



Herbert C. Irvin 1972

The election of Herbert C. Irvin of Oklahoma City to the Hall of Fame was intended to honor not only this pioneer driller but his father, William Howard Irvin, who is deceased and his brother, William Irvin, Jr., of Denver.

As with many men well-known and well-liked in the oil fields, William Howard Irvin, father of the honoree, picked up a nickname: “vinegar Bill.” He was born in the first Capital of Oil, Titusville, Pennsylvania, in 1871. By 1910 he and another noted driller had formed a partnership to drill for oil in Oklahoma. By 1916, when the oil tide was beginning to move west of Fort Worth, he was in Breckenridge Field of Texas. And in 1920 he contracted to drill five miles west of Colorado City. By then his two sons, Bert and Bill, were sharing in the drilling. Their well was dry, but it was only the third to be drilled in Mitchell County.

The father and the two sons worked on many exploratory wells drilled by Steve Owen and Sam Sloan including the big well that opened up the Dora Roberts Ranch near Big Spring. Bert Irvin also was involved on the Owen-Sloan well that found the Chalk field in Howard County and on many others in Scurry and other West Texas counties.

Bert Irvin and his father and brother knew what it was to sweat while beating out a bit on a 100-degree day. Their cranky old machines took every bit of loving care they could give them and sometimes repaid them by just sitting there in ornery silence. It took obstinate, determined men to overcome those mechanical mules we call “cable tool rigs.” A great deal of the oil found in the Permian Basin came out of the work of the Irvins and men like them. With what they had they did remarkable things.

In 1927 Herbert C. Irvin returned to Oklahoma City and left the drilling business to join forces with a savings and loan association. We hope it gives him pleasure to know that we here remember a career that ended so long ago. It is not, I might say, because our memories are so good, but because his shadow and those of men like him remain on the West Texas land.