

William Stewart Herron

“Bring them solutions, not problems.”

Stewart Herron knew in his bones how rich Alberta could be. He looked at the contours of the high country and saw underground oil traps. When he passed the banks of the Sheep Creek, close to Okotoks, he could smell gas. But Herron had to prove that this valuable commodity was hidden there. He found a way to collect the natural gas in glass vinegar jars, sealed them and sent them off for geochemical analysis. The results proved his hunch right, and Turner Valley’s legend began.

In 1914, the Dingman No. 1 well blew in as much speculation as oil. The forest derricks didn’t always produce, and Herron had a hard time attracting backers. Still, his trademark tenacity as a prospector and developer never faltered, and despite perennially delinquent lease payments, he formed companies and browbeat investors while making ends meet with his cartage company.

A self-taught scientist, Stewart Herron saw the need for bold economic and strategic planning. He set the tone for wildcat oil and gas companies, creating the models central to Alberta’s natural resource development.



William Stewart Herron, petroleum pioneer in
Turner Valley, Alberta
Glenbow Archives PA-4607-1

Discovering Natural Gas

A self-taught geologist, Stewart Herron had a hunch there was gas below a muddy swamp on the banks of Sheep Creek. He dug through the oily gunk until his spade clanked against rock. Now he was ready to conduct an experiment to verify his findings.

Herron cut a large wooden barrel in half and dug it into the stinking mud, trapping the gas. He then inserted a rubber hose through a hole in the top of the barrel and sealed it with paraffin wax.

At the nearby creek, Herron filled his wife's laundry boiler and some vinegar jars with water. Returning to the barrel, he plunged the rubber hose into the laundry boiler. Gas began to bubble up into the water.

Herron took one of the water-filled jars, turned it upside down in the tub, and stuffed the hose into it. Slowly gas bubbles filled the jar, pushing the water down and out, leaving only gas behind.

Herron waited for over a day to collect the two gas samples. A lab in California confirmed his hunch: he had discovered natural gas.

Born: February 10, 1870 – Died: July 21, 1939

Additional Resources

- **Dictionary of Canadian Biography**
http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/herron_william_stewart_16E.html

Our Collections

Glenbow Museum

<https://www.glenbow.org>

Glenbow Western Research Centre | Glenbow Library and Archives

<https://libguides.ucalgary.ca/glenbowlibraryandarchives>

Glenbow Library and Archives | Digital Collection

<https://digitalcollections.ucalgary.ca/asset-management/2R340826N9XM?WS=PackagePres&Flat=1>