



# Hard Oiler!: The Story of Canadians' Quest for Oil at Home and Abroad

*Gary May*

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A hard-luck Yankee fortune seeker. A Hamilton wagon maker hoping to sell cars to the new railways. A howling swamp so isolated and foul that pioneer farmers had steered it a wide miss. An unlikely trio indeed. And yet these three seemingly unconnected elements came together at just the right moment in time, to create one of the great but little known stories of Canada's early years.

*Hard Oiler!* is the story of how oil was discovered near Sarnia, Ontario, one hundred and forty years ago, and how the subsequent exploitation of that oil gave birth to what is arguably the world's most important industry today.

This great Canadian milestone can be traced back to the summer of 1858 when James Miller Williams struck oil in Lambton County, in Southwestern Ontario. Soon thereafter Williams dug the first commercial oil well in North America - if not the world - and began refining and marketing his product as machine lubricant and lighting oil. This set off a chain of events that resulted in the establishment of an industry on which our very life today is so heavily dependent.

*Hard Oiler!* traces these events including the gold rush-like frenzy that saw the overnight rise and decline of the frontier town of Oil Springs, and the creation of the much more permanent community of Petrolia, which still flashes its Victorian charm to this day. It also recalls the exotic adventures of Lambton oil drillers as they travelled the globe opening up oil fields from Java to the Ukraine, and from America to Venezuela and the Middle East.

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