

Guide to the **Hydrofracking and Drilling Collection**

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COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

Local scientist and environmental activist Dr. Carolyn Eberhard began collecting information on gas drilling in the Finger Lakes region in 1995. She described herself as “an environmentally conscious person minding my own business until NYSEG wanted to put a high pressure gas transmission line across our back field.” Alarmed at the potential risk to her Coddington Valley neighborhood near Ithaca, she was galvanized into becoming an advocate for her community. In September of that year, she and a group of fellow citizen activists established the Coddington Valley Association. This determined group lobbied for NYSEG’S relocation of the gas transmission line to a less environmentally sensitive location. A state Public Service Commission judge agreed with their assessment of the risks, and ruled that NYSEG would have to run its pipeline near Route 96B through Danby instead. This successful effort is documented in this collection, as are several subsequent years of environmental activism fighting against fracking.

According to the State Department of Environmental Conservation, New York State has more than 40,000 conventionally drilled gas wells. Conventional drilling involves pumping oil or gas vertically from easily accessed sources using natural pressure. On the other hand, hydrofracking, or fracking, involves drilling for oil or gas from hard-to-reach sources using horizontal drilling and creating fractures in the rock by pumping large quantities of fracking fluids at high pressure into the rock formation. Fracking fluid consists of chemicals, sand, and water, and injecting this at high pressure releases gas, which flows out to a well head. Fracking was first used as long ago as the Civil War, but it wasn’t until the 1940s that water was used to fracture rock formations to make gas and oil more accessible. But the real boom in fracking took place in the 21st century, with two major innovations in the drilling process: first, the development of fracking fluid, and second, the use of horizontal drilling, which made the oil and gas deposits more accessible, and hence, more profitable for energy companies. In the early years of the 21st century fracking was becoming pervasive in other states in the US, including Texas, North Dakota, Colorado, and Pennsylvania, and environmentalists as well as pro-drilling advocates in the Southern Tier of New York monitored the fracking situation carefully. The southern part of New York sits on top of the Marcellus Shale, a large swath of energy-rich sedimentary rock that lies thousands of feet below the earth’s surface, stretching through Pennsylvania to West Virginia and Ohio. In 2010

Brett Chedzoy of Cornell Cooperative Extension of Schuyler County said that the Marcellus gas drilling was “perhaps the largest rural land issue” to face upstate New Yorkers.

Beginning in 2008, New York’s Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) spent years examining the potential environmental impacts of horizontal gas drilling. Dr. Eberhard chronicles the concerned public’s engagement during these anxious years with a detailed and methodical compilation of articles, emails, notices, surveys, congressional reports, maps, published papers, government studies, advertisements, testimony, and more, primarily on gas drilling and fracking and the public response to it in other states, especially Pennsylvania, as well as in central New York. However, the collection contains more than anti-fracking materials: Dr. Eberhard monitored environmental issues of all kinds, including clean energy, carbon offsets, mountain-top removal coal mining, water testing, land conservation, and wastewater disposal. In a notably balanced way, she also includes articles and editorials in support of drilling in the Marcellus Shale. Newspaper and magazine articles throughout are carefully clipped and pasted to supporting sheets; all are dated and carefully annotated, giving the researcher an impressive and comprehensive array of useful data.

One of the more remarkable aspects to the fracking story is the role that the Tompkins County town of Dryden played. According to the environmental group Earthjustice, “Dryden’s story began in 2009, after residents pressured by oil and gas company representatives to lease their land for gas development learned more about fracking, the technique companies planned to use to extract the gas. Residents organized and educated for more than two years under the banner of the Dryden Resource Awareness Coalition (DRAC), ultimately convincing the town board to amend its zoning ordinance in August 2011 to clarify that oil and gas development activities, including fracking, were prohibited.

Just six weeks after the town board passed the measure in a unanimous bi-partisan vote, Anschutz Exploration Corporation (a privately held company owned by a Forbes-ranked billionaire) sued the town. Dryden argued that their right to make local land use decisions, enshrined in the home rule provision of the New York State Constitution, applies to oil and gas development. In February 2012, a state trial court judge agreed. In May 2013, a panel of judges in a mid-level appeals court unanimously sided yet again with the town.” And on June 30, 2014, New York State’s Court of Appeals agreed, giving Dryden the autonomy they needed to outlaw fracking within their town borders. This case had major implications for other small municipalities in New York, as well as in other states.

In June 2015, the DEC issued a final *Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement on the Oil, Gas, and Solution Mining Regulatory Program for Horizontal Drilling and High-Volume Hydraulic Fracturing to Develop the Marcellus Shale and Other Low-Permeability Gas Reserves*, prohibiting fracking in New York State.

This collection is sorted mostly chronologically, but contents that fall into clear categories, such as maps, copies of legislation, and entire issues of newspapers, are located in separate folders. It covers the years 1995-2015, with the biggest share of materials falling between 2010-2012, reflecting Dr. Eberhard’s concern with the rapidly changing situation of the years before the final DEC decision.

The collection also contains the book *Under the Surface- Fracking, Fortunes, and the Fate of the Marcellus Shale* by Tom Wilbur, published 2012 by Cornell University Press. It contains personal notations from Dr. Eberhard.

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