know it today but also with additional course work that would be equivalent to a Bachelor of Arts degree. https://archive.org/details/alumnirecord189600drew/page/90/mode/2up

Bickley was born in Pennsylvania in 1855, the eldest of six children to George and Hester Bickley, a family engaged in farming. He married Elizabeth Huckel in 1879. During his career as a Minister, he experienced several personal events: his first son died at one year old in 1888, his wife passed away at age 48 in 1908, and his second oldest son, Francis Exley, died at 25 in 1911. After these events, only his youngest son, Everett Huckel (born in 1888), moved with him to San Diego upon his retirement in 1922.

COMMUNITY OIL WELL TO BE DRILLED AT OVERLOOK

Famous Geologist to Locate First Well and Supervise Drilling

Dr. F. D. T. Bickley, famous geologist who has recently reported rich oil indications north of San Diego, has been retained to supervise the drilling of the first well at Overlook Heights, according to information revealed by Mr. George O. MacGregor, owner and developer of the tract.

Mr. MacGregor states that plans for drilling what is to be a community well are progressing rapidly. "Although no lot owner is asked to contribute in any way toward this well, each one who has purchased a lot from me, will share pro rata in eighty percent of the profits from it. Lots at Overlook are the same price now as they were before oil possibilities were discovered and this community well is merely an additional opportunity for profit."

Oil possibilities at Overlook are said to have been brought to light by a number of geologists. Dr. Bickley, famous as the discoverer of more oil than any other man, after a thorough investigation of the territory, is credited with the statement that the formation underlying Overlook and surrounding territory is the same, in his opinion, as that from which ninety-three percent of the oil in California is taken.

Overlook Heights

Figure 18; This is what the San Diego Sun published about the importance of Francis Bickley's analysis of the oil potential of the area:

"Dr. F.D.T. Bickley, famous Geologist who has recently reported rich oil indications North of San Diego has been retained to supervise the drilling of the first well at Overlook Heights, according to information revealed by Mr. George O. MacGregor, owner of the tract.

Mr. MacGregor states that plans for drilling what is to be a community well are progressing rapidly. Although no lot owner is asked to contribute in any way toward this well, each one who has purchased a lot from me, will share a pro rata in eighty percent of the profits from it. Lots at

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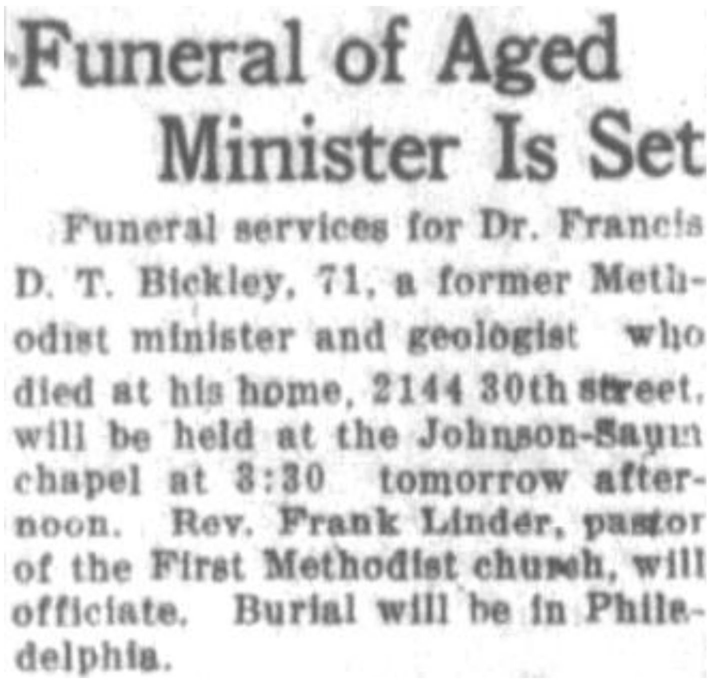
Francis Bickley died in January of 1927. What is hard to reconcile is that George MacGregor touted him as the expert on the team and guiding the operations of the well drilling did not start till well after Bickley had passed away.



Funeral of Aged Minister Is Set

Funeral services for Dr. Francis D. T. Bickley, 71, a former Methodist minister and geologist who died at his home, 2144 30th street, will be held at the Johnson-Saum chapel at 3:30 tomorrow afternoon. Rev. Frank Linder, pastor of the First Methodist church, will officiate. Burial will be in Philadelphia.

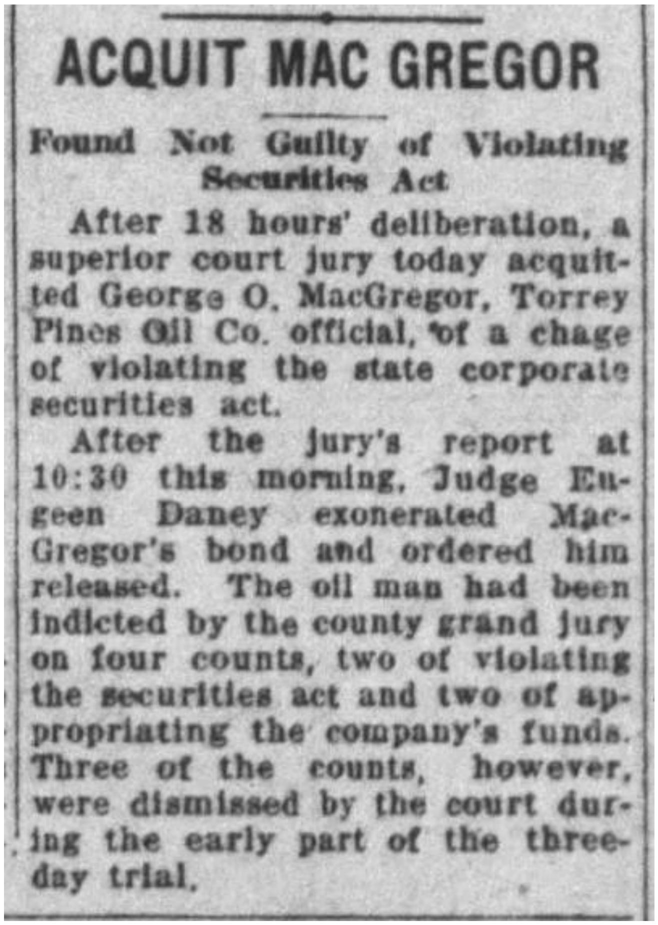
Figure 19: San Diego Sun January 25th, 1927; Death notice of Dr. Francis D.T. Bickley. Francis Bickley was from a family prominent in the Methodist Episcopal Church. His youngest brother George Bickley Jr. was a Bishop in the Church and was posted to Singapore from 1920 till 1924. George died in 1924, three years prior to Francis due to ill health related to his time in the far east-Philadelphia Inquirer December 25, 1925.

Regardless of the tale of Dr Francis Bickley, the advertisements and shameless promotion worked. Land prices at Overlook Heights doubled, then tripled. Investors boasted of their wise purchases and told friends to get in before it was "too late." George MacGregor basked in the fleeting glow of success, hosting luncheons at the U.S. Grant Hotel in downtown San Diego but never posing for photographs. Rather George relied on lots of hand-painted signs and newspaper ads that promised “Futures Secured—Riches Assured.”

Figure 20 San Diego Sun December 26 1925. Additional claims published included that “$625 spent on a marvelous view lot could return $50,000” in a few months when the Overlook Well discovers oil.

Success at Promoting but Failures Arise as drilling Begins

The MacGregor Group started promotions in mid-1925, but drilling on Butler #1 well at Overlook Heights did not commence until September 1928. This well was named after the original landowner, who began drilling in 1926 before forfeiting leases and equipment to the MacGregor Group in 1927. The renewed drilling sparked hope among landowners for significant oil wealth. However, expenses for drilling, advertising, and salaries quickly drained George's finances, and lot sales failed to keep up. By late 1928, as drilling continued, George, desperate for funds, misused his authority as president, leading to charges of fund misappropriation and violations of state securities laws. He was subsequently arrested and detained.



ACQUIT MAC GREGOR

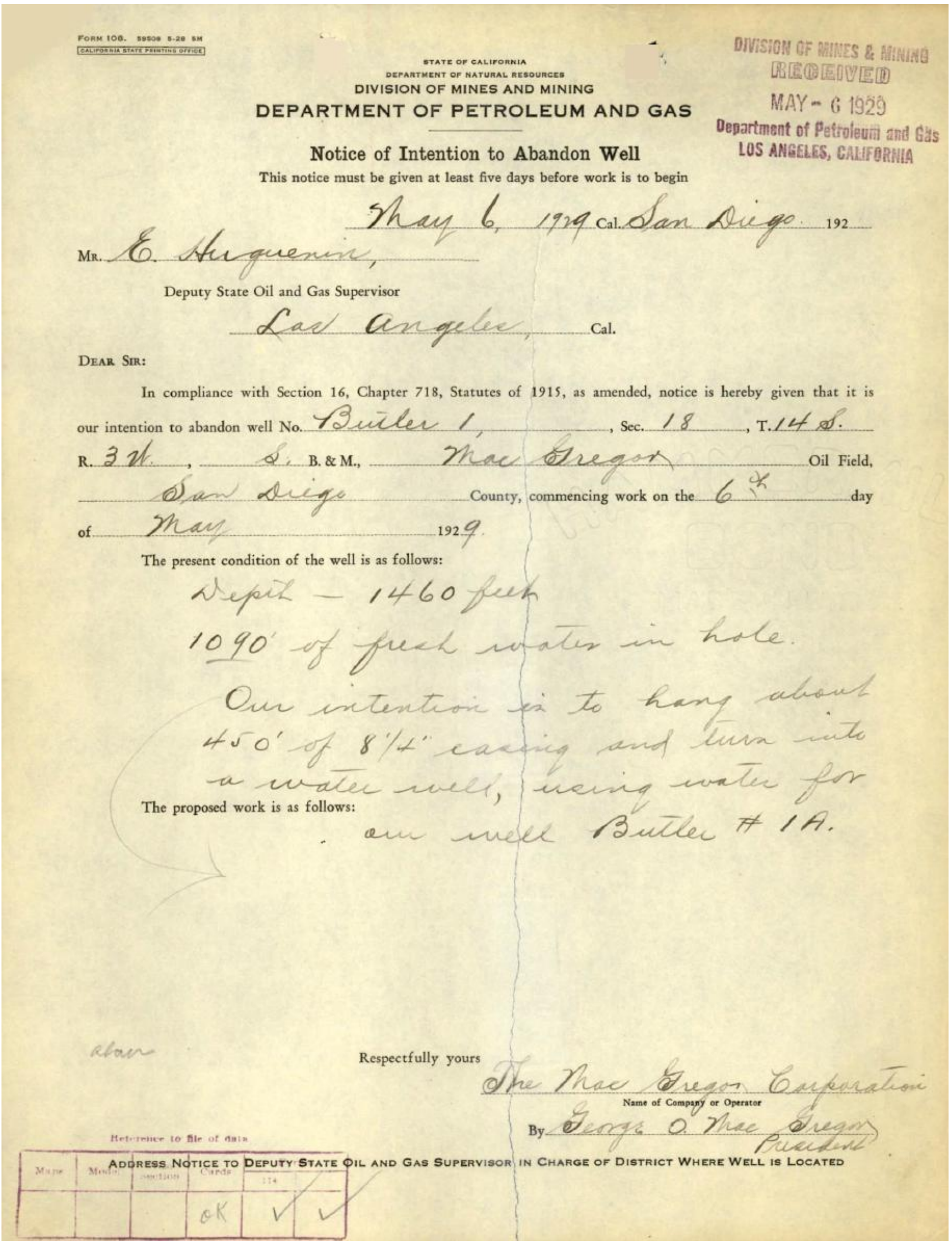
Found Not Guilty of Violating Securities Act

After 18 hours' deliberation, a superior court jury today acquitted George O. MacGregor, Torrey Pines Oil Co. official, of a chage of violating the state corporate securities act.

After the jury's report at 10:30 this morning, Judge Eugeen Daney exonerated MacGregor's bond and ordered him released. The oil man had been indicted by the county grand jury on four counts, two of violating the securities act and two of appropriating the company's funds. Three of the counts, however, were dismissed by the court during the early part of the three-day trial.

Figure 21: Article on page 27 of the December 27th, 1928, issue of the San Diego Sun about George MacGregor's not guilty verdict of violating the Securities Act. Drilling operations on Butler #1, the company's first well, only began in May of the same year yet by the fall the MacGregor Group was in financial difficulty and afoul of the law.

Three of the most serious charges of misappropriation of funds were dismissed by the court before trial. The remaining charge of violating the state corporate


FORM 108. 59508 5-28 5M
CALIFORNIA STATE PRINTING OFFICE

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION OF MINES AND MINING
DEPARTMENT OF PETROLEUM AND GAS

DIVISION OF MINES & MINING
RECEIVED
MAY - 6 1929
Department of Petroleum and Gas
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Notice of Intention to Abandon Well
This notice must be given at least five days before work is to begin

May 6, 1929 Cal. San Diego 192

Mr. E. Huguenin,
Deputy State Oil and Gas Supervisor
Los Angeles, Cal.

Dear Sir:

In compliance with Section 16, Chapter 718, Statutes of 1915, as amended, notice is hereby given that it is our intention to abandon well No. Butler 1, Sec. 18, T. 14 S. R. 3 W., S. B. & M., Mac Gregor Oil Field, San Diego County, commencing work on the 6th day of May 1929.

The present condition of the well is as follows:

Depth — 1460 feet
1090' of fresh water in hole.

The proposed work is as follows:

Our intention is to hang about 450' of 8 1/4" casing and turn into a water well, using water for our well Butler # 1A.

Respectfully yours
The Mac Gregor Corporation
Name of Company or Operator
By George O. Mac Gregor
President

Reference to file of data

Address Notice to Deputy State Oil and Gas Supervisor in Charge of District Where Well is Located

OK ✓ ✓

Figure 22: Note by George MacGregor to the State Oil and Gas Supervisor advising that they intent to use Butler #1 as a water well to supply fresh water to the drilling of the follow-up well Butler #1A. Butler #1 was never abandoned, and it wasn't until 1998 that the State had to permanently abandon the well to prevent uncontrolled release of water.

Securities Act went to trial. At trial he was acquitted by the Superior Court Jury and released by Judge Daney. Learning of the evidence that was laid bare before the Judge and the jury one only could wonder to this day if the relationship with the city council and former mayor may have played a part in giving George some advantage with the Court. What is certain is that many investors in the “Land and Oil” scheme were left holding the bag having waited now more than three years for results of the drilling to be known.

George soon realized that being found not guilty did not restore his reputation, and trust in his real estate and oil ventures declined. Undeterred, he continued drilling, though most of the operation was spent stalled or repairing equipment rather than making progress. Real estate sales slowed, and drilling costs quickly drained his group's limited funds. By mid-1929, after reaching a depth of 1,460 feet at the Butler #1 well at Overlook Heights, found only clay and fresh water.

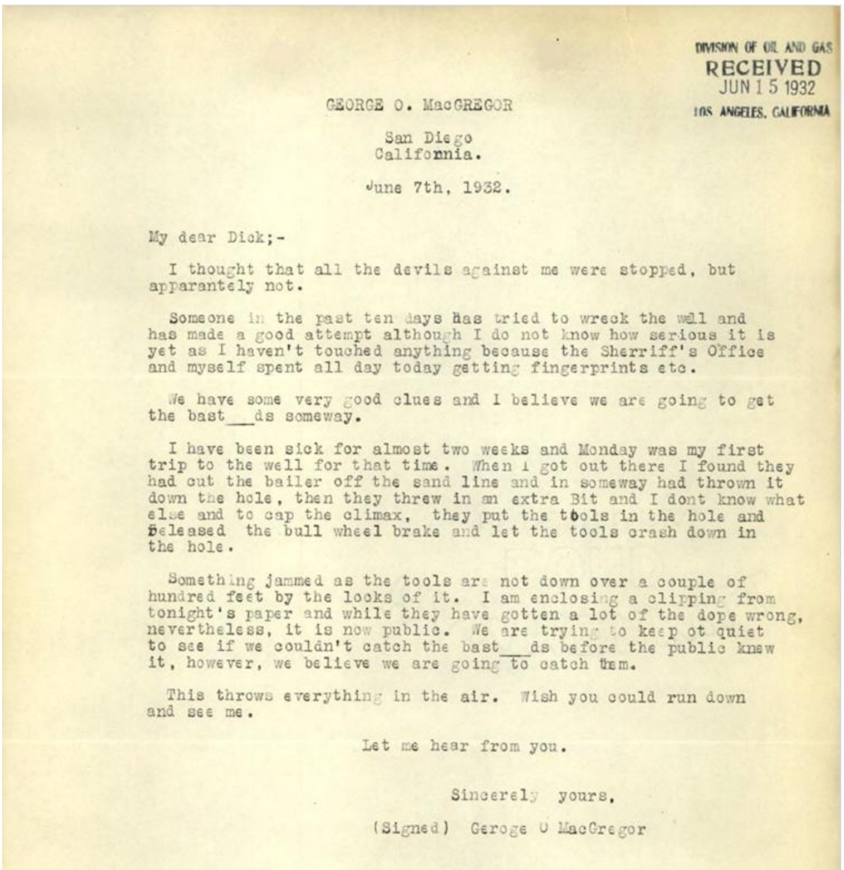
Not deterred by lack of drilling success of Butler #1 and invigorated by his being found not guilty George with some fresh capital from new investors began in May 1929 to drill a second well, Butler #1A, to “prove-up” the riches that the first well had indicated but not been able to produce. Drilling Butler #1A proceeded very quickly and over five months the well drilled more than 1000 feet deeper than the first well. This sudden burst of optimism was soon blunted by the absence of any oil and the filling of the well with fresh water. Investors began to panic but were still hopeful that the water influx could be stopped and drilling could resume. Then the world came crashing down on everyone with the Market Crash of October 1929. George’s stock holdings, which he used to back a mortgage loan to pay for the initial acreage position became worthless and investors were not to be found. All drilling and work on the well stopped.

For the next year and a half, George delayed foreclosure through promises and legal actions. By late 1931, unable to resolve the defaulted loan used to buy the rig and land, foreclosure was inevitable. After extended court proceedings, all assets were sold at a sheriff’s auction in February 1931 to A.D. Mitchell of Coast Supply Company, the primary lien holder. Though George lost control of the venture, a sales agreement loophole gave him 12 months to secure funding for one last attempt at striking oil.

With acreage now impossible to sell due to the market crash Geoge’s only hope of recouping his and the investor’s lost money was to strike oil which would make the mineral rights they still held extremely valuable and bail out the initial investors from their financial difficulty.

To the irritation of A.D. Mitchell, George using the loophole in the foreclosure agreement continued to exercise his right to promote the well to new investors and claim that the well would be "starting back up any day". A. D. Mitchell was a true hardened oil man and knew a busted well when he saw it. The wells at Overlook had hit nothing but stubborn clay and fresh water which only confirmed his belief that George's persistent promotion was a fool's errand.

Then on the night of June 6, 1932, George's hope to reclaim drilling rights and



DIVISION OF OIL AND GAS
RECEIVED
JUN 15 1932
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

GEORGE O. MacGREGOR

San Diego
California.

June 7th, 1932.

My dear Dick;-

I thought that all the devils against me were stopped, but apparantely not.

Someone in the past ten days has tried to wreck the well and has made a good attempt although I do not know how serious it is yet as I haven't touched anything because the Sherriff's Office and myself spent all day today getting fingerprints etc.

We have some very good clues and I believe we are going to get the bast__ds someway.

I have been sick for almost two weeks and Monday was my first trip to the well for that time. When I got out there I found they had cut the bailer off the sand line and in someway had thrown it down the hole, then they threw in an extra Bit and I dont know what else and to cap the climax, they put the tools in the hole and released the bull wheel brake and let the tools crash down in the hole.

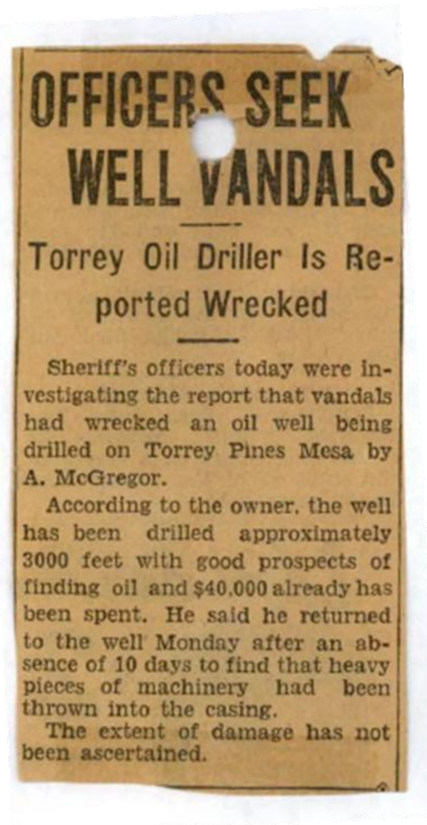
Something jammed as the tools are not down over a couple of hundred feet by the looks of it. I am enclosing a clipping from tonight's paper and while they have gotten a lot of the dope wrong, nevertheless, it is now public. We are trying to keep ot quiet to see if we couldn't catch the bast__ds before the public knew it, however, we believe we are going to catch them.

This throws everything in the air. Wish you could run down and see me.

Let me hear from you.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) Geroge O MacGregor



OFFICERS SEEK WELL VANDALS

Torrey Oil Driller Is Reported Wrecked

Sheriff's officers today were investigating the report that vandals had wrecked an oil well being drilled on Torrey Pines Mesa by A. McGregor.

According to the owner, the well has been drilled approximately 3000 feet with good prospects of finding oil and $40,000 already has been spent. He said he returned to the well Monday after an absence of 10 days to find that heavy pieces of machinery had been thrown into the casing.

The extent of damage has not been ascertained.

Figure 23: Letter and newspaper clipping that George MacGregor sent to the State Oil and Gas Supervisor Richard D. (Dick) Bush about "the devils against me" had not been stopped and ruined his Butler #1A well for further drilling.

continue to deepen Butler #1A died. Unknown vandals sabotaged the rig, dumped equipment into the well and made future drilling or use of the well impossible. As George noted the following day to the Oil and Gas Supervisor R.D. Bush, "whoever vandalized the well knew what they were doing to make it permanently inoperable".

Suspicions turned to A.D. Mitchell who applied to abandon the well the next day and was granted permission by the state supervisor against the strenuous objections of George.

Having exhausted any possible legal recourse to reclaim control of Overlook Heights George turned all records and remaining assets to Mitchell and left San Diego for Los Angles. A.D. Mitchell quickly abandoned the well and then went about drilling for the real gold that George had discovered, fresh water from shallow zones. This resource was a precious commodity, and the years post 1929 saw a resurgence of agriculture to the region fueled by what George had found but A.D. Mitchell had capitalized, fresh water. After all George really did strike it rich, but for someone else.

California, ever capricious, has always had a way of humbling overconfident. The drills at Overlook Heights had hit nothing but stubborn clay and fresh water. Rumors that had fueled the boom dissipated in the coastal fog. As quickly as it had risen, the MacGregor Group collapsed into scandal, bitterness, and bankruptcy. The hills above Del Mar, once alive with the chatter of investors and the rumble of rigs, grew quiet again, the silence only broken by combines and rumble of farm trucks. Overlook Heights faded into memory, the land eventually swallowed by the city's steady march. Today, at the intersection of Del Mar Heights and Carmel Canyon Roads, the only traces of George MacGregor's grand scheme are the stories told by old-timers, salty geologists and the faint shimmer of dreams that never were.

The curious case of George MacGregor is a tale as old as California itself: a land of illusion, ambition, and reinvention, where fortunes are made—and just as easily, lost—on the shifting sands of hope.

The Late 1930's to Early 1950's: A Rich Man's Well, One Last Hustle and Looking for Water with Oil Wells

In the early 1930's improvements in the drilling of oil and gas wells took a dramatic leap- from drilling with cable to rotary drilling. The difference between the two methods is important.

Cable-tool rigs use a heavy drill bit on a cable that is lifted and dropped to break rock. Debris is cleared by bailing or flushing with water, leaving drilled rocks exposed to the surface. Early wells often produced uncontrolled oil flows—called gushers—because there was no way to contain them.

A rotary drilling rig uses a rotating bit attached to a long pipe to cut through soil and rock. Cut material is brought to the surface by a column of continually circulating slurry of water mixed with bentonite mud. Oil reservoirs are not exposed to the surface, allowing inflow into the wellbore to be controlled.

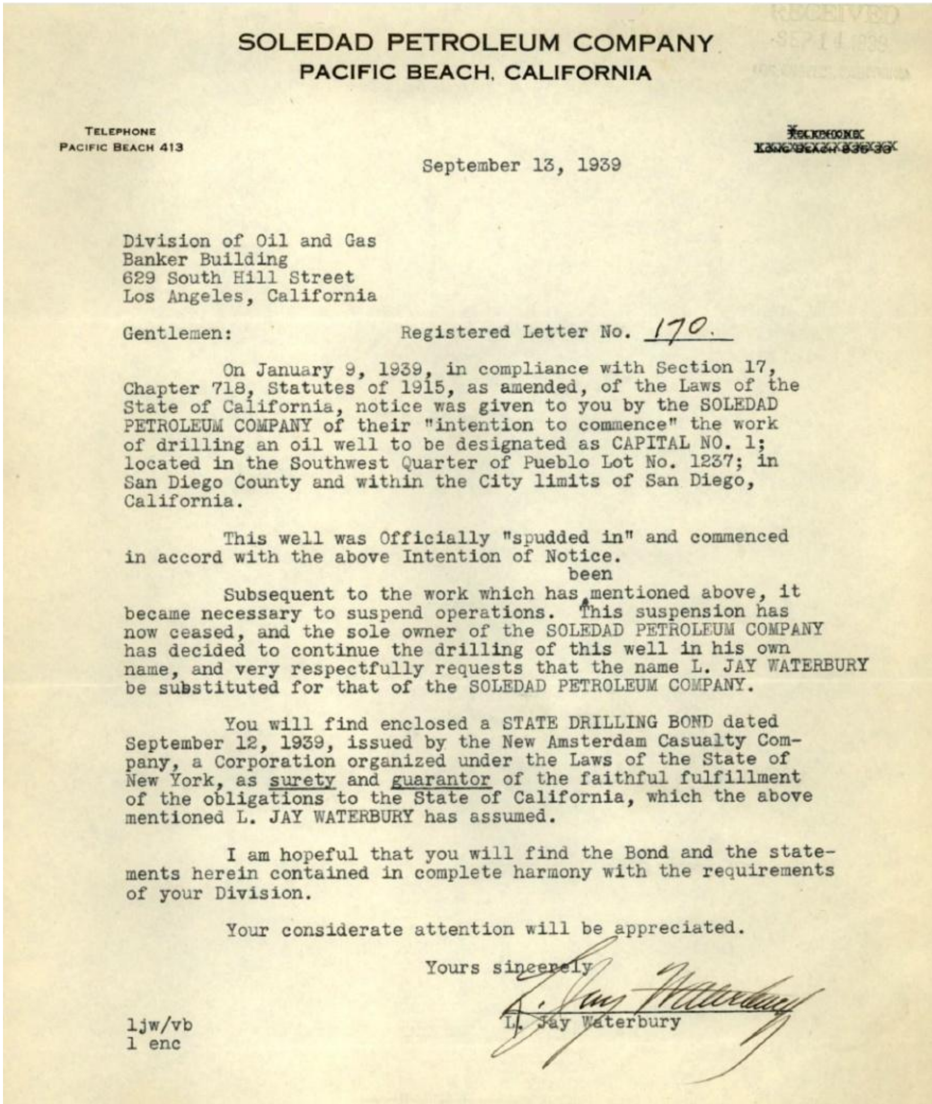
Rotary drilling allows drilling to much greater depth than cable tool. In addition, because the inflow to the well can be controlled, they are safer and less likely to cause uncontrolled flow of fluid from the wellbore.

In the 1930's and later, oil exploration was largely funded privately or by publicly listed oil companies regulated by California's Commissioner of Corporation. Land-selling schemes were generally avoided due to past negative outcomes from ventures like Community Oil and Overlook Heights.

Two of the deepest wells oil exploration wells drilled in San Diego were the Capital #1 Well drilled in Clairmont Mesa and the San Diego Gas and Petroleum Holderness Well #1 drilled in the Tiajuana River Valley West of San Ysidro.

A Rich Man's Well Capital #1

Capital #1 was backed by wealthy Pacific Beach resident L. Jay Waterbury. Waterbury was born in Minnesota in 1875. He attended two years of university and in the early part of the century moved to New York. In the 1920's he was a self-employed broker of bonds and became very wealthy during the crash of 1929 when stocks became worthless, but U.S. Treasury bonds became valuable. Waterbury seems to have had a similar experience as other bond traders in 1929 crash such as Lee Loomis and Landon Thorne, two notorious bond traders that became very wealthy *because of the* 1929 financial crash. Regardless of exactly how Waterbury became wealthy he established a company to drill the well Capital #1 and paid for the entire venture himself. He is listed as living in Pacific Beach not far from where the well was drilled. He died in 1945 and as a World War I veteran and is buried at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery.



SOLEDAD PETROLEUM COMPANY
PACIFIC BEACH, CALIFORNIA

TELEPHONE
PACIFIC BEACH 413

September 13, 1939

Division of Oil and Gas
Banker Building
629 South Hill Street
Los Angeles, California

Gentlemen: Registered Letter No. 170.

On January 9, 1939, in compliance with Section 17, Chapter 718, Statutes of 1915, as amended, of the Laws of the State of California, notice was given to you by the SOLEDAD PETROLEUM COMPANY of their "intention to commence" the work of drilling an oil well to be designated as CAPITAL NO. 1; located in the Southwest Quarter of Pueblo Lot No. 1237; in San Diego County and within the City limits of San Diego, California.

This well was Officially "spudded in" and commenced in accord with the above Intention of Notice.

Subsequent to the work which has been mentioned above, it became necessary to suspend operations. This suspension has now ceased, and the sole owner of the SOLEDAD PETROLEUM COMPANY has decided to continue the drilling of this well in his own name, and very respectfully requests that the name L. JAY WATERBURY be substituted for that of the SOLEDAD PETROLEUM COMPANY.

You will find enclosed a STATE DRILLING BOND dated September 12, 1939, issued by the New Amsterdam Casualty Company, a Corporation organized under the Laws of the State of New York, as surety and guarantor of the faithful fulfillment of the obligations to the State of California, which the above mentioned L. JAY WATERBURY has assumed.

I am hopeful that you will find the Bond and the statements herein contained in complete harmony with the requirements of your Division.

Your considerate attention will be appreciated.

Yours sincerely
L. Jay Waterbury
L. Jay Waterbury

ljw/vb
1 enc

Figure 23: Note from L. Jay Waterbury that the original well being drilled on Waterbury's property by Soledad Petroleum Company was being taken private. "Thus, all operations are turned exclusively to the responsibility of Waterbury. Who personally will be bearing all costs of the well including responsibility for providing bond to the State against potential damages".

As for Capital #1 the well was drilled to a depth of 6180 feet, and a small amount of oil was recovered but not nearly enough to be economic. There are many letters between Waterbury and the Sate Oil and Gas Supervisor insisting that he desired to continue drilling in spite of the advice State and independent petroleum engineers that the well was uneconomic and should be abandoned.

San Diego Gas and Petroleum's Well #1: One Last Hustle

San Diego Gas and Petroleum #1 is also known locally and in some newspapers as the Holderness Ranch well. It was drilled just South of what is today the Naval Landing Field in Imperial Beach. The company's management included President J. Francis White, Vice President J.E. Pettijohn, Superintendent L.L. Malone, geologists George H. Doane and W.S.W. Kew. Acting as agent was R.W. Walling. The Company was established by a lawyer, Robert R. Hamilton, and a prominent physician, Dr. J. Francis White. Fifty primary investors were crucial to raising capital to get the company stated. They included such notables as
Roscoe E. Hazard a prominent figure in San Diego, California, known for his work in construction and civic contributions. Also known as "Mr. San Diego". The company he established in the early part of the 20th century and operates today as Hazard Construction.
Samuel Fox, a San Diego merchant and civic leader, started in real estate during the city's growth from 1909 to 1927. After marrying Pauline Lyon Khun, he took over the Lyon Clothing store and built the Fox building at 6th and Broadway to accommodate his expanding businesses.
George M. Hawley is known as a promotor and developer of Normal Heights. Also deeply involved with real estate projects in University Heights, Point Loma, Teralta Heights, East San Diego, Encanto, Ramona, Ocean Beach and Point Loma.

Figure 24: Roscoe Hazard around1940. Roscoe Hazard was one of many prominent San Diegan's who were the investors and backers of the Holderness Ranch Well

Company Founders Robert Hamilton and J. Francis White

Robert R. Hamilton was Born in Kansas in 1880; he moved to San Diego in the early 1900s and married Claire C. Coulthurst in 1917. By 1920, they lived on Sierra Vista Street in Mission Hills with their three-year-old daughter.
He established a law firm with Fred Lindly soon after passing the California Bar in 1913. Their office was located at 416 Union Building in downtown San Diego. The firm provided Robert and his family with a stable lifestyle and regular participation in social events, as noted in the society pages of the local newspaper. Circulating among the powerful elites of the time was central to the success of the firm. Connections and several real-estate ventures saw Hamilton active in City and County business. Robert was particularly active with independent financial oversight of City and County staffing levels and spending plans. He created a collective of City Chamber of Conference Committees to coordinate scrutiny of how property tax reevaluations of lands within the county were conducted. Other projects that he was drawn to criticize were cost of several major water infrastructure projects and the building of the Southerland Dam.

For Dr. Jhon Francis White the path to settling in San Diego was a long and troublesome road. He was born in England in 1875 and immigrated to the United States with his parents and younger brother when he was just two years old. They settled in San Francisco on Washington street, and his father had sufficient money to own a retail butcher shop. The sound financial conditions of the family allowed John to attend medical school at Cooper Medical College -later became part of Stanford Medical College. At Medical school he met Grace Rains who was two years his junior. They married in 1895 and when they graduated as physicians in 1897, they set up a practice in Auburn California. Their only child Stanley was born in 1903 and from all appearances they had successful practice in the first decade of the new century. By 1910 they were prosperous enough to have live-in help. Grace was beloved in the area and was known as “Mrs. Dr. Gace White.”
In 1918, Grace became seriously ill with influenza and never fully recovered. Hoping San Diego's climate and health spas would help, she and John decided to move there. The family settled in at 4138 Hermosa Street in the Mission Hills area. Grace stayed at home continuing to recuperate while John got busy developing a

new practice. In September of 1920 Grace passed away and John was left as a single dad for his 17-year-old son and grieving for the loss of his wife.
Soon John's wide medical experience and powers of observation saw him to routinely be called upon to help the corner and police with murder investigations and autopsies. This combined with a flourishing practice made him a prominent figure in the community after only a few years.
Then in 1922 John's life took another turn when he married Jessie Stansell, a nurse working in his office. Jessie was 23 years his junior and had moved to San Diego the previous year from Texas. They had a son Oscar who was born in 1924. Jessie continued to work in John's office and from all records appears to be a popular and engaging couple.

The Holderness #1 Well: Good Science Put to a Nefarious Use

This well was notable because the company used advanced geological and geophysical methods, rather than just surface geology, to choose drilling sites. These techniques allowed for accurate subsurface predictions of oil and gas potential.
But if history doesn't repeat it definitely rhymes. The analysis of the geologists and geophysicists indicated that a well of greater than 6000 feet would be necessary to prove up the lease. Such a well would require substantial funds which exceeded the capitalization of San Diego Gas and Petroleum and its predecessor Saratoga Oil Company.
The company initiated a robust advertising campaign and engaged a local agent to facilitate the issuance of additional shares, with the objective of raising capital for drilling a well. As a result, many local investors were drawn in, hoping to find enough resources to support San Diego's industry and Navy, even if not matching Los Angeles's scale. Missing from the promotion was the advice by the technical experts that the well was a risky venture. Particularly since all previous wells drilled in the County had up to this point failed to find any significant real evidence of hydrocarbons.

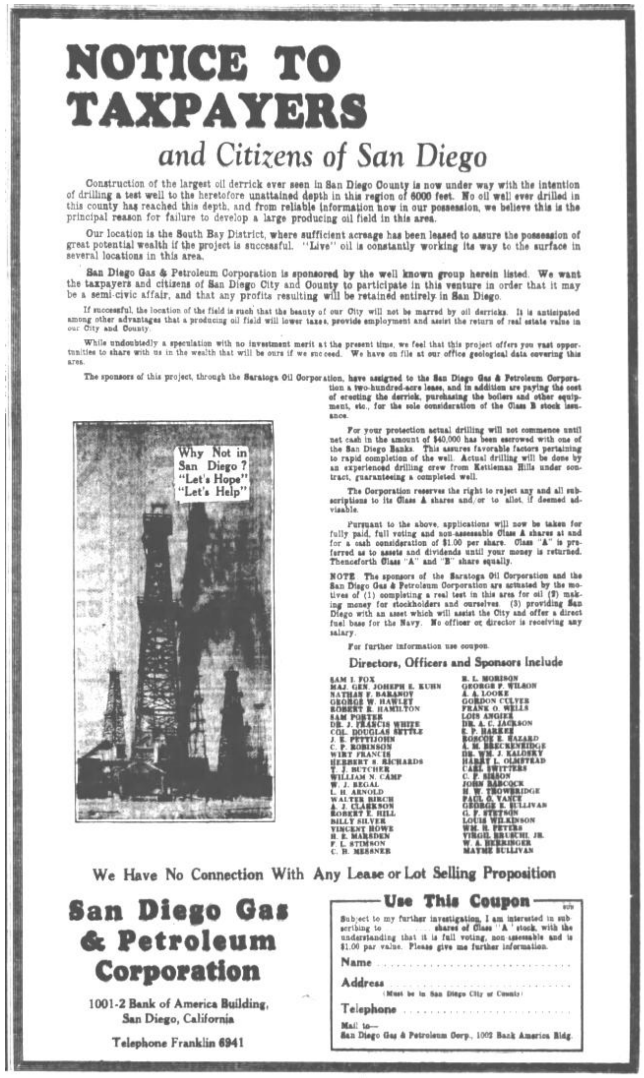


Figure 25: November 28, 1933, advertisement in the San Diego Sun by the San Diego Gas and Petroleum Corporation. The ad reads in part;

"Construction of the largest oil derrick ever seen in San Diego County is now under way with the intention of drilling a test well to the heretofore unattained depth in this region of 6000 feet. No oil well ever drilled in this county has reached this depth, and from reliable information now in our possession, we believe this is the principal reason for failure to develop a large producing oil field in this area. Our location is the South Bay District, where sufficient acreage has been leased to ensure the possession of great potential wealth if the project is successful. "Live" oil is constantly working its way to the surface in several locations in this area. San Diego Gas & Petroleum Corporation is sponsored by the well-known group herein listed. We want the taxpayers and citizens of San Diego City and County to participate in this venture in order that it may be a semi-civic affair, and that any profits resulting will be retained entirely in San Diego.

If successful, the location of the field is such that the beauty of our city will not be marred by oil derricks. It is anticipated among other advantages that a producing oil field will lower taxes, provide employment and assist the return of real estate value in our City and County.
While undoubtedly a speculation with no investment merit at the present time, we feel that this project offers you vast opportunities to share with us in the wealth that will be ours if we succeed. We have on file at our office geological data covering this area."

The advertisement is significant as it proclaims that the reason oil wasn't yet discovered in San Diego is that deeper horizons have not been tested. In addition, they stress the importance of scientific due diligence in locating the well.
As the case in previous oil drilling efforts in San Diego, prominent members of the community were used to entice investors that their money would be safe and profits assured given the reputation of the Company management and leading investors. However, what made the 1930's different than unregulated 1920's were security laws and regulations enacted after the 1929 market crash. It is also worth noting that advertisements promoting the company were very clear that the business at hand was for the legitimate exploration for oil and gas and there was no connection to land schemes that had been common in the past. Overlook Heights was still in the minds of leery San Diegans. While the laws regarding securities laws and use of company stock were strictly followed the details regarding risk of the venture were understated.
The "Spud Party" marking the beginning of drilling operations was a heavily promoted and popular event. The day that drilling operation were to begin the Company invited all of the surrounding community of South San Diego and National city to come out to the rig site for a "Spud Party". The motion picture

actress Minna Gombell was scheduled to break the bottle of champagne on the drill bit before it started its journey to those riches below.

Figure 26: March 9, 1934, advertisement in the San Diego Sun inviting San Diegan's to come out and witness the commencement of drilling operations at the newly constructed modern rotary drilling rig. The ad has a Warning, "the unconvinced potential investors should witness the heroic efforts being made by you own neighbors to drill an oilwell in San Diego the RIGHT way.

From pictures and informal reports, it appears the “Spud Party” was a great success as many folks from around the county came out to see the operation.

Figure 27: “Spud Party” March 11 1934 at the Holderness Ranch in the South Bay. Picture of the rig (left) and the mud pumps (right) that are a key component of rotary drill method. Pictures courtesy of the South Bay Historical Society
http://sunnycv.com/history/exhibits/trv.html

The start of an oil exploration well in San Diego always came with optimism and a giddy sense that everyone was going to get rich. In spite of all previous failures this deepest test, and as it turned out, last-best effort, started out with that same level of hype and excitement. Perhaps the mood was driven by anticipation San Diego could finally out-do Los Angles with brining in a big well in a place everyone had written off.
Drilling of the well began in March 1934 and quickly surpassed earlier wells drilled with cable-tool, reaching 400 feet within a month. By April, oil was first reported at 2,000 feet, sparking community excitement and media ads promoting

investment. However, the City Council denied the company's request to lease more land for drilling, citing concerns about competition and fairness; Hamilton claimed the denial stemmed from his proposal that the City Council take a pay cut. By December of 1934 conflicts with the city and technical issues slowed early drilling progress, leading to reduced enthusiasm within the community of potential investors, prompting more advertisements in newspapers and more ads with exclamation marks and bold print of oil riches to come. While gas and oil discoveries were heavily promoted as a "sure thing," public skepticism remained,

Figure 28: As costs rose and indications of oil or gas seemed to dim advertisements like that shown from a December 19th, 1934, issue of the San Diego Sun began to appear reminding investors and the population at hand that the "San Diego Gas and Petroleum Corporation was a legitimate sponsored by San Diego business and professional men of recognized integrity".

possibly explaining the need for the reassuring “Don’t Be Afraid” ad before testing the well.

A curious story about this well was the gap between technical analysis and public statements from company leaders. While geologists carefully collected core samples from intervals reported in the news as containing oil and gas, these samples showed no evidence of hydrocarbons, contradicting the claims and revealing a complete absence of such indicators.

Project costs rose as preparations were made to test the well's claims of producing 1,500 to 15,000 barrels of oil per day. To cover these expenses, the company issued additional stock, which raised concerns among investors about potential problems ahead.

In March 1935, a year after drilling operations started, the well was tested but yielded only water, mud and possibly some air—no gas or oil. Although local newspapers reported this result, the company's sales manager encouraged coverage

BLACK GOLD?

Soon, Perhaps, But Now Hot Air, Mud, Water, Down 6333 Feet

Where there's smoke, there's fire, and where there's "gas pressure" there's oil—maybe!

But Down at the San Diego Gas & Petroleum Co. well in the Tijuana River Valley, they are optimistic. Not, however, quite as optimistic as were the rumors, circulated widely here yesterday, that the well had "come in."

Some said a 1000-barrel well had come in. Others boosted the figure to 1500 barrels. And others were talking up in five figures—15,000 barrels!

Company officials, however, were quoted yesterday as saying only water and mud were being forced to the surface by a "gas pressure"—this at the

(Continued on Page 8)

BLACK GOLD

(Continued from page 1)

rate of 1200 barrels a day!

And there's a difference between mud and water and—oil.

However, H. W. Trowbridge, sales manager for the company, is reported to have made the statement Wednesday that the flow of oil "could be expected within 24 hours."

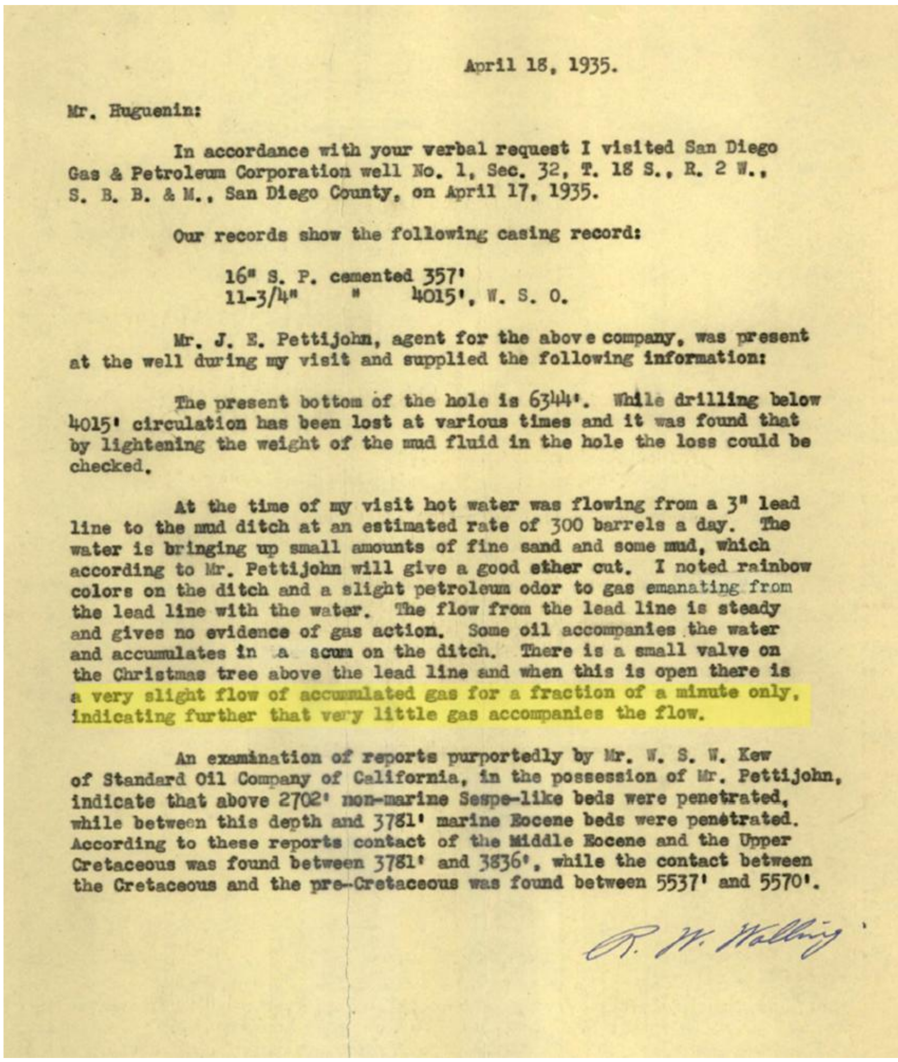
Now calling a hand, especially on an oil well, is a hard job, and as the 24-hour period expired yesterday, the officials of the company were forced to delay their prediction a little.

But where there's smoke, there's fire, and where there's gas, water and mud, the chances are there's oil, geologists say, and things look bright in the Valley of the Tijuana where, perhaps, "thar's black gold beneath them thar sands."

Figure 29: From March 22, 1935, edition of the Chula Vista Star reporting that not much has come from the well other than water, mud and hot air. Meanwhile the official position of the company was that the well revealed oil potential with additional scrutiny of results was warranted.

As it turns out the headline about, “hot air, mud and water” was more correct than the claims by the company.

Given all the uncertainty on what the well test actually revealed required the consultation of a Petroleum Engineer Robert Walling to visit the well and report on his observation. The report on April 18th, 1935, was damming as it clearly stated that there was no reasonable expectation that oil or gas in paying quantities could be expected.



April 18, 1935.

Mr. Huguenin:

In accordance with your verbal request I visited San Diego Gas & Petroleum Corporation well No. 1, Sec. 32, T. 18 S., R. 2 W., S. B. B. & M., San Diego County, on April 17, 1935.

Our records show the following casing record:

16" S. P. cemented 357'
11-3/4" " 4015', W. S. O.

Mr. J. E. Pettijohn, agent for the above company, was present at the well during my visit and supplied the following information:

The present bottom of the hole is 6344'. While drilling below 4015' circulation has been lost at various times and it was found that by lightening the weight of the mud fluid in the hole the loss could be checked.

At the time of my visit hot water was flowing from a 3" lead line to the mud ditch at an estimated rate of 300 barrels a day. The water is bringing up small amounts of fine sand and some mud, which according to Mr. Pettijohn will give a good ether cut. I noted rainbow colors on the ditch and a slight petroleum odor to gas emanating from the lead line with the water. The flow from the lead line is steady and gives no evidence of gas action. Some oil accompanies the water and accumulates in a scum on the ditch. There is a small valve on the Christmas tree above the lead line and when this is open there is a very slight flow of accumulated gas for a fraction of a minute only, indicating further that very little gas accompanies the flow.

An examination of reports purportedly by Mr. W. S. W. Kew of Standard Oil Company of California, in the possession of Mr. Pettijohn, indicate that above 2702' non-marine Sespe-like beds were penetrated, while between this depth and 3781' marine Eocene beds were penetrated. According to these reports contact of the Middle Eocene and the Upper Cretaceous was found between 3781' and 3836', while the contact between the Cretaceous and the pre-Cretaceous was found between 5537' and 5570'.

R. W. Walling

Figure 30: Note from Petroleum Engineer Robert Walling who witnessed the test and observed very little in gas and only traces of oil were being produced from the 300 barrels per day of water coming from the well. However, he also notes, correctly, that the well had revealed important aspects of the geology of the region. In the last paragraph walling reports “Examination of reports purportedly by Mr. W. S. W. Kew of Standard Oil Company of California, in the possession of Mr. Pettijohn, indicate that above 2702 non-marine Sespe-like beds were penetrated, while between this depth and 3781 marine Eocene beds were penetrated. According

to these reports contact of the Middle Eocene and the Upper Cretaceous was found between 3781 and 3836, while the contact between the Cretaceous and the pre-Cretaceous was found between 5537' and 5570'". This is the first subsurface documentation of important part od the stratigraphy of San Diego. One was left to wonder why a Geologist from Satnard Oil was involved with the well. Perhaps there may have been interest by the major oil companies on what was occurring on one of the deepest well every to be drill in San Diego County.

The Aftermath

A re-examination of the well revealed that there was a fault which was responsible for the failure of the well. In April 1936 Plans were made to use the existing well location and re-direct a new well to a position more favorable to encounter oil and gas. The recommendation was based on what at the time was new, geophysical and geological analyses. However, although here was promotion for this new follow-up exploration well to the previous failure there is no record that the proposed "Crofton #1" was ever drilled. Not until the1951 was an effort made to contact the original owners of the well, White and Hamiliton and other members of the San Diego Gas and Petroleum Company, to correctly abandon the well and remove remining equipment.

As for the founders of the well they seem to have had different paths. By 1939, Francis White retired at age 65, while his wife Jessie continued working as a nurse in his former office. Francis died at 77 in 1951. It is unclear what happened to Jessie or their son Oscar afterward, including whether Jessie remained in East County or moved elsewhere. Prior to the passing of Francis the couple's financial situation had changed, as they no longer employed live-in help and occupied a modest rented home.

After the fiasco of the Holderness well Robert Hamilton doesn't appear on any record as being an investor in another oil venture. He continued work as a lawyer and his practice included the hire of his nephew. Robert retired in San Diego in 1944 and died at age 77 in 1956. He spent his last years living in the Mission Hills area of San Diego with his wife Claire.

The aftermath of this well is consistent with many others, having resulted in what can be assumed as significant financial and reputational harm to the founders. While optimism can be valuable, leveraging it to justify imprudent business decisions leads to long-term consequences. Although San Diego was a rapidly expanding metropolis during the 1930s and 1940s, it remained, in many ways, a "small town," where unfulfilled promises by the promoters of these adventures could yield lasting consequences.

The scientific legacy of the well is somewhat positive. While no oil or gas was discovered, the geological data gathered contributed to a better understanding of the subsurface geology of San Diego. The well provided valuable records on the thickness and lithology of important stratigraphic sections and the geologic structure of South Bay.

Figure 31: The rig that drilled Holderness Well #1 two years after the first well was deemed uneconomic. All activity on the well was halted in January of 1938. The rig and drilling equipment was removed but there is no record the well was correctly plugged and to this day and remains an “orphaned well”

Looking for Water with Oil Wells: The Unusual Exploration Practices of Grober Associates and Harold Cross’ VOD Oil Company

From December 1952 until May 1954 there were six oil and gas exploration wells drilled in the North County communities of Oceanside, Vista and Carlsbad. Six wells were drilled by two Joint Venture Partners with private money. And what is strange is that although the wells were permitted for oil exploration they were all very shallow, less than 2000', and all of them were either converted to water wells, or if no water was discovered, plugged and abandoned.

Two joint ventures were responsible for raising the funds from private sources and for the drilling operation. They were Grober and Associates and the other managed by the lawyer Harold Cross called the VOD Oil Company. Both ventures did not include much in the way of subsurface oil and gas technical personnel relying instead on the experience of the managing partners based on their experience in the oil fields in Los Angles or the experience with water wells in Tulare.

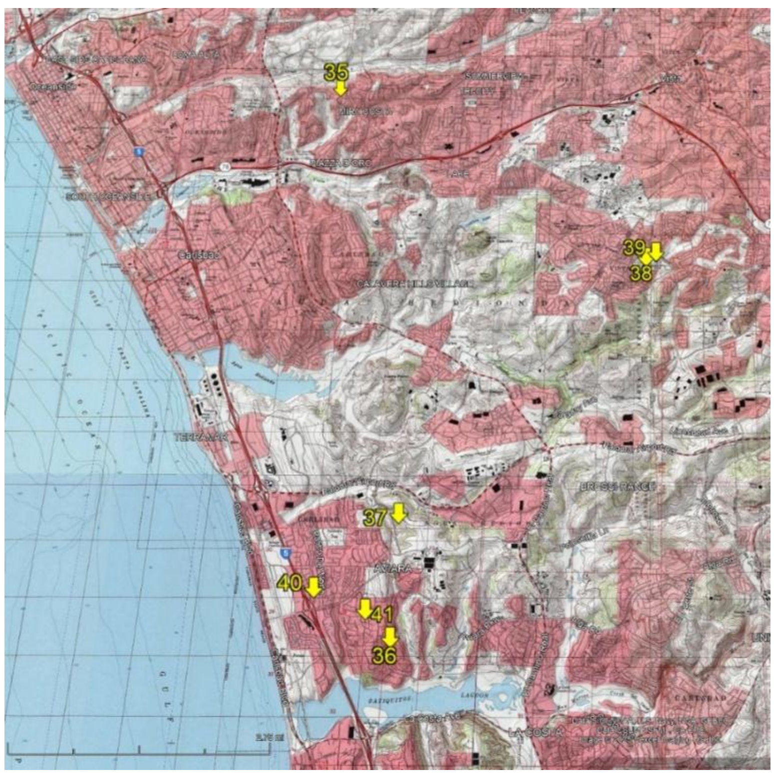


Figure 32: Location of well drilled by Grober associates and Harlod Cross.
Grober and Associates wells 35, 36 and 37 Harlod Cross wells 38,39,40 and 41.
The wells were drilled from 1952 to 1955, when Carlsbad and nearby areas relied on agriculture and faced rising water demand due to rapid growth. A drought in 1951–1952 raised doubts about the Water District's capacity to provide enough Colorado River water to the region.

Grober and Associates

Grober and Associates was a Private Joint Venture established by George Albert Grober in late 1940's to drill shallow oil exploration wells in the North County. He was also responsible for a number of exploration wells in Riverside County. His track record seems to be pretty poor with regard to oil discoveries, but he excelled at finding fresh water.

George Grober was elected to the First City Council in Carlsbad in July 1952. However, his background, much like that of many early twentieth-century oil pioneers, followed a long and complex path.

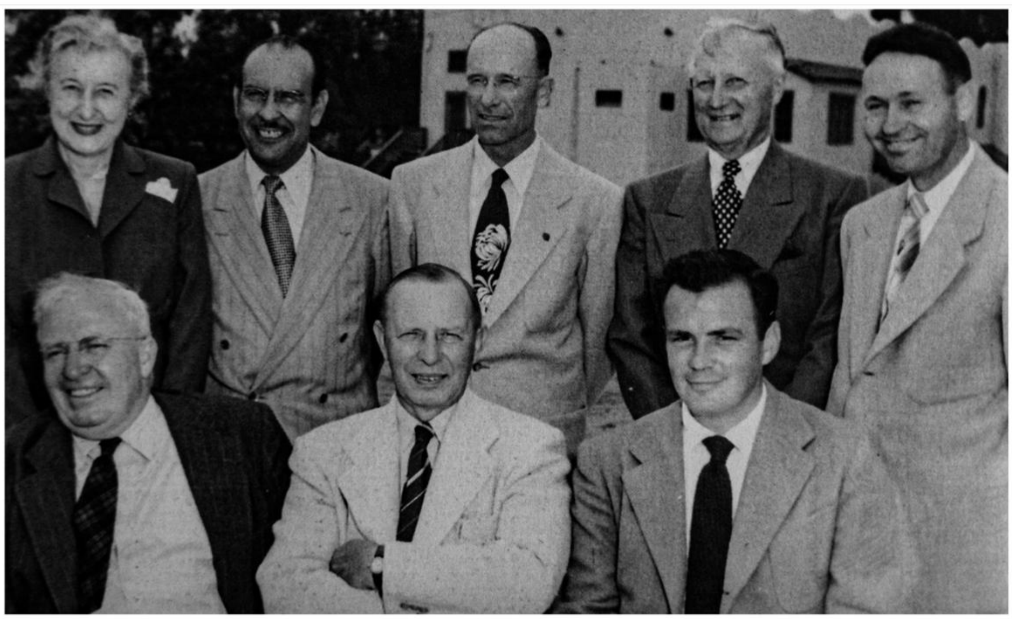


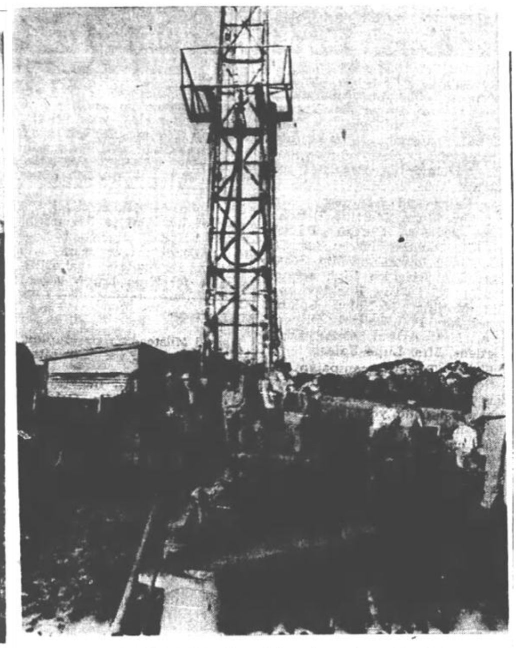
Figure 33: The first City Officials of new city of Carlsbad, both elected and appointed on July 19, 1952. First row left to right; City Treasurer W. Roy Pace, City Clerk Cornel Edward Hagen and City Attorney T. Bruce Smith. Back row; Council Members Lena Sutton and Manuel Castorena; Mayor C.D. "Dewey" McClellan; and Council Members George Grober, and Ray Ede who became Carlsbad's second Mayor.

George was born in 1886 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, one of eight children of Gustov and Elizabeth Grober, who worked as farm laborers. In his twenties, he moved to Santa Barbara and worked in agriculture, eventually becoming a farm owner in Riverside. He married Ida May Funk in 1911; they had no children. During Los Angeles's real estate boom, George became a real estate agent in Covina. Drawing on his experience from the oil boom and real estate in Los

Angles, he later moved to Carlsbad, where he sold real estate and promoted oil ventures to private investors.

George started drilling the Perry #1 well on the Ponto Structure (see #36, Figure 32) in December 1952.

DRILLING FOR OIL—The derrick is up and drilling was about to start on the property of Herb Estes and Bill H. Perry at Ponto when this picture was taken. Some of the men are partly hidden from the camera but they are, from left, Mr. Estes, Mr. Perry, George A. Grober who is in charge of the drilling project, Mr. Baumgardner, Joe Gramek, A. M. Dunn and Dr. Roy D. Brokenshire.—Coast Dispatch photo



PIPE AND MORE PIPE—No telling how deep they'll have to drill, but to the layman it looks as though George Grober is well stocked with pipe for the oil drilling just started on Ponto property owned by Will Perry and Herbert Estes.—Coast Dispatch photo

Figure 34 shows acreage owners Herb Estes and Bill Perry, JV Manager George Grober, and his partners Mr. Baumgartner, Joe Gramek, A.M. Dunn, and Dr. Roy D. Brookshire at the start of drilling operations at the Perry #1 well (labeled #35 in Figure 32). The right panel displays a small rotary rig, typically used for water wells, which strangely was employed here for oil exploration. After completion, landowner Bill Perry converted the well to a water well instead of abandoning it.

Of the four wells drilled by Grober and Associates all were found to contain no evidence of any oil or gas. However, of the four three found significant flows of fresh water from shallow zones (less than 500 feet depth) and were kept as water wells. After the drilling operations, George Grober remained in Carlsbad. He resigned from the City Council in 1953 and retired in the early 1950s, staying in Carlsbad until his death in July 1964 at age 77.

Although the joint venture did not find oil or gas the information provided about shallow water zones helped future decisions on where to position additional water wells. This was especially valuable when Carlsbad faced concerns about limited imported water for its growing urban and agricultural needs. Water discoveries benefited local farms like Heine (now Herman's Farm) in Encinitas, as well as Perry and Estes Farms in Carlsbad. These farms, reliant on crops from the 1940s to 1960s, shifted toward urban development by the 1960s and 1970s.

Harold Cross: A Lawyer leads the last round of Oil Exploration in San Diego

In 1950 Harold Cross, a lawyer residing in Oceanside, incorporated the VOD Oil Company with the stated objective of drilling four oil and gas exploration wells in the areas now known as La Costa, Carlsbad, and Vista. According to available records, the partnership primarily included landowners on whose properties the wells were planned, such as the Eckes family, Eckes sister-in-law Dr. Esther Maurer, the Estes family, the Dawsons, and the lawyer himself, Harold Cross. The background of all these families is somewhat known from the history of the various areas. Specifically, the land owned at the time by the Eckes and Dawson's known in part as Rancho Agua Hedonia, a holding that went back to the times of the Spanish. That being said it is somewhat worthwhile to outline a bit about the organizer and leadership of the group.

Harold Cross was born in 1902 in Tulare County California to Emmanuel, a day laborer, and Madge Cross and had an older brother Edmond two years his senior. After graduating from Tulare High School in 1920 he attended University of Southern

Figure 35: Harold Cross at University of Southern California Law School graduation 1923.

California eventually earned a law degree in 1923. After passing the bar he returned to Tulare in 1926 where he was appointed as a magistrate. Marrying Mary Catherine Usher in 1927 he continued living in Tulare until 1942 when and his wife and son Harold Cross Junior moved to Oceanside where he practiced law until his retirement. He passed away at the age of 80 in January 1983

The results of drilling by the VOD Oil Company were very similar to that experienced by Grober and Associates; of the four wells drilled by the VOD Company only two encountered significant flows of fresh water. Two of the wells drilled to less than 200 feet, delivered insignificant data useful for oil exploration but were evidently seeking information of the shallow water zones.

Grober and Associates and VOD Oil Company: Clever Tax Dodge Scheme in the 1950's

The exploration for productive freshwater zones is just as risky in many ways as the drilling for oil. A big difference however is offsetting losses. If oil exploration proved dry (unsuccessful), the costs of drilling could be deducted from all other sources of income, reducing taxes for the backers of the well. This effectively minimized the financial risk associated with exploration and drilling. In contrast no such benefit is given to unsuccessful water drilling or water well exploration.

Based on the available data regarding the depths of the wells drilled, the limited information about oil and gas, and the practice of converting wells that yielded fresh water into water wells after classifying them as unsuccessful for oil or gas, the following can be inferred.

In the 1950s, high marginal tax rates led individuals to classify water wells as oil exploration to claim tax deductions for failed drilling attempts. By labeling all wells as "dry holes," they could deduct losses from other income, regardless of whether the wells were intended for water or oil. Very clever, you drill for water, but classify the well as oil exploration, and regardless of what is found as long as it isn't oil or gas, all costs are deductible against any other source of income. In short, a money-making machine!

So, in North County we come full circle from the strange case of George McGregor who relentlessly clinged to the hope of oil in his water wells to that of Grober and Cross who figured out a way to get at MacGregors water by drilling oil wells. Go figure!

Summary

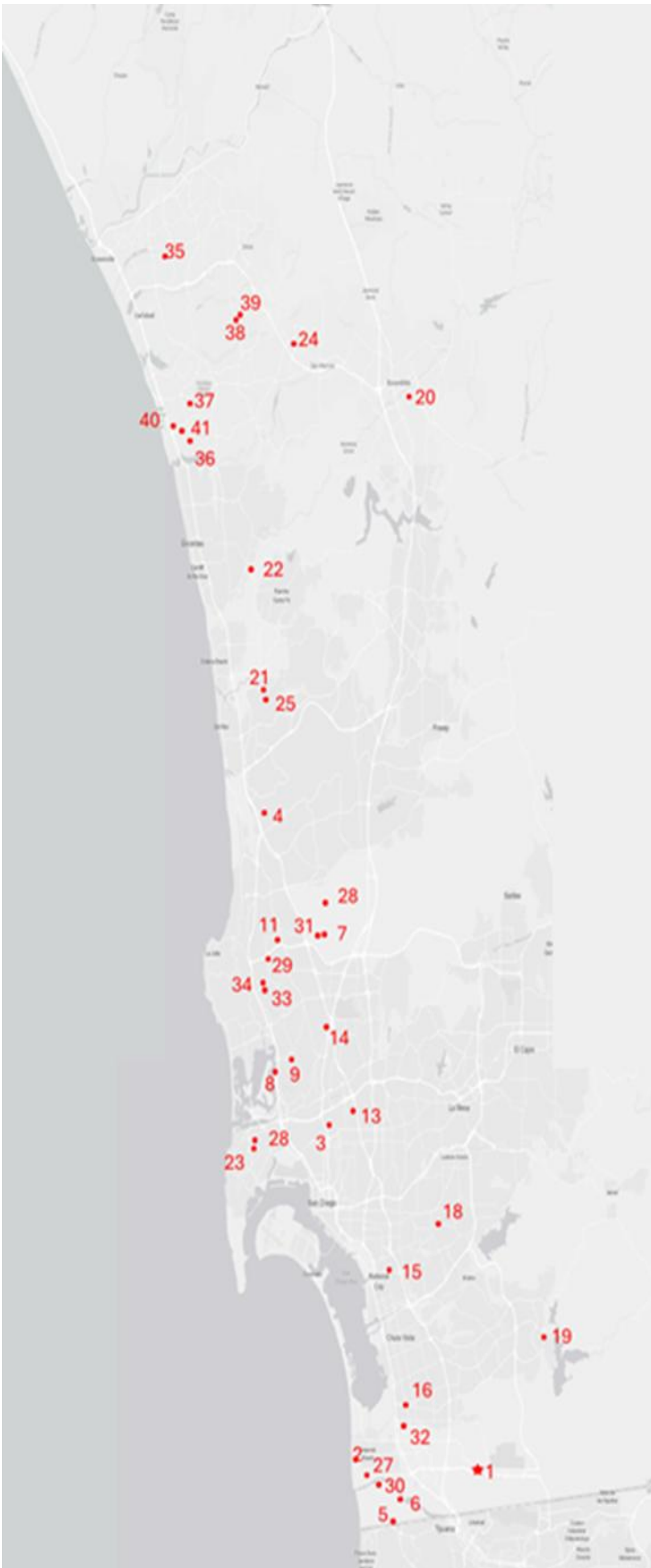
The story of oil and gas exploration in San Diego County between 1910 and 1953 is one of unfulfilled promise, yet it left an enduring legacy. The efforts of prospectors and companies during this period contributed to a broader understanding of the county's geology, aiding future scientific and environmental studies. Additionally, the exploration wells—though largely non-productive—highlighted the importance of technological innovation and detailed geological surveys in resource extraction.

Today, remnants of this era can be found in historical records, old drilling sites, and the occasional anecdote from local historians. While oil and gas did not shape San Diego's destiny, the ambition and determination of those early explorers remain a testament to the human spirit's unyielding quest for discovery.

Conclusion

The narrative of oil and gas exploration well drilling in San Diego County and City from 1910 to 1953 is a fascinating chapter of ambition, trial, and adaptation. Though ultimately unsuccessful in establishing the region as a petroleum powerhouse, these efforts played a role in shaping San Diego's historical identity. What transpired during those decades serves as a reminder that exploration—whether for oil, knowledge, or opportunity—is as much about the journey as it is about the destination.

Plate 1: Location, name and active date of all 41 oil and gas exploration wells in the state of California data base. The seven projects discussed are highlighted



Reference on Map	Well Name in State Records	Active Date
1	Otay Oil Co. #1	6/22/1910
2	Le Tengo Oil Co. #1	6/1/1911
3	Balboa 1	8/1/1911
4	Mac Neece #1	12/19/1911
5	Community Oil Scott #1	1/1/1916
6	Community Oil Well #2	12/15/1919
7	Linda Vista Oil Corp	4/3/1920
8	Community Oil Well 4	5/22/1920
9	Community Oil Well 5	6/20/1920
10	Oceansie Oil and Gas Syndicate	8/16/1920
11	Tecalote Dome Oil Company	7/9/1920
12	La Costa Oil Co. Well #1	11/13/1920
13	A.S. Bridges #1	3/7/1921
14	Associated Oil Syndicate 1	5/6/1922
15	W.P. Hanson 1	4/25/1922
16	Willamsevens #1 AKA National City Oil Co :	4/14/1924
17	C R Schuster 1 AKA Ganymeade #1	7/5/1924
18	L. Overbaugh and Rufus Choate #1	10/2/1924
19	Todd and Clark 1	12/13/1924
20	Turner #1	7/29/1926
21	Butler #1	9/13/1926
22	Stanley S. Turner #1	11/3/1927
23	Mission Bay Oil Co. #1	3/26/1923
24	Davenport Oil and Gas Development Co.W	11/18/1927
25	Butler #1-A	5/26/1929
26	Point Loma #1	4/30/1930
27	Grofton #1	4/13/1931
28	Mack 1	3/4/1932
29	Edmonds #1	6/14/1935
30	San Diego Gas and Petroleum Co. #1	3/9/1934
31	San Diego Dome Drilling Fund	9/11/1934
32	Palm City Oil #1	10/24/1938
33	Capital 1	9/12/1939
34	La Jolla #1	8/21/1944
35	Henie #1	1/23/1947
36	Perry #1	12/8/1952
37	Estes #1	2/16/1953
38	VOD Dawson #2	7/15/1955
39	VOD Dawson #1	7/7/1953
40	Estes-Cross #1	10/20/1953
41	Cross-Estes #1 (Ponto Area)	1/6/1954

Reference on Map	Selected Projects Discussed
1	Otay Oil
5,6,8 and 9	Community Oil (Mayor Wilde)
11	Tecalote Dome
21 and 25	MacGregor Group
30	San Diego Gas and Petroleum Co. #1 Holderness Well
33	Capital 1
35 to 41	Oil Wells Drilled for Water