

**COLUMBIA OIL FARM OF THE OIL CREEK
VALLEY, VENANGO COUNTY, PA
150 YEARS OF PETROLEUM LEGACY**

Amy Randolph, Senior Geologic Scientist
Minerals Section
Bureau of Forestry, Rachel Carson State Office Building
P. O. Box 8552, Harrisburg, PA 17105
arandolph@state.pa.us

August 27, 2009 will mark the sesquicentennial anniversary of the world's first successful commercial oil well. The well was drilled by *Colonel* Edwin Drake in the Oil Creek Valley of Venango County in northwestern Pennsylvania. Oil drilling leases bordering along Oil Creek were quickly secured up and down the valley following Drake's success.

One such company which leased early in the oil boom was the Columbia Oil Company, formed by a group of Pittsburgh investors. The property they leased became known as the Columbia Farm, on which several high-yielding oil wells were drilled. A young Andrew Carnegie was one of the early investors in the Columbia Oil Company; Carnegie's profits allowed him to eventually quit his job with the Pennsylvania Railroad, thereby affording him the opportunity to then found his steel-making ventures. The company town which sprang up at the site hosted a library (thought by some to have been the inspiration for later Carnegie-funded libraries), its own baseball team and cornet band, a church and company housing. Several building foundations and a small cemetery are all that is left of this settlement. Believing that the oil would soon run out, Carnegie's associate and co-investor, William Coleman, conceived of an idea to construct a brick-lined impoundment capable of storing 100,000 barrels of oil, so that they might take advantage of a price spike resulting from short supply and high demand. The oil didn't run out, the impoundment concept failed, but the remains of the suspected *brick pond* are still discernible in the form of a present-day wetland.

The history of the oil-drilling operations on the Columbia Farm ranges from the early-1860s to near present. One of the wells on site may have been the first to have been unintentionally *water-flooded*, a technology which later became industry standard for the enhanced (i.e., secondary) recovery of oil reserves. Brundred Oil Company eventually bought the property and employed compressed air injection for this same purpose. Casinghead gasoline was a crude, unrefined petroleum product which helped supplement domestic supplies during World War II, and was later manufactured at the site though a condensation process, the equipment for which was only just removed in 2008. In 1952, Quaker State Oil and Refining Corporation took assignment to the property and in the early-1970s it unsuccessfully experimented on site with its *Maraflood* enhanced oil recovery project. In 1970, the

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania filed a declaration of taking to acquire the surface rights to the Columbia Farm for its incorporation into Oil Creek State Park.

The oil drilling legacy of the area is on-going. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is still locating and plugging many old oil wells within the Oil Creek Valley, while at the same time, oil well drilling is actively taking place within the boundaries of the Allegheny National Forest, located a short distance east of Drake's original well. Pennsylvania is also in the midst of a natural gas drilling boom related to the recently recognized *unconventional* Marcellus shale gas deposit.

THE FIRST REPORTS OF OIL IN OKLAHOMA

Raymond P. Sorenson
1912 S. Cheyenne Ave.
Tulsa, OK 74119
sorensonrk@sbcglobal.net

POSTER PRESENTATION: 150 years ago, when the 1859 Drake well in Pennsylvania provided the spark that launched the modern petroleum industry, Oklahoma already had oil production from a hand dug well in Mayes County, and at least nine publications had mentioned oil seeps in southern Oklahoma. By the time Oklahoma became a state and a major oil producer in the early 20th century, these reports had been largely forgotten, and have been overlooked in the modern geological literature.

The Dragoon Expedition (Wheelock, 1834) first reported rock oil in Oklahoma at seeps probably located near the Loco and Healdton oil fields. Lt. Johnston of Fort Washita next reported a steeply dipping sandstone seeping oil in the northern Arbuckle Mountains at an 1845 geological convention. Lt. Johnston's report was summarized in multiple commercial books related to coal and oil from 1855 to 1865. Chickasaw Indian Agents stated in several annual reports (Upshaw, 1845; 1846; 1848; Smith, 1853) that two or more oil springs in southern Oklahoma were used by the local population for medicinal purposes. Michler (1850) mentioned these medicinal springs in a military expedition report and showed *Oil Spring road* leading west from Fort Washita on what is probably the first published map to depict oil in Oklahoma. Randolph Marcy, returning from his 1852 expedition to find the source of the Red River, traveled through the Wichita Mountains to the area of future Fort Sill and found oil within igneous outcrops in the immediate vicinity of Medicine Bluffs.