

The World's First Oil Gusher Was Drilled in Canada by an Irishman

Forget the Middle East; forget Pennsylvania, Texas and Oklahoma! The first commercial oil well was DUG in 1858 in the village of Oil Springs, Lambton County, Ontario (a year ahead of Drake's Well in Titusville, Pennsylvania). And nearby, in January of 1862, Irishman Hugh Nixon Shaw DRILLED the world's first 'gusher'.

Southwestern Ontario is steeped in Irish heritage. The area between and around London and Sarnia is replete with names relating to Thomas, a son of the Malahide Castle Talbots -- Malahide Township, Talbotville, numerous Talbot Streets and the Talbot Trail highway. Thomas, a key aide to Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe played a major role in laying out that area.

Driving South on Highway 22 from any of the several intersecting east-west roads between Sarnia and London, one comes upon the world's first oil country. Passing through Petrolia and Oil City one arrives at Oil Springs and the Oil Museum of Canada, a National Historic Site.

So rich were the area's oil deposits that there were pools of it at surface levels; hence the first commercial well really was DUG. But it was perseverance of Hugh Nixon Shaw, born near Dublin, in a drilling that almost bankrupt him that brought in the world's first gusher and was the real start of the area's oil boom.

Oil Springs had Canada's first planked main street and, by 1862, the street's one and a half mile length was lined with kerosene lamps – the first place anywhere in the world to achieve that distinction. Before 1900, Oil Springs and neighbouring Petrolia provided 90% of Canada's oil needs.

The Lambton County oil boom also spurred the development of oil extraction technology and, truly the birthplace of the modern oil industry, Canadians who gained their experience there carried their expertise to Borneo, Venezuela, Russia, Egypt and other oil fields throughout the world.

The Oil Museum of Canada is well worth a visit. (www.lcmlg.org)