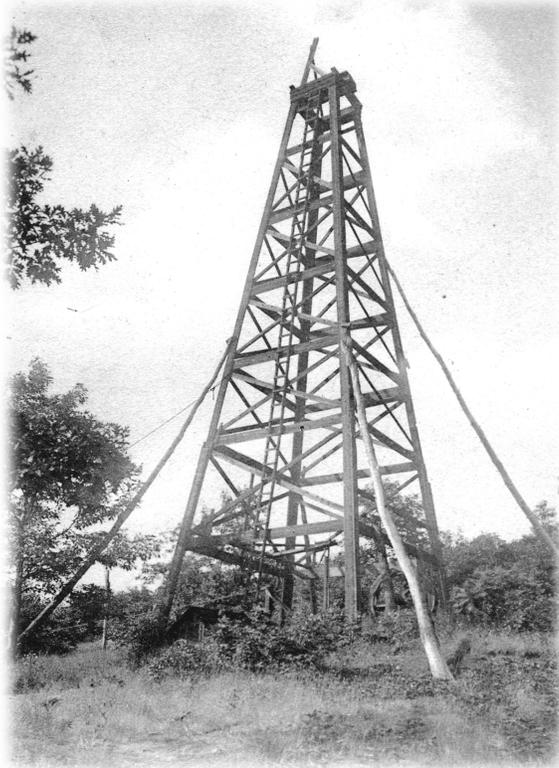


Back in the Country...
Bell Acres Stories
 by Debby Rabold

SEWICKLEY TOWNSHIP OIL & GAS



OIL STRUCK AT SEWICKLEY...

A few weeks since you noticed the fact that a company had commenced boring for oil in the Borough of Sewickley, of this county. I now have the pleasure of informing you of their success. Last evening about 6 o'clock they struck a most promising vein of oil at the depth of about one hundred feet [on the lot of G.F. Rudisill, Esq.]

When Gen. John McLaughlin, who is superintending the boring, announced that they had struck a vein of oil, the news caused the wildest excitement among the usually quiet citizens of our borough. There was a general stampede for the well. Men, women and children might have been seen with excited faces and flying steps hurrying up Main Street and up the hollow leading to the well [Waterworks Road area]. The village was nearly deserted. Several amusing incidents occurred. John Way, who keeps a store, started as soon as he heard the news, leaving the store in charge of Seet Guy. But as the crowd passed, Mr. Guy got excited and started at a full run, forgetting to close the store, or give it in charge of another. Fortunately, Mr. Myers, the tinner, discovering the mistake, closed the store. Neither Mr. Way nor

Mr. Guy returned till after 11 o'clock at night, and not till then did either think of their store. William A. Ellis left his shoe bench without hat or coat, and started up Main Street at full speed in this shirt sleeves, and his apron fluttering in the breeze, (Mr. Ellis has a lot adjoining the well.) Squire Rudisill gave a specimen of the tallest walking ever seen in the borough. Squire Starr, usually a little absentminded, before he started for the well, locked up his store, but forgot to close the shutters, and left the key sticking in the door. Dr. McCready, who heard the news just as he arrived home from the country, forgot to hitch his horse, and started for the well. And did not return for several hours. His horse was found this morning three miles from home, and this saddle bags in the corner of B. Gray's lot, where the Doctor had crossed over in the eager race. (He also has a lot adjoining the well.) In fact, nearly every person who could, visited the well during the evening, and all seemed delirious with the excitement.

The oil appeared on the top of the water at the mouth of the well in such quantities as clearly to indicate that something had been struck. Enough was gathered to establish beyond controversy that the oil was there...

This morning the excitement was greater even than last evening. Men are out exploring all the ravines and bottoms, and a hundred wells are in mental embryo. Property even has gone up to fabulous prices. The universal sentiment this morning is Sewickley against the world for oil!

[Pittsburgh Gazette 15 February 1861]

GAS AT SEWICKLEY

The first gas well in Sewickley was struck yesterday afternoon at 4 o'clock and created a big excitement in that borough...The gas was struck at 1,730 feet and came out with a roar...The well was visited by a great crowd last night and some leases of surrounding territory were made. Today the pipe will be raised above the derrick and the gas lighted. Its roar can be heard all over Sewickley.

[Pittsburgh Daily Post 8 July 1886]

THE NEW OIL FIELD

They have the petroleum fever back of Sewickley, have it badly, and the staid farmers who have heretofore depended mainly on the sale of agricultural products to secure other things and enjoy life generally, are now too rich to farm, at least some of the are...

It is only seven or eight miles northeast from Sewickley to Duff City, but if you attempt to follow the directions given in Sewickley, 10 to 1 you will land in Beaver county the first thing you know. The safest way to guide a stranger is to tell him to pass the big dairy farm with its palatial stables, and when he gets to Sewickley Creek, follow it up until he comes to a schoolhouse, and a very poor looking one at that; then turn to the left and keep on in a general way promiscuously until he sees derricks.

A Region Full of Dogs

There is an utter absence of fence boards...to be compelled to drive half a mile from a road to learn the way, and then be confronted with a pack of savage dogs, is not one of the least ills that beset the traveler in the wilds of Pennsylvania-and there are wilds almost within the classic precincts of Sewickley. They are all placarded and at first sight one would suppose the country had fallen into the hands of some enterprising real estate broker. Each, however, contains a threat of prosecution for anyone found hunting or shooting on them. A native said of the county was largely a shooting preserve of Mr. Westinghouse. Why anyone should want to shoot on them passes comprehension, for there was certainly no evidence of animated life seen in a drive of several miles, save a frisky chickaree, or pine squirrel, and a real sportsman does not consider this kind of squirrel game.

Down Sewickley Creek is a road at best uninteresting...Duff City is the baby city in the galaxy of Pennsylvania municipalities. It is pleasantly situated at the base of several low hills. Architecturally, it possesses the usual oil town variety. The substantial old farmhouses are already flanked by engine houses and shanties, and derricks are sprouting in all directions, both on hill and vale.

Brisk Operations

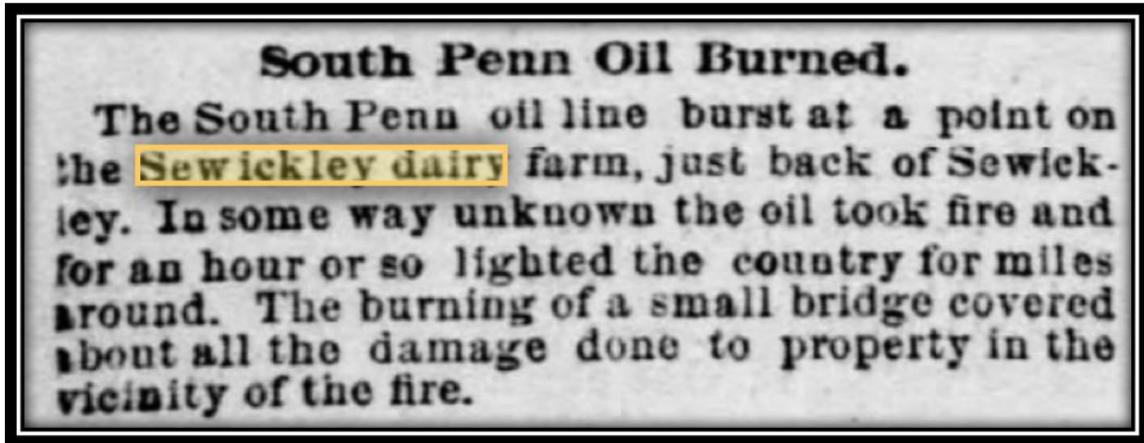
On the Duff, Rhodes, Downey, Sohn, Hamilton and Rosensteel farms there are nearly 30 derricks up or building, and within 30 or 60 days the capacity of the territory thereabouts will be well tested. One thing seemed to be pretty well agreed upon by drillers, and that was that the territory was likely to prove somewhat spotted. Some drillers think there may be some very large wells struck, while the number of dry holes will be large...

A Well Near Sewickley

There are already a few small wells around Sewickley, the best one being in Mitchell's Hollow. There is much expected of the territory, and the people are looking for an early development of the entire tract. It is not considered a bad venture, even if there are not any exceedingly large wells brought in. If prices keep up the stray pools in all the territories can be brought to the surface to an advantage, because they can be operated even at a greater cost; while if prices go down, the operators could not afford to pay any attention to them.

The South Penn Oil Company is taking leases in this territory wherever they can find a field that looks like possible oil land. The Sewickley Dairy Company also owns 2,500 acres that is regarded as important from an oil standpoint. It is known as the McKean tract. Nothing has yet been done on it, but there is a well on the S. Logan

farm just back of the McKean ground, that should it prove a good one, might prompt the dairy company to discard the milk business and embark in the oil trade. [Pittsburgh Dispatch 10 November 1889]



MISSIONARY 1,2 &3

If you ride out to Duff City any of these fine frosty mornings and the roads about Sewickley, though rough with ruts, are not impassable as they were a week ago with mud, you will find three oil wells right on the edge of the [Big] Sewickley Creek. Duff's City is a somewhat grandiose name for a farmhouse or two, a blacksmith shop, a flourmill and a cove of derricks, three miles north of Sewickley. There have been exciting times there lately, because of his majesty petroleum has been spouting from some of the holes in a truly royal style.

But about those three wells, the derricks of which you cannot fail to notice upon a narrow swampy strip of land beside the [Big] Sewickley, there is an odd story connected with them. On a shingle nailed to the derrick of one of these wells is scrawled in rude letters: Mish'nerly Number 1.

Here's the key to the story. The land on which these three wells are drilled belongs to a young man who, when a boy, was bound apprentice, or something of that sort, to Farmer Duff. In lieu of pay for his service, Mr. Duff gave the boy the slice of land by the creek. The land did not seem worth the taxes upon it then. But a few months ago, oil was struck on the Duff property and the indications were that the strip of land by the creek covered with stones and overflowed half the time by the creek was in the oil belt.

Presently some oilmen waited on the youthful owner and proposed to bore for oil on a certain contract. The young man was willing, but surprised the gentlemen who were negotiating with him by insisting that tit should be stated specifically in the lease that his share of the profits as agreed upon should go to the missionaries. They explained to him that he could do what he liked with his money, which would be paid to him regularly in the usual way. But he insisted on the insertion of the clause as to the missionaries.

Oil was struck in the first well put down, and since then two other wells have come in on the same property. The wells are called Missionary 1,2 and 3. They are not gigantic gushers, but good paying wells...

[Pittsburgh Dispatch 26 January 1890]

At Haysville, very happily, ends abruptly the recently most aggressive march of the oil well derrick. So far, and no farther, Nature has said to the adventurous driller, and the wells which have been put down in the Sewickley Valley proper have been such failures as to forbid future marring of its beauty by the unsightly structures of rough boards and timber. These affairs rear their homely proportions at the Western limits of the valley, but there seems no likelihood that the peaceful and pastoral serenity of the charmed vale will be broken by the creak of the walking-beam, or the roar of natural gas, or that its summer breezes shall bear the unpleasant burden of

a smell of crude petroleum. Evidently, the Sewickley Valley is held sacred from such an invasion by the same power which fashioned it so perfectly as a place of homes and for homes.

[The Bulletin Vol.21 #24 11 October 1890]

SEARCHING BIG SEWICKLEY

Operators have long held to the opinion that a pool of oil could be developed on the Big Sewickley Creek. A number of test wells have been drilled along that stream and to the east and west of it, but the results have not been satisfactory. In the face of discouragement Pittsburg operators have decided to continue the search...

[1896 newspaper clipping]

The territory on Big Sewickley Creek has been attracting attention for more than a year and it is the opinion of some that something better will be found in that locality than has yet been discovered.

[1898 newspaper clipping]

After the nation's first commercially successful oil well was drilled near Titusville, Pennsylvania (1859), speculators quickly began leasing potential well sites throughout Western Pennsylvania. Until 1900, Appalachia was the most

productive oil region in the nation with Pennsylvania leading in production. The state was known for Pennsylvania Crude, an especially high quality oil used for lubrication.

Typically, wells in northwestern Allegheny County reached depths of 1200' to 1600' before tapping into an oil producing deposit known as a 'sand'. An oil sand is a layer of sandstone, clay and salt water saturated with crude oil. Sands can be found at different depths and varying thicknesses. Some wells produced oil, some gas and others both oil and gas. Some wells were 'dusters', which produced nothing at all. Forty gallons of salt water might be pumped for every gallon of oil.

Drilling and operating a well was an expensive undertaking that was financed by selling shares to investors. Once financing was in place, speculators leased well sites from property owners for a payment plus the usual 1/8 share royalty. Property owners often received free natural gas to light and heat their homes.

Despite the number of productive wells in neighboring Economy, Leetsdale, Aleppo and Franklin, drilling in Sewickley Township produced little oil. According to the 1910 Geologic Survey report, approximately fifteen wells had been drilled into the Sevins oil pool in the southwestern corner of the township, but only six of the wells were productive. The Sevins wells tapped into what was known as the Hundred Foot Sand. Other than the Sevins wells, the only other producing wells were two found on the George Sohn farm on Camp Meeting Road Extension and one on the Prophater farm on Hunt Road. Several unproductive wells or 'dusters' had been drilled along Big Sewickley Creek. Geologically speaking, the township was simply in the wrong place for widespread oil and gas production.



Oil and gas revenues were not important to the overall economy of Sewickley Township. The Federal Census of 1900 recorded only three residents employed in the oil industry, two in 1910 and four in 1920. Farming remained the main occupation within the township.



In 1919, a natural gas field opened in McKeesport, Pennsylvania, which caused great excitement in the Sewickley area since it was believed the same sand that was the source of the McKeesport gas boom reached into the Sewickley district. By then, oil and gas production had peaked in the Sewickley area and it was hoped that drilling into the deeper Speechley Sand would lead to an upturn in the local oil and gas industry. The McKeesport boom last about a year with the hoped-for profits never materializing.

There was much interest in Aleppo's Hartle farm located on Lang Road, but within a year or two, the excitement faded.

Production in local wells gradually dropped to where most wells were eventually abandoned with the remains of derricks and well houses dotting the landscape for many years. Until 1955, wells were not required to be registered and as a result, it is impossible to determine the exact number and location of wells that had been drilled during Pennsylvania's oil and gas boom.

*Read This Story
of Sewickley Oil!*

**SEWICKLEY NOW
THE CENTER OF BIG
OIL EXCITEMENT**

**Many New Wells Proposed to
Drill to Speechley Sand.**

To learn more about the area's early oil and gas industry, go to:

https://www.northlandlocalhistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Final_oilgas_story.pdf