

HISTORY CORNER

By
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It's a Gas

Edwin Drake discovered oil in Titusville Pa. in 1859. When he distilled the oil one by-product was kerosene, which was a good thing. Kerosene was not a new discovery. In 1854, Canadian Abraham Gesner received a patent to extract kerosene from coal, and he coined the word kerosene. Up to that point, coal or wood was used for heating, cooking, and lighting. But now kerosene could be used in lamps which was a replacement for whale oil. Another by-product of distilled oil was gasoline. But since there was no need for such a volatile liquid, Edwin Drake disposed of the gasoline. I think maybe because there weren't many cars around.

In the early 1890's, gasoline was made available to farmers in this country and in 1891 John William Lampert of Ohio City, Ohio built America's first gasoline powered automobile. I know what you're thinking, 'No, no, Elwood Haynes built the first gasoline powered car in America.' Or you're thinking, 'No, no, Charles Duryea built the first gasoline powered automobile in America.'

There were other shade-tree tinkerers who laid claim to making the first gas powered car, such as Marshall McClure, Gottfried Schloemer, and Frank Toepfer. However, the Smithsonian Institute recognizes John Lambert as being the first even though his automobile only had three wheels. And in 1891, upon Elwood Haynes learning of Lampert's development, rode the 240 miles to Ohio City from Kokomo, Indiana to confront John Lampert and had him promise not to mention to anyone about building a gas-powered vehicle. Haynes was a blowhard, along the lines of George Selden when it came time for taking credit for someone else's invention.

By 1892, gasoline was readily available to anyone who wanted it, and it was recognized as a valuable fuel. And there still weren't many cars around.

So, who was second and third in making a gas-powered car? History says Duryea did the trick in 1893, and Haynes had his car ready on July 4, 1894.

For the next 20 years, gas stations, or gas pumps were sprouting up all over the country. But these so-called gas stations were curbside. You stopped your car in the street in front of a building that had gas pumps on the sidewalk.

On December 13, 1913, the country's first drive-in gas station was opened. Care to guess where that was? Wrong! It was in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.