

Mystery of Vaca Artifacts Found in Old Mine

By John Rico

Friday, August 07, 1981

NO BLACK GOLD BENEATH VACA SOIL - Despite the fact dozens of holes have been bored into Vacaville lands in search of oil, or gas, as far as is known the area is "dry."

Before reviewing the activity in search of oil in Vacaville, a bit of mystery has come to light. Dempsey Raley, Jr., a Vacaville resident, gave to me several interesting items which he said his nephew, Andy Morely, had discovered in an old mine shaft near Placerville about 15 years ago.

Included in the items was a copy of the Vacaville Leader, a one-page newspaper published in Vacaville for about six months in early 1901. The paper was taken over later by The Reporter. Also among the artifacts" was a brochure for the White Mountain Oil Company which was seeking investors in drilling ventures in Kern County. An interesting paragraph notes: "There are yet a few hundred more shares to be sold at 25 cents; after these are disposed of the price will be advanced to 50 cents per share."

The copy of the Leader devoted most of its front page to the White Mountain Oil Company, indicating there was considerable interest here in the oil exploring potential of Kern County.

Just how these papers were deposited in an old mine shaft is a mystery which perhaps can be solved by some of the older residents of the community. Among the artifacts is a check in the amount of \$41.22, made payable to Dan. A. Buckley, and signed by M. P. Stansbury. The check was dated Dec, 31, 1924, and was drawn on Stansbury's account at the First National Bank of Vacaville, (later taken over by the Bank of America).

Older Vacaville residents will remember Stansbury, because he was one of two doctors practicing here for many years after the turn of the century, The recipient of the check, Buckley, was an office employee for one of Vacaville's many fruit shipping companies. The shrouded mystery is why did the doctor make out the check to Buckley, and then having the cancelled check discovered in an old gold mine?

Let's get back to the search for oil in the areas around the town of Vacaville. The first known venture was in 1901, a period in our history when the need for oil was insignificant.

Local promoters, after raising \$100,000, hired a well-drilling firm to explore the area in search of the black gold. A total of 10,400 acres were leased in Vaca Valley, with the landowners being promised compensation of 10 cents a barrel when the oil was discovered, plus an interest in the company amounting to \$1 a share per acre of land.

On March 18, 1901, drilling started on the Pinkham Ranch in upper Vaca Valley. The drilling company had promised to sink the well for a fee of \$4 per foot.

Drilling operations posed no problem for the first 1,000 feet, but at a level of 1,150 feet a heavy flow of salt water was discovered. This water stream had to be blocked out, and drilling continued. A small amount of gas was found at the 1,500-foot level, and as the drilling progressed slow it was discovered that a layer of blue shale rock could not be penetrated. Numerous problems arose, and the Vacaville Oil Company, incorporated under the laws of the state of Arizona, found itself out of money and had to abandon the venture.

Local investors were not to be discouraged. They formed the Premier Oil Company and became active in Napa County. Another firm had discovered a small flow of oil in Capelle Valley in Napa County. Premier was unsuccessful in its search for oil or gas.

At about the same period in our history shortly after the turn of the century, a seach was under way between Vacaville and Fairfield. No success.

Then came a Rochester Oil Company, which became active in the Vanden area southeast of Vacaville. The venture was plagued by problems, which included a fire that did considerable damage to the derrick, and the discovery of a heavy flow of water.

Oil prospectors and their advance crews were cautioned not to trespass on the Muzzy Ranch, a spread of several thousand acres south of Elmira. Shepherders there were not receptive to intruders, and to back up their threats carried rifles.

During his term of office, President Benjamin Harrison (1885-1889) had been invited to the Muzzy Ranch for a hunting outing, but after Secret Service men had learned of the belligerency of the shepherders, the President's trip was cancelled.

There have been exploratory wells drilled in all four directions around Vacaville, in search of gas or oil.

The most costly of such ventures was in the Allendale-Browns Valley area where an oil well promoter had invested several million dollars before "calling it quits."

A.T. Taecker came into the local area and with enough confidence that he would strike

oil, purchased outright several hundred acres and took options on many more acres.

In 1929 Taecker energetically pursued his desires to bring in an oil well in this area. In an around-the-clock operation his drilling machinery dug deep into the earth on the Bowles Ranch, in the Browns Valley-Allendale area.

Fred Bowles of Vacaville, a member of the family which had leased the ranch to Taecker, remembers working with the drilling crew. There were many problems, but the determined Taecker would not give up. After having reached a depth of about 5,000 feet, and with the national economic conditions in a depression slump, Taecker was forced to cease his operation.

It is interesting to review the activity in the search for oil, going back nearly 100 years. The first commercially producing well was discovered in 1859 in Pennsylvania.

There could be an unexpected happy ending for descendants of those local residents who invested in the White Mountain Oil Company in Kern County. Perhaps, by searching trunks in attics they may find some old oil stock certificates, and there is a possibility that stock may have become a part of Belridge Oil Company, which had large oil properties in Kern County, and ended up selling out to Shell Oil Company in 1979 for a cool \$3.6 billion.

Downloaded from the Solano History Database

<http://www.solanohistory.org/7066>

<http://articles.solanohistory.net/7066/>