

Joseph C. Trees
1869-1959
Inducted 1970

Born in West Virginia in 1869, Joseph Trees worked in his parents' sawmill and flour mill as a youth. As a college athlete, he attracted the attention of the captain of the football team at what is now the University of Pittsburgh. He lured Trees to Pitt with room, board and tuition, making Trees the school's first subsidized athlete. He graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering in 1895. During summer vacations, Trees worked for Standard Oil. And that's where he met Michael Benedum. The two bought a drilling lease in Pleasants County, West Virginia. The first well came in and six more followed on the same lease. That was the start of an amazing partnership. Trees was the operator, engineer and drilling expert; Benedum had a flair for finance and risk assessment. Together, they found oil in Illinois, Louisiana and then made discoveries in Canada, Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Romania and many other locations. Of course, their biggest find was right here in the Permian Basin, when the conventional wisdom at the time said there was no oil west of the Pecos River. Their 1926 discovery, the Yates Field, near Iraan, has produced more than 1 billion barrels of oil and remains active even today.

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