

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF PETROLEUM COMPANIES

Rasoul Sorkhabi

*University of Utah, Energy & Geoscience Institute, Salt Lake
City; Utah*
rsorkhabi@egi.utah.edu

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

Raymond P. Sorenson
1825 S. Cheyenne Ave.
Tulsa, OK 74119
sorensonrk@sbcglobal.net

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