

REMEMBER WHEN

A look back at the nation's oil & gas industry.



The nation's, as well as Oklahoma's, oil and gas industry is rich in history. As part of a new partnership with the American Oil & Gas Historical Society (AOGHS), Exploring Energy will bring you energy stories from the past in each publication. Also catch "Remember When Wednesday" each fourth Wednesday of the month with AOGHS Executive Director Bruce Wells joining the discussion on KECO 96.5's Exploring Energy show from 8 to 9 a.m. and on 102.3 KWDQ, sponsored by Big Chief Plant Services. For more articles, photos and features, or to support AOGHS, visit www.aoghs.org.

Illuminating Gaslight

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A small plaque on a street lamp at a street corner in Baltimore, Maryland, commemorates America's first commercial public street lamp that burned manufactured gas. Dedicated in 1991, the lamp at the North Holliday Street and East Baltimore Street, once Market and Lemon streets, is a replica of the original 1817 design. Back then, the newly formed Gas Light Company of Baltimore manufactured gas by distilling tar and wood (later coal) at a nearby plant.

In 1816, a gaslight exhibition had first impressed visitors at "Peale's Baltimore Museum and Gallery of Paintings," during an event hosted by artist, naturalist, and inventor Rembrandt Peale. He illuminated a large room in his Holliday Street museum, dazzling local businessmen and socialites with a "ring beset with gems of light."

Peale's museum included natural history collections like those of his father, Charles Wilson Peale, who painted portraits of the country's founding fathers and established a Philadelphia museum in 1786, one of the first in the United States.

The Rembrandt Peale museum in Baltimore displayed fossil collections as well as portraits of leading figures of the American Revolution that Peale's father had painted. Peale also was an innovator, according to the modern utility Baltimore Gas & Electric. He hosted the 1816 illuminating demonstration at his museum to promote gas.

"During a candlelit period in American history the forward-thinking Peale aimed to form a business around his gas light innovations, the exhibition targeting potential investors," explains the BG&E company website. The manufactured gas gamble worked, and several financiers aligned with Peale, forming The Gas Light Company

of Baltimore, BG&E's precursor. "Less than a year later, on February 7, 1817, the first public gas street lamp was lit in a ceremony one block south of City Hall."

The City Council speedily approved Peale's plan to light more of the city's streets. BG&E also credits inventor Samuel Hill for establishing America's first gas meter manufacturing company in 1832. Two years later the first meters were installed. The gas light company petitioned the city to begin laying a network of underground pipelines in 1851.

Over coming decades, two miles of gas main would be completed under Baltimore streets and the company showed its first profit. Metering replaced flat-rate billing, helping residents afford lighting their homes with gas. By 1855, a gas manufacturing plant was constructed to distill gas from coal – an improvement over the former gasification of tar or wood.

Manufacturing gas from coal had proven successful in Philadelphia, where 46 lamps burning manufactured "coal gas" were lit on February 8, 1836, along

Second Street by employees of the Philadelphia Gas Works. When the 1876 American Centennial Exposition displayed the wonders of the age, gas cooking was showcased as a novelty. Sixty miles of pipe brought manufactured gas to the exhibition's lamps.

The earliest commercial use of natural gas in a community took place in Fredonia, New York, in 1825, according to historian Lois Barris. The gas was piped to several stores, shops, and a mill from a natural gas well drilled by William Hart, who had made three at-

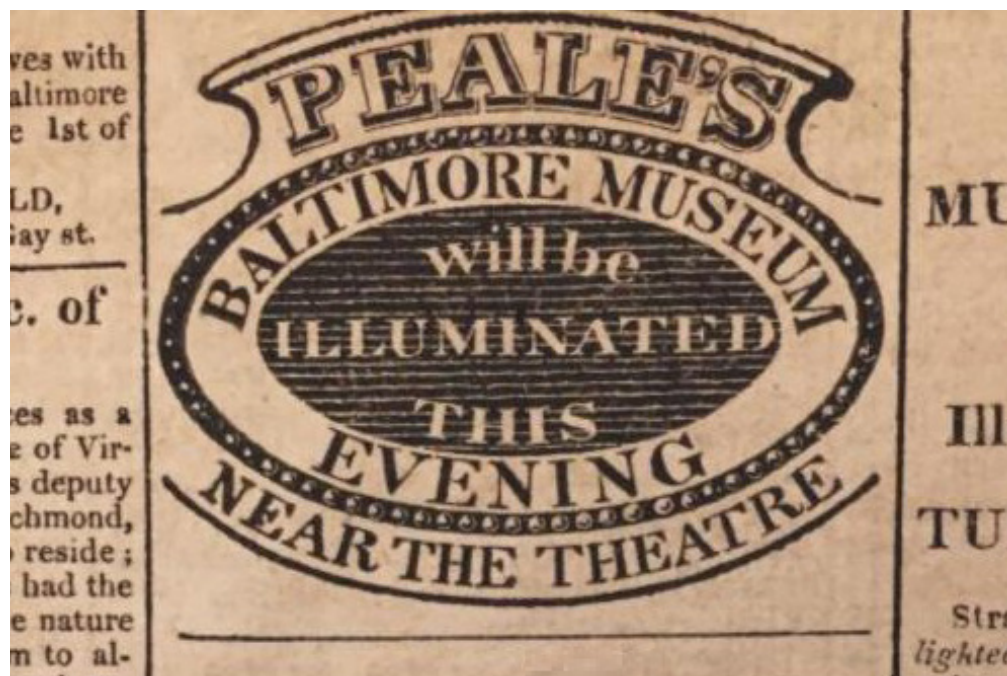
tempts at drilling.

"He left a broken drill in one shallow hole and abandoned a second site at a depth of forty feet because of the small volume of gas found," Barris notes. "In his third attempt, Mr. Hart found a good flow of gas at seventy feet. He then constructed a crude gasometer, covering it with a rough shed and proceeded to pipe and market the first natural gas sold in this country."

Today, more than 900 public natural gas systems serve more than 70 million U.S. customers.



The Baltimore gas company used wooden pipes to distribute gas to elegant street lights. Photo courtesy BG&E.



An advertisement for the Peale Museum illumination. Photo courtesy BG&E.



A 1921 painting dramatizes the moment when Rembrandt Peale ignited his "gems of light." Photo courtesy BG&E.

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