



## NHL Executive Summary



**Name of Property:** *Mr. Charlie* Offshore Oil Rig

**City, State:** Morgan City, Louisiana

**Period of Significance:** 1952-1963

**NHL Criteria:** 1 and 4

**NHL Theme:** V. Developing the American Economy  
VII. Transforming the Environment

**Previous Recognition:** 2012 American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME) Landmark

**National Historic Context:** Industry/Processing/Extraction  
2. Extractive Facility

**NHL Significance:**

- *Mr. Charlie* is nationally significant as the first, the longest operating, and the oldest surviving Mobile Offshore Drilling Unit (MODU) capable of drilling for oil in waters up to 40' deep. Its design and success revolutionized the process of drilling for oil offshore by demonstrating the viability of a portable oil rig atop a submersible barge, able to venture far out to sea to reach previously untapped underwater oil fields. These achievements demonstrate contributions to



engineering (Criterion 4), which lay the foundations for offshore oil drilling as a major new industry (Criterion 1).

- Because *Mr. Charlie* carried on board the equipment, materials, and derrick for drilling and the facilities to house and support a large crew of workers for extended periods at sea, the rig introduced an entirely new mode of drilling for oil that profoundly affected life and commerce in the Gulf region and around the world.
- The newly formed company that developed *Mr. Charlie*, Ocean Drilling and Exploration Company (ODECO), grew to become at one point the largest drilling contractor in the world, with rigs deployed from the Gulf of Mexico to the North Sea, to the Mediterranean, to Australia and Japan.
- Eventually drilling over 250 wells before being retired, *Mr. Charlie* illustrates the engineering ingenuity and creativity of a small business seeking to pioneer a foothold in a much larger industry and ultimately contributing to the profound, wide-reaching transformation of industry, life, and the environment in the post-World War II-era United States.

#### Integrity:

- *Mr. Charlie* retains high integrity as a three-part submersible drilling barge filled with equipment, despite being operated in the Gulf of Mexico for over thirty years. Its separate sections that attracted comment in 1954 remain recognizable: the submerged barge, the ten columns or caissons rising from the water, and the upper platform of the decks with the machinery and quarters. Given its continual exposure to the weather for decades, elements and materials have been repaired, replaced, or updated over time. The rig was dry-docked twice for major repairs and/or component replacements to maintain operability and to address changing needs, which contributed to the vessel's preservation, its long-term use, and its survival today.
- *Mr. Charlie's* preservation as a museum located in the Atchafalaya River in Morgan City is appropriate because the town was significant in the development of the offshore oil industry. Oil companies were formed here as early as 1901, a Morgan City rig, Kerr-McGee's Rig 16, first discovered oil in the Gulf in 1947, and the next year Alden Laborde moved here and would soon meet John Hayward to conceptualize the creation of *Mr. Charlie*.
- In addition to pioneering engineering advancements in offshore oil drilling, *Mr. Charlie* is also an extremely rare survivor among oil extraction resources generally. Despite the existence of numerous small museums nationwide dedicated to telling the story of land-based oil extraction, original drilling rigs are rarely found. A peer reviewer for the nomination noted, "*Mr. Charlie* is the only remaining architectural link to the birth of the offshore oil industry."

**Owner of Property:** The International Petroleum Museum and Exposition, Inc.

**Acreeage of Property:** Less than an acre.

**Origins of Nomination:** Commissioned by the International Petroleum Museum & Exposition, with funding provided by grants from the H & B Young Foundation and the Alden and Margaret Laborde Foundation.



**Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:** NHL designation of *Mr. Charlie* should receive positive responses from the offshore oil and gas industries. Additionally, positive responses should be anticipated from the Louisiana tourist industry and from individual citizens who are engaged with the region's history and economy. As noted in the nomination and enthusiastically endorsed in the peer review report, "Although few industries transformed the economy, material goods, the environment—both natural and built—and everyday life in the United States in the 20th century more than the oil and gas industry, relatively little recognition has been given to sites associated with the exploration and production of oil and gas."

**Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:** None known.

**Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of 10/4/2024):**

- US Senator John Kennedy, Louisiana
- US Senator Bill Cassidy, Louisiana
- Representative Garret Graves, 6<sup>th</sup> District Louisiana, United States Congress
- Representative Clay Higgins, 3<sup>rd</sup> District Louisiana, United States Congress
- Governor Jeff Landry, State of Louisiana
- Mayor Lee Dragna, Morgan City, LA
- James H. Davis, Jr., St. Mary Parish Councilman, District 7, Morgan City, LA
- Jason McFarland, President, International Association of Drilling Contractors, Houston, TX
- Charlie Solar, Jr., Chief Administrative Officer, City of Morgan City, LA
- Sam Jones, Parish President, St. Mary Parish, LA
- Senator Robert L. Allain III, Louisiana State Senate District 21
- Catherine P. Holcomb, President, St. Mary Excel
- Mark Childers, former executive, ODECO, Houston, TX
- Roy Luck, Geologist and Principal, APEX Subsurface Consulting LLC, Cypress, TX
- Sarah A. Laborde, Manager, The Almar Foundation, New Orleans, LA
- Justin Williams, Vice President, Communications, National Ocean Industries Association
- Bruce A. Wells, Executive Director, American Oil & Gas Historical Society, Washington, DC
- Carrie Stansbury, Executive Director, St. Mary Parish Tourist Commission dba Cajun Coast Tourism
- Anthony L. Baham, Dean of Workforce Programs, South Louisiana Community College
- Mike Moncla, President, Louisiana Oil & Gas Association
- Roger Beaudean, Executive Director, Atchafalaya Intracoastal Coalition, Morgan City, LA
- Kason Simoneaux, Senior at Berwick High School, St. Mary Parish Schools
- Thomas Costabile, Executive Director/CEO, The American Society of Mechanical Engineers, New York, NY
- Kyle Richter, Reservoir Engineering Advisor, Occidental Petroleum Corporation
- Kristin P. Sanders, Louisiana State Historic Preservation Officer, Division of Historic Preservation
- Brooke Scott, Agriculture Teacher, FFA Advisor, 4-H Sponsor, Berwick High School, St. Mary Parish
- Evan D. Boudreaux, Director of Economic Development, St. Mary Parish, LA
- Beth P. Chiasson, President, St. Mary Parish Chamber of Commerce
- Roger W. Jenkins, Chief Executive Officer, Murphy Oil Corporation, Houston, TX
- Jacob Allen, Baltimore, MD
- Wesley J. Wilkinson



**Landmarks Committee Comments:**

- Review and revise overall tone of nomination for more balance between achievements and consequences of this industry
- Provide additional context regarding use of sunk barges in the 1920s and 30s as a predecessor of offshore oil rigs
- Revise or remove unsuitable comparisons to space program

**Landmarks Committee Recommendation:**

The Committee recommends that the National Park System Advisory Board recommend to the Secretary of the Interior designation of the *Mr. Charlie* Offshore Oil Rig in Morgan City, Louisiana, as a National Historic Landmark with any additions and corrections as noted by the Committee being made prior to the nomination being forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior for action.

**Advisory Board Recommendation:** The National Park System Advisory Board recommends to the Secretary of the Interior the designation of the *Mr. Charlie* Offshore Oil Rig in Morgan City, Louisiana, as a National Historic Landmark.