

# Jackson Township

Cambria County, Pennsylvania



## Chapter 8

*Annals of Jackson Township*

**Mrs. Betty Burkhart**  
**Nanty Glo Journal**  
**May 28, 1942**

### **The Oil Well Project**

At one time Jackson township had high hopes of finding a place with the rich oil fields of the country, but for some reason, and the natives all agree what that reason was, the huge bubble burst, dreams of wealth faded away, and a feeling of injustice remained in the minds of the people.

It was in late 1878 or early 1879 that oil was discovered on lands owned by William Gillin, Abe Ribblett and Samuel Leidy, wells being drilled in that order. It caused a lot of excitement, which was natural, and we read in the Tribune, dated July 1879, "the natives look at the work in amazement and surprise. Hundreds visit the spot daily and questions asked are so numerous that occasionally they are compelled to shut down operations and all hands endeavor to satisfy in a measure the thirst of the multitude for knowledge."

Messrs. Thomlinson and Latshaw, according to the account, "the gentlemen drilling the wildcat venture in Jackson Township, report everything progressing finely. The well has now reached a depth of 200 feet. At 119 feet, a 20 foot vein of cannel coal was gone through, and should they not succeed in getting petroleum, an extensive coal mine will undoubtedly be opened." (It wasn't)

The Johnstown capitalists were confident of success and "expected to go down 1,800 feet at which point they will have reached a depth sufficient to touch the third sand of the county." It also stated that "a gusher from that locality helps us on to the 25 cent oil."

The company formed was called the Jackson Oil Company and Billy Richardson, George Page, and John Gettings formed it. Several local men bought stock in it. What really happened, no one could say definitely but from time to time, lasting over a period of two years or more, the company put the owners off, giving several reasons for doing so.

As oil is stored in porous rocks, it is found by drilling down from the surface, commonly done by a heavy string of tools suspended at the end of a cable and given a churning motion by a walking beam rocked by a steam engine. The steel tools fall from their own weight, and to prevent caving in and the flow of water the well is cased with iron pipes which are inserted in screw-joint sections at intervals during the drilling.

Well, the company claimed that something went wrong with their drilling, that tools stuck, that something got in the holes. But some of the men that were there at the time recall that they made tests that proved the statement was false. Gas was found at the Ribblett farm. Mary Davis of south Fork recalls how he and his brother, Howard, as boys, struck a match and the gas ignited. Milton Funk of Conemaugh, who was a boy of 18 at the time, also recalls making experiments of his own at the location. It was commonly thought that another company paid the local one to discontinue the drilling. One night, when no one was around, all the tools and machinery were moved away from the scene and the stockholders counted their losses. The holes may still be seen, some of them of a depth to be a danger to any unwary hunter. Several years ago, when Bert Gillin lived on the Ribblett place a valuable cow fell into one of the holes but was found in time and pulled with ropes to the surface.

Before this venture in oil speculation, Jackson township residents had another experiment with one who had dreams of making something out of oil, but there is no doubt in the mind of the residents why his venture did not prove successful. He purchased 50 acres of land in the township, where Nanty-Glo now stands, and started to drill for oil, and --so he said-- found it. It caused much excitement but he had to confess that he had no funds to finance the enterprise. So, a syndicate was formed by several of the leading Ebensburg citizens to purchase the property, only to discover that instead of the oil coming from within, it was coming from without. That is, it was out of the well before it was in it. It had to be poured in before it could be pumped out.

The Ebensburg men held the property for many years, being reconciled to their loss, but the story has a happy ending for when coal veins were discovered in and around Nanty-Glo they laid their land off in building lots and, it is said by knowing ones, recovered the amount they invested, with interest.

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