

Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry & Tourism

The Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry & Tourism is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Oil City, Pennsylvania. This membership-based organization serves all of Venango County as well as the City of Titusville, Borough of Hydetown and Oil Creek Township in eastern Crawford County. The Alliance is an active economic development agency and the official Tourist Promotion Agency for Venango County as well as the administrator of the Pennsylvania Oil Heritage Region and the federally designated Oil Region National Heritage Area.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry & Tourism is to increase the prosperity of the Oil Region by enticing people to live, work, learn and play in "the valley that changed the world" through the preservation, promotion, development and support of historical, educational, natural, recreational, residential, commercial and industrial destinations.



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Historic Properties Series

McClintock- Steele-Waitz House



167 Old Bankson Road
Oil City, PA 16301

41°28'59"N, 79°41'31"W



www.oilregion.org

Coal Oil Johnny

John Washington Steele, more commonly known as "Coal Oil Johnny," was Petrolia's prodigal prince. Born in December 1843, Steele and his sister Permelia were adopted at an early age by Culbertson and Sarah "Sally" McClintock. The McClintocks were farmers living along Oil Creek in Venango County, Pennsylvania (between present-day Rynd Farm and Rouseville). As a child, John attended school and church, did chores, and enjoyed hunting in the woods surrounding the farm. In 1855, Culbertson McClintock died, leaving the farm to his wife with the understanding that John would inherit it upon her death.



John Washington Steele,
a.k.a. Coal Oil Johnny

Following the success of the Drake Well near Titusville in 1859, oil speculators were in a frenzy to buy or lease property along Oil Creek. Mrs. McClintock leased her farm in exchange for oil royalties, becoming quite wealthy when oil was discovered on the property in 1862. During this period, John worked as a teamster hauling barrels of oil to shipping points as well as drilling machinery and materials to well sites. He also learned to pilot the flatboats that took oil down Oil Creek to the Allegheny River. In 1864, Mrs. McClintock died from burns sustained in a fire at the house, and 20-year-old John inherited the farm, his childhood home, and the oil royalties.

For a time, John tended to business on the farm. However, his ever-increasing wealth became too tempting. John embarked on a two-year spending spree in Philadelphia and New York, where "trouble and hangers on had a way of finding him." He squandered all his money and then some on poor business deals and extravagances



Steele Farm along Oil Creek, c. 1864

like clothes, diamond rings, gold watches, cigars, and alcohol. Journalists coined the handle "Coal Oil Johnny" for him, reflecting in part his love for his custom carriage. The carriage was bright red, drawn by a matched pair of black stallions; painted onto the carriage doors were black oil derricks spouting dollar symbols. After the money ran out he traveled with a minstrel show to earn a living. John was then invited to return to Venango County, where his wife and son waited. For a while, he returned to work as a teamster and he tried his hand at operating several small retail businesses in nearby communities. Then, after trying to live a sober life in a place where everyone knew his spend-thrift past, the Steeles moved west, first to Dennison, Iowa, until John's reputation caught up with him, and then to Nebraska where John Washington Steele died

in 1921.

Today, John Washington Steele's home, known as the McClintock-Steele-Waitz House, is owned by the Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry & Tourism. Rehabilitated to an 1860s appearance, the house interprets Coal Oil Johnny's life as well as the early years and material culture of Pennsylvania's oil boom.

Recommended Reading

Coal Oil Johnny—His Book by John Washington Steele, 1902 (Reprinted by the Oil Region Alliance in 2006).

Preservation Efforts

The McClintock-Steele-Waitz House, constructed circa 1850, is a 1.5-story wooden peg-n-post frame building. In 1999, the Oil Heritage Region, Inc. (predecessor to the Oil Region Alliance) purchased the 1,024 square foot house from Larry and Carole Waitz for \$1 plus the cast iron bathtub and the kitchen stove.



The McClintock-Steele-Waitz House, 1999. Preservation PA, Inc. added the home to its list of Pennsylvania's Most Endangered Historic Properties in 1997.

Restored to original joists and beams, and electric/security panels, in ways not visible to the casual observer. To complete the exterior rehabilitation, the home was painted its original color scheme, and a new front porch, identical to one in historic photographs of the home, was added.

The Oil Region Alliance undertook the home's interior restoration in 2005. Following the design of architect David Strickland, Gustafson General Contracting added insulation, electricity, and stove behind the building. The crew also finished the home's original floors and staircase. New interior decorations, including period-accurate wall coverings and light fixtures resembling those of the 1860s-1870s,



Visitors explore the rehabilitated parlor, 2011.

Gustafson General Contracting began the exterior rehabilitation in 2001. To start, the home was fumigated twice, removing an infestation of powderpost beetles. Workers then prepared the structure, originally located on Waitz Road, to be relocated further up Oil Creek. They stripped the house to its original materials and then dismantled it, numbering each component. The materials were transported 0.6 miles to Rynd Farm inside Oil Creek State Park where the crew reassembled the house piece by piece. The home's elements were used in their exact prior positions. However, the foundation stones were placed around a new, more stable cement block base. The contractor also added other safety and security enhancements, including tarpaper

behind the walls, attic and sub-floor ventilation, stronger boards



In 2001, workers reconstructed Coal Oil Johnny's home at Rynd Farm inside Oil Creek State Park.

were chosen to depict what the house might have looked like after the McClintocks and Steeles came into their oil money. The Alliance has also furnished the home with historically accurate furniture and antiques, as well as materials about the lives of the McClintock and Steele families.

Today, the Oil Region Alliance operates the McClintock-Steele-Waitz House as a house museum, depicting the household of an early oil producing family. The home is open for tours by appointment, and the Alliance hosts public open houses each year. Passengers on the Oil Creek & Titusville Railroad have the opportunity to view the house exterior when the train stops at Rynd Farm Station.

Oil Region National Heritage Area

The Oil Region National Heritage Area (ORNHA), also known as "The Valley that Changed the World," was designated by the United States



Congress in 2004. Administered by the Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry & Tourism, this national heritage area encompasses all of Venango County as well as the City of Titusville, the Borough of Hydetown, and Oil Creek Township in eastern Crawford County.

As the administrator of the ORNHA, the Oil Region Alliance works to preserve, interpret, enhance and promote the region's distinctive legacy as the birthplace of the modern petroleum industry.



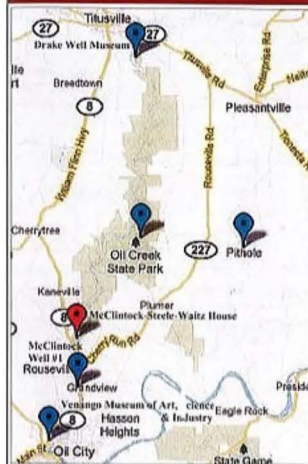
The ORNHA is 1 of 55 National Heritage Areas in the country. National Heritage Areas are regions where a combination of natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources shape nationally significant stories and landscapes.



In partnership with the National Park Service, National Heritage Areas foster community stewardship of our nation's heritage.



Explore More Historic Sites



Drake Well Museum
202 Museum Lane; Titusville, PA 16354
(814) 827-2797 www.drakewell.org

McClintock Well #1
Waitz Road; Oil City, PA 16301
(814) 827-2797 www.drakewell.org

Oil Creek State Park
305 State Park Road; Oil City, PA 16301
(814) 676-5915 www.dcnr.state.pa.us/stateparks

Pitholo
14118 Pitholo Road; Pleasantville, PA 16341
(814) 827-2797 www.drakewell.org

Venango Museum of Art, Science & Industry
270 Seneca Street; Oil City, PA 16301
(814) 676-2007 www.venangomuseum.org