

A shortcut through history

The shortcut to my desk leads through the library that houses Oil & Gas Journal's archives. Those bound volumes only cover the last 80 years of the magazine's 111 years of publication, but they always remind me of the long-term success of OGJ and of the changes and constants in the oil and gas industry's history. As interesting as those reminders are, they also suggest something broader in the history of the oil and gas industry.



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Technological changes

Computations required to plan and drill wells before the early 1970s were likely performed with either pencil-and-paper or a slide rule. As computers became more commonplace, industry changes occurred rapidly. The software routinely used by geologists, petrophysicists, and drilling engineers began evolving in the early computer days.

The parallel developments of the internet, hardware, and software paved the way for increasingly complex developments within the industry, including shared computer platforms, applications that enable multidisciplinary teams to share data, and databases to organize and store the massive amounts of data acquired. Centers from which engineers monitor multiple wells remotely and in real time once seemed impossible but are today in common use.

These developments enhanced the ability to drill extended-reach, multilateral, and horizontal wells, making it possible to target reservoirs that were previously not profitable or not possible.

Enhanced technologies, however, brought new industry challenges. The fracking controversies (OGJ Online, Aug. 27, 2012), ongoing arguments about the Keystone Pipeline (OGJ Online, Mar. 11, 2013 and Mar. 15, 2013), and ethanol requirements in the Renewable Fuels Standard (OGJ Online, Nov. 26, 2012, and Feb. 18, 2013) all present issues that the industry will have to address. Interestingly, all of these issues also relate to governmental involvement within the industry, which isn't new. For example, the Apr. 6, 1933, issue of OGJ includes articles titled "Failure to Get Desired Relief from Washington Further Weakens Crude Oil Price Structure" (p. 7), and "Misinformation

and Politics May Ruin Oil Industry Says President Holmes" (p. 17).

If history provides clues to the future, it's reasonable to expect technological advancements and increasing industry capabilities to continue. It's also reasonable to expect governmental involvement to create new challenges. Industry's history, however, shows that industry can use advancements to address the goals of better, faster, cheaper, and safer operations and can survive and thrive despite challenges.

Human constants

As impressive as industry's technological developments and solutions to current issues have been, the real successes of the industry occur because of its people. This is a broader view than industry usually takes of itself, but it is important.

The yellowing, brittle pages of the 1933 issues of OGJ include photos of many people of the oil and gas industry of that day. These people—and those of the day not pictured—went to work every morning, addressed the then-current issues, and did their parts to keep the bits turning to the right.

The industry belonged to them 80 years ago. They were the present, and their imaginings of the future—our present—probably didn't include all of today's tools, processes, and capabilities.

The oil and gas industry demands excellence, and so many people—petrophysicists, geologists, engineers, drillers, web and software developers, research scientists, trainers, technical writers and editors, and graphic artists—routinely work together to accomplish tasks that, by today's standards, are monumental. Just as the industry once belonged to the people of 1933, it belongs to us now, and we go to work every morning and do our parts to keep the bits spinning and the hydrocarbons flowing.

Eighty years from now, the industry will belong those who have yet to be born, and the current high-tech developments may seem just as antiquated to them as slide rules seem to us. Although their accomplishments may be just as unimaginable to us as ours were to the people of 1933, they should be just as monumental. **OGJ**