

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Norman No. 1 Oil Well

AND/OR COMMON

Norman No. 1 Oil Well

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Northeast corner of Mill and First Streets NOT FOR PUBLICATION 5

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Neodesha

— VICINITY OF

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Kansas

20

Wilson

205

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

City of Neodesha (Contact: Charles A. Logan, Mayor)

STREET & NUMBER

102 South 4th Street

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Neodesha

— VICINITY OF

Kansas

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Register of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

Wilson County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Fredonia

Kansas

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Survey of Historic Sites and Structures in Kansas
National Register of Historic Places

DATE

1957; 1973

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

410

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Kansas State Historical Society; National Register of Historic Places

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Topeka, Washington

Kansas, D.C.

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Norman No. 1 Oil Well, situated on the edge of a residential district on Neodesha's east side and near the Verdigris River, is now part of a city park created to celebrate its role in opening the Mid-Continent field. In 1961, a reconstruction of the original 67-foot derrick was placed over the actual well site, and a small shed and drilling equipment placed nearby in their proper locations. Presently, a fence surrounds the reconstruction and much of its equipment, separating it from the museum and information center built on the park grounds in 1970.

After Norman No. 1 was abandoned in 1919, its casing was removed, its rig dismantled, and most of its equipment removed from the site. It was virtually ignored until 1942 when the town of Neodesha celebrated the 50th anniversary of the discovery of oil in the area. By this time, the site of the Norman well had returned to its natural state and was overgrown in bushes and trees. Eventually, the town's Chamber of Commerce established a Norman No. 1 Oil Well Committee to create some type of marker to draw attention to its achievement in opening up the Mid-Continent region.

Because of the community interest created by this committee, Mrs. W. A. Rankin donated approximately 1 acre of land, which included the oil well site, to the town. At this juncture it was decided to create a park and erect a replica of the original rig over the old well. In 1961 a reconstruction of the derrick and adjacent structures, based on old photographs and the memories of senior citizens, was completed.

The derrick is 67 feet high and has a 22-foot-square base, and it and its shed rest on concrete foundations. Although the rig was originally constructed of local wood, California redwood was used for the replica because of its durability. While the reconstruction project was underway, some of the well's original equipment, including the original bull wheel, was uncovered. Although those artifacts were too deteriorated to be used for the reconstruction, they are presently displayed on the replica. Also, a number of pieces of old oil field equipment, not original to but contemporary with the site, were placed in the park. These include a Bessemer gas engine for pumping oil, a water pump, a steam engine, a horse-drawn oil wagon, and a cannon of the type utilized in fighting oil field fires. In 1970 a one-story museum and information center was built on the park grounds. Presently, it contains exhibits relating to the Neodesha oil industry plus working scale models of the Norman No. 1 Well.

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(continued)

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1892-1919 BUILDER/ARCHITECT A.P. McBride & Cam Bloom, drillers.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of Norman No. 1 Oil Well is two-fold. First, the successful drilling of this well in 1892, as historian Francis W. Schruben has pointed out, "opened the vast Mid-Continent field."¹ The commercial possibilities suggested by the Norman well attracted all the Nation's leading oil men to that region, which included all or part of the states of Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas. As a result, according to Harold F. Williamson, Ralph L. Andreano, Arnold R. Daum, and Gilbert C. Klose, perhaps the leading scholars on the development of the American petroleum industry, the Mid-Continent area became "the major producing field in the United States" by 1900.² In fact, by 1919, the Mid-Continent field produced over half of the Nation's oil supply and continued to do so well into the late 1930's. At present no National Historic Landmark celebrates this immense field.

Secondly, by demonstrating the potential of the Mid-Continent region, Norman No. 1, despite the fact that it was eventually controlled by the Standard Oil Company, contributed to breaking the stranglehold that this giant firm had on the American petroleum industry. "The shift of production to this area," says historian J. Stanley Clark, "made possible successful competition; at the beginning of the century, the Standard Oil Company controlled more than 80 per cent of the nation's oil industry; by mid-century, major companies--other than former Standard affiliates--and independents were in the majority."³

(continued)

¹Francis W. Schruben, Wea Creek to El Dorado: Oil in Kansas, 1860-1920 (Columbia, 1972), vii.

²Harold F. Williamson, Ralph L. Andreano, Arnold R. Daum, and Gilbert C. Klose, The American Petroleum Industry: The Age of Energy, 1899-1959 (Evanston, 1963), 22.

³J. Stanley Clark, The Oil Century: From the Drake Well to the Conservation Era (Norman, 1958), 130.

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9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See continuation sheet.)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY circa 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	1.5	26.7400	414.412.0	B	1.5	26.7620	414.410.0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	1.5	26.7520	414.396.0	D	1.5	26.7320	414.300.0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

(See last page of description.)

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Ralph J. Christian, Historian, Historic Landmarks Project

ORGANIZATION

DATE

American Association for State and Local History June 1977

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

1400 Eighth Avenue South

615/242-5583

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Nashville,

Tennessee 37203

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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CONTINUATION SHEET Norman No. 1 ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE one

The oil well site is situated near a residential area, but there has been some discussion of reopening the well for oil production. This has not gone beyond the talking stage, however. Generally, the park and the rig are well-maintained and appear to be in good condition.

Boundary Justification. The boundary of the nominated property corresponds to the Norman No. 1 park and covers an area of approximately 1 acre, including the Norman No. 1 site, the reconstructed rig, and several pieces of contemporary oil field equipment. Also within the boundary are a museum and information center, restroom facilities, playground equipment, and picnic tables, none of which contribute to the site's national significance.

Boundary Description. As described in legal records furnished by Terry Harper, President of the Neodesha Chamber of Commerce and indicated in red on the accompanying maps [(1) U.S.G.S. 7.5' Series, Kansas, Neodesha Quad., 1959; and (2) Neodesha Chamber of Commerce-AASLH Sketch Map, 1977], a line "beginning at a point on the extended north line of Ohio Street, Neodesha, 494 feet east of the West line of the E 1/2 of the SE 1/4 of Section 20, Township 30, Range 16; thence East to the first branch entering into the Verdigris River; thence, following said branch to the center of the Verdigris River; thence, following said river to a point under wagon bridge across said river; thence, West along the center of Mill Street, formerly the State road, to a point that is 75 feet East of the extended East line of Lot 60 of Sperry's Subdivision of Block 75; thence, North to a point 75 feet East of the Southeast corner of Lot 30, Sperry's Subdivision, Block 75; thence, East 114 feet, thence North 216 feet to place of beginning (2 deeds, Book 106, page 515 and Book 106, page 517);" [plus] South 47 feet of Lot 60 Block 75, Sperry's Subdivision, City of Neodesha and the South 47 feet of a tract beginning at the Southeast corner of said Lot 60; thence, West 75 feet on East line of Lot 60 to place of beginning in the E 1/2 of SE 1/4 of Section 20, Township 30, Range 16 East.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Norman No. 1 ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE one

The Norman No. 1 Oil Well, situated on the edge of a residential district on Neodesha's east side and near the Verdigris River, is now part of a city park created to memorialize the well's role in opening the Mid-Continent field. In 1961, a reconstruction of the original 67-foot derrick was placed over the actual well site, and a small shed and drilling equipment were placed nearby in their proper locations. Presently, a fence surrounds the reconstruction and much of its equipment, separating it from the museum and information center built on the park grounds in 1970.

History

The search for oil in Kansas and the Mid-Continent area dates from well before 1892. For many years, settlers traveling west on the Santa Fe and other trails had reported oil seepages which they often utilized to lubricate their wagons. After Edwin Drake's success in drilling the world's first commercially successful oil well in 1859, the search for oil intensified, particularly in eastern Kansas. Several wells were drilled, but these were either dry, yielded only minute quantities of oil, or were solely natural gas producers. Because the Kansas experience was repeated in several other western States as well, some, supposedly knowledgeable oil experts bragged that they could drink all the oil that would be discovered west of the Mississippi River.

In 1891 Dr. Thomas Blakeslee and several other prominent citizens of Neodesha, Kans., asked William M. Mills, a former Pennsylvania oil man who had moved to Osawatomie and developed several gas wells in its vicinity, to come to their town and drill enough wells to provide it with a natural gas supply. After they secured leases on several thousand acres in the vicinity of Neodesha, Mills agreed. Immediately, he hired William G. Bryson, an Ohio rig builder and driller and contracted with A.P. McBride and Cam Bloom to drill the well for \$2.50 per foot. After examining several sites in the area, Mills selected a garden plot, belonging to T.J. Norman, a local blacksmith, and situated near the banks of the Verdigris River, as the most promising and commenced drilling operations.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Norman No. 1 ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE two

On November 28, 1892, McBride and Bloom brought in an oil well, soon to be known as Norman No. 1, at 832 feet, producing 32 gravity oil. Mills, however, tried to keep the discovery secret, probably to enable him to purchase additional leases at favorable prices. Subsequently he drilled two other wells nearby but then ran out of money. At this juncture, Mills, carrying oil samples from the Norman well, returned to the East in the hope of attracting sufficient financial backing. After failing to raise money in Titusville and elsewhere, he went to Pittsburg and showed his samples to John H. Galey. Galey and his partner James C. Guffey, impressed by the oil's high quality, expressed interest but refused to lend Mills money. Instead, they persuaded him to allow them to take over the whole operation in return for a quarter share in the profits. Soon, Mills sold his share for \$4,000 and returned to Osawatomie to supervise his gas interests.

In 1893 Galey came to Neodesha to examine the former Mills holdings but did not make it known that he and Galey had acquired control. Galey hired William G. Bryson, who had helped drill the Norman well, as his field superintendent and began to use him as a front man for stockpiling supplies and drilling material and purchasing additional leases. Shortly after Guffey arrived in Neodesha, he and Galey decided to put the capped Norman well into full production. On July 4, 1893, the dormant well was shot with 30 quarts of nitroglycerine by George M. Perry. The first pumping yielded 371 barrels of oil, and for a brief period the well produced as much as 2 barrels per hour before settling down to an average production of 12 barrels daily.

Shortly after Norman No. 1 went into full production, Guffey and Galey leased over a million acres of land and "undertook a wildcat campaign," says petroleum exploration scholar Edgar W. Owen, "which extended from near Kansas City southward into Indian Territory."⁴ By the following year, according to oil wildcatting historian Samuel W. Tait, Jr.,

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⁴Edgar W. Owen, Trek of the Oil Finders: A History of Exploration for Petroleum (Tulsa, 1975), 231.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Norman No. 1 ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE three

"they had put down sixty-eight wells near Neodesha and over forty wildcats" on their leases but "had 150,000 barrels of oil in storage, and no market."⁵ Unable to obtain favorable railroad rates for shipping their oil, Guffey and Galey sold their holdings to the Forest Oil Company, a standard Oil subsidiary, in November, 1895.

Although Norman No. 1 was not a gusher in the usual sense of the term, it was "large enough," says Tait, "to have the distinction of being the first commercial well in the Mid-Continent region."⁶ Its commercial possibilities attracted oil men to this area, which includes all or part of the states of Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas, and by the early 1900's it had become, according to Williamson, Andreano, Daum, and Klose, "the major producing field in the United States."⁷ In fact, by 1919, the Mid-Continent was producing over half of the Nation's oil supply and continued to do so well into the late 1930's.

Despite the fact that Norman No. 1 eventually came under the control of Standard Oil, it helped break the stranglehold this firm had on the American petroleum industry by demonstrating the potential of the Mid-Continent region. "The shift of production to this area," says Clark, "made possible successful competition; at the beginning of the century, the Standard Oil Company controlled more than 80 per cent of the nation's oil industry; by mid-century, major companies--other than former Standard affiliates--and independents were in the majority."⁸

After Norman No. 1 came under control of the Forest Oil Company, it continued to produce 12 barrels of oil daily for a few years. As late as August, 1904, it was producing 6 barrels, but by 1919, because of a leaky casing, production had dropped to half a barrel a day. That same year, the casing was pulled out, and the well abandoned despite the fact it still contained oil.

⁵Samuel W. Tait, Jr., The Wildcatters: An Informal History of Oil-Hunting in America (Princeton, 1946), 106.

⁶Ibid., 105-6.

⁷Williamson, Andreano, Daum, & Klose, American Petroleum Industry: Age of Energy, 22.

⁸Clark, The Oil Century, 130.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Norman No. 1 ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE one

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Hidy, Ralph W. and Muriel E., History of Standard Oil Company (New Jersey): Pioneering in Big Business, 1882-1911 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955).

Owen, Edgar W., Trek of the Oil Finders: A History of Exploration for Petroleum (Tulsa: American Association of Petroleum Geologists, 1975).

Rister, Carl Coke, Oil! Titan of the Southwest (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949).

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