



Michael L. Benedum
1869-1959
Inducted 1970

Michael Late Benedum was born July 16, 1869 in Bridgeport, West Virginia. He married Sarah Lantz of West Virginia in 1896. They had one son, Claude Worthington Benedum, who died in WW I.

Benedum spent his life searching for oil in the earth, beginning in 1897 when he drilled his first well in the Cow Run sands of West Virginia. It has been said that there wasn't a day in his life since then that he wasn't drilling somewhere in the world. Benedum wildcatted all over the United States and Mexico, making the first big oil strike in Illinois. He also proved the Louisiana Caddo field and helped develop important fields in Texas. He discovered Colombia's famous "Tropical" field, was the first to probe Romania's Ploesti fields, and credited with finds in Canada and the Philippines. His discovery in the West Texas field 50 miles southeast of Midland, the Benedum Field, is the only field named after him.

Benedum's first job in the petroleum industry was in 1891 with South Penn, a Standard Oil subsidiary which lasted four years. An official of the company, not Benedum's usual boss, accused him of pocketing company lease money. Benedum told him that if he believed that, they needed to find another man for the job. The man also insisted that Benedum buy the leases in question. Benedum agreed, paying \$7,500. Less than one year later, he sold the leases to Standard for \$400,000 after he and Joe Trees had found oil on them, beginning his petroleum career.

Although Benedum found a considerable amount of oil, his West Texas discovery, at the age of 78, was his proudest. The key to this particular play was the large block of acreage Plymouth Oil, Benedum's company, was able to obtain. Benedum was certain he would find oil in the deep sands of the Ellenberger, but with oil at less than \$1.00 a barrel in the late 1930's, it was not a job he wanted to tackle. The war finally provided the incentive needed and in 1941 the first well was spudded, the "Alford Number One". The drilling proved difficult and slow. The operation was shut down once, then in 1946, Benedum's company returned to the site only to run into more bad luck. With additional investors, including Fred Turner of Midland, in 1947, six years after it was first begun, the "Alford Number One" was the beginning of a boom that swept West Texas. For Benedum, it was the end of a 10 year search in which he had drilled 100 wells, 75 of which were dry and spent nearly \$10 million. The vision that conceived the possibilities of the Permian Basin and the guiding genius that organized the Plymouth Oil Company to explore those possibilities was Michael Benedum.

