OILY DAYS AT CHERRY GROVE

By Ernest C. Miller

"COLONEL" E. L. DRAKE, whose military title was purely the brain-child of a clever financier,1 struck oil near Titusville, Pa., on either August 27 or 28, 1859.2 Two days later the news was conveyed over the hills to the village of Tidioute, a lumber town hugging the banks of the Allegheny River, in Warren County. Within a short time, drilling about Tidioute was common, and land having oil springs or signs of petroleum seepages thereon was the favored spot for trial wells.3

The most famous early well in Warren County was drilled across the river from Tidioute on the William S. Cohell farm by the Rev. C. L. Hequembourg, a Presbyterian minister, who was aided by several partners. Finished August 13, 1860, a common pitcher pump was connected to it and efforts made to pump the crude to the surface; after fifteen minutes of pumping, the well started to flow oil and yielded 300 barrels daily. This well, commonly known as "the Hequembourg well," was the first flowing well in the world and today is appropriately marked by a boulder and plaque.4

Undaunted by lack of capital and often by the lack of proper tools, many prospectors had dazzling luck. At Tidioute paying pools were opened, and across the river the Economite lands yielded excellent wells; in addition, Enterprise, Dennis Run, Triumph, and the Fagundus field, were all the sites of good develop-

1A paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association, at State College, November 2-3, 1951.
5Ernest C. Miller, "The Fountain and Hequembourg Flowing Oil Wells," Pennsylvania History (July, 1945), XII, 194-199.
ments within Warren County.\(^5\) Productive wells were even drilled on islands in the Allegheny River and barges were anchored offshore with drilling conducted from them.\(^6\)

Chronological reports make brief mention of a trial well being put down at Glade, near Warren, as early as April, 1860, and within another month, a second well had been sunk 45 feet along Conewango Creek, but neither was ever finished.\(^7\)

Ten years later, in the fall of 1870, an oil strike was reported along Jackson Run, three miles north of Warren, but the 420 foot well was good for only three barrels daily and even that quickly disappeared after the well was “shot” with a torpedo in an attempt to increase production.\(^8\)

To the county seat at Warren, petroleum came slowly. During 1864, a trial well was drilled near the confluence of Conewango Creek and the Allegheny River, but the drillers must have been pessimists, for they abandoned the well before it was ever finished though it had fair “sand showings” indicative of possible production.\(^9\)

David Beaty, an early driller who had made a fortune along Oil Creek in the early 1860’s, moved to a farm outside of Tidioute, to, as he expressed it, “get away from the oil.” When the Fagundus field was discovered, his farm was inundated with oily riches and he made still another fortune. He next moved to Warren where he built an impressive mansion, and having previously enjoyed natural gas as a fuel, and now finding himself without it, the story goes that he decided to drill a well close by his home to strike gas. Instead of gas, oil spurted up and the Warren field was discovered!\(^10\) Petroleum seemed to have a special affinity for Mr.\(^{11}\)

\(^{5}\) *The Derrick’s Handbook of Petroleum* (Oil City, Pa., 1898), I, gives the following dates for the opening of these oil fields:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Opened</th>
<th>Reference Page</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tidioute</td>
<td>July 1860</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economite Wells</td>
<td>Dec. 1860</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprise</td>
<td>July 1865</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis Run</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triumph</td>
<td>May 1867</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fagundus</td>
<td>July 1870</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{6}\) *Warren (Pa.) Ledger*, October 31 and December 5, 1860; also *Warren (Pa.) Mail*, September 15, 1860.

\(^{7}\) *Warren (Pa.) Mail*, April 21 and May 19, 1860.

\(^{8}\) * Jamestown (N. Y.) Daily Journal*, September 3 and 8, 1870.

\(^{9}\) John J. McLaurin, *Sketches in Crude Oil* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1896), 188.

\(^{10}\) Herbert Asbury, *The Golden Flood* (New York, 1942), 265.
Beaty, for wherever he drilled, he found it. His well, Warren's first producer, started a furor of drilling around the town with John Bell, James Roy, and Charles Verback among the leaders. This was in 1875 and was only preparation for what was to come.\footnote{11}

Henry Landsrath was an experienced oil man who called Oil City, Pa., his home but lived where he drilled. In the middle 1870's, he gathered his maps and charts about him and projected lines between known oil fields; he extrapolated those lines to certain geologic formations and by comparing characteristics of sands obtained from wells actually drilled, deduced that somewhere in the region between Kane and Warren, rich oil-bearing territory should be found.

At Balltown, Kane, and Sheffield, trial wells proved dry for this man of theories. Next, he collected data from Tidioute and Clarendon wells and decided to drill in Cherry Grove Township, Warren County.\footnote{12} On map tract 668, six miles west of Sheffield and the same distance southwest of Clarendon, he drilled a well over 2,000 feet deep and once more got only a "duster." Discouraged, but still certain his views were correct, Landsrath found himself in such financial straits that he was unable to drill another well, for impaired credit simply did not allow another risk with possible failure.

Landsrath sold his Cherry Grove leases to William T. Falconer of Warren, who induced a jeweler, Frederick Morck, to join him in the venture. When George Dimick happened to enter Morck's jewelry store and asked where he could find some land to drill on, Morck and Falconer hastily subleased their land to Dimick, who, with Captain Peter Grace, operated under the name of the

\footnote{2} Warren (Pa.) Mail, May 25 and 27, 1875.

\footnote{22} Writing of Cherry Grove in \textit{The Petroleum Age} (August, 1884), III, 793, Professor Carli of the Pennsylvania Geological Survey says: "Cherry Grove is the only township in the county whose boundaries form a complete parallelogram, and whose sub-divisions are uniform throughout. The original warrants composing it contained nominally 1,000 acres; that is, 1,000 acres and five per cent allowance for roads, making really 1,050 acres. They were laid out 525 rods long north and south, and 320 rods east and west. Having been sub-divided into six lots, the theoretical dimensions of the present tracts are 175 rods north and south and 160 rods east and west; equal to 175 acres. But the original measurements upon the ground were not accurately made, and there is a surplusage of from five to ten acres in nearly all the lots. As the maps are now plotted there are 12 lots in an east and west range and 14 lots in a north and south range, but those adjoining the Forest County lines are not full lots."
Jamestown Oil Company. Dimick was an experienced operator, and gained his knowledge as confidential clerk to the famous Henry R. Rouse; after Rouse perished in the first oil fire in the region, Dimick entered the Civil War and after being discharged from service, he resumed “oil hunting” as his business with brilliant success. When Dimick encountered Henry Landsrath, he asked him where he would have drilled his next well had he continued. Landsrath truthfully replied, “On the northwest corner of 646.” With that clue as a guide, the new combination commenced a well that was to amaze all oildom.

Oil and the oil market had been in the doldrums but, as the year 1882 opened, hopes for a successful year were high among the oil fraternity. The Allegany field in New York State had been defined, Bradford production was falling off rapidly, and higher crude prices seemed almost certain. Even on January 11, when word was broadcast about a new well at Cherry Grove on tract 646, miles from other productive territory, hopes for an improved year were not dimmed. Only the previous month an important oil magazine had expounded in these terms:

As yet, there has been nothing discovered in Warren County, outside of the Tidioute section, calculated to cause apprehension of the discovery of immense and dangerous deposits of oil.

Early in March it was discovered that the new well was carefully guarded and scouts soon found the derrick tightly boarded,
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the work halted, and armed guards posted to keep the curious away. The drillers had signed a secret agreement with George Dimick to reveal nothing about the progress or possibilities of the well and they fulfilled the requirements of this unusual document to the letter.\(^8\)

The trade reasoned from past experience that the well was probably good but the owners were withholding the news, purposely stalling for time while they purchased and leased additional land in the vicinity. Late March saw this stalling rumor crystallize into truth as Horton, Crary & Company, tanners at Sheffield, and owners of large blocks of Cherry Grove land, sold over 1,000 acres for one-eighth royalty plus cash payments of over $150,000 as bonus.\(^9\) F. H. Rockwell & Company also sold land near the well and these transactions added to the intense and sudden demand for property.

According to the well owners, "the 646 mystery," for such the well had been named, struck sand and made a good show on March 11, then was plugged up tight until March 29 when the plug was drilled out and the oil flowed stronger than before. Sufficient tankage was not available to handle such a flow of oil and as the well was being carefully watched, the plug was again inserted. The owners thought the impression was becoming general that the well was a gusher and decided to do something to counteract that opinion.\(^20\)

Captain Peter Grace explained what they did in these words:

At the time it was impossible for me to move without being watched. I was shadowed by scouts wherever I went. So one night I went to Warren, Pa., and told one of the Roberts Torpedo Company’s men that I wanted to see him later in a certain room at the hotel. He agreed to meet me there. When I went away I was shadowed to the hotel, and the men who were following me went into

\(^8\) The original agreement was owned by Dimick’s sons, George H. Dimick, Jr., and Thomas E. Dimick. It is dated March 7, 1882, and was signed at the well by J. B. Barr, S. F. Karnes, R. G. Thompson, and F. W. Chase before Justice of the Peace D. H. Brennan. The agreement was presented to the Petroleum Collection of the Warren Public Library in January, 1952.

\(^9\) James C. Tennant, The Oil Scouts (Oil City, Pa., 1915), 16.

\(^{20}\) Charles A. Whiteshot, The Oil Well Driller (Mannington, W. Va., 1905), 70-71.
the room next to the one I had designated. The torpedo men came at the hour named, and I told them I was going to shoot 646. I especially charged them to make their arrangements for doing the work with the utmost secrecy. It was arranged that they should come down the following night. All this conversation was overheard by spies in the next room.

The next night, when the men started for Cherry Grove with the torpedoes, it seemed as though everybody in the region knew that the well was going to be shot. Hundreds in wagons and on horseback followed the wagon down to the woods. The empty shell and the glycerin cans were taken into the derrick. Our lanterns showed these movements to the hundreds who were watching at a distance. The contents of the cans was poured into the shells—but the cans had contained nothing but water. Then, with the torpedo reel, the shells charged with water were carefully lowered down into the plugged well. While we stood around the hole an iron was rattled in the casing head to imitate the sound of a falling slug, and then one of the men in the derrick struck the anvil a powerful blow that faintly jarred the ground. It happened that just then the well made a little flow.

The news spread in the crowd that "646" had been shot and had failed to respond except with a very feeble flow. The motions of shooting the well had been gone through with so faithfully that one of the men who had been on guard outside declared when he came into the derrick that the smell of glycerin made him sick, but there hadn't been an ounce of glycerin in the woods. Before morning the news was all over the oil region that the Cherry Grove wildcat had been shot and had proved to be little better than a dry hole.21

The public had been fooled but only temporarily. All further doubtful waiting terminated abruptly May 17 when the plugs were removed and the drill bit deeper; the following day the estimated flow was from 300 to 500 barrels and this climbed until on May 23 the gusher yielded over 1,000 barrels. By June 13 the production was over 2,000 barrels daily.22

21 Ibid., 71.
Regional newspapers shouted the news of the strike in loud and anguished tones. The *Oil City Derrick* told its readers that "It's a Gusher, and Don't Forget It," while the *Buffalo Express* proclaimed it as "The Largest Well on Earth." The same issue of the Oil City paper also explained how a panic seized the oil market with prices for crude reaching the lowest figures in months as despondency struck the trade in all quarters.

The respect and fear which the entire oil trade had for the "646" well was illustrated best by the presence of "the oil scouts." As news of this latest of strikes reached the larger operators and companies, they eagerly desired accurate information for their own protection and possible gain, and to get this intelligence, many of them hired professional investigators or spies, and rushed them to Cherry Grove. There were suddenly quite a group of these watch-dogs about the locality and they banded together informally to facilitate their work. The phrase "oil scouts" was first used at Cherry Grove and it stuck to the men as long as they did such work. The best known scouts were Jim Tennant, Joe Cappeau, Si Hughes, Pat Boyle, and J. C. McMullin, though there were many others besides these.

Only one of the petroleum detectives was able to solve the mystery of whether or not closely guarded "646" was a poor or good well. S. B. Hughes contrived in some manner unknown to this very day to escape the nine men who guarded the well under the direction of Tom King; he entered the derrick and discovered the well was amazingly rich. Wasting no time, he communicated the news to his principal, the Anchor Oil Company, and the firm was enabled to purchase valuable lands close to the gusher. Nor did the company forget Hughes' classic work, for he was rewarded with a check for $10,000.

Whenever any individual or group make an astounding discovery, be it of gold, cinnabar, crude oil, or anything else, there always seems to be a friend to whom the good word is given far in advance of releasing the information to the general public. This permits such a friend to "get in on the ground floor," giving him

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Tennant, *loc. cit.*, 16.

additional advantages to grow rich by allowing him to do business before the public gets an inkling of the true circumstances.

When “646” was nearly finished, such a man was Michael Murphy of Philadelphia; after receiving the news, this Irish oil exporter bought lot 619, northeast of the well, paying $100 per acre and one-eighth of the crude as usufruct.\footnote{2}{2}

Murphy rushed his well down only to meet disaster. While he was in Washington on business on May 9, the rig caught fire and burned, but under Murphy’s direction it was rebuilt in a frenzy and on June 2 his No. 1 well started to throw 1,600 barrels of oil a day into the clear air of Cherry Grove.\footnote{27}{Just a month later, his No. 2 well began at the rate of 3,600 barrels daily and this was one of the best wells in the field.} Indicative of the excitement caused was the sale of unseated Warren County lands by County Treasurer Knapp less than ten days after Murphy’s first well roared in so successfully. The newspaper reported:

Bidding was lively and prices varied, the highest being $80,000 for lot 665 in Cherry Grove, next door to a dry hole.\footnote{28}{Oil men, always optimists, paid fabulous prices for drillable acreage close to productive territory.}

The “646” well, along with Murphy’s gusher, found in a region long believed non-productive, brought the oil pack rushing into the new field like hungry wolves. They came after land and leases and oil; they brought with them teams, drilling equipment, and all the paraphernalia common to oil booms. The incoming horde knew but did not care that “646” had wrecked the oil market and had caused crude to finally reach its lowest point in twenty years. They reasoned only that wealth was at hand and it was the duty of all to corner as much of it as possible.

To enter this surprise region, two plank roads were used and long wagon lines were common. Some days 500 teams traveled the roads. Horton’s plank reached the field from Sheffield by way of

\footnote{26}{“The King of the Mystery Men, Michael Murphy,” The Petroleum Age (July, 1885), IV, 1027-1031.}
\footnote{27}{Loc. cit.}
\footnote{28}{Warren (Pa.) Mail, June 13, 1882.}
Vandergrift while Rockwell’s road started at North Clarendon and followed Farnsworth Creek. For single teams the toll was 20 cents, for double teams 30 cents, and for heavier loads of boilers and casing, $2 was charged.29

Warren experienced a business boom, too, something it was not used to having. Oil supply houses were quickly cleaned out while grocery and clothing stores did a thriving business and were pressed to keep any kind of a stock available. Morck’s jewelry store was termed the “646 store” because the owner was one of the original Cherry Grove lease holders.30 A telegraphic flood came to the Western Union office and many days over 2,500 messages were filed and nine extra operators were employed to handle the dush.31

More and more wells went down, influenced partly by the printed comment that:

. . . operations in the Cherry Grove district are comparatively cheap. No drive pipe is used and not over 300 feet of casing is required, while the cost of tubing and glycerin has not yet entered into the estimates.32

It was also noted that it had required twenty-two years to find thirty wells yielding over 1,000 barrels each day in the Pennsylvania region, and Warren alone had come up with a majority of these within three months. This fact alone served to demonstrate that men who did not risk all by drilling were fools!

So many oil-seekers jammed about the “646” and in the surrounding forests that crowded quarters were the rule, not the exception. At first tents served nobly, and later Farnsworth’s barn was packed with exhausted men, eager to have body space and an old blanket at 50 cents nightly. As the population increased, rough board shanties made their appearance and a town was born on the southeastern corner of tract 646; it was called Garfield in memory of President James A. Garfield. Farnsworth was a little to the south as was Vandergrift, and Tough City and Granny City were

29 *The Petroleum Age* (August, 1882), I, 296. The writer interviewed William H. Berry, Warren, Pa., on May 4, 1942. He recalled that when his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. William Mahler, operated Rockwell’s toll gate at North Clarendon, tolls were 45 cents one way, 60 cents for a round trip, and no extra charges for heavy loads.

30 *Warren (Pa.) Mail*, June 13, 1882.


slightly to the north. Of them all, Garfield was the largest with a population in excess of 6,000 at the zenith of the excitement, and it was a well-behaved town frequented by the largest producers. Farnsworth had the doubtful reputation of being the favorite spot for toughs and disreputables as they gradually entered the area.33

Among the names that have traveled down the years as having been characters not to reckon with lightly are those of Big Alex, Charley Ross, and California Red. At a little later date, the great and mighty Al Stanbrook roamed the Cherry Grove area as well as the Mayburg and Sheffield fields.34

But the most famous name in the field was that of Gib Morgan, a slight figure of a man, a driller and general oil field laborer who was known wherever wells were drilled for his "tall tales" and his inimitable manner of telling them. In more recent years, his fame has grown and an oil novel has been written using him as the chief figure.35 In addition, he has aptly been called "the minstrel of the oil fields," and the quality of his stories and the legends that have grown up about Morgan himself well qualify him for the title.36

If Cherry Grove avoided having murder blazed on its escutcheon, it did not escape crime. One calm Sunday seven robberies took place and this did not unduly excite the milling populace. Oil and equipment were often stolen, and bribery was the accepted method to gain advance information on any subject.37

33 "Farnsworth and Garfield," Warren (Pa.) Mail, June 20, 1882. Two maps of the Cherry Grove field should be consulted for accurate locations. These are E. C. Grude, New Map of the Warren Oil Field (June, 1882), and J. Opperman, Map of the Middle Oil Field (1883).

34 Statement made to the author by C. V. Card, Warren, Pa., April 8, 1941.

35 This novel was 646 and the Troublemaker (Chicago, 1916), by Charles H. Oliver.

36 The article that brought Morgan to the attention of the public was Harry Botsford, "Oil Field Minstrel," Saturday Evening Post, October 3, 1942, 11, 71-72. Also see, Mody C. Boatright, Gib Morgan: Minstrel of the Oil Fields (El Paso, Texas, 1945).

37 In a statement made to the author by W. E. Allison, Warren, Pa., February 5, 1942, Mr. Allison related how Bill Green, a gambler, got angry at one George Coyle, a Canadian. Thinking to frighten Coyle a little, Green took his pistol and shot close to Coyle's feet, but either Green was a little drunk or not as good a shot as he thought he was. The ball struck Coyle's foot, gangrene set in, and he died within several days. They put Coyle in a rough pine box, hauled him to Sheffield, put the box head-up on the hotel porch and the oil men held a great wake. But this event happened after Cherry Grove had declined materially, probably in 1883.
Strange events were common among the turmoil. Sickness struck many and this was due chiefly to the unsanitary conditions; dysentery and general debility were common but not too serious. Dr. Evan O'Neil Kane, who later gained fame for operating on himself many times, had one of his first confinement cases at Cherry Grove; there, in a wooden shanty, beneath the floor of an oil derrick, he delivered a healthy baby boy. Today that boy is Dr. Howard M. Cleveland, a well-known practicing physician at Mt. Jewett, Pa.

The only resident doctor in this section among the derricks was a young man fresh from medical school who commenced his work at Farnsworth. After the oil boom had vanished, he moved to Sheffield and continued his work for many years; Dr. George T. Pryor gained many friends for his kindness during the oil excitement and served rich and poor alike under conditions that many doctors could hardly imagine.

Late in 1881, a new monthly petroleum magazine was inaugurated at Bradford, an important oil center circumscribed by the rich field bearing its name. An oil exchange, high crude productivity, and much drilling activity, made the town the logical home for an oil publication and *The Petroleum Age* had gained considerable importance by the time Cherry Grove spouted and full reports of the Warren County strike constituted part of the news.

From the outset the *Age* was slightly antagonistic and more than a little sarcastic about the Cherry Grove developments, and it quickly predicted the field would soon die out. But the magazine did render valuable service by reporting the drilling accomplished month by month. A condensed version of the reports is given here because, in brief, that record represents the rise and fall of Cherry Grove:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month of 1822</th>
<th>Wells completed</th>
<th>Drilling; not yet completed</th>
<th>Rigs now being erected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>39</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Time Magazine*, January 18, 1932, 19.
*Dr. M. V. Ball, A Medical History of Warren County, Pa.* (Warren, Pa., 1946), 30.
Many wells were drilled later than November but that month brought with it an end to the greatest drilling spree.  

As production increased and tank after tank was erected to store crude oil, the alert pipelines raced each other to shove their lines into the area, each eager and intent on handling as large a percentage of the crude as possible. Announcements of the various lines entering the territory were made on these days of 1882:

May 1           Union Pipe Line  
May 25          Warren Pipe Line  
June 6          United Pipe Line Co.  
July 4           Tidewater Pipe Line Co.  
July 21          McCalmont Storage Co. 

There was no dearth of competition among the anxious pipe companies.

Following Farnsworth Creek, the Union Pipe Line put an eight inch line into the “646” well, and, not to be outdone, the United took about the same general route and placed a three inch line to Murphy’s well. On June 6, this same line announced preparations to move 10,000 barrels of oil daily from Cherry Grove, but the capacity of the new field had been grossly underestimated. So rapidly did production increase that in less than one week this announcement was revised and the company next stated they would make ready to handle 40,000 barrels daily from Cherry Grove.

The chief struggle was between the Tidewater and the United Pipe Lines, but the latter, being a subsidiary of the potent Standard Oil Trust, eventually won the leadership and did the greatest business. At Vandergrift it installed eight 90 horsepower boilers and two huge pumps in less than thirty-five days; at this station was also set up a great Worthington-Duplex pump, at the time the largest in the world. It excited a great deal of curiosity and really deserved it.

Yet all the lines could not seem to move all the oil. Crude came faster than the lines were laid and excess oil ran over the tanks and the Arnot and Farnsworth branches of Tionesta Creek often flowed oil instead of water. Imagine the trouble wily trout had maneuvering in a stream of crude oil!

40 Compiled from *The Petroleum Age*, May, 1882, through November, 1882, I.  
41 *Derrick’s Handbook of Petroleum* (Oil City, Pa., 1898), I, 347-350.  
42 *Warren (Pa.) Mail*, July 25, 1882.
In July the pipe line companies ruled that producers had to have 4,000 barrels of storage capacity in order to allow their crude "to settle," for the companies maintained "fresh crude" gummed up their lines. But even when excess crude backed up as it did, none moved from the region except by the lines. Teamsters were many who earned $20 daily, not from hauling oil, but from moving equipment, passengers, and vast quantities of food.

During the year, internal strife and court case after court case plagued the Tidewater Pipe Line Company. The other smaller lines offered such slight competition to the United system that by August 1 both the Warren and Union lines sold out to the Standard's decoy. Before December ended, the McCalmont Storage Company joined the United and this new alignment left only the Tidewater as competition. Actually the United had accomplished nothing worth gloating about. Ida M. Tarbell explained it best by writing:

The Standard spent $2,000,000 getting ready to take care of a great outpouring of oil—which came, but did not stay. In 1882 Cherry Grove produced 2,345,000 barrels; in 1883, 775,512! It cost the company forty-six cents a barrel to take care of the production of one short-lived group of wells in this field, on which they never realized more than twenty cents pipeage.

Pipe line runs increased steadily through September 1, and on that day 40,000 barrels really did move through the pipes, but this was the largest single day's shipment from the territory.

The three summer months brought drastic fires and heavy losses for some producers. During this period, the Anchor Oil Company well came in with 3,000 barrels production, and, four days later, a careless man passed too close to the storage tanks with a lighted lantern. Fire started, burned the rig and with it 5,000 barrels of crude. The intensity of the blaze prevented men from getting close to the fire, but finally two dare-devils, Vic Gretter and S. E. Humphrey, contracted to extinguish the blaze for $3,000. They did it by employing a small cannon-like device, using a bolt for a

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projectile, shooting off the casing-head top, and then capping the well. This fire raged two full weeks.\(^{45}\)

While this well burned, "646" was furnishing too much oil, so the excess was run away from the well and burned to get it out of the way. Michael Murphy, with hard luck at his heels again, lost his No. 1 well to fire for the second time, plus 9,200 barrels of empty tankage and 4,000 barrels of crude. All of these were substantial losses.

The Warren & Farnsworth Valley Railroad was a unique narrow gauge line built by Warren capitalists led by Myron Waters. It ran from North Clarendon to Garfield and Dunham's Mills, a total of thirteen miles. Built hurriedly to secure the revenue from heavy freight hauls occasioned by the great amount of oil producing equipment entering the region, ground was first broken April 24, 1882. On August 3, slightly over ninety days, the first train was running, and credit for building with such speed went to A. D. Wood, an experienced railroad construction engineer who had helped build the famous Oil Creek Railroad.\(^{46}\)

The line commenced with three engines for locomotion plus thirty-six freight cars and three passenger coaches.\(^{47}\) By far the greatest percentage of freight was made up of casing, boilers, ropes and cables, pipe, valves, and sheet metal; freight was the life blood of the road, for passengers at $1 a round trip or 80 cents for one-way fare could never have served as the chief revenue. The road paid at least one dividend, that being 5 per cent in July of 1886.\(^{48}\)

As Cherry Grove was depleted, the road lost most of the oil freight revenue but it staggered along for some years and was singular in that it never hauled one barrel of oil. All the oil moved by pipe line.

Optimism was the order of the day, and about Warren roved a surprisingly large number of traders and speculators, distinguishable chiefly by pencils parked behind ears and folded maps jutting from coat pockets. These were the men who made the wheels spin, and they bought, sold, traded, and dickered oil and oil lands as

\(^{45}\) Gretter's contrivance was patented November 29, 1881, and assigned patent number 250,232.

\(^{46}\) Warren (Pa.) Mail, May 30, 1882.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., August 8, 1882.

\(^{48}\) Ibid., November 23, 1886.
though their very lives depended upon it—and perhaps they often did.

As individuals reaped profits from drilling new wells, from selling and leasing lands, or from trading on the oil exchanges in other towns, they told their friends who told other friends. A desire to invest in oil seized the people and something was promptly done to afford such citizens a release mechanism for their enthusiasm. An oil exchange was conjured up and was first mentioned in *The Warren Mail* of June 13. Two weeks later we read, "The Entre Nouse Society opened the new Oil Exchange room last Thursday evening. . . ."49

As organized July 7, the Warren Oil Exchange had 150 charter members at $50 each. Capital stock was $15,000 and membership was limited to 300. C. N. Payne was the first president and Captain Robert Dennison the first treasurer.50

A large room next to the Carver Hotel was rented and equipped, and business was so good that larger quarters were taken in February, 1883, near the Exchange Hotel, just rebuilt.51 Two telegraph companies maintained offices in the Exchange, and, to be certain of an auspicious start, the first transaction was arranged as a sale of 50,000 barrels of oil made by George Wetmore to C. N. Payne for 57½ cents a barrel. A local paper proclaimed, "No Exchange in the oil regions has started with fairer prospects."52

As activity continued to mount higher and higher, it could be partially explained in these words of contemporary verse:

And still the wells flow on and on
And the greasy currents run,
And ever the Bears are uppermost
And ever the Bulls undone.53
The inexperienced citizenry tried their hands as Exchange experts, and, while the majority lost rather than gained, there were always others ready to take their places. Warren investors were difficult to discourage in 1882.54

A very rough indication of the unprecedented volume of business in Warren, and on its oil exchange, is shown by the number of tickets sold by the agent of the Philadelphia & Erie Railroad at Warren. During the month of June he sold 6,000 tickets to Clarendon plus many others to Sheffield, and, besides, he tended to seventeen trains daily. It is thus safe to guess that he was underpaid.55

September found much speculation in oil certificates by old and young alike, and early November found oil hitting a high of $1 on the Warren Exchange. When that magic figure was reached, the place became a bedlam, and just at that time genial Charlie Goodwin, an Exchange member and a driller and operator of much ability, entered the room; the assembled members lifted him to their shoulders and marched round and round, yelling, singing and shouting for joy. Warren oil investing became greater than ever before.56

Nor was all the activity confined to the formal Exchange. It was reported that, "The Warren Exchange has one main office and three branches: one at the Carver House, Leonhart's Saloon, and Jamieson's Hardware Store. An Exchange with several annexes is now the proper thing. Other towns will please take notice."57

Such unconfined happiness was not to be permanent. After crude had climbed to $1.37 per barrel in November, those who had sold the market "short" had to break it down in order to cover their sales.58 They were aided when the Anchor Oil Company's latest well was tapped and responded with several hundred barrels yield. "Black Friday" came November 17, and the market tumbled down

54 One operator at Warren, by the use of $500 in margins, kept doubling his purchases as the market favored him, to $52,000. Instead of selling out at a profit, he held until he was forced to sell during the panic. He lost all he had gained and more. See also, The Petroleum Age (December, 1882), II, 413.
55 Warren (Pa.) Mail, July 11, 1882.
56 Ibid., September 26 and November 7, 1882.
57 Ibid., November 21, 1882.
58 Ibid.
until it was below 90 cents. Many Warren County "lambs" were slaughtered, and the regional loss was conservatively estimated at over five million dollars. Once again verse expressed the situation:

'Tis the same old story,
It's often been told,
Put up your margins
Or your oil will be sold.59

Nothing more clearly points out the trend and optimism of those days than the knowledge that just one week after "Black Friday" oil men at Clarendon, midway between Warren and the Cherry Grove field, met and formed their own oil exchange. They soon had 93 members and operated for a short time.

Ruination for many on the Exchange signified the beginning of the end. For two months glycerin had been freely used in Cherry Grove wells and after September production fell off rapidly. The Sardine Oil Company finished a well in August and the first day it produced 2,000 barrels, then declined on successive days to 1,128, 594, 444, 350, and finally to 274 barrels. Besides the flowing wells being affected, water seeped through the field from abandoned wells wrecking many others.

Before this sudden decline, Cherry Grove had gained national recognition as the greatest oil boom ever known. It was claimed to have surpassed the famous Pithole furor of 1865.60 Harper's Weekly sent an artist-reporter to the field, and the magazine carried an extensively illustrated article depicting life in the territory.61

Real estate values collapsed, and lots of from two to five acres that had cost $15,000 and one-quarter of the oil as royalty, became nearly worthless. In three months, May-July inclusive, $2,775,000 for land had been pumped into the small acreage at Cherry Grove by crazed oil-seekers. They never had a better chance to obtain large production at small costs per barrel, but, with the crude market so low, it was folly and would have required two dollar oil to permit them to break even.

As the drillers and speculators departed, most of them headed into Forest County where the Cooper Tract was being explored.

59 Ibid., December 5, 1882.
60 E. V. Smalley, "Striking Oil," The Century Magazine (July, 1883), XXVI, 323-327.
And as the population was reduced, no group was more disappointed than the men who had opened beer parlors along the roads leading to Garfield. Securing licenses for $50, they sold bottled beer, urged their customers to just step off their property into the woods and along the road, and drink all they wanted! As long as the drink was not consumed on property belonging to the dispenser, all was legal. One small beer seller netted $3,000 in several weeks, proving that oil men were thirsty men.

The narrow gauge railroad was used by the F. H. Rockwell & Company to haul bark and logs from the forests and later was taken over by the Penn Tanning Company and in turn by the United States Leather Company. It has been abandoned for years. In 1934, when the United States Forestry Service built a road from North Clarendon to Cherry Grove, the rail grade was used as the roadbed most of the way.

The Warren Oil Exchange tottered along conducting but a small percentage of its former business. In the Warren County Directory for 1886 the Oil Exchange is listed at 333-335 Water Street, and the same volume carries the advertisement of “A. J. Mercer, Factor in Petroleum.” Mercer was the last active broker to handle oil on the Warren Exchange.

The two villages of Garfield and Farnsworth gained ephemeral fame but little else. But Cherry Grove carved a niche for itself in the eternal record book of petroleum; the amazing output from the narrow cigar-shaped territory of about 2,270 acres has never been equalled in any region producing Pennsylvania grade crude oil. A recent guidebook describes it as “...one of the maddest periods in the history of oil in Pennsylvania.” Even the caustic Petroleum Age relented by writing, “The field surpasses any ever previously discovered in the capacity of the wells to produce.”

While difficult to believe, it is true the great “646” well was producing five-eighths of a barrel of oil a day as the year 1882 came to a close. The Cherry Grove House, Sieffen’s Hotel, the Keystone Hotel and others, were converted to new uses or torn down. And today if you visit Cherry Grove, there is nothing to

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a Guidebook to Historic Places in Western Pennsylvania (Pittsburgh, 1938), 116.
a The Petroleum Age (July, 1882), I, 259.
indicate that here was once all the turmoil and sensationalism that was the greatest of oil booms. A kindly farmer will guide you to the old plank roads or point out the hole marking the location of “646” but that is all.

Time and nature have already done a remarkable job of camouflage.