

## The Oil Industry in Sękowa<sup>1</sup>

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In Sękowa, the place Professor Aleksander Guterch was born, as well as in neighbouring localities Siary and Ropica Ruska (now Ropnica Górna), people had “always” been aware of the presence of oil. Rock oil, which comes from natural spills, often accompanied by exhalations of natural gas, has been observed in the Gorlice region for as long as its history goes.

The evidence for the existence of oil deposits in the area comes from multiple historical sources: one of the earliest dates back to 1530, when Seweryn Bonar, treasurer of King Sigismund the Old, burgrave of Cracow and mayor of Biecz, while searching for gold in the village of Ropa under Chełm Mount, came across oil that flooded his mine.

Another historical message about oil dates back to the 17th century. In the treatise on Galicia, Antoni Schneider<sup>2</sup> wrote: “In Galicia, the existence of asphalt was known in the past in the area of Gorlice, Iwonicz, Lisk, Stara Sól; it had been utilized to cover roofs, even as far as Warsaw. And Adam Jastrzębski, a builder and musician of King Władysław IV, describing Warsaw as it was in 1643, mentions that the stones covering the roof of the Ossoliński Palace, in order to prevent harming it by snow and rain, were »ditched« with the earth tar. For this purpose, by distilling the light and volatile fractions, the so-called Jewish tar was made, which, by admixing sand, was transformed into asphalt and ooze.” The presence of oil in the area is also reflected in numerous names of rivers, villages, and family names.

For centuries, people of the Gorlice and Nowy Sącz regions have used the fat material as an effective remedy against various human and animal diseases. They treated with it the throat diseases, wounds, and sores in humans, fasciolosis in sheep and pastern dermatitis in horses. Cobblers employed oil to soften leather; it was also used to treat wood, for firelighters, and finally as a lighting material in various types of candles.

In the 1850s, Prince Stanisław Jabłonowski, one of the pioneers of the oil industry in Poland, developed his business and established an asphalt factory near his Kobylanka palace. Initially, he drew oil from the legendary oil wells owned by Jan Wybranowski in the village of Siary.

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<sup>1</sup> This text is an abbreviated, amended and translated version of the internet article written by the author and published at the address: <https://www.sekowa.info/index.php?go=34&id2=40> (added by the editors).

<sup>2</sup> *Encyklopedia do Krajoznawstwa Galicyi*, zebrał i wydał Antoni Schneider, Vol. 1, Lwów 1871, Vol. 2, Lwów 1874.



Fig. 1. An oil worker called “łebak”.

Responding to the demand for crude oil needed for the production of asphalt, in January 1852, Jabłonowski established the world’s first oil mine in the Puste Pole in Siary near Gorlice; in July of that year he got a plentiful flow of oil through the “Stanislaw” dug well in a depth of 12 fathoms<sup>3</sup>.

The Cracow daily “Czas” of January 19, 1854, reported that rich deposits of rock oil had been discovered near Gorlice in Męcina Wielka, Lipinki and Magdalena. The distribution and size of these deposits gave the mines under the administration of Prince St. Jabłonowski the first place in the Monarchy<sup>4</sup>. Hence, the development of oil industry as a separate industrial branch in the Gorlice region dates back to 1852. Numerous mines were established, a forest of shafts kept growing, and many hard-working people were employed (see an ancient oil worker in Fig. 1).

Initially, oil wells, known as dug wells (kopanki) were drilled with a shovel and pickaxe, which were later replaced by an auger, and around 1874 a steam engine was used to move the auger. The largest number of dug shafts was made within the Siary–Sękowa–Męcina Wielka mining region, so they are the oldest ones in the Gorlice oil area, characterized by a shallow occurrence of oil-bearing levels, starting from a depth of 30 meters (not counting natural seeps).

In the years 1881–1886, the Gorlice region was the most abundant oil-producing area in Galicia, which ranked third after the United States and Russia, with a production of 40 000 tons, and half of this Galician production came from the Gorlice Basin.

At that time, the region became a mecca for world-class entrepreneurs and ordinary people who bravely and often sacrificially sought work and a way to improve their existence. Among the former was Mr. Mac Garvey from Canada, who, having made a tour of all the centers in

<sup>3</sup> 1 Viennese fathom (sażeń wiedeński)  $\approx$  1.9 m.

<sup>4</sup> Galicia, to which the region belonged, was a Crownland of the Habsburg Monarchy (1772–1804), Austrian Empire (1804–1867), and Austria-Hungary Monarchy (1867–1918) (*added by the editors*).

Galicia, decided to start his business in the Gorlice area and became permanently associated with this place chosen to realize his great initiative, e.g., the construction of a drilling tool factory and refinery in Glinik Małopolski in 1883.

In 1873, products from the local mines were presented at the Vienna World's Fair. It is known that earlier (already in 1854) Ignacy Łukasiewicz<sup>5</sup> had a share in the local mine of Jan Szymonowicz. After the Polish Uprising of November 1831, many refugees found shelter in local mines, including miners from Silesia, who became the first diggers there. By 1875, there were as many as 60 active shafts. In 1881, oil was exploited by 9 companies and private people.

They were accompanied by 16 workshops. The drilling workshop consisted of a high-impact auger, a shearer, and a shepherd crook (pasterka in Polish) suspended on a rope. About 250 people were employed in the local oil industry. Initially, the mines were in the hands of private individuals, only later coming under the management of companies and larger enterprises.

The total production in 1881 was about 350 tons of oil. A distillery was put into operation in 1886, and a larger refinery was established by the end of the 19th century. The growing oil industry in the area had a vitalizing effect on other areas of life. There was a need to improve the communication between the mines and refineries, which gave rise to new roads and a railroad line to Gorlice.



Fig. 2. Oil shaft of Mieczysław Mrazek in Sękowa, January 1901.

<sup>5</sup> Jan Józef Ignacy Łukasiewicz was a well-known Polish pharmacist, engineer, and inventor (kerosene lamp).



ש. גרף (מימין) בלוויית מזכיר העיר ושני פרופסורים-מומחים לקידוחי נפט  
 Sh. Graf (first from right) in company of experts.

Fig. 3. Experts visiting mine "Fred" in Sękowa in 1910.



Fig. 4. Oil refinery in Sękowa near Aleksander Guterch's family house, 1930s.

In 1900, more than a dozen companies were in operation in Sękowa, including “Galician Carpathian Oil Company” (formerly “Bergheim at Mac Garvey”), “Joint Stock Society for the Petroleum Industry”, “Anonyme Societe Belge de Petrole de Galicie”, “Kruszewski Bolesław”, “Austro-Belgian Oil Society”, “Mieczysław Mrazek – Oil Mine and Drilling Company” (Fig. 2), Arnold Spitz (mine “Apollo”).

In 1927, drilling work was carried out on the “Ugoda” mine, but with meager results. Then drillings took place on the mines “Fred” and “Paul” (Fig. 3). A certain crisis occurred in the early 1930s, when production declined significantly. The regression was overcome, and production began to increase again in 1932. The mines “Puste Pole” and “Szczęść Boże” were then established and “Ćwiartka” was reactivated. In 1934, the company named “Future” drilled a hole “Marysia”.



Fig. 5. In front of the “Sękowa” mine in 1957. Mr. Edward Szloch, with his children Halinka and Wiesio, stand on the right. Aleksander Guterch was the children's uncle – their mother was his sister.

In the 1930s, most of the local wells ranged in depths from 180 to 150 meters. The 255-meter-deep “Szczęść Boże” well achieved the highest yearly production, namely, 62.7 tons of oil in the year 1934. Second in terms of production was the 487-meter-deep “Marysia” well, attaining 36.2 tons of oil per year. The shallowest, 100-meter-deep, and offering the smallest production of only 500 kg of oil per year was the “Puste Pole XXII” well.

In 1945, the “Sękowa 4” well was drilled down to a depth of 517 meters, and produced 1.6 tons of oil per day. The following mines worked there: “Sękowa-Kretowicz” (255.8 tons), “Apollówka” (6.5 tons), “Dobra” (47.8 tons), “Kamila”, “Magdalena”, “Stanisław”, “Szczęść Boże”, and “Maria III–IV”. A total of 432.6 tons were mined yearly. 237 wells were drilled, including 98 digging and 137 impact drilled. The main method of oil extraction was pumping. Pistoning was also used on a small scale.

In 1970, the “Sękowa” mine had 180 boreholes and yielded 18 tons/24 h. All these shafts were closed down by the Krosno Mining Company in 2000.

Summarizing, a total of 248 dug and impact-drilled wells had been executed in Sękowa. More than 200 000 tons of gasoline-paraffin oil had been extracted.

Currently, no oil is produced in Sękowa. The last wooden workshops in „Puste Pole” have been dismantled. Small-scale prospecting drills have not yielded any results so far. All the dig pits have been buried, and the pipes have been sealed. One of the long-time workers created the Museum of Oil Industry in Sękowa.

Over nearly 150 years of oil production in Sękowa, many generations of people worked in it; almost every house had somebody involved. Among them were Professor Aleksander Guterch’s family members, who worked in the oil industry and had an oil refinery nearby their home (Figs. 4 and 5).

Professor Aleksander Guterch, a great son of the Sękowa Land and its Honorary Citizen, highly respected geophysicist and an outstanding person, will always be remembered. Farewell to this Great Man, rest deservedly after a difficult and wonderful life! Honor to His Memory!

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