



Van Stratton Welch 1969

Van S. Welch was 88 years old when he died in 1969. During his long lifetime he both saw and participated in some of the most exciting days of the oil industry.

He drilled his first well at the turn of the century in Allegany County, New York, where he was born. Later, with Thomas Flynn, he drilled the discovery well at Wyoming's Elk Basin Field. He drilled in Illinois and at Burkburnett in Texas.

In the early 1920's Van Welch, along with Tom Flynn and Martin Yates, undertook three wells in the Pecos Valley near Artesia, New Mexico. They sold acreage to raise a little money and promised their drilling crew part payment in oil.

The third of their wells was Illinois Producers No. 3, and it found oil. It was completed June 29, 1924, and opened up the great southeastern New Mexico fields. Van Welch and his partners thus were chief instruments in enlarging the Permian Basin's production toward its westward limits.

Van Welch was a citizen of Artesia from 1930 until his death. Among his philanthropies was the establishment of college scholarships for students in each of the three major ethnic groups in his home community. Both personally and as a noted wildcatter he represented the finest qualities of the industry.