

REGIONAL PROFILE: SOUTHERN

Oil Springs: Where the Oil Industry Began

By Donna McGuire

Oil Springs, Ontario, is a village south-east of Sarnia. It's central to the energy history, not only of Lambton County and Ontario, but of the entire world. Oil Springs is the birthplace of the 20th century - the place where the world first started to become the frantic-paced, ever-shrinking globe we now live on.

Oil is an amazing substance. If you had to invent a fuel that would revolutionize this world of ours, you'd come up with something pretty much like oil. It's just right. It's liquid, it's powerful and it has a great deal more energy than coal.

Lambton County's Oil Heritage District is a celebration of oil pioneers. The Oil Museum of Canada is located just south of Oil Springs, in the field where the world's first commercial oil rig was dug.

The Oil Museum of Canada traces the history of the people of the area. Lambton County drillers invented the Canadian pole drilling rig and when their own boom went bust, they took their tools around the world to explore for oil.

The Museum is full of fascinating artifacts with solid links to Oil Springs. There's an outstanding collection of Peruvian water jugs - brought back home by drillers who explored Peru for oil. A Cossack outfit was a gift from Russian nobility to an Oil Springs driller.

When you visit the museum, you will also see the geological conditions leading to the trapping of oil, the evolution of lamps and railways, early prospecting, and drilling and refining practices. There are guided tours, and a theatre, gift shop and picnic area. See a working jerker-line system that pumps the "Black Gold" from the ground, the original Oil Springs Railroad Station or Langbank Post Office (1895) and the "History of Natural Gas" Exhibit in a new Industrial Building.

Oil Springs still produces oil. In fact, you can stand in front of the Museum and see the pumps working just across the road, or pick up a driving tour map and explore the Oil Heritage District. The Oil Heritage Route, marked on the Ontario map, is now easy to follow.

The Oil Museum of Canada hosts many visitors, travelling from near and far to visit the site. Some people will have families who are part of this exciting history, or visitors can relive the boom times and gain an appreciation of an earlier way of life in the historic oil fields that surround the village.

The Oil Museum of Canada's Special Events, such as the "Oil Patch Quilt Show" and "Black Gold Picnic" are regular planned events of the season. Oil Springs is a 35 km, 30 minute drive south-east of Sarnia.



Donna McGuire, Manager/Curator of The Oil Museum of Canada, is pictured at the site of the first commercial oil well in North America (1858).

Self-Profile: Donna McGuire

I attended elementary school in Dawn Township, Lambton County, and graduated from Petrolia District High School and Sarnia Business College. I married Gerald McGuire in 1954. We purchased a farm in Dawn Township, growing cash crops and raising cattle and hogs.

We have two daughters and four sons, all married and living in Lambton County. We have twenty-one grandchildren and still counting. I became a member of the Bentpath Women's Institute in 1969 and have held the position of Secretary-Treasurer and President. I have also helped on many of the standing committees and was a convener for many special events.

I had the opportunity to take part in the 4-H programs in my teen years, and in return I had the pleasure of teaching 4-H. I served as President for Lambton South, and held the office of Standing Committee for Agriculture and Canadian Industries for the Southwestern Area Women's Institute. I have been on the Board of Directors for the Sarnia/Lambton Chamber of Commerce and served as Chair of the Economic Development Commission.

In my working career I was hired by the Corporation of the County of Lambton to work at The Oil Museum of Canada as an Assistant Curator; since 1984, I have held the position of Manager/Curator. At the present time, I am on the Group Sales Committee for the Visitor and Convention Bureau for Sarnia/Lambton.

To further my education, I completed the Homestudy Program from the Ontario Museum Association. I attended Lambton College for the Ontario Management Development Program and received the OMDP certificate in Business Management Studies (B.M.S.). It has been my belief that the training you receive through the Women's Institute helps you achieve other goals.

Since October of 1994, I have had the honour to represent Subdivision 25 as their Provincial Board Director. I enjoy Women's Institute work and it is my desire to see the organization grow and remain viable.

Donna McGuire is a member of the Bentpath WI, Lambton South District. Donna is also the Board Director for Subdivision 25 for the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario.