

The Lone Star Story:

“How Spindletop Left an Imprint on Texas Forever”

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Boom! That was the sound of the Lucas Gusher in January 1901. This gusher was unlike anything in the world before. Named after Anthony F. Lucas, it caused a stampede of people to rush into Texas. This sudden migration transformed Beaumont Texas from a “sleepy backwater town” into a “bustling boomtown.” After this blast of oil, the Lone Star State would stay altered forever.

As a result of the worldwide industrial revolution, fuels other than coal and kerosene were needed. The answer was oil. The first oil well was built in Pennsylvania, around 1859 by a man named Edwin Drake. By the end of the 19th century, Pennsylvania produced more oil than any other state. The Spindletop strike, however, would change that.

Prior to the gusher, the economy of Texas revolved around agriculture, ranching, and the railroad industry. Lynis Barrett, an early wildcatter, drilled at Oil Springs which became the first producer in Texas around 1866. Later on, more discoveries of oil at Corsicana and Nacogdoches were made, but wouldn't compare to Spindletop.

The oilfield at Spindletop was a salt dome south of Beaumont, Texas. Patillo Higgins, a self-taught geologist, was the first to believe that there was oil here and other salt domes. In 1892, he and a few other investors established the Gladys City Oil, Gas, and Manufacturing Company, and were the first group to drill at Spindletop. After three failed attempts, Pattillo Higgins left the company.

Higgins still did not give up on his belief, and decided to look for investors. He ended up meeting engineer Anthony F. Lucas. Lucas was the leading American expert for salt dome formations during the time. They both believed there was oil at Spindletop because of the gas seepages and sulfur springs. Around 1899, Lucas began drilling. He got to a depth of 575 feet before running out of money. He then contacted John H. Galey and James M. Guffey, the leading Pennsylvanian oilmen, for financial support. They made an agreement with Lucas that excluded Higgins. Galey and Guffey brought in two experienced drillers, Al and Curt Hamill.

On October 27, 1900, Lucas began a new well. To drill in the tricky sands, Lucas and the Hamill brothers pumped mud into the well instead of water. This technique prevented cave-ins, which was revolutionary and is still being used today.

On January 10, 1901, mud began to bubble from the well. Surprised oil workers ran away as drilling pipes shot up. After a brief pause, mud, followed by gas then oil spewed over 150 feet in the air. Beaumont resident Dillard Singleton said, "It roared, I'm tellin' you, it roared." The gusher was so large that it took nine days to cap it. This delay caused a loss of almost a hundred thousand barrels of oil. As a result of the lost oil, devices called Christmas Trees were invented to control the flow.

After the Lucas Gusher, land prices surrounding Spindletop went from thousands of dollars to hundreds of thousands. In 1902, Spindletop produced approximately 17 million barrels of oil. While production plummeted because of excess wells, a few years down the road a second boom came to Spindletop. A discovery of oil on the flanks of Spindletop was made by the Yount-Lee Oil Company. By 1985, Spindletop oilfield produced roughly 153,000,000 barrels in total.

In one day, Spindletop oilfield produced more oil than the world's fields combined. The Lucas Gusher itself, produced more oil than the entire United States. Following Spindletop, investors spent billions across Texas praying for another bonanza. The inexpensive fuel revolutionized American industry and transportation. Spindletop also brought several new oilfield technologies to the United States. Various oil companies formed and grew larger at Spindletop including oil titans like Texaco and Exxon Company USA. Spindletop inspired more successful drilling along the the Gulf Coast and other salt domes.

Texas today produces over a million barrels of oil per day, and if it was a country, it would be the second largest oil producer worldwide. This achievement would not be possible if

the Lucas Gusher never sounded that “Boom”. This shows the importance Spindletop has to Texas, and how it changed our wonderful state for the better.

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