

THE CITY OF KANE.

A Description of the Oil City and Oil Speculation

Written for the Post.
KANE, Pa., Sept. 21, 1895.
EDITOR POST:—

Every American school boy who reads the daily and weekly newspapers watches with a profound interest the details of the Arctic explorations and speculates, perhaps, in his boyish excitement upon the probabilities of his organizing an expedition to the polar seas, in the time to come. In 1843 Dr. Elisha Kent Kane, an eminent Philadelphia physician and surgeon entered the United States Navy, and subsequently when our Government sent Daniel Webster to China on his mission to arrange diplomatic relations between that country and our own, Dr. Kane accompanied the distinguished statesman and while en route disclosed to Webster his theories of an open, passable sea in the North and also urged upon him the importance of having the United States Government send an expedition there, in the interest of scientific and commercial advancement. Dr. Kane undertook his polar trip and incidentally searched for Sir John Franklin, an adventurous Englishman, who lost his life in the frigid countries of the North. Kane returned but Franklin was never found, and Lieut. Greeley's Arctic trip, undertaken in 1879 at the instance of the Federal Government, was likewise unproductive of results except that it proved the absolute futility and perhaps, folly of sending expeditions to the North Pole for either scientific or mercantile purposes. When Greeley returned to the United States in July 1884, bringing back in metallic caskets, the emaciated remains of this brave companions who succumbed to the untold rigors of that fateful journey, the Philadelphia Ledger told in several columns of graphic recital that Congress had up to that time appropriated \$70,000,000 for polar explorations with a net result of nothing.

Nothing in the face of all experience and unsatisfactory information, men are indomitable and restlessly ambitious and our own Peary is to-day trying to do that which dozens of his stirring but misguided predecessors undertook at the peril of their lives.

Dr. Kane, the explorer, was a gentleman of high cultivation, having studied in Paris and London. His brother, General Thomas L. Kane, located at Kane, Pennsylvania, and the veterans of the late war remember him as the commander of that famous military organization known as "The Bucktails," the most unique and daring company of soldiers which fought throughout the war. When he returned from the army, General Kane invited a corps of surveyors to his mountain home on the very crest of the Alleghenies and pointed out to them how a railroad could be built to communicate with the lake regions. The road came, with it came Kane, a thriving, permanent town, with Kane came the discovery of oil and with oil came that wonderful illuminant of which we have read since we were babies, natural gas, and with natural gas came a network of constant and dependent communications with all surrounding towns and Kane to-day is the best lighted town in America, say its inhabitants; while Jamestown, Buffalo, Salamanca and other cities in New York state and many adjacent ones in Pennsylvania, receive through pipes, the natural gas from Kane for light, heat and fuel.

Pennsylvania is the greatest state in the world. That is a very general and bold declaration to make. It might be termed reckless and uncalculating; but who would be a technical hairsplitter with reference to our vast natural and undeveloped wealth when gas and oil and coal and iron and timber have multiplied millions in Pennsylvania until you grow tired keeping track of them. Some years prior to the outbreak of the Rebellion, about 1856 Col. Drake, a resident of Crawford county dug an oil well across the line in Venango county. It was the first authenticated oil well put down in Pennsylvania, and then came the oil tide with its many eccentric money kings—beggars suddenly made rich, and the poor reveling in dazzling wealth. The best specimen, the most pronounced type of "a millionaire in a day with-

out work" was the famous Coal Oil Johnny. He was one of the mushroom of unstable growth who sprung up in a night, startled the world with his amazingly extravagant manners and then extinguished himself with one faint flicker, as we sometimes see a brilliant star plucked from the heavens, its light lost in the flood tide of greater planets. Coal Oil Johnny, thirty years ago was a real living fact in esse. Today he is a memory. He was the first, feeble precursor of a commercial and financial storm which was to hurl into existence the greatest and most powerful corporation on the face of the earth, namely the Standard Oil Company.

If you start on the map of Pennsylvania and trace a line from the north-eastern corner of McKean county, diagonally across the State down to the West Virginia border, you describe between that and the Ohio State line on the west, and the New York boundary on the north, the territory in Pennsylvania, known as the oil district, comprising about twenty counties. Until the Standard Oil Company invaded France and Russia, this territory furnished the oil for the world and started many millions of capital into the track of commerce. In the Bradford district alone, over fourteen thousand wells have been dug within the past ten years at an average depth of twenty-two hundred feet representing a yield of about ten barrels per well per day the first year of their flow and now flowing two or three barrels per day.

This district is known as a "torpedo" territory, that is explosives of the most terrific character must be employed to dislodge the oil from its rocky caverns even after being found by the industrious and persistent driller. I saw a well shot recently in the heart of a hemlock forest, at a depth of twenty-hundred feet. One hundred quarts of nitroglycerine, the most powerful explosive known, were carefully poured down to the bottom of the well and in the language of one of the wild, rough oil men, when the exploding cap was dropped by a modest and composed young lady present "there was a living hell" at the bottom of that well, half a mile beneath the surface of the earth. The detonation could be distinctly heard and the earth trembled while the oil, set free, came rushing out at the top like a great, gurgling fountain and shot over a hundred feet into the air. Nature accompanies the discovery of oil with gas, which latter agent drives the fluid out of the earth and when it fails to do so men pump it out. Oil is not found in streams or in strata like coal, iron and the minerals. No man has ever been to the bottom of an oil well, but a quarter of a century of daily experience, with all possible information and knowledge, which science and hard work have brought to bear upon the problem, have as conclusively as these means can establish anything, proven that oil is confined in irregular belts between a casing, or it is found in huge oblong shaped rock formations, resembling eggs. When the driller pierces the rocky covering he has been successful, while expert oil hunters say you might as well dig in China for it, if you send the drill to the bottom and miss the cavern.

Oil is seldom found at a depth less than twenty-two hundred feet, but there is a specimen secured at six or seven hundred feet less although it is of a spurious character, unfit for illuminating purposes. The average annual product of it has steadily increased since first discovered and wells are to day being put down in active oil districts, at the rate of five hundred per month, and this rate of drilling has been steadily maintained during ten years past, says Superintendent Charles E. Goodwin, a practical oil man of McKean county. The amount of capital invested in the oil business in Pennsylvania is almost beyond rational belief, but two years ago the bureau of industrial statistics at Harrisburg collated, under the supervision of the State Statistician, facts concerning the production of oil, iron, gas and timber in our State, and the returns exhibit an array of figures almost incredible.

Mr. Goodwin has told me that one enterprise alone in which he is concerned has invested the sum of \$370,000,00 in getting the enterprise into a productive condition. This field now has eighty three wells in operation, but the sum invested does not represent salaries paid for services, taxes upon stock and real property, insurance, repairs, etc.

This concern is constantly opening new oil territory, and for twenty years past they have put down wells at an average of three hundred per month, the work going forward at all periods of the year, unhampered by weather, accident or any of the contingencies liable to occur in active business pursuits. Conversation with a practical oil man soon gets a "tenderfoot" into a condition of mental frenzy, for it seems to be a mighty speculation from beginning to end, in which millions have been gained and lost. In the whirlpool of this speculation, John D. Rockefeller stepped forth, unknown to wealth and fame, and now he does not stop to count his millions. The oil statistics are intensely interesting but they are too numerous to cite in detail. In what is known as the white sands, an unvarying yield of two thousand barrels to the acre, can be relied upon, while the red sands produce on the same relative territory, from three to four

thousand barrels. It costs ordinarily, in the northern oil fields, about two thousand dollars to put down a well ready to flow, while in the southern fields, in West Virginia, and the southern counties of Pennsylvania, each well costs from three thousand to seven thousand dollars. The difference in cost is attributable to a caving rock or quicksand, in the southern fields, requiring immediate casing when the drill reaches the oil strata, while the product is neither greater nor better than that of northern Pennsylvania.

For the month of July just past, 832 new wells were drilled in this state, while there were in the same time 1466 rigs and drilling wells in a state of prospective formation; for the month of June, 811 new wells were completed and 1595 rigs and drilling wells were in the prospective condition. All wells are not productive of oil and the failures are called "dry holes." The shooting of a new well in a good district is watched with great interest as its yield may seriously affect the market. Large wells, with a thousand barrels a day, early in the operative stage, take the bottom out of the market and holders of oil go mad in their frantic efforts to unload their thousands of barrels when a giant well comes in. Fortunes have been made and lost in the twinkling of an eye, as a man's golden opportunity many times hangs upon the narrow and hazardous margin of receiving quick telegraphic returns, when a new well is exploited. The stock speculator, equipped with all the readiness which skill, experience and wealth can suggest, sends his trusty lieutenants into the oil fields to keep unremitting and vigilant watch of every move made by the prospectors, and in the old days, when wells were shot, flowing a volume that could not be confined, men went mad in their efforts to rush to the nearest telegraph station, to herald the news first to the oil centers. When a large broker sold the market, upon field advices, oil and prices and fortunes would collapse with the ease of breaking an egg-shell and many eye-tiring incidents fill the life of the oil hunter and the "wild cat" of the past, who wrecked his all in persistent and aggressive endeavor to find wealth in the bowels of the earth. The most notable instance of "wildcatting", which meant simply planting your well wherever your whims would command, is that, perhaps of the famous Phillips Brothers, who became beggars and outcasts in searching for oil. For many years they roamed about the oil country, sinking their shafts two and three thousand ft. beneath the surface of the earth, every vain and luckless attempt in an expenditure of two or three thousand dollars, until their money, faith, and credit were shattered to nothing. They dug sixty wells that were dry holes and the next was a banana, which yielded them a fortune at a single bound. One day they were beggars unable to borrow a penny; the next, they were millionaires receiving the praises of their fellows. Their sixty-first well flowed three thousand barrels per day for thirty days and "wild catting" was over with them. Perseverance conquers all things.

Another quite striking incident in the oil history is that of Mr. Samuel Armstrong a neighbor of the Phillips Brothers, as related to me by Mr. Goodwin. Mr. Armstrong had nothing in the world except his one wild cat well. When it was shot, it flowed the enormous yield of six hundred barrels per hour, the first few hours, and then settled down to the rate of nine thousand barrels for every twenty-four hours, until its fortunate owner was a multi-millionaire. These are isolated cases, but they are wonderful examples of how wealth are gained in the oil industry. The days of fortune are past and so are the "wild cat" days in the Pennsylvania oil fields, but men with a tireless activity will go on enriching the world, by laying hold of Nature's inexhaustible stores. The past may have been prosperous but the future is the age in which we must live.

W. K. M.

MARRIED.

Sept. 22, by Rev. S. E. Ochenford, at the residence of the bride's parents, Harry P. Bolig and E. Catherine Arbogast, both of Selingsgrove.

On the 19th inst. by Rev. W. A. Haas, Myron K. Laudenslager of Selingsgrove to Mrs. Nora V. Ulrich of Salem.

DIED.

On Sept. 15, near Freeburg, Chas. S. Kissing, aged 6 1/2 years 6 months and 28 days.

On the 18th inst. in Centreville, Galen Earl, infant child of T. E. and C. V. Kleckner, aged 10 months.

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