

*in memoriam*

## **Leonid Pumpiansky (1889–1942) – 70 years from the death of a distinguished fosterer of oil shale industry**



Leonid Pumpiansky was known in Estonia as a marketing figure who was particularly apt at attracting foreign private equity to Estonian shale oil industry and organizing the export of chemical products.

Estonian oil shale industry was born along with the Republic of Estonia. In 1921, the Estonian State Oil Shale Industry was established, which until 1938 accounted for a third of the country's total shale oil production, while the rest was produced by foreign oil plants. Different technologies were used and tested to produce oil. A modern oil plant in Estonia was built in the 1930s at Sillamäe by the Swedish Wallenbergs family. The enterprise became fully operational in 1936, achieving a capacity of 15,000 to 16,000 tons of shale oil per year. Shale oil was produced from fine-grained oil shale, for that aqueous oil shale suspension was used to form granules. After drying those granules were strong enough to produce pyrolysis oil in tunnel ovens. Leonid Pumpiansky was the director of the industry in Estonia called Eestimaa Õlikonsortsium (Estonian Oil Consortium) during the period 1936–40.

When World War II broke out, Estonian oil shale industry was largely destroyed by the withdrawing Soviet troops, the oil refinery at Sillamäe was heavily bombed. Having been the major user of Estonian oil shale products

previously, Germany started to restore the demolished oil industry immediately, but attempts to put the oil plant at Sillamäe into operation again failed.

After WW II the Soviet Union had its own plans concerning Sillamäe. So, processing of local dictyonema argillite started there to produce uranium and other useful minerals. The oil industry at Sillamäe was never restored.

Leonid Pumpiansky was born in Russia in 1889. He completed his doctoral studies in political economy at the University of Munich, Germany. After returning from emigration to Soviet Russia, Leonid Pumpiansky was arrested. While in prison he graduated, by correspondence, from the Faculty of Law of the University of Kazan. Later he worked at the Russian Siberian Bank. In 1922 Leonid Pumpiansky and his family were expelled from the country to Germany together with a number of Russian scientists. In 1922–25 he worked in Berlin and Paris. Thereafter Leonid Pumpiansky's working career continued in Estonia. From 1925 to 1936 he was employed at Shell Bank, acting for Saku Brewery, Tallinn Glue Factory and Franz Krull Machine-building Works. During the period 1936–40 Leonid Pumpiansky was the director of Kiviõli and Sillamäe oil plants. In 1940 he was arrested on false accusations but was soon released. Leonid Pumpiansky was appointed manager of the marketing and supply department of oil shale plants subordinated to the Estonian SSR Ministry of Light Industry.

In 1941 Leonid Pumpiansky and his family evacuated to the then Molotov (now Perm) Oblast of the Russian Federation. When working in Perm, Leonid Pumpiansky supervised the USSR oil shale industry. He also worked at Kemerovo coal explosives factory in Kuzbass and was in charge of the development of a coal-based explosives factory in the region.

Leonid Pumpiansky died of a stroke in Perm in 1942. After the war Pumpiansky's family returned to Tallinn, but has by now been long living in Canada.

Leonid Pumpiansky was a foreign specialist who busied himself in Estonia with the development of industry, especially oil shale industry, attracting foreign investments and marketing oil shale products.