



Hell's Half Acre -- Turning a Dream into Reality

At the Petroleum History Society luncheon on October 24, Larry Clausen outlined the role played by the Turner Valley Oilfield Society in the establishment of an interpretive centre to be located at the site of the old Turner Valley Gas Plant. The plant, which is now closed, commenced operations in 1914 and was the first plant in Canada to refine and produce natural gasoline. Mr. Clausen is the Director responsible for promotion in the Turner Valley Oilfield Society.

In 1980, a group of Turner Valley area residents decided to put together a historical project. They approached the oil companies working in the area and a meeting was held at the Glenbow Museum to discuss alternative suggestions. The companies were very supportive of the general concept of a historical project and the residents organized to form the Turner Valley Oilfield Society (TVOS). Between 1980 and 1984, the TVOS worked on area studies to try to isolate a specific project. By 1984, it was decided that a museum was a good idea and that the increased tourist interest in the town of Turner Valley would benefit the whole area. This brought the town of Turner Valley into the project as a partner. However, like other projects of this nature, progress was slow, much of the community was unaware of the project and funding was required for publicity.

Cont'd, p. 32

Luncheon Presentation: Tar on His Boots

**An Account of Oil Sands Scientist
Dr. Karl Clark***

Time: 12 noon

**Date: Wednesday,
November 29**

Place: Palliser Hotel

**Cost: \$16 for members; \$20
for non-members**

**RSVP: Rhonda Boorman,
269-6721 by noon,
November 28th**

**For detailed write-up, see page 2.*

Tar on His Boots

An Account of Oil Sands Scientist Dr. Karl Clark

Dr. K.A. Clark spent the major part of his professional life -- from 1920 to 1950 developing the science of producing oil from the Alberta oil sands. During the first decades of the Alberta Research Council -- the first research council to be established in Canada, Clark showed remarkable insight in developing an astute understanding of the fundamental position of the hydrocarbon in unconsolidated sands. This led ultimately to a classical example of industrial technology transfer when Clark, as a very special scientist, with tar on his boots, saw his discoveries lead to the first mega project of Western Canada in the late 1960's.

Dr. Gordon Hodgson, Professor Emeritus of the University of Calgary, will present a talk on Dr. Karl Clark, pioneer oil sands scientist, at the next Petroleum History Society Luncheon on Wednesday, November 29th at 12:00 noon in the Palliser Hotel. Dr. Hodgson has had a long association with Dr. Clark, beginning in 1944 when he worked as a summer student under Dr. Clark at the Research Council of Alberta.

Dr. Hodgson has had a distinguished career in his own right. He worked at the Alberta Research Council for 23 years, during which time he rose to become head of the Petroleum Research Division. In 1967 Dr. Hodgson went to work for NASA as a Senior Research Fellow in the Apollo Space program where he performed analyses on moon rocks. Since 1969 he has been a member of the University of Calgary faculty. He is also a Senior Research Associate of the Arctic Institute of North America.

The Publisher

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Submissions on historical topics related to Canada's petroleum industry are welcome. For information on membership or society activities, contact society president W.R.S. McLellan (403) 290-2840.

Turner Valley

(Cont'd from p. 1)

Then, in 1985, Western Decalta (now Pembina Corporation) announced plans to close and decommission the Turner Valley gas plant. This focused the interest of the TVOS, who wanted to preserve the plant, and sparked the interest of the area residents. The TVOS wanted at least a part of the existing plant site preserved for its historical value and expressed their concern to Alberta Culture. Through Historic Resources legislation, Alberta Culture has the power to request evaluation of potential historic sites before they can be destroyed and they advised Western Decalta that they should not disturb the site without informing

Alberta Culture. Alberta Culture also encouraged a partnership of the TVOS, the town, and the plant operator and participants. Western Decalta conducted a study of the plant to determine its economic and historical value and, happily for all, concluded that the entire 22 acre plant site should be preserved.

The TVOS decided to champion the cause and developed a master plan to convert the plant into a world class interpretive centre at an ultimate cost of \$28 million. This was a challenging undertaking as it is very unusual, anywhere in the world, to convert an industrial site into an interpretive centre.

As part of the plan to publicise the project, the Hell's half Acre name came into being, which is

not only historically appropriate but catchy and memorable. A marketing package, with a brochure and video tape, were prepared over the next eight months, followed by a one year marketing campaign to ensure that Albertans and government were aware of the project. Membership in the TVOS was solicited locally to demonstrate the community support for the project. Presentations were given wherever possible, media attention was sought, petitions were organized, promotional materials were sent to government officials and the local MLA, Harry Alger, worked hard to promote the project.

During the publicity campaign, in 1986, oil prices plummeted and environmental concerns increased. This shifted the emphasis of the publicity campaign to promote the benefit of increased tourism, which would result from the creation of a world-class interpretive site to commemorate the contribution of the oil industry to the province of Alberta.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL NOTICE

Here it is Fall again, and time to renew your membership in the Petroleum History Society. Each year we build upon the successes of the preceding year and 1990 will be no exception. Your Society is actively working towards renewing the Oral History Project, has undertaken to produce a limited number of commemorative lapel pin sets before the Christmas season, and is underwriting a project to produce two radio broadcast series and related educational materials. Our noon luncheon meetings with guest speakers continue to be well attended.

Please make use of the Application for Membership/Renewal form included in every issue of *Archives* and renew today. We are a small but increasingly important Society, and every member is critical to our success.



Renew Now!

New Members

Institutional Members

Canadian Western Natural Gas Company Limited

Sustaining Individual Members

Harry Carlyle

Individual Members

Michael Dawe

Cynthia Robinson

Harry Robinson

George Warne

In 1988, Pembina Corporation transferred the site and equipment to the Crown for protection under Historic Resources legislation. The site was officially designated as a Historic Resource at the Turner Valley Days celebration in the spring of 1989. The environmental study has indicated that the site is surprisingly clean, considering how long the plant had been in operation in days of less environmental concern. Nearby water is not contaminated and contaminants in the soil are not migrating towards the river. Consequently Alberta Culture does not require the site to be environmentally reclaimed. The plant site will only be cleaned up to the extent required to protect the visiting public.

Now the Turner Valley Oilfield Society is faced with the task of making the dream a reality. First on the agenda is a funding campaign to generate budget commitments from the federal and provincial governments, as well as from corporate and private sources. If this campaign goes well, a ground breaking ceremony could occur as early as 1992. Alberta Culture is forming an Advisory Committee to oversee the development and Danae Lott, President of the TVOS, will be Chairman of the committee.

We wish the Turner Valley Oilfield Society success with the project and look forward to the creation of the Hell's Half Acre interpretive site. The Turner Valley Oilfield Society is selling Hell's Half Acre lapel pins, for \$5 each, to help generate revenue. If you would like one, contact Larry Clausen at 284-9222.

The Petroleum History Society gratefully acknowledges financial support from the following institutional members:

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