PRESERVE THE HISTORY OF GAS

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ABSTRACT

The responsibility and interest for preservation of the history of gas is in danger for being reduced or lost because the gas industry in the recent years, have been subject for dramatic changes.

The history of gas describes a cultural, scientific and industrial development, which many people world wide have shown great interest for. It is therefore the obligations of the industry and professionals preserved the history of gas for the future.

A number of museums over the World have collections about gas. A less number of museums are dedicated to the history of gas and to perform research in that field. These museums are often supported by the national gas companies and they are in danger for being closed without any public attention, as changes in the gas industry take place.

A considerable number of gas companies may still have different objects and documentation in their custody, which can contribute to tell the history of gas for a wider ordinance.

There is an urgent need for establishing a communication platform for museum, collections and interested persons.

A historical network has been established under the auspices of IGU with this purpose. Website www.gashistory.org
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2. THE ANCIENT HISTORY OF GAS

Going back in the history of methane, you will reach the early days of the Universe. Methane gas has since then, been present and been an element in the evolution of planets. Scientists have found signs of methane on the planets Titan and Mars, where it is thought to have played a role as water has on the Earth.

Methane has been a climate driver throughout the Earth’s history.

Scientists at the university of California, Riverside have found evidence of the release of an enormous quantity of methane gas as ice sheets melted at the end of a global ice age about 600 million years ago, possibly altering the ocean’s chemistry, influencing oxygen levels in the ocean and atmosphere, and enhancing climate warming. Methane clathrates are increasingly thought to play a role in mass extinctions associated with significant climate change in Earth’s history.

Did methane explosions again cause the worst mass extinctions in Earth’s history 251 Mill. years ago? In an article in magazine “Geology” 2003 it is suggested that huge explosive clouds of methane gas, initially trapped in stagnant bodies of water and suddenly released, could have killed off the majority of marine life and land animals at the end of the Permian era – long before the dinosaurs died, 65 mill. years ago.

All right, it could have taken place, but it is so long time ago, that it mainly is of interest for scientists.

The history, the professionals and the public are interested in, begins when interaction between man and nature takes place.

It is well known that in china 900 years BD was natural gas discovered in borings for salt deposits and back 100 years AD was the streets of Fontaine Ardent, near Grenoble, France, lit with natural gas for centuries.

Before there was an understanding of what natural gas was, it posed somewhat of a mystery to man. The gas seeps, probably first ignited by lightning, provided the fuel for the “eternal fires”. These types of springs became prominent in the religions of India, Greece, and Persia. Unable to explain where these fires came from, they were often regarded as divine, or supernatural.

One of the most famous of these types of flames was found in ancient Greece, on Mount Parnassus approximately 1,000 BD. The Greeks, believing it to be of divine origin, built a temple on the flame.

It wasn’t until about 500 BD that the Chinese discovered the potential to use these fires to their advantage.

As this became more common, the Chinese discovered that certain deposits of gas were unsafe to use because they were not mixed with air. These unsafe pockets of gas were put through a relative complicated refining process utilizing the world’s first carburettor. After being mixed with air in this ingenious way, the gas could be used quite safely.

In America it was known to the natives who observed it issuing from the ground in various spots, chiefly along the western side of the Appalacian Highlands.
3. THE MODERN HISTORY OF GAS

The beginning of a commercial and industrial use of natural gas in the Western hemisphere took place in USA in 1821, when gas was used for illuminating purposes in Fredonia, N.Y., after the first well was drilled 27 feet deep.

This period was the beginning of the modern history of gas.

At the same time began manufactured gas to become successful for lightning. From then on accelerated the use of manufactured gas worldwide up to the 1930’ies, where natural gas took the lead in gas energy supplies in USA. In 1948 had US 250,000 miles of natural gas pipes.

It was first in the 1950’ies that natural gas was implemented in Europe and Japan in a larger scale. The gas systems grew larger and logistic has become more sophisticated, gas is transported between Continents piped or by ships.

The increase on oil prices and the growing concern for greenhouse gas in the 1970’ies changed the role of gas in many countries from a daily commodity to a political and fiscal instrument. For decades had the gas industry had functioned and served the gas users under different political regimes from marxism to capitalism. World wide competition and liberalisation of the industry is where we stand to-day.

As it can be seen, the history of gas can be told from such different angels as anthropology, geology, technology, astronomy, enviromentology. It is the obligations of the whole gas industry and its professionals to preserve our history of yesterday, but also make sure that the history of to-morrow can be preserved for the future.

4. The global historical network

A small group of history enthusiast have established a global virtual network under the auspices of IGU for preserving the history of gas. The net work welcome museums, individual collections and person with interest in gas history.

The history of to-day and to-morrow has so many facets and is so complex, that it is unrealistic to preserve and exhibit it at one central place. The history shall be told and the artefacts be shown where there are related to, but the history should also be seen in a wider (global) context, and it is here the global network can contribute with links and interactions between collections and persons world wide.

Research and dissemination activities can develop and reach a larger audience through a global network.