Salt Creek - A Wyoming Giant and a Cast of Characters*

Sam L. Pfiester¹

Search and Discovery Article #20485 (2020)**
Posted July 20, 2020

*Adapted from oral presentation given at 2019 AAPG Rocky Mountain Section Meeting, Cheyenne, Wyoming, September 15-18, 2019
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¹Consultant, Georgetown, TX. (sampfiester@yahoo.com)

Abstract

The history of Salt Creek Field in central Wyoming covers more than 160 years. In 1851 Cyrus Iba, on his way to the California gold fields, visited Jackass Springs, an oil seep which emigrants to Oregon and California used for axle grease. Cy Iba returned to Jackass Springs in 1883 and began staking claims under the Placer Mining Act of 1872. In 1886 Samuel Augey, the Wyoming Territory geologist, mapped the Salt Creek surface anticline. Based on the Augey report, the Schoonmaker group from New York staked claims, dug shafts, and was awarded a patent covering 320 acres near the apex of the anticline, including Jackass Springs. The discovery well for Shannon Field on the far northern flank of the Salt Creek anticline was drilled in 1889-90 by Phillip M. Shannon. In 1896 Wilbur C. Knight in Bulletin Number One Petroleum Series for the University of Wyoming mapped the anticline and reported on the Shannon production and refinery in Casper. The discovery well for Salt Creek Field, the Dutch No. 1, was drilled in December 1908. For the next decade promoters, scoundrels, schemers, dreamers, and oilmen staked claims, jumped others’ claims, and drilled wells on the anticline. In 1910 a group of businessmen from Colorado Springs, Colorado, and Paris, France formed Midwest Oil Company, which ultimately developed and operated the field. It had already produced more than 700 million barrels of oil when Anadarko bought Salt Creek in 2004 and initiated one of the world’s largest CO₂ recovery projects. Today FDL LLC operates the field and anticipates it will produce for another forty years.
SALT CREEK

The Saga of a Rocky Mountain Oil Field

SAM L. PFIESTER
CAPTAIN BENJAMIN BONNEVILLE
DALLAS DOME OILFIELD
CYRUS IBA
SALT CREEK OIL SEEP
SAMUEL AUGHEY SCHOONMAKER REPORT TO CENTRAL ASSOCIATION OF WYOMING 1884
SECTION ACROSS SALT CREEK OIL BASIN.

SAMUEL AUGEY
TERRITORIAL GEOLOGIST
1886
SCHOONMAKER PATENT
&
IBA 80
String-team headed for the Salt Creek Field—about 1911. Probably hauling engine sections for pipeline.

Photo courtesy M. N. Wheeler.

18 HORSE STRING
GEOLOGIC MAP FOR
BELGO WELL
The Temporary Withdrawal Order of President Taft which proclaimed that in aid of proposed legislation affecting the use and disposition of the petroleum deposits of the public domain, 2,871,000 acres in California and 170,000 acres in Wyoming of public lands were temporarily withdrawn from all forms of location, settlement, selection, filing, entry or disposal under the mining or non-mineral laws; and that all locations or claims existing and valid on that date could proceed to entry in the usual manner after field investigation and examination.

This withdrawn acreage in Wyoming covered the Salt Creek field.

When this order was received at the General Land Office, copies were sent to the register and receiver at the land office under whose jurisdiction the land lay, but no official notice was given to the oil prospectors at large of any change in the Government's policy in regard to the oil bearing public lands.

Although this withdrawal order was dated Sept. 27, 1909, it apparently did not come to the general knowledge of the oil men in California until some time in November. See page 73 4th paragraph of the Report of the Federal Trade Commission on the Pacific Coast Petroleum Industry of April 7, 1921.

It apparently did not come to the general notice of the oil prospectors in Wyoming until about the same time.

WITHDRAWAL NOTICE
SEPTEMBER 27, 1909
H.E. “DADDY” STOCK
DISCOVERY WELL

B. FLOW OF OIL AT DUTCH WELL NO. 1, DECEMBER, 1908, BEFORE WELL WAS CAPPED.
VERNER REED
COMPANY CAMPS