

and one man even handed us his car keys, telling us to drive ourselves to a restaurant.

While traveling through the Mojave Desert, we were excited to meet a family from Milwaukee, who, of course, immediately handed us a cold beer! A highlight of our journey was the Grand Canyon. Once there, we rested for two days and enjoyed the scenery.

As we pedaled up Highway 1 along the Pacific Ocean, we realized that our time and money had run short. Although our route had changed from the original plans, we were satisfied with our progress. It was mid-August, and with 16 states behind us and 5,200 miles, we were ready to go home.

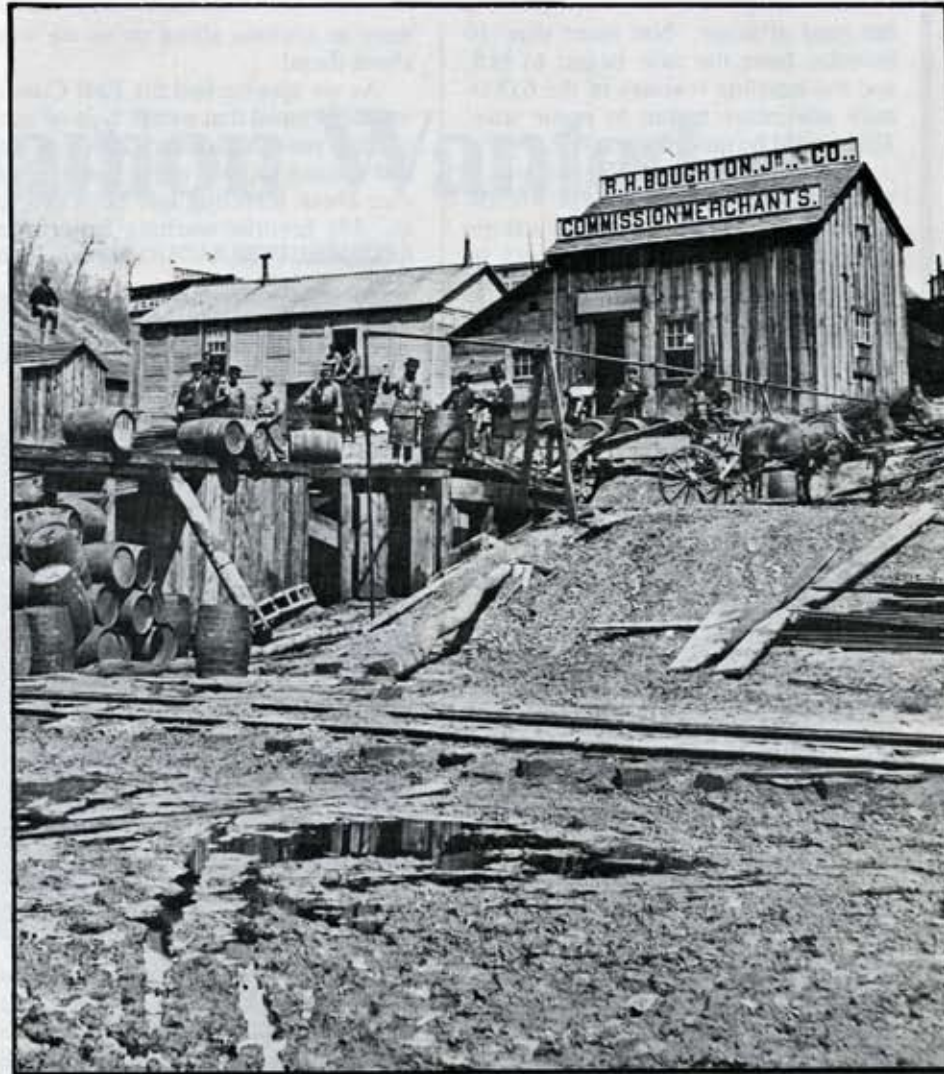
It was a quiet day as Mike and I flew home from San Francisco. We would have to readjust to a routine way of life, and knew it would be difficult to be apart.

Upon our return, people often asked "Why would you want to travel across the country by bicycle?" A car would have taken us much farther and would have certainly provided more comfort. But the answer to this question is quite clear. Bicyclists see a part of the country that most people miss while driving down interstate highways. Bicyclists learn more about nature and, most of all, gain a better understanding of what kinds of people make up the United States.

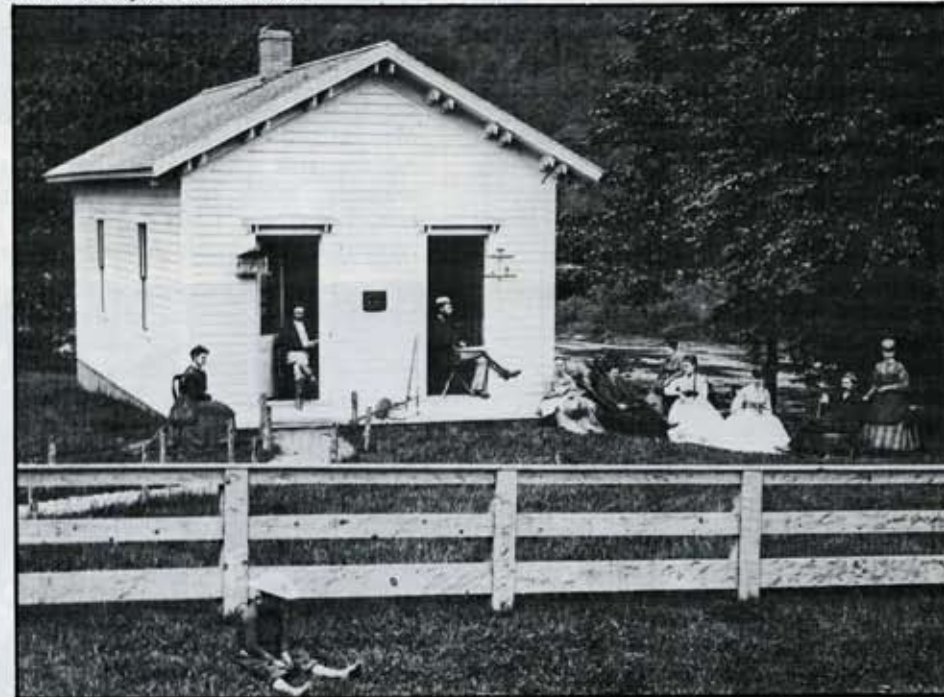
Another important benefit of traveling by bicycle was the personal growth we experienced. There was no one else to pedal the bike for us. We learned self-confidence, pride, and a great deal of independence. I was extremely proud that I had lived for three months without use of a microwave oven, television, stereo, or refrigerator! Finally, we came to realize how magnificent our nation is. The land is beautiful, the people are friendly, and the roads are free to travel.

It still amazes me, when I think back, how well Mike and I got along during the entire trek across America. Not once did we argue. Our only disagreements started when choosing groceries for dinner. We conquered many obstacles through 5,200 miles.

Now, after two years have gone by, Mike and I have gotten married. We once shared a dream and will now share the rest of our lives. We look back at the M&M Bicycle Tour with fond memories. The personal ad I answered years ago in *BikeReport* has its place on the first page in our photo album. Where will we go for a honeymoon? On a bicycle tour, of course. But we're only planning a 3,000-mile trip this time!



Photos courtesy of Drake Well Museum



Pennsylvania Crude

Before Dallas, there was Titusville

By Daria Woodside

The ridge is thickly forested. Deer, bear and wild turkey roam the area foraging for food. An occasional break in the trees gives a view of the creek lazily flowing through the valley below.

Sometimes it's possible to see fishermen in hip-high waders casting a line in the middle of the stream or a raccoon busily searching for crawfish under the rocks. Chipmunks chatter warnings as an occasional rider passes them by, bicycling the 10-mile trail that runs along the ridge in Oil Creek State Park near Titusville in Northwestern Pennsylvania. For better or worse, this is where an industry destined to shape America's future was born.

Riding the smooth, flat, asphalt path under a cathedral of trees it's difficult to imagine that a little more than 100 years ago the same area was filled with prospectors looking for black gold: Pennsylvania's oil.

Then the only trees were bare year-round. Men with handlebar mustaches and mutton-chop sideburns waded ankle deep in mud, erecting derricks along the ridge, hoping gushers would come in. And come in they did, making instant millionaires of many of the investors.

It started in 1859 when "Colonel" Edwin Drake struck oil in Titusville, Pennsylvania. What ensued can only be compared to the California gold rush. What had previously been a quiet farming community suddenly became a booming oil region.

Investors and speculators ranging from John D. Rockefeller, who founded the Standard Oil Company, to Lincoln's assassin John Wilkes Booth, who bought and sold stock in a well before it could make him rich, flooded the area.

Within a short time all of the lots along Oil Creek and out into the countryside were leased, or sold, and being drilled for oil. Well after well came in and within a few years well after well went dry. Many wells that made fortunes and places that were important during the boom are now only wooden

markers along the bike trail.

The path begins about 12 miles from Titusville in Petroleum Center. Dotted with picnic tables, parking spaces and a children's playground, it's hard to imagine that once the area was filled with houses of prostitution, gambling halls and bars, and had a reputation of being even more wicked than Sodom and Gomorrah.

A replica of the Coquette Well,



next to the park office, stands to remind visitors of what made the ghost town rich and infamous.

The bike rental office is in the old Egbert Farm Oil Office where once leases could be bought and sold. The 39-acre Egbert farm was purchased by two brothers, who were physicians, in 1859. Every well that was drilled on the property brought the investors greater wealth. One well alone, the Maple Shade, netted \$1,500,000. The owners sold the farm in 1864 for \$200,000.

The trail itself was once the tracks

of the Oil Creek Railroad, which, during its first 14 months of business in the early 1860's, carried 430,684 barrels of oil out of the area. Coasting along the shaded bikeway it's easy to glide by the brown and yellow markers that indicate where important stops along the railroad once were.

Miller Farm is one such place. Here the world's first pipeline carried oil from the boomtown of Pithole to waiting tank cars on the tracks at the farm. Before its development, there were at least 3,000 teamsters hauling oil in wagons from the Oil Creek region. Their prices were high (almost \$3 a barrel, close to the market price of a barrel of oil) and the road conditions were intolerable.

Soon oil was being produced faster than it could be shipped. Pipelines began to spring up throughout the region to speed transportation and to avoid the exorbitant fees of the teamsters, who soon found themselves out of work. Angry at their loss, they began making raids to destroy the pipelines.

At Shaffer Farm, another spot along the bike trail, two new pipelines drove 400 haulers out of the area in 1866. Those that remained sought vengeance when they set fire to the tanks on the shipping platform at the farm. Luckily the tanks had been emptied the day before and little damage was done.

Today, hidden among the trees are remnants of the by-gone era. A stone foundation, some solid wooden beams or part of an old tank all act as reminders of the past. Many relics can be seen among the trees just riding along the path. Pedaling through the forest it soon seems almost possible to hear the sound of the derricks or the old steam engine train puffing along the ridge.

Approaching the end of the trail the fantasy becomes real as the clanging sound of a working well echoes across the valley from Drake's Well Museum.

Only the sight of the park buildings yanks the imagination back to the present and to the trail's end not far from the well where it all began.