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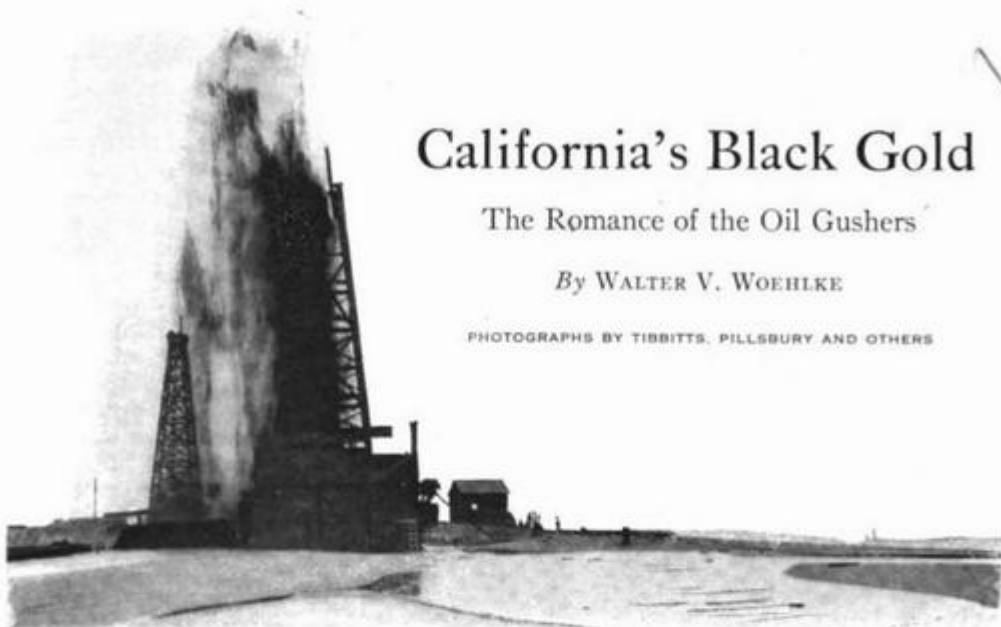
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# California's Black Gold

The Romance of the Oil Gushers

By WALTER V. WOHLKE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TIBBITTS, PILLSBURY AND OTHERS



ON THE morning of March 15th Parker Barrett and Jim Dunn felt blue and forlorn. For a week they had been trying to raise some cash by selling an interest they owned in a deep hole in the ground—a hole which had been swallowing money daily for nearly a year and a half, but no one would bite. They came down as low as fifteen hundred dollars for their interest in the hole and still prospective buyers crossed over to the other side of the streak of dust called a street when Dunn and Barrett laid a course for them. Disappointed in their fond hopes of finding a victim, the two discouraged partners on the morning of March 15th were hunting a job instead of chasing the elusive buyer. They were builders of rigs, of the tall tapering scaffold that rises above the surface of ground suspected of containing oil. Sad and disheartened, on that bright, warm March morning, they cast aside all dreams of fifteen hundred round, hard dollars—a small fortune in their eyes—and prepared once more to buck the sagebrush, to acquire a few more calluses on the palms of their hands, to irrigate a few more patches of

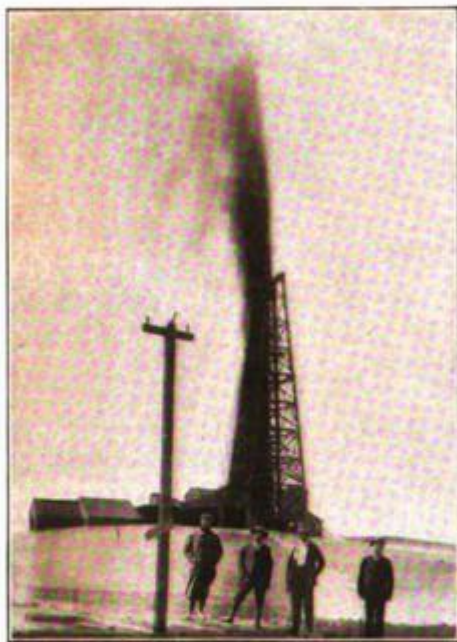
greasewood with the sweat of their brow, in order to pay the butcher, the grocer and the landlord.

On the evening of the same day Barrett and Dunn were walking on air, gliding over the surface of the arid slopes without feeling the ground, shaking hands all around, setting 'em up to squads of fifty at a time, scanning automobile catalogues, looking over diamond price-lists, consulting the time-tables of the transcontinental lines and smiling, smiling, smiling with an irrepressible joy that fought for expression without finding an adequate vent. To-day, four months after the memorable event that blew the partners high up on the ladder of fortune, Dunn owns two motor-cars, and his helpmate, as a reward for the seven lean years, may, with the aid of a maid, adorn her comely person with several thousand dollars' worth of diamonds every morning before breakfast; Parker Barrett, however, the older and more stable of the partners, was satisfied with one seven-passenger touring-car and a trip East for his family.

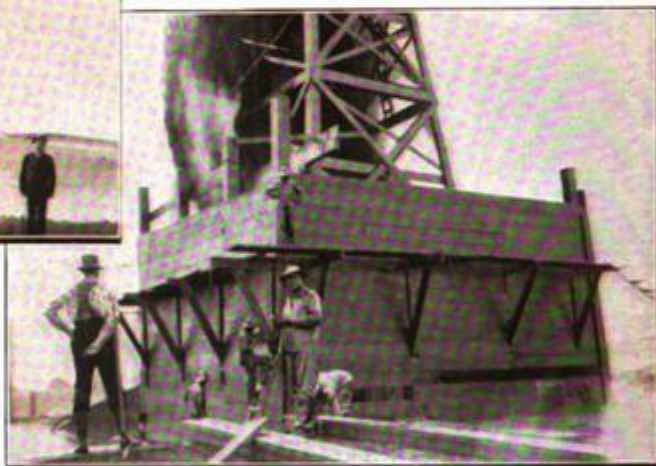
Between the morning and evening of March 15th the forces hidden far from human eyes half a mile below the sagebrush slope of the Coast Range, in the extreme southwest corner of the San Joaquin valley,



found a vent through the deep iron-bound hole containing the hopes of the two partners and, on the top of a jet-black fountain spouting two hundred feet into the air, the forces sent out a steady stream of potential automobiles, gold pieces and banknotes, of jewelry and precious stones, of power, reputation and esteem—a stream of all the good, bad and foolish things that men strive



The Lakeview gusher, one week old. In front of it are, from left to right, F. F. Hill, field manager of the Union Oil Company, J. M. Dunn and Parker Barrett, the locators of the gusher ground, and A. E. Hodgkinson, part owner by purchase. The lower photograph shows the base of the gusher with its oil-spattered attendants



and toil for. All over the slope the gigantic fountain sent a shower of oily spray, spread a coat of black over gray sagebrush and brown, dry ground. Wherever the spray fell, and for miles beyond, the value of the land leaped joyfully into the blue sky, jumped and bounded up and up as the Lakeview gusher kept on playing day after day, week after week, month after month, the greatest, most consistent and continuous producer of liquid black gold ever struck in any oil field in the world—a geyser of oil that made scores of poor men rich and

added millions to the wealth of men of means.

The story of this wonderful gusher, the sight of which, as the barker at the door of the side-show says, "is alone worth the price of admission," is the story of the California oil industry. Into the making of this gusher entered all the elements that were woven into the epic of the Forty-niners, the romance of oil differing from the golden ballad of the Argonauts only in its accentuation of the tragic. When the great fountain of oil had entered upon its third day, H. A. Blodgett of Bakersfield, a man who for twenty years had been exploring and drilling in the vicinity of the gusher, who with the grit of a bulldog had endured disappointment and failure, who had worked with an indomitable faith for two decades and longer only to see his holdings slip out of his fingers after the grim, hard soil of the naked hills had swallowed his money—this man, grown gray in the struggle with the forbidding slopes, gazed upon the titanic geyser with tears running down his cheeks, realizing

that a little more experience, a little more luck might have put the gusher or the rich land adjoining it into his hands ten years ago, saving him a decade of heart-breaking effort and toil. However, the struggle of this and other pioneers with the desert was not futile; it helped to open up one of the richest oil fields in the world, to increase the wealth of the Golden West by many millions, to lay the foundations for a great industrial structure and, as a concrete reward, the well-fought battle will bring the pioneer a fair measure of the

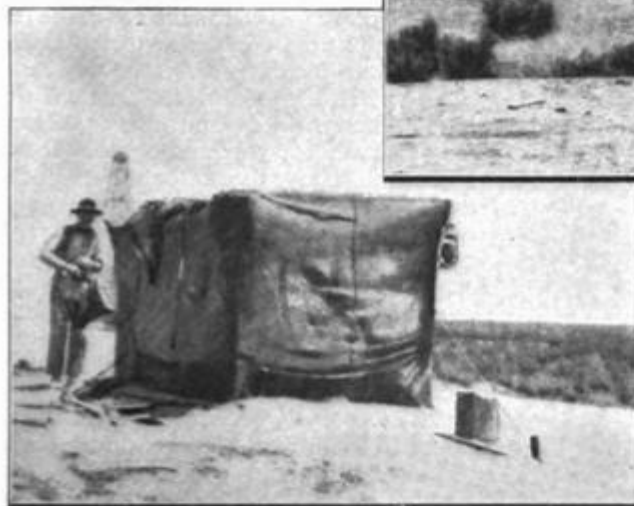
riches eaten by moth and rust, through his valuable holdings in the new oil region to the north of the gusher.

'Way back in 1900, during the first oil excitement in the San Joaquin valley, prospectors overran the blazing hills and burning slopes forty-five miles to the west of Bakersfield. Hundreds of square miles of land were located, scores of rigs went up, the heavy material being hauled by team across the scarcely visible trails that served as roads. The pounding of ax and hammer, the screech of the saw and the clang of metal against metal drove out the long-eared jack-rabbits and lazy rattlers. Hole after hole went down, greedily sucking down the dollars of the locators and their friends, but

Bakersfield suffered severely when the price of crude oil, in 1902, dropped as far down as ten cents a barrel and refused to move up again except at a snail's pace. With oil at that unremunerative price, capital stuck like glue to its owners and declined all invitations to bury itself in the sagebrush. Thousands of claims located two years previous were allowed to return to the



Two lots on the main business street of Maricopa, one of the new oil towns in the sagebrush of the San Joaquin valley's western rim. These last made the owner a profit of \$800 in three months



Shelter of sentinels guarding land worth \$1,000 an acre against claim-jumpers

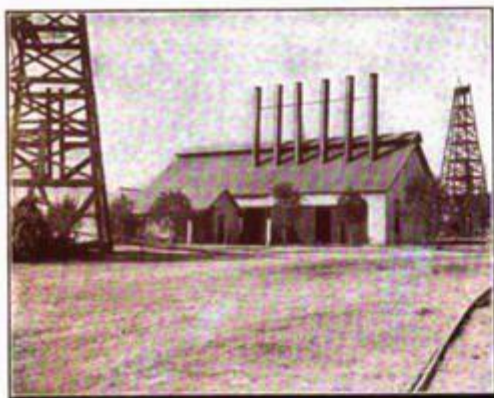
refusing to return the capital with interest. The very tract which to-day is spouting oil to the value of \$25,000 a day was located by the four McCutchen brothers—poor farmers—and a well was put down at a cost of approximately \$10,000; but when the drill had reached a depth of seven hundred feet the money gave out, likewise the hope of ever striking the pay sand, and the well, together with the money in it, was abandoned.

In common with all the other California oil fields, the new territory to the west of

public domain, though here and there a group of true believers clung to its favorite land year after year, doing assessment work and scanning the boundless horizon for a sign of the dove carrying higher prices in its beak. Early in the spring of 1908, when the price of oil was looking up again, a fresh

crop of location notices sprang up on the landscape like weeds after the winter rains. Among those who gave paper hostages to fortune were Dunn and Barrett, rig builders, poor men who followed the example of all their friends and took up a large number of claims, putting up the notices as close to the few producing wells as possible. Around Maricopa and throughout the Sunset field the gaunt, black skeletons of the derricks above the producing wells clung close to the broken country in the foothills, valiantly hanging to the rugged





A pumping station in an established field

sides and brows of the heights. The hills and cañons were then considered the only promising territory. The gentle, gradual slope leading to the valley's broad floor was thought to be barren, dry territory. Had not this ground been proved worthless by the dry 700-foot well on fractional section 25, so worthless that M. C. Platz, the city attorney of Bakersfield, was able to buy the land upon which the dry well had been drilled at a sheriff's sale for five dollars, allowing his chance five-dollar investment to go to waste?

Just as a flyer, Barrett and Dunn stuck up their location notices on the ground abandoned years ago by the McCutchen brothers and began to do a little assessment work in their spare hours. One day a stranger from the Coalinga oil field, Julius Fried, drifted in, looked over the ground, considered the indications worth while and joined the locators.

Fried was the man with the money—the angel with the needed supply of manna. Locating a claim in the arid sagebrush plain is no child's play; but compared with the effort required to locate the cash for its development it is a soft snap, a task no harder than lying in a shady hammock with the lemonade within reach of the right hand. Fried could supply the sinews of war, having gathered them in the Coalinga oil field during an up-and-down career of eight years. He had entered the oil business through the doors of the San Francisco stock exchange in 1900, leaving railroad employment to invest his savings in petroleum shares during the first boom, with such success that he opened a brokerage office

which left him as bare as a burnt-over hillside when the bubble burst. Nevertheless he stuck to the business and won out, and the same determination that induced him to stay in the oil business after the bottom had dropped out of it, helped him to become the father of the Lakeview gusher.

For a one-sixth share of the expected production, the locators, Barrett, Dunn and Fried, leased the land to the Lakeview Oil Company, organized by Fried with a capital of \$100,000, the shares selling for 50 cents. Fried received 10,000 shares; like amounts were taken by G. S. Seifert of Los Angeles, the president of a trucking company, and F. P. Wells, the "oar king" of Buffalo, who was induced by Fried to help paddle the canoe of the newly organized concern. Banker Wickersham of Arizona subscribed for five thousand shares and the Santa Maria Crude Oil Company, having no more use for its machinery in the Santa Maria field, where it had failed to strike the pay sand, sold its equipment to the Lakeview concern for thirty thousand shares.

In the fall of 1908 Fried staked out the site for the new well and drilling began. It continued for a year and a half. It ate all the cash received from the sale of stock; it ate the proceeds of four assessments and called for more; it ate a hole into Fried's bank account when he had to make one loan after another in order to keep the Lakeview drill going, and still it insistently clamored for more cash. The operators and drillers farther up on the hills smiled at the costly efforts of the Lakeview people out "on the flat" and predicted that the Lakeview would find about as much oil as the first drillers did ten years ago. The geologist of one of the largest companies



Loading oil cars at the end of a pipe-line in the Bakersfield country

operating in the field came down from the hill regularly to assure Fried that his well would be a failure, that according to all the rules of geology the herculean efforts would be rewarded by bringing forth a mouse of a flow, until the exasperated operator silenced the man of science by betting him a stack of new hats that the well would come in better than one thousand barrels a day.

The well had gone down three times the depth of the old hole drilled ten years ago, had penetrated the first stratum of oil sand with a flow of only two hundred barrels a day and still the expected wealth was not forthcoming. Unwilling to advance any more of his money to the concern, Fried proposed to the stockholders that the offer of the Union Oil Company, which wanted the land for a pipe-line pumping station and storage tanks, be accepted and that fifty-one per cent of the Lakeview stock be sold to the big corporation. The stockholders, having tasted nothing but assessments, joyfully assented, especially the Santa Maria Crude Oil Company, which parted with twenty-seven thousand of its shares at 50 cents, glad to receive the cash for its second-hand equipment.

With the new capital the well was slowly sent farther down. It passed the two-thousand-foot level, advanced to two thousand one hundred feet, to two thousand two hundred feet, to two thousand two hundred and fifty feet and still no new oil sand was found. A few days before the middle of March an order was sent out from headquarters to stop drilling and to perforate the casing at the first stratum of oil sand, headquarters having given up all hope of finding a better pay streak; but before the



Oil from untroubled waters. Derricks that pump oil from under the sea at Summerland

order was executed the drill had gone sixty feet farther and the oil was shooting three hundred feet over the top of the derrick, carrying with it tools, rig, everything in sight. The Lakeview gusher, the spouter which exceeded in aggregate output, in steadiness and length of production the far-famed gushers of Spindletop hill in Texas, the vast geysers of oil in the Baku field in the Caucasus, the richest strike in the black history of oil, was brought in and the shares of the Lakeview company jumped in value every day it kept on sending forth its stream of wealth.

There have been many gushers that at the start produced more than two and three times the daily output of the Lakeview well, but not one has ever kept up the performance longer than a month. When two months and a half had passed the Lakeview well had produced three and a half million barrels of oil and its flow had increased to sixty thousand barrels a day. Though Dunn and Barrett had a royalty of only one-twenty-fourth of the output, their income from this source alone amounted to four or five hundred dollars a day, while the stockholders who had paid fifty cents saw their stock rise to twenty and thirty dollars a share within three months.

For many days after its birth the gusher threw a column of oil hundreds of feet into the air, drenching the landscape for miles with the spray until its black hand left an indelible mark upon the hill—a mark visible twenty miles away, standing forth like a blot of ink upon the silky sheen of the slope spread like a Persian rug of neutral brown tints at the foot of bare, smooth, blue-white



An oil train in the San Joaquin valley, heading toward the world's market





A productive strip in the Cat Cañon, Santa Maria field

hills. For weeks an army of men toiled to subdue the giant. Covered from head to foot with the black, sticky stuff, standing in a shower of hot oil that caused the skin to blister and peel off wherever it struck, these men attacked the gusher time and again, trying to smother it with caps and rafts weighing many tons, attempting to spread aprons over the fountain, to tie it down with masses of steel, and yet they did not succeed until they smothered it in its own oil.

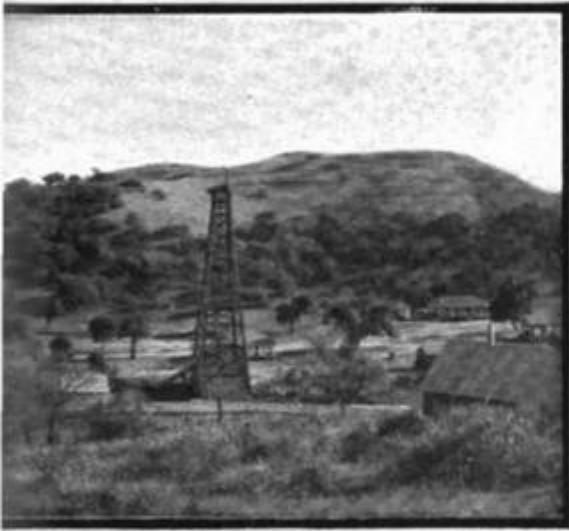
Around the mouth of the well they built a high and wide stockade of alternate rows of brush and sand, slipping, choking, literally bathed in the oil the geyser bombarded them with. Heavy planks on the outside completed the corral. As a roof they constructed an immense raft of timbers sixteen inches square, weighted it down and, at an opportune moment when the geyser was taking breath, threw it over the mouth of the well in the center of the stockade and anchored it with immense chains on the four corners. With a roar the gusher attacked the new obstruction. High up, to the limit of the chains, the jet of oil lifted the roof; but it held, for a while at least, long enough to fill the interior of the stockade with oil and choke the gusher with a lake twenty feet deep. The sixteen-inch timbers were scattered to the four winds a few days later, but the lake effectually

checked the fountain's force, cutting the height of the jet down to twenty or thirty feet and saving almost every barrel of the flow.

The Lakeview gusher and its many smaller sisters and brothers, the Ethel D., the Honolulu, the Santa Fe and the Standard Oil spouters, all brought in during the last year, mark an epoch in the dramatic history of the California oil fields. Had they released their wealth three years earlier,

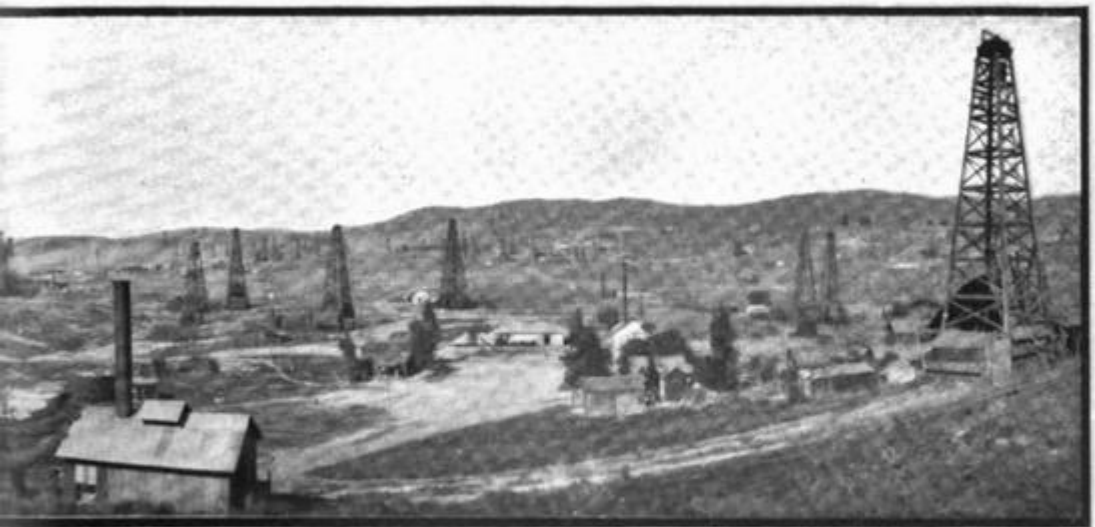






they would have broken the market for fuel oil, discouraged further drilling on new ground and retarded the development of the state's greatest industry. They came at the appointed time, at the psychological moment, at the end of the thirty years' war waged by the pioneers against the forces of hostile, stubborn nature, against prejudice, ignorance and manipulation. The fight for the oil began half a century

ago, while the strings of the mandolin were still vibrating with the last note of the fandango, before the completion of the first transcontinental line. Three years after the discovery of oil in Pennsylvania, the first well in California was dug, not drilled, on the Camulos ranch in Ventura county; but the oil was too heavy and the well was abandoned, though a small-sized oil boom spread over Ventura county and flickered till after Appomattox. Ten years later, in 1875, the Pacific Coast Oil Company, organized by Charles M. Felton and his associates, brought in the first gusher of the state near Newhall—a well drilled by hand with a spring-pole. Into this new field came Lyman Stewart and W. R. Hardison—small operators from the Pennsylvania field who brought with them capital to the extent of about a third of a million. Their first venture, in Pico cañon, did not prove a success; but when they transferred operations to the vicinity of Santa Paula their luck changed and the foundation was laid for the towering structure of the Union Oil Company—a concern with assets and holdings estimated to be worth fifty millions to-day. Lyman Stewart, many times a millionaire, a shrewd, conservative man of business noted for his piety and integrity, is still the active head of the corporation, one of the field marshals in the long fight.

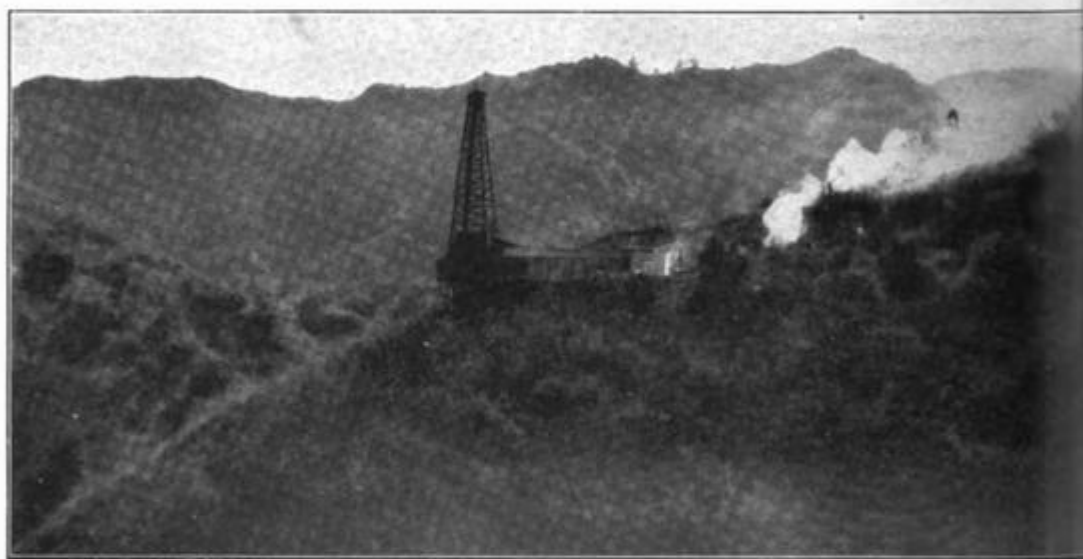


Showing part of the Olinda fields, where millions of gallons have been taken out

By 1883 the production of the wells, small as it was, had exceeded the capacity of the refineries and a new market for the excess had to be found. It occurred to Sutherland Hutton and L. Blankenhorn, Los Angeles oilmen, that the crude oil would make an excellent substitute for coal and, with the help of information from Russia, where the Caucasian crude oil was extensively used as fuel, they set about to construct suitable burners. As the Oil Burning and Supply Company, the two men contracted for the surplus of heavy oil not used in Stewart & Hardison's refineries and set to work introducing the new fuel in Los Angeles.

was too great to be overlooked. Within a few years the demand for fuel oil exceeded the supply to such an extent that Hutton traveled as far as Peru seeking new sources.

He would have done better if he had stayed closer at home and watched the doings of one Edward L. Doheny, a prospector and lawyer who had come to Los Angeles in 1890, bringing from the Arizona desert a rich store of experience, but little cash, a character hardened to the temper and resiliency of fine steel by years of hardship and adversity, a man not afraid, if need be, to take any kind of work that offered, but with his eyes always wide open for an opportunity to find the mother lode.



Oil is struck in all sorts of places: in beautiful wilds like this Wylie cañon, in sagebrush wastes like some of the San Joaquin

If they expected to be received with wide-open arms, they were disappointed. The dealers in coal and wood fought the use of crude oil as fuel with all the means at their command; the engineers, suspicious of the oil, objected vociferously; the insurance companies would take no risks on buildings in which oil was used as fuel; the city council of Los Angeles, afraid of possible explosions, would not grant a franchise for a pipe-line from the concern's yard and storage tank. The oil, however, won the battle as it has won every contest since. With coal bringing fourteen to sixteen dollars a ton and oil two and a half a barrel, four barrels being the equivalent of a ton of coal, the saving

This man, on November 4, 1892, attracted by the oil seepages visible on the surface, began digging a well on a lot right in the city of Los Angeles, wielding pick and shovel hopefully until his efforts were rewarded at a shallow depth by a flow of several barrels of oil daily. After he had struck the oil his troubles had only begun. Though he was able to dispose of a few barrels at a fair price for pipe-dipping purposes, the consumers of fuel oil would not take his product. It was too heavy and would not burn readily. Undismayed, Doheny experimented, discovered a simple method of burning the heavy oil and created a good market for it. Within the year he had

eighty producing wells in leased ground and all about him two thousand more holes were going down in backyards and on acreage. The hard times of 1896 stripped Doheny of the wealth he had acquired, but the setback was only temporary. Within a year he had recovered the lost ground in the new Fullerton district and was extending his operations. To-day the companies controlled by him are producing oil from Coalinga in the San Joaquin valley to the east coast of Mexico. His personal wealth, acquired within eighteen years solely out of California oil, is estimated at twenty-five millions and his career has not yet reached its zenith.

of the brasses and woodwinds as the curtain rose upon the first act, the deep undertone of the bass, the wail of the strings prophesying the impending tragedy that was to follow the joyous, riotous climax.

In 1899 J. M. Ellwood, a farmer wringing a bare living out of a piece of dry land near Bakersfield, endeavored to sell the wood he had cut to Tom Means, a well-to-do rancher north of the town, close to the banks of Kern river. Means did not need wood. Instead, he repeated to Ellwood an advice he had been giving for twenty years, "Go out to the oil seepages along the river, dig a hole and become rich."

The poor dry-land farmer followed the



valley, in the dooryards of Los Angeles bungalows, and under the surf at Summerland. Look out for the next big gusher!

Doheny's Los Angeles strike and the subsequent boom development doubled the oil supply in two years, raised it from three hundred and eighty-five thousand barrels in 1892 to seven hundred and eighty-three thousand barrels in 1894. In 1899 the production had increased to a little more than two million six hundred thousand barrels, bringing the producer a dollar a barrel; but the new industry did not kick off its swaddling-clothes until after it had received its black baptism in the south end of the San Joaquin valley—the greatest oil territory in the country. The development of the southern California fields was but the prelude ending in the jubilant crash

counsel. With pick and shovel he dug a shaft sixty feet deep, struck a small flow of oil, borrowed an old drilling outfit, went deeper and landed in the real oil sand, coming out of the venture with a competence for life. Immediately the oil rush began to the Kern river field—the territory that has made a score and more of millionaires. Two Bakersfield men, for example, J. J. Mack and J. M. Keith, men with some ready cash, bought a section of railroad land for \$2.50 an acre, organized companies that up to this year paid two millions in dividends and then sold their holdings to a British syndicate for a consideration said to exceed five million dollars.



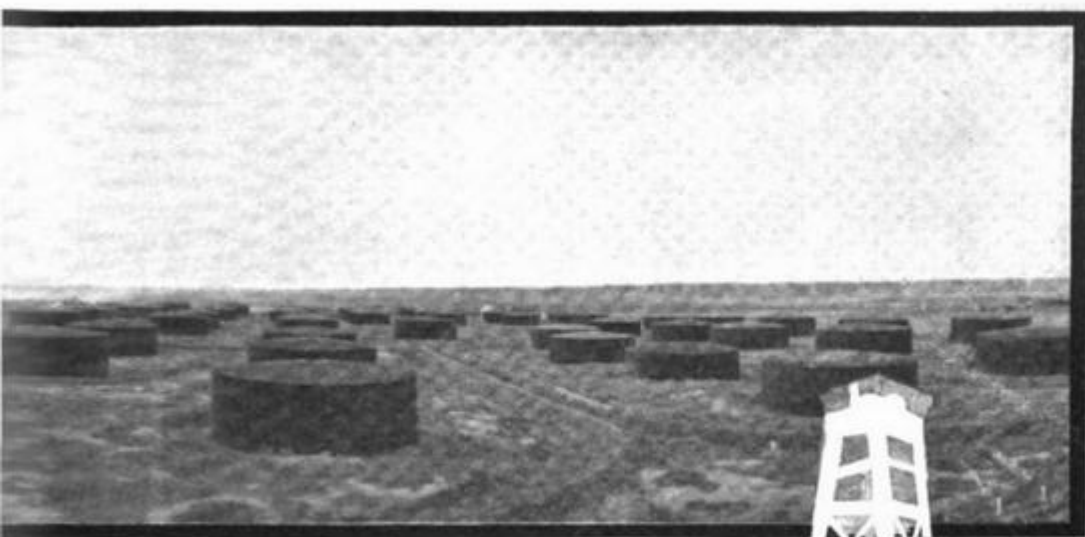
The noise of the multitudes rushing into the Kern river field was still reverberating in the barren hills when C. A. Canfield, a miner and prospector like Doheny, and his young partner, J. A. Chanslor, made a strike forty-five miles to the north, on the opposite side of the valley, alongside of a few shallow shafts repeatedly turned down by oil experts who suspected that the wells had been "salted," filled with oil for their benefit. Canfield did not share this suspicion. With a loan of \$2,500 and borrowed tools he entered upon the venture, bringing in the famous Blue Goose gusher, the very light oil of which brought \$3 a barrel in San Francisco for gas-making purposes. Within a year Canfield and Chanslor had not only repaid the loan but had bought the outsider's interest in the strike for \$110,000, all of it spouted out of the ground by the gusher. Coalinga the mighty sprang into existence. A procession of gaunt, tapering derricks crawled over the waterless, parched land, crawled in an unbroken line for ten miles, greedily sinking its bit into the ground for the black liquid gold hidden far below. Out of a thousand wells the oil began to flow in volumes increasing day by day. In a thousand sluggish streams it began to trickle into sump holes and tanks and through pipes to the railroad line, there to be transmuted into money.



Then the crash came. With Wagnerian suddenness the blare of trumpets and trombones, the piercing notes of the horn, the roar of the kettledrum stopped, the chorus of the promoters left the stage in confusion and only the grieved voice of the cello told the audience of the silent suffering of the oilmen behind the dropping curtain. Like a stone thrown into a well, the price

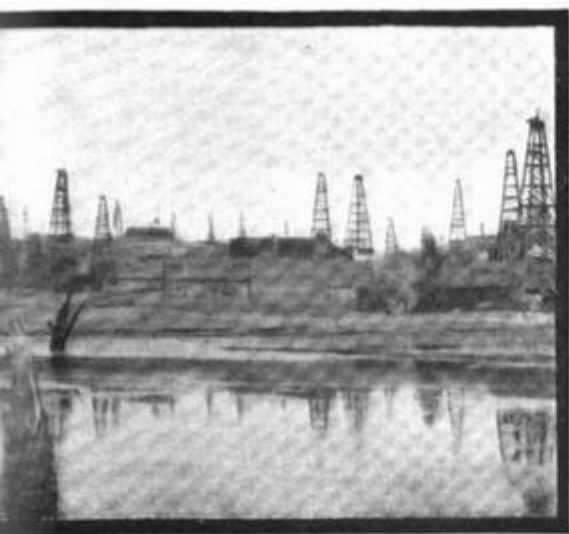


Derricks as thick as trees, reflected in a prismatic colored lake



Tankage of the Standard Oil Company in the Kern country

of oil fell, down and down, until it touched ten cents a barrel. Even the glare of the desert sun shining upon the sagebrush slopes and barren hills could not disperse the gloom; the sight of the flowing wells only enhanced the despair of the men whose dreams of sudden riches had been rudely shattered by the superabundance of wealth yielded forth by the arid land.



From four million barrels in 1900 the production of the California oil fields increased to twenty-four million barrels in 1903. Within three years twenty million barrels were added to the supply per annum; but transportation facilities and the market scarcely doubled in the same period. The inevitable logic of these figures forced the price down until hundreds, thousands of operators gave up the financial ghost. Almost every day during this period of depression funeral processions started out from the forest of derricks to the burying-ground of defunct oil companies in the office of the referee in bankruptcy. Cheap oil stimulated consumption; cheap oil forced the men owning it to seek new and bigger markets, to get rid of it at better prices, and cheap oil taught the well owners that only in union lies sufficient strength to subdue petroleum.

Up to 1900 the use of crude petroleum as fuel in California had been limited because the supply was limited. The railroads were burning oil, but only locally and mostly on engines pulling passenger trains; the burners were crude and the available supply did not warrant increased changes from coal to oil. The same condition prevailed in practically every line of industry depending upon steam-power. When the San Joaquin fields were opened up, the railroads and



Frank L. Brown



Capt. Wm. Matson



Capt. John Barneson

Three men who have been factors in the development of California's oil industry and who now direct a multitude of oil companies

the industrial establishments still held back. Would the fields last? Would the wells permanently supply enough crude oil to warrant the change from coal to oil? These questions had to be answered before the market could broaden enough to absorb the growing output, and when the market did widen, so the producers charge, manipulation kept the price down artificially.

A fuel representing a saving of fifty per cent in cost over coal could not be kept down permanently. Transportation facilities increased with the building of pipe-lines and transportation cost was cut in half; the railroads began burning oil in their locomotives to such an extent that in 1909 this outlet absorbed more oil than was produced in all of California up to and including 1900. Coal was pushed out of California and adjoining territory, pushed out completely except for domestic purposes, California crude oil fighting its way to the very mouths of the coal-mines in the Northwest. And again, the fact of cheap and abundant fuel

stimulated the establishment of new industries which further increased the market for oil.

The many struggling companies of the Kern river field, handicapped by rivalry in prices and by lack of capital for proper development, gradually got the notion of a consolidation. This was crystallized into a plan by W. S. Porter, formerly a traveling salesman for a large wholesale house, whose thorough knowledge of conditions had been gained largely through associations resulting from the sale of oil pipe, and who is now a millionaire. Associated closely with him was O. Scribner, a young attorney with a moderate pocket, but of indomitable energy. Into the plan also entered with energy and ability such men as Frank H. Buck, J. A. Chanslor, M. H. Whittier (who is said



Lyman Stewart  
President of the Union Oil Company, and one of the oil pioneers

to be able to "smell" oil from above the surface), B. E. Green and others.

After much debating and many months of hard work the great Associated Oil Company was formed. It does a business of





O. Scribner



Wm. F. Herrin



H. S. Porter

Officers of the Associated Oil Company, a great amalgamation of fifteen thousand holders of \$10,000,000 of stock, doing a business of \$15,000,000 annually

\$15,000,000 per year and owns, besides, many thousands of acres of oil lands, rifled-oil pipe-lines extending the length of the San Joaquin valley and from the valley to the coast, a fleet of oil steamers carrying oil to Honolulu, the Northwest and the near coast ports. Its two new steamers are models of their kind.

The magnitude of the oil industry in California is well illustrated by the statement that the Associated Oil Company, with its \$40,000,000 stock, has fifteen thousand stockholders.

The upward trend of oil prices began in 1907, when the offers advanced to 25, 30 and 35 cents a barrel. At once the oil industry responded. The dry plains west of Bakersfield, all the way from the old Sunset field where Jewett & Blodget had sunk their fortune in shallow wells and in a small asphaltum refinery, through the new town of Maricopa to McKittrick and beyond to Coalinga, the prospector and locator once more scurried through the sagebrush, over plain, cañon, gully and hill. More and

more of the farmers and business men in the fertile country around Bakersfield and Fresno looked with covetous eyes upon the inscrutable, dusty, dry landscape rimming the valley to the west. Month after month the rush increased until the pioneers, the

men who had stuck to their holdings out in the grim, desolate land of oil throughout the hard times, were forced to keep a watchful eye upon their claims.

Every foot of land suspected of containing oil—and many a square mile without this suspicion—was located by prospective millionaires. Since no man may legally take up a placer claim of more than twenty acres at a time, the locators usually worked in squads of eight, or eight names at least, filling up a quarter section of one hundred and sixty acres before they moved on to the next quarter, the same

set of men often pre-empting five or six sections of six hundred and forty acres each. Locating was not the main task, however. The more difficult feat was holding onto the land after location and keeping the claim-jumpers off.



J. A. Chynsler

His romance is that of the Blue Goose and the birth of Coalinga



G. W. McCutchen,  
a type of the farmer oil pioneer



Ed L. Doheny,  
the Los Angeles lawyer who drilled  
for oil in his dooryard and is  
now a millionaire



Julius Fried, the patient angel of the  
Lakeview gusher

Perfunctory assessment work, the building of a cabin or derrick, the scraping of a few sump holes to store the expected flow of oil, would not give possession, the courts held. Only the actual discovery of oil in commercial quantities assured valid title. As oil cannot be discovered except through the medium of a well, and as a well in California oil fields represents a cash investment of at least \$15,000, the small locator's chance of holding onto several square miles of unproven territory were slim, if others coveted his claims.

When the first gushers were brought in eighteen months ago, armed guards were placed on many holdings to keep off claim-jumpers. On a number of sections close to the Lakeview gusher bloodshed several times seemed imminent when the armed hosts of different claimants clashed in attempts to pull down the cabins and rigs erected by rivals on land worth five thousand dollars an acre; exciting races were run by the drillers of companies claiming the same piece of ground, in an effort to reach the oil first and thereby gain possession; but always mortal combat was avoided and bloodless compromise substituted.

During the first oil excitement in 1900 the four McCutchen brothers, hard-headed, hard-fisted ranchers near Bakersfield, located and claimed, in company with others, over four sections of oil land, leasing portions of the claims to operating companies which rarely extracted anything but deficits out of the wells drilled, even though most of the land has since been proven richly productive deeper down. Despite failure

and disappointment, the McCutchen brothers clung to what claims they could throughout the seven years of stagnation, only to see the largest part of their locations pass into other hands when the revival began. In 1907, when oil reached 25 cents a barrel, George McCutchen succeeded in borrowing \$15,000, at the rate of one per cent interest a month, and with this money the brothers sunk their first well on the twenty acres they considered most promising. With the revenue produced by the first well, six others have been drilled, all good producers, and the future has a rosy hue in the flower embowered cottages of the brothers set in the midst of the gaunt, black derricks. Walter Snook, Captain F. F. Weed, late of the Confederate army, J. W. Schultz and a score of other pioneers who stayed stout-heartedly, hopefully in the arid hills when the nearest railroad was forty miles distant, who for ten long years drank water shipped in all the way from Bakersfield, waiting and working, these men were all carried to independence and moderate wealth on the crest of the wave of capital that rolled across the broad valley and surrounded their homes in the sagebrush.

Practically all the wells in California's greatest oil fields—those in the San Joaquin valley—were drilled on land that had either been given away by the government or was sold by the Southern Pacific Company for \$2.50 an acre. In September, 1909, while the oil excitement in the field west of Bakersfield was at its height, the Secretary of the Interior issued an order withdrawing from

entry all lands supposed to contain oil, and the validation of this order was attempted by the Pickett bill pending before Congress at the time of writing. Against this order and the bill confirming it a storm of protest arose. While recognizing the wisdom of conserving and husbanding the Nation's resources of soil, forest and stream, the California oilmen maintain that this conservation policy cannot apply to the golden state's oil lands without modification. They call attention to the fact that, through its original land grant, the Southern Pacific is the owner of every alternate section in the major portion of the San Joaquin oil belt, while many other companies have acquired immense holdings adjacent to public land. They maintain that these companies, on the lines of their sections, could drill wells and pump the oil from underneath the government land, thereby defeating the purpose of conservation. This argument is based on the assumption that the withdrawal of oil lands from entry will last many years and that the land in private ownership will be developed at once.

As a second argument against the withdrawal order and the Pickett bill, the oilmen point to the injustice of that feature of the order which pulls the ground from under the feet of individuals and corporations who, at the time the order was issued, had been doing assessment and development work on their claims, had spent large sums in building roads and drilling wells, but had not as yet reached the oil sand. Under the provisions of the order every acre of oil land was withdrawn from entry except those unpatented claims which were producing oil. By a strict interpretation of this feature, locators and leasers who, in good faith, had been drilling expensive wells, would lose large sums and the labor of years. Among hundreds, thousands of other claims, the ground upon which the Lakeview gusher stands would revert to the government because the gusher did not begin to spout oil

until March 15th, six months after Secretary Ballinger issued his withdrawal order. It is scarcely to be feared, however, that locators and leasers who were drilling in September, 1909, will be deprived of their investment. Amendments to the Pickett bill protecting their rights have been introduced, though those companies which, relying upon the advice of eminent counsel declaring the Secretary's order illegal and without authority of law, entered upon government land after September, 1909, in open defiance of the withdrawal edict, and began drilling, may have to fight for the wells on public land out of which oil is flowing every day into their tanks.



A tower of fortune  
—perhaps

In the production of petroleum California is far ahead of any other field in the country, having left its nearest competitor, the Kansas-Indian Territory field, in the rear by more than ten million barrels in 1909. Last year California's production was fifty-six million barrels; this year it will probably reach seventy millions, with a value of four times the gold output. Despite this startling increase overproduction is no longer feared. If this fear prevailed, British capital would not pour into the oil fields in a steady stream. Every year more oil is burned crude in the Southwest, and every year the size of the oil-burning zone is increasing. The California oil industry, with a supply of eight and a half billion barrels still in the ground in the eight hundred and fifty square miles of proven oil land, according to the United States Geologic Survey, is standing in a pair of solid, homemade boots—a healthy, growing giant who promises to reach over into the Eastern fields and give them battle for their markets as soon as the Panama canal is finished. Crude with the crude strength of the West, this young titan has broken its shackles and to-day stands free, unchained, the only oil field in the country free from domination, lusty, unfettered, with a wonderful future lying before it.