
**Petroleum exploration in onshore western
Newfoundland: an historical overview**

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Hydrocarbons have been recognized for nearly two centuries along the shores of western Newfoundland and numerous attempts to establish and exploit this resource have taken place over the ensuing years. The majority of this drilling occurred over three distinct time periods; the 1890s to 1920s, the 1950s to 1960s, and starting from the mid 1990s up to the present time. Approximately 60 wells were drilled over the two earlier time intervals (historic period), with most of them being located around Parsons Pond (27) and St. Paul's Inlet (8) on the Northern Peninsula, Shoal Point (13) on the Port au Port Peninsula, near the town of Deer Lake and the upper Humber River area within the Deer Lake Basin (9), and around Flat Bay and further to the south in the Bay St. George Basin (3). More than half of the wells put down had minor to good shows of crude oil, natural gas, oil shale and/or bitumen staining. Impressive as this may seem, even more importantly, the various hydrocarbon shows were encountered over all five areas of interest. Around the turn of the century, minor intermittent production was achieved at Parsons Pond and at Shoal Point, although based on available records, it is estimated that less than 8 000 barrels of oil in total was ever produced and consumed either within the local market or elsewhere on the island.

So why did individuals and their respective companies in colonial Newfoundland (1890s to 1920s) and then much later in the province of Newfoundland (1950s to 1960s) fail in their attempts to develop a viable petroleum industry along the west coast of the island? The reasons are many and highly variable over the two time intervals. Some were controllable; however most were not.
