



The Thorla-McKee Well

In 1814, Silas Thorla and Robert McKee drilled a hole near Caldwell, Ohio. Hoping to find an underground salty spring, they drilled a well approximately 475-feet-deep. They lined the well with a hollowed out Sycamore log and pumped out the water. Thorla and McKee had found the salty spring but it was contaminated with oil. At the time, oil was of very little use. Local residents tried to use the oil to burn in lamps, but it created a great deal of soot and smelled bad.



Thorla-McKee Oil Well

Courtesy of the *Mount Vernon News*

Peddlers learned of the well and gathered the oil by soaking blankets in it. They would wring out the blankets and collect the oil in bottles. They sold the bottled oil as Seneca Oil. It was supposed to have healing properties and by drinking the oil, almost any ailment would be cured. The oil sold for about \$20 a quart. Many people

bought it to help cure rheumatism, sprains and bruises.

Refining crude oil wasn't perfected until 1859, after which it was used for lamps and heating. In 1860, Ohio's first commercial oil well began production at Macksburg located in Washington County. From 1860 to 1998 over 267,000 wells were drilled in Ohio, making the state the fourth largest in oil production in the United States.

Today oil is a very important product. Oil and gas wells can be found in both rural and residential areas of the state. There are working wells in 68 of Ohio's 88 counties. Most Ohio wells are called marginal wells. This means that they produce less than 10 barrels a day.

The Thorla-McKee Well is no longer a working well. You can still visit the site where you can see the original hollowed out log enclosed in a cage made of pipes and wire fencing.

