

BOOK REVIEW

Oil! Titan of the Southwest. By Carl Coke Rister. (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1949. xxiii + 467 p. Illustrations, maps, notes, glossary, bibliography and index. \$5.00.)

This volume, *Oil! Titan of the Southwest*, will doubtless earn for itself a well-deserved place as a basic reference work for students and readers interested in the development of the oil industry. It is the first thoroughly competent and exhaustive study of the history of oil production in this six-state Mid-Continent and Gulf producing area.

This book is essentially a history of oil production, of the successive discoveries of new fields, their "boom" days of spectacular and often disorderly expansion, and the sometimes drab and dismal years of their gradual decline and decay. In tracing the expansion of oil production, Professor Rister has analyzed the evolution of each of the major fields developed between 1890 and the present time.

The author's discussion of each production area follows the same basic pattern. The conditions which stimulated interest in the possibility of locating oil in a particular community, the key individuals and companies connected with the development, the difficulties faced in securing adequate financing for their ventures, the technical problems which appeared during drilling, and the storage and marketing difficulties which had to be faced—all of these are mentioned in the discussion of each of these fields. Every chapter in this volume covers a different area, the Indian Territory of the 1890's, the great discoveries at Spindletop and other Gulf coast salt domes, Oklahoma's Glenn Pool, Red Fork, Cushing, and Greater Seminole fields, the Ranger, Panhandle, and Permian basin discoveries in Texas, and on down through the long list of major fields to the West Edmond development during and after World War II. No area of major significance is omitted.

Fully three-fourths of Professor Rister's book deals with the development of these various fields. In the final chapters of his volume the author touches briefly on several topics related to the recent history of the oil industry. There is a brief analysis of the role played by oil during the second World War, its relation to the collapse of Japan, and the factors which led to the laying of the Big Inch and the Little Big Inch pipe lines. The problems of oil conservation and control which eventually led to the establishment of the Interstate Oil Compact Commission are outlined. A final chapter incorporates a brief statement regarding the impact of petroleum on the economic and social life of the Southwest.

Professor Rister, Research Professor of History at the University of Oklahoma, has made with this volume a major contribution

to the history of Oklahoma and to the economic history of the entire Southwest. A grant to the University of Oklahoma's Research Foundation by the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey made possible three years of careful work that went into the preparation of this book. Trade journals, newspapers, government documents, letters, and interviews all provided the raw material out of which the author fashioned this volume. It shows the results of this painstaking research. The reader is almost overwhelmed at the detailed information, such as production statistics, shifting price levels, population figures, which is crammed into these pages. Elaborate footnotes present summaries of individuals and firms that have played a part in the development of this industry. The result is a fact-crammed volume, almost encyclopedic in content, which may be somewhat frightening to the reader when he first pages through it. It is hoped that the mass of detailed information in the pages of this book will not discourage the general reader from finishing the volume. As previously mentioned, this work will probably find a place primarily as a reference work.

Oklahomans will certainly want to become acquainted with *Oil! Titan of the Southwest*. Here they can find outlined the story of the industry so basic to the welfare of their state. Here they can uncover a little of the color of the hectic days of Cushing, Seminole, and other communities whose traditional cultural and social pattern was shattered by the influx of oil workers and money. Here they can re-live again the depression years of the early 1930's and the heated disputes of the administrations of Governors Murray and Marland. Oklahomans who have lived through this period of oil development will find in Professor Rister's book a carefully-presented outline into which they can insert details out of their own experience. Young Oklahomans will be able to derive from this volume a useable summary of the development of one of the state's basic industries. A glossary which could have been somewhat expanded and several maps will help this latter group find their way around.

Professor Rister's book may well be considered a "discovery well" opening up a new field of historical writing. As the latter chapters of this volume suggest, and as the author himself pointed out in a recent address before the Oklahoma City meeting of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, there are many phases of the oil industry which still need to be presented in more adequate written form. In fact, the whole area of the financial and economic history of the Southwest needs to be developed. Literary explorers who choose to probe deeply into those pools in search of a literary bonanza will find that a high standard has been set for them by Rister's *Oil! Titan of the Southwest*.

—Norbert R. Mahnken.

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