

## Charles Wallen in Russia

**Title Text:** International Oil Drillers

Excerpt from the International Drillers Tent Exhibit at the Oil Museum of Canada

[*Wind whistling, film rolling*]



[A curtain opens. An actor stands with a scarf around his neck, shivering and rubbing his hands. As he is talking, an illustration of an oil rig with snow flying past it appears.]

**Actor:** [*Humming and shivering*] Grosny, absolutely appalling place really. But there is oil underground, out it must come.



[A photo shows Charles Wallen behind an animated globe. It is followed by photographs of an oil field and a family.]

**Actor:** Charles Wallen, a Lambton oil man, helped to develop fields all over the world. During World War I, he found himself working in the Grosny oil fields of Russia. It was a relatively safe area, far from the trench warfare of Western Europe. Wallen managed a large oil field and lived in luxury with a small army of servants. His family was accustomed to dining on caviar, pheasant, and wild boar, washed down with the finest champagne.



[A photo of a group of soldiers standing in a trench appears. There is an image of a hammer and sickle symbol over top of it. Images of the Russian Revolution and a photo of Wallen holding a pipe are displayed. Photos of planes and guns are shown and an animated shell drops in front of a building. Images of horses and wagons appear, followed by a map of Scotland and a copy of a newspaper article.]

**Actor:** Then, in 1917, the Russian Revolution broke out and the party came to an end. Russian workers took over the oil fields and stripped Wallen of his authority and most of his pay. Still, Wallen stayed out of loyalty. Soon, the Chechen forces and Bolsheviks closed in and the oil fields became a battleground. The oil derricks were set ablaze as artillery and gunfire erupted all around them. It was time to go. With some bribes and the help of a few loyal soldiers, Wallen and his wife and children made a narrow escape just as shells were dropping around their house. Wallen's family was forced to hide out in the cold Russian winter for nearly three months. Then they made a break for it, running by night, hiding by day, riding in farm wagons until they finally reached the Caspian Sea. After six months of harrowing travel, the family made it safely to Scotland, reduced to rags and nearly starved to death. After the war, the Wallens returned to Oil Springs. They lost everything but their lives.

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