

WOMEN AND CHILDREN OF SPINDLETOP

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The stories of the Spindletop oil boom in 1901 revolve around the roughnecks and the rascals who poured into Beaumont at the same phenomenal rate as the oil poured out of the ground. The small southeast Texas town swelled to five times its normal population, and for a period of only about two years the crowds ruled “the Hill.” Crime was rampant, money spilled out into the city streets, mud and muck and oil covered everything and everyone. The tales are boisterous and profane, hilarious and tragic, as a piece of the American Frontier made its way through the Big Thicket and Gulf Coast Plains of Texas.

But not all of the stories told have included the “rest of the crowds” that roamed the Beaumont streets and the nearby Gladys City rutted paths: the women and the children of Spindletop. Some were Beaumont born and bred; others came trailing after husbands and fathers. Babies were born in the crude camps, many of those same infants buried in occasional cemeteries. Women established homes as best they could. Many of the transient ones worked side by side with their men.

Their stories make up a poignant, easily overlooked chapter of the history of the oil boom at the turn into the 20th century. Seen through the eyes of struggling wives and wide-eyed children, Spindletop becomes a menagerie of sights and sounds and sensations dramatically different from the perspective of the oil millionaire, the banker, or the roughneck himself.

This paper looks through the eyes of the women and children of Spindletop, follows them across the Hill and along the corduroy road to Saratoga and Sour Lake and Batson Prairie, and presents a unique perspective of the hardships, and the innocent delights, of a world temporarily gone mad.

JENNINGS OIL FIELD: THE START OF LOUISIANA’S OIL INDUSTRY

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Louisiana’s oil industry began September 21, 1901, with the discovery of oil at Jennings Field. The Jules Clement No.1 Well was completed as a spectacular gusher, spraying a fountain of oil into the air at a rate estimated to be 7000 barrels of oil per day. Just 9 months earlier, oil had been discovered near Beaumont, Texas, at Spindletop Field. Together, the Spindletop and Jennings discoveries ignited an “oil rush” of exploration and development activity throughout Texas and Louisiana.

Jennings Field has been a prolific producer, with total production of 124 million barrels of oil and 52 billion cubic feet of gas since 1901. Through 1920, the production from Jennings Field alone accounted for 67% of the total oil and gas production for the entire state of Louisiana. Jennings Field continues to produce oil and gas today and is still an area of drilling