

**ABSTRACTS:  
PETROLEUM HISTORY INSTITUTE 2014 OIL HISTORY SYMPOSIUM & FIELD TRIP  
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Abstracts are arranged in alphabetical order according to first author's last name.

**THE SENECA OIL SPRING: JUST THE FACTS**

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**POSTER PRESENTATION**

They have squashes, beans, and other vegetables in abundance, and very good oil, which they call Atouronton (a Touronton), so that I have no hesitation in saying that we should settle there rather than elsewhere.

From this single sentence in Fr. Joseph de La Roche d'Allion's 1627 letter to a friend in France comes the question did he or did he not travel to what is now the Seneca Oil Spring in Allegany County, New York? For centuries, it has been widely believed that Fr. Joseph was the first white man to encounter petroleum in North America. Still today, there are government road signs, books, websites and other sources that claim Fr. Joseph saw the spring in 1627. However, some researchers and historians as far back as 1962 have cast doubt on this claim. Through a bibliographic study of published sources relating to the discovery of the Seneca Oil Spring, we go back to explore when the word oil from Fr. Joseph's letter was interpreted to mean petroleum.

**LOUISIANA OYSTER WARS, 1930S-1950S: SCIENCE,  
LITIGATION AND REGULATION ISSUES DURING  
EARLY COASTAL OILFIELD DEVELOPMENT**

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In the fall and winter of 1932-33, massive oyster mortality occurred in the shallow Louisiana coastal waters. While cycles of elevated oyster deaths had been recorded for de-

ades, there was a new neighbor—oilfields had entered these coastal bays by 1929. It was against regulations to release oil, but spills sometimes occurred, and produced waters and drilling wastes were legally disposed of into coastal waters. Oyster inspections by regulatory scientists noted the lack of spatial relationships between oyster-bed damage and oil well proximity. State (headed by James Gowanloch) and Federal scientists (including Paul Golstoff and Herbert Pryterch) conducted studies on potential impacts of oilfield wastes to oysters. Several scientists hypothesized that an unidentified soluble fraction was present in seawater from oil-spill interactions. This soluble fraction allegedly retarded oyster feeding. A lawsuit was filed in October of 1933 (*L. Ducet v. The Texas Company et al.*) by an oysterman for damages. By the time the case was tried in 1942, 18 other similar suits had been filed. Scientists who had put forth the soluble fraction hypothesis served as plaintiff experts. A district court dismissed the suit, but the Louisiana Supreme Court overturned the ruling in 1944 and awarded damages of \$10,650. The other cases settled for an estimated amount of over \$200,000.

Oyster litigation exploded in 1946-47 as 108 suits were filed against several oil companies, seeking over \$30 million in damages. In late 1946, Gulf hired scientists to investigate oyster mortality, followed by the Texas Company who organized a consortium of several oil companies. At its height, about 90 people and several major universities were involved, and approximately \$2 million was spent. The chief scientists were Albert Collier, Sewell Hopkins, and J. G. Mackin. The State hired Malcom Owen to head up its efforts. While no correlation was found between oyster mortality rates and oil well proximity, by mid-1948, evidence indicated a disease was causing major oyster mortality during warm summer months. A new tissue-damaging organism was identified by late 1948, and by 1949 it was classified as a new fungus species. In 1950, scientists of the Texas A&M Foundation (Mackin and Collier) and the State of Louisiana (Owen) published their findings in the journal *Science*. The complete project, *Studies on Oysters in Relation to the Oil Industry*, was published in 1962 by The University of Texas.

Meanwhile, as the 1946-47 lawsuits were filed, the Louisiana Stream Control Commission (SCC) heard from oystermen and parish authorities, plus State scientists involved in the 1930s studies (primarily James Gowanloch, LA Wildlife and Fisheries, WLF). Oilfield inspections showed no apparent relation to oyster deaths. WLF held that there was enough evidence based on older 1930s works and litigation. In November of 1946, the SCC adopted a WLF resolution to stop the discharge of produced water (new), oil (already banned) and other wastes into the 16 coastal parishes' waters. In 1947, notices were sent to companies in potential violation of this resolution, and as a result, the Texas Company filed suit against the WLF commissioner (Texas Co. v. Montgomery) in which it challenged the constitutionality of the legislative act creating the SCC. While this suit was dismissed by the federal courts, stronger administrative challenges were put forth concerning procedural issues, the lack of scientific data or pollution standards to indicate regulations had been broken. These regulatory battles continued into the early 1950s, but by this time, sufficient scientific data indicated that the basic assumptions of oyster mortality were incorrect. The resolution was not carried forward into a final order, and a statewide ban on coastal produced water discharges did not occur until the 1990s.

**THE PENNSYLVANIA GRADE CRUDE OIL ASSOCIATION'S RESEARCH PROGRAM TO 1960**

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The Pennsylvania Grade Crude Oil Association (PGCOA) was founded in 1923 as a trade association of producers, refiners and jobbers. It addressed problems associated with the decline of Pennsylvania's Oil Region. The Association's earliest effort was a marketing program to promote the characteristics of the local petroleum and its product: a superior lubricant. It was followed with a policing program: legal cases against firms that sold other oils as Pennsylvania products.

By the end of the decade, the PGCOA added research to its mission. It signed agreements with Pennsylvania State College in 1929. In subsequent years, the Association entered into agreements with the U.S. Bureau of Mines, as well as other government agencies and privately run laboratories. In addition, the PGCOA operated a production research laboratory in Bradford, Pennsylvania, in cooperation with the Bradford District Pennsylvania Oil Producers Association.

Research covered several areas. The first was a program to develop tests for geographic origin of lubricants to support the policing program. The Department of Petroleum and Natural Gas Engineering at Penn State used its refining laboratory for this work, as well, as general research in the field. Next were tests of engines using Pennsylvania lubricants. Another focus was on production, including secondary and, later, tertiary recovery of oil.

By the late 1950s, financial problems led to the sale of the Bradford lab, and production research increasingly shifted to producing firms.

This paper traces the outline of this effort from its inception in the late 1920s through 1960. It is based largely on papers deposited at the Drake Well Museum Archives at Titusville as well as the Penn Brad Oil Museum and Bradford Landmark Society, both at Bradford. Additional material includes books and pamphlets published by Pennsylvania State College, state and national government agencies, and secondary sources.

**TANK TRUCK PETROLEUM TRANSPORT DURING WORLD WAR II:  
AN ARMY MIGHT MOVE ON ITS STOMACH, BUT EVERYTHING ELSE RUNS ON OIL**

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Prior to the World War II, ocean tankers moved over 95 percent of the oil shipped to the East Coast from the Gulf Coast. That supply link was seriously disrupted by German U-boats which found the slow moving tankers an easy target. The demand for alternative means of petroleum transportation utilizing rail, truck and pipelines was met through the combined efforts of government and industry. Transportation was never nationalized and intense intermodal competition was sidelined. Much has been written about how the oil and railroad industries adapted to wartime distribution. This paper will examine the role of tank truck transportation in support of the nation and the war effort.

The day after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, two government agents knocked on the door of Sam Niness who was vacationing with his family in the Pennsylvania Mountains. Niness was told to prepare immediately for a flight to Washington DC to meet with Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes to discuss tank truck petroleum transportation. Niness, then vice-president of Leaman Transportation Company of