

RIFLE'S BLAST FROM THE PAST

RIFLE HERITAGE CENTER

P.O. Box 1882, Rifle, CO 81650

ISSUE 25

Feb. 2016

Museum Address: 337 East Avenue, Rifle

Museum Phone: 625-4862

With lots of snow on the ground I decided the February would be a good month to look at what was going on in our area one hundred years ago. The first thing I could find was about oil shale and so this issue is about the early days of oil shale in our area. I hope you enjoy this early history and the events that changed our local history forever. George Pearson Newsletter Editor

To early settlers the shale rock appeared to be a good source of building material for new homes and fireplaces but one early settler in the Parachute area was about to learn the hard way the dangers of shale rock. In 1882 Mike Callahan decided to build his new home's fireplace out of the shale rock, despite the stern warnings of the local Ute Indians about the danger of the rocks. At the new home's housewarming, attended by local Utes and settlers, Callahan started a roaring fire in the fireplace which soon caught the oil shale rock on fire and quickly burned the new home to the ground. This made him a believer, and forever after, he was a strong advocate for oil shale. In his honor the mountain that rises above the town was named Mount Callahan.



Early Picture of Mount Callahan wagon is on highway 26

The shale rock was for the most part ignored by early settlers, but many of them found that the "oil" produced from melting the rock was good for treating cuts and bruises on the cattle and themselves and swore by it as a local remedy. But this was all about to change due to what normally would have been an obscure government publication.

From 1913 to 1915 a government survey or study of the shale formations was done by a geologist by the name of Dean E. Winchester. He roamed the Colorado Plateau area studying the rock formations and in 1916, he published his findings in a pamphlet called "Oil Shale in Northwestern Colorado and Adjacent Area." The publication stated that up to twenty billion barrels of oil was locked in the oil shale formations. This soon was brought to the attention of President Woodrow Wilson, and on December 16, 1916, he set aside by Presidential Order some 45,444 acres in Colorado and 86,584 acres in Utah as Naval Oil Shale Reserves. He also requested that Winchester check his figures, and so he did, and in 1917 he announced that he had made an error that his study should have shown that there were forty billion barrels of oil.

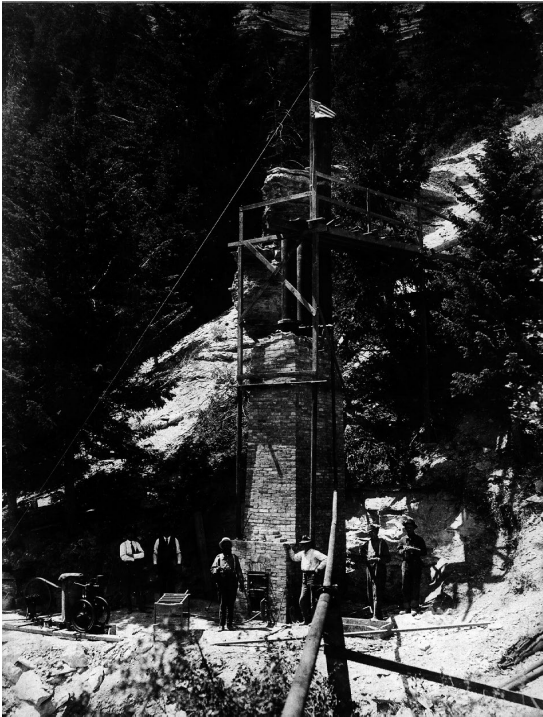
The first oil shale boom was on, even though very little was known about how to get the oil out of oil shale reports of its magic properties soon spread. It was deemed that oil shale gasoline produced thirty percent better gas mileage than traditional petroleum. The oil could be used to manufacture soaps, fertilizer, mineral oil, dyes, sheep dip, fine harness dressing, and automobile paint. Almost anything from oil to medicine could probably come from this new miracle product. The publication Shale & Oil News started up to keep the public and investors informed on the products.



Early Retort on Hill Side

Speculators poured into the area filing claims on the land not taken by the government. Soon Oil Shale Stocks and claims became the most sought after in the mineral world. By 1920 there were well over a hundred oil shale companies of various competence mining the stockholders pocket books, if not the shale. By 1918 the estimated oil in the shale formations had climbed to twenty trillion barrels.

By 1920's several small mines and retorts were heating the shale rock and recovering the "oil" actually a substance known as Kerogen. Working mines on the cliffs was not easy and on July 30' 1921 disaster struck when a steel cable supporting a tram car operation up Wheeler Gulch just north of Parachute gave way, killing seven miners.



First working retort picture by Dean Winchester

In 1924 the Federal Government decided that the Bureau of Mines should do a study. So a couple of trial retorts were built at the base of cliffs in an area known as Anvil Points. This location was just west of Rifle. This location was selected due to the large amount of oil shale rocks that had fallen off the cliffs above and were accessible for testing without mining. Experiments were carried out for three years and some “oil” was produced. But the discovery of oil in Texas and Oklahoma changed the nations supply of oil, and this was the key to the end of the first oil shale boom.

It would not be until 1947 that serious oil shale research would again be done in our area, but that is another story.

RIFLE HERITAGE CENTER NEWSLETTER

NEW BOARD MEMBERS

MARY ELDER
LOIS SCRIPTER

2015 MEMBERS LIST

Businesses:
ALPINE BANK
CHERYL & CO. REAL ESTATE
GRAND RIVER HOSPITAL DISTRICT
MICHAEL CHAFFEE – PHOTOGRAPHER
MILLERS DRY GOODS
NEW UTE THEATER SOCIETY
NITA SMITH - NLS BUSINESS SOLUTIONS
PEARSON INSURANCE
SOUTH BANK SECURE STORAGE
TOWN & COUNTRY VETERINARY HOSPITAL

UP COMING EVENTS

Feb. 15,2016 Board meeting 6:00 PM at Library

WEISS & ASSOCIATES
JEANS PRINTING
SPORTSMANS'S BARN TAXIDERMY

Individuals/Seniors/Families:

PHIL, MARLEA & MARCIA ANTES
LORI BABCOCK-WARGO
JUDY BUILTEMAN
TRAVIS & DIANA CASEY – Lifetime Membership
DAVID CAYTON – Lifetime Membership
BETTY CLIFFORD
GAIL COOMBS
ROGER & JANICE DAY
MARY ELDER
KIM FAZZI - Lifetime Membership
STEVEN FULLER
HARRY HUTTON
ALAN & PATTY LAMBERT
JAMES & ALBERTA LANGSTAFF
DAVID & SHIRLEY LAWSON
RUTH LAWSON
WALTER LEMON
JAKE & BECKY MALL
DIRK MYERS
DICK & KAREN RHOADES
KEVIN & KATHY RUNIA
CECIL & BETTY WALDRON
JOHN SCALZO
ELAINE & RAYMOND LANGSTAFF
MARRYHANNAH THROM

NEEDED ITEMS FOR DISPLAY

Ute and Native American artifacts and items.