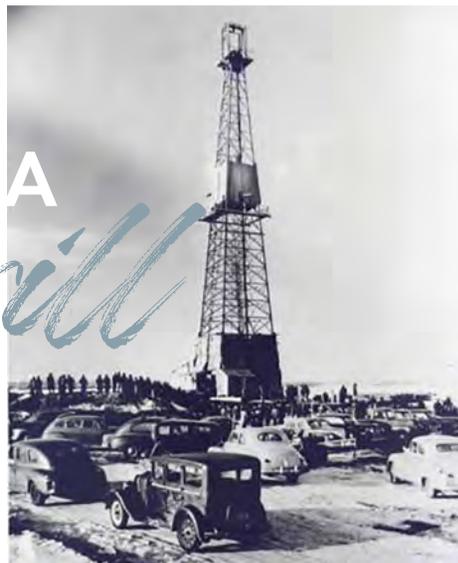


THIS IS NOT A

By Tamara Aschenbrenner

Drill

FROM OIL BOOM TO
ALTERNATIVE ENERGY



AN HISTORIC DAY IN 1947

On a frigid, windy February morning in 1947, 500 people gathered together in a field—waiting. These spectators included local farmers, Edmonton residents, reporters, politicians, and oil executives, collectively holding their breath for a glimpse of Alberta's future.

Canadian petroleum company Imperial Oil had spent millions of dollars the last few years with very little to show for it, but a 1946 seismologist survey suggested the region near Leduc, Alberta, included an oil-bearing Devonian formation. There was a lot of hope riding on the Leduc No. 1 exploratory well, even with Vern "Dry Hole" Hunter leading the team.

The eventual shot of that iconic geyser and its 15-metre fireball of flames on February 13, 1947, was soon splashed across newspapers, propelling the small central Alberta hamlet into history. A new era had begun. ▶



Now, 75 years later, the Canadian Energy Museum continues to keep that history alive. Originally opened in 1997 as the Leduc #1 Energy Discovery Centre, the CEM in Leduc County captures that historic day and its impact on the entire Canadian energy sector. With its rebranding in 2019, the museum is committed to an even broader focus that includes alternative energies and social histories.

Currently, the museum's collection includes the 1949 film, *A Mile Below the Wheat*, a 15-minute depiction of that eventful February day and the development of the Leduc field as workers and their families flocked to the site and built up both the town and the area. While accurate, educational, and historically essential, this film shows only part of the picture. As the museum's new executive director, Kayla Goodwin is seeking ways to broaden the narrative.

SHARING A BROADER STORY IN 2022

To celebrate the 75-year anniversary of the discovery of oil in Leduc, a brand-new documentary is scheduled to premiere on June 18, 2022. "A lot of the last names in the area are still last names that you can find on the original rig workers," says Goodwin. "There's a



sentimental piece to say, “This is my family history; this is where we came from.”

The Canadian Energy Museum partnered with Know History, which provides historical services for museums, non-profits, Indigenous organizations, and various corporations across Canada. At the time of our interview, historical researcher Christine Englot and her Know History team were still in pre-production. “We’re going to be interviewing people in the community whose ancestors might have been involved or have just been in the area for a while and have been impacted by the discovery of oil,” she shared. Know History had laid out the general story and were in the midst of research, but were still scheduling interviews and had not yet started filming. While there have been documentations of the engineering feats involved in the oil discovery, Goodwin, Englot, and their respective teams know there are still stories to learn regarding the wider social impact on the workers and their families, the growth of the general community, and the number of affected communities.

Before the oil boom, the small town of Leduc was home to roughly 900 people. Thousands flocked to and built up the area, and the once-rural community eventually earned its City status in 1983. The City of Leduc is now home to more families, workers, and businesses than the 1947 group probably imagined for their little oil boomtown, but that small-town spirit remains strong. “I’m really close at heart to ‘Shop Local,’ so we tend to try to fill our [museum] gift shop with as much local product as we can,” says Goodwin. “And then for our 75th anniversary, I put the call out to all Leduc, Wetaskiwin, and Devon non-profits to give them a free booth at the event.” Many local groups are banding together to celebrate the milestone. ▶





DIGGING BEYOND THE OIL

“In the context of the bigger picture, the oil industry is *transformation*. Global events also have a role to play. Even things like the Second World War had a part to play in oil and gas drilling activities that happened through the late 1930s and 1940s,” says Bandita Deka Kalita. As a PhD student in the Department of Strategic Management and Organization at the Alberta School of Business, she has been researching the organizational facets of the oil and gas industry in Alberta and its transformations between 1938 and 2019.

The Leduc discovery spurred questions about industry regulations, which led to changes and restructurings over the years. “I don’t think [we] would have been talking about transitions and moving away from fossil fuels had the discovery not happened—had we not lived through these decades of economic prosperity that it brought,” says Deka Kalita.

The controversy and sensitivity surrounding oil and gas balances economic and familial aspects with

environmental and technological changes. It’s why the Canadian Energy Museum is adamant about preserving this history, while still looking forward. “It’s sort of the father of Alberta’s energy sector, and as Alberta keeps growing, so do our energy strategies,” says Goodwin.

The Canadian Energy Museum explores histories and sectors beyond oil, also covering the impact of the coal industry, innovations in safety, and geological discoveries. According to Goodwin, the museum is committed to renewable energy sectors as well, but she admits it can take a lot of patience to wait for the right donated artifacts to come in. “We tend to put the call out, so now we have a wind turbine, we have a solar panel,” she says. “But a lot of what I’m working on right now is an energy audit of the building to get a strategy to put in alternative energy and treat it as a sort of living museum.” The hope is to be able to, for example, show visitors solar panels in action as they heat the 15,000-square-foot building. This should allow the museum to educate more tangibly about different

alternative energies sooner than otherwise possible when relying on donations.

At the CEM, patrons can check out the original Leduc No. 1 rig a mere 200 meters from its original drill site and then step inside the world's largest drill bit. You can learn about the importance of coal mining in Canadian history, find out what a firefighter and canary have in common, and discover more about rocks, minerals, and Alberta's fossil reefs. The site also includes a playground and seasonal campground with water and power, perfect for a family weekend.

"We've just updated our Geology Wing, so all our fancy rocks are there. And we have the *Women in History* exhibition starting in April," says Goodwin. "I've had people say every time they come in that it's something different. And that's what I want it to be."

Watch the museum evolve and adapt before your eyes, just as our energy sectors do. 📍



YOU'RE INVITED

What: The official 75-year Anniversary Event!

When: Saturday, June 18, 2022

Where: Canadian Energy Museum
50399 Hwy. 60 South, Leduc County

Details: This full-on family event is ready to celebrate all things history and all things local! Come for food trucks, local vendors, the premiere of the exciting new documentary, and more family fun.



We can't wait to see you!



REYNOLDSMUSEUM.CA

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