

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

and development activity. Total production in 2001 amounted to 183 thousand barrels of oil and 148 thousand cubic feet of gas.

RANGELY OIL FIELD – COLORADO’S GIANT STILL GOING STRONG AFTER ONE HUNDRED YEARS

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The Rangely Oil Field had a modest beginning in 1902 when Poole drilled a 750 foot test which produced 7 BOPD from a fractured, upper Cretaceous aged Mancos shale. Few would have imagined that this discovery would result in an oilfield that will ultimately produce nearly a billion barrels of oil and would an area of over 31 square miles.

The early development of the field was slow. Production rates were modest and this portion of northwestern Colorado was 225 miles from the nearest market for oil, Salt Lake City. In 1918, the Raven Oil Company constructed a small refinery with a daily capacity of 250 barrels. Refinery equipment was carried by wagon over the rough roads from a railhead at Dragon, Utah. Gasoline, kerosene and other products were marketed locally in Colorado and nearby parts of Wyoming and Utah. By 1924, fractured Mancos shale wells were producing between 1500 and 2000 barrels per month. Ultimately, the fractured Mancos would yield over 14 million barrels of 41 gravity crude at depths less than 3500 feet.

Deeper pool production in Rangely was not to come for another 30 years after the discovery. In 1907, the Colorado Pacific Development Company, a division of the Southern Pacific Railroad, purchased a 8640 acre block on the crest of the anticline. The first well drilled below the Mancos, by Colorado Pacific, found gas in the Dakota Sand, which was worthless so far from any market. In 1917, A.C. McLaughlin bought this block and resold 5000 acres of it to Standard of California for \$200,000. Standard drilled fourteen discouraging Mancos wells in a year’s time; their entire production for the year 1919 was only 2100 barrels.

But in 1933, Standard of California’s #A-1 Raven well discovered oil in the Pennsylvanian Weber sand and was completed for a modest initial potential of 229 barrels of day. With no pipeline in the area and the nearest railroad 130 miles away, it was to be another ten years until Weber exploitation began. With the national push for oil during World War Two, development of the Weber sand started with three wells in 1944. By the end of 1948, Rangely had been delineated on a forty acre pattern with 473 wells. Today there are about 900 wells at Rangely. Maximum production occurred in 1956 at a rate of 82,000 barrels per day with 45 to 50 million cubic feet of gas being flared.

In September 1945, Utah Oil Refining completed a 10 inch pipeline to Wamsutter, Wyoming, where it joined a major east-west trunkline, and in 1948 another 10 inch line was completed to Salt Lake City. The field was unitized in 1957, with Chevron the designated operator, allowing a successful peripheral water flood with gas reinjection. In February 1986, the 125 mile Raven Ridge Pipeline was completed from Rangely to Rock