



# Barry Lawrence Ruderman Antique Maps Inc.

7407 La Jolla Boulevard  
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## **(Southern California Oil Fields) [27 original photographs of the Kern County Oil Fields, oil derricks, oil tanks of the Pacific Coast Oil Company]**

**Stock#:** 94688  
**Map Maker:** Anonymous  
**Date:** 1905 circa  
**Place:** [Kern County, California]  
**Color:** Uncolored  
**Condition:** VG+  
**Size:** 6.25 x 5.25 inches  
**Price:** \$ 2,800.00



### **Description:**

***Rare, Early Photographs of Kern County Oil Fields, Ca. 1905***

***Visual Evidence of Booming California Oil Production***

***"A Spot Where a Murder Was Committed in 1899"***

A set of 27 original photographs relating to the oil fields of Kern County, including views of wells, oil tanks, pipelines, burning oil wells, oil company workers, and the like.

This group of photographs from circa 1905 offers a captivating glimpse into the early days of oil development in Kern County, California. These images vividly portray an atmosphere created by the relentless pursuit of oil profits. The towering oil derricks, vast oil tanks, and rough-looking young laborers building the facilities, are all captured in the present photographs, epitomizing the relentless ambition that drove the industry's early developers. The photographs evoke the unbridled pursuit of wealth that permeated the nascent Southern California oil industry, reflecting the turbulent and often controversial nature of its early development. One photograph in particular seems to hint at the corruption associated with early oil development in Southern California: the image depicts a group of people under a tree and is captioned: "A spot where a murder was committed in 1899."

The photographs serve as striking visual evidence of the drama depicted in Paul Thomas Anderson's epic film, *There Will Be Blood*, which was inspired by Upton Sinclair's novel *Oil!*, which itself was based on the life of Edward L. Doheny. In May 1899 Doheny, already a veteran oil man, bought up land surrounding the initial Kern River strike discovered by Jonathan Elwood. Doheny would later become part of a consortium that would build an oil pipeline from Kern County to the Pacific Coast.



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At the time of the Kern River field discovery, the Los Angeles City oil field was already the most productive oil field in the state, producing 1.4 million barrels in 1899. By 1901 Kern County was producing twice as much crude as Los Angeles, doubling the state's production to 8.8 million barrels. When the present photographs were made, ca. 1903, California led the country in petroleum production, with nearly 25 million barrels, beating out Ohio and Texas.

#### **Pacific Coast Oil Company**

We can date the present photographs based on a view of newly-built above-ground oil tanks bearing the initials P.C.O. Co., i.e. Pacific Coast Oil Company.

Well No. 4 in the Pico Canyon Oilfield, located in the Santa Susana Mountains north of the San Fernando Valley, was the first commercially successful oil well in California. In 1875 the Star Oil Works, later reorganized as the California Star Oil Works Company, hired Charles Alexander Mentry to supervise its drilling operations in Pico Canyon, which became the Pico Canyon Oilfield. Lacking the necessary capital to successfully market the product, Pacific Coast Oil Co. acquired California Star on Sept. 10, 1879. Within the next year P.C.O. built California's largest refinery, at Point Alameda on San Francisco Bay, with a capacity of 600 barrels a day. A pipeline linked Pico Canyon with the Southern Pacific's station at Elayon in southern California. In 1899 the P.C.O. Co. struck black gold at the Kern River Oil Field. At that time Standard Oil was moving into the region, having set up offices in Los Angeles. Standard managed to buy out Pacific Coast Oil in 1900. The P.C.O. Co. was allowed to continue using their own name until 1906. As the tanks and other facilities depicted in the images appear quite freshly built (still under construction in the case of the oil tanks), we can quite confidently date the photographs to ca. 1905.

While clearly made by an amateur, the photographs are all neatly captioned and some of the images are numbered (either in the negative or in ink directly on the print), which suggests they were possibly used in an oil company promotion.

The images are captioned as follows:

- Erecting the Bottom of Oil Tank
- The Wells of an Oil Company
- Tank Work
- Tank Work [different scene]
- A Flowing Well from Green Mt.
- An Oil Well Tank
- A Pipe Line



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oil derricks, oil tanks of the Pacific Coast Oil Company]**

- Burning of an Oil Well. Bakersfield, Calif.
- The Burning of wasted oil
- Passage-way up the Mt
- Conveying Water to a Power House
- A.R.R. Bridge Crossing the Canyon
- Water Forced in Canals
- A River Almost Dry
- Looking Down the Canal at Sunset
- The Bluffs or ft. Hills of the Rockeys
- An Irrigation Ditch
- A Canal Ditch
- A Spot where a murder was committed in 1899
- John Longacre, on the Rock
- John Longacre, at ft. of the Falls
- Mr. Jones, on the Rock
- Mr. Jones and John Longacre
- Mr. Jones, at the Foot of Falls
- Mr. Cordy of Missouri
- Lunch Time
- Among the Tanks

**Rarity**

Such collections of vernacular images of Southern California oil wells are very scarce in the market.

**Detailed Condition:**

27 silver gelatin photograph prints, each mounted on card. Photographs measure 4 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches, on mounts with decorative embossed borders which measure 6 1/4 x 5 1/4 inches. Ink manuscript captions on verso of each mount. Condition of photographs and mounts excellent.