



**PETROLEUM
HISTORY
SOCIETY**

ARCHIVES

Newsletter of the Petroleum History Society

February 2006; Volume XVII, Number 1

P.H.S. Lunch and Learn Meeting – Tuesday, February 21, 2006

Speaker: B.A. (Sandy) Gow, Ph.D., Professor of History

On:

The History of Drilling Safety in Alberta

“You was either quick or you was dead”

Sandy will be speaking to us about one aspect of his recently published book “Roughnecks, Rock Bits and Rigs”. This masterful account of the technological history of the drilling side of this industry in Alberta is, of course, far too much to condense into a short talk and Sandy has therefore selected one aspect of his publication for this purpose. To quote “Alberta’s early rigs were unsafe places to work. Our first gas well – really meant to be a water well for the C.P.R. – caught fire, exploded and produced injuries. Death and injuries were to dog Alberta drilling from the start, and the development of the Turner Valley Field – as well as some smaller fields before the end of World War II – accelerated this trend.” Sandy will touch upon the gradual trend to a more safety-conscious workplace leading up to the situation in 1970 that marks the end of his analysis.

Sandy Gow studied History at the U. of A. and Dalhousie, as well as Education at U. Vic. and Mount St. Vincent. He currently teaches History at Concordia University College in Edmonton where he is continuing his research into the industry. Copies of the book will be available.

TIME: 12 noon, Tuesday, February 21, 2006.

PLACE: Fairmont Palliser Hotel (133 - 9th Avenue S.W.) – Marquis Room (check marquee)

COST: Members \$25.00 and Guests \$30.00 (most welcome) (cash or cheque only)

**R.S.V.P. if you wish to attend to: Clint Tippett, 691-4274 or
clinton.tippett@shell.com by noon Monday, February 20**

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Archives is published approximately 6 times a year by the Petroleum History Society for Society members. Back issues are archived on our website at:

www.petroleumhistory.ca

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THE PETROLEUM HISTORY SOCIETY
THE BULL WHEEL



Next Board Meeting: The Board will meet next on Thursday, February 23, 2006 at noon at the Glenbow Museum and Archives. Meet in the lobby just before noon.

Volunteers: We are always on the lookout for people with the energy and dedication to help us grow and to undertake projects on the Society's behalf. Please contact Clint Tippett (691-4274), Doug Cass (268-4203) or Hugh Leiper (249-0707) if you would like to get involved.

Next Luncheons: Our luncheon slate for the Spring session is gradually filling up. We are always seeking speakers and interesting subjects. If you would like to consider presenting, please contact Clint Tippett, President P.H.S., at 691-4274 or Director Debbie Knall at 780-463-3859 (Edmonton). Our Annual General Meeting is scheduled for March 22 in the late afternoon.

Canadian Centre for Energy Information: The P.H.S. has a "Content, Marketing and Traffic Partnership" with the Centre. This arrangement is an expression of the mutually beneficial cooperation that we hope will exist between our two organizations. Please see www.centreforenergy.com for more details. Of particular interest to our members is their on-line historical volume "Evolution of Canada's Oil and Gas Industry" that can be downloaded free of charge.



P.H.S. 2004 Awards: It had originally been our intention to present these awards during the February luncheon but it was decided to defer this event until the Annual General Meeting in March.

Sad News: As many of you will know, Elsie Kerr, wife of P.H.S. Director Aubrey Kerr for sixty-three years, passed away on January 21, 2006. Elsie was well known to our membership and attended many luncheons with Aubrey. Her friendly smile will be missed. We pass along our deepest sympathies to Aubrey on behalf of the membership of our Society.

Gow Invoices: For those of you who ordered a copy of Sandy Gow's book through the Society at the discounted rate, you should find herewith an invoice for the small amount of money owing to the Society as a result of the final cost of the book being somewhat higher than originally anticipated. This process for extra billing was anticipated at the time that orders were taken.

P.H.S. Pin Sets: Our pin sets (of 6) have been reduced in price to \$40.00. Please contact the Society if you are interested in buying one or several sets. These make great and original Calgary- or Western Canada-related gifts. Detailed comprehensive descriptions accompany each plush-boxed set.

Membership Dues: Please note: At the September 15, 2005 meeting of the P.H.S. Board a motion was passed to alter the Society's dues structure as follows effective January 1, 2006:

1. New applications for the lifetime membership category will not be accepted. All lifetime memberships existing at that time will, of course, still be honoured.
2. Individual memberships will increase to \$25.00 per year from their current level of \$20.00.
3. Sustaining individual memberships will remain unchanged at \$50.00 per year.
4. Membership applications and renewals received before January 1, 2006 will be handled under the 2005 dues structure.

Dues renewal invoices for 2006 are included with this month's Archives.

Turner Valley Gas Plant Status: The following is part of an announcement from Alberta Community Development released on November 16, 2005: "The site will remain closed to public use throughout the entire 2006 visitor season to allow for the construction of a permanent containment system. The containment system will prevent hydrocarbons and other contaminants from moving offsite and will allow for their remediation. It is expected to be in place by fall 2006." As well, on January 17, 2006, a second press release was issued entitled "New Panel to review viability of Turner Valley Gas Plant". This panel will be made up of 12 members and is called the "Turner Valley Gas Plant Resolution Advisory Panel" involving municipal, environmental and stakeholder representatives. As of press time, ten of these members had been announced with only the "members at large" still being un-named. At first glance, the panel seems light on those representing the historical side of the case although the Turner Valley Oilfield Society and the "Turner Valley Gas Plant Committee for a Safe Historic Site" have delegates. An expression of interest has been made in support of some representation for the broader provincial and national aspects of preservation. Details are available on the Government of Alberta website.

New Book: A new volume entitled "Athabasca Oil Sands – From Laboratory to Production – the letters of Karl A. Clark, 1950-66" has been released. It contains an introduction and selection of letters compiled by Mary Clark Sheppard. The book is available from Geoscience Publishing, Box 79088, Sherwood Park, Alberta T8A 5S3 and goes for \$50.00 (plus \$5.00 postage and handling) prepaid. Check also local bookstores such as DeMille's at McNally-Robinson.

New Petroleum History Course at the University of Calgary: Recent P.H.S. speaker and U. of C. lecturer Paul Chastko will be instructing a new course at the U. of C. entitled "History of the North American Oil Industry" during the Summer term of 2006. It appears to be catalog number 1371 and will run on Tuesday and Thursday mornings at 9:00 a.m.. Consult the U. of C. website for more information. Congratulations to Paul and the U. of C. for undertaking this long-expected teaching program.

Alberta Centennial Stamps: Some of you may have noted a pane of 50 cent domestic stamps issued by Canada Post last year featuring so-called "Tallpecs" – striking landscape photos digitally stretched and elongated. The three used were shots of a Nova Chemical Plant, Calgary's skyline and the CP mainline beneath Mount Grassi. Somewhat unusual for stamps was the presence of another series of pictures on the back of each pane. The one of particular interest to the P.H.S. was what was labeled "the Snowdon Oil Refinery of Calgary ca. 1912". This is unusual as it predates Turner Valley. Does anyone have any background on this?

Earle Gray Remarks at AGM March 23, 2005 re: Ontario Anniversary

I want to avoid starting out like a speaker who began with this announcement: "Before I begin, I have something important to say.". I mention that because I, too, have something to say before we get to the advertised subject of my talk. What I'd like to do is offer a challenge to the Petroleum History Society. I think you can expect that four years from now, the Americans will make a bit of a to-do about the 150th anniversary of the Drake discovery well at Titusville, Pennsylvania. The first oil well drilled in North America, they say; the oil well that gave birth to the petroleum industry. And you know that's not right. You know that, more than anywhere else, it was in Canada that today's petroleum industry was born, with Canadian parents. You know that the foundation was laid by that remarkable Nova Scotian - Abraham Gesner - with the process he developed to refine a liquid fuel from fossil fuels, a liquid he called kerosene. Produced first from coal at some three dozen coal oil refineries that sprang up overnight in the eastern United States, kerosene fuelled the lamps of the world for decades and today fuels jet aircraft. Even NASA, yes, the U.S. National Aeronautical and Space Administration, in its educational web site, has called Gesner "the father of the modern petroleum industry". You know also that James Miller Williams brought in North America's first commercial oil well at least a full year before Drake. William's 1858 well at Oil Springs produced a daily volume of oil eight times greater than the Drake well, and there is evidence that suggests Williams drilled his first oil well not one, but two years before Drake. Williams did more than that. He was the first to refine kerosene from crude oil, as opposed to producing it from coal, undoubtedly with the help of Gesner. Within a few years, all the U.S. coal oil refineries had followed this lead and had switched from coal to crude oil for their feedstock. Williams also established the first integrated oil producing, refining and marketing business. As historians, we know all this. But very few other Canadians know it, and even fewer Americans.

So the challenge is this, what can we do to gain wider recognition for Canada's pioneering contribution to the development of the petroleum industry? I can think of two things. First, let's see if we can persuade Canada Post to strike a postage stamp in 2008 -- less than three years from now -- that would mark the 150th anniversary of North America's first known commercial oil well. Secondly, I know from Bob Bott that a joint meeting with the U.S. Petroleum History Institute in 2007 or 2008 has already been discussed. I would encourage you to make it 2008, in southwest Ontario, where North America's oil production began.

At Oil Springs, you can view operations at the world's oldest producing oil field, where hundreds of wells are still pumping a tiny trickle of oil after 147 years - 150 years if you meet there in 2008. Moreover, they are still produced by the rod-and-jerker system developed by John Henry Fairbank in 1863. His great-grandson, Charlie Fairbank, still uses that system to pump about 25,000 barrels of oil a year from some 350 wells. Too often we Canadians fail to recognize our heritage until someone else points it out. That could be the case at Oil Springs where an American, Dr. Emory Kemp, a professor of industrial archeology at the University of West Virginia, has mounted a campaign to have this producing field declared a World Heritage Site by the United Nations. Perhaps the Petroleum History Society could lend some support to that effort.

I can't imagine why anyone interested in the history of Canada's oil industry would not welcome an opportunity to see how oil was actually produced a century and a half ago. And I suspect that Charlie Fairbank would be pleased to show it to you. So this is what I wanted to say before I begin. And I thank you for bearing with me.

THE STORY OF LEDUC NO. 1 – It drilled to a depth of 118 miles and took 28 years to complete

(From the Financial Post Survey of Canadian Oils for 1948 – an advertisement by Imperial Oil Limited)

“It was a devious hole! It spudded in as a cable tool test at Czar, in eastern Alberta in 1919. It sampled the strata at Wainwright, Ribstone, Red Coulee, Tilley, Vermilion, Princess and a host of other Alberta locations. It wandered over into Saskatchewan. It had tough drilling at Stolberg, Coalspur, Wildcat Hills, Grease Creek, Jumping Pound and numerous foothill structures. It had to case off a tremendous gas flow at Kinsella but otherwise it just got inadequate showings of oil! The final 5,000 feet of drilling was done by rotary at Leduc and production was obtained in the Devonian limestone! That, literally, is the story of the Leduc Discovery Well. It was not a promiscuous “wildcat” that met with immediate success. It was the culmination of years of systematic effort. It was the lineal descendant of 622,600 feet of exploratory drilling. It was the fruits of an expenditure of millions of dollars.”

“Western Canada has 500,000 square miles of prospective oil territory. Imperial Oil geologists started back in 1919 to look for a Leduc in that vast area. As the science of oil finding progressed they were joined by geophysicists with their gravity meters and seismographs; the core drillers with their portable rigs; the palaeontologists with their microscopes; each applying his specialized knowledge to the problem of where to drill. They were not always right; many disappointments inadequately rewarded the efforts of the drillers who, surmounting the difficulties of climate and terrain, drove their test holes to ever greater depth. But Imperial’s toolpushers, like Oliver Twist, always came back for more and at Leduc they got their reward.”



Section of an oilfield painting by Franklin Arbuckle, Shell Canada Collection, not in ad

“Imperial Oil is in the oil business in Canada from coast to coast. To serve its customers it must supply its seven refineries with crude oil. The farther it has to go for crude, the heavier the transportation charges are and these, of course, are part of the cost of the finished products. Only one out of every ten barrels processed in Canadian refineries comes out of a Canadian well. Some of the imported barrels have accumulated over \$2.00 of transportation charges before they go into the cracking coils. That and the saving of foreign exchange are strong reasons for trying to boost Canada’s domestic production. Who will benefit from Leduc? Here is how Mr. H.H. Hewetson, President of Imperial Oil Ltd. summed it up for the Company’s shareholders at their last General Meeting: “I need not comment on how good an enlarged production of oil in Canada would be for all segments of the national economy. It would mean an addition to the national income and, in the course of time, with production at a sufficient level, it would mean also a reduction in the cost of petroleum products to consumers on the prairies. This, of course, would also be a very important contribution to the national wellbeing because it would eventually lower the cost of production for our great agricultural industry.””

Newfoundland Flying Boat Festival going International

The central Newfoundland, Canada towns of Botwood and Norris Arm, and the Town of Foynes, Ireland are exploring partnership opportunities for the Flying Boat Festival International (F.B.F.I.) that is being organized for the summer of 2007. A celebration of the well-known Flying Boat era that saw hundreds of non-stop Atlantic crossings between Botwood and Foynes, the F.B.F.I. project also includes newly developed infrastructure and attractions in the two Bay of Exploits communities. Initial consultations with representatives of the Foynes Flying Boat Museum have been met with an enthusiastic response. Communications have been ongoing for a number of months via e-mail, and this past Sept. a conference call was held between local F.B.F.I. committee representatives and members of the Foynes Museum Board of Directors. Foynes representatives have been asked to consider a cultural exchange, including: music and other forms of entertainment, food, crafts, reciprocal pavilions and dignitary visitations. A new web site for the festival was launched in Nov. - www.flyingboatfestival.ca. The site has already received responses and enquiries from aviation enthusiasts, and festival coordinators are in the process of making contact via email with hundreds of flying boat and aviation organizations and devotees throughout North America and around the world. A prelude of the festival will take place in early August of this year and will include activities in both Botwood and Norris Arm.



In 2007 the main celebration for the FBFI will be held as this year marks the 70th anniversary of an important event in aviation history. On July 5, 1937 two flying boats - one eastbound from Botwood and the other westbound from Foynes - were each successful in their attempts to traverse the Atlantic Ocean non-stop. This event is said to have heralded a new era in human connectivity. Although experimental, these first triumphant flights were touted as a tremendous feat by the media of the day. They led to a short, but colourful, period in aviation history that included 492 scheduled flying boat Atlantic crossings between 1939 and 1945. *[editor's note – Shell aviation fuel was central to these flights as depicted above. Promotion of the role of high quality aviation fuels was a major marketing component in those days.]*

At a time when Britain, and later the U.S., were inevitably being drawn closer to a formal declaration of war, and during WW2 itself, the Ireland-Newfoundland flying boat connection was the central part of an important transportation route starting in Port Washington, New York, through the Bay of Exploits, and ending in South Hampton, England. Dignitaries and entertainers such as Winston Churchill and Bob Hope were among those who traveled between North America and Europe via flying boat.

The new Central Newfoundland celebration will bring to life the vision of a group of dedicated individuals from Botwood and Norris Arm who have put in countless volunteer hours since Dec. of 2002. Norris Arm's involvement in the F.B.F.I. stems from its aviation history and its link to Botwood. Meteorological survey work for the British Air Ministry was carried out from Norris Arm in the early to mid 1930's. This included work required before non-stop flights across the Atlantic could be attempted.