



John Shaw. Photo from John H. McLaurin's *Sketches in Crude-oil*.



Hugh Nixon Shaw. Photo courtesy of the Oil Museum of Canada's collection.

*The Shaw Investigation:*

*A Review of Sources to Determine Who Drilled Canada's First Oil Gusher*

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## *The Shaw Investigation: Summary*

According to recent scholarship by Earle Gray and William R. Brice, the wrong man is being commemorated as the oil producer who brought in Canada's first gusher on January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1862. This illusive figure has variously been cited as John Shaw, James Shaw, and Hugh Nixon Shaw. An investigation has been conducted that analyzes primary and secondary sources to pin down the identity of the man who brought in Canada's first oil gusher. This report begins with a quick summary of the investigation's findings, following by three appendices that offer further depth and detail about the research conducted.

Sources consulted by this investigation show that the evidence supports John Shaw as the man who brought in the gusher. The earliest newspaper articles to attach a first name to the Shaw well use John Shaw, and never Hugh Nixon. The *Hamilton Times* of January 20<sup>th</sup>, one of the earliest accounts of the gusher, cites John Shaw. Another important newspaper article is from the *Sarnia Observer* on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 1866, and reports that John Shaw is returning to the site of his old gusher to try the spot again; this cannot be a confusion of names because Hugh Nixon passed away three years prior to the article.

Journals from the 1860s also point to John Shaw. J.H. Fairbank's diary from 1862 – 1864 records important business dealings and a close friendship with Hugh Nixon, and a disdainful attitude towards another Shaw (presumably John, who was "peddling oil like an ass.") Hugh Nixon's personal journal from 1861 – 1863 recorded his business transactions and income, and mentions nothing about an oil gusher. The journal also fails to show fluctuations in his income that would reflect a sudden burst of wealth in early 1862.

Available land records recording owners and lessees for Lot 18, Concession 2 are all signed John Shaw. Hugh Nixon's obituary mentions nothing about oil gushers, while the obituaries for both James/John Shaw and his wife Jane commemorate John as the man who struck the gusher. Secondary sources written by historians and reporters until 1940 almost unanimously point to John Shaw as the man who brought in the gusher, the exception being the *Belden Illustrated Historical Atlas of 1880*, a major anomaly. The shift to Hugh Nixon as the man credited for the gusher did not occur until the mid-1900s.

This report contains three Appendices substantiating this short summary. **Appendix 1: List of Sources** provides a comprehensive list of all sources cited in this report, as well as additional sources that were not cited but mention the Shaw well or Shaw debate. **Appendix 2: Overview of Key Evidence for John/James Shaw** reviews the evidence outlined above in further detail, fleshing out the argument that John Shaw did indeed bring in Canada's first oil gusher. **Appendix 3: Analysis of Secondary Material – Determining When Hugh Nixon Became Recognized as the Gusher Driller** examines documents from the mid-1900s to uncover when the shift occurred, and Hugh Nixon began receiving credit for the gusher.

## Appendix 1: List of Sources

This summary of sources lists articles, records, and books that have discussed the Shaw well, and organizes them into categories. The first, “Sources Mentioning ‘Shaw,’” lists works that discuss the “Shaw well” and do not attach a first name. The second, “Sources Mentioning ‘John,’” lists sources that claim John Shaw brought in the gusher. The third and fourth perform the same function for James and Hugh Nixon, respectively. The fifth category, “Debates on Shaw vs Shaw,” highlights the work of historians and reporters who have argued on the topic. All lists are arranged chronologically, which is especially significant when looking at the publication dates of the secondary sources. The majority of historical works written from approximately 1960 to 2000 have not been highlighted here, due to the fact that they all suggest Hugh Nixon and quote/reference the older sources that are included in this list.

### 1. Sources Mentioning “Shaw”

- *London Free Press*, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1862, “A Freak Fortune – Enniskillen Oil!”
- *Toronto Globe*, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1862, “Extraordinary Oil Developments in Enniskillen”
- *Sarnia Observer*, January 24<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “The Canadian Oil Wells”
- *Toronto Leader*, January 27<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “The Extraordinary Flow of Oil at Enniskillen”
- *Hamilton Times*, January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “The Oil Wealth”
- *Toronto Globe*, January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “The Oil Wells of Enniskillen”
- *London Free Press*, January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “The Great Enniskillen Oil Springs”
- *London Free Press*, February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “Fresh Burst Out at the Oil Springs”
- *London Free Press*, February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “The Oil Wells of Enniskillen”
- *Toronto Leader*, February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “The Enniskillen Oil Regions”
- *Sarnia Observer*, February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “The Oil Wells of Enniskillen”
- *Christian Guardian*, February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “The Oil Wells of Enniskillen”
- *London Free Press*, February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “Another Flowing Well”
- *Toronto Globe*, February 20<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “The Oil Springs”
- *Toronto Globe*, February 20<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “A Visit from Dresden to the Enniskillen Oil Region”
- *Toronto Globe*, March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “The Oil Springs of Enniskillen”
- *Sarnia Observer*, March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “Visit to the Oil Wells”
- *Hamilton Times*, April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “Oil Wells”
- Logan, William E. *Descriptive Catalogue of a Collection of the Economic Minerals of Canada and its Crystalline Rocks*. Montreal: Printed by John Lovell, 1862.
- *Toronto Globe*, January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1863, “The Enniskillen Oil Springs”
- *Toronto Globe*, January 21<sup>st</sup>, 1863, “Items from the Oil Springs”
- *Sarnia Observer*, August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1863, “The Oil Trade”

- Fleming, Sandford. *Notes on the Present Condition of the Oil Wells of Enniskillen*, read before the Canadian Institute, February 29<sup>th</sup>, 1863.
- Rand, Theodore D. “The Occurrence of Petroleum in Canada,” paper read before the Canadian Institute, published in *The Artizan*, November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1865.
- Henry, J.T. *The Early and Late History of Petroleum, with authentic facts in regards to its development in western Pennsylvania...* Philadelphia & New York, 1873. “The Oil Fields of Canada” chapter.
- Whiteshot, Charles A. *The Oil-Well Driller: A history of the world’s greatest enterprise, the oil industry*. West Virginia: The Acme Publishing Company, 1905.
  - Repeats verbatim account from J.T. Henry’s *The Early and Late History of Petroleum*
- Johnston, Arthur B. *Recollections of Oil Drilling at Oil Springs, Ontario*. London, 1938.

## 2. Sources Mentioning “John Shaw”

- *Hamilton Times*, January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “Extraordinary Flowing Oil Well”
  - Identifies John Shaw as the man who brought in the first gusher: “... to-day at half past eleven o’clock, a.m., Mr. John Shaw, from Kingston, C.W., tapped a vein of oil in his well... the present enormous flow of oil cannot be estimated at less than two thousand barrels per day, (twenty-four hours), of pure oil...”
- *Toronto Leader*, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1862, “Extraordinary Flowing Oil Well”
  - Reprinted from the *Hamilton Times*, January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1862; the same article verbatim.
- *Toronto Globe*, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “A Promising Trade”
  - Detailed rendition of the John Shaw story, and one that is often quoted and referred to by later writers. Author was using a style of reporting that might have been more concerned with telling a dramatic story than giving the facts about Shaw’s discovery. Began the article by describing his style: “... the fashion in newspaper articles now a-days – a fashion set by the *London Times*, and faithfully followed by all the lesser lights – to commence as far off from your actual subject as you can, and show your ingenuity by bringing the reader gradually to the matter at hand.”
- *Hamilton Times*, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “Another Extraordinary Flowing Oil Well – Great Excitement”
  - Identifies John Shaw as the man who brought in the first gusher: “Mr. John Shaw’s perseverance and industry in his search after the “grease” has fairly developed this theory, and his successful experiment procured for him a flowing well to the happy tune of over two thousand barrels per day.”
- *The Canadian Native Oil; Its story, its uses, and its profits, with some account of a visit to the oil wells*. London: Ashby & Co., 1862.
  - Identifies John Shaw as the man who brought in the first gusher; uses the *Globe*’s February 5<sup>th</sup> article, “A Promising Trade,” and repeats it almost verbatim.
- Mrs. Robinson, *An Early Record*, c. 1862.
  - From c. 1862, information provided about thirty-three wells in Oil Springs. Following is said about Shaw’s well: “John Shaw: Well No, 6; Lot No, 18; Con No, 2; Ft. in Surface, 46; Ft. in Rock, 158; Bbls. per day, 2500.”
- Description of leases and sales for Subdivision Lot 7 in Range B of W.E. Sanborn’s plan of Lot 18, Con. 2.
  - All transactions in reference to the land where the oil gusher was struck are made with John Shaw.

- *New York Times*, January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1865, “The Oil Question”
  - Identifies John Shaw as the man who brought in the first gusher: “One John Shaw also drilled a hole... this well flowed 3,000 barrels daily for about one year and a half...”
- *New York Times*, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1866, “Petroleum: The Oil Fields of Canada West”
  - Identifies John Shaw as the man who brought in the first gusher: “One John Shaw, a Canadian by birth, conceived the idea of deeper drilling, and after a long and wearisome task, almost despairing of success, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of January, 1862, reached a very prolific vein...”
- *Sarnia Observer*, May 11<sup>th</sup>, 1866, “Oil Items”
  - Reports on John Shaw deciding to give his old well another try; printed after the death of Hugh Nixon Shaw in 1863. Article reads, “Mr. John Shaw, who suddenly found himself famous one day early in 1862, is about to give the old spot another good ‘try’ over again.”
- Philp, Robert Kemp. *A Journey of Discovery All Round our House or the Interview*. London: Houlston and Wright, 1867.
  - Uses *Globe* February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1862 article (“A Promising Trade”) to tell the story of John Shaw as the man who brought in the gusher: “There is a story told in the *Toronto Globe* of February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1862, which, as the well is alluded to in Sir W. Logan’s official report...”
- Death Certificate, Jane Shaw, Deceased February 22<sup>nd</sup>, Registered February 24<sup>th</sup>, 1880.
  - No mention of John Shaw; but substantiates Jane Shaw’s obituary.
- *The Petrolia Advertiser-Topic*, February 26<sup>th</sup>, 1880, Jane Shaw Obituary
  - Identifies Jane Shaw as the wife of John Shaw: “Jane Shaw, relict of the late John Shaw... Her husband, who died nine years ago from the same complaint [inflammation of the lungs] was well known here from his connection with the petroleum trade, having struck, at Oil Springs in the month of January, 1862, the largest producing oil well ever struck in the world.”
- McLaurin, John J. *Sketches in Crude-oil: Some Accidents and Incidents of the Petroleum Development in all Parts of the Globe*. Connecticut: Hyperion Press, 1902.
  - Claims John Shaw began drilling in the summer of 1860; was low on credit and disrespected when he brought in the gusher; well only produced four months; flaunted and squandered his wealth, was “...uneducated and fell ready prey to sharpers on the watch for easy victims. Cargoes of oil shipped to England brought small returns and his sudden wealth slipped away in short order.” Puts death at 1872 in Petrolea.
- McLaurin, John J. *The Oil City Derrick*, July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1914, “How Ontario Came to be on the Map”
  - Identifies John Shaw as the man who brought in the first oil gusher: “Late in the fall of 1860, when the scramble for territory had abated a trifle, John Shaw managed to lease a desirable plot... one forenoon he vainly implored the local dealer to sell him boots and provisions and the blacksmith to sharpen his bit.”
- Tait, Samuel W. *The Wildcatters: An Informal History of Oil-Hunting in America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946.
  - Claims John Shaw was present in Oil Springs as early as 1856, “In 1856 people in southwestern Ontario called John Shaw an insane Yankee because he wanted to drill a well...” Claims Shaw was eventually “defrauded on shipments of oil to England and in other ways.”
- Wallen, Charles. “Colorful Early History of Oil Springs Field,” newspaper unknown. Petrolia, January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1936.

- Identifies John Shaw as the man who brought in the first oil gusher: “The ill-fated partner was none other than John Shaw an itinerant photographer, who was later to gain fame as the discoverer of the world-famous Shaw well.”
- Yates, A.J. “Early Days in Oil Springs” account, September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1931. Reproduced in the “Tweedsmuir History of Oil Springs.”
  - Identifies John Shaw as the man who brought in the first oil gusher: “I recall the excitement over the flowing well, owned by John Shaw, a photographer from Napanee, during the winter of ’62. It was one of the first, if not the first rock well, the others being surface wells...”

### 3. Sources Mentioning “James Shaw”

- *Sarnia Observer*, July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1871, “Death of a Well-Known Oil Man”
  - Obituary for James Shaw: “Mr. James B. Shaw, one of the pioneers of the Canadian Oil business, and the person who owned one of the original flowing wells at Oil Springs, died last week at Petrolea.”
- Ross, Victor. *Petroleum in Canada*. Toronto: Southam Press Limited, 1917.
  - Identifies James Shaw as the man who brought in the first gusher: “... February, 1862, however, that what may be termed the first real oil well was drilled. This was the achievement of James Shaw, a poor photographer, who had lived in the vicinity for many years, and had been a close observer of the methods of the prospectors.”
- *Imperial Oil Review*, August, 1930, “Petrolia, Cradle of Oil-Drillers”
  - Identifies James Shaw as the man who brought in the first gusher: “In 1862, however, James Shaw drilled through the rock at a depth of 165 feet to a depth of 240 feet, and his well was a ‘gusher.’”
- *The Petrolia Advertiser-Topic*, October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1936, “Petrolia, Cradle of Oil Drillers”
  - Reprinted from the *Imperial Oil Review*, August, 1930. “In 1862, however, James Shaw drilled through the rock at a depth of 165 feet to a depth of 240 feet, and his well was a ‘gusher.’”

### 4. Sources Mentioning “Hugh [Nixon] Shaw”

- *Toronto Globe*, September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1861, “The Oil Regions No. II”
  - Mentions Hugh Shaw in relation to his new refining processes, not in relation to digging oil wells. All it has to say about Hugh Shaw is here: “When the sun shines upon the oil, green, blue, red and brown colours sparkle upon its surface. These colours, Mr. Hugh Shaw of Toronto says, he can extract at a cheap rate from the refuse oil after refining. They will form a superior description of unfading dyes and paints. Mr. Shaw is about patenting the discovery, and also a process of refining the oil, which he believes will considerably reduce its price, and what is equally desirable, completely deodorise it.”
- *Toronto Globe*, September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1861, “The Oil Region No. III”
  - Gives a list of important wells in the area and mentions: “No. 6 Shaw & Co., lessees. Well sunk 50 feet to rock; 70 feet bore in rock. Yield about 15 barrels each 24 hours.”
  - Also mentions Hugh Shaw when discussing the twenty-second well on the list of producing wells in Oil Springs: “No. 22, Messrs. Johnson & Co., of Montreal, own lot No. 18, 3<sup>rd</sup> concession. A well 60 feet deep has been sunk to the rock, and drilling will be commenced immediately. Mr. Hugh Shaw, who is interested in the matter, imagines he will have little difficulty in getting rid of the water with which the well is filled. He has had considerable experience in California. He proposes to erect a refinery near the well, as mentioned in a previous letter.”

- At the end of the article, it reads “In addition to the refinery already mentioned, which Mr. Shaw has it in contemplation to establish, a New York House entertains a similar scheme.” The correspondent writing “Oil Region No. III” is the same who wrote “Oil Region No. II.” Just because “No. 6 Shaw & Co.” was mentioned, and “Mr. Shaw” is here mentioned in connection with a refinery, does not mean the writer is referring to the same man.
- *Hamilton Times*, October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1861, “The Canada Oil Regions”
  - Mentions Hugh Shaw in relation to his refinery, not in relation to digging oil wells: “On this property [a large tract of land owned by Messrs. Greenshields & Johnson, of Montreal] Mr. Hughshaw, of Cooksville, C.W., purposes to build a refinery on the reserve appropriated for this purpose.”
- *Toronto Globe*, March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “The Oil Springs of Enniskillen”
  - Mentions Hugh Shaw in relation to his refinery and patent still, not in relation to digging oil wells: “The Montreal Company are about to start six of Mr. Hugh Shaw’s patent stills with a capacity of 15 barrels a day... Messrs. Liddell and Sherman and Mr. S.H. Smith, have each one of Hugh Shaw’s patent refiners, which distil about two barrels per day... oil is not deodorised, but merely distilled... able by once running the vapour through the worn more completely to rid it of all explosive elements than by any other process employed. His stills are like two sugar kettles placed one upon the other, forming together an iron globe... Mr. Shaw contends he retains many impurities in the retort, which otherwise would be carried into the oil.”
- *Hamilton Times*, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1862, “The Oil Diggings”
  - Mentions Hugh Shaw in relation to his refinery, not in relation to digging oil wells: “There are about ten refineries going into operation... Messrs. Webster & Co., Farren & Co., Hugh Shaw & Co., Savage & Co., and M.J. Liddell & Co., are amongst our established refiners.”
- *Toronto Globe*, February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1863, “Hugh Nixon Shaw Obituary”
  - Obituary does not identify Hugh Nixon Shaw as the man who brought in the first oil gusher. Only says: “Died - Of suffocation, caused by inhaling poisonous gases from a well at Oil Springs, Canada West, on the 11<sup>th</sup>, Hugh Nixon Shaw, Esq., merchant of Cooksville, aged 51 years. The funeral will take place on Sunday, the 15<sup>th</sup>, from his late residence, Cooksville, at 10 o’clock am. Friends are respectfully invited to attend without further notice.”
- *Toronto Globe*, February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1863, “From the Oil Springs”
  - Coroner’s results and witness reports on Hugh Nixon Shaw’s death; does not mention Hugh Nixon Shaw as the man who brought in the first oil gusher. Reads: “... further particulars of the death of Mr. Hugh Shaw in an oil well, on Wednesday. One of the men employed about the well at the time, and a witness, stated: ‘Deceased was lowered into the well by myself and Mr. Stewart, a depth of about fifteen feet; after deceased had taken hold of the pipe, he asked to be hauled up; witness and Mr. Stewart commenced to wind him up by the windlass; witness thinks deceased called the second time to be hauled up, but is not sure; heard him drawing several long breaths, or breathing heavily; at that instant he fell back into the oil and disappeared. Witness says deceased was a man of temperate habits; deceased consulted no person about going down into the well; lifted the covering from the well himself, and gave orders to be lowered into it.’” Goes on to give details from attending physician.
- *Christian Guardian*, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1863, “Mr. Hugh Nixon Shaw, of Cooksville”
  - Obituary does not mention Hugh Nixon Shaw as the man who brought in the first oil gusher, only says, “Hugh Nixon Shaw, of Cooksville; native of Dublin, Ireland; died February 11<sup>th</sup>; engaged in mercantile business in Cooksville; one of oldest and most respected proprietors of oil wells at Oil Springs; death was occasioned by suffocation, from inhaling obnoxious gases while in an oil well, into which he had descended for the purpose of pulling up a piece of gas pipe; long been in the enjoyment of religion; conversion took place in his twenty-first year; united with the Wesleyan Methodist Church; consistent and devoted member of the church.”

- **Hugh Nixon Shaw journal, 1861 – 1863**
  - This journal was kept by Hugh Nixon Shaw between 1861 and 1863, and lists many of his business dealings and expenditures, although is of poor quality in handwriting that is very difficult to decipher. Additionally, the journal is not complete; it will list expenditures for one month, and then skip several months before expenditures are listed again.
  - Some of the journal’s contents date after Hugh Nixon’s death, including notes on the settlement of Shaw’s estate, which Robert Harkness claimed “[The notes were] evidently made by Bart Shaw [Bartholomew, Hugh Nixon’s son] who was in Oil Springs in June and July (see Fairbank notes) to settle Hugh Shaw estate.”
  - The journal does not contain any notations or business transactions that suggest Hugh Nixon experienced a massive spike in oil production in January, 1862. There are no reports of large amounts of crude being collected from his own well, no reports of payments made to W.E. Sanborn (who had leased the lucky spot), or reports of that quantity of oil being shipping to Wyoming.
  - As mentioned above, the journal is a difficult read, and does not appear to be a complete account of Hugh Nixon’s business transactions.
- ***Christian Guardian*, May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1865, “An Admonitory Occasion”**
  - Article looks back on the lives of Hugh Nixon Shaw following the recent death of his wife Anne Shaw (February 17<sup>th</sup>, 1865). Also mentions death of Bartholomew Shaw (their son) on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1865. Overview of Hugh Nixon Shaw’s life makes no mention of the gusher: “... in a respectable business at Cooksville, suddenly deprived of life in an oil well February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1863; his habits were pious...”
- ***Belden Illustrated Historical Atlas*, 1880**
  - First source to identify Hugh Shaw as the man who brought in the gusher: “... the ‘flowing’ wells... The first of these was struck by Hugh Shaw, originally a photographer from Strathroy, who came here in the early days of the oil discovery, invested all he had in the purchased and development of oil territory, and was one of four (the others being J.M. Williams, Jas. Thompson, and W.E. Sanborn) who laid out the village in 1860. Just before he made this strike, he had been reduced by his want of success to such pecuniary straits, that it is related of him that the very day he struck oil he was refused credit for a pair of boots.”
- ***Windsor Daily Star*, October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1955, “Canadian Oil Companies Buys First Well Site”**
  - Identifies Hugh Nixon Shaw as the man who brought in the first oil gusher: “Canada’s first ‘gusher,’ a 2,000-barrels-a-day well, was brought in by Hugh Nixon Shaw in January 16, 1862.”
- ***Sarnia Observer*, July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1958, “Oil Pioneer’s Grandson Attends Centennial”**
  - Identifies Hugh Nixon Shaw as the man who brought in the first oil gusher: “... a totally unexpected climax to four days of centennial celebrations – the sudden appearance of the 80-year-old grandson of Hugh Nixon Shaw, discoverer of North America’s first flowing well.”
- ***Imperial Oil Review*, June, 1958, “North America’s Father of Oil”**
  - Identifies Hugh Nixon Shaw as the man who brought in the first oil gusher: “Hugh Nixon Shaw; 165 feet; water of Lake St. Clair black; one to three foot deep oil on 40 to 50 acres; oil men got around by leaping from log to log, using a pole to steady themselves.”
- ***London Free Press*, June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1958, “Oil Springs... Birthplace of the North American Oil Industry”**
  - Identifies Hugh Nixon Shaw as the man who brought in the first oil gusher: “...Canada’s first gusher – 2,000 barrels a day – was brought in by Hugh Nixon Shaw and tons of oil were lost because it couldn’t be barrelled fast enough.”

- William Shaw, Letter to Oil Museum of Canada Curator Mrs. McLaughlin, October 20<sup>th</sup>, 1961, with photos of Hugh Nixon Shaw attached. OMC Archives, Box 1 of 1, Shelf 3-4a, “Oil History,” in “Shaw, H.N.” file
  - Letter from Reverend William Shaw, submitting photos of Hugh Nixon Shaw and his family to the Oil Museum of Canada. William had been frequenting the museum with friends and relatives; this followed his July 1958 visit to the Oil Springs Centennial Celebrations, where he was revealed as Hugh Nixon’s grandson.

## 5. Sources Engaging the Shaw vs Shaw Debate

- Harkness, Robert B. *Makers of Oil History, 1850 – 1880*, c. 1939-1940.
  - Argues for Hugh Nixon Shaw: “All recent writers refer to Shaw as James, John or J.W., if an initial is given, and call him an American from Pennsylvania, evidently confusing him with Lick; but the *Globe* correspondent (September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1861) calls him Hugh Shaw, as do all contemporary writers, and says he has considerable experience in California and is about to erect a refinery and has patented a process for refining oil as well as extracting colours therefrom. His home is variously assigned to Kingston and Toronto, but in his obituary notice (*Globe*, February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1863) it is given as Cooksville, Ontario...”
- Lauriston, Victor. *Lambton County’s Hundred Years: 1849 – 1949*. Haines Frontier Printing Company: Sarnia, 1949.
  - Argues for Hugh Nixon Shaw: “The daily issues from 1861 to 1866, and the annual reports published each January from 1867 to 1873, make no reference whatever, in connection with the oil fields, to any John or James Shaw... the Oil Springs correspondent... refers to him consistently as Hugh Shaw. His full name was Hugh Nixon Shaw, and, far from being a “sturdy, muscular, uneducated labourer” he appears to have been a quite outstanding man in the community.”
- *Imperial Oil Review*, April, 1959, “Who Really Drilled the Great Shaw Well?”
  - Argues for John Shaw: “More likely, the honor should have gone to John Shaw, an obscure photographer-turned-driller from Kingston, Ont., and Port Huron, Mich., a man whose public life was as spectacular – and short-lived – as the first gusher... Difficult to reconcile talented well-known figure [Hugh Nixon Shaw] with the obscure driller whom reporters belatedly found to be “a gentleman” and “easy of access.” In fact, no description written of the driller in 1862 coincides with what we know of H.N. Shaw.
- Correspondence re: Fergus Cronin’s article, “Who Really Drilled the Great Shaw Well?” Cronin to Charles O. Fairbank, July 12<sup>th</sup>, 1958.
  - Cronin was asked to write a piece about the Shaw debate for the *Imperial Oil Review* (“Who Really Drilled the Great Shaw Well?”), and here he is conducting research for that piece. Cronin seeks proof dating back to the 1860s that shows Hugh Nixon as the oil driller in question. Here, he asks Fairbank for information from J.H. Fairbank’s diary, which Cronin had heard was in his possession (from a June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1958 article in the *Sarnia Observer*). Cronin notes, “As you know, he has been variously called John, James, and Hugh Nixon Shaw, and although the general opinion now is that the last is his correct name, I have so far been unable to find proof of this – at least, I have not found any proof which dates back to the 1860s... none of the obituaries for Hugh Nixon Shaw mention that he was the man who struck the gusher.”
- Correspondence re: Fergus Cronin’s article, “Who Really Drilled the Great Shaw Well?” Fairbank to Cronin, July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1958.

- Fairbank's reply to Cronin's inquiry. Indignant about Cronin's suggestion that the oil man may have been John or James Shaw: "Through a study made by Colonel Bruce Harkness, retired Oil and Gas Commissioner for Ontario, who now lives at Port Rowan, Ontario, it has been conclusively proven that Hugh Nixon Shaw was the gentleman who drilled the first flowing well in Oil Springs..." No details about what that proof is, or where to find it, although he suggests that on asking Harkness "he would give the information in more detail." Fairbank provides the quotation from the diary from February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1863, describing sorrow at Shaw's sudden passing.
- Gray, Earle. *Ontario's Petroleum Legacy: The birth, evolution, and challenges of a global industry*. Edmonton: Heritage Community foundation, 2008. p. 32.
  - Gray relates the history of early oil production in Oil Springs, and as he tells the story of the first oil gusher, he refers exclusively to John Shaw, not even mentioning Hugh Nixon: "... Canada's first oil gusher blew... the gusher belonged to an itinerant American photographer, John Shaw." Following this statement, he has an asterisk and a note, which explains how the Shaw story has been changed over time.
- Brice, William R. *Myth, Legend, Reality: Edwin Laurentine Drake and the Early Oil Industry*. Chicora, Pennsylvania: Mechling Bookbindery, 2009. p. 566 – 569.
  - Brice relies heavily on the research done by Earle Gray, and also argues that John Shaw was the man who brought in the gusher. He points to a series of newspaper articles, as well as secondary sources from John J. McLaurin, Charles A. Whiteshot, and J.T. Henry.

## Appendix 2: Overview of Key Evidence for John/James Shaw

### 1. *First Accounts of the Gusher: all name John Shaw*

The first article to attach a first name to the “Shaw well” appeared in the *Hamilton Times* on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “Extraordinary Flowing Oil Well.”<sup>1</sup> This is the first article to report on the Shaw gusher (the *London Free Press* reported on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1862, and the *Toronto Globe* on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1862; neither article attached a first name to the Shaw well.)<sup>2</sup> The *Hamilton Times* received this report from a correspondent in the field: “... to-day at half past eleven o’clock, a.m., Mr. John Shaw, from Kingston, C.W., tapped a vein of oil in his well... the present enormous flow of oil cannot be estimated at less than two thousand barrels per day, (twenty-four hours), of pure oil...” The *Toronto Leader* reprinted this article on January 22<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>3</sup>

Another reference to the first name of the man who brought in the Shaw well does not appear until February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1862, in the *Toronto Globe*’s “A Promising Trade.”<sup>4</sup> See **Appendix 1** for a complete list of articles that mention either the “Shaw well” or the “John Shaw well.” It is important to note that no early articles refer to the “Hugh Shaw well.”

### 2. *Sarnia Observer, May 11<sup>th</sup> 1866: Reference to John Shaw returning to “the old spot”*

A notable article appears in the *Sarnia Observer* on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 1866, entitled “Oil Items,” which offers further evidence that John Shaw drilled the gusher. This article related the following news under the heading “The Shaw Well:”

Mr. John Shaw, who suddenly found himself famous one day early in 1862, is about to give the old spot another good “try” over again. He has a three inch pump, and a boiler, much the largest in the diggings, which ought to be capable of driving two or three such pumps. He is found to try what virtue there is in making a heavy “draw,” a long pull and a strong pull, on the old source of supply. The arrangements now making by Mr. Shaw on the east gumbeds territory, ought to settle the question were long, of whether oil in large quantities still exists there, merely kept back by water – and whether the power of steam machinery is capable of bringing the oil up.

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<sup>1</sup> *Hamilton Times*, “Extraordinary Flowing Oil Well.” January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1862, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *London Free Press*, “A Freak Fortune – Enniskillen Oil!” January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1862, p. 2. *Toronto Globe*, “Extraordinary Oil Developments in Enniskillen.” January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1862, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Toronto Leader*, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1862, “Extraordinary Flowing Oil Well,” p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Toronto Globe*, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “A Promising Trade,” p. 2. This article is widely utilized and quoted when historians are discussing the Shaw story, and contains many of its most interesting details (for example, Shaw being unable to receive credit for a pair of boots days before the gusher blew).

It seems unlikely that this item would have appeared in the newspaper had John Shaw not been the man who brought in the gusher. Additionally, no name confusion can possibly be present in this article, since Hugh Nixon had passed away over three years before its publication.

### 3. *Land records: John Shaw on Lot 18, Con. 2 in several different sources*

Land records are another source that can illuminate the Shaw identity. One of the earliest records of oil well operators in Oil Springs was written by a Mrs. Robinson in 1862. She identified Well #6 as “John Shaw: Lot No. 18; Con. No. 2; Ft. in Surface, 46; Ft. in Rock, 158; Bbls. per day, 2500.” Additionally, the description of leases and sales for Subdivision Lot 7 in Range B of W.E. Sanborn’s plan of Lot 18, Con. 2 identifies John Shaw and never mention Hugh Nixon.<sup>5</sup>

### 4. *Obituaries: John’s refer to the gusher; Hugh Nixon’s does not*

Obituaries are another key source of evidence that support John/James Shaw. The *Sarnia Observer*’s “Death of a Well-Known Oil Man” on July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1871, commemorated the passing of “Mr. James B. Shaw, one of the pioneers of the Canadian Oil business, and the person who owned one of the original flowing wells at Oil Springs, died last week at Petrolea.”<sup>6</sup> Nine years later, John/James Shaw’s wife Jane also passed, and *The Petrolia Topic* included the following obituary on February 26<sup>th</sup>, 1880: “Jane Shaw, relict of the late John Shaw... Her husband, who died nine years ago from the same complaint [inflammation of the lungs] was well known here from his connection with the petroleum trade, having struck, at Oil Springs in the month of January, 1862, the largest producing oil well ever struck in the world.”<sup>7</sup>

Hugh Nixon’s obituaries mention nothing about any involvement with an important oil gusher.<sup>8</sup>

### 5. *Secondary Sources up to 1940: All reference John Shaw*

Historical accounts and newspaper articles describing the history of oil production in Enniskillen consistently referred to John/James Shaw until Harkness’s publication in 1940 (see **Appendix 3** for more details). John J. McLaurin, Samuel W. Tait, Charles Wallen, Victor Ross,

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<sup>5</sup> Description of leases and sales for Subdivision Lot 7 in Range B of W.E. Sanborn’s plan of Lot 18, Con. 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Sarnia Observer*, “Death of a Well-Known Oil Man,” July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1871, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Petrolia Topic*, “Deceased,” February 26<sup>th</sup>, 1880, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Obituaries for Hugh Nixon Shaw are found in: *Toronto Globe*, “Died,” February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1863, p. 2; *Toronto Globe*, “From the Oil Springs,” February 18<sup>th</sup>, 1863, p. 1; *Christian Guardian*, “Mr. Hugh Nixon Shaw, of Cooksville,” May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1863, p. 88; *Christian Guardian*, “An Admonitory Occasion,” May 31<sup>st</sup>, 1865, p. 86.

and Selwyn P. Griffin all attributed the gusher to John Shaw in accounts written pre-1940 (see **Appendix 1** for a list of publication names and dates).

The notable exception to this trend is the *Belden Illustrated Historical Atlas* of 1880, which clearly attributes the gusher to Hugh Shaw. It is an anomaly, and this investigation has concluded that it must have been a mistake by the compiler of the atlas. Perhaps the compiler of the atlas was referring to the same *Globe* articles as Harkness and Lauriston (more details in **Appendix 3**) and reached the same conclusion. The *Historical Atlas* and its implications are discussed further at the beginning of **Appendix 3**.

#### 6. *The J.H. Fairbank journal: describes both Shaws*

The journal kept by local oil producer J.H. Fairbank between 1862 and 1864 has been cited by Harkness as evidence that Hugh Nixon was the man who brought in the first gusher (see **Appendix 3** for more details.) However, if the journal is read in context, it becomes apparent that there is never any reference to the actual oil gusher.

In fact, Fairbank describes both Shaws in his journal, and he makes disparaging remarks about one of them. November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1862, Fairbank recorded, “Shaw peddling oil he is a big ass; would do a smashing business at selling molasses candy and peanuts, ye gods; what money he would make at training dogs.” This is in direct contrast to the way Fairbank discusses Hugh Nixon. Fairbank discusses their business dealings in some detail over a series of months:

- September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1862: “Went out to saw mill gave Bathurst order from H. Shaw for 2000 ft. of lumber, got 20 pcs 2X4X16...”
- January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1863: “At refinery, Shaws. Thompson got pipe of Henry brown, fixed up engine, bent pipe, etc...”
- January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1863: “... Borrowed one carboy of acid from Shaw.”
- February 9<sup>th</sup>, 1863: “Got 15 lime from Shaw...”

February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1863, the day that Hugh Nixon passed, Fairbank recorded this: “Poor Mr. H.N. Shaw drowned in his well to-day. In him I have lost one of my best friends in Enniskillen. A good man and most obliging neighbour. Sad, sad, sad calamity.” Fairbank goes on to assist in settling Hugh Nixon’s estate and deals with his son, Bartholomew Shaw, recording on June 24<sup>th</sup>, “Altered pump at refinery, barrelled oil. Wrote to B. Shaw,” and on July 1<sup>st</sup>, “At Shepherds in evening about tent well. B. Shaw settled with him for still.”

So there was a Shaw peddling oil in November, 1862, who apparently was a substantial enough figure in Oil Springs that Fairbank was annoyed by him. Additionally, while Fairbank discusses business dealings with Hugh Nixon, the gusher is never mentioned, nor is Hugh Nixon described as an oil driller; the focus is always on his other business endeavours.

### 7. *Shaw's personality as described in newspapers: Fits John, not Hugh Nixon*

Whether the man is being identified as Hugh Nixon or John/James Shaw, the story generally remains the same. Shaw is characterized as down-on-his-luck, chastised by his neighbours and fellow oil men, and almost completely broke when the gusher was struck in January, 1862. The story of how Shaw was refused credit for a pair of boots the morning of the gusher is attached to nearly every rendition of the tale. Newspaper articles commented that before the gusher, he was an undesirable figure in the community, while after he struck oil, he became *Mr. Shaw*. This characterization does not match what historians know about Hugh Nixon, a staunch Methodist and savvy businessman. Hugh Nixon was one of four men to lay out the village of Oil Springs in 1860 (along with J.M. Williams, Jason Thompson, and W.E. Sanborn). He was a successful merchant in Cooksville, and as early as the summer of 1861, had patented a still for distilled oil. Shaw also owned and operated local refineries. This man cannot be reconciled with the tale of the Shaw who brought up the first oil gusher. However, John/James Shaw, who worked odd jobs (most often cited as photography) and moved often, is much more believable as the community clown who could not afford a pair of boots the morning he struck lucky.

Additionally, the Shaw who brought in the Shaw well is never identified as being from Cooksville or Toronto. The Hugh Shaw discussed in the *Globe* in relation to his refinery and distilling process is always cited as being from Cooksville, or Toronto; the same location is given in the Hugh Nixon obituaries. John/James Shaw is attributed to a variety of different locations, as is the driller of the Shaw well: however, none of those locations are ever Toronto or Cooksville.

### 8. *Hugh Nixon Shaw's journal, 1861 - 1863*

The journal kept by Hugh Nixon Shaw from 1861 to 1863 is another valuable source of information in the Shaw investigation, and substantiates the evidence outlined above about Shaw's character. Hugh Nixon recorded information about business transactions, income and payments from his early days working in oil production until his death on February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1863. The journal also contains an analysis of his assets, conducted by his son Bartholomew, after his death. Hugh Nixon's journal shows that he had substantial business transactions with many significant oil producers in the area, including Fairbank, Liddell, Smith and Sisk, in 1861.<sup>9</sup> Records of expenses for September and October of 1861 show that Hugh Nixon was hiring labourers, selling conductors, travelling to London, lending out drilling tools, and selling timber.<sup>10</sup> Hugh Nixon was an active member of the community, he did business with the most important oil dealers in the area, and he had a steady and prosperous business. This figure cannot be reconciled with the bare-footed, penniless Shaw who brought in Canada's first oil gusher.

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<sup>9</sup> Hugh Nixon Shaw journal, 1861 – 1863, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> Hugh Nixon Shaw journal, p. 31.

Additionally, the journal does not mention ever striking a gusher. Had Hugh Nixon brought in the gusher, it is likely that he would have recorded the experience in his journal. Even if that experience had not been recorded, his business transactions and income records should reflect substantial fluctuations. The journal is incomplete and difficult to decipher, but it does not mention and increase in business, or the striking of a major oil gusher.

#### 9. *The shift in the Shaw debate: the move to Hugh Nixon, now back to John*

Although the great shift from John to Hugh Nixon as the identity of the oil man began in the 1940s and 1950s, Fergus Cronin's "Who Drilled the Great Shaw Well?" in the *Imperial Oil Review* of April, 1959, argued that John Shaw struck the gusher (more in **Appendix 3.**) Recently, two scholars interesting in the history of oil production have readdressed the Shaw question and argued for John. Earle Gray's *Ontario's Petroleum Legacy: The birth, evolution, and challenges of a global industry* is one of the first books written recently that asserts John Shaw brought in the gusher. Gray points to Harkness and Lauriston as the point when "the confusion of Hugh Nixon Shaw with John Shaw arose."<sup>11</sup> Gray goes on to provide some references to newspaper descriptions of Shaw, and asserts that "the known contemporary records identify the discoverer as John Shaw, while almost every account since the 1950s credits Hugh Shaw."<sup>12</sup> William R. Brice's *Myth, Legend, Reality: Edwin Laurentine Drake and the Early Oil Industry*, reiterates the research done by Gray (same newspaper articles) and substantiates that work with several secondary sources, including J.T. Henry's *The Early and Late History of Petroleum*, Charles A. Whiteshot's *The Oil-Well Driller: A history of the world's greatest enterprise, the oil industry*, and John J. McLaurin's *Sketches of Crude-oil*. Brice is strongly in the John Shaw camp.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Earle Gray, *Ontario's Petroleum Legacy: The birth, evolution, and challenges of a global industry*. Edmonton: Heritage Community foundation, 2008, p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> Gray, p. 32.

<sup>13</sup> William R. Brice, *Myth, Legend, Reality: Edwin Laurentine Drake and the Early Oil Industry*. Chicora, Pennsylvania: Mechling Bookbindery, 2009. p. 566 – 569.

### Appendix 3: Analysis of Secondary Material – Determining When Hugh Nixon Became Widely Recognized as the Gusher Driller

Until the Oil and Gas Commissioner of Ontario Colonel Robert Harkness's *Makers of Oil History* in 1940, the only primary or secondary source to refer directly to Hugh Shaw as the man who brought in the gusher was the *Belden Illustrated Historical Atlas* of 1880: "... the tapping of the 'flowing wells.' The first of these was struck by Hugh Shaw, originally a photographer from Strathroy..."<sup>14</sup> The 1880 *Historical Atlas* goes on to identify Hugh Shaw as one of four men who laid out the village in 1860 (with J.M. Williams, Jason Thompson, and W.E. Sanborn). This passage from the 1880 *Historical Atlas* is the only reference to Hugh Shaw in relation to the oil gusher until Harkness's *Makers of Oil History*.

*Makers of Oil History, 1850 – 1880* is a benchmark publication in the Shaw debate, and according to all sources consulted for this study, the first historical review of Oil Springs that identifies Hugh Nixon as the man who brought in the gusher. Following a close review of Harkness's text, it is not apparent that he has provided sufficient evidence to prove that Hugh Nixon brought in Canada's first oil gusher.

On page 8, Harkness misinterprets newspaper articles to promote Hugh Nixon as the man who brought in the oil gusher. He cites a *Globe* correspondent, who published four articles in a series entitled "The Oil Regions" (August 27<sup>th</sup>, September 2<sup>nd</sup>, September 6<sup>th</sup>, and September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1861). Harkness points to the September 6<sup>th</sup> article and claims:

... the *Globe* correspondent... calls him Hugh Shaw, as do all contemporary writers, and says he has had considerable experience in California and is about to erect and refinery and patented a process for refining oil as well as extracting colours therefrom. His home is variously assigned to Kingsnton and Toronto, but in his obituary notice (*Globe*, February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1863) it is given as Cooksville, Ontario.<sup>15</sup>

Harkness makes several assumptions in this passage. The article he is referring to, which discusses refining and extracting colours from oil, comes from the *Globe* correspondent's article from September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1861, *not* September 6<sup>th</sup>. The September 6<sup>th</sup> article merely states: "In addition to the refinery already mentioned, which Mr. Shaw has it in contemplation to establish, a New York House entertains a similar scheme."<sup>16</sup> The September 2<sup>nd</sup> article (and the one Harkness meant to cite) reads:

When the sun shines upon the oil, green, blue, red and brown colours sparkle upon its surface. These colours, Mr. Hugh Shaw of Toronto says, he can extract at a cheap rate

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<sup>14</sup> *Belden Illustrated Historical Atlas*, 1880, p. xxvii.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Harkness, *Makers of Oil History, 1850 – 1880*, c. 1939-1940, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> *Toronto Globe*, "The Oil Regions No. III," September 6<sup>th</sup>, 1861, p. 2.

from the refuse oil after refining. They will form a superior description of unfading dyes and paints. Mr. Shaw is about patenting the discovery, and also a process of refining the oil, which he believes will considerably reduce its price, and what is equally desirable, completely deodorise it.<sup>17</sup>

This *Globe* correspondent was writing more than four months before the oil gusher was struck. Once the *Globe* began reporting on the gusher in January, 1862, it was *never* identified as the “Hugh Shaw gusher” (and on February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1862, it is connected with John Shaw). Any mention of Hugh Shaw is always in relation to his refineries and not in relation to the gusher, and they are scarce. March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1862, the *Globe* ran an article entitled “The Oil Springs of Enniskillen,” which mentioned, “The Montreal Company are about to start six of Mr. Hugh Shaw’s patent stills with a capacity of 15 barrels a day... Messrs. Liddell and Sherman and Mr. S.H. Smith, have each one of Hugh Shaw’s patent refiners, which distil about two barrels per day... Mr. Shaw contends he retains many impurities in the retort, which otherwise would be carried into the oil.” In *Makers of Oil History*, Harkness presumes that because the *Globe* is commenting on Hugh Shaw’s refinery and patents, it is also referring to Hugh Shaw when discussing the “Shaw well.”

In a half-page of hand-written notes attached to an early copy of his *Makers of Oil History*, Harkness extends his discussion of John Shaw, noting, “... in the Lambton County Directory of 1864 – 1865... Here will be found ‘John Shaw, Oil Land Proprietor’ thereby making it clear that there were two Shaws. How John Shaw could live in Petrolia, enjoying the glory of his gallant pioneer-namesake Hugh Nixon Shaw, along with men who knew this to be incorrect, is extraordinary.”<sup>18</sup> Harkness is right in asserting there are two Shaws, but he has not brought forward any convincing evidence.

Following Harkness’s *Makers of Oil History*, other historians and journalists began to cite Hugh Nixon as the man responsible for the first gusher. Victor Lauriston’s *Lambton County’s Hundred Years, 1849 – 1949* makes many of the same points as Harkness, citing the same *Globe* correspondent, who “refers to him consistently as Hugh Shaw.”<sup>19</sup> Additionally, Lauriston claims, “The daily issues [of the *Globe*] from 1861 to 1866, and the annual reports published each January from 1867 to 1873, make no reference whatever, in connection with the oil fields, to any John or James Shaw.”<sup>20</sup> In fact, the *Globe* featured a lengthy article on February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1862, “A Promising Trade,” which refers extensively to John Shaw.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Toronto Globe*, “The Oil Regions No. II,” September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1861, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Harkness, p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Victor Lauriston, *Lambton County’s Hundred Years: 1849 – 1959* (Sarnia: Haines Frontier Printing Company), p. 164.

<sup>20</sup> Lauriston, p. 164.

<sup>21</sup> *Toronto Globe*, “A Promising Trade,” February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1862, p. 2. Article includes quotations such as: “In a certain deep well near Victoria, on lot 18, in the second concession of the Township of Enniskillen. In that well, a certain

Harkness reiterates these ideas in *Canadian Oil and Gas Industries* in the February/March 1951 issue, in an article entitled “Ontario’s Part in the Petroleum Industry.”<sup>22</sup> Fergus Cronin’s “North America’s Father of Oil,” which appeared in the *Imperial Oil Review* in June, 1958, claims “Hugh Nixon Shaw drilled and brought in Canada’s first ‘gusher’...”<sup>23</sup> However, Cronin published another article in the *Imperial Oil Review* in April, 1959, “Who Really Drilled the Great Shaw Well?” that examined claims about the Shaw gusher. Cronin wrote to Charles O. Fairbank in July, 1958, inquiring if it would be possible to examine J.H. Fairbank’s journal for any references to Hugh Nixon Shaw.<sup>24</sup> He received a reply from Fairbank, which asserted:

Through a study made by Colonel Bruce Harkness, retired Oil and Gas Commissioner for Ontario, who now lives at Port Rowan Ontario, it has been conclusively proven that Hugh Nixon Shaw was the gentleman who drilled the first flowing well in Oil Springs. I have on hand the information given by Colonel Harkness though I feel on asking he would the information more in detail... Mr. Shaw apparently was a friend of my Grandfathers for I find his name in the diary you mention. On Wednesday February 11<sup>th</sup>, I find this notation: “Poor Mr. H.N. Shaw drowned in his well to-day, in him I have lost one of my best friends in Enniskillen. A good man and most obliging neighbour. Sad, sad, sad calamity.”<sup>25</sup>

Charles O. Fairbank failed to outline Harkness’s “conclusive proof” in his reply to Cronin, and the fact that Hugh Nixon was friends with J.H. Fairbank does not mean he was the man who brought in the oil gusher. Cronin’s article came down on the side of John/James Shaw as the correct man to credit for the discover of the oil gusher: “... the honor should have gone to John Shaw, an obscure photographer-turned-driller from Kingston, Ont., and Port Huron, Mich., a man whose public life was as spectacular – and short-lived – as the first gusher.”<sup>26</sup>

In spite of Cronin’s article and arguments, the Hugh Nixon gusher phenomenon gained credibility when Oil Springs held 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in 1958, and a flurry of articles began to circulate describing the history of oil production in Oil Springs and crediting Hugh Nixon with the oil gusher. The Reverend William G. Shaw, Hugh Nixon’s grandson, even made

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John Shaw centred all his hopes and expectations for many long months.” Article continues to tell Shaw’s story, referring to *John* Shaw a total of eight times.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Harkness, “Ontario’s Part in the Petroleum Industry,” *Canadian oil and Gas Industries*, Feb/Mar 1951. Article states: “... Shaw is constantly referred to as John Shaw, with the information that he died a penniless old man in Oil Springs. There were two Shaws: John Shaw, who may have been buried at public expense, appears in Sutherland’s Directory of Lambton County of 1865 as an oil land proprietor; but the Shaw who drilled the great flowing well that was publicized throughout the newspaper world, was Hugh Nixon Shaw...”

<sup>23</sup> Fergus Cronin, “North America’s Father of Oil,” *Imperial Oil Review*, vol. 42, num. 6, June, 1958, p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> Correspondence re: Fergus Cronin’s article, “Who Really drilled the Great Shaw Well?” Cronin to Charles O. Fairbank, July 12<sup>th</sup>, 1958.

<sup>25</sup> Correspondence re: Fergus Cronin’s article, “Who Really drilled the Great Shaw Well?” Fairbank to Cronin, July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1958.

<sup>26</sup> *Imperial Oil Review* 43.6, Fergus Cronin, “Who Really Drilled the Great Shaw Well?” April 1959, p. 27.

an appearance at Oil Springs to pay homage to his grandfather. He told the *Sarnia Observer*: “It wasn’t his oil experience that they wrote about when he died... He was a devout Christian and a very honourable man. I was quite surprised a number of years ago to find that there were write-ups about the Shaw well in the newspapers. Father referred to it occasionally but never attached any importance to it.”<sup>27</sup> Reverend Shaw is correct in asserting that none of Hugh Nixon’s obituaries ever mentioned an oil gusher; conversely, the obituaries for John/James Shaw and his wife Jane Shaw both discuss the family’s involvement with the oil gusher.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, the fact that the Shaw family never discussed the wells, and Reverend Shaw was not even truly aware of this family history until after Harkness began promoting Hugh Nixon as the man who brought in the oil gusher, suggests Hugh Nixon did not bring in the oil gusher.

By 1958, enough influential figures and historians had become determined that Hugh Nixon drilled the oil gusher, and John’s story faded into the background. Given the sources consulted during this research and the analysis of those findings, this investigation concludes that it was likely John/James Shaw who struck Canada’s first oil gusher.

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<sup>27</sup> *Sarnia Observer*, Ben Fiber, “Oil Pioneer’s Grandson Attends Centennial,” July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1958, p. 22.

<sup>28</sup> *The Sarnia Observer*, Author Unknown, “Death of a Well-Known Oil Man,” July 21st, 1871, p. 2; and *Petrolia Topic*, Author Unknown, “Deceased,” February 20th, 1880, p. 5. See Appendix 2 for more details.

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