

# Historic Oil and Gas Wells in and Adjacent to Grand Lake St. Marys

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Geological Survey

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For a brief period in history, from the mid-1880s to the early 1910s, northwestern Ohio was the leading oil-producing region in the world. In 1896, annual production from this region reached its peak at nearly 23 million barrels. Oil came from Trenton Limestone reservoirs that extended in a broad, 185-mile curve from Toledo, Ohio, through Grand Lake St. Marys, Ohio, and southwestward to Indianapolis, Indiana. This collection of productive fields is known as the Lima-Indiana trend. Drilling in this trend began near Findlay, Ohio, in 1884 and extended to the eastern boundary of Grand Lake St. Marys by 1890.

In 1891, at the beginning of production in the water of Grand Lake St. Marys, wells were drilled within the canal reservoir mainly by small local companies such as the Bryson Company, Riley Oil, German American, and Banker's Oil. In less than 10 years, more than 100 wells were drilled within the shallow waters of the lake. Well foundations were made by driving pilings into lake sediments and bedrock to create a crib, and then by constructing a standard wooden derrick on top of the crib. As illustrated in the photograph, derricks were connected by walkways and wooden pipelines elevated above the water. The drilling in Grand Lake St. Marys may have been the first over-water drilling operation in the world, which was the precursor to modern offshore drilling platforms. (The oil industry often cites Caddo Lake, Louisiana, as the location of the first over-water drilling operation, but drilling in Caddo Lake did not begin until 1911, 20 years after the first well was drilled in Ohio's Grand Lake St. Marys.)

Individual wells in Grand Lake St. Marys produced from approximately 25 to 250 barrels of oil each day. In 1901, the Spindletop well near Beaumont, Texas, produced 100,000 barrels of oil each day. When news of the well reached Ohio, the oil industry shifted its focus from producing oil in Grand Lake St. Marys and the Lima-Indiana trend to discovering new fields in the mid-continent and southwestern United States. Oil from Texas flooded the fledgling market and, at one point, drove the price of oil down to 3 cents per barrel. By 1910, according to historic issues of *The Daily Standard* (Celina, Ohio), only a handful of wells remained active in Ohio's "Grand Reservoir," which were abandoned shortly thereafter.



Drilling activity in Grand Lake St. Marys (circa 1890). Photo from the archives of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Geological Survey (it is reported that the original photo was used for a post card published in the 1890s).

### FURTHER READING

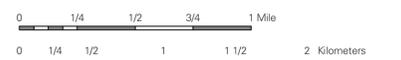
Wickstrom, L.H., J.D. Gray, and R.D. Steglitz, 1992; Stratigraphy, structure, and production history of the Trenton Limestone (Ordovician) and adjacent strata in northwestern Ohio. Ohio Division of Geological Survey Report of Investigations 143, 78 p., 1 pl.

### EXPLANATION

- ★ Unknown
- ◇ Dry hole
- ⊙ Gas well
- Oil well
- ⊛ Oil and gas well
- ⊞ Plugged gas well
- ⊟ Plugged oil well
- ⊠ Plugged oil and gas well

- Depth of water (feet)
- Marsh/wetland/swamp/bog

SCALE 1:25,000



For more information on Ohio's geology, visit us on the web at <http://www.ohiodnr.com/geosurvey>.  
September 2007

