

Wolfe Rig

Research by David Weber, Pleasantville, Pennsylvania, provided some of the following information on the popular Wolfe rig. An article on the subject was published by the American Association of Petroleum Geologists in a 1989 guidebook (Pees, ed.)

Linden W. Wolfe, an oil producer in the Oil City area, put together his ideas on a light weight, portable cable tool drilling machine in the opening years of the 20th century. Of course there were a number of makes of portable rigs already on the scene, but Wolfe was rightly positioned in the middle of oil country and was able to quickly cater to local demand. L.W. Wolfe manufactured his Venango Portable Drilling Machines in Sugarcreek Borough, Venango County, Pennsylvania (near Oil City). The drillers simply called them Wolfe rigs. Hundreds were sold and many were used in the Venango County area.

There were two kinds, the regular cable tool drilling machines and the smaller spudder, the latter being used for workovers, clean-outs or drilling the surface hole. The Wolfe rig had a wooden walking beam and a folding wooden ladder-type mast. They were pulled to the well location by tractors or horses. It was said that a Wolfe rig could be set up on a well site in one day. The operator could use steam, gas or gasoline engines to work the rig. A leather belt connected the skid-mounted engine to the drilling machine.



There were two sizes of Wolfe drilling machines. Type A would spool 1200 feet of manila rope. Type B, the largest, could spool 2000 feet of rope. The use of wire cable instead of manila rope would allow extra depth capacity for both types of rigs.

These rigs were sales-pitched with the usual kind of slogans: "The most practical machine for all drilling purposes and cleaning-out purposes." "It will do the work as the work ought to be done."

The development of portable steel spudding and drilling machines such as the Bucyrus-Erie truck rig, eventually made portable wooden walking beam drilling rigs obsolete. L.W. Wolfe continued to build his portable rigs until the great depression of the 1930's. Wolfe rigs can still be found deserted in the early oil belt. Oilmen have told the author fascinating tales of their younger days working on the Wolfe rigs. Those big wooden wheels still make a memorable impression even though the abandoned rigs are slowly sinking and rotting away.



photo by S.T. Pees, 1998

The Wolfe drilling rig (described previously) set up in the park of the Drake Well Museum, Titusville, Pennsylvania. It was donated by Jon Ifft of Seneca, Pa.

A restored Wolf Rig is located on the grounds at Drake Well Museum in Titusville, PA

Four Wolfe Rigs are known to be located in Oil Creek State Park. One is located along the hiking trail in Wildcat Hollow. Another is located along the red blaze Cross Country Ski Trail north of Russel's Corners Road. A third is located in a wooded area west of White City Road and north of Miller Farm Road. The fourth is located in a cleared area north of the Cow Run Shelters along the Gerard Hiking Trail.