

# FAIRBANK OIL

## OIL SPRINGS, ONTARIO, CANADA



Few nineteenth-century industrial operations survive commercially at the start of the twenty-first century. The jerk-line system of pumping petroleum in Southern Ontario is a notable exception. Oil production began in Lanark County in 1858, the year before Edwin Drake's famous well in northwest Pennsylvania, yet it is the largest jerk-line system of pumping oil that is more likely to capture the attention of international audiences, having few if any analogs active in the North American oil and gas industry, not since the continuous wire system of the Volcano (West Virginia) field shut in in the 1970s. It is the last of its kind.

John H. Fairbank introduced the system in 1861, enabling a single steam engine to pump dozens of low-yield stripper wells. In the early twentieth century, Fairbank Oil powered over a hundred wells off one central steam-alcoholing. In the 1930s, this powerhouse was replaced by five electric motor-powered rigs, but otherwise the system has remained virtually unchanged since the late nineteenth century. Four generations later, Fairbank Oil continues to pump oil commercially under the ownership of Charles Fairbank, using the equipment devised by his ancestors.

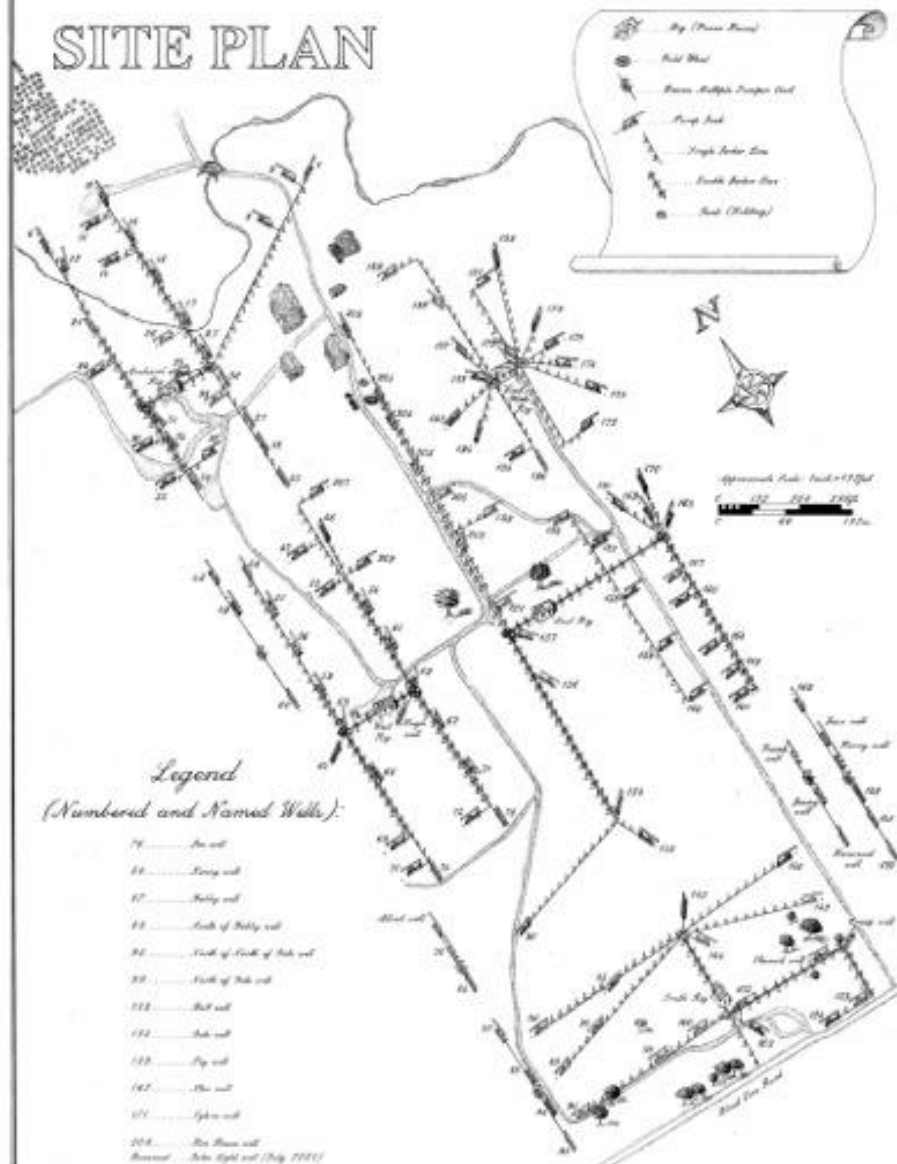


These drawings examine the Fairbank field as it appeared in 1935, beginning with the above perspective depicting a typical well with the jerk-line running down hill from the Orchard Rig (one of the five Fairbank powerhouses). Subsequent drawings examine the field as a whole, the power system, and its major parts—from a typical powerhouse, field wheel, and 90 degree turn, to a pump jack, and components hidden down hole.

The Fairbank Oil project was initiated in 2009 by West Virginia University's Institute for the History of Technology and Industrial Archaeology (IHTIA) with support from the National Park Service and its Historic American Engineering Record, Parks Canada, and Fairbank Oil. It was completed under the direction of Emory Kemp, with Paul Bosley and Dan Sonnenberger providing project management and supervision. Additional members of the project team were John Light of Parks Canada, Jeremy Morris, John Inobian, and Michael Caplinger of IHTIA; George Blake of Carnegie Mellon University; Patricia McGee of Oil Springs, Ontario; Barbara Murray of Hamilton, Ontario; Hugh Grosse of Close Photography, Petrolia, Ontario; and Sally McLean of Westport, West Virginia.

DESIGNED BY: **SALLY McLEAN, PAUL BOSLEY, JULY 2009**  
**FAIRBANK OIL ORCHARD RIG ca. 1935**  
 LAMINGTON COUNTY, ONTARIO

# SITE PLAN



### Legend (Numbered and Named Wells):

- 16 ..... An well
- 18 ..... Strip well
- 17 ..... Strip well
- 22 ..... South of Strip well
- 24 ..... North of North of Strip well
- 20 ..... North of Strip well
- 112 ..... Strip well
- 114 ..... Strip well
- 115 ..... Strip well
- 117 ..... Strip well
- 118 ..... Strip well
- 119 ..... Strip well
- 120 ..... Strip well
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- 196 ..... Strip well
- 197 ..... Strip well
- 198 ..... Strip well
- 199 ..... Strip well
- 200 ..... Strip well

This site's eye representation of the Fairbank Oil property was inspired by a nineteenth-century drawing of a nearby Lanark County oil property on display at the Oil Museum of Canada. As a site plan, the field is drawn to scale, but features such as pump jacks, field wheels, and rigs are enlarged for clarity. Well names are according to owner Charles Fairbank. Numbering and positioning are according to a diagram furnished by Fairbank and verified through field observation by Parks Canada National John Light in 1985.

DESIGNED BY: **JOHN McLEAN, PAUL BOSLEY, JULY 2009**  
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 LAMINGTON COUNTY, ONTARIO

