

BASIN ANALYSIS OF THE LATE DEVONIAN  
(UPPER BRALLIER--CHEMUNG) INTERVAL  
OF NORTHERN WEST VIRGINIA

Thesis

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## ABSTRACT

Upper Devonian Chemung interval sediments in northern West Virginia prograded westward with time and were confined by basin closure to the south. Sedimentation patterns were influenced by displacement of underlying basement features along the Rome Trough, the inferred Eastern Cross-Over Rift, Pocono Dome, and the Weston Cross-Strike Structural Discontinuity. These observations are supported by the construction of a regional cross-section network and isopach maps based on 1662 well logs in a 90 quadrangle (4528 square mile) area.

Thick intervals of strata defined between regionally correlatable transgressive shale markers can be traced westward to their basin plain shale equivalents and eastward to their correlative outcrops. Between the Alexander and the younger Warren Sands, isopach mapping identified depoxes for three intervals and showed eastward thickening of five others within the study area. Commonly, depoxes and isopach strike trends are parallel to the Rome Trough and depositional patterns indicate that its axis coincided with a basinal setting throughout much of the Upper Devonian. Isopach mapping also shows that sedimentation within the Rome Trough was restricted south of the northwestward projection of the Weston CSD (Lewis County) during this time, while certain units (such as the Lower and Upper Benson) are anomalously prograded to the north of this

feature. A lower basement block within the Rome Trough north of the CSD is proposed to have controlled this sedimentation.

Synthesis of core observations, regional map patterns, and environmental indicators displayed in the relatively more proximal surface exposures near Elkins (Randolph County) resulted in facies interpretations ranging from anoxic basin plain to delta front environments for units from the top of the Alexander Sand to the lower portion of Riley interval. Two end-member storm deposit models inferred from outcrop observations include "amalgamated proximal" and "non-amalgamated distal" varieties. The interval from the top of the Alexander to base of the Lower Benson represents the construction of a shaly shelf bulge early in the history of Catskill clastic wedge and forms a foundation for subsequent Benson deposition.

The Benson interval, an important gas reservoir in the region, was chosen for detailed analysis. Its evaluation illustrates the contribution of just a few discrete depositional facies to Upper Devonian sedimentation. In addition to mapping and outcrop observations, analysis included examination of 5 Benson cores from the western half of the subsurface study area. Individual core samples were sorted by their well log facies which corresponded to 3 distinct lithological types. These included the bioturbated silty Lower Benson, the channelized sandy Upper Benson, and

the shales of the overlying transgressive lower portion of the Riley interval. Petrographic characteristics and macroscopic features exhibited by these samples and cores provided a "finger print" characterizing each facies, showing not only the differences between them, but also the degree of variation within any one particular log facies.

A shelf depositional model is proposed for the bioturbated siltstones of the Lower Benson with a position below storm wave base, and having distant deltaic sources to the northeast and east. A more comprehensive model for the Upper Benson is possible as a result of this study. Its components include: (1) transitional to strike-oriented trends in the proximal (eastern) setting where wave influence and geostrophic currents are important, (2) parallel dip-oriented shelf slope trends (controlled by downstepping of the eastern edge of the Rome Trough), and (3) distal (western) strike-oriented trends that are non-dip oriented and in places parallel to the basin axis.

Storm wave contact with the seabottom in the proximal prodelta to delta front setting is proposed as the mechanism responsible for entrainment of sediments into the water column and subsequent wave-base influenced deposition in the proximal shelf, dip-oriented density current deposits on the shelf slope, and channel/channel-fringe progradation onto the basin plain. This deposition was probably associated with a relative low-stand of sea level.

Lithologies indicate that the lowermost portion of the Riley interval represents channel abandonment and basin plain deposition associated with a transgressive rise in sea level following the deposition of the Benson units.

Future exploration and development of the important Upper Benson "Sand" should be aided by using these interpretations and understanding the nature of its enclosing rocks.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	viii
LIST OF TABLES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.....	xi
Figures.....	xi
Plates .....	xii
Outcrop photographs.....	xiii
Core photographs.....	xiv
Core data tables.....	xvi
Exhibits in pocket.....	xvii
 INTRODUCTION.....	 1
Statement of problem.....	1
Method of investigation.....	2
Subsurface mapping.....	2
Core analysis.....	3
Outcrop analysis.....	3
REVIEW OF PREVIOUS WORK.....	5
STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS.....	17
Regional tectonic features.....	17
Local basement structures.....	18
Structural mapping.....	20
Fault density.....	21

OUTCROP ANALYSIS AND CORRELATION.....	23
Briery Gap Member.....	24
Blizzard Member.....	25
Pound Member.....	27
Redlick Member.....	29
"Bradford" Interval.....	30
"Balltown," "Speechley", & "Warren" Intervals..	30
STRATIGRAPHIC MAPPING & TECTONIC INFLUENCE ON SEDIMENTATION PATTERNS.....	32
Large-scale stratigraphic isopach maps.....	32
Onondaga to Warren.....	32
Alexander to Warren.....	33
Benson to Bradford.....	35
Bradford to Warren.....	37
Progradation of Depoaxes.....	38
Sub-Benson isopach maps.....	38
Alexander to base of Lower Benson.....	38
Alexander to top of Upper Benson.....	41
Benson isopach maps.....	42
Gross (Total) Benson.....	42
Lower Benson.....	45
Upper Benson.....	46
DETAILED EVALUATION OF BENSON INTERVAL USING CORE ANALYSIS.....	49
Identification of log facies.....	49
Benson core data base.....	50
Core analysis methods.....	51
Presentation of core analysis parameters.....	52

Petrographic analysis of cores.....53

    Thin section point count analysis.....53

    X-ray diffraction mineralogy analysis.....58

    Shale distribution analysis.....62

    Whole rock analysis.....63

Macroscopic analysis of cores.....64

    Summary of log facies characteristics  
    derived from core analysis.....74

DEPOSITIONAL PROCESS INTERPRETATIONS AND MODELS...81

    General.....81

    Alexander to base of Lower Benson.....82

    Lower Benson (facies "c").....83

    Upper Benson (facies "b").....85

    Lower Riley (facies "a").....86

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.....89

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....95

APPENDIX I (FIGURES).....99

APPENDIX II (PLATES).....115

APPENDIX III (OUTCROP PHOTOGRAPHS).....131

APPENDIX IV (CORE PHOTOGRAPHS).....140

APPENDIX V (CORE DATA TABLES).....151

APPENDIX VI (EXHIBITS IN POCKET).....Pocket

VITA.....164

APPROVAL PAGE OF THE EXAMINING COMMITTEE.....165



## TABLES AND ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF FIGURES  
Appendix I

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Stratigraphic context of this study.....	100
2. Benson time paleo-geographical reconstruction.....	101
3. Correlation diagram.....	102
4. Regional basement features for the central Appalachians.....	103
5. Generalized vertical sequence of facies in Acadian clastic wedge.....	104
6. Amalgamated proximal storm deposit.....	105
7. Non-amalgamated distal storm deposit.....	105
8. Late Silurian subsidence.....	106
9. Early Devonian subsidence.....	106
10. Middle Devonian subsidence.....	107
11. Late Devonian subsidence.....	107
12. Total Devonian isopach map.....	108
13. Benson interval log character.....	109
14. Late Devonian paleoslope.....	110
15. Depositional model for Lower Benson (middle part of Pound Member).....	111
16. Bouma sequence truncation.....	112
17. Depositional model for Upper Benson (upper part of Pound Member).....	113
18. Mechanism for density current generation in the Catskill Sea.....	114

LIST OF PLATES  
Appendix II

<u>Plate</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Well log control.....	116
2. Basement structures.....	117
3. Structure map (datum: top of Upper Benson).....	118
4. Structural axes.....	119
5. Fault Density.....	120
6. Onondaga to Warren isopach.....	121
7. Alexander to Warren isopach.....	122
8. Benson to Bradford (Riley interval) isopach.....	123
9. Bradford to Warren isopach.....	124
10. Depocenter axes.....	125
11. Alexander to base of Lower Benson isopach.....	126
12. Alexander to top of Upper Benson isopach.....	127
13. Gross (total) Benson isopach.....	128
14. Lower Benson isopach.....	129
15. Gross (Total) Upper Benson isopach examples.....	130
a. Slope (dip-oriented deposition).....	130
b. Proximal (transitional/strike-oriented deposition).....	130
c. Distal (strike-oriented deposition).....	130

LIST OF OUTCROP PHOTOGRAPHS  
Appendix III

<u>Photo</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Briery Gap Member.....	132
2. Briery Gap Member.....	132
3. Upward transition from Briery Gap Member to Blizzard Member.....	133
4. Blizzard Member.....	133
5. Blizzard Member, Pipe Creek Shale unit.....	134
6. Pound Member.....	134
7. Pound Member.....	135
8. Pound Member.....	135
9. Pound Member, probable "Upper Benson" equivalent.....	136
10. Upward transition from Pound Member to Red Lick Member.....	136
11. Sandstone in Red Lick Member.....	137
12. Red Lick Member.....	137
13. Red Lick Member.....	138
14. "Bradford" Interval.....	138
15. "Bradford" Interval.....	139

LIST OF CORE PHOTOGRAPHS  
Appendix IV

<u>Photo</u>	<u>Page</u>
<u>Basal Riley Interval (Facies "a"):</u>	
16. Well A (core 4766', log 4763') Anoxic black shale.....	141
17. Well A (core 4759.8', log 4756.8') Weakly oxic laminated dark gray shale.....	141
18. Sample D9 (core 4763.3', log 4758.2') Basin plain shale.....	142
19. Sample D9 (core 4763.3', log 4758.2') Basin plain shale (thin section).....	142
20. Sample E3 (core 3974', log 3982') Dark gray laminated shale.....	143
21. Well E (core 3960.9', log 3968.9') Thin-bedded cross-laminated siltstone.....	143
<u>Upper Benson (Facies "b"):</u>	
22. Well A (core 4775', log 4772') Submarine channel sandstone.....	144
23. Well D (core 4771.1', log 4765') Convolute lamination.....	144
24. Well D (core 4786', log 4782') Erosive base, shale clast.....	145
25. Sample D5 (core 4730.7', log 4724.7') Submarine channel sandstone, fracture.....	146
26. Sample D5 (core 4730.7', log 4724.7') Submarine channel sandstone (thin section).....	146
27. Sample E6 (core 3996.4', log 4004.4') Silty base of channel sandstone, inverse grading.....	147
<u>Lower Benson (Facies "c"):</u>	
28. Sample D6 (core 4744.3', log 4738.3') Massive siltstone .....	148
29. Sample D6 (core 4744.3', log 4738.3') Massive siltstone (thin section).....	148

LIST OF CORE PHOTOGRAPHS (continued)  
Appendix IV

<u>Photo</u>	<u>Page</u>
30. Sample D7 (core 4748.1', log 4742.4') Bioturbated siltstone.....	149
31. Sample D7 (core 4748.1', log 4742.4') Bioturbated siltstone (thin section).....	149
32. Well D (core 4739.1', log 4733.1') Bouma sequence.....	150
33. Sample E7 (core 4000.9', log 4009') Interbedded siltstone, sandstone, shale.....	150

LIST OF TABLES  
Appendix V

## CORE DATA:

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Thin section point count analysis: samples sorted by log facies.....	152
2. X-ray diffraction mineralogy analysis: samples sorted by log facies.....	154
3. Shale distribution analysis: samples sorted by log facies.....	156
4. Whole rock analysis and porosity varieties: samples sorted by log facies.....	158
5. Summary of significant core analysis parameters.....	160

LIST OF EXHIBITS IN POCKET  
Appendix VI

Exhibit

1. Northern West Virginia Upper Devonian regional study outline and cross section index.....Pocket
2. Regional strike cross sections.....Pocket
3. Regional dip cross sections.....Pocket
4. Cross Section X: showing key markers and subsurface to outcrop correlations.....Pocket
5. Cross Section Y: showing cored Benson wells, log facies, and sample depths.....Pocket

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The sedimentation and stratigraphy of Upper Devonian rocks of northern West Virginia were based on geophysical logs from 1662 wells, cores of the Benson interval from five wells, and outcrops near Elkins, West Virginia. The main emphasis of this study was the Benson "Sand" and its immediately enclosing strata, although this basin analysis examined the stratigraphic interval from the Onondaga to the Warren. Stratigraphic cross sections established regional correlations and nine different isopach maps were constructed for various intervals. These cross sections and maps were supplemented with core studies by company consultants. My analysis of all these data resulted in the conclusions summarized below, beginning with conclusions based on mapping and map interpretation.

1. Depoaxes are inferred east of the study area from thickness maps of the Onondaga to Warren (Plate 6), Alexander to base of Lower Benson (Plate 11), Alexander to top of Upper Benson (Plate 12), Gross (Total) Benson (Plate 13), and Lower Benson (Plate 14) intervals.

2. Depoaxes within the study area lie parallel to the eastern edge of the Rome Trough for the Alexander to Warren (Plate 7), Benson to Bradford (Plate 8), and Bradford to Warren (Plate 9) intervals. These depoaxes are summarized on Plate 10.



3. Basinward (westward) progradation of progressively younger intervals can be observed on the isopach maps and the regional dip cross sections (Pocket Exhibit 3).

4. Based on most intervals mapped, the basin exhibits closure to the south and opens northward within the study area, in agreement with regional basin-wide patterns for the Silurian and Devonian as illustrated in Figures 8 through 12.

5. Thick stratigraphic intervals consist of numerous discrete facies and therefore the individual trends, character, and depoxes of these individual facies (other than the Benson) are sacrificed in order to show generalized attributes. Individual facies maps of the Benson, on the other hand, illustrate the trends and thickness of a relatively thin interval.

6. A lobate prograding slope apron is indicated by the thickness map of the Alexander to base of Lower Benson Interval (Plate 11). These deposits constructed a "shelf bulge", upon which the Benson "Sands" accumulated.

7. A new relatively deep-water distal shelf interpretation (including aerobic conditions and deposition below storm wave base) is proposed for the massive and bioturbated siltstones of the Lower Benson (Figure 15). Deltaic sources are evidenced by map trends of this unit (Plate 14) to the east and northeast of the study area.

8. A more comprehensive regional picture for Upper Benson deposition is indicated from isopach maps which include proximal (eastern) transitional/strike-oriented trends, parallel dip-oriented shelf slope trends, and basinal (western) non-oriented or strike-oriented trends as illustrated by Plates 15a, b, and c. A depositional model is proposed for the Upper Benson (Figure 17).

9. The Rome Trough, shown in Plate 2 along with other basement features, formed a sag that defines the basinal position for several Upper Devonian sedimentary intervals. Structural block faulting, downward along the eastern edge of this feature, controlled the position of shelf slope sedimentation. Sedimentation patterns also indicate differential block faulting within the Rome Trough north and south of the Weston CSD (Cross Strike Discontinuity).

10. Some sedimentation patterns indicate that sediments preferentially funneled through the Eastern Cross-Over Rift in their dispersal toward the Rome Trough. Other patterns show thin to absent deposition over the West Virginia (Pocono) Dome (which probably was activated by tilting of a basement block), and thickness trends superimposed over the Weston CSD (Plate 2). The evidence for syn-tectonic sedimentation (growing structures) is significant.

11. The abundance of small displacement thrust and reverse faults (Plate 5) trending parallel to Alleghanian folds (Plates 3 and 4) causes anomalous local thickness

values and their recognition is necessary for accurate stratigraphic analysis and interpretations.

As illustrated by Cross Section "X" (Pocket Exhibit 4), the subsurface intervals analyzed can be correlated eastward to the Elkins, West Virginia outcrop. Outcrop analysis provides important insights about depositional environments for these rocks.

1. Correlation confidence was increased in this study by the availability of logs of a new well located east (four miles proximal) of the Elkins outcrop.

2. Rocks show more proximal environments of deposition in the outcrop compared with the subsurface sections starting 9 miles to the west in the study area.

3. Progradational sequences such as the Pound Member, and upper part of the Red Lick Member have been distinguished from retrogradational sequences such as the Blizzard Member and the lower portion of the Red Lick Member.

4. Storm deposits recognized in the outcrop were grouped into two types including 1) amalgamated proximal storm deposits (Figure 6) and 2) non-amalgamated distal storm deposits (Figure 7). Type 2 (distal facies) is interpreted to form in deeper and more offshore seas than type 1 (proximal facies).

5. Transgressive shale markers at the top of the Briery Gap Member (Alexander) and Pound Member (Benson) can be traced westward across the state and allow the

correlation of equivalent basin shales, driller sands, and eastern outcrop units (Figure 3).

Core analysis permitted a detailed study of a select interval of deposition (the Benson interval) within the lower part of the Catskill clastic wedge. The following conclusions were drawn.

1. Based on petrographic and macroscopic properties, "finger print" characteristics of the shaly lowermost part of the Riley Interval (facies "a"), the sandy Upper Benson (facies "b"), and the silty Lower Benson (facies "c") were identified that augmented the interpreted depositional environments of these intervals established from their mapped thickness and lithological patterns.

2. Comparison of rock properties from core analysis showed both the differences between facies, and within facies, observable from well to well.

Based on the data analyzed, a depositional model for the Lower and Upper Benson intervals is proposed (Figures 15 and 17). Elongate marine belts of sandstone/siltstone change orientation east to west from interpreted shoreline to basin axis in the following manner: 1) strike trends dominate shelf sedimentation between fair-weather and storm wave base; 2) dip trends dominate slope sedimentation coinciding with the eastern edge of the Rome Trough and sedimentation caused by turbidity flows; 3) strike trends for axial flow of waning turbidity flows occur along the basin axis within the area of the Rome Trough.

An understanding of the Benson using these interpretations explains the mapped patterns and depositional character of the Benson "Sands", and should aid future exploration and development of the important Upper Benson gas reservoir rock.

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