

# ON THE LAZY BENCH

*Penn Brad Oil Museum strives to preserve the history of the Bradford Oil Field and the unique culture that developed along with it. The Museum also honors the people and their families whose lives contributed to making Bradford the "Highgrade Oil Metropolis of the World."*

A Quarterly Newsletter

Vol. 12 – No. 2 – Spring 2026

## Open House Kick-Starts 2026 Season

Photos by Francie Long, Patty Lehosky, & Angela Nuzzo

A slow but steady stream of visitors took part in the museum's Old Fashioned Ice Cream Social in May and got our 2026 season underway. The 50 or so people who signed the guest book had a great lunch of sloppy joes, chips, various cookies and brownies, and an ice cream sundae to top it all off. And no one can resist the freshly popped popcorn handed out in convenient little bags, just big enough to carry with them as they wandered the museum and investigated the displays.

Thank you to all of the board members and volunteers who provided supplies for the luncheon and who came to meet our guests.



*Kids enjoyed making sundaes & the new conference table was put to good use.*



*Patty Lehosky & Brenda Fish serve lunch with a smile!*



*Patty serves a sloppy joe to Angela, the newsletter editor.*



*Joyce Cline brings out the kid in everyone with her popcorn maker.*

## PENN BRAD OIL MUSEUM

901 South Avenue - Bradford, PA 16701  
Email: pennbrad.oilmuseum@yahoo.com  
Website: penn-bradoilmuseum.org

Phone: 814-362-1955

Open:

Thurs. & Friday  
9 AM to 4 PM  
Saturday  
9 AM to 2 PM

Admission Cost  
Adults - \$6.00  
Seniors - \$5.00

Children (under 12) - Free  
Active Military / Family - Free



## Matt Kropf Honored for Sustainability Efforts

Story and photo from University of Pittsburgh website



Dr. Matt Kropf, associate professor of engineering technology at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, was honored during the University of Pittsburgh's Sustainability Awards on the Pittsburgh campus on April 24.

Kropf, who is also the director of the ARG/Harry R. Halloran Jr. Energy Institute and chair of the Division of Physical and Computational Sciences, will be one of three faculty Regional Campus Awardees.

Kropf has been a member of the university-wide Chancellor's Advisory Council on Sustainability since its beginning, contributing to the original 2018 Sustainability Plan. As chair of the Pitt-Bradford Sustainability Committee and director of the Energy Institute, he has worked to center student voices in the campus's sustainability efforts, including its nearly complete Sustainability Plan.

Kropf has been a key driver of Pitt-Bradford's solar expansion, using existing and future installations as living laboratory operations and ensuring every building is considered for rooftop solar.

Samantha Chan, assistant director of sustainability at Pitt, nominated Kropf for the award. "Dr. Kropf is known for bringing people into sustainability work and making them feel heard," she said.

Additionally, Kropf developed the energy science and technology and energy engineering technology academic programs at Pitt-Bradford. He collaborated with architects and engineers designing the programs' home, the George B. Duke Engineering and Information Technologies Building, and served on hiring committees for the required faculty and staff.

He has also worked with students to map out trails on Pitt-Bradford's Quintuple Mountain property, opening it up for public use. He holds patents for a process that uses microwaves and ultrasound to refine biodiesel and others to sequester carbon dioxide underground.

The Pitt Sustainability Awards recognize students, faculty, staff and groups making meaningful contributions to campus sustainability as defined by the Pitt Sustainability Plan. This is the first year the university has dedicated awards for its regional campuses, of which Pitt-Bradford is one.

Matt is a long-standing member of the Penn Brad Oil Museum's board of directors, and says "Through my position as Director of the Harry Halloran Jr. and American Refining Group's Energy Institute at Pitt Bradford, I have been able to advance energy efficiency improvements, energy production, and a host of energy and sustainability programming on the Bradford campus. It was nice to be recognized by the University for the efforts on our campus in Bradford". Congratulations, Matt.

## Fireside Pumpers Breakfast

The Fireside Pumpers of the Penn Brad Oil Museum meet each 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month for a breakfast meeting with a guest speaker, at Mama Jane's Eatery (formerly Perkins Restaurant) at 31 Bolivar Drive in Bradford.

The public is welcome as an educational outreach and fundraising effort by the Museum. Donations are appreciated. Attendees order off the menu, at their cost, beginning at 8 am, and the program begins at 8:30.

If you or your business would like to sponsor a breakfast, please complete the form on our website or call the Treasurer at 814-368-6824. Sponsorship profits go toward museum improvements.

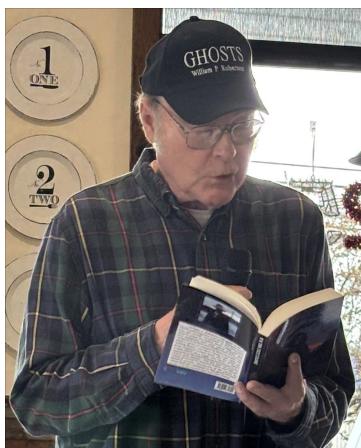
June 17, 2026

Scott Morgan

*Ghost Towns of McKean County*

## Fireside Pumpers Meetings for April and May

by Isabelle Champlin, with photo by Joyce Cline



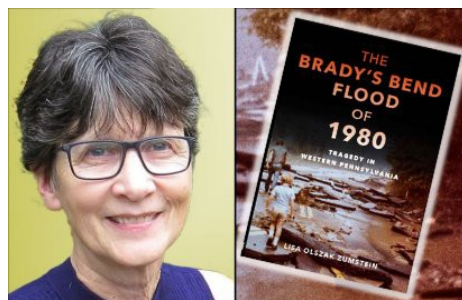
The first meeting of the Fireside Pumpers featured Bill Robertson explaining his latest 2026 book, titled “New York State Strange: 91 Creepy Tales of the Empire State”. This is his 26th short story collection. It features a wide variety of stories from historical sites, local ghostly encounters, Native American lore, and newspaper articles. He read examples of each one.

“Old Fort Niagara” is said to be haunted by a murdered French officer, Henri LeClerc, who is trying to find his decapitated head, an impossible task since it had been thrown into Lake Ontario long ago. “The Hitchhiker” describes a frightening drive home through a dark rainy forest, passing by a hitchhiker who suddenly appeared in the passenger seat, silently riding along until suddenly vanishing as the car passed by the Limestone Cemetery. The “Lake Erie Monster” describes the Mishebeshu or Great Serpent, a 40-foot long horned snake which can create storms, enormous waves and whirlpools with its churning tail. “The Staten Island Horror” recounts that the Willowbrook State School (famously closed in 1987 because of the

physical and sexual abuse of the intellectually disabled patients), had spawned a legend of a serial killer called Cropsey. A real-life custodian of the school, Andre Rand, was accused of several child murders in the 1980s although never convicted.

There are 87 other stories in this book with over 200 photos. The author has personally investigated 90% of their locations. There are copies for sale in the Penn Brad Oil Museum gift shop and they also can be ordered from <https://store.bookbaby.com/book/new-york-state-strange>

In May, Lisa Olszak Zumstein, a native of Brady’s Bend, reviewed her 2025 book “The Brady’s Bend Flood of 1980: Tragedy in Western Pennsylvania,” about a severe 40-minute thunderstorm on Aug. 14, 1980, that devastated her small community.



Beginning as a family memoir, she enlarged it into a 144-page paperback with 70 photographs. She conducted 62 interviews of survivors, consulted 8 technical advisors, 26 family collections and the Heinz Historic Center archives, and read many newspaper articles and documents to create a comprehensive overview.

Her Power Point presentation showed the 9 pm flood was the

result of a multicellular storm that dumped an astonishing 5 to 10 inches of rain in only 40 minutes. (A NOAA chart showed that a 3.5"/hour rate would be a 1000-year rarity, and this chart did not show anything more extreme.) Nearby Sugar Creek, with its many steep tributaries, rapidly and forcefully rose so high that houses and vehicles were swept away. Nine people drowned and many families became homeless. Locating the bodies in the debris took 5 days; some were found in the river 28 miles downstream. One pet who woke up its sleeping owner later won a Dog Hero award. Many people rescued and sheltered their neighbors and several astonishing personal accounts were related.

The town had no flood warning. The 1977 post-Johnstown Flood warning system based on volunteer reports could not have helped as this flood was far too rapid and intense.

The entire Appalachian Mountain Corridor from Georgia to Canada is apparently noted for record-breaking catastrophic rainstorms like this, and the year of this flood was wetter than usual by both the number of thunderstorms and the precipitation rates. There is now an historic marker to the memory of the 9 people who died, unveiled for last year’s 45th anniversary of the tragedy.

The museum thanks Dresser Pipeline Solutions who sponsored this program. Copies of this fascinating book were available for purchase after the program.

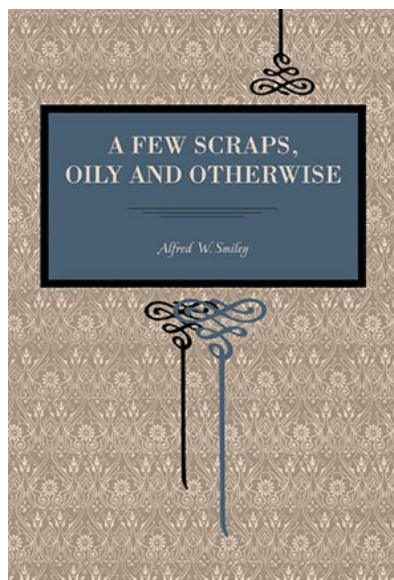
## Book Review

**A FEW SCRAPS, OILY AND OTHERWISE**

by

Alfred W. Smiley

Reviewed by Rick Lutz



When Col. Edwin Drake struck oil in 1859 near Titusville, PA, Alfred (“Alf”) W. Smiley was a 16 year old working on his family’s farm near what is now Union City. News of Drake’s success traveled quickly around Western Pennsylvania and beyond. Alf Smiley joined the rush of thousands seeking their share of expected fortunes during the birth of the oil industry. Timely recollections from events that Smiley witnessed and where he was a participant make up the contents of *A Few Scraps, Oily and Otherwise*. He claims to have known Col. Drake, “a jovial, kind-hearted, polite, polished gentleman.” Alf “soon found employment helping to kick down a well not far from and in sight of the Drake well.”

Published in 1907, Smiley preserves his experiences from the first fifty years of oil development in our area. His focus is on Oil

City, Franklin, Venango County, and later Clarion County. Smiley makes no mention of Bradford. Like many, his finances roller-coasted with high peaks and low bottoms. In early 1865, the last year of the Civil War, Alf was drafted into the Union Army, but his resources were enough by then to hire a substitute. “In my desire to show loyalty to my country and big-hearted generosity, I paid \$1,500 to my friend, Joe Whitaker, the favor of letting him go for me.” Alf was glad to learn that Joe made it home safely.

Smiley was a resident of the short-lived boomtown of Pithole, near Titusville. He describes when, in 1865, after many lucrative oil strikes within a small area, a chaos of humanity appeared. Within a year, Pithole went from farmland to a population of 20,000 with over 50 hotels along with all the expected challenges and vices of uncontrolled growth. Alf Smiley did well for himself - for a while. Along with Samuel Van Slyke, he participated in the first oil pipeline - from Pithole six miles to the Oil Creek railroad moving 81 barrels per hour, increasing production and cutting out work for teamsters. But Pithole was doomed. By 1867, after bank failures and uncontrolled fires, the population dropped to 2,000. Alfred W. Smiley survived, but “In various ways, I lost the greater portion of

what I had made the first year of the excitement.”

Alf remained active in various positions of the expanding oil industry, and, like a Horatio Alger character, learned and worked his way upward. From Pithole, he followed opportunities in Titusville, Oil City, Franklin, Emlenton, Shippensburg, then settled in Foxburg. He found success managing and overseeing crude oil from wellhead to refinery. “Foxburg was the point to and from which activity centered in the lower oil field. All business for St. Petersburg, Antwerp, Turkey City, Dogtown, Pickwick, Triangle, Jefferson City, and Slam-bang had their outlet at Foxburg.” Smiley became a principal buyer & seller of large quantities of oil. His largest transaction was for one hundred thousand barrels at five dollars per barrel from the U. S. Petroleum Company. For reasons he did not explain, the \$500,000 was in cash wrapped “in grocery paper”, which, along with two body guards, he personally delivered. “We were all well provided with Colt’s latest edition of annihilators.”

His “scraps” of memories are not woven into a chronological narrative, and topics often switch with minimal transitions. His flow is a challenge, but for fans of “The Lazy Bench,” Smiley’s stories will be a treat. During 1864 in Franklin, Alfred Smiley met and

became friends with John Wilkes Booth. They shot billiards together. “Booth was very stylish in his dress, rather good looking, cold in manner with strangers, but quite social and very polite.” Tales about murders and burglaries, disgruntled teamsters sabotaging pipelines, barrels of “oil” filled with water, partially filled barrels, run tickets, tank tables, early gushers erupting with no way to contain them, waterways running black with crude often catch the reader by surprise. “Chapter IV” focuses upon flat bottom boats on Oil Creek dragged upstream by horses and mules during low water. Temporary dams were constructed to hold back water. Boats were floated behind the dams and filled with barrels of oil. At synchronized times, flood gates were opened and water released to carry the loaded boats downstream to the Allegheny River. “The scene was more exciting than a three-ringed circus. Property and Life was imperiled, boats ground to splinters, thousands of barrels of oil were spilled . . .”

Throughout the text of *Scraps*, Smiley focuses on his role in oil production, and, in later years, his dabbling in politics. He mentions his wife once, “On the first day of October, 1866, I married the daughter of the late Rev, O. L. Mead, a Methodist minister.” He does not even mention his wife’s name. In the “Preface” of the book there is a formal photo of a “Mrs. A. W. Smiley.” Still no first name, and Mrs. Smiley is not smiling. Alf has no trouble mentioning the names of others, many others. The final fourteen pages of the book includes a list of hundreds of names and brief comments of those who Smiley remembered: “Densmore Bros - the first to ship crude oil in tanks on cars;” “John W. Steele (Coal Oil Johnny) - has been notoriously lied about;” “WM. Halderman - threatened to make a corpse of a man who stole oil;” “L. H. Smith - was on the toboggan going both ways;” “Charlie Goodwin - struck a good one then owned the world;” “Hon. L. Emery, Jr. - either in politics or oil, always fights to a finish;” “M. J. Kirschner - can locate a well with a witch hazel stick;” “Al Karns - on a wager, jumped off the Parker bridge;” “R. Stone - has climbed every telegraph pole between Pittsburg and Oil City;” “Sam Tippery - can tell you about towing boats up Oil Creek in the sixties;” “Frank Weller - has never been envied for the beauty of his hair;” . . .

From 1886 to 1895, Alfred W. Smiley served three

terms in the Pennsylvania State Legislature. In 1902, he lost in his attempt to represent the Twenty-seventh District of Pennsylvania in the U. S. House of Representatives, his final foray in politics. He was accused of being a “henchman for the Standard Oil Company,” which he vigorously denied. It was a bitter defeat for him.

“It is a deplorable fact many men get into the halls of legislation who are entirely void of honesty, and whose only ambition is to stand with the graft gang hoping a few tainted dollars may fall into their pockets.”

Two reprint editions of this book, published by The Pennsylvania State University Press, are available in the museum’s Kinley Library.

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*The following is an article as it appeared in The Bradford Era on June 15, 1895, concerning another famous "Moses" well.*

### The Famous Big Moses Was Struck by Lightning—A Roaring Volcano

Pittsburg, June 14.—[Special.]—The Big Moses gas well on the Spencer farm on Indian creek, located east of Sistersville 16 miles, and owned by the Victor Oil and Gas Co., was struck by lightning this afternoon and is now a roaring volcano fire.

Of all the big gas wells ever struck in this county, the “Big Moses” in volume over-leaped them all. It was drilled into the sand early in the fall last year, and the pressure was so strong that the tools were thrown out of the hole. The end of the walking beam was broken by the huge boulders thrown out of the well and the derrick was literally torn to pieces. For several months no one would undertake the hazardous work of shutting it in.

After an outlay of much money and many days of hard work, it was brought under control. Special fittings, many times heavier than had ever been before then used, had to be made to accomplish the purpose. Heavy timbers were buried deep in the ground and on top of them was poured 50 barrels of cement and to the timbers were bolted the fittings and it was thought that it was securely anchored, but in the course of a few months, it seemed to tire of its confinement and burst its bounds and since then has been flowing millions of feet of gas every day.

## A Town Built on Oil: Preserving Bradford's Past, One Donation at a Time

by Francie Long

Most pumping jacks and oil shacks are gone now, but a few remnants remain. That's why donations to the museum are always appreciated and welcomed. It helps to build our collection to educate visitors seeking knowledge of the days when Bradford's oil was flowing freely from the earth.

I grew up with the sounds of the barkers in the hills. I never gave much thought as to what it was but that it was always there like the heartbeat of the town. They were a part of waking up on foggy mornings and hearing them echo throughout the valley.

Pumping jacks were a part of our landscape and again as a kid I assumed everyone must have had them in their town. They reminded me of riding horses. Some even had horse faces painted on the front with a raggy rope on the back for the tail. I enjoyed watching them pump up and down in a slow soothing motion.

"Oil shacks" were what my grandmother called them. Some of those brown cottage style houses left over from the early days are now converted into modern housing but still bear the familiar brown oil color.

Below are a few recent items donated by local folks who either themselves worked in the fields or their family did. We are forever grateful to the kind people who think of us and bring these nostalgic items.

**A couple of hats donated by Bill Lowe of Eldred.** The red Kendall hat reminds me of the days when we were thrilled to get some of those little items that the refinery gave out to employees. Hats, mechanical pencils and pocket calendar books bearing the logo that they all came from "The Kendall".



**A nitroglycerin can and pair of a belt stretchers** were donated by Tom McElhattan of Cyclone. I've only heard and read stories about the "rugged men" who had enough guts to work with such highly explosive stuff. Also read about the men who let their guard down for one second and never lived another.



**Bob Whiteman of Bradford donated two mechanical pencils and a small Kendall oil can that had been converted into a bank.** I loved



using those pencils for drawing— no sharpening needed. Bob had a whole tool chest filled with instruments used for work in the oil fields. Unfortunately, I wasn't strong enough to help carry them into the museum.

**Becky Jordan of Big Shanty donated a sucker-rod joint (not pictured).** Early sucker rods were made of hickory before the industry switched to metal. A prime example of these wooden rods can be seen outside the museum, where they are now used as a railing.



**Brad Swackhammer of Bradford donated a booklet on the 75<sup>th</sup> diamond anniversary of Kendall Refinery, celebrated in 1956.**

### Board Of Directors

The Penn Brad Oil Museum Board of Directors is as follows:

- Brenda Fish, President
- Marsha McCracken, Vice President
- Patty Lehosky, Recording Secretary
- Joyce Cline, Treasurer
- Isabelle Champlin, Corresponding Secretary

- Jeff Brewer
- Fred Fesenmyer
- Matt Kropf
- Chip McCracken
- William Pantuso
- Stanley Pecora
- Sherri Schulze
- Dale Smith

# Penn Brad Oil Museum



## DAN PALMER MEMORIAL GOLF SCRAMBLE

### Saturday, August 15, 2026

**9am Shotgun Start**

West Warren Road ~ Bradford, PA



**Check our website and Facebook page for more details coming soon.**



Engraved personalized paving bricks can be purchased to surround the base of the flag pole. The bricks can honor people who have been involved in the oil industry or be used as a memorial to a deceased person. Bricks can also be purchased personally to show your support for the museum.



### Remember or Honor a Loved One with a Gift to the Penn Brad Oil Museum

Memorials received after May 28 will appear in the next newsletter.

Memorials are available by calling 814-368-6824, or by mailing the coupon below to: Penn Brad Oil Museum, P.O. Box 163, Bradford, PA 16701. If ordering a brick, please call the number for more details or print out the order form available on our website. A notice will be sent to the recipient.

Penn Brad Oil Museum is a 501(c)(3) entity and all donations are tax deductible. **Clip and Mail Coupon**

<b>Memorial/Honoring Gifts</b>	Check one: In Memory of _____	Name _____
	To Honor _____	
Amount Enclosed \$ _____		Send acknowledgment to:
Donor's name _____		Name _____
Donor's address _____		Address _____
		_____

# Derrick Day

Saturday, July 11, 2026

10am - 3pm

**Free Admission** (*Donations appreciated!*)

*Fun  
for the  
whole family!*

PENN BRAD  
OIL MUSEUM

- \* Antique Engines & Displays
- \* Short Historical Movies  
in the Doghouse Theater
- \* Heritage Craft Demonstrations
  - \* Tour the Museum
  - \* Live Music
  - \* Food Vendors
- \* 50/50 & Basket Raffles

Penn Brad Oil Museum

901 South Ave (219 South), Bradford, PA

Visit our Facebook page for more articles, photos, and updates. User name: Penn Brad Oil Museum.

PO Box 163  
Bradford, PA 16701