

# ARCHIVES

Newsletter of the Petroleum History Society

October 2017; Volume XXVIII, Number 7

P.H.S. Lunch and Learn Meeting – Wednesday, October 25, 2017

## **“Betting on Bitumen: Alberta’s Energy Policies from Lougheed to Klein”**

*by Gillian Steward – Author and Journalist*

Gillian Steward's presentation focuses on the contrasting oil sands policies of Premiers Peter Lougheed and Ralph Klein, two of Alberta's most popular leaders, which were key to the development of the oil sands. Even though they were both Progressive Conservatives, each premier had very different ideas of how much control the petroleum industry and the provincial government should each have when it came to development of Alberta's bitumen reserves. By examining the policies of these two PC premiers it also becomes clear that Rachel Notley's current NDP government leans more towards the Lougheed model than the Klein model.

*Please see page 2 for Ms. Steward's biography.*

Time: 12 noon, Wednesday, October 25, 2017

Place: Calgary Petroleum Club

319 - 5 Avenue SW, Calgary; Cardium Room (but check marquee).

Dress: Business casual.

Cost: P.H.S. Members and Student Members \$35 and Guests \$40 (most welcome).

Only cash or cheque at the door. Payment can be made in advance by credit card or by e-mail. Please advise payment method with reply.

Lunch: Soup, sandwiches and cookies. Gluten-free? Vegan? Advise with reply.

### **NOTE: Instructions for registering for the Luncheon:**

Reply, if you wish to attend, to: Micky Gulless at 403-283-9268 or  
[micky@petroleumhistory.ca](mailto:micky@petroleumhistory.ca) by noon, Monday, October 23, if not sooner.

**Those who register but do not come, or cancel after the deadline, will be invoiced.**

**Those who do not register by the deadline may not get a seat.**

## The Bull Wheel



**Luncheon Pricing:** Please be advised that on June 12, 2017 the P.H.S. Board approved a motion to increase luncheon prices for events held at the Calgary Petroleum Club by \$5.00 bringing those rates for \$35.00 for members and \$40.00 for non-members. We try to run these events on a long term break-even basis and increases in our costs over the last few years have unfortunately made this move necessary.

**October 25 Speaker Biography:** Gillian Steward is a Calgary-based author and journalist. She currently writes a regular column for the Toronto Star and teaches journalism at Mount Royal University. She was the managing editor at the Calgary Herald from 1987 to 1990, and was the publisher/editor of Alberta Views magazine in 2006/07. In 2014 Ms. Steward completed a Ph.D. in Communication Studies at the University of Calgary.

***The Black Gold Tapestry at the Glenbow:*** On Sept. 20, P.H.S. Director Micky Gulless alerted the membership to a new exhibit at the Glenbow Museum that is closely related to the petroleum industry. The details are as follows: *“Calgary artist Sandra Sawatzky has spent the last 9 years embroidering a 67 m-long tapestry telling the story of oil - from oil in ancient China to oil derricks in modern Alberta. The tapestry is as large as two city blocks, represents a time commitment of nine years of one artist's life and displays million years of petroleum history (in the broad sense) with an obvious focus on the last few thousands of years. With each carefully chosen thread, neat stitch, firm knot and expressive gesture, the artist tells an epic story of how oil has impacted human civilizations around the world, from prehistoric times to the present.”*

Key dates are/were: **October 6, 2017** - Fall Launch took place at the Glenbow Museum.

**October 21, 2017** - Artist Talk with Sandra Sawatzky at 2:00 p.m. – Tickets from the Glenbow at \$12 (Glenbow members \$10). Join Sandra as she shares the exhaustive research and creation process of *The Black Gold Tapestry*, followed by an audience Q & A. **October 7, 2017 to May 21, 2018** - *The Black Gold Tapestry* on display at the Glenbow Museum. The usual museum entry fees apply, except for the first Thursday night of every month which is free after 5:00 p.m.

The following link tells more about the tapestry.

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/sandra-sawatzky-oil-tapestry-tells-history-of-energy-at-glenbow-1.4283778>

Sections of the tapestry can be viewed on the artist's website at:

<https://www.theblackgoldtapestry.com/gallery/>

**Call for contributions and speakers:** The Petroleum History Society values your input. If you have an article that you'd like to see in *Archives* or if you have a talk that you'd like to give, please get a hold of us. Contact President Clint Tippett at the address indicated below.

**Oil Paintings:** A recent visit to the Calgary Home Show included a visit to the booth of artist Edward Michell who had a number of his works on display. Edward's technique involves the use of naturally-occurring materials in his paintings, as described in his brochure *"Edward Michell paints with the "guts" of the land. This resourceful international artist incorporates into his palette: oil sands, gold and silver leaf, crushed diamonds and handmade paints: red, derived from raspberries and beets; green, extracted from grass and leaves; and blue, from blueberries. His unprecedented composition of these elements results in truly stunning works of art."* I would have to admit that the paintings themselves are a bit too abstract for me – titles include "Evolution of the Soul" and "Mystical Connection", but to each their own. It would be kind of cool, however, to see a painting of the Great Canadian Oil Sands plant done using bitumen from the oil sands.

**The War on Tubular Goods:** We are all familiar with the environmental opposition to petroleum pipelines such as Energy East and Northern Gateway. Sensing some degree of success in their campaigns, the ENGO community has opened a new front for their activities. An article in the Calgary Herald on September 9, 2017 indicated that their next target is plastic drinking straws which are seen as the epitome of the "throw-away society" and an environmental hazard once the plastic disintegrates and gets into the food chain. But perhaps the connecting theme is the use of hollow tubes for transporting liquids. What's next – the plumbing in our houses?

**New Book concerning the Oil Sands:** On September 18, Chris Turner, a recent speaker for the P.H.S., launched a new book on the subject of the oil sands entitled *"The Patch – The People, Pipelines, and Politics of the Oil Sands"*. As described in its promotional material: *"Published by Simon & Schuster, The Patch is the definitive story of Alberta's oil sands, "told through the eyes of those who live in it day-to-day -- from the shift workers, entrepreneurs, and politicians who make a living mining the oil sands' material riches, to the scientists, activists, and Indigenous peoples who seek to curb the region's unrestrained growth". Basically it's a whole-hog explainer of Alberta's oil sands: what it is, what it has been, and what it means to Canada and beyond -- all in Chris Turner's signature accessible and intelligent style."* The book is 340 pages and retails for \$34.99. Check your local bookstore.

**Editorial Comment:** Please note that unless otherwise indicated, all contents of this newsletter have been created or assembled by P.H.S. President and *Archives* Editor Clinton Tippett.

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by the Petroleum History Society for Society members.

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Back issues are archived on our website at <http://www.petroleumhistory.ca/>

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## Publication Sales from the Petroleum History Society

The P.H.S. has in its possession an inventory of books and related materials that have been donated to it by both individuals and organizations. The core of this collection is, of course, the Peter McKenzie-Brown Library which is an amalgamation of our original set of publications with a large body of materials donated by Peter a number of years ago. An interim catalog is present on our website. As there was some duplication, we have identified some volumes that are surplus to our needs. We also have books donated by speakers whose intention it has been to assist us in raising funds through their sales.

If you would like to top up your petroleum book collection, please consider purchasing one or several of the following:

**Tertzakian** – A Thousand Barrels a Second

**Tertzakian** – The End of Energy Obesity

**Finch** – From the Beginning: Schlumberger's history in Canada

**McKenzie-Brown, Finch and Jaremko** – The Great Oil Age

**Gilbert** – Ned Gilbert – Geologist, Landman and Oil Sands Pioneer (hard cover and soft cover)

**Haskayne** – Northern Tigers

**Dormaar** – Black Gold in Waterton Park (with Parks Canada brochure Tales of Mountain Oil)

**Kelly** – The Oil Sands – Canada's Path to Clean Energy

**Leeson** – Torn in the U.S.A.

**Porter** – A Backward Glance (history of Canadian Superior)

**Foran** – Earning our Stripes (history of Chevron Canada)

**Petroleum Communications Foundation** – Our Petroleum Challenge (6<sup>th</sup> Ed.)

**Stenson** – Waste to Wealth (history of natural gas processing in Western Canada)

**TransMountain** – the Building of the TransMountain Pipeline

**Sproule** – Spirit of Success (history of Sproule and Associated)

These volumes can be purchased at a price of \$5.00 each with the exception of Ned's book. Shipping and handling can be negotiated by contacting Director Micky Gulless at the phone number or e-mail address indicated on page 1. The most obvious approach, and to keep it simple, is to request a volume and we will bring it to a luncheon for you to pick up and pay for.

If you require a more complete citation or if there are others that you are interested in that do not occur on the list, let us know and we will try to point you in the right direction.

### Other books of Interest

Camp, M. J. 2016. On a Handshake: Humble Beginnings to Global Impact: Ohio's Oil and Gas Industry. HPNbooks – A division of Lammert Incorporated, San Antonio Texas. 264 p., \$49.95. A publication of the Ohio Oil and Gas Association.

Keirns, A. J. 2015. Ariel-Foundation Park – The story of an Ohio town that preserved its history and transformed an abandoned industrial site into a world class park. Foundation Park Conservancy, 148 p. (*glass manufacturing, perhaps some learnings for Turner Valley?*)

## REMEMBRANCE

*(with thanks to the Calgary Herald and Legacy.com)*

**Alexander, Bruce Edward.** Bruce was born on June 12, 1946 in Almonte, Ontario and passed away September 14, 2017. He was born into an armed forces family and that meant a lot of moves. His family moved from Calgary, AB, after WWII to Almonte, ON near Ottawa where Bruce was born. They moved to Ottawa, Toronto, Trenton, Camp Borden, Newfoundland, Ottawa (again) and back to Trenton all before the age of eleven! They stayed in Trenton until a final move to Ottawa where Bruce started at Carleton University in Engineering. In 1970, he completed his Applied Science degree in Metallurgical Engineering at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. His first Job was at Dofasco in Hamilton, Ontario. In 1970 Bruce also met Mary Lou, and in 1972 they got married. At that time he began a career shift into the oil and gas industry and so off they headed to Inuvik, Northwest Territories. After various small jobs with Esso, Adecco Drilling and Northern Transportation (NTCL), he was hired by Gulf Oil in 1976 and moved to Calgary. He flew on a rotation out of Calgary, which became part of his work life for the next forty years. For example two weeks on and off, a month on and off or two months on and two weeks off - all depended upon the agreement. With Gulf he started as a coordinator at Swimming Point on Richard's Island near Tuktoyuktuk, Northwest Territories. He moved from there to Enhanced Recovery as the Arctic shut down after the results of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry (Berger Inquiry). The family then moved to Stettler, AB where Bruce did field work for Gulf in their Clive and Bashaw Fields. Then back to Calgary for a manager position with Gulf, as the Arctic was once again open for business. The camp that he now built was his crowning achievement of his career, called Nalluk Base (Swimming Point). He supervised the bid process to decide who would be the builder. The piles (embedded into the permafrost to prevent the building from sinking and to protect the environment) on which the building base was constructed was named Alexander's Forest. He supervised the construction and managed the operation of support for the drilling operation, alternating with a cross shift for a month on and a month off. This company was called Beaudril, a subsidiary of Gulf Oil and was an offshore drilling operation with the Kulluk and Molikpaq drilling vessels. Once that closed down, Bruce and a lot of his co-workers moved onto the joint Canadian/ Russian partnership, called Komiarctic Oil in Usinsk, Russia. He finished with Gulf in 1995 and went on to State Petroleum in the Sudan where he was an Operations Manager. In 1997 he worked with Hurricane Hydrocarbons in Kazakhstan as a Director. In 2000, Bruce and Mary Lou started a company called HPR Resources Inc. This company brought Bruce back to his "work roots", with a contract for Arctic Oil and Gas Services, based in Tuktoyuktuk and Inuvik. This work re-united Bruce with some of his old cohorts (some as early as 1972). His last company was Shell where he was a senior manager on two projects related to bitumen processing, each being about five years long. For the first project, Bruce and Mary Lou relocated to Fort McMurray for three plus years. It was a fun time - new friends, new neighbours, new work mates. He worked a total of eleven and a half years for Shell and when the projects were done, he planned to retire. As he stepped off the plane on his last trip home, he started to show signs of what would cause his demise. His achievements include being well respected in his last job at Shell, both as a mentor and as a significant source of information that helped to move the projects ahead in a timely and cost effective way. He was very healthy, never a sick day all his school, or work life. He loved the outdoors and the bush, fishing, walking, hunting, especially with his family and our dog, Anna. He also loved his music, Rock and Roll, Elvis, New Orleans Jazz and the Blues. On Saturday nights Bruce and Mary Lou would often sit outside with the lake in front and a glass of scotch or a red wine in hand, listening Randy Bachman and Holger Peterson on CBC.

## The Suncor Story by Peter McKenzie-Brown September 11, 2017

*Peter launched his new book “Bitumen – The People, Performance and Passions behind Alberta’s Oil Sands” at the Glenbow Archives on the afternoon of September 11, 2017. His presentation focussed on the part of the oil sands history that involved Suncor. The event was well-attended and the talk followed by an interesting discussion. The self-published book is 349 pages and is a contribution to our understanding of this facet of Canadian petroleum history based on the P.H.S. Oil Sands Oral History Project of 2011-2013 of which Peter was a main proponent. Peter was kind enough to make a transcript of the talk available to us for publication in Archives and we are grateful for that.*

### The oil sands

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for joining me today for this book launch. Book writing is such a time-consuming effort that getting it out the door is always a cause for celebration..... The slide is a map of Alberta’s oil sands, and its purpose is to orient you geographically to the oil sands themselves. I have registered the book as a Canada 150 publication, so it sports the 150 logo. In global terms, the oil sands are the world’s second-largest petroleum resource. Only Venezuela has more bitumen in the ground.

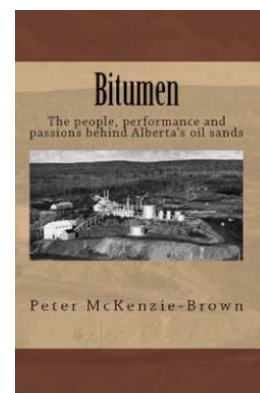


### Why history?

In my view, people write and read history to find ways to make society better, and to prevent it from getting worse. Inquiry into history has played a role in many of the key events of our planet’s past. For example, the women’s liberation movement of the 60s and 70s began with President Kennedy’s inquiry into the status of women, and fundamentally changed social perceptions of women. Similarly, many inquiries and studies have been behind efforts to empower Canada’s indigenous people, after the dysfunction created in those communities through more than a century of residential schools. One of the first steps to begin making amends is to understand what went before. An important part of moving ahead, in other words, is to study history, and put it on the record – whether as a book, a film, a website or even through a talk like the one I am giving today. For the history wonks among you, this probably seems like stating the obvious.

### About the book

I obviously can’t tell you much about the contents of a rather fat book. Instead, I want to tell you a small part of the story – what I take to be the amazing Suncor story. This story takes us back to the North American petroleum industry’s earliest days. You may not know that this story began in Ohio, decades before such great discoveries as Spindletop shifted much of the industry’s focus to Texas. During Canada’s Centennial 50 years ago, an Ohio-based American company laid the foundations for Suncor Energy, which has become Canada’s largest energy company. Here’s how it happened, as seen through the eyes of the people who were there. Today I want to tell you the stories of four men who played roles in building Canada’s largest petroleum company.



- The first of these men was J. Howard Pew, who was born in 1882 and died in 1971. I learned about him from books, but also by talking to people who knew him.
- Number two was Robert McClements, Jr., who is almost 90.

- Another was the late Jack Avery. Jack became a field worker in 1966, just before commercial oil sands development began.
- The fourth was Rick George, who died last month, aged 67.

The people who developed Alberta's oil sands turned Alberta into an economic powerhouse, and my book tells the story of how that happened. I based my writing about the last three of these men in interviews from among 117 which the Petroleum History Society collected, transcribed and donated to the Glenbow. I coordinated that project, and it sparked my interest in writing the book we are launching today. Among the other people I had the honour to interview were Premier Peter Lougheed, who died about 18 months later, and the remarkable Tom Morimoto, who actually worked in the oil sands as a teenager, during the Great Depression. Tom died about a year after our interview. The interviews that comprised the oil sands oral history project illustrate the vital role that oral history can play in preserving the stories of our past.

### J. Howard Pew

I can't imagine anyone in petroleum history I'd rather have met than J. Howard Pew. I once gave a presentation in which I mentioned Pew's contributions to the oil sands. At the end of my talk, a former Sun Oil employee – he had worked in the lower echelons of the company's global enterprise – stood up to make a few extemporaneous comments. The man's name was John, and he had worked at one of the company's field projects in Canada. John met Pew twice, he told me. The first time was at a



company social gathering. The second time was several years later at a staff meeting in the field. On the second occasion, Pew came up to him and said *"Hello, John. How's your dog, June?"* On both names – man and dog – Pew's remarkable memory was correct. Born in 1882, Pew graduated from high school at age 14. He graduated from university at 18, and he became president of the Sun Oil Company at age 30. Pew and his brother Joseph transformed the Ohio-based company by introducing new refining, marketing, and distribution techniques. During the First World War he led the company's move into crude oil tankers, playing a vital role in supplying the Allies with the oil that enabled them to win the war. He founded a Canadian subsidiary known as Sun Company of Canada with headquarters in Montréal in 1919. Others had been experimenting with oil sands development since the 1920s. Pew's company began its investigations in the late 1940s. Pew was one of the early proponents of continental energy security, partly because of his experience during two world wars. North America depended heavily on oil from the Middle East, and submarines could destroy tanker traffic. For that reason he saw the need for North America to develop continental energy security, and he saw the oil sands as a vital part of that equation. In the early 1960s, Sun Oil's majority-owned subsidiary filed an application for a commercial oil sands project in Alberta. It would be the first ever constructed. Pew was one of the ten wealthiest men in America, and one of the few with the financial resources and the technical know-how to pull off a project of this magnitude. In 1967 – the end of September marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary – Pew told the audience at the plant's opening ceremonies that *"No nation can long be secure in this atomic age unless it be amply supplied with petroleum... It is the considered opinion of our group that if the North American continent is to produce the oil to meet its requirements in the years ahead, oil from the Athabasca area must of necessity play an important role."*

## Ernest Manning

It would be hard to overstate Ernest Manning's impact on Alberta's oil sands. Alberta's eighth premier, he recognized their potential and took steps to spur interest within what would soon become a rapidly-growing petroleum industry. First by providing provincial funding for Bitumount during the Second World War, his government provided political assistance for the embryonic industry during its most critical quarter century. Shortly after the opening ceremonies for Great Canadian Oil Sands plant, Premier Manning retired from government, after a quarter century as Premier. He saw the GCOS plant as one of the crowning accomplishments of his career. I didn't interview



Manning for the oral history project, of course, but I did interview his son Preston, who rather dramatically described negotiations between the two men. *"My father looked Pew in the eye and said 'We believe you can build a plant where nobody's done it before, a 40,000 barrel-a-day plant, and we're prepared to give you a lease and a permit.'"* To make the plant economic, though, Pew needed Alberta to open up markets for the oil the plant would produce. And that would require shutting in some of Alberta's profitable conventional oil. Manning said he would do this. Without missing a beat, Preston said, *"Pew looked him in the eye and said, 'We believe you will honour that commitment. Without it, we cannot finance the plant.' So they shook hands on it, and that's what sealed the deal."*

## Jack Avery

Now, I'd like to move toward the bottom of the chain of command in the Sun organization, and tell you a bit about Jack Avery, whose proudest achievement was his participation in D-Day, which effectively ended World War II. Jack was not a skilled worker when he became the plant's fifth fulltime employee. This occurred in September, 1966, just before plant production began. But when the company opened the taps in the winter of 1967-68, it seemed that everything was going wrong. *"We were frozen up from Grey Cup weekend well into February,"* Jack told me. The reason? The plant had been designed by a California engineering company. *"California is not like Fort McMurray,"* he said. *"We have a little thing up here called winter."* The plant hadn't been designed for northern Alberta. Avery added that Sun quickly changed the engineering, with the result that within two years the problems were gone. *"In the winter of 68-69, we had a stretch that stayed really cold, yet the plant ran good. And when I say cold, I mean -40° at night and daytime -30°."*



## Robert McClements, Jr.

Through the oil sands oral history project, I have had the honour of interviewing both of the other two men I want to focus on today. The first is Robert McClements, Jr. Bob McClements had been construction manager for GCOS, and he was the project's first project manager when the plant went on stream in 1967. At the time, Sun was the world's sixth largest publically-traded integrated oil company. In 1968, he wrote an article titled *"The Athabasca tar sands"* in a book about the Canadian oil and gas industry. It is the authoritative description of that project when it went on production half a century ago. In the 1980s McClements succeeded Pew as Sun Oil's President and Chief Executive Officer. During his tenure at the top, the company remained a





petroleum giant. When Sun was near the top of its game, McClements asked Rick George to take charge of the company's Canadian subsidiary. At the time, George was in charge of North Sea development and production for Sun. On that assignment, he had overseen construction of Europe's first purpose-built offshore production platform. *"I flew over to London and asked him whether he would give up his position with an established operation in the UK and move to a totally different environment in Canada,"* McClements told me, and the following day Rick George agreed. *"You have never met a more unassuming, low-key but brilliant executive in your life. Rick George was quiet and unassuming, but when he spoke you listened. He knew what he was doing because he came up the ranks. He was given increasing responsibilities and he did well in every one of them."* Shortly after hiring Rick George, McClements retired. When George took up residence in the company's Toronto head office as Suncor's President and Chief Operating Officer in 1990, the company's primary assets included the money-losing oil sands plant, some service stations and a small refinery in Ontario. But times were changing – specifically, Sun Oil was divesting itself of some potentially valuable assets.

### **Rick George takes over**

Why did the American parent divest itself of Suncor? *"We were actually going through a recession back in 1991-92, both here in North America and in Europe,"* Rick George told me. *"The Government of Ontario owned 75 percent of the plant, but was struggling with paying their bills. Sun Company had some issues around debt as well. It was just fortunate that both of them actually needed money at the time and decided to sell Suncor to the public."* Big mistake: Suncor had market capitalization of \$1 billion when



George took over. Today it's about 65 times bigger, and 20 times larger than Sunoco. Assisted by Dee Parkinson-Marcoux, who brought a traditional mining background to Suncor, the first items of business during George's presidency were to restructure the plant, deploy truck-and-shovel technology for mining, make major improvements to the processing plant, and expand capacity to 130,000 barrels per day. Despite dreadful oil prices, in 1998 Suncor filed its regulatory application for Project Millennium, comprised of mining capacity increases and a new upgrader. The project was a dramatic expansion designed to increase production to 210,000 barrels per day. Rick George recalled that, *"about the time our board approved the Millennium Project, which was 1997, The Economist forecast that prices would be stuck at \$5.00 a barrel for a long period of time.... I think what they lost track of is that this industry moves through cycles and it will continue to roll through cycles as we invest, as we try to figure out where the next investments should be."* I could offer a lot of detail about Suncor's growth during his tenure, but I only want to mention one more: In 2009, the company announced a \$19.1-billion bid to take over Petro-Canada. With the merger's success, Suncor suddenly had a much bigger refining and marketing presence in Canada, light oil and gas properties around the world and significant additional oil sands properties. *"We picked Petro-Canada off at the low point of the market, or pretty close to that,"* George told me. *"I'd thought for a period of time about putting the assets together, particularly their downstream with our upgrading and our upstream made a lot of sense."* In his view the deal would create synergies and drive costs out of the system. *"All of that was there in spades. I think it was a great move, made at the right time. And, you know, most mergers actually don't drive shareholder value. This is one that did."* George was competitive when it comes to production systems and oil sands technology, but collaborative on environmental issues. As one of the founders of the Oil Sands Leadership Initiative, he told me

the industry should share *“anything to do with safety, the environment, environmental improvement, anything on reducing our air, land and water footprints. This is important, very important.”* George told me that even though he had been at the helm of Suncor for 20 years, the real excitement was yet to come. *“I think the next ten years in this industry are going to be some of its best,”* he said, pointing specifically to technology around reducing the environmental footprint of oil sands operations. *“It is going to astound people how quickly this happens and how well it happens.”* The step-changes will come particularly in the in situ area, he said. *“The important thing to remember about steam assisted gravity drainage is that is still a young industry. You’re going to see a real take-off because of the critical mass of investment in technologies that will rapidly change how we do this. It will reduce water use. It will reduce energy intensity. It will make wells more productive. As wells get to the end of their life, we’ll figure out ways to extend that and recover more.”* *“Listen, industry is looking at all kinds of ways to [improve efficiency], whether it’s use of solvents, surfactants, better downhole pumps, whether you eventually, once you get these caverns, use fire-flood,”* he said. *“There are so many technologies out there that are being looked at, being researched, being tried in the field, you’re going to see this thing change rapidly, particularly over the next decade or so. It’s actually quite exciting.”* George’s final year in the company saw record production, record cash flow and earnings, and total debt way down, to \$7 billion. I asked him whether, 20 years before, he could have imagined that Suncor would become the largest oil company in Canada – bigger by far than Imperial. *“No. That would have been the most improbable thing. But you know what? It’s been an exciting ride. What I would say is, the potential to do those kinds of things is still out there. If I were, you know, 20 years or 30 years younger than I am today.... Opportunities still exist to do those kinds of things.”*

### **To the present**

When Rick George retired six years ago, chief operating officer Steve Williams inherited Canada’s largest energy company, but he didn’t stand still. Under his leadership, Suncor used a combination of historically low interest rates and the oil price crash for rapid and fundamental expansion during the 2016 oil price bust. The company began by making a takeover bid for Canadian Oil Sands, the only piece of the Syncrude giant to trade directly on the stock market. Reflecting a rapid drop in oil and gas stocks, the company began by buying the company’s shares on the open market. Eventually, Williams signed an amalgamation agreement with the company. A friendly \$6.6-billion cash and stock deal gave Suncor control of the company through a subsidiary. Two months later, Suncor bought Murphy Oil Corp’s interest in Syncrude for \$937-million. Combined, these two acquisitions gave Suncor majority control of Syncrude, the largest single source of oil in Canada. So that, ladies and gentlemen, is how Suncor changed from a small, American-owned downstream oil company to the largest energy company in Canada – a process that took a century. Of course, there are many other fine stories in the book. I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I enjoyed the telling.

*Peter McKenzie-Brown is the author of Bitumen: The people, performance and passions behind Alberta’s oil sands, which was recently released. His other books have also been about Canada’s energy industry.*

