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NORTH AMERICA’S FIRST OIL WELL—WHO DRILLED IT?

Claims, Comments, Clarification, with Some Additional Information

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The question we are concerned with is this—who actually drilled North America’s first successful oil well in a definite attempt to secure oil from beneath the surface of the earth?

This question comes about because in recent years some Canadian oil men have claimed that the first well in North America was drilled by James Miller Williams, at Enniskillen (later known as Oil Springs), Ontario, prior to the Drake Well which came in August 27, 1859.

This is an attempt to explore the question carefully and fully.

Neither Canadian nor United States citizens who are interested in this matter can mean by an oil well a well or hole that has been dug. This type is ruled out because if it were not, we would have to go back into history so far that the true facts could not be ascertained. For example, it is well known that as early as 1825 sand pits were dug along the Hughes River in the present State of West Virginia.1 It is also a matter of record that General Andreas Pico was recovering oil from hand-dug wells and seepages in the canyon

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The author of this article, Ernest C. Miller, has been actively engaged in the oil business for more than twenty-five years and has been interested in petroleum history longer than that. He is the author of several books on the early days of oil and more than thirty articles. Currently he is vice-president of the West Penn Oil Company, Inc., of Warren, Pennsylvania.

—Ed.

bearing his name near present-day Newhall, California, as early as 1855.² At a much earlier date and on a larger scale, pits in great numbers were dug along Oil Creek, between Titusville and Oil City, in northwestern Pennsylvania, and were found when the first white men visited the area about 1755; these men, French explorers, soldiers, and priests, never determined who had made the pits. Prior to 1848, white settlers talked with the oldest Indians in the territory and found that they had no knowledge of the well diggers.³ Trees were found growing in some of the pits and also in the dirt thrown up at their sides, and when cut down and examined, some of the trees were found to be three hundred years old. Dating back three centuries from 1848 would make the construction of these hand-dug wells at least as early as 1548.⁴

Professor J. S. Newberry found similar ancient pits and dug wells along Black Creek, near Enniskillen, Ontario, and also reported that he found some trees three feet in diameter growing in the center of these pits.⁵ Today, no one is certain as to the makers of the pits or what the oil recovered from them was used for.

Nor can we consider in this matter wells that were drilled specifically for water or salt brine, for there is no doubt at all that many wells were drilled for both of these products long before 1850 and the early records carry accounts of them in many parts of North America.⁶ One that has been extremely well documented is the

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² *California's Oil*, issued by the American Petroleum Institute, New York, April 1948. p. 5.
³ Davis, William H., "Oil Pits Along Oil Creek," *The Crawford Democrat*, Meadville, Pa., April 1, 1848.

In Europe the art of drilling wells for water was very well known and books had been published on the methods. For example, M. Amedée Burat's book, *Geologie Appliquée, au Traite de la Recherche et de L'exploitation des Minéraux Utiles*, was first published in Paris in 1843 and was followed by a second and third edition. This volume pictures a derrick used in drilling and lists many successful wells.

The outstanding early book concerning drilling is by Jules Degousee and called *Guide du Sondeur, ou Traite Théorique et Pratique des Sondages*, published in Paris in 1847. An Atlas of 34 plates shows drawings of derricks, tools, and other equipment. A second edition of this work was also issued.
American Well, drilled by Lemuel Stockton near Burkesville, Cumberland County, Kentucky. This well was drilled in the winter of 1829 and crude petroleum "gushed" up from the bowels of the earth.\(^7\)

As to the Canadian claims, it is interesting to note that they came into prominence only in the last few years and we should examine what they really do and do not say. Two articles published by two different Canadian banks quietly started the trend. *The Monthly Review of the Bank of Nova Scotia* for July, 1949, said, "Few people realize that the first producing oil well on the North American continent was opened in Lambton County, Ontario, in 1858, the year before the advent of the famous Drake Well in Pennsylvania, which marks the birth of the oil industry in the United States."\(^8\) Only four months later, November, 1949, the *Royal Bank of Canada Monthly Letter* said, "The first producing well on the American continent was opened in Lambton County, Ontario, in 1858."\(^9\) Note carefully the similarity of the wording of these two quotations with both saying that the well "... was opened ..." but nothing is said about drilling at all.

In 1951 the Western Canada Petroleum Association issued a book titled *The Story of Oil* written by G. W. Auxier. In his second chapter Auxier writes, "The first producing well on the North American continent was opened in Lambton County, Ontario, in 1858. In the following year the much publicized Drake well near Titusville, Pennsylvania, was drilled and came into production."\(^10\) He does not say how the Canadian oil was secured but on the very next page suddenly decides that, "Although Canada can boast of the first well in North America which was drilled for oil, it has always been a heavy importer of oil."\(^11\) Here Auxier tells us the Lambton County well was *drilled* but he states it and there is no attempt at documentation; it is as though the word *drilled* had slipped in inadvertently.

In February and March, 1951, the *Canadian Oil and Gas Industries* magazine published an extensive article by Colonel R. B. Harkness, at the time Natural Gas Commissioner for Ontario. In the article, titled "Ontario's Part in the Petroleum Industry," Hark-
ness writes, "They give Colonel Drake the laurels for having drilled the first producing oil well in the world. This writer takes the view that the industry is not at all concerned with the manner of obtaining the crude oil from which marketable products are obtained."  

In this same article the author refers to the report of a special correspondent of The Toronto Globe who was sent to the Canadian oil fields in late August and early September, 1861. Of the oil business around Oil Springs, Enniskillen Township, the reporter made mention of a well belonging to James M. Williams and wrote of it, "Williams & Co., Proprietors. Well sunk 46 feet to rock; bore 100 feet in rock. This well averages the large quantity of 60 barrels a day. A very great deal of oil has been taken from it. It has been in operation two years."  

On the last sentence of this single paragraph the Canadians base their claim to the first drilled oil well in North America. Let us examine what they are offering as proof.

First, it seems a little ridiculous to say that the first well in North America was drilled at any one place by anyone on the strength of a single sentence by one reporter; no other source that we have been able to find of a contemporary date by a Canadian author, historian, or reporter, says what this reporter said.

Second, the reporter does not say the dug well was finished and immediately the drill was used to bore another 100 feet into the rock; he says the well was "sunk," meaning dug, and then "bore" into the rock. As will be pointed out, the boring was most likely not done until after Edwin L. Drake's successful well demonstrated that this was the way to get oil.

Third, all Canadian sources agree that James M. Williams was an astute businessman who formed the Canadian Oil Company late in 1860. From 1869 to 1879 he served as the Hamilton (Ontario) Provincial Representative and, upon retiring from the Legislature in 1879, he was appointed Registrar for Wentworth County, a position he held until his death in 1890 at the age of 72. Not once during his lifetime, which lasted thirty-one years after Drake struck oil at Titusville, did Mr. Williams or any member of his family claim that he had drilled the first oil well in North America.

Fourth, it seems inconceivable that the claim that Williams

drilled the first well in North America should have had to wait nearly ninety years to be given publicity.

Fifth, let us assume that the newspaper reporter was accurate in all details and to the very last day. His report was dated "Bothwell, Thursday, August 29," two days after the day Edwin L. Drake struck oil, and his article did not appear in The Toronto Globe until September 7, 1861. By any measure at all Williams was behind Drake, not ahead of him!

Sixth, it seems strange that when the very same correspondent revisited the Canadian oil fields four years later, in 1865, and wrote a comprehensive book on the oil country with a complete survey of activities, James M. Williams or his wells are not mentioned at all.14

Seventh, if Canadian oil men are so sure of Williams' early drilled oil well, it would seem that by this time some tangible proof would have been turned up to substantiate their claims.

Now, what do oil men in the United States claim? They claim the first well in North America drilled for the express purpose of recovering oil was that of Edwin L. Drake who "struck oil" August 27, 1859. We have never heard of anyone disputing the fact that Drake did drill this well, that he drilled it seeking oil, and that he did secure oil in commercial quantities. And his entire activities have been so very well recorded that all historians accept the unimpeachable evidence available at the Drake Well Museum at Titusville.15 This is evidence that would stand up in any court in the world.

Having had inquiries following the appearance of the two Canadian bank letters, the Auxier book, and the article by Colonel Harkness, the American Petroleum Institute wrote to Dr. Paul H. Giddens, at that time Head of the Department of History, Allegheny College, and Curator of the Drake Well Museum, and the foremost


15 The evidence consists of the records of the original Seneca Oil Company, The Townsend Papers (Townsend was the New Haven banker who hired Drake), letters to and from J. G. Eveleth, George H. Bissell, Brewer Watson & Company, and many others who were instrumental in forming this company. There are also Drake's reports to his company both before and after he found oil, and his own report on the events. The evidence dates from 1854 forward. The John Mather negatives form an interesting and complete story of the Drake Well and what happened after the strike; there are more than 3,600 of these early pictures.
oil historian.\textsuperscript{16} After examining the Canadian material with care, Dr. Giddens wrote the Institute and in brief he said,

1. Drake was the first to drill specifically for petroleum.
2. Because of the Drake Well, a chain of circumstances was started that led to the development of the petroleum industry.
3. Drake adapted the salt well drilling methods for drilling for oil, thus setting a pattern for all who followed.
4. Drake originated the idea of the iron drive pipe, thus permitting drilling through lands filled with water.

In addition, Dr. Giddens pointed out that Canada's oil historian, Colonel R. B. Harkness, did not claim the well of Williams was the first to be drilled in North America.\textsuperscript{17}

Dr. Giddens' explanation was fully accepted by the American Petroleum Institute on May 29, 1952, and the exchange of letters between the Institute and the historian was published in full and freely available.\textsuperscript{18}

For three years little or nothing was heard of the Canadian claim. But in April, 1955, Fergus Cronin's article, "North America's Father of Oil," appeared in the house organ of the Imperial Oil Company, Ltd. A brief preface to the article said, "James Miller Williams of Hamilton, Ont. was 'a genius at business,' said his contemporaries. He was too busy creating new enterprises to notice. For instance, he dug the first commercially successful oil well, probably drilled the first well, and built the first Canadian oil refinery."\textsuperscript{19} But of course Williams did not dig the first successful well or pit, as others were years ahead of him on this score, as has been explained. Also note that Mr. Cronin says Williams "probably drilled the first well." In the same article he states that a reporter for \textit{The Toronto Globe} described the Williams well on September 16 but the newsman actually wrote his report August 29 and it appeared in the \textit{Globe} on September 7, 1861; it is obvious that Mr. Cronin has not personally investigated the matter and this must be classed as careless writing.

Four months later, the magazine \textit{Esso Oilways}, published by

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16 Letter, American Petroleum Institute, New York City, to Dr. Paul H. Giddens, April 16, 1952.
17 Letter, Dr. Paul H. Giddens, Meadville, Pennsylvania, to the American Petroleum Institute, May 19, 1952.
18 \textit{Titusville Herald}, Titusville, Pa., July 8, 1952.
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the Esso Standard Oil Company of New York City, a company closely affiliated with Imperial Oil Company, Ltd., carried a condensed article titled "Williams Drilled the 1st Oil Well," which is merely an abstract of Cronin's earlier article. Neither article carried any documentation.20

In refuting these repetitious claims of 1955, the previous evidence of Dr. Giddens was republished, as was the acceptance for the American Petroleum Institute by Mr. Edward D. Mellinger, in these words, "You have summed up the argument for Drake as the innovator in a thoroughly impressive way. After reading your analysis I can see no sound basis for the Canadian claim, or any other . . . ." 21

Certain Canadian oil interests apparently still thought they had something of considerable public interest in the Williams claim and refused to consider the matter settled. The Crombie Advertising Company of Toronto now enters the scene as the publicity part of the picture. Early in October, 1955, they sent to a wide range of newspapers and magazines an extensive news release and the first part stated, "We have set the release date well forward to give you more time for handling this yarn to suit your individual requirements." Another paragraph explained that "The data comprises excerpts from Colonel Harkness' manuscript, 'Makers of Oil History 1850 to 1880.' The original manuscript was completed in 1939 and a copy was acquired by Harvard University." The release also promised of this manuscript that "It is to be published within the near future." And another part of the release, which was set for October 22, 1955, stated flatly, "Col. Harkness told observers, 'We have conclusive proof that James Miller Williams, North America's first successful oil producer—and refiner—sank this well 46 feet to rock in 1857 and drilled a further 100 feet into rock, sometime between 1857 and 1859.'" 22

21 Letter, Mr. Edward D. Mellinger, American Petroleum Institute, New York City, to Dr. Paul H. Giddens, May 29, 1952.
   See also,
   Memorandum to Editors—2 pages.
   General release and information—10 pages.
   Four photographs and one location map.
   Biographical Sketch of Col. R. B. Harkness—2 pages.
Keeping these quotations from the news release carefully in mind, it is extremely interesting to note that the facts are quite different, as follows,

1. If Harvard University secured a copy of the Harkness manuscript, they have no record of it whatsoever.  

2. The statement put out by the advertising agency in October, 1955, that the important manuscript was to be published within the near future, certainly has been a disappointment and, at this writing, November 1, 1959, it has still not appeared in print.

3. Suddenly, on October 21, 1955, some person discovered that the "conclusive proof" phrase was not correct, so telegrams were dispatched in these words,

"Correct re Oct 22 news release of first oil well delete Para 5 in main story sub Col. Harkness told observers 'We have discovered a well operated by James Miller Williams North America's first successful oil producer, which we believe was dug and drilled sometime between 1857 and 1859.'

Signed "F. J. Himbury
Canadian Oil Co." 24

The conclusive proof entirely disappeared and the phrase and drilled was altered to read "was dug and drilled." This smacks of extreme doubt about the whole matter.

4. If this error was honestly discovered only on October 21, 1955 (the day before the release date), one must agree that the timing was unfortunate for locating the error, for of course some papers and magazines did not have the time, upon receiving the change, to alter the story they already had in print or already had set up about to be printed. One Ontario paper advanced the release date two days and printed the story as originally issued. 25 A leading Canadian technical magazine, as late as December, 1955, still was insisting that Williams drilled the first successful oil well in North America! 26

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Biographical Sketch of W. Harold Rhea, President, Canadian Oil Companies, Limited—2 pages.

24 Telegram from F. J. Himbury, Canadian Oil Company, Toronto, October 21, 1955.
EDWIN L. DRAKE

From a recently discovered unretouched plate. He was the first to drill a well specifically for oil.
New Jersey born, Williams went to Canada at the age of 22. He was the first to produce and refine oil in Canada.
Following this news release by the Crombie Advertising Company and the sudden correction by the Canadian Oil Company, Dr. Giddens once again examined the Canadian position and in refuting the claims this time, wrote a very long letter to the American Petroleum Institute exploding the Canadian claim. This was published also as a newspaper article and was titled, "Historian Refutes Claim of Canada for First Well." 27

Things were quiet in Canada for several years and the next word we find about the matter is that Mr. Cronin's article, "North America's Father of Oil," is reprinted in the June, 1958, issue of the Imperial Oil Review. While the article is unchanged, it is important that a special box printed with it as an explanatory paragraph states, "We reprint the article here in recognition of the Canadian oil industry's centennial celebrations taking place later this month at Oil Springs, Ont., a village that grew up around the pioneer operations of James Miller Williams. Since Williams' activities in 1857 are not wholly documented, centennial officials decided to base their celebrations on the more conclusive evidence of 1858." 28 It would have been more accurate if they had stated that Williams' drilling activities in 1858 and 1859 are not documented—and they have not been to this day.

The Canadians went ahead and held a centennial celebration at Oil Springs from June 28 to July 4, 1958; there was a parade, a pageant, the presentation of a scale replica of a spring pole drilling rig by the Canadian Oil Companies, Limited, and the dedication of a stainless steel plaque set in the ground. 29 Written especially for this affair was a folder by Colonel R. B. Harkness titled, Early Historical Record of First Oil Well in America and there is no mention in it that Williams drilled the first well, or that he drilled prior to Drake. The question is neatly circumvented in these words, "The Centennial to be held at Oil Springs is not to commemorate the drilling of the first oil well drilled, bored or dug in North America, it is to do honor to the man who dug his well nearly as deep as

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Drake's and of greater volume, produced crude oil, refined it, and marketed it." 30

As recently as November, 1958, the Canadian Petroleum Association issued a radio statement which read in part, "Despite fact and legend concerning Colonel Drake at Titusville, Pennsylvania, James Miller Williams had twenty-seven wells and a refinery in operation by the time Drake got started." 31 This is a prime example of the way facts get twisted; this Association presumed that Williams had twenty-seven wells because the reporter from the Toronto Globe numbered all the various wells he mentioned in his article and the first well belonging to Williams that he wrote about was numbered "No. 27." Two other wells belonging to Williams are described and these were called "No. 28 and No. 29." The reporter did not say at all that Williams had twenty-seven wells!

In 1955 the Canadian Oil Company, Limited, purchased the site of the Williams well at Oil Springs and informed the public that "... it will be established as an international historic site commemorating the birthplace of North America's oil industry." 32 If it is so established, it will be an historical hoax and a misrepresentation to a gullible public. The location may mark Canada's first commercially produced oil site but not the birthplace of North America's oil industry. That is securely located at Titusville, Pennsylvania.

It may be of interest to examine what some Canadians have said about early drilling and development of the petroleum business in Canada. That unknown reporter, on whose Toronto Globe report of 1861 the Canadians seem to take their stand, wrote in 1865, "It is a matter of great regret, in looking over the list of companies which have been formed, to find that so little Canadian capital is invested. Ninety-nine hundredths of it are American. Mr. Andrew Elliot, Mr. Fairbank, and Messrs. Torrance, are almost the only—I think the only—Canadians who have a really large extent invested in search after oil. For all our 'monied men,' such as we have, would do, this large and rich territory would remain untouched.

30 Harkness, R. B., Early Historical Record of First Oil Well in America, published by the Advertiser-Topic, June 1958.
32 Quoted from the extensive news release; see note number 22.
There is perhaps no country in the world, certainly no other country where the English language is spoken, in which less commercial 'pluck,' less enterprise, is manifested than in Canada."  

The following is extracted from evidence given by J. H. Fairbank of Petrolea before the Royal Commission investigating the mineral resources of Ontario which took place during 1890, "In 1859 or 1860 the first attempt was made at utilising Canadian petroleum. This consisted in extracting a liquid from the 'gum oil' that found its way to the surface at what then was known as the 'gum beds' at Oil Springs. The surface wells were dug to a depth of 40 to 60 feet; they were not flowing wells. Near the surface rock was a bed of gravel, and on reaching that the oil would press into the well, and raise it quite a number of feet. The surface well was usually a shaft of four or five feet in diameter. That was done both at Oil Springs and here, and was the first development. The first drilling in the rock was at Oil Springs, about 1861—and soon after rock wells were sunk here." 

Victor Ross wrote from Toronto a few years ago in these words, "The discoveries on Black and Bear Creeks, in Lambton County, from which the flourishing industries of Petrolia and Oil Springs have grown, were due to the excitement which attended the Pennsylvania discoveries . . . " And he continued in an interesting manner when he wrote of Williams, saying, "In the hope that he might obtain greater quantities by digging beneath the surface of the gum beds, he excavated a well, and found that the deeper he penetrated the earth, the greater the yield. This was really the first oil well in America and was dug (italics by this writer, not by Ross) a year before Drake's Well in Pennsylvania, in 1859, although it did not pierce the limestone." 

Two United States sources are appropriate and the first appeared in 1887 in these words, "In the year 1857 these surface marks attracted the attention of more skillful and better informed men. In this year the first well was dug, not drilled (for this art

33 The Petroleum District of Canada West, op. cit. p. 34.
was quite unknown in this section at that time), resulting in a flowing well of considerable proportions." 36

Perhaps the most famous company in the early Canadian oil fields at this time was the Wyoming Rock Oil Company. This firm employed Professor S. S. Cutting of the University of Rochester, Rochester, New York, to inspect its Canadian lands and to report on them. In his comprehensive report dated December 11, 1864, Professor Cutting said in part, "When, some four years ago, the oil bearing character of this region was discovered and those wells were dug which, for a brief time, created literally an inundation of oil in the valley of Black Creek, petroleum was worth hardly more than ten cents per barrel, and therefore hardly worth transportation." 37

It seems clear that Mr. J. H. Fairbank and Mr. Victor Ross, both of Canada, were sure the wells that yielded surface oil prior to the Drake Well were only dug wells or seeps, and it is likewise clear that Mr. Benjamin Crew and Professor S. S. Cutting were of the same mind. Mr. Fairbank resided in the Canadian oil regions and Professor Cutting visited and carefully inspected the Canadian oil fields in 1860 and 1864.38

Lest there be those who regard James Miller Williams as the first refiner of petroleum in North America, this is the place to set the record straight, and on the refining of petroleum by Mr. Williams in Canada, these are the facts:

1. T. Sterry Hunt, chemist to the Geological Survey of Canada, was at Oil Springs in December, 1860, and later wrote that "... it was not till 1857 that Mr. J. M. Williams, of Hamilton, with some associates, undertook the distillation of this tarry bitumen ..." 39

2. But a newspaper reported in August, 1858, that "... as yet no works for manufacturing the oil has been erected on the premises,

38 The Enniskillen Petroleum and Refining Company of Canada West, Prospectus and Report of Professor Cutting, 1865. A copy of this is available for inspection at the Drake Well Museum.
what has been obtained has been barreled and sent to Hamilton to be prepared there."  

3. As these two statements are in conflict, we are not certain that Williams refined petroleum at Oil Springs in 1857.

4. However, if the Sarnia Observer's earlier report is correct, it would indicate that Williams was refining in Hamilton prior to August 26, 1858.

5. We are fairly sure he was actively in the refining business in Hamilton during 1858 for he sold his excess crude to A. C. Ferris of New York that year and Ferris went up to see him in October, 1858; his account shows the oil he purchased from Canada was paid for on November 19 and 22. This oil was from the Williams dug wells and seepages and what he sold was part of what his refinery could not handle.

6. What is believed to be the first advertisement for illuminating oil in Canada appeared in a London, Ontario, newspaper September 15, 1859, and the material is identified as "... the recently-discovered Earth Oils of Lambton ..." and offered at one dollar a gallon. This was from the Williams property.

7. The first advertisement in his own name appeared in the Hamilton Spectator on July 4, 1860, and offered illuminating oil at seventy cents a gallon.

8. At London, England, in 1862, Williams was awarded a medal as the first to refine oil in Canada.

These are the bare facts that can be substantiated.

But others had refined petroleum earlier. Samuel M. Kier, a Pittsburgh industrialist, had sold crude oil in its natural state as a bottled medicine for some years starting in the 1840's and as early as 1852 he was refining petroleum. Some of the crude oil he refined was purchased from Charles Lockhart of Pittsburgh, later to become an official in the Standard Oil Company.

William L. Kier, a son, said his father started refining oil by 1851 in a one barrel capacity still; the City Council of Pittsburgh worried of possible danger from the refinery and so Kier moved to

40 Sarnia Observer, August 26, 1858.
43 He was also awarded a medal for his crude oil produced in Canada.
44 Stofiel, L. E., "S. M. Kier, the Pioneer Oil Refiner," Pittsburgh Dispatch, August 7, 1892.
A GREAT DEAL has BEEN SAID ABOUT
the recently-discovered Earth Oil of Lambton,
otherwise known as the Ennistilen Oil. In its pure
state it is unfit for use, but, by the action of Chem-
istry, is rendered beautifully pure, transparent,
and free from offensive odour.
Professor Croft of Toronto, after much labour,
has succeeded in deodorising the Oil, and rendering
it useful as an article of commerce.

L. C. LEONARD,
Richmond street
Opposite the Post Office.

Has been appointed by Messrs. WILLIAMS and
HAWES the
Sole Agent for London & the West,
for the sale of this new Oil. He is prepared to treat
with parties for a supply either wholesale or retail.
This Oil is superior to the Coal Oil in quality and
durability; is free from unpleasant smell; and burns
with a pure, bright flame. It burns longer, and is
at least 40 per cent, more economical than any Coal
Oil now in use. Price One Dollar per Gallon.

Samples for trial can be obtained gratis of the
Subscriber.

LAMPS

For Burning the Ennistilen and Coal Oil always
on hand, at wholesale and retail.

NOTE THE ADDRESS:
L. C. LEONARD,
Store and Tin Warehouse,
RICHMOND-STREET (OPPOSITE THE P. O.),
LONDON, O. W.

STOVES,

THE SUBSCRIBER ALSO SELLS
Cook, Dining-Room, & Box Stoves,
JAPAN & TINWARE,
a great variety, and cheaper than any other House
in London.

London, Sept. 15, 1859.

Believed to be the first advertisement for carbon oil pro-
duced from petroleum in the United States. This appeared
in the American Agriculturist,
September 1858.

Believed to be the first advertisement for carbon oil pro-
duced from petroleum in Can-
ada. This appeared in The
London (Ontario) Free Press,
September 15, 1859.
CARBON ILLUMINATING OIL

Is not a Coal Oil,

But is for burning in Coal Oil Lamps, and is made by distillation of pure Petroleum, a liquid Mineral Oil, obtained from a boring 450 feet deep, in the Alleghany Mountains, near Pittsburgh, and makes a

PERFECT AND SMOKELESS OIL

It is not explosive; and is entirely free from unpleasant odor!

Burns a high flame, without smoke or crust!!

Is a bright clear straw color, and will not change!!!

Will burn as long as the best coal oil!!!!

And is guaranteed to be the BEST OIL EVER USED in a Coal Oil Lamp; and it, on trial, it should not be found in all respects, as stated, the money will be returned to the purchaser.

For sale at Carbon Oil Co.'s Depot, 191 Pearl-st., New-York.

Author's Collection

nearby Lawrenceville where he erected a five barrel plant for refining. This still can be seen today at the Drake Well Museum at Titusville, Pennsylvania, where it is on display.

Carbon oil or illuminating oil had been widely sold in the United States starting in 1857 and a few of the sales of that day were as follows:

December 1857
/ Stout & Hand, Grocers
\ Gowanus, S. Brooklyn, N. Y.

December 1857
/ Augustus Prout
\ Geneva, New York

December 1857
/ W. Wheaton, Grocer
\ Rye, New York

By March, 1858, general sales had been made from Boston southwards through Virginia, South Carolina, and parts of Georgia.

By September, 1858, Mr. Alexander Muir had established his Carbon Oil Company Depot at 191 Pearl Street in New York City and was advertising nationally in Orange Judd’s famous American Agriculturist, a monthly paper published in both English and German.

45 Ibid.
In June, 1860, Schiefflin Brothers had prepared a circular on how to refine oil and this appeared in Thomas Gale's book, *Rock Oil in Pennsylvania and Elsewhere*, and was freely available. Of James Miller Williams, we can say so far as we know today, that he *produced* the first crude oil in Canada, is believed to have *drilled* the first oil well in Canada, and was without doubt the first to *refine* petroleum in Canada. That seems glory enough.

As the present facts show, he was not the first to drill a well specifically for oil in North America and he was not the first to refine petroleum.

If Canadian oil men are looking for a Canadian pioneer who contributed heavily to the early development of the petroleum business, they surely have one in the person of Dr. Abraham Gesner. Nova Scotia born, at different periods of his life he qualified as a physician and surgeon, geologist, naturalist, chemist, and author. His work relative to petroleum was that,

1. He provided a satisfactory replacement for the dangerous and expensive existing illuminants before crude oil was readily available.

2. He formulated and patented methods of refining a "burning fluid" from deposits of bitumen, soft mineral pitch, and asphaltum, by dry distillation followed by treatment with reagents.

3. He conjured up the name by which such oils were to be known—kerosene.

4. He wrote an important book on practical refining which was published in 1861 titled, *A Practical Treatise on Coal, Petroleum and other Distilled Oils*.

Only recently has his work been carefully investigated and written about. Dr. Gesner died at Halifax in 1864 and in 1943 a special marker

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47 *American Agriculturist*, New York, September, 1858.
was erected at his grave. It said, "Erected as a token of appreciation and for his important contributions to the oil industry." 50

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