



**From: Kelli Williams, Chief Communications Officer  
City of Bartlesville**

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### **BAHM nominates ‘This is the City Oil Built’ for state award**

A new exhibit at the Bartlesville Area History Museum is telling an old story from a new perspective. “This is the City Oil Built” is a 12-minute video jam-packed with information about the discovery and early production of oil in and around Bartlesville, told by some of the area’s most familiar faces.

The video, which has been nominated for an Oklahoma Museum Association Conference Award, traces the history of oil from the early days of Bartlesville by focusing on the people who helped build the town — and who ultimately helped change the world — through their hard work, ingenuity and perseverance in getting oil from the ground and producing it for world-wide use.

Bartlesville Area History Museum Collections Manager Debbie Neece said the goal in making the video was to produce a snapshot of the area’s rich oil history — much of which even long-time Bartlesville residents might not know.

“We’re so modernized now that we look at the Phillips buildings or ConocoPhillips buildings and we think, ‘That’s just how it is.’ But where did it start?” said Neece. “Well, it started with an oily film on Sandy Creek, from which the horses wouldn’t drink.”

No one knew quite what to do with the crude, but the mystery was solved when oil was discovered in Pennsylvania — and that prompted entrepreneurs to rush to Oklahoma in hopes of finding more.

“It started off on a small scale, but by the turn of the century (to) 1920, that’s when they knew they hit those prehistoric dome caps, which was multi-millions of barrels of oil,” Osage Tribal Leader and Mineral Liaison Everett Waller told Bartlesville media company PioneerDream Studios, which produced the video.

The film delves into the dark U.S. past, when white settlers took all the land deemed “valuable” and forced Native Americans to relocate in Indian Territory, which later

became Oklahoma. Prior to statehood in 1907, entrepreneur Henry Foster made a blanket lease deal with the Osage Tribe that allowed oil exploration on 1.5 million acres of Osage land. Around the same time, George B. Keeler and William Johnstone, who had married Native American women, giving them the right to drill on Indian land, had joined forces to form Cudahay Oil, which brought in the famed Nellie Johnstone well in 1897. The Nellie, which produced for 50 years, was replicated and today stands in Johnstone Park for public viewing.

But the biggest change in early oil history came in 1904, when H.V. Foster came to Bartlesville to take over the family business, beginning with the renegotiation of the 1.5-million-acre deal Henry Foster had made with the Osage. The new deal forever changed the history of oil — and the future of Bartlesville.

“The most fascinating thing Henry Vernon Foster did was he rode out on horseback with his surveyor, and they took that 1.5 million-acre map and they started dividing sections of land in a 160-acre checkerboard pattern, basically,” local actor and history re-enactor Dr. Michael Bush says in the video. “He would retain one block and then lease out the other one to someone else, like the Phillips brothers or Getty or Sinclair — these very famous names we hear — let them do all the exploration and finding the oil, and then he would come in right beside it and drill.

“If it wasn’t for him, Oklahoma’s oil wouldn’t have happened as quickly as it did,” Bush says.

And quick it was. Thanks to the Osage deal, along with the Seminole and Oklahoma City fields developed by H.V. Foster, the oil boom was ushered in during the early 1900s and Oklahoma land was suddenly far more valuable than previously believed.

“To put it in perspective, in 1900, they produced 6,000 barrels of oil out of Osage County,” Woolaroc Museum and Wildlife Preserve CEO Bob Fraser told PioneerDream. “By 1912, that number had risen to 11 million barrels. It was literally like throwing a light switch. It went from nothing to, just, huge — in a decade.”

“I believe that H.V. Foster is probably the best-kept secret in the oil industry,” Foster’s great-granddaughter, Darian Doornbos-Kedy, says in the video. “There’s a lot of people who don’t know anything about him, and that’s ok because I think he would really want it that way. But what he did was really amazing.”

The video, which can be viewed on a 70-inch screen during regular hours at the museum, or at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9uGIT5xaGw>, takes the viewer through the turn of the century through today, where oil still plays a significant role in the community.

“It is a compelling video, not even 15 minutes long,” said City Manager Ed Gordon. “If you’re from Bartlesville or part of Bartlesville, you know that oil is our history. It’s what birthed our community, and it has been the driver of our community ever since.

“What a rich history we have,” Gordon said. “We were once the oil capital of the United States, and we are still a significant presence in the oil industry. We are very proud of our oil heritage.”

The video, which was filmed at Woolaroc, is narrated by PioneerDream’s Ann-Jeanette Webster and features Waller, Bush, Fraser, Doornbos-Kedy and Joe Price, the son of Harold Price, who developed Electra Welding Company — the company that became H.C. Price Company, which allowed the oil to be shipped out of the area and across the country through pipeline. Price’s comments were filmed at his home in California during an interview for another event, Neece said.

“Through the creativity of Jay Webster of PioneerDream, some of the footage from that interview was included in the film, and it really added a lot of context,” Neece said.

Funding for the video was provided by the Martha Jane Starr Field of Interest Fund, which is administered by the Greater Kansas City Community Foundation, and the Bartlesville Area History Museum Trust Authority. Starr is the daughter of L.E. Phillips, brother of Frank Phillips, founder of Phillips Petroleum Co.

“What we wanted to do is tell people about our oil history,” said Neece. “It’s not about just Phillips Petroleum Company; it’s about Citgo, Cities Service, Getty, Foster — all these ‘little’ people. Foster was a key player, and most people don’t know anything about him. The Million Dollar Elm in Pawhuska was key — all the million dollar oil deals happened right there. L.E. and Frank Phillips, Getty — they all made their oil deals right there, in Pawhuska.”

So far, everyone who has seen the video loves it, Neece said.

“We’ve had third grade students who have seen it, and they were just in awe,” she said. “It’s set up so that every age gleans something from it. We wanted it so that it wasn’t industrial — we wanted to be able to cover a broad range. We didn’t want it centered on one oil company. We wanted to encompass everybody. So regardless of what age sits down before that screen, they’re in awe.”

To purchase a DVD of “This is the City Oil Built,” contact BAHM on the fifth floor of City Hall, 401 S. Johnstone Ave. in Bartlesville, or call 918-338-4290. The museum is open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Admission is free and donations are always welcome.