



Joe G. Roper 2003

Starting with one rig in 1955, an oil field salesman and a roughneck transformed their company into one of the most successful independent oil companies in the nation and one of the largest drilling companies in Texas.

When Tom Brown and Joe Roper formed their partnership neither envisioned the scope of what would become Tom Brown Drilling and, today, TMBR Sharp Drilling Co.

Joe Greer Roper was born July 15, 1928, in Henrietta. After graduating from Midway High School and attending one semester at Midwestern University in Wichita Falls, Roper headed into the field as a roughneck. He served in the U.S. Army from 1941-1945.

Thomas Clark Brown was born Jan. 11, 1927, in Bowling Green, Ohio. After graduating from high school, he joined the Navy in 1944. After his discharge, Brown attended Tulane University. He left after his junior year for a job with Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company in Akron. In 1949, he transferred to Wichita Falls, where he met the man who would become his lifelong friend.

Brown, managing the Goodyear distributorship, also was selling rubber goods to Halliburton and Smith bits on commission. He called on a Jack Grace Drilling Company rig in late 1953 to sell bits and there he met the morning tour driller -- Joe Roper. The driller ran one of Tom's bits and it made a record run.

In 1955, Brown found backers for him and Doyle Scarber to purchase a trailer-mounted drilling rig. Roper was hired as daylight driller. Brown eventually bought out Scarber, and Roper took over supervision of all operations for the firm now known as Tom Brown Drilling Company. Headquarters were moved to Midland in late 1957.

By 1959, the company's rig fleet had grown to four, although none was paid off. Roper wrote a check and became half owner of the company. Growth continued and by 1969 it became one of the first companies in the Permian Basin to be publicly traded. When the company expanded into oil and gas exploration and production, the name was changed to Tom Brown, Inc. During the mid-1970s, the firm extended its holdings to the Rocky Mountains with a discovery well in Wyoming.

After the economic bust of the 1980s, the company was restructured and the drilling operations spun off as TMBR Drilling Co. Brown was chief executive officer of Tom Brown, Inc., while Roper served as CEO of TMBR Sharp. Tom Brown, Inc. became

solely an exploration and production company. At one time with a rig count of 52, TMBR Drilling was one of the largest drilling companies. Roper ran TMBR/Sharp Drilling until his death Jan. 26, 2001.

Over the years, the company brought millions of dollars and hundreds of jobs to the Permian Basin. Today, the firm is one of the state's leading independent oil companies with 130 million cubic feet per day of gas production and 5,600 barrels per day of oil production.

Brown married Sammie Angela in 1989. He has two children, Thomas C. Brown, Jr., and Nancy Spadafora. His numerous memberships include Independent Petroleum Association of America, International Association of Drilling Contractors, All American Wildcatters, Midland College Board of Trustees, United Way, West Texas Rehabilitation Center, West Texas Boys Ranch and Texas Research League. He has received the Texas Railroad Commission Pioneer Award and Hearst Newspapers Lifetime Achievement Award.

Roper married Julia Johnson, who died in 1989. He died in January 2001. They have four children: Judy Kathleen Roper Davis, Joe Mark Roper, Patricia Ann Roper Elledge and Jeanie Elisabeth Roper Cornelius.

Among his memberships are International Association of Drilling Contractors and Permian Basin Oil Show Board of Directors. In 2000, he also was honored with the Hearst Newspapers Lifetime Achievement Award.