

REMEMBER WHEN

A look back at the nation's oil & gas industry.



The nation's, as well as Oklahoma's, oil and gas industry is rich in history. As part of a new partnership with the American Oil & Gas Historical Society (AOGHS), Exploring Energy will bring you energy stories from the past in each publication. Also catch "Remember When Wednesday" each fourth Wednesday of the month with AOGHS Executive Director Bruce Wells joining the discussion on KECO 96.5's Exploring Energy show from 8 to 9 a.m. and on 102.3 KWDQ, sponsored by Big Chief Plant Services. For more articles, photos and features, or to support AOGHS, visit www.aoghs.org.

First Mississippi Oil Well

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The first Mississippi oil well was drilled soon after a Yazoo County geological survey by a young geologist looking for a suitable clay to mold cereal bowls for children. "It all began quite independently of any search for oil," noted a southern history journal decades later.

In February 1939, Frederic F. Mellen worked for the Works Progress Administration in Yazoo County during the Great Depression. The 28-year-old geologist supervised a clay and minerals survey project, "to locate a suitable clay to mold cereal bowls and other utensils for an underprivileged children's nursery."

Instead, Mellen launched Mississippi's oil industry.

At Perry Creek, about a mile southwest of Tinsley, Mellen's survey found a strata of Mississippi's Jackson formation. But the seam was 250 feet above where it was supposed to be. It was a salt dome structure, well known since Texas' Spindletop Hill discovery of 1901.

The Jackson formation offered evidence oil could be found along Perry Creek. Indications in the Yazoo Clay suggested an anticlinal structure. Mellen urged more seismographic testing, and the state geological survey issued a press release.

Union Producing Company of Houston quickly acquired mineral rights to about 2,500 acres around Tinsley. After more seismographic testing southwest of Yazoo City, the company choose a drill site on the Green Crowder

Woodruff farm at Perry Creek.

On September 5, 1939, after six weeks of drilling, Union Producing completed its G.C. Woodruff No. 1 well at a depth of 4,560 feet. The well flowed at 235 barrels of oil a day from a sandstone later named the Woodruff Sand. Drilling companies, investors, and speculators recorded more than \$5 million in lease transactions over the next month.

"Hotels are overflowing, restaurants are overtaxed, map companies are dizzy from the rush of new business," reported Oil Weekly, adding that "farmers are trying to obtain drilling clauses with leases, geophysical crews are slipping through the woods, and in every hotel lobby John Doe will tell you he has a sure-shot lease - for sale at the right price."

Three weeks after the Woodruff No. 1 well was completed, Union Producing exported the first barrel of Mississippi oil to Louisiana, sending four tank cars carrying 8,000 gallons from Tinsley Station to the Standard Oil Refinery at Baton Rouge. By June 1944, Mississippi had almost 400 wells producing oil from eight oilfields.

"The discovery and development of the largest oilfield in the southeastern states is an exciting part of Mississippi's history," the state geologist proclaimed in 1974. "The fact that this giant field was discovered through the application of basic geology, in an investigation not necessarily slated toward oil and gas exploration, is a tribute not only to the geologist making the discovery but to all geologists engaged in similar undertakings."

When the Pickens

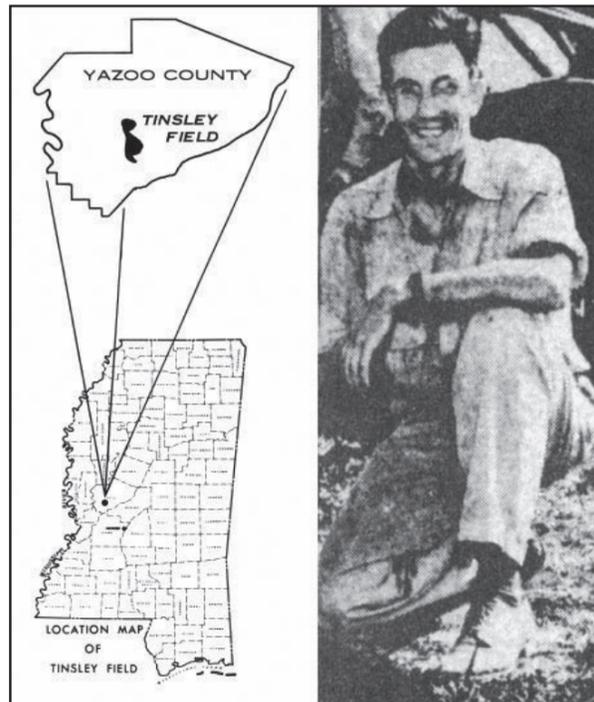
oilfield was revealed east of Tinsley, "Mississippians, and Yazooans in particular, thought at last Mississippi would mushroom in development as did Oklahoma and parts of Texas and Louisiana," the editor of the Yazoo City Herald later noted. "However, Pickens was not another Tinsley."

But other discoveries followed, and today Mississippi ranks as the 14th largest oil-producing state. By 2017, with secondary recovery through carbon-dioxide injection, the Tensely oilfield was still producing more than 6,000 barrels of oil a day, about eight percent of Mississippi's total oil production.

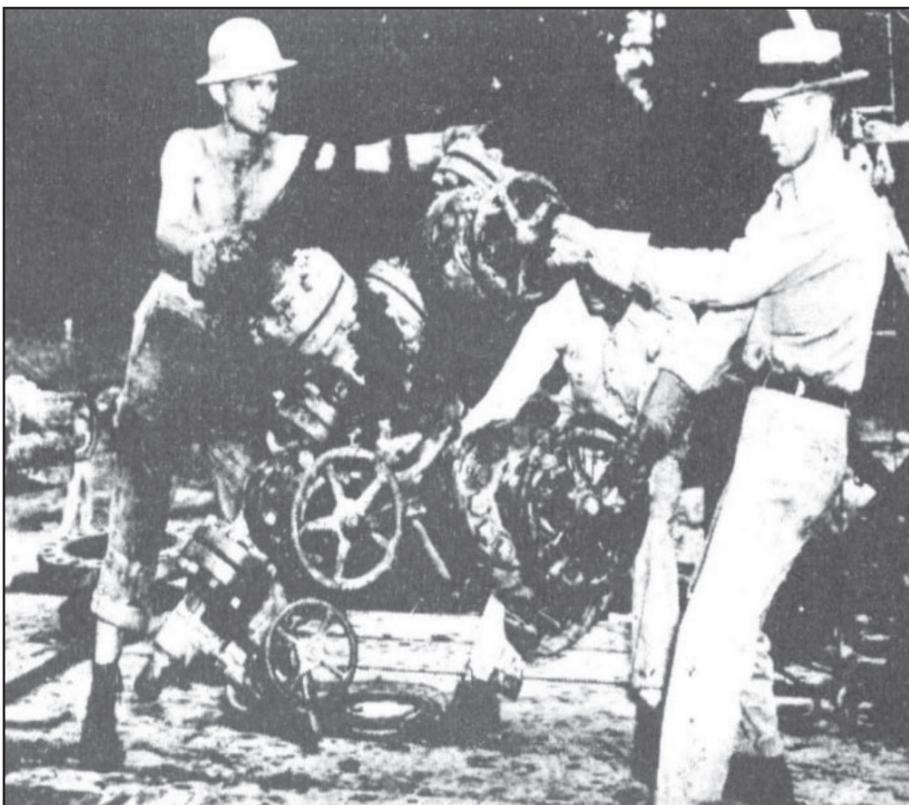
In 1985, the Mississippi Geological Society asked Mellen to lead young geologists on a summer field trip, "to traverse the very hillsides of Yazoo County that he had mapped 47 years previously in his discovery of the large surface anticline that later became the giant Tinsley field." Mellen died four years later at age 74.



"Mississippi's prospects of finding oil in commercial quantities were heightened yesterday," proclaimed the Vicksburg Evening Post in 1939.



Frederic Mellen became president of the Mississippi Geological Survey in 1946. Images courtesy Mississippi Geological, Economic and Topographical Survey.



A Memphis newspaper described how "a drilling crew sets a 'Christmas tree' (drilling apparatus) in place" at the discovery well.

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