



Joseph C. Trees 1970

The lives of Michael L Benedum and Joseph C Trees were so intertwined that we here found it difficult to separate their accomplishments. We therefore cite them in the way they saw themselves – as partners and fellow adventurers in the great game of oil discovery. Both men were products of the West Virginia oil boom of the 1890's. Mr. Trees was an operating man, an engineer and an expert in drilling. Mr. Benedum had a flair for finances and for assessing risks. Their talents were different and their personalities were different, yet they worked smoothly together throughout their lifetimes and each was willing to let the other go it alone if he so chose. Their partnership lasted until Mr. Trees died in 1943. Mr. Benedum died in 1959 at the age of ninety. He had then become a legendary figure, mixing in the early days of the industry into the computer age of today.

During all of those eventful years, Benedum and Trees found more new oil in more new places than anyone can imagine. They found major fields in Illinois for the first time. They discovered the Caddo Lake Field in Louisiana and Mr. Trees himself developed ways to overcome the tremendous gas pressures that were found there. There followed an unparalleled series of petroleum finds all over the world. They together found oil in Canada, Colombia, Mexico, Romania, Texas, Venezuela and elsewhere. Whoever it was that coined the word "wildcatter" was bound to have had them in mind.

Together or separately, and under different company names, they did great things in the Permian Basin at times when no one knew whether this area was to be a freakish flash in the oil pan or be one of the large producing areas of the world. In 1926, an answer came once and for all. Before then, there was a belief that the Pecos River probably marked the western limits of petroleum deposits in Texas. It took courage to present the arguments that brought a series of wildcats into Pecos County and into the area now known as Iraan. Wells were drilled in a venture with what is now Marathon Oil Company. Those wells were dry. Even more courage was required to order the rig moved onto the Yates ranch, a full sixty miles from the nearest production in Bit Lake. But this move and that well established the existence of oil in tremendous quantities. The Yates field remains a star in the Texas Oil crown and is one of the greatest fields ever found in the United States. Much more could be said of Mr. Benedum and Mr. Trees and of the great influence they had on the petroleum industry, not only in this region, but in other places as well. It is thought to be enough to see them as representing a special breed of men who grouped their way through uncertainty to find oil. The nation and the world needed oil in great amounts. Without the independent explorers such as Mr. Trees and Mr. Benedum – men who were willing to risk everything to meet that need – we would all be

the poorer. If we do not see their like again – and we all hope that we do – then the petroleum industry will have lost forever a bit of its soul.