

Early Oil History - James Miller Williams

Title Text: Early Oil History: James Miller Williams
Excerpt from "The Spark that Ignited the World" on display at the Oil Museum of Canada



[A woman writes a letter with a pen and ink. A photo of Williams and a map of Oil Springs are shown, followed by illustrations of a train and Mr. Tripp. A video of an actor working at the bottom of a well plays.]

Narrator: There's a new man in town, a hard-working entrepreneur by the name of James Miller Williams. He's purchased most of the trip property and has been generous enough to give Mr. Tripp a foreman's job. Quite a man, this Williams. At the age of 25, he was already making carriages and soon after, railcars for the Great Western Railway. Now he's trying his hand at the oil business. He's not satisfied to pick at the gum beds. He's digging far below them.



[A newspaper rotates around the screen, with a story about striking oil on its front page. A video plays, showing an actor working at the bottom of a well.]

Man (voice): "Williams dug a well at the edge of a bed of (?) struck upon a vein of oil, the supply of fluid thus accidentally discovered will continue at almost inexhaustible source of wealth, yielding at the lowest calculation and with no greater flow than at present, not less than 1,000 dollars a day of clear profit."



[A man looks up from the bottom of a well as he uses a bucket to lift oil out of the hole. A photo of a plan for boiling crude oil and a video of an oil still producing kerosene are shown. The man lights a piece of wood covered in kerosene on fire and then extinguishes the flame.]

Narrator: They're bringing the oil up in buckets and pumping it by hand. Williams is drawing 40 to 60 barrels a day. He's built a simple oil still where he boils the crude and condenses the vapours that come off the top. A clear liquid called kerosene drips out the side spout. It's cheaper than whale or coal oil, burns brightly, and is safer too.

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