

Luella Harris (1862-1946) was a teacher who wrote several books about early Bradford pioneers. In 1925, she helped to found the First Families of the Tuna Valley, an organization dedicated to the preservation of the histories of those pioneers. - photo / info from Around Bradford Vol II

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A VALLEY

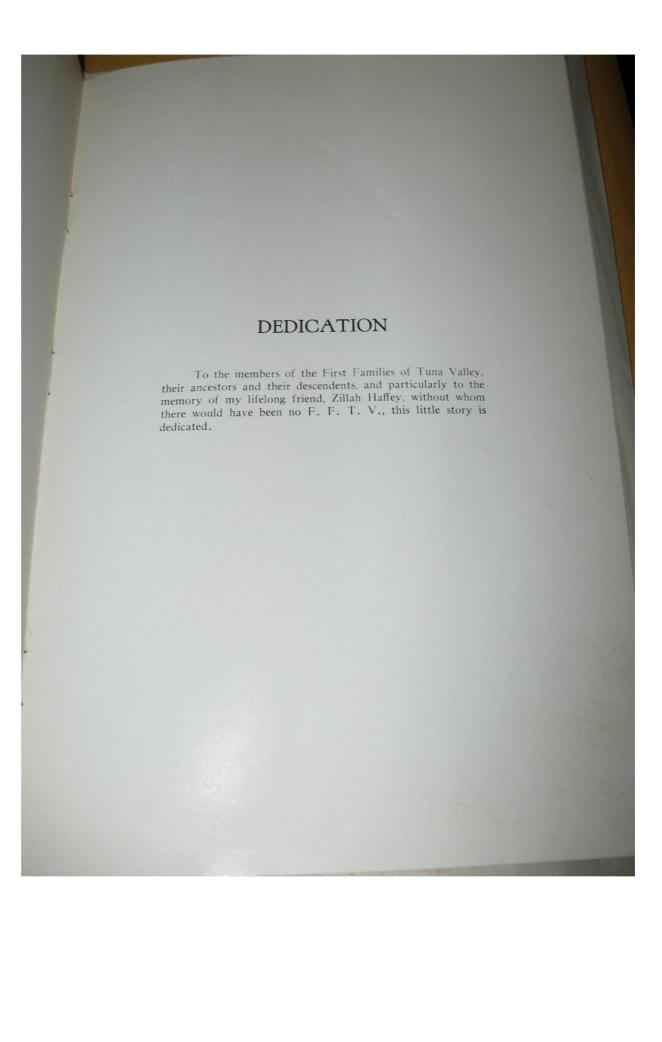


This is a true story of the Valley, ten miles and half a mile wide, which is to-day the area of The Metropolis of High Grade Oil of the World.

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PREFACE

I was born in the Tunungwant valley, and except for a few short years, have spent my life here. Though neither my father nor my mother was born here, they both came with their parents while young children. Consequently, I have known of all the

A few years ago, my younger sisters asked me to write out for their benefit my recollections of the past. After various sketches including a brief history of Bradford and family reminiscenses, the idea came to me to let the valley tell its own story. In doing so, I have naturally had to use some fancy, but I believe that in no case have I violated historical accuracy. I completed the Autobiography in 1931, and laid it away. In 1935 I was asked if I had something I could give at the annual gathering of the First Families of the Tuna Valley. That seemed a particularly fitting time for the Valley to speak for itself and the paper was read there for the first time. It is making its appearance in this form through the wishes and efforts of that organization.

LUELLA A. HARRIS.

August, 1938.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A VALLEY

1

FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD

I am one of those remote spots so common in the United States—remote, not in distance, but because the western movement left me long on its outer fringe. In the short space of a hundred years, I have undergone such changes as could hardly occur in any other country; and I need often to ask myself, "Is this I, or another?" I lie among the foothills of the Alleghenies in Western Pennsylvania with my mouth just over the border into New York State. East of me are the head waters of the Susquehanna, and just west was the old French and Indian carry between Lake Erie and the Ohio; but neither molested my solitude.

The stream from which I take my name was called by the Indians, Ischunungwant. This word proving too much for the white men was softened by them to Tunungwant, and the haste-ridden people of to-day have shortened it to Tuna. I am, therefore, known far and wide as the Tuna Valley. My stream, which is scarcely more than twenty-five miles long, keeps a straight northerly course till it empties into the Allegheny just where that river, regretting its sudden flight to the north, is returning to its native state. I am very narrow, and my sides are steep. Some of my hills are rounded like domes; some break off sharply and stand out clear against the sky. As one follows the course of the stream, each turn brings new hills into view with glimpses of still smaller valleys opening out toward me. Nowhere is the range an unbroken one, but everywhere is cut into cross sections by mountain brooks that find their way into the larger creek. Yet none of these gaps give promise of being a thoroughfare; and I am, in effect, a fortress with only one opening.

Such I was in reality many, many decades ago. Inside my protecting walls lived a tribe of people, small of stature, but otherwise not unlike the American Indians. How long they lived here in peace I cannot say, nor when they began to fear enemies. Across my mouth, from hill to hill, these little people built an embankment or fortification. When the enemy did appear, they were much larger and stronger than the valley-dwellers, who massed themselves behind the mound to repel the attack. A long and bitter battle was fought. The little people fell, to the last man, and the

invaders passed in over their bodies though they, too, had lost heavily. When white men first plowed my flats, they found heaps of larger bones north of the mound of earth and countless smaller ones south of it.

Time passed, and I was merely part of the Iroquois hunting grounds. My silences were rarely broken, and I dozed on contentedly. I hear it said now-a-day that Lafayette once passed this way, and one point still bears his name. But to me it is only a dream, and I can not tell, more than they, when or why he should have done so. Neither can I explain how the swampy flats that in the spring time are largely under water and in the summer grow lush grass, came to be called bayous. It seems a strange word on the tongue of the earliest English settlers, but by that name have they always been called. But when the first settlers wondered at traces of a road that they had not made, and gazed in wonder at a distinctly marked trail of considerable width cut through the forest straight up one of my hills, I could have told them Perry and his guns had gone in the most direct line from Philadelphia to Lake Erie; and nature had not yet obliterated their tracks.

These were my only contacts with the outside world until well on in the nineteenth century. Pennsylvania was still too rich in woodland for any to envy me my small store. In 1796, William Bingham had been given by the state a warrant for 1100 acres of land for which he paid six pounds and seven shillings, or about \$31.75. A little of this grant lay over in my territory; and recently two acres of it were sold for \$21,000. But many were the changes before its value came to be realized.

H

The Murmuring Pines and the Hemlocks

The name *Pennsylvania* proved more fitting than its giver could know, especially after the boundary of the state was extended to Lake Erie. The Allegheny mountain region was everywhere densely wooded; and I was no exception. Trees grew on all my slopes, climbed all my hills to the very top, and hid under their heavy foliage all my brooks and hollows. White pine predominated; but there were hemlocks and spruce and almost every variety of hardwood. In the spring, I seemed covered with a veil into which was woven every possible shade of green; in the autumn I glowed with colors beyond the skill of any artist, and lay like a rare and brilliant jewel on the bosom of the earth.

The time came when my riches were called for. A Boston lumber company sent its agents to all this section, and lumbermen followed in their wake. Soon the blows of the axe and the crash of falling timber sounded from every hill top. Down the slides prepared for them on every hill came the giant trunks to the brooks below. There they waited for the spring freshets, when every stream was crowded with logs which poured out into the Tunungwant, and by it were carried to the Allegheny. On down the river, to be joined at the mouth of each tributary by more logs, they rushed, their progress varied only by log jams and fights between the logging crews.

The saw, however, soon followed the axe. There was more profit in shipping lumber than in sending down the rough logs. All up and down my length and in my branching valleys was the buzz of sawmills. On the twenty-five miles of the Tunungwant and its branches there were at one time sixteen mills turning out thousands of feet of lumber. The methods of marketing remained the same as for the logs. On each brook the sawn lumber was made into rafts. As these reached the main creek, they were united into larger rafts which in turn were again joined with others when the river was reached. Men accompanied their rafts to Pittsburgh where most of them disposed of their cargoes, and either bought a horse and rode home or came on foot through the woods. A few, before returning.

Gradually my great trees disappeared. My hills stretched up bare and bald to the sky. There were no more giants to fall. Little by little, the buzzing of the saws was stilled, and mill after mill was allowed to fall into decay. Two had become in part grist mills and so lived on in a new capacity. Two or three continued to work up what little timber remained, but the output was not greater than was needed for local purposes. The number of rafts going "down river" grew smaller each year until in 1865 the last run was was made.

The men coming home that spring had a sad story to tell. Usually at their return, they enlivened their neighbors with accounts of near-drowning, of rafts broken in pieces going through the Falls of the Ohio, of jokes played on each other, of unconscious jokes—as that of the youngster who called out to his companion as they struggled in the rapids, "It's a good thing we got our money before we started. We are not going to live to get back." But

this time they could think of but one thing. Going to a farmhouse this time they could the Ohio one morning for eggs, they learned of the on the bank of the Ohio one Morning for eggs, they learned of the on the pank of the Lincoln. All day their rafts remained tied to death of President Lincoln, the ground and looked out to death of Flestient lay on the ground and looked out into what seemed to be a hopelessly dark world.

There was to be no more "going down river," but you are not to think of me as desolate and barren. In Western Pennsylvania that would be an impossibility. True, I had lost most of my pines and hemlocks; the greatest of my hickories and maples had fallen. But even while the sound of the axe could still be heard, Nature was busy seeking to repair the injury done. As if by magic I was again encased in green—soft and shimmering, with less variety and of little commercial value, but still of radiant beauty.

III

Following His Plow Along the Mountain Side

Behind the man with the axe followed closely the man with the plow. As early as 1826 the first settler had arrived; and for the next twenty-five years, they continued to come. As soon as the heavier timber was removed, a house would appear in the clearing, and a home would be set up. For these people came, not like the lumbermen, to leave again when their task was done: they came because they wanted land—a farm! My area was so limited that nothing like a real farm was available, and my surface was steep and stony. But there were fertile spots in sheltered hollows and along the creek flats, and there was plenty of good pasture land. And at any rate, it was land—to feel beneath one's feet and to call

Early settlers reached me in two ways. The opening of the Erie canal had made possible an easy passage to the West; and though it was long and tedious, hundreds of families took advantage of it. From the vicinity of Rochester they scattered in every direction. A few came on down the Genesee Valley canal to Olean, and from there found their way by raft and flatboat along the Allegheny river and up its tributaries, and then again up still smaller

One of these families, poling along on the Tunungwant, lost overboard a huge box packed with clothing. It was rescued with difficulty; but that night it turned suddenly cold, and the contents of the box were frozen solid. For days after the cabin on one of of the box were trozen some. For days arrest the cabin on one of my branches was reached, the precious box stood before the firemy branches was reached, the precious box stood before the life-place, layer after layer of clothing being peeled off as it thawed, to admit the heat to the next layer.

The other method of reaching me was by ox-team. Families that had stopped in Western New York for a few years on their way from Massachusetts were likely to arrive in this manner. From one of these families, a ten-year old boy was started on foot ahead of the wagon to drive the cow. They were supposed to overtake him before night, but were delayed; and the child made the hundred miles alone through the woods. Of such stuff were to be the men who shaped my history.

So by raft or by ox-team they continued to come. All spots that could be cultivated were seized on; and gradually but surely I became a farming community. Not from any scientific knowledge but from necessity, "diversified farming" was the rule. Corn did well, and buckwheat throve; wheat was almost unknown. Potatoes and all other hardy vegetables found the new soil to their

liking.

There was plenty of hay for stock in the winter. Every farmer kept a few cows and made his own butter and cheese as well as some to send "down river" or into "York State". Many had bees; sugar was made from the thick groves of standing maples. Wild fruits had sprung up where the forests had been cut down, especially in the "slashings" and on the edges of the great tracts of burntover lands. Strawberries, red and black raspberries, gooseberries, huckleberries-crowded each other in their season. Best of all perhaps, were the blackberries—both the fat, short, seedy kind and those as long as your fore-finger and so sweet and juicy as almost to melt in your mouth. Such delicious pies, jam, pickles, and cordials, as they made! Bushels of them dried gave the needed variety to winter meals. Then there were elderberries in unlimited quantities, and wine was made from both the blossoms and the fruit.

Along the banks of the creek grew wild plums, and the friendly woods furnished wild cherries and crab apples as well as stores of nuts, butternuts, hickorynuts, walnuts, to be dried and stored for the winter, besides the more perishable beechnuts and chestnuts. In the spring, how welcome were watercress, and cowslips and dandelion greens. From both the roots and the blossoms of the latter plant wine was also made. After a long winter, leaks

and wild onions were table dainties not to be despised in spite of

For meat, pigs were raised, and beef was common; but the wild life furnished its full share. Venison was easily obtainable: partridges and quail were thick; rabbits were everywhere. ticularly appetizing stews or meat pies could be made from the great black squirrels that frequented my woods. Scientists tell us to-day, I hear, that black squirrels are only a variant of the gray; but no one has yet explained why there should have been no gray squirrels in the valley of the Tunungwant—only little red squirrels, chipmucks, and these huge black fellows. It is a thousand pities that the need of food combined with the hunter's instincts should have extermi-

Now what of the families—my families—making new homes in this bit of wilderness? At first they lived in log houses; but as the sawmills became active, frame houses of good stout timbers were built. As they were rarely painted, they soon took on the color of the tree trunks whose branches swept their roofs. At first, a bear, attracted by the firelight, occasionally put his feet on the sill and looked in at the window. Sometimes the cry of a wildcat could be heard, and deer often glided by their doors. But as the destruction of the forests continued, these things became less frequent.

In my social life I was largely a little bit of New England with perhaps a slight increase of friendliness and informality. The same amusements and diversions were to be found. House-raisings, quiltings, apple-bees, sugaring-off, spelling-down, drew people together. In 1842 a "Woman's Association" was formed, the object of which, as stated in the constitution, was "to meet together once a month to discuss how to give our children the best possible mental, moral, and spiritual bringing-up." In the thirties, Methodist circuit riders had found their way to me; and soon "classes" were organized at various points. The meetings were held at first in the homes and later in the school houses, and these formed additional rallying places. Though somewhat scattered the people were all truly neighbors in a literal as well as in a Biblical sense.

Meantime, a village had grown up at my widest place, where the east and west branches of the creek came together. It was at first called Littleton in honor of some pioneers of the lumbering 10

era, but the name was soon changed to Bradford. Here were all the ordinary enterprises of a small country place, including a select ordinary energy ladies and gentlemen who wished to carry their school for young the district schools. Here was also for many years the only church in my area. Under the joint patronage of the lumber company that still controlled many acres and of the missionary society of the Congregationalist Church of Massachusetts, a comfortable and dignified frame edifice was erected, a silver communion service and a bell found their way here; and a Congregational Church was organized. As a society it soon died; but the building continued to be used by all denominations. A clause in the deed for the land, providing that the property should revert to the Kingsbury estate whenever it ceases to be used for religious purposes, has led to some strange transitions. When it was no longer needed for union services or traveling preachers, it was sold to the Universalists who erected a new building on the lot, only in turn to sell it to a Jewish congregation who now occupy it. So has the letter if not the spirit of the old deed been kept.

To such a peaceful scene and to a life essentially rural did the men return from the Civil War. The axe was no longer heard except to clear the ground for a new house or to furnish firewood, and the buzz of the saw was less frequent. The people had become a settled community with little to link them to outside interests

IV

Within Our Breast This Jewel Lies (?)

Throughout these years I had been hiding a secret that as yet was unsuspected. Even when my silences were broken by a hot pursuit for wealth below my surface, the seekers were following a wrong scent. Still, it seemed plausible. Almost on my southern rim coal had been found. Why not in my rocky sides? Prospectors sought me and made long diligent search. They examined every outcropping of the rocks and sunk shafts into my bowels. They traced the boulders by the creek to their sources on the steeps above, and followed with care each stratum of my formation. Though they discovered interesting geological facts, they left as a matter of dispute the origin of the great masses of rock crowning my hilltops, and made no effort to explain why the strata of these rocks of white sandstone should be as level as a floor and full of pebbles while my slopes were strewn with huge rocks of pearl gray, pink, and

brown sandstone without a pebble, and eventually to prove of great value as a building stone. Neither did they find coal; and they left me to hide my secret a little longer.

During this period, however, one lasting benefit came to the settlers. An attempt had been made to put through a railroad, but the few miles of road bed had been abandoned. Now the Erie tended the track to my southern limit on the hill top. The first equipment was exceedingly primitive: a queer little locomotive the like of which cannot be seen to-day outside of the Smithsonian Institute, drew a flat car on which were placed benches for passengers. The brakeman spent his time putting out sparks thrown by the locomotive on the clothing of the ladies. This crude affair was but temporary; but the whole rolling stock for several years consisted of cast-off equipment from the main line.

An interesting story is told of the device by which one train crew succeeded in obtaining, not a new, but a slightly better locomotive. An Erie official had occasion to make a trip over the Branch. The ramshackle train reached Bradford as usual about five P. M., and began its climb to the terminus of the road. Suddenly "engine trouble" developed. By the judicious use of fuel and some assistance to the already leaking boiler, the train came to a complete stop every few feet and seemingly required the most strenuous efforts to start it again. At five A. M. the wearied and raging official stepped on the platform at Mount Alton and telegraphed to Hornell, "Send an engine to the Bradford Branch." He had been twelve hours in going the same number of miles.

So we settled down to our one little train a day, and to the ordinary occupations and amusements of a country village and its environments. The social life of my people had both expanded and concentrated:—expanded in that it was of greater variety, and fewer families were really isolated; concentrated, in that most things now centered in the village. There were to be found camp meetings, Sunday School concerts, Good Templars' Lodge, a Free Mason's Lodge, and in the winter season, musical festivals and a lyceum lecture course. For a decade after the Civil War, nothing disturbed my serenity; and the dwellers within my borders became knit together in bonds which lead them to style themselves to-d the "First Families of Tuna Valley."

Oil Out of the Flinty Rock

The time came when my long hidden secret was discovered. Within sixteen years after Colonel Drake drilled the first well to whim sixted year paying quantities, it began to be whispered produce crude on an payons quantities, it began to be winspered about that in my bosom were stores of the same riches. Prospecabout that it any metal and the same Henes. I respect tors again visited me with a new object. Sometimes with a hazel wand, sometimes with more scientific methods, sometimes merely at random, they selected the sites for oil wells. And oil was found, -no single well outdoing those of other fields, but what was better, wells that continued to produce over a long period of years.

With the first yellow stream gushing from the earth, people flocked hither from all points of the compass. The poor little railroad was ridiculously inadequate for the demands made on it. train with overloaded coaches often stood for a whole hour just outside the village while trainmen struggled with the congestion of freight inside the switchyard. Every house became of necessity a boarding house, and men walked the streets at night for lack of sleeping quarters. The pretty little village was transformed into a sprawling town with rough frame buildings—mere boards and paper-with false fronts. Beautiful trees along the main street were cut down to make room for traffic. Stray bits of forest left standing on the outskirts of the village were destroyed by fire as the quickest way to get more building lots.

Up the sides of the hills where had once been log slides now crept wagon roads. On every slope, crowning every summit, rising from every nook, were wooden derricks seventy-two feet high. They dotted the flats like clustered spires, and crowded each other on boundary lines. Strong teams of horses drew the timbers for the rigs and the tools for drilling to each site, and took the oil tanks to the railroad. Soon, however, pipe lines were installed, and great red tanks stored the crude petroleum till it could be pumped to dis-

Now instead of the wood chopper's axe was heard the sound of hammers, the clang of the blacksmith's forge, the rattle of pipes, the puff of the donkey pump. To these sounds was added, as soon as the pumping of wells began, that of the "barker" by which the pumper, busy at the other side of his lease, knew that his engine was still at work. Instead of the fragrance of forests and the aroma

of new lumber, there was every where the pungent odor of natural

In several hollows among my hills villages as large as Bradford before the oil excitement grew up. Easier means of transportation became necessary, and three narrow-gauge railroads climbed out and up in three different directions, and wound their way along the sides of the hills. Great machine shops turned out the engines, bits, "jars", sucker-rods, tubing, and everything necessary to keep the army of drillers busy. Eventually the products from these machine shops of the Tuna Valley found their way to every country

Oil was the thing sought for; natural gas was regarded as a nuisance to be got rid of in any way possible. Hence, to add to the wierdness of the scene after nightfall, enormous gas lights, often with flames ten feet or more in length, illuminated every hillside and blazed before cottage doors. Under these great jets, games of croquet were played by night, and dance platforms furnished another amusement. Wooed by the heat, grass grew in January, and occasionally a tiny flower found its way to the light.

The new-comers, the "oil men," numbered many times over the original settlers. Their coming changed the general character of the inhabitants as well as the means of livelihood. They were, of course, of every class and condition; and as is usual in new towns, the froth rose to the surface, and for a time seemed to give color to the whole. But this period was unusually short; even while the dance houses and music halls were thronged, the theatre was crowded on Sunday also with men in flannel shirts and trousers tucked in boots, but reverent and attentive to the Methodist preacher who spoke from the stage. The lawless element never triumphed, and soon the community had resumed a wholesome normal life.

A considerable number of the men who flocked to this new field were financially "broke." Partly as a result of this condition, the operations of each individual or company were not likely to be on a large scale. The leases were small, and while many became well-to-do, no enormous fortunes were made. The owners of the land had no money with which to develop their few acres. Neither had they, as a rule, much faith in the duration of the riches supposed to lie beneath their feet. Consequently they either sold their farms out-right for what seemed to them a reasonable compensation, and moved away, or gave long-time leases, for which

they received a royalty of one-eighth the production and which often handicapped operations in the years ahead.

After all, very few of those who rushed to me hoping to make their fortunes expected to stay. As soon as the extent of the tertheir tortunes expected to be indicated by a dry hole here and there, as soon as the production began to fall off, they drifted away. Below a as the production as well was not regarded as worth pumping; and one after another they were abandoned. Few families continued to live on leases as the needed work could be done in an hour or two. Derricks were almost entirely removed. All three of the narrowgauge roads were taken up, and their beds became mere lines of beauty among my rapidly increasing woodland. For trees and shrubs now grew up unchecked and blotted out almost all traces of oil. Only the larger of the hamlets that had grown up among my hills survived; the others became more truly "deserted villages" than ever was Sweet Auburn.

VI

Sunk Are Thy Bowers in Shapeless Ruin All

The story of one of these "towns" will illustrate what happened to most. Bordell had been one of the most populous and busy of the oil communities. A narrow-gauge railroad reached it, and a line of telegraph poles pointed the way out of the hidden; vale. A bank, stores, all the buildings of an active village were to be found. The houses of boards, unpainted and without foundations, gave little evidence from their exteriors of the comfort and even luxury usually to be found within.

A few years passed. Visitors, drawn back to the spot by fond memories, could follow the still-open wagon road, but the railroad bed was quite overgrown with grass and weeds. Even the telegraph poles were gone. Only an occasional derrick was to be seen. But one house remained lonely by the roadside. Everywhere were trees and shrubs, clustered closely together and obliterating all former paths. Even the sites of the houses were blotted out. The exact location of the school house where at one time forty children had gathered, could not be identified. The once well-beaten paths to friendly doorways were now a hopeless tangle of undergrowth, and not even "garden flowers grown wild" helped to retard the

A few things remained unchanged, but they were nature's and A few things remained unchanged, but they were nature's and not man's. The cool spring still gushed from the bank by the roadside, and its waters were as refreshing as in the former days Innumerable birds still piped and fluttered in the shadows of the trees, and squirrels stood up to look at the strangers as they passed And the everlasting hills with their changing lights and shadows still looked down on the lonely house and the quiet and deserted

VII

So Unconscionable a Time in Dying

Such was the fate of Bordell, and such was to be that of Bradford if the pessimists were to be believed. But they forgot that the life sheltered by my hills was not born of oil, and went deeper than their drills. There had also been another discovery made. or a truth long known recognized—that natural gas made good fuel. For some time its wicked waste had been stopped, and its use for all domestic purposes was universal. If then we must cease to be an oil metropolis, why not become a manufacturing city? Already there were machine shops and a refinery. To these were added great glass factories, lighting the night with their molten masses. Brick and terra cotta works sprang up throughout my length. Small factories multiplied. Then came chemical works; and again my hills were stripped bare.

But there the growth of my city was again checked. There were two things indispensible in order to realize my new ambition. and neither of them did I have. The first was extended areas of nearly level land for the erection of large plants; the second, sufficient ready capital to offer inducements for concerns to locate here. Still more serious, the costs of shipping out freight were so high as to prove eventually prohibitive. So, little by little, most of my factories closed their doors. The city continued to live, and even to hold its own in population, but not to grow. The people who now remained were, however, like the original settlers-they were here to stay. Hence, as they proceeded to make homes, beauty once more triumphed. Trees now shaded again the streets; lawns and flowers surrounded the residences. But strangers often asked the question, "What keeps the place alive?"

The answer came. I had revealed only a part of my secret. Now was the time to let more of it be known. A whisper—and the whole length of me stirred with new life. Flooding—a way to force whole length of me stirred with new life. Flooding—a way to force out of the ground quantities of oil that had defied all former product of the ground quantities of oil that had defied all former product of the ground quantities of oil that had defied all former products of production. It does not need to be described here,—only its results.

At first quietly, rather in the nature of an experiment, new wells began to be drilled. Almost unheralded, long lines of powerful horses began again hauling machinery to inaccessible hillsides and rocky farms. Derricks appeared rivaling in places those of former times in numbers. These, however, were not of wood, but of steel, and were taken down as soon as a well was finished, to be used again. And with what feverish haste was the work done! As if in some mysterious way the oil that had so long resisted all efforts to bring it to the surface might disappear forever. As the wells were completed, a great network of pipes connected them into groups of forty, fifty, or even more, to be pumped by one engine. Great companies bought out the smaller ones; a few men became immensely wealthy; a few received moderate compensation for their property; the most were affected only as they shared in the general prosperity of the city. For now in the backwoods valley there is a city whose name is known around the world.

New-comers say that unless one is in some way connected with the oil industry, he is never quite recognized as "one of us." Oil is master, and nothing else really matters. Yet there are those whose roots are deep in the soil, whose forefathers came into the primeval forest to make their homes, who still think of the "oil spot rich in memories and fruitful with hopes for the future; for they do not believe that I have yet revealed all my secrets.

Luella A. Harris, 87 High Street Bradford, Penn.

March, 1931.



Left to right: Miss Zillah Haffey, Mrs. Dora Blair Everson, Mrs. Tait Gallaher, Mrs. Ruben Gates First Families of the Tuna Valley (FFTV) Reception Committee, Bradford, PA, 1925

The woman on the left, Zillah Haffey, is the friend mentioned in the dedication of this booklet.

- photo donated by Shari Moon (great great niece of Lizzie Tait Gallaher)