

IF THE RIG WAS RED, IT WAS RINE

By Marjorie Rine

In 1910, after oil had been discovered in commercial quantity in Pennsylvania and in that little neck of West Virginia that juts up to join the west side of Pennsylvania, most of the knowledge of building a derrick and operating a cable-tool oil rig was concentrated in that area. Any man with an entrepreneurial streak and who was willing to work hard could save his pay and gradually buy a small interest in a well to be drilled.

Such a man was R. W. Rine -- a giant of a man in stature and action. The W was for Wesley, or more often 'Wes'. Indeed, an ancestor had been a Methodist circuit rider who spread the gospel in the hills of West Virginia. He grew up in a large family in the area of Parkersburg and New Martinsville. They were mountain folk used to hard times.



This photograph of R. W. "Wes" Rine (at left) and a workman on the rig appeared on the cover of *The Territorial Magazine* a number of years ago. At that time, it was loaned to us by "Wes" Rine's nephew Jack Rine, who was Marjorie Rine's husband. We knew Jack Rine, who died in 1995. Jack was named after his father, G. C. "Jack" Rine who was killed in a car accident when the author's husband was only 3. (Barbara Oringerderff, Editor).

As the oil play in that area slowed and hearing of a 'play' in Oklahoma and eastern Kansas, R. W. and many other roughnecks prepared to head west. His brother G. C., known as 'Jack' Rine, who, orphaned like R. W., was in his mid teens. He had been placed with a farm family as a servant much in the manner of an indentured one. R. W. wanted to take him west with him but the family would not allow it. So he was forced to leave without him. Later on, Wes returned to West Virginia and, in the dark of night took his brother and whisked him back to the Midwest.

After arriving in Oklahoma, it was not long before Wes had acquired a rig and had named his company The R. W. Rine Drilling Company. He became a force to be reckoned with in the field. He expected a day's work for a day's pay, and woe be to the 'hand' who did not deliver it. He then became known as 'Checkbook Rine'. Legend has it that he had climbed to the top of his rig to fire an incompetent man so that the man could 'come down on his own time.'

By 1917, the United States had been drawn into World War I. Oil was a scarce commodity. The Stapleton #1 was drilled at El Dorado, KS. There was a promise of a great field yet to be drilled. (This very successful field, still pumping today, may very well have accounted for the successful outcome of that war.)

R. W. moved his rig to 'Oil Hill' in Butler County, KS and drilled exclusively for the Empire Oil Company, which was to become Cities Service. It was the beginning of over 60 years of association with that company. Deals were made with handshakes. In the next few years, more rigs were acquired and fortunes at Rine were made, lost and made again.

At about this time, R. W. took notice of a young lady schoolteacher. She had been reared in Silverdale, a community southeast of Arkansas City. Jessie Rowell was an intelligent and upstanding person and 'Checkbook' Rine was more than pleased when she agreed to his marriage proposal. Later, her





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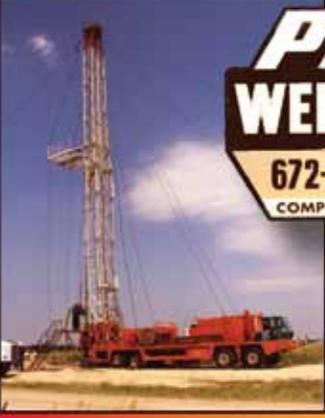
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sister, Alva, accepted the same invitation by Charlie Todd, who became president of Rine Drilling Company after Wes' retirement.

Among the many roustabouts who worked for Rine during World War I when the rig had been 'skidded' to Augusta, KS was Fred Crabtree. He had just been married and he and his wife honeymooned there. Fred and LaRue, his wife, had both been reared in farming communities and found it exciting to be a part of a booming town. Later, they spoke often of their oilfield days. They boasted that they were there when the popular song **"A Hot Time In The Old Town Tonight"** was composed in the oilfield camp.



From the left is R. W. 'Wes' Rine and G. C. Rine posing in front of the automobile.

Fred remembered R. W. as a formidable taskmaster who did not hesitate to use his physical prowess to settle any argument that appeared to have no other solution. He recalled that he had heard that once, when 'Checkbook' had been

duped on a transaction with a disreputable scrap metal dealer, he retaliated by selling the man what appeared to be a huge pile of scrap which was actually a middling bit of scrap piled upon and hiding several empty cable spindles. In as much as R. W. lived to tell about it, I presume that the scrap metal dealer didn't wish to take further action.

Wes Rine loved the color red and it became the custom to paint every Rine derrick with bright red paint. It always distinguished a Rine rig. When electricity became easily accessible with rotary rigs, at Christmas time lights were strung the height of the rig. It was a spectacle to see out in the middle of an uninhabited, flat plain in Western Kansas or the Oklahoma Panhandle.



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In those days, injuries on the rig were common events. There were many hazards. One day, while drilling near Vinita, OK, a roustabout's leg was caught in a chain or cable and amputated. He was rushed to the nearest farmhouse for emergency aid. Whether the man lived or not, I do not know, but he was nursed by the daughter of the family. It was G. C. (Jack) Rine who brought him there. G. C. took notice of the farmer's very shy daughter, Nina Proctor, and soon after they were married. Arkansas City, KS became their home base. It was near the field in which Rine was drilling at the time. Later, they took their infant son named Jack and went to Pampa, TX where drilling was booming. Nina spoke of the hardships of living in Pampa -- the cold of the winter in a 'shotgun' field house, the dirt, dust, mud and heat of the summer. G. C. was away more than he was at home -- not unusual for the designated field man. Nevertheless, Arkansas City was still home base. In 1938, G. C., having gone too many hours on the rig without sleep, went to sleep

while driving east of Wichita and was killed. His son, Jack, was 13. Sometimes a plot that would be considered trite in fiction happens in real life. Fred Crabtree (former roustabout for Wes) and his wife settled in Arkansas City and raised six children. As child #5, Marjorie, enrolled in the local college, met a young man returning from another war. His name was Jack, son of G. C. and nephew of Wes Rine. He was still healing from wounds inflicted by a kamikaze plane as he was a gunner on the battleship "New Mexico" at Okinawa. He married Marjorie, the daughter of a former Rine roustabout. They have three children. R. W. Rine, with age, affluence and the loving hand of his wife, Jessie, became mellow with age. He was always kind to his nephew, Jack and, indeed, did many things for him to help make up for the loss of his father. He was so kind to this writer that she could hardly reconcile the legend with the man that she had learned to call 'uncle'. The youngest 'Jack' became president

of Rine Drilling in about 1975. At that time the company operated nine diesel rotary rigs in Western Kansas and northern Oklahoma. Later, in the early '90s, the Rine heirs wished to sell. Jack died in 1995. He was inducted into the Kansas Oil Man's Hall of Fame in Great Bend, posthumously. His son, Brad, is a geologist and carries on the third generation of Rines in the oil patch. Oilmen no longer do business merely with a handshake. Most of the glamour has gone from the drilling business, but it is exciting still to look back and think of the times when some of our parents worked in this business, with teams of mules pulling machinery through the ubiquitous mud in the hope of making a fortune with just one 'gusher'. ■



Marjorie Rine, who lives in Wichita, is also the author of a book *Doggerel Catharisis and Poetry* published in 2007 by Xlibris Corp., 1-888-795-4274, or orders @ Xlibris.com



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