

William Gillespie in Egypt

Title Text: International Oil Drillers

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

[*Music, film rolling*]



[A curtain opens. An actor looks at a book, and then addresses the audience. He tosses the book to the side. Images of newspapers, an RCMP officer, and photographs of the International Drillers and where they worked are displayed. A photo of William Gillespie is shown with an animated Canadian Red Ensign flag flying behind him.]

Actor: What was so special, you may ask, about the Lambton men? Why not the Americans, or the British for that matter? Well, it's quite simple really. If you want to get the job done right, well there's nothing for it than to send the Canadians. If you were opening up a new oil field in an underdeveloped part of the world, you wanted an experienced driller of course. But you also wanted someone who could get along with the natives and be inventive, be a problem-solver. That's why the Canadians were in such demand. Take William Gillespie; now there's a man you could count on in a pinch.



[A photo of William Gillespie standing on top of a map is shown, followed by photos of camels, oil rigs, and a map of Sumatra and Borneo. There are animated tools moving behind a photo of Gillespie, as well as an animation of someone working with an anvil. Photos of Gillespie's time as an International Driller are shown and are followed by an image of him bouncing up and down on a ship. A curtain closes.]

Actor: William Gillespie seemed to relish travelling the world. He spent 24 years working as an oilman on four continents. It was in Egypt where he first tried his hand at the oil business. Gillespie taught Egyptian workers the Canadian pole drilling method. He later moved on to help develop the fields in Sumatra and Borneo. Gillespie was typical of most of the Canadian oil men. He was a jack-of-all-trades. [*Sound of a saw cutting wood*] If there was a job that needed doing, he could do it. In Egypt, William used his spare time to shod the mules using discarded casing protectors. In an eight-month period in Sarawak, he built several bridges, cut down seventeen dangerous trees, built a timber dam, a horse stable, and several houses for the rig crews, all after hours! One of the highlights of Gillespie's already illustrious career was meeting the sultan of Brunei and the Prince of Wales in 1922. William signed a contract for five dollars a day, four times what he would have earned in the Lambton oil fields. [*Ship horn*] He returned to Petrolia once for five months to recuperate after falling ill. But as soon as he felt better, the restless oil man boarded a ship and returned to Egypt.

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