

## HISTORIOGRAPHY OF PETROLEUM COMPANIES

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This paper is a continuation of “database” papers published in the *Oil-Industry History*: Spencer (2009, 2011, 2012), and Sorkhabi (2012, 2015). A bibliography of nearly 500 books and booklets on the oil and gas companies has been compiled from various print and online sources, and has been arranged according to “region,” “company” and “author.” The bibliography considers only the works in English, and is biased toward North America (although it also includes major international companies originated outside USA, like BP, Shell, and Saudi Aramco). The North American bias may be result of the fact that the most of the literature in this field may have indeed been published in North America; it also reflects my limitation in accessing the books published in the other countries and other languages. Nevertheless, the database is a helpful synthesis of our knowledge of the history of oil and gas companies. This historiography can be divided into four categories: (1) general books covering the oil companies of a particular region or worldwide; (2) promotional or anniversary reports of historical nature published by the oil companies themselves; (3) research-based scholarly works on a given company (partly tapping into company documents and records) including M.A. and Ph.D. dissertations; and (4) critical literature by activist authors, such as works related to environmental disasters or political disruptions caused by the oil industry. The paper also analyzes the bibliographic database in a chronological manner, thus reflecting the rise, fall and evolution of the oil companies through time.

SORKHABI, Rasoul (2012) Historical documentary films on petroleum Industry: *Oil-Industry History*, v. 13, pp. 187-192.

SORKHABI, Rasoul (2015) A history of petroleum geoscience textbooks: *Oil-Industry History*, v. 16 (in press).

SPENCER, Jeff (2009) The Petroleum industry in trade cards, trading cards, and comic books: *Oil-Industry History*, v. 10, pp. 115-119.

SPENCER, Jeff (2011) Oilfield photographers – Three who captured North American oil booms; Frank Robbins, Frank Trost, and Jack Nolan: *Oil-Industry History*, v. 12, pp. 45-57.

SPENCER, Jeff (2012) Oilfield movies: Theater posters, lobby cards and other promotional material – selections from pre-1975: *Oil-Industry History*, v. 13, pp. 193-198.

## DATABASE OF EARLY PETROLEUM REFERENCES

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A database is being assembled, under the auspices of the Petroleum History Institute, for the purpose of compiling a comprehensive list of published references that mention petroleum and natural gas prior to the 1859 Drake well in Titusville, Pennsylvania. The existence of written descriptions of petroleum prior to the Drake well publicity is the primary guideline, although formal publication in many cases was delayed for years afterward.

Events following the Drake well clearly demonstrated the commercial potential of drilling for oil, but in many ways the petroleum industry was already present. The manufacture of coal oil and refineries to process it were explosive growth industries during the 1850s, and the primary impact of the Drake well was to provide a much cheaper and more abundant source of raw materials. Oil was already being produced from seeps and hand-dug wells in numerous locations around the globe, notably in Baku, Burma, Trinidad, and western Ontario. The use of coal gas methane for municipal lighting systems and fuel was a mature industry after almost a half century of development, and its application for aerial navigation systems was becoming routine. Consequently there are many more relevant publications than one might anticipate.

All appropriate references are being captured as they are found, although the collection of published literature that is easily accessible dictates that the initial database will be weighted toward English-language geological studies and exploratory expeditions in North America. A bibliography of early publications cited by historians as having mentioned petroleum will also be assembled although it might not be available in time for the symposium.

Each item will include a complete bibliographic citation and a scan of the page on which petroleum was mentioned, so that comments can be viewed in their original context. Although nineteenth century or earlier publications should not be a problem, some of the modern edited volumes and translations can be subject to copyright protection. For the 2016 PHI meeting in Casper, a hard copy set of all material gathered

to date will be made available for attendees to view. It is anticipated that by the time of the meeting more than 2000 net pages will have been scanned from more than 500 separate publications.

### **MYRON KINLEY AND THE *TORCH OF MORENI***

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Myron M. Kinley (1898-1978) has been called the first, the dean, the grandfather, and the original pioneer oil well fire-fighter. In 1913 he and his father Karl are credited with being the first to use explosives to extinguish an oil well fire. Myron formed the M.M. Kinley Company in 1923, specializing in controlling well blowouts and extinguishing well fires. During Kinley's long career he fought hundreds of oil well fires throughout the world.

On May 28, 1929, while drilling at a depth of 1460 meters, the No. 160 Romano-Americana well in Moreni, Romania blowout and caught fire. The derrick was destroyed and the 100 m high flames could be seen in the city of Ploiesti over 50 km away. Attempts to extinguish the well were unsuccessful and the well burned for over two years. More than one hundred workers were injured and fourteen died. By the spring of 1931, the "Torch of Moreni" had created a crater 76 meters wide and 20 meters deep. Newspapers covered the attempts to extinguish the fire and many of the photographs of the fire were used to create postcards.

Kinley first visited the No. 160 well in 1930, but was unable to convince the operators to allow him to try his fire-fighting methods. It took a second visit, a year later, before he was hired by the Romano-Americana Company, an affiliate of Standard Oil. Kinley arrived in Romania on crutches. A few months earlier, Myron had broken his leg while fighting an oil well fire in the huge East Texas (United States) oilfield. The Sinclair No. 1 Cole fire, where nine oilfield workers died, was extinguished by Myron and his brother Floyd in May, 1931.

A three-man crew consisting of Americans Kinley and Grady Chupp and Romanian Costeca Luper battled the fire for three months. On September 19, 1931 the fire was finally extinguished and Kinley was paid his \$50,000 fee. American

newspapers recounted his exploits and praised his heroism. Some Romanian newspapers provided a different version of the well fire's demise, stating that the fire was not completely extinguished by Kinley and his crew and the fire had reignited. The fire was then extinguished when large amounts of water pumped into the crater resulted in the collapse of the crater wall, smothering the flames on November 4<sup>th</sup>. Eighty-five years later, oil production facilities and producing wells surround the crater and patches of carbonized ground attest to the intensity of the "Torch of Moreni".

### **THE EARLY UNITED STATES OIL INDUSTRY ON WHEELOCK SOUVENIR CHINA**

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### **POSTER PRESENTATION**

With the rapid growth of the railroad in the late 1800s to early 1900s, United States travel greatly increased along with the demand for souvenirs. Images, many taken from postcards, could be printed onto pieces of china. Scenes depicted on souvenir china include historical sites, courthouses, churches, bridges, monuments, natural wonders, and industrial sites. The china pieces include plates, cups, bowls, vases, mugs, candlesticks, pitchers, toothpick holders, and steins. Souvenir china's heyday began in the 1880s, peaking from 1898-1909.

One of the most prolific merchants of souvenir china in the late 1800s and early 1900s was the Wheelock Company. W. G. Wheelock opened a store in Janesville, Wisconsin in 1855, selling crockery, china, glassware, and general merchandise. By 1900, with the help of his four sons, a total of six Wheelock stores operated in Wisconsin, Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa, with the main store in Peoria, Illinois. Charles E. Wheelock, one of W. G.'s sons, and his employee John Roth became interested in souvenir china around the time of the 1892-93 Columbian Exposition in Chicago and shortly thereafter began selling the china in their stores. Within a few years the Wheelock China Company employed thirty-one salesmen covering the United States and parts of Canada and Mexico; one of the first United States' companies with a national sales force. The Wheelock souvenir china was manufactured in Europe, primarily in Germany and Austria. On the base of the pieces "Wheelock" is written, along with the country of origin, and often a local shop name. With World War I, this Austria-Germany source ended in 1915. The Wheelock China Company continued selling other products until 1975.