



# PETROLEUM HISTORY SOCIETY

# ARCHIVES

*Probably about September 1990.*

*Newsletter of the Petroleum History Society*

*May, 1990; Volume V, Number 3*

## Geophysics: Past, Present and Future

R.O. Lindseth

**M**ost of the world's petroleum is found with the aid of geophysical sensing methods, most commonly the reflection seismograph. The method was invented in 1910 by a Canadian, Dr. Reginald Fessenden, but regular commercial application required about 20 years of additional development.

World War II provided a substantial impetus to petroleum exploration and hence to the seismograph. Exploration in Canada did not meet with much success, and hence was rather limited prior to drilling the famous Leduc #1 Well in 1949. The huge discovery triggered a great deal of activity and prompted new technology, the development of which has continued to this day.

The greatest single development has been the use of digital computers to apply sophisticated mathematical routines to enhance the quality of signals and extract geological information. Today, it is possible to peer through 10,000 feet of solid rock and predict the nature of the rock,

and, in a few cases, if it contains natural gas. Oil is more difficult to find.

In all the world, Calgary is second only to Houston, Texas as a centre for petroleum exploration technology and services.

## R.O. Lindseth

**R.**O. Lindseth is a native son of Calgary who has gained world recognition for his work in petroleum exploration geophysics.

Starting his career in Canada in 1945, Lindseth lived overseas for many years, then returned to Canada in 1960 to found one of the first computer-based petroleum service companies in Canada. His technology is used in most of the major producing areas of the world.

He has received numerous awards for his work, and is the author of over 150 technical and professional publications. He is the 1990 Distinguished Lecturer of the Society of Exploration Geophysicists, and Chairman of the Forum for Geophysical Data Acquisition and Processing to be held at the World Petroleum Congress in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 1991.

## Luncheon Presentation:

**Time:** 12 noon  
**Date:** Monday, October 22  
**Place:** Palliser Hotel  
**Cost:** \$18 for members;  
\$20 for non-members  
**RSVP:** Claire Bane  
269-6721 by noon, Oct. 19

## Geophysics by R.O. Lindseth

(See write up on Mr. Lindseth and his topic, this page.)

# The Sidney Martin Blair Project

Presentation to the annual meeting of the Petroleum History Society, March 28, 1990

By Frank Dabbs

**P**etroleum engineer Sidney Martin Blair (1897 - 1981) wrote a remarkable chapter in the history of the Canadian petroleum and energy industries, as a scientist, project developer, businessman and a leading catalyst in Canada's post-war economic development.

He studied at the University of Alberta under oil sands pioneer Karl Clark, Clark and Blair built first oil sands hot water separation plant for the U of A and the Alberta Science and Industrial Research Council.

Blair then went to work for the Universal Oil Products Co. of Chicago and became an accomplished refinery engineer. His work for UOP took him to Trinidad, where he was engaged by Trinidad Leaseholds Limited as a refinery manager. He developed, for TTL and the British Air Ministry, a high-octane aviation gasoline brand and the refinery facilities, in Trinidad, to produce it. During the Second World War, Blair was responsible for the production in Trinidad, and the tanker shipping, of two-thirds of the RAF's fuel.

After the war, he came back to Canada to establish and develop Canadian Bechtel Limited, a subsidiary of the international construction giant, Bechtel Limited.

Under Blair, Canadian Bechtel was the general contractor and/or project manager of the following: the Interprovincial Pipeline, the Trans Mountain Pipe Line, the Trans Canada Pipeline, the Great Canadian Oil Sands plant, Syncrude, the Baie James and Churchill Falls hydro power projects and many refineries and petrochemical plants. Blair and the company also played a key role in the founding of the Canadian nuclear power industry.

In his private life, Blair was an accomplished sheep and cattle breeder in an operation that was based on his Cedar Mains farm at Bolton, Ont., outside of Toronto. The story of Sid Blair's life is the story of a young and vigorous country, Canada, during the formative years of the 20th Century. Calgary petroleum columnist Frank Dabbs is writing a biography on Blair which is scheduled for completion in 1990 and is to be published in 1991.

# Frank Dabbs Biography

**F**rank Dabbs was recently appointed public relations manager for TransCanada PipeLines. Prior to that appointment, he was editor of OILWEEK, the author of THE FINANCIAL POST's twice weekly OIL PATCH column and the Sunday business columnist in the CALGARY SUN.

He has won several awards for his oil and gas journalism including the Alberta Chamber of Resources 1988 Media Award, the Banff School of Management/Canadian Petroleum Association's 1988 award for environmental reporting and the 1989 and 1990 Canadian Petroleum Association Award for columns, comment and opinion.

He is president-elect of the Canadian Petroleum Writers Association and a member of the Petroleum Joint Venture Association, the Canadian Institute of Energy and the Calgary Desk and Derrick Club.

Frank grew up in Orillia, Ont. and attended the University of Calgary where he studied Fine Arts.

He has been active in newspapers, television, radio and magazines in the Calgary market since 1967, and has been covering the energy business since 1976.

Frank is married to Rickey Dabbs, a teacher-librarian with the Calgary Board of Education. He has two daughters and a step-daughter.

## The Publisher

*Archives is published periodically by the Petroleum History Society, 3800, 150 6th Ave. S.W., Calgary, T2P 3Y7; (403) 269-6721. Editor: Peter McKenzie-Brown.*

*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.*

# Rig Raising

By Aubrey Kerr

It was Fin Lineham's day! Bursting with pride, he and his hands had worked long hours and had scrounged for timbers and old iron in every nook and cranny in the area. The reincarnation (well, not exactly) of the standard derrick that had drilled Imperial Leduc #1 would now stand as a landmark memorializing Fin's drilling at that all important discovery and the hands that made it come true.

The idea of re-creating Imperial Leduc #1 had been on the minds of many people over the years. The dream became a reality when the Leduc Devon Oilfield Historical Society was formed. The Executive Committee are all boosters and successful fund raisers. Ramrodded by Don Hunter, Vern Hunter's son, the Committee was thus able to fund the hauling of a standard derrick (all 77 tons) from Loffland Bros. Louisiana yard (Loffland generously donated the iron) to the project and pay for its erection on the site.

Bowing to the exigencies of time and technology, a crane had replaced the old gin pole but the expertise of another rig builder was essential and this is where Jesse Domingue (pronounced domain) from Louisiana came in. He successfully completed the re-assembly of the 1947 steel derrick in time.

Rather than hold the ceremony on February 13th, the executive wisely decided to have it timed for August 4 and what summer weather it was!

Although there were many other Alberta activities scheduled for Heritage Day there was a good turnout. Tall tales were swapped among the retired roughnecks and old friendships were renewed.

Shirley Cripps, First Vice President of the Society was the Mistress of Ceremonies. She introduced the many speakers starting with the Honourable Helen Hunley, Lieutenant Governor.

Gerry Kalyniuk, Division Manager, Central Operations, Calgary represented D.D. Baldwin, ESSO's C.E.O. and presented a cheque in the amount of \$25,000 to the Society.

One of the highlights of the afternoon was the actual raising and bolting into place of a length of steel ladder with Vern Kerber (original member of Shorty Mann's rig raising crew) climbing up among the girts. This symbolized the success of this first stage in the historic site.

The Marquees were welcome shelters for those who stayed for the excellent B-B-Q. Roughnecks and others were also able to quench their thirst on \$2 beer.

The Society has long range plans for the balance of the 11.3 acres that they have been able to purchase from the local owner. Chief among these is an interpretive centre.

If we are to honour and remember our heritage, it is essential that the Imperial Leduc #1 historic site be supported by all citizens whether they be in the oil patch or not.

To become a member, please send a cheque for \$10 to the Society. All donations will be acknowledged with a tax receipt because the Society has a charity registration number. The address:

Leduc Devon Oilfield Historical Society  
P.O. Box 640  
Devon, Alberta  
T0C 1E0

## Books

# Coffee table book tells oil sands tale

*Darlene J. Comfort, The Abasand Fiasco (Fort McMurray: Privately published, 1980) 148 pages.*

By Peter McKenzie-Brown

**S**cientists and historians have probably chronicled no other mineral deposit better than Alberta's oil sands. Pro-

vincial archives and universities and petroleum industry libraries contain millions of words on their history, development and technical characteristics. From time to time, a dozen successful and not-so-successful popular and scholarly books about the sands have graced Canada's book store shelves. Notable among these were Fitzgerald's **Black Gold with Grit** (1978) and Ferguson's **Athabasca Oil Sands** (1985).

The volume covered in this review is a decade old. But it nonetheless deserves ink in **Archives**. It is a significant publication.

From a popular picnic area just outside of Fort McMurray, you can see a stone chimney - the only remnant of the Abasand project. That relic stirred Darlene Comfort to research and write about Abasand, and thus began her romance with the oil sands. The offspring of that romance, **The Abasand Fiasco**, is a gem.

Comfort's research was exhaustive. The resulting tale is unusually well written for an industrial history. The book offers important insights into a yeasty period in Canadian history. A period of oil sands development during depression and war; a squabble between Edmonton and Ottawa over how to develop the oil sands. In those days Alberta felt the oil sands were its only hope to emerge from the dusty poverty of the thirties.

Subtitled "The rise and fall of a brave pioneer oil sands extraction plant," **The Abasand Fiasco** also describes developments at Bitumount, a second early plant. In addition, the book covers other parts of the oil sands' early history. Throughout, it focuses - as good history must - on the men and women who shaped events.

Entrepreneurs built the two early oil sands plants because they believed oil sands development could be a good business venture. But both projects fell prey to a deadly combination of primitive technology, poor econom-

ics and, ultimately, fire. And both ended up in the hands of government.

After the 1947 Leduc discovery, interest in the oil sands quickly waned. Companies proposed other projects from time to time, but nearly two decades past before construction of the first modern plant in the mid-1960s.

**The Abasand Fiasco** offers more than a well-written and well-researched narrative. Comfort has illustrated the book with exceptional historical photos. And she introduces peripheral issues and highlights in a series of short, boxed essays. Although interesting, her sidebars detract from the readability of the volume.

Its imperfections notwithstanding, **The Abasand Fiasco** presents a freewheeling historical mosaic of the oil sands in the first half of this century. Its audience is the general reader with a penchant for history, and for those people it is a buy. Copies are available from the author. She still lives in Fort McMurray and she's still romancing the oil sands.

## President's Report

**H**ere it is October again, and your Society is about to begin another season of activities relating to the history of the petroleum industry in Canada. As in past years, we are planning an exciting series of noon luncheon speakers, beginning with well-known geophysicist Roy Linseth later this month. We are planning an aggressive campaign for the sale of the remaining sets of our very popular commemorative lapel pins in time for the Christmas gift-giving season. The radio programme series we are developing with the Access Network/CKUA Radio will be aired in January 1991. Hopefully, the Oral History Project will be underway before year-end. Your Executive is looking for additional projects to promote our prime objectives, so if you have any ideas, do not hesitate to give me a call (at 290-2840, daytime; 288-9089, evenings).

Fall is also the time when we are called upon to renew our memberships. Later in the month, the Membership Committee will be sending reminder letters to all members. If you take the time right now to fill out the Membership Application/Renewal Form printed elsewhere in the Archives, you can save our small Society the cost of mailing.

For your information, The Petroleum History Society, as non-profit organization, is exempt from collecting GST on membership dues, but may have to collect the tax on any goods and services that compete with or are similar to those provided by businesses. The GST will apply to luncheons and any lapel pins sold after December 31, 1990.

The Membership Committee undertook a small, test membership drive in August of this year, sending 27 letters to a random selection of prominent Alberta companies, both large and small. The pilot drive has been a resounding success, with 7 new membership being purchased to date. A 26% success rate! In November, the Committee plans the major solicitation, with letters to be sent to over 300 additional Alberta Petroleum industry companies.

All things considered, the 1990-1991 season is developing into another exciting one for The Petroleum History Society. On behalf of your Executive, I would like to thank you for your continued support

*William R.S. McLellan*  
President

## New Members

### Institutional

Alberta Energy Company Ltd.  
Canadian Hunter Exploration Ltd.  
Morgan Hydrocarbons Inc.  
North Canadian Oils Limited  
Sperry-Sun Drilling Services of Canada  
Ulster Petroleum Ltd.

### Individual

"Scotty" Cameron	William Lawrence
Bill Elser	Julie Parsons
Robert Feick	Peter Simon
Stanley Harding	Dwayne Stady

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

Alberta Chamber of Resources  
Alberta Energy Company Ltd.  
Alberta Natural Gas Company Ltd.  
Alberta Patch Work  
BP Canada Inc.  
Canada Northwest Energy Limited  
Canadian Hunter  
Canadian Oilfield Stimulation Services Ltd.  
Canadian Western Natural Gas Company Limited  
Chevron Canada Resources Limited  
Coles Gilbert Associates Ltd.  
Ernst & Young  
Esso Resources Canada Limited  
Gulf Canada Resources Limited  
Home Oil Company Limited  
Independent Petroleum Association of Canada  
Morgan Hydrocarbons Inc.  
Norcen Energy Resources Limited  
North Canadian Oils Limited  
Pan-Alberta Gas Ltd.  
Pembina Corporation  
Petro-Canada Inc.  
Ryerson Oil and Gas Limited  
Schlumberger of Canada  
Shell Canada Limited  
Southam Communications Group Inc.  
Sperry-Sun Drilling Services of Canada  
Syncrude Canada Ltd.  
The Petrolia Discovery  
TransCanada PipeLines  
Ulster Petroleums Ltd.  
Ultramar Oil and Gas Canada Limited  
and the Canadian Petroleum Association