

VENANGO COUNTY PENNSYLVANIA

HER PIONEERS AND PEOPLE

Embracing a General History of the County

PREPARED BY

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*A Genealogical and Biographical Record of
Representative Families*

TWO VOLUMES

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BIOGRAPHICAL

JOHN B. SMITHMAN is a name connected with so many permanent public improvements that belong to a history of Venango county that we give from his autobiography a condensed account of a few of the many activities that have formed a part of his busy life. We find here much data of historic value of the stirring days when the oil industry, born in Venango county, was in its infancy and dominated the affairs of the county, and which in fifty-nine years has grown to stupendous magnitude, changed the economic life of every nation, and was an important factor in winning the world war that ended Nov. 11, 1918.

Mr. Smithman was born on a farm near Shippenville, Clarion Co., Pa., Dec. 31, 1844, and in 1851 removed to a farm near Knox, that county, where he attended the country district schools three months each year. In 1860 he entered the Shippenville high school, where one professor personally taught all the students in attendance; was selected by Professor Haight to teach the high school one week in February, 1861, during the Professor's absence on other business; taught district school in 1862 near Knox; again attended high school; taught district school in 1863 at Hill City, Venango county; taught school in the early part of 1864 in what was called the "Red School House," located a half mile south of what is now South Oil City. To the latter district at that time belonged all of what is now South Oil City from Sage Run to Deep Hollow, all being then in Cranberry township.

In the winter of 1864 Mr. Smithman drifted into the oil business as a buyer of barrelled oil on Oil creek, selling it in Oil City on the west side of Oil creek, where then was a great busy oil mart, and the principal business part of Oil City. At this time he was also engaged in the business of looking up oil lands or leases having thereon ravines, streams,

large or small, and more particularly streams with branch streams running into them; and making maps thereof, with the streams conspicuously marked, and turning the lands over, on a short time option sale, to promoters, who in turn would join other promoters in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore and other cities, and use these options and maps, with flaming prospectuses, as the basis for forming stock companies with high-sounding names, such as "Ocean Petroleum Company," "Pouring Rock Oil Company," "Oil Basin Petroleum Company," with large capitalization, and selling stock therein, at fabulous prices; all on the theory, then prevailing in the oil country, and emphasized to the prospective buyers of lands, leases or stock certificates, that the oil was found in vertical and horizontal crevices in the rock formations, below the surface, and that the ravines, streams and coves on the lands offered were sure indications of crevices, deep below the surface, where oil would surely be found. A stream or ravine with a branch running into it, made it doubly certain that a crevice filled with oil existed below, at or near the place where they joined. An example of this is the castiron drive pipe conductor in Monarch Park, now a popular, flowing drinking fountain, where in 1864 the Fulton Mining Company located an oil well at the confluence of Three Lick run and Van Buren run, by which names these streams were then known. A flow of mineral water found at a depth of ninety feet prevented further progress by the then crude methods for drilling oil well holes. In 1865 the crevice theory of oil deposits gave way to the theory that oil existed in a horizontal porous rock, and that by drilling down to the level of the oil rock, oil could be found on elevated lands as well as along streams and valleys.

In 1865 and the fore part of 1866 Mr.

Smithman owned a shipping platform at Reno, and witnessed the rise and fall of C. V. Culver's dream of a magnificent city at that place that would eclipse and supersede Oil City, based on a secret agreement made by officers of the Atlantic & Great Western Railroad Company, as revealed by Mr. Culver, confidentially to a few intimate, interested friends, that the A. & G. W. R. Company, which had a six-foot-gauge road, would stop its road at the "narrows" on the west side of Oil City and not extend it through Oil City to its east side, and therefore he could isolate Oil City by building a road from Reno direct to Rouseville, and divert from Oil City the Oil creek oil business by connecting at Rouseville with the Cherry Run & Oil Creek railroad, which was organized early in 1865 by directors of the Columbia Oil Company to construct a railroad from its oil wells on the Story farm to Oil City. Mr. Culver's road, called the Reno, Oil Creek & Pithole railroad, was a three-foot, nine-inch-gauge road, and was built from Reno over steep grades up Shafer run and over the hills north of Oil City and down the brow of the hill on the east side of Cornplanter run, and on a high wooden trestle and wooden bridge fifty feet high over Oil creek to Rouseville, thence to Plumer, where was located the Humboldt oil refinery, then the largest in the world; and early in 1866 several passenger and freight trains were operated daily between Reno and Plumer. The road was graded to Pithole, but no cars were ever run there. Gen. A. E. Burnside was chief engineer. Galusha A. Grow, once Speaker of the National House of Representatives, was president of the Reno Oil & Land Company, which owned twelve hundred acres of land and was capitalized at ten million dollars. Reno was named after Gen. Jesse Lee Reno, and in 1865 was a booming city, with several solid blocks of business houses, and a projected seminary. The *Reno Times* was a well edited newspaper with a wide circulation. But in the latter part of 1865 a cloud arose. The Jamestown & Franklin branch of the Lake Shore railroad, a four-foot, nine-inch-gauge road, surveyed an extension of its road from Franklin to Oil City, including a tunnel under "Hog Back," in Oil City, to run its road on a low grade up Oil creek. This forced the A. & G. W. in self-defense to seek a route to the east side of Oil City to connect with the Farmers' railroad, a four-foot, nine-inch road, which, under the management of R. R. Taylor, was projected to go from the east side of Oil City up Oil creek, to meet the Oil Creek railroad, also

a four-foot, nine-inch road, that was building from Titusville to Petroleum Center; and with the Oil City & Pithole railroad, a four-foot, nine-inch road, which was projected to go from Oil City up the river to Pithole. Sir Morton Peto, James McHenry and a score of other foreign stockholders of the A. & G. W. visited the oil country to investigate its possible future, and they came to Oil City and together with many owners of wharves and interested private citizens stormed the Oil City borough council and quietly obtained its consent to lay tracks on the alley that extended most of the way from the west side of the city to Oil creek; rights of way for the remainder of the distance were purchased; tracks were speedily laid; a track was laid on the ice over Oil creek; a steam locomotive was rushed across on it for the use of the Farmers' railroad, to hurry its construction up Oil creek ahead of the Cherry Run & Oil Creek railroad, and of the Jamestown & Franklin road, which was delayed by its forty-thousand-dollar tunnel. A railroad bridge over Oil creek was commenced by the A. & G. W.; and Mr. Culver's dream of a large city at Reno was ended. The collapse came on March 27, 1866, when occurred the failure of Culver, Penn & Co.'s bank in New York and a string of affiliated banks in the oil country, including the Petroleum Bank at Titusville, the Venango Bank at Franklin, the Crawford County Bank at Meadville, the Oil City Bank at Oil City, and the A. D. Cotton & Co. Bank at Petroleum Center, causing a financial panic in the oil country and dense gloom in Reno. Five years later not a vestige of Mr. Culver's railroad remained. The inside history of the basis and failure of Mr. Culver's colossal enterprise, here disclosed, was never in any way public information. After the failure of the banks Mr. Smithman moved his shipping platform and office building from Reno to Oil City, and sold it to John Munhall & Co., who owned an extensive oil wharf in what is now the Third ward of Oil City, and who used the material to connect their wharf with the track of the A. & G. W. railroad, Mr. Smithman entering the employ of this company as a purchaser of oil. He relates that one day in 1868 he went up Oil creek on his mission and bought a large quantity of oil, from Cherry Run to Petroleum Center, paying three dollars per barrel in the morning and advancing the price by quarters and halves until he was bidding six dollars per barrel in the evening, without sellers. Oil then was shipped in bulk in wooden tub tanks holding

fifty barrels each, one on each end of a flat car, from Oil creek and from Pithole, to the oil yards in Oil City west of Oil creek, on a third rail of the A. & G. W. tracks, to be transferred to wide-gauge cars, hence the names tank car and tank steamer. This method was followed until 1880, when the A. & G. W. changed its gauge from six feet to four feet, nine inches, which soon thereafter became the standard gauge of railroads all over the United States. This change by the A. & G. W. railroad was made on its road from Salamanca, N. Y., to Dayton, Ohio, and to Oil City, nearly three hundred miles, on Sunday, June 20, 1880, without delaying its express trains, and was considered a great engineering feat.

In 1867 Mr. Smithman drilled an oil well on the bank of Oil creek above what is now Duncomb street in Oil City, in a manner that was a radical departure from the way oil wells were then drilled. He drove eight-inch iron pipe through the gravel to bed rock, instead of six-inch, and then, instead of drilling a five-inch hole from the bed rock clear down through the oil rock, with a column of water standing in the hole, as was then the practice, he drilled a seven-inch hole down below the fresh water rocks. This large hole was stopped at 140 feet from the surface, and five-inch iron pipe inserted therein to rest on the bottom of the hole. He then poured down a liberal amount of flax seed and mud on top of it on the outside of this pipe, to seal the lower end against water going through; bailed out the column of water, and behold the seal was tight. A four-and-three-quarters-inch hole was then drilled through the inside of this five-inch pipe, down through the oil rock, free from the usual column of water and its various evils. A ten-barrel oil well was obtained, and no other casing, or seed bag on the tubing, was necessary.

In the days of salt wells, drilled along the lower Allegheny river and elsewhere, in 1859 and before, it was the custom to drill with a center bit a two-and-one-half-inch hole, followed by a three-and-one-half-inch rimmer and by a second rimmer four and one-half inches in diameter, making a four-and-one-half-inch hole down through all the rocks including the salt water rock, and then insert into this finished hole two-inch tubing, with a leather sleeve, filled with flaxseed, called seed bag, on the outside of this tubing, at a point below the fresh water rocks lying near the surface; the flaxseed would swell and shut off the fresh water from descending into the

salt brine-bearing rock, a horizontal porous rock lying four hundred feet below the surface at Tarentum, Pa.; and later, when oil wells were sunk on Oil creek in 1859, this plan was followed in every particular, even to the seed bag to prevent water from going into the oil-bearing rock. In 1865 the Commercial Oil Company on the James Tarr farm, having much trouble with its pumping outfits, which necessitated frequent withdrawals from its oil wells of the tubing and seed bags, and consequent releasing of the column of water into the oil rocks, resulting in great damage to its wells, conceived the idea of inserting into its finished wells three-and-a-quarter-inch casing below the upper fresh water rocks with a seed bag on the outside of the lower end of this casing to keep out the fresh water. The tubing without a seed bag was then inserted inside of this casing, and this plan was used generally in old wells and new wells until the method adopted by Mr. Smithman superseded it, and which is now in general use. Later mud was used instead of flax seed, and five-and-five-eighths-inch casing, instead of five-inch pipe, came into use, with a five-and-a-half-inch hole drilled through it.

Later he operated for oil in Butler, Clarion, McKean, Warren, Washington, Allegheny and Venango counties, Pa., and experienced the usual ups and downs allotted to the prospector in a business that is proverbial for producing men of acumen and financial daring. At present (1919) he has extensive holdings of oil lands and wells in the second sand district of Venango county.

He also took an active part in the regulation of the speculative oil trade, which was depended upon to absorb and carry the enormous oil stocks that commenced to accumulate in 1873, on account of the fact that the amount of the oil produced largely exceeded the consumptive demand therefor. This trade consisted of buying and selling, for prospective profit, so-called oil certificates, in the various Oil Exchanges, located, one each, at Oil City, Parker, Titusville, Bradford, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and New York City, and elsewhere. These certificates were negotiable, and were issued by various pipe line companies engaged in the business of transporting crude oil from oil wells to refineries, railroad shipping points, and huge iron storage tanks. They were issued for one thousand barrels of oil each, deliverable upon demand at any point reached by the company issuing them, and were subject to a pipeage charge of twenty cents per barrel, payable when the oil was

called for, and also to a charge for storage and shrinkage payable in advance every fifteen days. Mr. Smithman was chairman of the committee that formulated the rules and regulations for the government of the extensive dealings in these Oil Exchanges, which were all more or less affiliated and all governed by the same trade regulations, which all the members agreed in writing to support and maintain. One of these rules provided for the settlement by an arbitration committee of all disputes arising among members; another provided for confining all trading in oil among members to the hours between nine o'clock a. m. and three p. m., and, to this end, Mr. Smithman arranged with the Western Union Telegraph Company, which was connected with all the Oil Exchanges, to ring in them, simultaneously, a gong at nine a. m. and three p. m. to mark the opening and closing time for trading; this being the first time in history when instant time was sent to widely separated points by electricity. He was chairman of the committee which in 1877 got out a charter of incorporation for the Oil City Oil Exchange and selected and purchased the site for the magnificent building erected on the west side of Seneca street, between Sycamore and Center, and which became the home of what had always been the leading Oil Exchange, and in which the trading amounted to many millions of barrels per day, making the base market price for oil throughout the world.

In 1882 the stocks of oil in one pipe line alone, the National Transit Company, operating in western Pennsylvania and New York, amounted to over thirty-three million barrels, most of which was covered by these oil certificates; and the extensive trading in the Oil City Oil Exchange by numerous brokers and traders, by open bids around a "bull ring," caused much confusion when the deliveries of these oil certificates and bank checks in payment therefor had to be made, which by a rule were due and deliverable before three o'clock p. m. on the day after the sales were made. The brokers and dealers depended upon getting in, at this time daily, the oil purchased by them the previous day, in order to make deliveries, at this time daily, of their sales of the previous day, amounting to hundreds of transactions each day by each active trader. This resulted in a big rush just before the close of the delivery hour, often ending in failure to make all the deliveries within the time set to make them, and frequently causing a financial loss to those directly concerned; and various expedients were tried by a com-

mittee appointed by the Exchange to remedy the evil, but none were successful. It was then that Mr. Smithman, although not an active trader, nor a member of this committee, got up a plan, by which each trader was enabled to effect daily, with ease, all his receipts and deliveries of both oil certificates and money. This was accomplished by each trader making, on a sheet of paper ruled for the purpose, a list of his purchases and of his sales, with the names of co-traders and prices and amounts thereof, and footings of both oil and money and balances due to or from the trader, and delivery to a clearing house or receiving therefrom only the balances shown, of both oil and money; the balances of all the traders balancing each other. He demonstrated his plan by going through the actual operation of clearing at a meeting of the Oil Exchange called for this purpose, which thereupon adopted it by nearly a unanimous vote, and it proved so simple, that all the Oil Exchanges and later the stock exchanges throughout the United States adopted it, and it is now used by all stock exchanges and bourses throughout the world for the delivery of different commodities and money at the same time. Since the successful operation of this plan many persons have bobbed up in different cities claiming to have invented it, one New Yorker even trying to copyright it; but these are all disposed of by the minutes of the meeting of the Oil City Exchange held Oct. 10, 1882, where appears this record: "Mr. J. B. Smithman presented and demonstrated his plan for making deliveries of oil certificates, consisting of sheets ruled for the purpose, one sheet to be filled out each day by each trader, showing his purchases in a column on one side and his sales in a column on the other, and the amount and prices thereof in separate columns; the names of the sellers and the purchasers in other columns; and showing at the foot the amounts of the balances of both oil and money due to or from the trader; checking up with each trader involved; and delivery of this sheet with bank check, and oil certificates, shown to be due from the trader, to a clearing house manager, whose duty it shall be to prove the balances and deliver them to whomsoever is entitled to them. The meeting adopted the plan."

In 1883 the question arose among the holders of these oil certificates whether the National Transit Company really held sufficient stocks of oil to cover or make good the oil certificates it had outstanding; and to allay suspicion, the Pipe Line Company invited the

Oil Exchanges to gauge its tanks and examine its books. Mr. Smithman, although an opponent of the alleged ruthless seizure of the oil trade by the Standard Oil Company interests, was on account of his reputation for fairness selected by the Oil Exchanges, and accepted by the Pipe Line Company, to act as chairman of a committee to make the gauge and examine the books. All the oil stocks of this company, amounting to over thirty-six million barrels in iron and wooden tanks, scattered over a large area of country, were measured in one day, Sept. 1, 1883, and the books of the company were later examined, showing an excess of over half a million barrels of oil on hand, which stimulated the price of oil, and further speculation in it. On May 14, 1884, the trading in the Oil City Exchange amounted to over twenty-nine million barrels; on the next day, to over twenty-seven million barrels; and the extensive dealings in these oil certificates made the base for the market price of oil for the whole world, which finally was not to the liking of the Standard Oil Company. So in 1893 the Standard Oil Company interests stopped buying these oil certificates, the issues of their own pipe line company, except at a prohibitory discount, which they had previously been buying at market prices to replenish their needs of crude oil; and announced that they would buy only what are now termed "credit balances," at a price made by themselves, and thus, in one stroke, was enacted the tragedy that killed the trading in oil in the Oil Exchanges; and, as a consequence, killed the Oil Exchanges themselves.

In 1885 Mr. Smithman was a pioneer in the Speechley gas field in Venango county, ten miles southeast of Oil City, drilling several good gas wells into the deep gas sand. In 1886 he organized the Manufacturers' Gas Company and put into Oil City and vicinity a complete substantial gas distribution plant, in competition with a plant owned by Standard Oil Company interests, and made contracts and delivered cheap gas for three years, and also helped to organize the Columbia Gas Company, selling to that company fee and leased land of over one thousand acres. Both of these companies obtained their supply of gas from this gas field, and after a war of cheap gas became part of the United Natural Gas Company, which supplies gas in Venango, Crawford and Mercer counties. In 1886, during the construction of the gas lines in Oil City, he invented the flexible coupling for connecting gas pipe line joints, whereby a rub-

ber ring is compressed against the outside of the gas pipe by means of bolts and a sleeve, thus making a tight joint without a screwed coupling, and which is now in universal use on gas lines.

In 1886 he was interested in the Keystone Oil Company, being its secretary and the manager of its oil lines, which extended to the Tarkill oil field in Venango county and to the Cogley Run oil field in Clarion county, where he had many oil wells, and where the company purchased oil directly from owners of oil wells and piped it to its refinery below Rouseville. When a premium for oil in these districts locally was bid up by Standard Oil Company interests to seventeen cents per barrel, only three cents below the price for this oil delivered at the refineries, causing the pipe lines of the company to be operated at a loss and helping to reduce the company itself to financial straits, he at the request of its board of directors purchased the pipe lines of the company at their cost to put the company in funds, and to save the patrons of the oil lines from financial loss and from deserting the lines, with the understanding that the company could redeem the pipe lines at any time it so desired. He paid his own money for the oil collected by the oil lines and sold it to the refinery company at the market price delivered, which was only three cents per barrel above the price at the wells, twenty miles away, and besides took the company's obligations for much of the oil, for which obligations he received later from the receiver ten cents on the dollar. Adverse interests, however, applied before Judge Charles E. Taylor, of the Venango County court, for the appointment of a receiver of the company, whereupon the directors, realizing that a possible hostile receiver could wreck the company, which was still a going concern with a new, up-to-date, complete refinery, and desiring to convert into quick assets the entire property of the company while it was in good running order, and for which they had secured, from a syndicate organized by themselves, a standing offer equal to its entire cost, and much more than enough to pay all its indebtedness, made, before the time set for the hearing for a receiver, an assignment for the benefit of all the creditors, there being no judgment creditors. But Judge Taylor ignored the assignment and held a hearing and in 1887 appointed a receiver, who a year after his appointment sold the entire plant, including the oil pipe lines, at public sales; Standard

Oil interests becoming the buyers, and the creditors of the company receiving ten per cent. of their claims.

In April, 1888, while Mr. Smithman was operating the pipe lines above referred to, the editor of the Oil City *Derrick*, a newspaper that was owned by Standard Oil Company interests, brought suit, as an informer, in the Venango County court against him for the sum of \$80,500 penalties for alleged violation of an act of Assembly passed May 22, 1878, which was enacted for the purpose of safeguarding owners of oil in the custody of companies or persons engaged in the business of transporting or storing petroleum, etc. Mr. Smithman contended that he himself owned all the oil he transported, and therefore did not come under the act and should not be compelled to reveal his private business to a powerful rival bent on crushing him; and feeling that he and the Keystone Oil Company were treated very unfairly by the sitting judge in the receiver case, he decided to apply for a change of venue to another court, to try the penalty case, to which change he was entitled on account of the county of Venango being entitled to a part of the penalty to be recovered. The hearing upon the application for a change of venue was taken up by Judge Taylor, who said to the attorneys: "Well, gentlemen, where will you send this case?" Mr. Smithman's attorney, desiring for reasons to prevent it from being sent to Butler county, forced the other side to make the first suggestion of a place, and the other side, probably thinking that their first choice would be objected to, named Crawford county; to which Mr. Smithman's attorney promptly replied: "We concur in Crawford county and Crawford county it is." But the court arbitrarily, and against the strenuous protest of Mr. Smithman's attorney, took it out of the hands of the attorneys and sent it to Butler county! Butler county and Lawrence county constituted one judicial district, having a president judge who lived in the town of Butler, and an active associate judge, who lived in the town of New Castle, Lawrence county. The case against Mr. Smithman was continued a number of times, and he while attending the court sessions observed that the president judge always attended to the motions and other routine work of the court, and the associate judge always took the first jury and first case ready and went into another courtroom, and there tried this first case. Here was a possible chance to get the case away from the judge, who he felt had been selected by the Venango county judge to try

the case. So when the plaintiff's leading attorney, who lived at Oil City, came to Mr. Smithman to get his consent to "just one more continuance of the case," he demurred and complained of the many times he had his witnesses at court at large expense for nothing, but finally suggested that if the case could be placed first on the list at the following term, so that he could tell just when to have his witnesses there and save the big expense, he might consent to one more continuance. To this proposition the plaintiff's attorney unwittingly agreed, and a paper in accordance therewith was drawn up, signed, sealed and left with Mr. Smithman, and the plaintiff's Butler lawyers did not know of the full contents of the paper until the case was called and thus got first on the list at the next term of court, when it was tried by the associate judge on its merits. A vast amount of testimony was taken, and a Butler county jury, upon the trial of the case, ending Nov. 16, 1889, rendered a verdict in favor of the defendant, on the ground that the oil transported by him was his own oil after receiving it into his pipe lines. The plaintiff attacked the verdict in the columns of his newspaper with bitterness, but the Supreme court of Pennsylvania confirmed it, and thus ended a hotly contested case that was watched by the entire oil country.

In 1890 Mr. Smithman incorporated the Oil City Street Railway Company, whose cars were to be run by electric motors; and being unable to make arrangements for running street cars upon the then existing toll bridges, and there being an act of Assembly, passed in 1876, and regularly digested, prohibiting the building of any highway bridge within three thousand feet of any existing toll bridge, without its consent, he in 1891 secured the passage of an act, by the unanimous vote of both houses of the Pennsylvania legislature, empowering street railways to build their own bridges over streams within the State, with the consent of the local authorities; but Governor Pattison vetoed the bill after the close of the session. Mr. Smithman thereupon, not wishing to wait two years for the next session of the legislature, investigated all legislation and court decisions upon the subject of highway bridges, and by combining the effect of three separate decisions of the Supreme court of the State, rendered at different times, concluded that the amendment containing the three thousand feet limit was void. In March, 1892, after three hearings, he convinced the secretary of State of this fact and secured a

charter to build the "Relief Bridge" over the Allegheny river at the foot of Central avenue, between and within four hundred feet of the other two toll bridges, erected prior to the act of 1876. He commenced the construction of the bridge piers and of the street railway in 1892 after the great flood and fire in Oil City of June 5th of that year, and after all his associate stockholders in both bridge and street railway had, on account of the gloomy future prospects, decided not to invest any money whatever in the enterprise. The piers and the abutments of the bridge were planned and finished at a height to go over the tracks of the Allegheny Valley railroad at a distance of nineteen feet above the rails, in order to meet the grade of Front street; this being one foot higher, above the tracks, than was the suspension bridge, three hundred and fifty feet below; and two feet higher than was the Petroleum bridge, four hundred feet above. But the railroad company refused to permit a span at a less distance than twenty-two feet above its rails, which would mean a jumping down of over four feet at the south end of the bridge, to get onto Front street. The city engineer refused permission to raise Front street. The railroad company stood ready to serve an injunction against putting a span over its tracks at a less distance, and they had a nest of Western Union telegraph wires running along the right of way, and located just where the roadway of the bridge would come. And Judge Taylor, who had shown unfair hostility in the Keystone cases, and who had been attorney for the Allegheny Valley Railroad Company, would be on the bench to hear the application for an injunction! And all the iron work for the bridge was on the ground! And the press of the city was attacking him and his enterprises, making every step he took difficult and expensive! Here was a problem! Well, a few days before Decoration Day, 1893, mention was made to fishermen of a newly discovered trout stream on Stewart's run in the wilds of Allegheny township. The Judge, who was an ardent fisherman, heard of it. He and a friend of his, with fishing rods, were seen on the morning of May 29th, the day before Decoration Day, to enter the train for Titusville, on the way to Stewart's run. During the early hours of Decoration Day holes were dug in front of two telegraph poles above, and two poles below, the location of the bridge span; the poles were then sawed off at the level of the ground, and dropped bodily into the holes, thus lowering the nest of wires down out of the

way of the roadway of the bridge before daylight, the holes were all carefully filled up, the ground covered with locomotive cinders as before. The two heavy iron plate girders, ninety feet long, weighing twenty tons each, composing the sides of the span to go over the three railroad tracks, were up in the air on gin poles at six a. m., out of reach of the switch engine that came tearing down the middle track five minutes later to ram them down. Mr. Thomas, the yardmaster, scrutinized the nest of wires, the poles, the ground and all surroundings, but could not figure out what had been done to the nest of telegraph wires. Front street was lined with spectators all day, watching and cheering the speedy workmen, who by night had completed the iron work of the span, the south end of which rested on the south abutment, and the north end on its own iron pedestal. The railroad attorney, after frantic efforts, got Judge Taylor located, and served papers on Mr. Smithman for a hearing at four p. m. on the following day at Franklin, in proceedings for an injunction. But before the hearing took place the span was finished, with street car tracks in place and loaded hand cars running over them, and crowds of people using the span, although no other span was as yet completed. At the hearing his papers showed the court that he had a charter to erect and operate a highway bridge over the Allegheny river with approaches to Front street and to Main street, on plans duly approved by the Secretary of War, and that the span in question had a clearance over the railroad tracks of one foot more than a bridge located three hundred and fifty feet below, and two feet more than another bridge located four hundred feet above, and that the span was in daily use and did not interfere with railroad traffic, that the A. V. Railroad Company had a summit in the roadbed one and a half feet high, right under the bridge span, and that no injunction could interfere with public use of his bridge. The judge took the papers and gave no decision, and the problem was solved. The bridge, eight hundred and thirty feet long, was finished during the financial panic of 1893, when occurred a frightful shrinking of values, and the first street car was run over it on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 30th, of that year. The price of oil during all of 1892 and most of the year 1893 was below sixty cents per barrel, on account of the large production of the McDonald oil field in Allegheny county, and new oil fields in West Virginia, so that the population of Oil City and the "upper country"

migrated in droves to these new oil fields, which, together with the effects of the disastrous fire of 1892, created a feeling of uncertainty as to the future of Oil City, and therefore the building, by Mr. Smithman, during these panicky times, of the new bridge, with one-penny toll for foot passengers, as compared with the three cents on the upper bridge, and the construction of the street railway, he furnishing all the money for both and giving employment to a large number of idle men, were, with the exception of the public press, gratefully acknowledged by the people of Oil City, but also soon forgotten. These public improvements engendered a feeling of confidence in the future of Oil City and encouraged people to buy homes and locate here permanently. Property values in the city and particularly on the south side of the river increased millions of dollars in a short time. In 1894 and 1895 Mr. Smithman extended the street railway to Cottage Hill; to the East End; and to the West End, and finding that the street railway business would not pay in Oil City he purchased five hundred and thirty acres of forest lands in Cranberry township, midway between Oil City and Franklin, and thereon founded what was known as "Smithman Park," and in July, 1896, against the protest of the newspapers, extended his street railway to it, with a view of extending the railway later to Franklin. This park has an ideal location, contains valuable mineral springs, and at once became a popular resort for all classes, attracting picnics from all the nearby towns and the surrounding country, which had previously gone to distant places, at large expense and tedious travel. The park thus became a valuable asset to Oil City, Franklin, and the surrounding country, as well as to the street railway company. Early in 1895 the bar of Venango county held a public meeting and there decided to impeach Charles E. Taylor, judge of the Venango County court, and appointed a committee of three to prepare articles of impeachment to be presented to the State legislature. This committee called upon Mr. Smithman to get his testimony in connection with the Keystone cases and he had the belated opportunity of showing them the ruinous results of diverted law and justice as administered by the judge in these cases. Judge Taylor resigned.

In August, 1900, Mr. Smithman sold the "Relief Bridge" to the county at half its cost, to be made, against the violent protest of the Oil City public press, a free bridge—the first free bridge over the river in Oil City. Mem-

bers of the Citizens' Traction Company and of the press started proceedings to enjoin the county commissioners from closing the deal, but they failed.

In 1900 he secured an ordinance to build a street railway in the city of Franklin, and a permit from the War Department to erect a bridge over the Allegheny river to enter that town at Third street, and commenced the erection of piers for this bridge and the extension of the street railway from the Park to Franklin, and also commenced the construction, on his lands, of a dam one mile below the Park for a lake. But before their completion he sold, Jan. 14, 1901, his street railway and the surface of sixty acres of the Park lands, including the Auditorium, restaurant and pavilion, to the Citizens' Traction Company, which backed by the press of the city had secured an ordinance to build a rival street railway in Oil City, including the right to use the tracks of Mr. Smithman's road through the center of the city and the construction of which was actively progressing—and he knew that there was no room financially for two street railway systems. The new company changed the name of Smithman Park to Monarch Park.

In 1901, after the opening of the Spindle Top gusher oil field, near Beaumont, Texas, Mr. Smithman was invited to come to Houston, Texas, to help form the King Oil Company, a three million dollar oil corporation, which had oil leases in the coastal counties of Texas, including the renowned King ranch of a million and a half acres in Nueces county. He examined the charter of the company, which was the same as others that were being granted in Texas, and he convinced the two lawyers on the board of the company and the attorney general of the State that these charters were invalid, because they authorized leasing and buying of oil lands; operating for oil; refining, selling and dealing therein; and also the laying and operating of pipe lines for transporting oil, and condemning lands for rights of way therefor; the latter, as he claimed, being a common carrier public service business, separate and distinct from the former, and therefore not germane as required by law. The charter was changed, and thereafter no more such charters were granted in Texas. The promoters of the company, which included Pittsburgh (Pa.) oil men, had taken the leases on the northeast and southwest belt line theory, prevailing in New York, Pennsylvania and West Virginia oil and gas fields. He convinced the board of the com-

pany and the Texas State geologist that Texas does not belong to the domain of the Appalachian mountain range, and that anticlines and domes in Texas would be dominated by the Rocky mountain system and would run northwest. Mr. Smithman was thereupon elected president of the King Oil Company, although another man had been selected for the office. Three wells were, however, drilled by the company on the leases already taken, but they were barren of oil. The one well drilled on the King ranch and the well drilled in Jackson county proved the presence of artesian waters, which knowledge was of incalculable benefit to the coastal region. The enormous production of the Spindle Top fuel oil pool sent the price of this oil down to five cents per barrel, and the King Oil Company and many others quit the business.

In 1866 Mr. Smithman was secretary of the Petroleum Institute, the first organization to engage in library and literary work in Oil City, and in 1873, after the general exodus of oil men from Oil City to the rich oil fields of Butler county, the library, which was then located in the third story of a building then owned by D. L. Trax, on Seneca street, on the north side of the Erie railroad tracks, was sold out by the owner of the building on a landlord's warrant. Mr. Smithman bought the library, some two thousand volumes, with the bookshelves, and gave it to the Young Men's Christian Association, which then had rooms on the second floor of the Lamberton block. Here he again had to redeem it from arrears of rent, and later presented the library to the school board for the south side high school. He was chairman of the building committee that erected the Carnegie Library building on Central avenue in 1902, and was the president of the Library Commission for several years thereafter. He gave liberal sums of money to pay for books, and also donated the money to found the "Renting Collection," now a popular institution of the present library. He also gave one third of the cost of the brick edifice that housed the Second Presbyterian Church before the present stone structure was erected in 1913.

After Mr. Smithman sold his street railway, he had on his hands, in the west end, a street railway power house and machinery for making gas engines, and he sold a one-half interest in it to Edward Gray for the manufacture of gas engines under the name of Riverside Engine Company, with Mr. Gray as manager. The works were materially en-

larged, but the venture was unsuccessful, and the plant is now owned by the Pittsburgh Filter Company.

Mr. Smithman now lives in a fine residence at No. 113 West First street, in the Fourth ward of Oil City. He was married June 9, 1874, at Paterson, N. J., to Julia Hathaway, of that place, a descendant of General Hathaway, who served in the war of the Revolution. They have four children, Frederick, Howard, Mabel and Carlotta. Fred is with the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. Howard is in the United States navy in the war against Germany, having enlisted for four years.