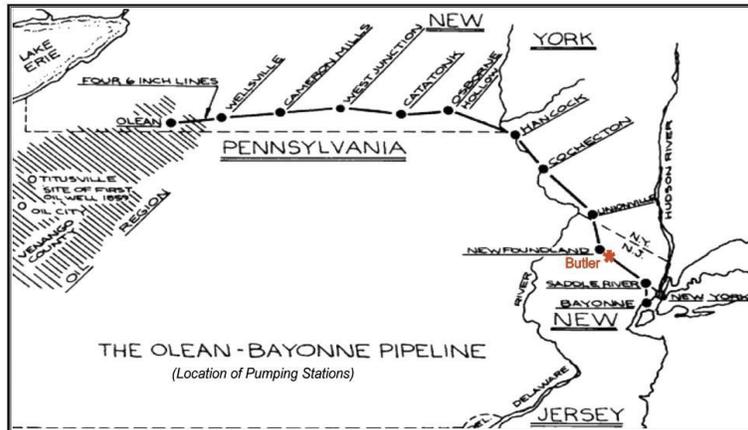


# Butler's Oil Pipeline

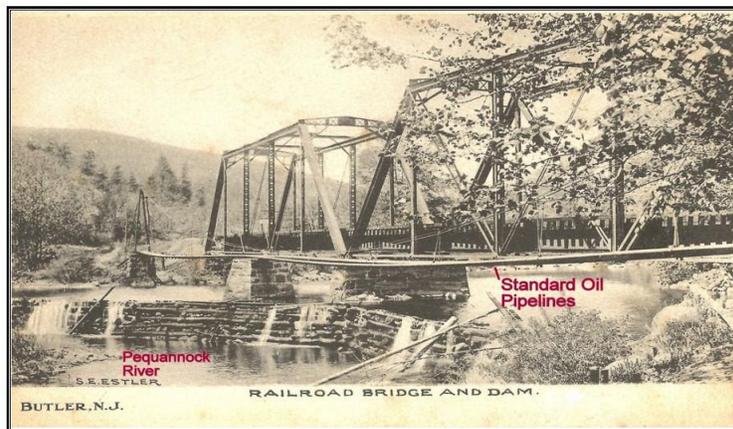
By Tom Riley

It is not well known that our nation's first long distance oil pipeline ran down Main Street, Butler, parallel to the New York Susquehanna and Western Railroad tracks.. The pipeline entered Butler at Smith Mills, crossed the Pequannock River four times at railroad bridges and exited the borough at the Riverdale boundary line. The first 6-inch pipe running through Butler was laid in 1881 and the second in 1882. Originating at the oil fields around Olean, NY, the pipeline ran 315 miles to the oil refineries near Bayonne, New Jersey.



The pipeline had eleven similarly constructed pumping stations along its route. Each station was equipped with duplicate boilers and 28-ton Worthington pumps. The large boiler houses contained seven 80-horsepower steam engines.

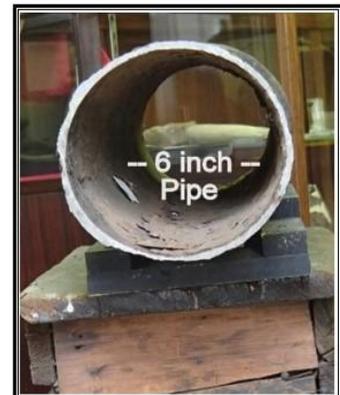
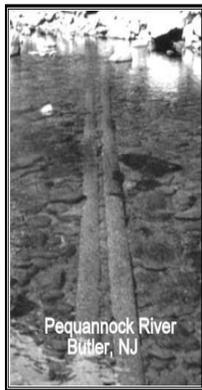
The oil fields around Olean, NY were estimated to run dry after fifteen years, so it was originally questionable if the pipeline would ever make a profit. No one could foresee, however, that new yet-to-be-discovered oil fields would keep the oil flowing day and night for 45 years, yielding a profit worth many times the original cost of five million dollars. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, profits (adjusted for inflation) were estimated at over 100 million dollars per year.



Smith Mills

By 1878 the U.S. oil industry was controlled by one man, John D. Rockefeller. His Standard Oil Company dominated the market. The standard practice at the time was to ship oil in large barrels by train. The problem was that the cost of transportation could run as high as the value of the oil. A long-distance pipeline seemed to be a viable solution. Hundreds of right-of-way leases were acquired from landowners along the pipeline route, but Rockefeller's name and that of Standard Oil were kept out of the negotiations. Before long, thousands of 18-foot-long threaded sections of 6-inch wrought iron pipe were being laid at a depth of 18 inches. When bedrock was encountered, the pipe ran on the surface.

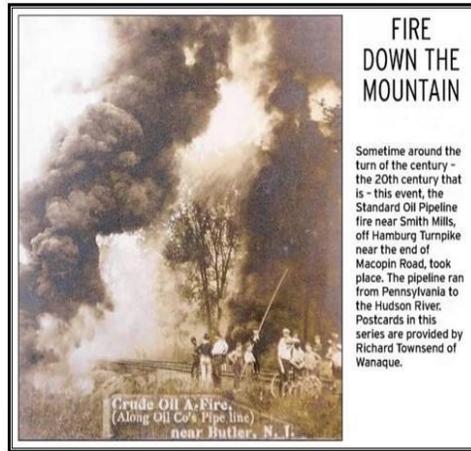
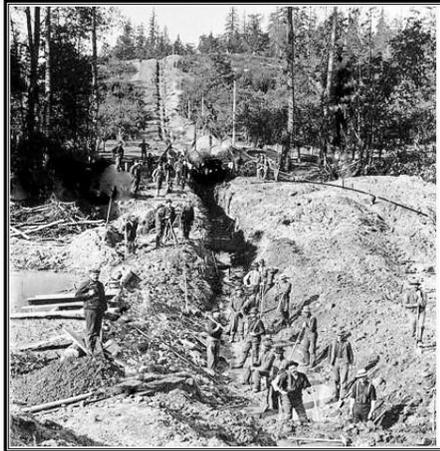
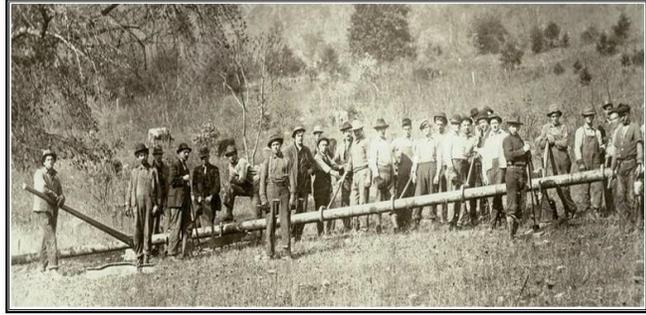
Running due east from Olean, NY, the pipeline turned southeast at the Delaware River and entered New Jersey near Unionville, NY. The pipes crossed fourteen rivers, twenty streams, and eight mountains that varied in height from 1,400 to 2,530 feet.



With the construction of the Newark watershed reservoirs, the pipeline had to be re-routed across Bearfort Mountain in West Milford to protect the water supply. As a result, everything between Newfoundland and Pompton Lakes, including Butler, was by-passed. The pipeline rejoined the route of the railroad in Pompton Lakes and continued to Bayonne. Eventually, two additional 6-inch pipes were added, bringing the total carrying capacity of the line to 50,000 barrels of crude oil per day.

With the shift of oil production to the west, the Olean-Bayonne Pipeline was abandoned in 1927. Standard Oil decided it was cheaper and easier to pump oil to the Gulf of Mexico and transport it to the East Coast by tanker.

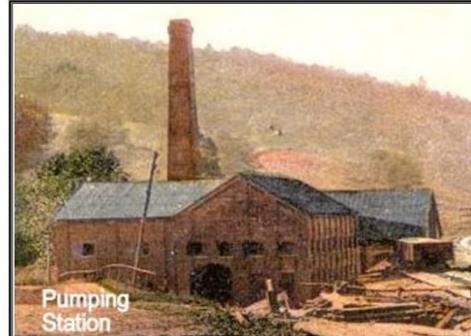
In 1930, Standard Oil sold the pipeline to the Columbia Gas & Electric Company. Unfortunately, the pipeline's career transporting natural gas was short lived. The pipes could not be sealed tight enough to carry gas and whenever the line traveled under rivers or wetlands, a constant stream of bubbles could be seen. Gas loss was considerable and it proved to be unprofitable. Eventually, the pipes were removed and sold for scrap. Later, through government intervention, Standard Oil was forced to give up its strangle-hold on the oil industry. The company was forced to divide into 37 separate companies. Its pipeline division was split off from the parent corporation and became a separate company.



### FIRE DOWN THE MOUNTAIN

Sometime around the turn of the century - the 20th century that is - this event, the Standard Oil Pipeline fire near Smith Mills, off Hamburg Turnpike near the end of Macopin Road, took place. The pipeline ran from Pennsylvania to the Hudson River. Postcards in this series are provided by Richard Townsend of Wanaque.

Crude Oil A. Fire.  
(Along Oil Co's Pipe line)  
near Butler, N. J.



Pumping  
Station



Sources: *Journal of Society for Industrial Archeology* Vol. 2 1976, *History of Federal Hill*, 2020, *Skylands Visitor* Winter 2006, *Sullivan County NY Historical Society* June 28, 2011, *Candor NY Historical Society* April 29, 2016, *Politico* Sept. 25, 2016, *Smithsonian* Jan, 12, 2015

