Oil 150 First Day Cover Unveiling Ceremony

by Will Wingo

Oil 150 and the Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry & Tourism will host an unveiling ceremony for the Oil 150 first day cover commemorative envelope, vanity stamp, and cancellation stamp on August 27. This unique one-day celebration is a do-not-miss event for all interested in stamp collecting and oil history. Join Oil 150 and the Oil Region Alliance at Perry Street Station on August 27 from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. to buy the first day cover of this special stamp and cancellation. The unveiling ceremony begins at 9:00 A.M.

The Oil 150 first day cover includes a vanity stamp depicting Colonel Edwin Drake at the first commercial oil well, a unique USPS cancellation stamp featuring a Densmore Tank Car and the Oil Creek and Titusville Railroad, and a high-quality Oil 150 envelope. The first day cover was designed by Fine Line Design of Oil City, PA.

The first day cover will be available Thursday, August 27, 2009 at Perry Street Station. Advance orders will be accepted via the online store at www.oil150.com and the Oil 150 office at (814) 677-3152 ext 104. A $2.00 shipping fee will be applied to these orders. Only 3,000 envelopes of this limited-edition first day cover of this special stamp and cancellation. The unveiling ceremony begins at 9:00 A.M. (Continued Page 3)

Editor's Column–Mark’s Remarks

The Historic Sibley Mansion

Reminders of the rich heritage of the early days of oil in northwestern Pennsylvania are still abundant. Though the refineries are gone, with a couple of exceptions, what remains are the various historic locations tracing the story of the birthplace of the petroleum industry, such as the boom town of Pithole and the abandoned pump houses near Emlenton. Travelling the streets, highways and back roads of the Pennsylvania Oil Region, one will find the grand one-of-a-kind homes and buildings with the evidence of the grandeur of so many oil pioneers.

River Ridge is probably the most os-
tentatious, opulent, and obvious reminder of old oil wealth in the region. The mansion sits high atop a hill overlooking the wild and scenic Allegheny River and the City of Franklin. Nearly all of the estate’s two dozen buildings and 1,200 acres are history now, but the 33-room, natural stone mansion, rapidly approaching its 100th anniversary, stands as a symbol of the story of how one man could rise to wealth and influence.

Born February 18, 1850 in Friendship, New York, Sibley came to Franklin, Pennsylvania in 1869. He went to work at a clothing store owned by his brother-in-law Charles Miller and worked as a salesman. On a train trip to Chicago and back, Miller and Sibley decided how they would fill a niche in the new oil industry. (Continued Page 4)
Band Music in the Oil Region
by Rebecca McElhatten

In the shadow of Colonel Edwin Drake’s oil well of 1859 came the loud sounds of oil music. Songs named PA Has Struck Ile, Oil on the Brain, and Petroleum Gallop may seem out of the ordinary now, but in the early days of oil, these songs were popular. Lyrics were humorous, narrative, or slanderous. They tell the story of ‘striking it rich’ and of oil companies taking advantage of the oil boom. Compositions strictly for piano and brass bands rivaled classical pieces. The left hand encounters dizzying note formations in Oil Fever Gallop and Petroleum Court Dance.

With sheet music that is already difficult, readers may also need to understand Pennsylvania Dutch, or Pennsilfaanisch Deitsch, a language that incorporates German and was popular among German, French, and Swiss immigrants. Ile or Vay Down in Pennsylvany uses this language and dialect, a combination of German and English native to Pennsylvania. Ironically, instructions for the player are in Italian, making pieces like these trilingual. Twelve songs with their sheet music are published in Margaret Anne Mong’s Oil Fever Songbook. The book of compositions is available at www.oil150.com for $10.00.

Even earlier stories of oil were cause for celebration, dating to as early as 1840 – the time of Samuel Kier’s rock oil. Bands sprung up in the oil region, playing melodic tunes and marches for the public. Music became a leisurely pastime. The Franklin Silver Cornet Band has celebrated its 150th anniversary and still performs concerts in the oil region. Oil is such a rich part of the history of the region that its discovery and stories are worth singing and playing.

The Franklin Silver Cornet Band of Franklin, Pennsylvania was organized before the end of 1856, three years before Col. Edwin Drake struck oil. It had humble beginnings, struggling to obtain instruments or a suitable conductor, but managed to find both by the end of 1856. The hard work of the Franklin Band, as it was then known, was not lost on the residents of Venango County. It received compliments in local newspapers from those who heard the brass music waft into their homes. Of course, at this point, most of the music performed was composed for holiday celebrations like the Fourth of July.

As time went on, the Franklin Silver Cornet Band concerts became a favorite of the oil region. The band experienced highs and lows in membership and audience. Events like the Civil War, the decline of oildom, the Great Depression, and the American slump after WWII caused problems for the band, but it has always rebounded. The Franklin Silver Cornet Band is in its 153rd year of musical service.

Peter Greene of the Franklin Silver Cornet Band offers a delightful biography of the band in his book, Musical Service: The Life and Times of the Franklin Silver Cornet Band. Greene explores all 150 years of the band’s history in this 421-page book published just this year. It is available at www.oil150.com for $24.95.
Oil Creek State Park Tag
by Rebecca McElhatten

Oil Creek State Park preserves the story of the petroleum industry with interpretive panels, oilfield equipment, and curriculum-based environmental education. The park, part of the system of Pennsylvania state parks, is the responsibility of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation & Natural Resources. Oil Creek State Park is located between Titusville and Oil City. The main entrance to the park is off PA Route 8, one mile north of the Borough of Rouseville. Oil Creek State Park, with its rich oil history, is an important part of the Oil Region National Heritage Area.

The Oil Creek Tag is a way to support the Pennsylvania parks system. Each year, a different state park is featured on a tag. The Oil Creek State Park tag is sponsored by the Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry & Tourism, in conjunction with Oil 150, to benefit the Pennsylvania Parks & Forests Foundation. Oil 150 is proud to have sponsored the Oil Creek State Park Tag that will promote the oil region nationally. The one-square-inch tags are produced annually and sold by donation.

This year’s tag features a painting by Jack Paluh of Waterford, PA. The artwork is the landscape looking downstream on Oil Creek from the Petroleum Center Bridge in the autumn, complete with changing leaves, two white tail deer, waterfowl, and an eagle. This tag can be purchased by donation ($5.00 minimum) at Oil Creek State Park and at www.paparksandforests.com.

First Day Cover

First day cover will be made. The first day cover will also be available for sale at the Drake Well Museum Store in Titusville and at the Oil 150 Store, 111 South Franklin Street, Titusville, PA.

For those looking to collect the Edwin Drake vanity stamp, it is available for sale as uncut press sheets at the Oil Region Alliance in Oil City, PA.

Anyone wishing to have mail other than the Oil 150 envelope cancelled with the unique cancellation stamp may do so by following regular USPS procedures at the main Oil City Post Office, located at 302 East Second Street, Oil City, PA. Those unable to reach the Oil City Post Office for the cancellation may send a stamped envelope inside a larger envelope to the Oil City Post Office. A return envelope with adequate postage and return address should be included to have the stamped mail returned. These requests through the Oil City Post Office will be filled only until September 26, 2009. Requests for the cancellation should be sent to: Pictorial Postmarks, Oil 150 Celebration Station, Postmaster, 302 East Second Street, Oil City, PA 16301-2300.

Visit www.oil150.com or one of Oil 150’s regional sales locations to find commemorative products, apparel, oil history books, and much more.
Mark’s Remarks

While traveling, the two men encountered daily weather-related delays. Low temperatures adversely affected the animal fat fuel locomotive signal and headlights. At night when the temperatures plummeted, the animal fat congealed. When Miller and Sibley returned home, Sibley, with a strong interest in science, set up a laboratory in which he successfully developed a specialized lamp oil for railroad use. Miller closed his shop, purchased a small refinery and brought Sibley on as a partner in the new Galena Oil and Signal Company.

In the ensuing years, Sibley entered into politics. At age 29, he was elected Mayor of the City of Franklin by a wide margin. He was a popular mayor, then Congressman. He even made a bid for the presidency. It was said many years later, President Woodrow Wilson wrote the famous Fourteen Points while visiting River Ridge. Sibley retired from Congress to travel Europe, Asia and Africa with his family using their private rail car adapted for continental use. While in Europe he closely examined a German castle which eventually served as the inspiration for River Ridge.

Sibley commissioned River Ridge in 1913. The mansion was built in nine months by up to 200 Italian stone masons. It sported 1913 state of the art features such as electrical power and power generation, electric lights, hot and cold running water, and a sewage system for the eight bathrooms.

The vast estate made use of six stone bridges and two gate houses. There were 13 miles of road and a private rail siding and depot. In addition to an experimental farm, there were 65 producing oil wells, a company store, a blacksmith shop, a corncrib, a gym, two greenhouses, an auto repair shop, and a West Point replica bell tower. Of the 22 structures, only five remain: River Ridge, the two gate houses, the bell tower, and the corncrib.

Beyond the features of River Ridge and reminders of the past, is the story of a man who became wealthy because of the Pennsylvania Oil Region. Joseph Sibley developed and marketed a specialized product used around the world, became a popular player in local affairs, and shared his wealth with his neighbors. Joseph Sibley died in 1926 at River Ridge.

Today, River Ridge is owned by Life Ministries, which hosts weekend religious retreats for groups year-round. Tours of the grounds and main building are conducted as fundraisers for local non-profit organizations.
Louis Brown Fleming was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1925. A retired journalist now living in California, he is one of the three surviving great grandchildren of John Henry Eaton. Fleming recently published a book about the life and enterprises of his great grandfather. The book, simply titled John Eaton, is an historical account of John Eaton’s personal life and his time with Oil Well Supply Co, which he founded.

More than just a timeline, Fleming’s book creates a vivid picture of the man behind one of the greatest companies in the late 1800s. Eaton, born in New York in 1840, grew up in Brooklyn and moved to Pittsburgh at age 47 in the interests of Oil Well Supply Co. While the history of his company was at times dramatic (Oil Well Supply Co. once faced bankruptcy), Eaton’s personal life was that of a well-mannered businessperson and a well-liked father and grandfather. Eaton enjoyed his Oil Well office and employees, and his family summers in New Jersey. By the beginning of the 20th century, Oil Well Supply Co. had 75 branch stores supported by eight factories, and nine subsidiary shops responsible for repairs. The total number of employees in the company topped 2,000. By 1889 Oil Well Supply Co. was the largest producer of oil-related machinery in the world.

Overall, Louis Brown Fleming does an exceptional job describing the many sides of John Eaton. For all those interested in oil history, this biography provides valuable information and top-quality photographs on 59 easy-to-read pages. This book is available for $15.00 at the Oil 150 website by visiting www.oil150.com. At the request of the author, all proceeds this year will benefit Oil 150 educational programs.

Oil Creek State Park is settled on more than 7,000 acres of scenic forest between Rouseville and Titusville, PA in the oil region. The park has a 9.7-mile bicycle trail that runs from Petroleum Centre to Drake Well. The park also has 52 miles of hiking trails. The shortest trails are the Oil History Trail and Forestry Trail, at .25 miles each. These two trails are used by school groups. The park has ten miles of cross country ski trails open in the winter months. The trails offer both beginner and intermediate skiers a variety of experiences. The bicycle trail is also open to skiers in the winter, adding another 9.7 miles of ski trails.

The longest hiking trail – a staggering 36 miles – is Gerard Hiking Trail. This trail can be completed in its entirety with the use of Adirondack-style hiking shelters, or it can be completed in sections by using different parking areas along the trail. Gerard Hiking Trail offers breathtaking views of Oil Creek and the surrounding woodlands. Hikers sometimes catch glimpses of wild animals – black bears, bobcats, turkeys, squirrels, and plenty of chipmunks – along the trail, as well as wildflowers and waterfalls.

The Oil Creek & Titusville Railroad tracks run through the park. This active train line gives its riders pristine views of Oil Creek State Park during its seasonal runs. A gondola car allows the transport of bikes, canoes, and kayaks.

Admittance to the park is free. Overnight accommodations for hikers can be reserved for a small fee. With the bustling summer season in full swing, this free park offers a refuge from busy city life.
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