EDWIN L. DRAKE'S successful well, drilled near Titusville, Pa.\(^1\) was the first shaft specifically sunk for the purpose of finding petroleum beneath the earth's surface. After the success of this well, the business of attempting to find oil became important to the residents of the oil country; their farms changed overnight into possible oil fields.

The first prospectors were chiefly men from the immediate vicinity of Titusville; they had little equipment and less money to promote their endeavors. To compensate, they were good workers, industrious and inventive. Many were unable to afford boilers, coal, drilling tools, hemp or hired help. As a result, they employed a manual method for boring shallow holes called "kicking down" a well.\(^2\) Use of this method was arduous and the hole could not be sunk too deep.

Most spectacular of the early wells were the "flowing wells," so named because natural gas under the oil was released when the exploring drill struck the pocket containing it. The gas rushed to the surface carrying the petroleum ahead of it and often throwing it high in the air over the top of the derrick. Generally the gas pressure was soon expended and the early wells were either abandoned or had to be pumped.

To oil historians, residents of the oil regions, and those interested in such natural phenomena, two flowing wells hold interest

\(^1\) Titusville, known as "The Birthplace of the Oil Industry," is in Crawford County, but Colonel Drake drilled his well a mile out of the town, along Oil Creek, and actually across the line in Venango County.

\(^2\) Andrew Cone and Walter R. Johns described the "kicking down" process in their book *Petrolia* (1870), p. 136, in these words: "A short elastic pole, ash or hickory, ten to fifteen feet in length, was arranged over the well, working over a fulcrum, to the end of which was attached stirrups, in which two or three men each placed a foot, and by a kind of kicking process brought down the pole, and produced the motion necessary to work the bit. By this process the strokes were rapid." It should be added the elasticity of the pole raised the tools after each downward stroke.
above all others. The larger of these was the Fountain well and
the story behind it is interesting. Late in the fall of 1859, David
McElhenny sold the upper and lower McElhenny farms, between
Titusville and Oil City, with Oil Creek flowing through the northern
and western sides of the lower half of the plot. Captain A. B. Funk, a lumber operator with heavy interests at Steam Mills, in
Warren County, was the purchaser. For McElhenny's 180 acres
he paid $15,000 and one-quarter of the oil as royalty. Drilling was
started in February, 1860, and by autumn a well had been "kicked
down" 260 feet into the second oil bearing sand. As no sign of
oil had been found, the Captain favored discontinuance. His son,
A. P. Funk, believed there might be a lower or third oil bearing
sand and backed his theory by purchasing a small locomotive boiler.
With this power he lowered the well an additional 200 feet. Suddenly, without warning, foam and bubbles appeared at the
mouth of the conductor pipe and crude oil shot 150 feet into the
air. Production increased to 300 barrels daily and continued for six
months but then the well ceased flowing as quickly as it had com-
menced. Paraffin had effectively clogged the tubing and ruined the
well; it never produced another drop of oil.

The Fountain well came in during May, 1861, and touched off
a flood of other gusher wells which caused overproduction and
nearly wrecked the crude market. On the northern part of the
upper McElhenny farm, a "boom town" leaped into being and was
named Funkville. It served as a shipping point for oil ready to be
sent down Oil Creek. After two years of existence, the village
faded rapidly away as the activity in the section declined.

Captain Funk and his son realized about $2,500,000 from their
amazing wells. The Captain sold his forest lands and mills in
1863, and promptly moved into Titusville where he erected a
mansion. His leisure was short for he died the following year.

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3 The title "Captain" came as a result of Funk's steamboating lumber on
the Youghiogheny River.
4 Steam Mills, also called Funk's Mills and Funk Church, was located
between Tryonville, Crawford County, and Tidioute, Warren County. The
mills were all in Triumph Township, Warren County, though not far from
the McElhenny farms.
5 McLaurin, John J., Sketches in Crude Oil, J. Horace McFarland Co.,
Harrisburg, Pa., 1896, p. 118.
6 Asbury, Henry, The Golden Flood, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1942,
p. 90.
7 Henry, James Dodd, History and Romance of the Petroleum Industry,
The Funk farm brought $150,000 when it was sold even though the flowing wells were depleted.  

Several early writers on Pennsylvania oil history have made serious errors relative to the Fountain or Funk well. William Wright, a New York newspaper reporter, visited the valley of Oil Creek in 1865 and produced a book in which he wrote of Funk’s amazing well, “The first flowing well ever struck was on this property.” In the same year, J. H. A. Bone prepared a pamphlet which had a wide circulation, and in it he said, “The first flowing well ever struck was on the McElhenny or Funk Farm. Funk was a poor man when the well was struck.” The pastor of Franklin’s Presbyterian Church, Rev. S. J. M. Eaton, usually careful of facts, further confused the matter when he stated, “Funk leased to McElhenny who drilled a well by the spring pole method.”

Ordinarily, these errors might not merit mention but it happens that many writers have quoted Wright, Bone, and Eaton. Eaton later wrote much of The History of Venango County and assisted Egle with his History of Pennsylvania. He is regarded as a good historian and the facts were either misrepresented to him or became twisted in some other manner. In actuality, the Fountain well was not the first flowing well; it was, however, the first well to be put down to the third, and previously unknown oil sand. Funk was not poor before he became interested in petroleum developments; a poor man would have had difficulty paying $15,000 for two farms besides having considerable investments in lumber ventures. Finally, Funk certainly did not lease any land to McElhenny; after the McElhenny-Funk transaction had been completed, McElhenny had so little faith that oil would be found on his former lands that he disposed of his usufruct for $20,000 to the firm of Hussey & McBride.

Another flowing well created a furor earlier but was less well-known; this was the Hequembourg or Russell well. It was drilled on the original William S. Cohell farm, bordering the Allegheny

River, and just across from the village of Tidioute, Warren County. Probably as early as January, 1860, Orris Hall and R. J. Brown, both of Warren, obtained a lease from Cohell for the purpose of sinking a well. Hall and Brown soon transferred their lease to Rev. Charles L. Hequembourg, Warren's Presbyterian minister. With the assistance of several other business partners from the town, chief among them being R. K. Russell, drilling was started by the spring pole method. It went on until one August day when gas began coming through the oil from the well. No iron pipe was to be had so wooden pump logs were used and a common pitcher pump placed on the well for pumping.\(^2\)

Now the minister hired two youngsters, Robert Cohell and Charles C. Garrett, to handle the pump. For fifteen minutes they pumped steadily and then a heavy flow of oil leaped from the hole twenty feet into the air.\(^3\) The production was estimated at from 100 to 300 barrels a day but the well was shallow, only 124 feet deep; the crude came from the third oil sand (the same as the deeper Fountain well) but at Tidioute this sand was close to the surface and very thick.\(^4\)

Ephraim Cowan was the editor of *The Warren Mail* at this time and he journeyed to Tidioute to gaze upon the wonder well.\(^5\) His report to his readers is worth quoting in full for Cowan was one of the most astute newsmen in the oil country.

The Mansion House is jammed and with luck you may make the “second table.” Work is going on on about 50 wells. The center of excitement is right across the river from the W. S. Cohell farm of 130 acres fronting 140 rods along the river.

Next below is the famous “Hequembourg” or “Russell” well—these wells take their names from those who start or operate them the most. It is owned thus, Cohell has one fourth, Orris Hall of Warren and R. J. Brown of Perry, Pa., another fourth, Rev. C. L. Hequembourg, Dr.


\(^5\) Ephraim Cowan founded the *Warren Mail* in 1848 and owned it until his death in 1894. He was an energetic and capable editor and his paper was of high quality.
G. A. Irvine, Wm. D. Brown, John Sill and R. K. Russell all of Warren, having the other half, or a tenth interest each. This well is 124 feet deep. At first it looked like nothing extra, not much gas or oil, though it was called a good show. When they put in a hand pump last week to try it, all at once it broke out like a torrent, throwing out 60 or 70 barrels an hour! This was the story that we went down to see about.

When we got there it was plugged up tight. Kim Russell had it in charge. They had sent off 50 barrels and 25 or 30 more lay there in the river. We tried to get Kim to stir the animal up so it would perform again for our special benefit. But he wouldn't—said he couldn't hold it—it would spoil his best clothes and squirt over all creation and the like. So we and fifty other anxious seekers for knowledge and oil under difficulties had to pocket our wrath and slyly guess that there was some humbug about it. But the next day down came John Sill. We told him our fix—must go home after dinner—boys must have copy—we wanted an item and so far must report the thing a failure—instead of a barrel a minute it hadn't run a drop. He always likes to help the printer and "says he to Kim says he, Kim let 'er run." "Says Kim, says he, just as you say John, but shan't promise what she'll do." So he got his old clothes on, like a candidate for Recorder, and over the river we went. Kim was evidently timid. He was more than half afraid "She wouldn't start," but to keep up a show of confidence he agreed to give up $1,000 if she didn't or $500 if she did." At first he chiseled out the big plug. Not a drop came. He put his ear to his pipe and said he "could hear a rumbling in her bowels." Then they put in the hand pump. Kim stood ready with a big plug and a half inch hole through it. Young Cohell gave the pump three or four pulls when the oil began to boil up two or three feet rising higher every second. Out they jerked the pump and in Kim drove the plug, the oil in the meantime squirting all over him from end to end and some twelve feet high through the half inch hole. Kim pitched for the river to wash the oil out of his eyes.

30 This account of the ownership varies slightly with that appearing in the Tidioute News, Tidioute, Pa., May 29, 1942.
31 Editor Cowan was in earnest, as Robert K. Russell was, at the time, Republican candidate for a second term as Register and Recorder for Warren County.
32 Cowan, E., "Oil, Oil—Tidioute Ahead of the World!" the Warren Mail, Warren, Pa., August 18, 1869.
The article continues by pointing out that the well flowed a barrel every three minutes through the half inch hole. Cowan ended carefully with this warning for oil investors, "It is a lottery in which some draw prizes, but the larger part blanks."

A month later the well was again visited and was flowing a huge stream but preparations to install a pump were in progress. The yield decreased soon and little more was heard about the well. In 1865 it was no longer producing but was owned by the Tidioute Bayou Petroleum Company, New York.

The fame of the Hequembourg well was long forgotten but in 1942 a Tidioute service club marked the location for posterity by a boulder surmounted by a bronze plaque telling of the well.

Rev. Charles Hequembourg was more interested in petroleum than in religion and in the following year he left his church over doctrinal differences; his congregation was under the impression he had intended to unite with the Presbytery with which his Warren church was connected but he failed to do so. Finally he was accused of preaching heretical ideas and the congregation and the pastor parted company for good.

79 Warren Mail, September 15, 1860.