Machines are still only machines, without men

The oil industry is the most automated industry in North America. One authority has said that if no further steps were taken towards automation in the oil industry it would still take the next leading industry 15 years to reach the same point.

As automation—in refineries, pipe line control centers, bulk plants—has increased so has the importance of the oil company employee. For no matter how good and how automated the equipment, the quality of the final product still depends on the skill and efficiency of the employee using that equipment. In fact, the human element is even more important in the age of automation.

We believe that Imperial’s employees are among the best equipped and best trained in any industry in Canada.

Last year the individual tool box of each of Imperial’s 13,600 employees was valued at $57,180. Such is the value of the complex technical equipment needed in the modern oil industry, that each employee’s tool box has almost doubled in value since 1953 when it was valued at $14,000.

The box now holds new refineries and new refining equipment, new automatic bulk marketing terminals, new office buildings, new product and exploration research equipment, new trucks and new vehicles to travel the northern muskeg. It represents plant and equipment worth $512 million.

Without employees properly trained to operate it, this equipment is really just a figure in the company’s balance sheet. It is like an automible without a driver.

For many years Imperial has operated training courses for its employees at all levels—from the newest recruit in the company’s ranks to its management. Its training programs—like its operating equipment—for supervision, operating, accounting and executive personnel are continually being revised, improved and enlarged. These training programs take place on the job, in special courses away from the job and sometimes in outside educational institutions. Last year alone 4,590 Imperial employees received specialized instruction to improve their skills in one or more of the company’s 37 training courses.
The unending quest
for data on rocks
which might bear oil
takes men into
many remote places.
What do they do and
how do they live?
Come with Geological
Party No. 29 during its

SEARCH
ON
TRY
MOUNTAIN

These men, dwarfed by a mountain, are members of a geological surface party — the vanguard of every oil search. They are the shock troops of oil exploration, gathering rock samples, measuring geological formations, mapping the faces of mountains. Often they pitch their camps in the loneliest corners of Canada, for there is much to be learned in such places.

Here, for example, near Rock Lake in the Jasper section of the Rockies, the geological story of the west—and of petroleum—lies laid bare. Millions of years ago these mountains were thrust up from the earth, exposing layers of sedimentary rock. The same kind of rock, bearing oil in some regions, lies in a great triangular basin thousands of feet beneath most of Alberta, part of the Northwest Territories, much of Saskatchewan and a corner of Manitoba.

By studying the mountains, geologists are gradually helping solve the mysteries of the entire oil basin, and so are helping find oil. The search brought Imperial Oil surface party No. 29 here in 1958. A helicopter—the modern geologist’s packhorse—carried them from peak to peak. But in the end, it always became the old fundamental search: men against mountain, hammering over shale and limestone with instruments and packtrucks, striving to uncover the prehistoric secrets of the rock.

Photos by Harry Rowed
Your day begins at dawn. The scent of balsam mingles with the tantalizing aroma of bacon and eggs cooked in the open. Nearby, in a clearing, the helicopter squats ready, motor ticking over, pilot waiting. Perhaps, as part of the mapping party, you will spend most of this day in the ‘copter, circling, hovering, landing, piecing together a geological picture of the rock formations. Or perhaps you step out on some distant slope with your hammer, pack, compass and a surveying instrument called an alidade.

This is a strangely silent search. Other branches of the oil industry’s exploration team explode small charges of dynamite or drive chattering core drills into the earth. But here there is only the dry clatter of falling shale and the dull clunk of hammer against rock. For hours you work in an emptiness of sky and mountain, measuring angles, elevations and distances, collecting rock samples with their tell-tale bits of embedded fossil. Oil is found in such rock. Perhaps the samples you gather today will help the drillers strike a well in Manitoba or Saskatchewan or the Territories.

At noon you hunch down on top of the world with a sandwich, idly watching a ribbon of river curl a few thousand feet below. Then it’s late afternoon, the aerial bus takes you back to camp and the job goes on by lantern light. Rock samples must be sorted, labelled and crated. Reports must be written. With the aid of the stereoscope, which provides a three-dimensional view, today’s geological measurements are correlated with an aerial map. From this will come a geological map. Tomorrow’s working area is studied, also under the stereoscope. Tourists save up 50 weeks of money and dreams for holidays in places like this, but to you the scenery is just a spectacular backdrop for a busy day’s work.

A job with a view, and lunch among the clouds. From 10,000 feet Bob Griffin and Ernie Manko reflect on the plight of deskbound people who work indoors.

For Walter Zielger and Ernie Manko the job goes on by lantern light. Maps must be studied, fossils must be labelled and rock samples must be crated for mailing back to Imperial’s laboratory.
"Come and get it!" (Cook Aime Goudreau never has to say it twice.) After dinner his kitchen tent becomes the community center. Card games, pocket novels, tall tales—you can make your own amusement.

The clang of Aime Goudreau’s dinner gong marks the welcome interval between outdoor work and paper work. When the last of the work is out of the way, you spend the rest of the evening with gin rummy or poker and the inevitable “bull session” with your companions of last night, last week and last month. When a few men are thrown together in the wilderness from May to September, as these men are, each comes to know himself and his fellows a little better. For the impatient ones, boredom and minor irritations sometimes become overwhelming. For the others, this is a welcome escape from city life, a place of quiet thought and lasting friendships.

For young geologists, in particular, a summer in the field is worth a year of book learning or office duty. Whatever your attitude to this job, you learn to “make do.” The helicopter’s infrequent trips to town and regular radio checks with base camp are the only links with the outside world. So you learn that life goes on quite satisfactorily without telephones, TV, movies and daily mail delivery. You discover that a washtub is also an adequate bathtub. You spin out the hours with cards or tunes from a battered accordion. You re-discover books. You scribble letters home by the glow of the ever-present lantern. And there is still plenty of time for sleep.

Tomorrow—on to some other obscure mountain top. Next summer? Perhaps an assignment in the Territories or the Peace River country or northern Saskatchewan. Wherever you go, you can be sure of this much: the site will be remote and the job will be important. And, depending on your point of view, it’s the best—or the loneliest—job in the world.

No four-piece bathrooms here, and the only running water runs straight downhill. But Jim Wood discovers that a washtub is a many-splendored thing. Time for a letter—and lights out.
Our Heritage of Fascinating Place-Names

by Marcus Van Steen

The awful responsibility of giving a place the name by which it will be known for all time to come seldom dismayed Canadian pioneers. Sometimes they brought the tried and traditional names of their homelands with them, but for the most part they accepted the challenge of finding new names with imaginations whetted by a new life in a strange land, with humor, conscious or unconscious, and on the whole with success.

As a result, the roads of Canada are adorned with many signposts bearing names that are sometimes beautiful, often charmingly unique, and always concealing a story in the background.

Some of our place-names came with recent arrivals from Europe—Ymir, and Yelliff in Ontario; Xena, Sask., and Tell, B.C. Others go back to the earliest settlers, none of whom had more vigorous imaginations than the first Newfoundlanders, who left us Pushthrough, Cupids, Hot Nosed Marshes, Bay Bulls, Joe Batt’s Arm, Come-by-Chance and Sel-dom-Come-By. Early Irish settlers in Newfoundland showed their simple satisfaction in Heart’s Content, Heart’s Ease, Little Heart’s Cove, Heart’s Desire, and Heart’s Delight. And a grim sense of humor was responsible for Mistaken Point where, it is said, many fine ships were lured to destruction by boot-seeking wreckers.

Some picturesque names were wiped out by the official Newfoundland Nomenclature Board, set up some 50 years ago to clear up confusion. In many instances the board named and subdued names expressed in the rugged language of two centuries ago. For example, the nautical use of “gut” to describe a narrow channel was regarded as too robust for modem ears. As a result, the self-explanatory Fairish Gut has become Fairhaven, and Turk’s Gut, which recalled the old searovers, indiscriminately called Turks, has become a name Maryvale. However, Cape Breton Island has retained its St. Ann’s Gut.

Name-changing does not always result in the loss of meaningful historical names. A few years ago, for example, the people of Artemisia dropped their Greek-goddess name in favor of Flesherton, after W. K. Flesher, a rugged Canadian who had pioneered that part of Ontario.

Place-names created or inspired by local heroes, however, do not always survive. Bytown was named for the British Army colonel who built the Rideau Canal, but it is generally agreed that Ottawa is a better name. And a change did seem necessary when it was decided to establish the capital of Saskatchewan at Pile O’ Bones, so called by Sir Sam Steele, who had found buffalo bones there. The choice of a new name was left up to the governor-general’s wife, the Princess Louise, who, being a lady of literary imagination, declared: “This is going to be a queen city, so let us call it Regina.”

The result could have been worse. When a lady of humbler birth than the princess but of equally aspiring tastes was called upon to name a new Ontario town she selected an Indian word that appealed to her as dignified and melodious, not knowing it meant “dead dog,” and the town bears the canine name of
Quebec names are noted for their sainthood dedications. Apart from an uncounted number of rivers, mountains, lakes and valleys, almost 1,500 Quebec communities are named for saints, including St. Louis du Ha! Ha!, which, surprisingly enough, means just what it says.

The French influence is strong on Canadian place-names, but in areas where the population has become predominately non-French-speaking, many original names have become distorted. Thus in one Newfoundland ballad there is a reference to "Clara from Brulée" and "my girl in Toslow." It is not difficult to reconstruct Brulée into Brule, but it takes a bit of digging to discover that Toslow at one time was Toscio John, a corruption of Toscio de l'Argent, a name given by a poetic French seaman to a cup-shaped bay surrounded by cliffs that glisten like silver in the sunlight.

It is not difficult to believe that in such a similiar poetic fancy the name Bras d'Or for Cape Breton Island's beautiful arms of the sea. As the written name means "arms of gold," and indeed there are times when these calm waters do shimmer in the sunlight like molten gold. However, early maps indicate the original name was Lakes of Labrador—Ladro in Spanish for the female fox), bestowed by Sir Peregrine Maclure on a town in Ontario's Lake of the Woods until television made the male zoro famous, many citizens of Zorra pretended to believe the name of their town property was Zorrah, for the Biblical home of Samson.

Twenty-four Canadian towns have beaver in their names, deer used 22 times, and 20 communities use bear, including Beersprig, Alta. If we count the "lions" in the Quebec 16 Canadian towns and villages have wolf names, including Lob, Ontario—another of Sir Peregrine's fancies.

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Newfoundland was named by a French privateer, George Stephen, later Lord Mount Stephen, and Sir William Van Horne. They simply started with the final "e" of George, the first three letters of Stephen, and the "Van" by which Sir William was generally known. Everwood comes from using all the letters in the name E. R. Wood, a Toronto railway financier.

In the Maritimes, the Micmacs of Nova Scotia, P.E.I. and eastern New Brunswick have given us many pleasing vowel combinations, including all those with the "acadi" endings which Bless Carman later wove into some hauntingly beautiful lines of poetry. On the other hand, the natives of the rest of New Brunswick, whom the Micmacs dubbed "Maliseets," meaning "broken Talkers" or "those who stumble when they talk," have left us many formidable combinations of hard consonants and splintering "s" sounds—Encimeanc, Memraamcook, Nauwigewak, Petinquis, and Richibucto.

Acadian (pronounced a-adh-dee) means "the place" and thus we have Subacadiane the place where musk rats live, Shunacahadee (where cranberries grow), and Traicadee (the camping place). Some of the Micmac names look difficult such as Musqugudooit, near Halifax; Wiycoomagh, in Cape Breton Island; and Tanagatoose, which means "the meeting of the waters." Others have distinctly unusual sounds, such as Ecm Secum (sew-cum-sew-siin, meaning a red home), Nemec Tecuch (sandy beach) and Mush-aboom, which is said to mean "the hair of the dead lying there." However, they are no more difficult or unusual than such Gaelic names as Skir Dhoo, Ben Eoin, and Stronach, which reached Nova Scotia from the Outer Hebrides in the early 19th century.

Sometimes the meanings ascribed to Indian names seem rather improbable. Antigoni in Nova Scotia is said to be the booklet put out by the Provincial Tourist Bureau to mean "the place where branch trees were torn off by bears gathering beechnuts." This is likely to leave one with a high regard for the people who could say all that in only four sounds.

Generally speaking, Canadian names are not inclined to name places after national leaders or military heroes. It is true that we have Brockville to commemorate the hero of the War of 1812, and Kitchener was named after the great British general in a moment of patriotic fervor during World War I. But we have more towns named after flowers (Aphrodite and Amaranth, in Ontario), and CPR stockholders (Armstrong and Revelstoke, both in B.C., and Bassano, Alta.). We even have a city, Alberni, B.C., named after a Spanish general sent by the viceroy of Mexico in 1790 to seize the Pacific coast for the king of Spain. And Almonte, Ont., commemorates the half-breed Mexican patriot who was executed in 1815 fighting for the independence of his native land.

There are place-names in Canada to suit every taste. There is a Sober Island near Halifax, a Wine Harbour not far away, and a Wine River near Chatham, N.B. There is a Whisky Jack near Norw ay House in Manitoba, a Whisky Gap on the CPR line near Carstons, Alta., and a Soda Creek in B.C.

There is a Garden of Eden in Nova Scotia, a Tranquility in Brant county, Ont., and a Traveler's Rest in Prince Edward Island. There are no fewer than three Paradises in Canada—one, of course, in B.C., one in Newfoundland, and one in Nova Scotia, which also has a Bible Hill. Near Vancouver are a Lulu and a Lulu Island, both named by Colonel Moody of the Royal Engineers after an actress, Lulu Sweet, who was much admired in the 1860s, we are told, "for her good manners and graceful bearing."

Yoho in the Cree tongue means "how wonderful," and no doubt there is some meaning behind Spread Eagle, Alta., and Floors, Man., but there is no meaning at all to Creemore, Ont. When Simcoe's "grand old man," Senator J. R. Gowan, was asked to name the village that was growing up in his county, he coined the word which some say is patterned after the Gaelic for "great heart," but Senator Gowan always said he was not thinking of any meaning but that he "liked the soft sound" of Creemore.

Several of our place-names have come straight from books. Gravenhurst and Bracebridge, in Ontario, are from a Washington Irving story, Bracebridge Hall. Norval, Ont., was taken from a pretentious narrative poem by an obscure British poet, John Home. Pecos, Alta., is out of the wide field of American legend. And Ingo, B.C., was named after the hero of Shakespeare.

There is a theory that Flin Flon comes from a character in TheSinsles City by Preston Sturrock, also called Professor Flint abby Floomais. A copy of this book, it is said, was kicked around in this out post and was read by some of the prospects, who used to joke about the name. This story sounds plausible to anyone who has ever heard the kind of things prospectors joke about. A more believable theory links this name with the French expression "no-fou" which occurs in the chorus of many French songs, especially the kind that would be heard in a booming gold town.
New life in some old fields

by Jim Moore

Subterranean surgery has injected new life into southwestern Ontario's 100-year-old oil industry. Old wells, thought to be drying up, are flowing again and new wells are producing up to six times their initial flow. In the 18 months after the company's engineers performed the first new operation, daily production of Imperial wells almost quadrupled, from 350 barrels a day to more than 1,200.

The operation, called hydraulic or sand fracturing, uses tiny grains of sand to open up cracks in oil-bearing rock and allow oil to flow more freely into the well bore.

On the surface around the wellhead this hectic, high-speed operation requires a dozen men working swiftly and expertly amid the roar and whine of high-powered pumps and mixing apparatus. Their object: to pump down the well, at pressures varying from 1,000 to 3,000 pounds per square inch, large volumes of sand suspended (and sometimes jelled) in crude oil. An average job consumes 10,000 pounds of sand mixed with 10,000 gallons of crude oil.

The walls of the well are already cased with concrete or steel pipe down to the oil formation, or perhaps right to the foot of the well with perforations in the oil-bearing section. Thus the walls are already sealed tight before the sand fracturing operation begins. If necessary, the bottom of the well is sealed off with a cement plug. The sand-and-oil mixture can then be driven into the oil-bearing rock which is fractured by pressure.

Within 30 minutes the operation is completed. Slowly the oil drains back out of the rock formation into the well. Grains of sand, however, stay behind and prop open the cracks caused by the pressure. These cracks now serve as tiny channels through which the once-trapped crude oil can flow into the well.

Formation fracturing proved itself half a dozen years ago in such western Canadian oil fields as Pembina and Smiley. But success in the prolific western wells did not necessarily mean that treating the Ontario wells would be worthwhile. A good well in Ontario produces only about 60 barrels a day while even a mediocre well in Alberta yields 200 barrels daily. So sand fracturing the least productive wells would give a correspondingly smaller flow of oil, but costs would remain the same—between $2,000 and $3,000 per well. The question was whether sand fracturing in Ontario would produce enough additional oil to be economically attractive.

After considerable study in Imperial's eastern producing office at London, Ont., Imperial-Union Grand Bend No. 2, a relatively new well near Grand Bend on Lake Huron, was chosen for a test in July, 1957.

Daily production of the well jumped from 14 to 69 barrels, and the sand fracturing became an established practice. The Rectus field, drilled a dozen years ago near Wallaceburg, was producing only a trickle of oil when the "frac" trucks moved in. After treatments, production on three wells jumped from almost nothing to 70 barrels a day. Two wells in the Shekerton field, south of Corunna on the St. Clair River, rose from one barrel to 150 barrels a day.

In the Courcea field, the combined production of three "fraced" (pronounced to rhyme with "tracked") wells increased from 30 to 133 barrels a day. And a new well in the Dawn field near the historic Petrolia field, jumped to 130 barrels daily from an initial production of 20 barrels.

Ken Oakley, Imperial's chief production engineer in Ontario, reports that "sand fracturing is also making it possible for us to produce oil from geologically zones which previously we never thought worthwhile."

The additional oil yields an extra barrel to the farmer in whose corn patch a well is drilled—he gets a royalty of one barrel out of every eight produced.

Sand fracturing has added years of life to the fields that cradled the oil industry in North America. Since James Miller Williams brought in the first commercial oil well on this continent near Oil Springs in 1857, oil men have lifted 33 million barrels of crude oil from the underground reservoirs of Ontario.

Every fracturing operation increases the optimism of the Ontario oil men and raises their estimates of how much oil can still be recovered.

The supervisor of one sand fracturing job expressed their hopes one day when he shouted above the roar of the motors: "There's lots of oil down there; it's just looking for a way to get into a well."
the northland’s bunkhouse professors

After working side by side all day with men of little or no formal education, the young teachers of Frontier College hold nightly classes in 80 remote camps across Canada

by Scott Young

With the air of a man about to speak words that would shake the world, the young Portuguese said measuredly, “You are fine professor?”

“Professor” Cam Mackie, an arts student at Winnipeg’s United College, was only 19; fair-haired and fuzzy-checked. But in the beat-up old railway car on a CPR work train in the wild forest north of Lake Superior, he sat in his dusty green plush seat with aplomb. After all, this was his second year as a professor—Frontier College style.

He chuckled, and nodded. “I AM fine, my friend! Very good! Very good!”

The Portuguese, who a few weeks before couldn’t speak a word of English, glowed in the full flush of pride.

For weeks now, Cam Mackie had been working on the transcontinental line in the summer heat and under blankets of blackflies and mosquitoes. He had swung a pick and fought a clawbar as hard—and for the same pay—as any of the Portuguese laborers in the gang. He wore the same clothes: rough, faded, washed when possible, never pressed.

A railway boxcar serves as crude classroom for these new Canadian workers attending one of Frontier College’s evening sessions

As the weeks had passed, the other members of the gang had come to believe what at first had seemed incredible: that an educated man voluntarily would work alongside them all day with his hands, so that at night he could give them something for their minds.

Once they accepted this, the dour or so Portuguese laborers became one of 80 Frontier College classes in remote camps all across the great Canadian frontier. Classes that were held with other railway gangs, in mining, logging and construction camps, and on the DEW line. Classes that were held with men sitting in their bunks, in dining cars, in tents and in open fields.

No class could be said to be typical. Some were composed of new immigrants; some were mostly Canadians of various bloods, including Indian; some were part immigrant, part Canadian. Some were attending Frontier College for the first time, others for the third and fourth time. If they had one thing in common, it was the rapta attention they gave to their “professor.”

In Mackie’s class, the pull-pull of the motor generator on the platform outside which supplied power for the lights, went unnoticed. Before Mackie was a folding table, marked and scarred, undoubtedly by veteran railway conductors before Mackie was born. On it lay his chalk, an eraser, a few texts—languages, citizenship, history, geography, mathematics. Behind him, tacked across the door, was a rectangle of heavily coated black cloth. It had visible fold marks, because even a blackboard in Frontier College needs to be in a form one can pack for a quick move.

He warmed up the shy ones in class with a chorous review of English. He’d point to his head, and they’d chorus, “Head!” (Or: “Hade! Hade!” Or even maybe: “Elbow! Toe!”) But even the mistakes had an effect. Relaxation. He picked up the chalk, wrote some new words, and the class tried them out.

Sixty years earlier other gangs of frontier laborers, Canadian-born, but not unlike these Portuguese in some respects (hard labor, boredom, the frontier) had kindled the original idea for Frontier, whose headquarters now are in an old brick house in downtown Toronto. Seven permanent employees work there, including the principal, Eric Robbins, a bouncy, hurried, good-looking 33-year-old who took his B.A. at McGill, where he played football. He’s a former laborer-teacher himself, so he knows the job—which is basically to keep supplies of both ideas and teaching aids flowing to the 75 to 80 labor-teachers who go out each year to frontier camps in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and every province except Prince Edward Island.

Frontier College occupies only the ground floor of the house. The second floor is rented as an apartment, because Frontier College needs all the money it can get. It is non-profit, and charges nothing for its classes. The building was bought in 1949 from donations which were matched dollar for dollar by a one-time laborer-teacher who had become a great financier, the late J. P. Bickell of Toronto. For 22 years before that, Frontier’s 3,000-mile campus had been served from a rented room above a wine shop. Before that, from smaller rooms—right back to when all policies and records were carried in the head of one man, with perhaps a few overflows to his pockets and battered traveling bags.

He was Alfred Fitzpatrick, a tall and graceful Maritimer who graduated from Queen’s in 1896 as a Presbyterian minister. At the time, he had a family problem. An older brother had left home and vanished into the west coast logging camps. Fitzpatrick accepted a field assignment with the American Presbyterian Church in the redwood camps in

Imperial Oil Review, April 1959
order to look for his brother. He found him. But he found something else: in camp after camp a “uniformity of barreness” where men merely worked, ate, fought, slept.

By the time he returned to his first Canadian church in the whte pine country around Georgian Bay, at an Ontarian village called Nairn Centre, he was developing a passion to do something about it.

This passion was to rule the rest of his life. He began visiting the camps, taking books and magazines. He gave up his

church because he was convinced that to be effective, his work had to be non-denominational. He preached, taught, prospected, and sought donations. In 1902 one of his first helpers, Angus Gray, became tired of the lack of money. He got a job in the woods and supervised the camp’s reading room at night. Fitzpatrick immediately saw the value of the idea, in trust, understanding, and elimination of the often strong suspicions among these rough men that the Frontier College representatives didn’t pull their weight in camp and therefore decreased no respect. Fitzpatrick began to besiege big companies which worked the frontier, asking for jobs and getting them. Funds began dribbling in to help buy books, rail tickets and other necessities for his volunteer teachers. The annual budget rose through hundreds of dollars, to thousands. (It is about $50,000 now. This raised partly by investments and government grants, but largely by donations, often from the same companies which employ Frontier’s labour-teacher. Imperial Oil is among the contributing companies.)

But what really made Frontier College grew was that other men began to share Fitzpatrick’s passion. One of the first was a tall, raw-boned youth who had been a country school teacher. His name was Edmund W. Bradwin. In 1903 he walked 16 miles to a lumber camp near Parry Sound, Ont., to his first assignment. He soon shocked off the school teacher’s suit and put on high boots, breeches, an open-necked shirt, and an old hat and, as Fitzpatrick’s assistant, became a legend on the frontier.

He’d walk in out of the rain, help a labourer-teacher with a class, talk far into the night, advising and inspiring, and then stomp off down the track again toward the next camp—still in pouring rain. He’d sleep on a bench or floor. One man recalls meeting him in a camp that had no kitchen utensils. Bradwin gathered with the others each mealtime around the stewan and ate with his hands, as they did. He fought a few times, too. Sometimes the men felt they should rough up the schoolmarm. When they picked on Bradwin, they’d find they had picked the wrong schoolmarm.

He had one year of college when he started with Frontier. He took his B.A. and M.A. by mail and in 1928 earned a Ph.D. from Columbia University after working 12 years in spare time on his thesis, later published as a book called The Bank House Man.

Bradwin was the personification of the labour-teacher, and still is. "In one 1 15-minute conversation before I boarded a train for a summer's work," one former labour-teacher wrote to me, "he so instilled in me the vision of our Canada and its backbone, the working man, that all that summer, no matter how tired I was after a day's work, I fought as if inspired."

Dr. Roy Mustard, one of Canada’s leading eye, ear, nose and throat specialists, met Bradwin first in 1911 at the end of steel, west of Cochrane, Ont. “My camp was 100 miles west,” Dr. Mustard wrote in a letter shortly before his recent death, “which I would have to walk. After walking a few yards I glanced back and well remember Bradwin’s attitude of concern as he watched me starting along the trail. But the sight of the walk he made himself many times.”

Jessie Lucas is Frontier’s secretary, and has been since she became a Bachelor of Arts at University of Toronto in 1920. Her stories about Bradwin are a delight. Twice he was offered posts by Canadian universities. Miss Lucas says he was flattered by these offers, but never considered them seriously; although his average annual salary with Frontier College was around $1,500.

He became principal in 1933. Three years later Alfred Fitzpatrick died a few months after being decorated with an O.B.E. for this pioneer work in adult education. But for many years before that Bradwin had done the main recruiting job for labour-teachers, by an annual tour of universities. For this he’d leave behind his bush clothes and dress in a suit with a high stiff collar, above which his powerful face, twinkling eyes and bushy hair gave a strange pull of adventure to his recruitment message. He’d come by day coach, having sent ahead a rough hand-done poster for the bulletin board giving a place and a time to anyone who wished to hear about Frontier College.

He’d tell the undergraduates, “I can offer you hard work, low pay, blackflies, mosquitoes, dirt, bad food—and a chance to help your fellow man.”

He got the men. To this day, when Eric Robinsone tours Canadian universities with basically the same message, Frontier College always has two or three men apply for every job open. Some men who met Bradwin on his recruiting trips have described him as the greatest single influence in their lives. One of these is Robinson, who succeeded Dr. Bradwin as principal shortly before Bradwin’s death in 1954.

One evening in 1948 Robinson and another McGill football player were showering after a practice. The other player had been out with Frontier College in the summer just past, and was full of his experiences. “The minute I heard about it,” Robinson says now, “I knew that nothing else would do for me.” He wrote to Dr. Bradwin, was accepted, and for the next two summers worked in northern Ontario and Newfoundanand with railway extra gangs, which annually take more than half of Frontier’s faculty. When Dr. Bradwin’s health began to fail shortly before his death, he was grooming Robinson as his successor; Robinson having given up a higher-paid teaching job in Montreal to jump when Bradwin called.

What effect has Frontier had on the quarter-million men who have passed through its classes in the last 29 years? It is difficult to measure. The Study

Certificates given out to better students (about one in eight) each year merely indicate to a future employer that this man has tried hard to improve himself. And has had some success. There is no way even to find out what happens to some students. A man with a Grade Four education wants to take diesel engineering. He works hard for three months, an hour a night, and the labour-teacher figures that with another year or two of such work he might qualify for a diesel course. But he be with a gang where there is a labour-teacher, the following year?

More than 3,000 labour-teachers have worked with Frontier College since Alfred Fitzpatrick hired his first helper. Most of the men they have taught have been transients, casual labor. The victories
read like this (from a student engineer): “Had an amazing man in my class who’d hardly been to school before, but learned how to read blueprints.” Another with only Grade Seven learned differential calculus in two months of night work. A man who had spent his lifetime as a deck hand but had no formal education had studied hard enough to earn a master’s ticket. Multiply that by the tens of thousands and the little victories add up to an impressive total.

Easier to assess is the effect Frontier College has on its laborers-teachers. Either the principals of Frontier College have had an unusually ability to pick good men, or working as laborer-teachers has helped many in their later careers—or maybe a bit of both. When I was gathering material for this article I asked for a list of former teachers. Some were still students in university. Among the others were bishops, a brigadier, professors, and Canadian high commissioner abroad, doctors, lawyers, accountants, teachers, a vice-president of a bank.

The Right Rev. Anson Phelps Stokes, Jr., coadjutor bishop of Massachusetts, was a laborer-teacher with a construction gang near Fort William in 1927—one of the few Americans hired every year. He tells me in a letter about his experiences, called them “one of the strangest and most real comradeships I have ever known.” For a number of years after he had taken a seminary course, the famed Philadelphia child specialist, had been impressed by his own year with Frontier in 1926 (his pay: 30 cents an hour) that he had convinced Stokes, classmate, to apply. Dr. Harley Jenner, medical superintendent of Fort Qu’Appelle Sanatorium at Fort San, Sask., called his year as a laborer-teacher “an enlightening, and, in fact, thrilling experience.” C. A. Cathers, M.P., said it was “one of the best experiences of my life.” Dr. Ray Farguharsen, head of the department of medicine, University of Toronto, was out for two summers and said: “A good thing for a student, especially a medical student.”

While there must have been a few in Frontier’s history who couldn’t stand the tuff, I couldn’t find them. I wrote to 60 former laborer-teachers for information and the response was almost 100 percent, containing dozens of variations on the theme that by helping others, they seemed to have helped themselves.

While modern “professors” usually work much harder for less pay than most students on summer jobs, Frontier College tries to make sure that its teachers make no financial sacrifice. A system of pro-rated bonuses is worked out so that each one, no matter what job he draws, may have at the end of a season $600 to $700 to help with his university fees. The average laborer-teachers nets $35 a week at his job, after bed and board deductions, and is paid $225 by Frontier at season’s end.

Before each teacher goes into the field, he spends a few days at headquarters listening to what Robinson calls “field philosophy.” This is an amalgamation of Dr. Bradshaw’s good sense and Robinson’s own. The young teachers learn what books they will have, what films, and what references if discussion should range beyond their sure knowledge. Robinson stresses time and again the amount of patience needed in dealing with illiterates, or those who are nearly so. “They’re ashamed to be illiterate and ashamed to be in class,” he says. “If you make them feel at home, they think, ‘Well, this isn’t too bad, this learning to read and write.’ But you show one flicker of annoyance and they think, ‘This man is just tolerating us, and they won’t come back.” And again: “Don’t let a man aim too high, at first. If he misses, he might not try again. Let him shoot for what they can hit, and then maybe they’ll go on from there.” And again: “Don’t underestimate them, either.” The best students each year are encouraged to keep in touch with Frontier College, and are offered aid in getting into trade schools, extension courses, or have courses for further study mapped out for them.

Frontier College and the laborer-teachers have an effect on yet a third group—the field bosses. Sid Baker is a big and tough roadmaster on a CPR division near White River. “First one of these Frontier College guys I ever saw, I just put my hands on what he was up for here,” Baker told me. “He was just a kid to start with, and white and puny thing, too,” Baker added, “but kids, born with a silver spoon in your mouth, suppose you might be all right for a clerk or something.” He came right back at me, “I’m not here to be a clerk. I’m here to be a laborer.”

“With that first year, you, then, you gave him a clawhorse and sent him out. It was funny, I’ll tell you. I don’t know how he lived through the first few days. First he was too tired to eat. Then he started eating enough for three ordinary laborers. But the gang took to him right away, even though they couldn’t speak English and he couldn’t speak their language. We found that when we couldn’t get them to understand, they would address him kids. And he did a full day’s work every day, and taught classes at night.”

“When he was leaving, three months later, I went up to him and said, ‘Kid, I was wrong about you. You’ve been a good laborer. You’ll make a good man around the gang.’

And a student in Frontier College once said of his teacher: “He has patience and a good cover.”

Somewhere in these two judgments, according to Eric Robinson, is all the tribute Frontier College ever wants. Alan C. Harrop

company director

Alan C. Harrop, manager of the employee relations department for the past eight years, has been appointed an Imperial director. A chemical engineering graduate of the University of Toronto, he has spent his career in the oil business. In 1925, Mr. Harrop joined Imperial at Calgary as a chemist and became chief chemist the next year. In 1927 he moved to Talara, Peru, where he was chief chemist at the International Petroleum refinery for four years before becoming refinery superintendent. He returned to Imperial in 1936 and for 10 years was refinery superintendent successively at Regina, Calgary and Sarnia. He was appointed general superintendent of the Montreal East refinery in 1946. In 1951 Mr. Harrop was named manager of Imperial’s employee relations department.

He is presently chairman of the Canadian Manufacturers’ Association national industrial relations committee, which continually studies employer-employee relations and labor legislation and makes recommendations to government and other interested bodies. Last summer he led a CMA delegation to the national winter employment conference in Ottawa. On three occasions the CMA chose him to represent Canadian employers at petroleum committee meetings of the International Labor Organization in Holland, Venezuela and Geneva.

Van Steen

Toronto freelance writer Fergus Cronin has been at it again—writing another fine piece. This time, in an admittedly contentious (but meticulously researched) piece beginning on page 26, Cronin arrives at some embarrassing conclusions concerning the dinner of Canada’s first gas. The last time Cronin dug into history on behalf of the Review he caused quite a flap in several sensitive parts of the United States. The article in question was about AMERICA’S FATHER OF OIL, which we first published in April, 1955, and reprinted last June. In it Cronin offered documented evidence that the celebrated Colonel Drake of Pennsylvania, known throughout the United States as “the father of the oil industry,” had long been credited with more than he deserved. Cronin showed that a Canadian, James Miller Williams, was a successful oil producer in northern Ohio before Drake even got started with his first well. Which, in some quarters, was as great a heresy as saying that Wyatt Earp was a slick.

Nevertheless, the same people who were so upset in 1955 by Cronin’s disconcerting facts are bravely going ahead this year with celebrations of the 100th anniversary of Colonel Drake’s first well—in Pennsylvania—and are braving the drum louder than ever. Presumably they hope the din will scare off the ghost of James Miller Williams.

The Cronin article in this issue has nothing directly to do with the Drake-Williams controversy. It does cast some serious doubts on the commonly accepted version of certain other events of the same era. This time Cronin offers evidence strongly suggesting that the wrong man was responsible for the discovery of Canada’s first gas (the original Williams well wasn’t a gasier). This new contention won’t spoil any anniversary celebrations, however. Another report on the same sobering theme appeared in a 1959 edition of the Journal of the Geological Society of Canada.

Explaining the origins of several hundred of Canada’s most unusual place-names calls for a research job that would make many an energetic writer flinch with dismay. But Marcus Van Steen, a freelance writer who lives in Brampton, Ont., turned out the article on page 8 in a period of time that seemed amazingly short—particularly after we found that one of our brightest young men needed 10 hours just to check it for accuracy.

However, the short time Van Steen took to put the article together is a deceptive measure of the amount of effort behind it. At the time he dropped us a note to see if we were interested, he already had a bulging file of clippings and notes—collected over the years as a hobby. “I have been interested in words ever since I learned to read when I was three years old,” he explained. “I seldom see a new word that does not set me wondering how and why it means what it does, and I never see a new name I do not immediately try to trace to its source.”

So, more as the result of the Van Steen curiosity than because of any initiative on our part, we offer Review readers a rather unusual bit of Canadiana.
Valleyfield: from Seigneur to Seaway

Through the centuries, voyageur, priest, seigneur, habitant and industrialist followed the St. Lawrence here. Each left his mark and now the best of all their worlds—old Quebec’s charm and new Quebec’s burgeoning industry—has blended happily in this city the river built by Robert Collins

In the island city of Valleyfield, Que.—the place that water built—one never forgets the St. Lawrence river. To 27,000 citizens the river is a friend, companion, almost a conscience, always with them, forever shaping their way of life.

The river hurries down from the Great Lakes to surround and divide Valleyfield with three channels. It chokes under a dozen bridges, slips past downtown business blocks and feeds water and hydro-electric power into the city’s fast-growing new industries. The river’s story is really Valleyfield’s story, in three instalments.

To the north of town the river proper tells chapter one. Here it charms over rapids toward Montreal, 37 miles east. Three hundred years ago French voyageurs rested between portages at this point, before paddling west. Later a seigneur was here; later still, habitants laid their little farms against the river’s edge: the beginning of a community.

In the center of Valleyfield one can read chapter two. Here, part of the St. Lawrence detours through the old Beauharnois canal, symbol of the first transition from agriculture to commerce. The canal was dug 115 years ago to bypass the rapids and admit the first large lake boats to the west. Valleyfield’s first population boom, industries and small hydro-electric developments came after it.

Here Charles de Salaberry’s name still lives in city of spires and industries South of the city the “new” Beauharnois canal (dug 30 years ago to generate electricity and now, slightly modified, part of the St. Lawrence Seaway) completes the city’s girdle of water. This is Valleyfield’s unfinished chapter, but one can guess the outcome. The canal puts the city directly on the ocean vessel route. And, at its terminus 12 miles downstream, it feeds one of the world’s largest power plants, capable of generating two million horsepower.

Perhaps in time, industry will extend solidly from Valleyfield to Montreal and 40 miles beyond—a region already nicknamed “North America’s Ruhr Valley.”

Already the river has been good to Valleyfield. Each working day, 9,000 men and women walk, drive or cycle into plants that produce such diverse items as chemicals, pharmaceuticals, textiles, whisky, munitions, canned vegetables, flour, metal powders, dyed fabrics, church pews and hockey sticks. Most of these industries have come since World War II. Most came, at least partly, because of the abundant river water and power.

So far, industry has not destroyed Valleyfield’s old-world charm. The factories are well scattered and the city still has the appearance and lively curiosity of a small town. In the venerable hotel where a moonshiner stirs down glassy-eyed from the lobby wall, one asks Madame, behind the formidable desk, “How do I find St. Cecile street?”

She gives directions, then asks forthrightly, “And to what place were you going?”

Along St. Cecile a voluble waitress inquires over your soup. “Your first time in Valleyfield? Ah! First time!” Then, casually over the meat course, “You are a traveller, M’sieur . . . ?”

And finally, with dessert, the question she has wanted to ask all along, “And . . . what firm are you with?”

There is still much of the old Quebec in this city. Valleyfield is a man with a hunch back cycling into a chemical plant and donning a yellow safety helmet. But it is also a black-frocked priest teaching Latin and general Arts at the 66-year-old Séminaire, a college affiliate of the University of Montreal.

It is a place where late-model cars meet gingerly on narrow side streets that were built for horse carts, and where the solemn toil of church bells vie with the shrill hoot of factory whistles. On its outskirts are rows of modern bungalows. In the old quarter, remnants of little multiple-family dwellings stand shoulder to shoulder, with the inevitable second-story porch and the bizarre iron staircase spiraling down the front of each house.

And on all sides are the limpid canals, lending an old-country air, giving Valleyfield its nickname “The Venice of Quebec” and reminding the city of everything it was, is or will be.

From the beginning of settlement, this
water system has governed the community. Valleyfield's first farmers settled along the St. Lawrence about 1813. That was also the year Col. Charles Michel de Salaberry and his little band of Voltigeurs (infantry) helped route an American army near Chateauguay river, 10 miles southeast of Valleyfield.

After the war the community was known as Parish St. Cecile and the St. Lawrence was its highway. A flurry of canal building turned parish into town and city. Newcomers flocked in during the 1850s with the completion of the first Beauharnois canal. Canal boats were then able to bypass the rapids; until then, there were only narrow ditches which admitted the smallest barques.

Within 50 years the Beauharnois itself was obsolete, with the building of the deeper Sorelange canal on the St. Lawrence's north shore. (The Sorelunes, used for boat traffic ever since, is also obsolete as ships use the new Beauhar- nois Seaway route.)

But before it became a mere picturesque stream, the old Beauharnois brought a paper mill and a textile mill. Both had a profound influence on the town. The Scottish owner of the paper mill gave Valleyfield its name, taken from a paper company in Scotland. In 1874 the city was incorporated as "Salaberry de Val-

leyfield" in honor of the war hero, but "Salaberry" is dropped in daily usage.

The textile mill, Montreal Cottons Ltd., save the town for more than half a century. It came to Valleyfield because of the river, brought out the paper mill and small wooden mill, purchased water power rights on the St. Lawrence and dug its own small canal, parallel to the Beauharnois, to drive its waterwheels.

Around the canal Montreal Cottons raised a sort of feudal castle: buildings of local limestone with turret-like towers encircling water tanks for fire fighting. The company owned a "town" of some 250 employee houses, provided garbage collection and street lighting, sold electricity to Valleyfield and kept a farm with registered dairy cattle to provide milk and butter for employees.

For years Montreal Cottons employed most of the local labor force. Even now it is not unusual to find an "all-company" family such as the Leondard Entroends. Emendor, a lean building man with a wide grin, lives in one of a half dozen similar small semi-detached frame house on one of the tin streets that one can almost reach across. Recently he retired after 51 years with Montreal Cottons. His father worked for the company about 40 years. His wife once worked there too; in fact, Leondite met her there.

Leonide's son, Marcel, and a brother, Eugene, still work for Montreal Cottons.

The company is still Valleyfield's largest employer, with 1700 people turning out finished cloth that goes into name-brand shirts across Canada, and spinning yarns for sweaters and underwear. But the river brought other industries to share the skyline with Montreal Cottons' stone towers.

Nichols Chemical Company, which came in to supply acid for a wartime arsenal (still in Valleyfield), depends on river water in its manufacture of sulphuric and hydrofluoric acids. Canadian Chemeney Ltd., founded in Valleyfield in 1945 around a small existing distillery, came partly because of the all-important water.

"We don't use it to water down the whisky," grins office manager R.G. Smith. "But we do use large quantities for cooling, in the distilling process."

The Duplan Dyeing Company and Merck & Company (pharmaceutical chemicals) both use considerable volumes of water. So does one of the newest industries, the Davison Chemical Company, which built a $6 million silica alumina catalyst plant here in 1957. Canada's first. In petroleum refineries silica alumina catalyst, a fine white powder, is used in the "cracking" process which increases the yield of high octane gasoline.

Davison, affiliated with W.R. Grace and Company in the United States, decided to build the plant to supply the growing demand in Canada for cracking catalyst. Imperial agreed to take all the silica alumina catalyst required for its refineries across Canada from the new plant, and it is its main customer. Thus a new Canadian industry was born—supplanting imported catalyst, saving Canadian dollars and providing local employment.

There remained for Davison the matter of a suitable site. Here, as in so many other phases of Valleyfield's development, the St. Lawrence was a deciding factor.

"We looked at a lot of locations," says plant manager Bill Davis, a pleasant American with a crisp crew cut. "We had to be near the major centers—Toronto and Montreal. We wanted to be near sources of our ingredients and near a good labor supply. And we needed plenty of water."

Valleyfield measured up admirably on all counts. The river level is almost constant the year round. The water is clear and soft. Some companies pump it directly into their plant. Others, including Davison, buy it from the city, which pumps an average of six million gallons a day for domestic and industrial use. A plant can buy water for as little as five cents per thousand gallons, depending on the volume used.

The Davison plant set off a chain reaction of business in Valleyfield. It gave the existing Nichols Chemical another market for sulphuric acid. It caused National Silicates Ltd. to build a Valleyfield plant expressly to supply Davison with sodium silicate. And Davison adds a $350,000 annual payroll to the community and gives employment to 83 local people.

Most of the employees had previous industrial experience and manager Bill Davis calls them "the best workers I've seen anywhere. They're less sophisticated in their attitude to work. They take pride in the job; it's not just a living to them. They keep this place spotless and you never have to tell them to do it."

Later, in the plant, he illustrated his point. One man was polishing the floor. Another was wielding a broom as though his life depended on it. A third was...
painting and polishing a row of already speckled green and yellow motors.

"See?" said Davis. "That man's job is servicing electric motors but he doesn't take up all his time. So instead of stretching out the job, he's always cleaning and painting. And nobody asked him!"

In such fundamental things—the belief in an honest day's work, the less sophisticated forms of recreation, and the adherence to a faith.—Valleymo is unchanged by the machine age. As center of a Roman Catholic diocese and site of the Pope's palace it is perhaps even more devout than the average Quebec town. Canada's sixth cardinal, Paul Émile Léger, was born here and later served as vicar general for several years. There are four Catholic churches (and also four Protestant) plus the cathedral, serene and huge on the quiet Rue de l'Eglise, its twin spires bathed in floodlight.

In Valleymo also is the Villa Sancta Maria, a religious retreat for women and girls. And behind high walls on the north side of town one sometimes glimpses the brown-and-black habits of the Sisters of Charity. This 87-year-old convent is one of five (others are in Sherbrooke and Rivière du Loup, Que., Tokyo and La Corogne, Spain).

Here, 35 cloistered nuns live in a world far removed from Valleymo. Seven hours of their day are devoted to prayer and 6½ to manual labor. Even their seven hours of sleep are broken: they retire at 8 p.m., rise at midnight for two hours of devotions, and rise again at 5 a.m. for their daily routine. They depend on voluntary gifts and once, the story goes, lived for years without salt until someone thought of dehydrating it. Outside the walls of church and convent the Valleyfield—evelyn in lime time—one engrossed with his river. He swims, boats, and water-skiing with the Club Nautil. He sits in Sauté Park, a finger of green that poke into Baie St. François, and dabbles a line for perch or lugs on the water with the by 45 blue-clad bandmen of the Union Músique.

For two days each July—again, thanks to the river—he joins 50,000 others in watching one of Canada's best-attended regattas. He goes to the heart of town, making a natural amphitheatre. While onlookers line the banks and watching the speedboats from many states and provin'es compete for trophies and cash. And when the cans turn to ice, very very small boy dom skates and a Canadians' sweater, and every father becomes a hockey fan. For 10 memorable years Valleymo had its own professional team, the Braves. In 1951 when the Braves, coached by Toe Blake (now coach of Montreal Canadiens) won the Alexander Cup, 250 Valleymoers traveled 320 miles to Toronto for the final playoff game.

To make it an all-Valleymoer fast, the championship series was managed by the local Bellerive Industries Ltd., which turn out some 400,000 sticks a year. It also makes church pews. A co-owner of the company is Albert "Battleship" Ledet, a local hero who played defense for Montreal in the days of Howie Morenz.

The financial burden of maintaining professional hockey finally proved too much for Valleymo. But no matter—one can still huddle over the TV on Saturday nights and cheer on the improbable Canadians. Indeed, even in the Braves' hey-day, the fans' loyalty sometimes wavered.

"The Braves never played on Saturday night and they had to stop the Wednesday night games," explains Louis-Claude Lefebvre, editor-manager of the local weekly, La Gaetite. "On those nights, you see, everyone watches the Provinces or the Canadiens on TV."

management changes

Ronald S. Ritchie, formerly an assistant general manager of the marketing department, has succeeded Mr. Harrop as manager of employee relations. Mr. Ritchie has been assistant manager of the co-ordination and economics department and of the Ontario division of marketing and, more recently, manager of the B.C. division of marketing. He graduated in political economy from the University of Toronto in 1938 and joined Imperial in 1947.

John F. Fairlie has succeeded Mr. Ritchie as assistant general manager of marketing. A graduate in mechanical engineering from the University of Toronto, he joined Imperial's manufacturing department at Montreal in 1935 and transferred to Sarnia the following year. He has been assistant manager and manager of the co-ordination and economics department, assistant manager of the Quebec division of marketing, and, since 1956, manager of Montreal marketing division. During World War II, he served overseas with the Royal Canadian Artillery.

Lyman H. Fraser, formerly assistant manager of the employee relations department, has been appointed assistant general secretary of the company, a newly created position. He joined Imperial at Toronto in 1935 and worked in the marketing department. He has been manager of employee relations departments before becoming co-ordinator of managemnt development in 1950. The following year he became as-
Who really drilled the Great Shaw well?

Sifting the clues in a long-standing 'whodunit,'

Fergus Cronin offers convincing evidence that the wrong man may have been credited with Canada's first gusher

The oil well “came in” on January 16, 1862. By the end of the month it was front-page news throughout most of Canada West and even a few American cities.

The Chatham Planet of Canada West (now Ontario) summed it up:

“Last week the most extraordinary discovery in the annals of oildom was made in Enniskillen (township). It seems for months past a man named Shaw has been sinking a well... He struck a vein of oil which spurted up some ten feet...!”

Other newspapers quoted other reports and predictions: The new well, at what is now Oil Springs in Lambton county near Sarnia, Ont., was throwing up two barrels per minute from a depth of about 150 feet. It was going to be one of North America’s best producers, equaling the “marvellous wells in Pennsylvania.” It was said the flood of oil ran uncontrolled for a week. The “man named Shaw” had refused an offer of $20,000 for his interest in it. And Canada—which had brought in North America’s first commercial well five years before, only to fall far behind the U.S. in oil production—was back in the running.

As it turned out, the excitement was justified. This was the first Canadian "gusher" or major free-flowing well (oil being forced to the surface by underground pressure). It was also the beginning of Canada’s first important field, in an area which has since yielded about 35 million barrels and is still producing.

But because of the excitement of the moment, and also because editors of those days did not demand first names or initials in their news items, the stories omitted or differed on an essential fact: the driller’s Christian name. Since two men named Shaw were involved in the oil business in that region at that time, the newspaper editors were unwittingly guilty of creating an industry “whodunit.”

After 97 years the mystery remains: who was “the man named Shaw”?

Today many writers and historians believe he was Hugh Nixon Shaw, a prominent Canadian oil pioneer from 1857 until 1863 when he drowned in one of his own wells. Indeed, last year during centennial celebrations at Oil Springs, the birthplace of Canada’s oil industry, Hugh Shaw was officially recognized as driller of the 1862 gusher.

Yet he may have been an impostor at the centenary. More likely, the honor should have gone to John Shaw, an obscure photographer-turned-driller from Kingston, Ont., and Port Huron, Mich., a man whose public life was as spec-tacular—and short-lived—as the first gusher.

The driller’s identity is important to Canadian oil history, not only because his well was the first of its kind but because it marked a turning point in a flagging industry. The industry had started auspiciously enough in Enniskillen’s strong-smelling “gum beds.” The first Canadian wells—like a great many since—were not gushers; they had to be pumped. But the best ones produced up to 60 barrels a day. Petroleum was a cheaper, more satisfactory source of light for Canadian homes than the dwindling supply of old-fashioned whale oil. Around the beds grew a village which eventually channeled the name Oil Springs and in 1869 experienced a land boom.

But in 1859 Pennsylvania’s fields were discovered and there, by 1861, North America’s first flowing wells were each spouting several thousand barrels a day. American oil, with the advantage of less sulphur content and therefore less odor as lamp fuel, soon invaded Canada.

Drillers began to flock from Ontario to the U.S., from whence most had originally come. Canada continued to produce its hard won few thousand barrels a day but, largely because of transportation problems, the Canadian oil industry was in a slump.

The oil was shipped in 40-gallon barrels over an almost impassable road from the Oil Springs fields to the nearest Great Western Railway station at Wyoming, Ont., 12 miles north. In wet weather, heavily-laden wagons bogged down completely. At the side of the road ran a ditch (later dubbed “the canal”) where in spring and fall teams of horses each hauled one barrel of oil on a wooden “A” frame, which was a kind of mud sledge. Transport was later speeded up by using
horse-drawn stone boats, which were platforms on wooden skids, capable of carrying two to four barrels apiece.

One enterprising outfit, Bradley & Co., floated 600 barrels of oil down Black Creek and the Sydenham River to Lake St. Clair. John McLeod, another well owner, carted barrels 14 miles south to Dresden on the Sydenham River where he loaded them on a shallow-draft vessel. The Shaw gusher changed all this. It put all previous Canadian wells in the shade, with its flow of about 2,000 barrels a day. Men and capital poured into Oil Springs. A company called the Canadian Native Oil Co. Ltd. appeared in London, England, promoting stock. Within one year drillers struck 32 more flowing wells. Most important of these was a plank road was rushed through to Wyoming about five weeks after the Shaw well came in. As many as 160 teams traveled it daily.

But while the oil fever spread, the driller who started it remained relatively unknown. He was evidently a reticent man. Many reportees apparently wrote about his well without ever meeting the man himself. The presence of at least two men named Shaw around Oil Springs did nothing to clarify the point.

Eighteen years later, for example, a special Lambton county edition of the Illustrated Atlas of Canada printed a picture of "Hugh Shaw ... who came here in the early days of oil discovery, invested all he had in the purchase of a small plot of oil territory and was one of four who laid out the village in 1860." The Atlas went on to attribute the gusher to him.

Since then several contemporary historians, as well as the organizers of the Oil Springs Centenary, have tried to identify him well to that same Hugh Nixon Shaw, a one-time merchant from Cooksville and the man who died down his own well. Yet although most newspapers at the time of discovery attributed Shaw's first name, none identified the well to that same Hugh Nixon Shaw, a one-time merchant from Cooksville or referred to him as Hugh. (All those that called Hugh Hicks were written years later.) The Hamilton Times in January, 1862, referred to the driller as a Mr. Shaw "lately of Port Huron, Michigan, a daugherer (photographer) and formerly of Kingston, Canada West."

A letter to the Sarnia and Lambton Observer said the well's owner was "a resident of Port Huron." So did a letter to a Sarnia published in the Hamilton Times, credited the well to "Mr. John Shaw from Kingston."

Even more significant is an item in the journal closest to the scene: Vol. 1, No. 1 of the Oil Springs Chronicle which began publication on April 23, 1862. "Our building works still maintain their popularity and continue to pour forth their oil treasures in unmeasured quantities," the editorial read. "...His well is filled in about one hour and a half, and a stream of the best oil that has yet been discovered by man's toil ever flows in the town..." Neighbors who had jeered or shunned him were now only too eager to help scoop supplies running oil. A day before the driller was known as "Old Shaw." Now he was greeted everywhere as "Mr. Shaw" and "consequently has any amount of credit." A few weeks later a London Free Press reporter interviewed him and reported somewhat incredulously, "I found Mr. Shaw to be intelligent, courteous and frank, easy of access and really a gentleman in his deportment..."

Then Shaw dropped out of the news. What happened? Again, we can piece together the picture. A man named John Shaw's career had been in shipbuilding. He had developed oil and was soon one of the biggest shipbuilders in the country. Oil was still a new commodity and Shaw seemed to be a man with a new fortune. The tentacles of his oil venture were reaching far and wide. In this period Shaw was a man of wealth and power, and his name was synonymous with success.

A letter written in 1920 by W. M. Spencer, a former secretary of Imperial Oil, said, "...When (Shaw) struck the big well and the oil was running away, Mr. Spencer (William Spencer, his son and partner) who were on the spot and offered to pay him 50c. per barrel for all they could save from the ditches, but Shaw said it could run to..." before he would reduce price. No wonder he died poor.

As early as April, 1862, the Oil Springs Chronicle listed the principal oil shippers of the district as Messrs. John F. and Horace F. Bush, Rocherlea, and Sanborn & Co. of Pennsylvania. There was no mention of Shaw. Since Sanborn had had an "option of access" to the interest in the gusher, it is possible that the driller had already sold him title to the balance.

An undocumental story says that Shaw quickly became an easy mark for sharps, who swindled him out of his money. Another source says he "scatter his funds with a lavish careless hand." At any rate, according to several sources, Shaw left Oil Springs, drifted for a while, resumed his photographic business and died in 1872 in Petrolia, Ontario. This day he worked from a box-car studio.

Shaw's well faded even faster. In August 1863, the Oil Springs Chronicle reported, "The Shaw well is being pumped by steam but the expectations of all in regard to its yield have been disappointed." Nevertheless, the erratic Shaw driller made history and, at one stage, Shaw was recognized by historians. In 1938 the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada put a bronze plaque on the Oil Springs town hall. It says, "John Shaw, by drilling into the rock opened the first flowing well... From these beginnings developed one of Canada's most important industries..."

Then the Hugh Nixon Shaw story gained favor. Who was this second Shaw? On this point, a plaque in Huron County.

He was the former Cooksville merchant. The London Free Press noted in 1861, "Mr. H. Shaw is manufacturing a lubricating oil from earth oil. It never gums, and apparently works itself all up on rapidly moving machinery..."

In the same year the Toronto Globe reported lyrically, "When the sun shines its yellow, earth and red colors sparkle upon its surface. These colors, Mr. Hugh Shaw says, he can extract. the situation from a copper, oil after refining. They will form superior unfinished dyes and paints. Mr. Shaw is about patenting the process of dyeing and also a process of refining the oil.

He was associated with James Miller Williams and developed the color industry. With his partner they formed a commercially successful oil well, and with another Oil Springs pioneer, J. H. Fairbank, who was the first to establish a commercial refinery. On January 11, 1863, "Poor Mr. H. N. Shaw drowned in his well today. In him I have lost a true friend in Ennisville. A good man and most obliging neighbor. Sad, sad, sad calamity." It is said that the Shaw gusher and the Shaw well were recognized with a talented and well-known figure with the obscure driller whom reporters lacked to be "easy Korea" and a "science of easy Korea." In fact, no description written of the driller in 1862 coincides with what we know of H. N. Shaw.

The supporters of Hugh Nixon Shaw deserve credit for rescuing him from obscurity and revealing him as one of this country's outstanding pioneer oil men. But it seems that the man who drilled the gusher was Shaw, who died of his own well.