

## Documents

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### Discovery of Natural Gas at Kokomo

*Contributed by Mrs. John F. Richardson\**

Although various gas wells had been drilled in Indiana before 1886, it was in that year that the natural gas boom got under way. Natural gas fields, however, had earlier been discovered and used in both Pennsylvania and Ohio. In fact, the discovery of gas near Findlay, Ohio, in 1884 apparently touched off the Indiana boom. On March 14, 1886 a successful well was opened near Portland, in Jay County.

The memorandum of agreement which follows is dated only eight days after the opening of the well at Portland. Whether it was an immediate result of the discovery at Portland or had already been planned is unknown, but it clearly represents a pioneer effort in the budding natural gas boom. On March 30, 1886 the *Kokomo Gazette-Tribune* described the new venture:

#### Shall We Bore for Gas?

There is a move on foot, as yet in the embryotic [*sic*] state, to tap this terrestrial ball somewhere in the immediate vicinity of Kokomo for natural gas. Archie Comstock has started a paper in order to get if possible the exact throbbings of our pulse on the natural gas question. When last seen \$1,400 was subscribed for perforating purposes. We venture to ask, that in case an inexhaustible supply of this dangerous combustion is found, who's going to pay for spoiling all our good drinking water, and ruining our good fishing holes along Wildcat? and [*sic*] for inflicting our olfactory organs with a continual smell of coal oil? These are questions of grave importance that should be looked after at once.

The boring for gas at Kokomo began on September 13, 1886, and gas was struck on October 6 at a depth of slightly over 900 feet. More than five thousand other gas wells were opened in Indiana in the years 1886-1897, but by the latter date more than half of them had already been closed.

The men named on the memorandum of agreement to prospect for gas in Kokomo included prominent local business and professional men. Professor Clarence V. Haworth of

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\* Mrs. John F. Richardson is Curator of the County Museum operated by the Howard County Historical Society, Kokomo. The editors are indebted to Professor Clarence V. Haworth for editorial assistance. A former superintendent of Kokomo Schools and former member of the teaching staff of the Kokomo Center of Indiana University, Professor Haworth has long been a student of Indiana history.

Kokomo remembers his acquaintance with about half of them. The memorandum illustrates one method of raising money to bore for gas in the early days of the boom. Perhaps its publication will encourage other persons to submit additional documents concerning the discovery, development, and impact of natural gas in Indiana. Moreover, the significance of natural gas as a factor which encouraged industrialization in the region which includes the cities of Kokomo, Marion, Hartford City, Muncie New Castle, Anderson, Elwood, and Noblesville needs further study by historians.<sup>1</sup>

Kokomo Inda. March 22 [1886]

The object of this paper i[s] to ascertain if there are a sufficient number of person[s] in this city willing to subscribe *One Hundred Dollars* each for the purpose of boring for gas a distance of not less than two thousand (2000) feet. The names of those willing to subscribe the above amount (\$100.) provided the scheme is properly and satisfactorily organized are as follows:—<sup>2</sup>

1	A. Y. Comstock	16	J. B. Michener
2	D. C. Spraker	17	Henry Hunt
3	J. C. Blackledge	18	Dixon & Co
4	J. M. Leach	19	Bell and Purdum
5	S. Davis & Sons	20	W. A. Stuart
6	Armstrong Landon & Co	21	G. W. Defenbaugh
7	R. Q. Wilson	22	Geo. W. Stidger
8	J. C. Dolman	23	
9	John W. Slider	24	
10	E. Quaintance	25	
11	Russell Dolman & Co	26	
12	J. O. Henderson	27	
13	J. McClean Moulder	28	
14	W. H. Sellers	29	
15	J. W. Cooper	30	

<sup>1</sup> The discovery and early use of natural gas in Indiana are described in: Logan Esarey, *A History of Indiana* (3rd ed., 2 vols.; Fort Wayne, Ind., 1924), II, 911-913; Margaret Wynn, "Natural Gas in Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History*, IV (March, 1908), 31-45; Jackson Morrow, *History of Howard County Indiana* (2 vols., Indianapolis, n.d.), I, 232-240.

<sup>2</sup> In reproducing the document, original spelling and punctuation have been faithfully followed except in the list of persons subscribing to the gas prospecting scheme. Since the signatures were inconsistent, periods have been added after initials for the sake of uniformity.