

1897 marked the beginning of Oklahoma's petroleum industry when the first commercial oil well was drilled in Indian Territory (I.T.). George B. Keeler, who had come to I.T. in 1871 to work at Chouteau's trading post near the Osage Indian Agency, noticed oil seeping from the ground on the south bank of the Caney River near Bartlesville in 1875. After Keeler and William Johnstone opened a trading post on the south bank, they decided to have a well drilled to boost economic conditions in the area. They and another early settler, Frank Overlees, obtained a lease from the Cherokee Nation and hired the Cudahy Oil Company to drill the well.

The news of oil in commercial quantities at Bartlesville, Indian Territory, in the Cherokee Nation just east of the Osage Nation, prompted the Santa Fe Railway to lay track to town site. Wildcatters, lease hounds and roustabouts hopped trains to Bartlesville and the boom was on!

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