TEXAS GULF HISTORICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL RECORD

The Journal of the Texas Gulf Historical Society
and the Lamar University History Department
Volume 53: 2017

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Vox audita perdit, littera scripta manet.

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THE TEXAS GULF HISTORICAL SOCIETY
AND
THE LAMAR UNIVERSITY HISTORY DEPARTMENT

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Editor's Note

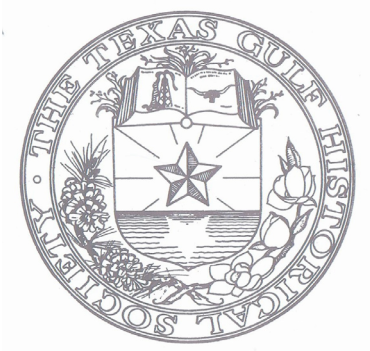
Jimmy L. Bryan Jr.

In this issue, Joe W. Specht explores the music inspired by the Southeast Texas oil industry. Often expressing working-class angst, local blues and folk artists, country and rock superstars reflected the good times and bad times that characterized the boom-and-bust oil market. Ken Poston revisits the 1947 Texas City disaster and focuses on how its impact reached Southeast Texans. Lamar University history major Rebecca Phillips searches through old year books and finds glimpses of 1920s culture at South Park Junior College. For this volume's "Biographical Notes," Matthew Pelz examines the civic and business contributions of George W. Grover of Galveston, and for "Primary Sources," Charlotte A. Holliman provides a sampling of the treasure trove that is the Rolfe and Gary Christopher Negative Collection.

My thanks to associate editor Robert J. Robertson for his tireless efforts in support of *The Record*, and we continue to benefit form our partnership with Jerry Craven and the Lamar University Literary Press. Thanks to Mary L. Scheer, chair of the Lamar University History Department, and William H. Yoes, president the Texas Gulf Historical Society, for their support. I would also like to express my appreciation for Ann Creswell and Suzanne K. Stafford of the Society and to Adam C. Gorrell, History Department graduate assistant, for their crucial help. Special thanks to the folks at the Rosenberg Library in Galveston for allowing us permission to reproduce the George W. Grover painting *Galveston as Seen from the Main Top of Ship at Central Wharf* (1855), a detail of which we used for this volume's cover and reproduced on pages 70-71.

TEXAS GULF HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Dr. Andrew J. and Betty H. Johnson 2018 Editor's Prize



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Through the generosity and support of Dr. Andrew J. and Betty H. Johnson, the Texas Gulf Historical Society will recognize a deserving Lamar University graduate or undergraduate history major for writing the best research article on Beaumont, Southeast Texas, or the Texas Gulf Coast completed in the 2017-2018 academic year. The recipient will receive a $500 scholarship and publication in *The Texas Gulf Historical and Biographical Record.*

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Oil Patch Songs from the Golden Triangle and the Bayou City

Joe W. Specht

On the morning of January 10, 1901, at a salt dome known as Spindletop on the outskirts of Beaumont, the Hamill Brothers, Al and Curt, brought in an oil well. Named for Anthony Lucas, a petroleum engineer and the drilling contractor in charge of the crew, the No. 1 Lucas well was a gusher that forever changed the world. Bobby Weaver, folklorist and oil field historian, notes that "Spindletop ushered in an era of unbridled oil production that brought a completely new economic factor to the Texas scene [and it] created a craze that, as it developed and expanded outward, propelled Texas into the realm of legend."[1] Oil workers expressed both the nostalgia and heartache in their songs, performed by local blues and folk artists as well as country and rock superstars. Their music exhibited both the hell-raising good times, the tenacity of working-class families, and the blue-collar anxieties of living through boom and bust markets.

Beaumont was the first town in the state built by oil money, and even after production slowed in the Spindletop field, the city continued to prosper. Three major petroleum companies trace their roots to Beaumont: Texaco (originally the Texas Company), Gulf, and Exxon (originally Humble Oil Company). More importantly for the region, the Texas Company and Gulf Oil built refinery complexes in nearby Port

1. Bobby D. Weaver, *Oilfield Trash: Life and Labor in the Oil Patch* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2010), 16; Bryan Burroughs, *The Big Rich: The Rise and Fall of the Greatest Texas Oil Fortunes* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 9.

Arthur, while the Magnolia Petroleum Company did the same in Beaumont. Beaumont and Port Arthur, along with Orange, eventually became known as "the Golden Triangle," one of the largest concentrations of refining and petrochemical facilities in the country.[2]

Twelve years after the Lucas well erupted, references in song to the Spindletop field were already in the air. Walter Prescott Webb, then a high school history teacher in Beeville, Texas, transcribed eighty stanzas of what would soon be labeled a "blues" he collected from Floyd Canada, a young black man also living in Beeville.[3] Webb dubbed Canada's composition "The African Iliad." He appended a selection of stanzas in an article published in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1915, including the following verse:

> Train I ride doan burn no coal at all,
> It doan burn nothin' but Texas Beaumont oil;
> That's the long train they calls the Cannon Ball,
> It makes a hundred miles and do no stoppin' at all.[4]

"Texas Beaumont oil" is an explicit reference to Spindletop. Even though Canada never recorded the so-called "African Iliad," the verse referring to "Texas Beaumont oil" later turned up in Big Boy Cleveland's 1927 "Goin' to Leave You Blues" (Gennett 6108). A similar reference was still in circulation in 1950 when Melvin "Lil' Son" Jackson waxed "Ticket Agent Blues" (Imperial 5100) in Dallas. As freelance journalist Mark Humphrey points out, Jackson "effectively recycled bits of blues in a way uniquely his own," and a line in "Ticket Agent Blues" is proof of that. "He got his oil in Houston and his gas at the Beaumont well." Twenty-four years later, Henry Qualls from Elmo, Texas, record-

2. Carl Coke Rister, *Oil! Titan of the Southwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949), 399; Paul E. Isaac, "Beaumont, Texas," The Handbook of Texas Online (www.tshaonline.org/handbook); Diana Davids Olien and Roger M. Olien, *Oil in Texas: The Gusher Age, 1895-1945* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 57; Jeff Spencer, *Texas Oil and Gas* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2013), 26.

3. David Evans, *Big Road Blues: Tradition and Creativity in Folk Blues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 37-38.

4. W. Prescott Webb, "Notes on Folk-Lore of Texas," *Journal of American Folklore*, 28 (July-September 1915): 293.

Mitch Torok and Ramona Redd, "Spindletop" (Texas Specialty Records, LH 8453-4). From the author's collection.

ed Jackson's rendition as simply "Ticket Agent" (DBS 8901) with the Beaumont locale intact.[5]

In 1972, Mitchell Torok included a song entitled "Spindletop" on *Ballads of Texas Volume 1* (Texas Specialty Records LH 8453-4; also 45 rpm Texas Specialty Records 1001). He was born in Houston in 1929, and is best known for his country-pop hit "Caribbean," which charted in 1953 and again in 1959. He also wrote Jim Reeves's chart-topping

5. Webb, "Notes on Folk-Lore," 291-292; Mark Humphrey, "Notes," for Lil' Son Jackson, *The Complete Imperial Recordings* (Capitol CDP 31744, 1995), 15; Henry Qualls, *Blues from Elmo, Texas* (Dallas Blues Society Records, DBS 8901, 1994); Necah Stewart Furman, *Walter Prescott Webb: His Life and Impact* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976), 55-57; Robert M. W. Dixon, John Godrich, and Howard Rye, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943* (Fourth Edition, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 165; Les Fancourt and Bob McGrath, *The Blues Discography, 1943-1970* (Second Edition, West Vancouver, BC: Eyeball Productions, 2012), 299. See also Joe W. Specht, "Oil Well Blues: African American Oil Patch Songs," *East Texas Historical Review*, 49 (Spring 2011): 83-108.

"Mexican Joe" among many others.[6] *Ballads of Texas Volume 1* features original songs with Texas themes composed and sung by "Mitch" Torok and Ramona Redd, a stage name of his wife Gail. For "Spindletop," she recites a spoken word introduction and joins her husband on the chorus. They definitely did their homework with the lyrics following the chronology of events beginning with Patillo Higgins, who had long believed there was an abundance of oil under the salt dome.

> Patillo Higgins was a mighty smart man
> When it came to oil the best in the land
> He began to dream of Spindletop in '92
> And it took him ten years to make his dream come true!

Torok and Redd continue the story, referencing how the locals met Higgins' theory with skepticism. "Patillo needed money just to drill him a well / But the folks around Beaumont said, 'It'll never sell!'" Even after Anthony Lucas signs on, continuing problems at the well site almost doom the endeavor. "So they started in to drillin' and the weeks flew past / Till the pipe went a'crumplin' from the pressure of the gas!" The singers name the characters who Higgins enlisted for additional financial backing "There was Folger and Payne and Mr. Cullinan / There was Guffey and Galey and the Hamil [sic] brothers too, / They got in on the action just to see it through." Henry C. Folger and Calvin Payne were representatives of John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil, while Joseph S. Cullinan was an original founder of the Texas Company. James M. Guffey and John H. Galey were prominent investors from Pittsburgh.[7]

On the fateful day, "Ol' Lucas and Higgins were a'thinkin' they were done / Another well was down around seven hundred feet / and all they had to show was just mud around their feet." Then the Hamill Brothers finally hit pay dirt, and "The ground started shakin' and the gusher came alive / Sixty thousand barrels she's a'pumpin' everyday / And, she made a lot of millionaires along the way!"

6. Don Roy, "Mitchell Torok," in Paul Kingsbury, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Country Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 541-542.

7. James A. Clark and Michael T. Halbouty, *Spindletop* (Special Centennial Edition, Houston: Gulf Publishing Company, 2000), 33-36, 38-40.

Nashville wordsmiths A. L. "Doodle" Owens and Dennis Knutson conjured up a millionaire of their own in "Pretty Little Lady from Beaumont Texas," a portrait of a woman with oil wells in her yard. Who better to pitch the song to than George Jones? He was born in 1931 at Saratoga in adjacent Hardin County. He came of age in Beaumont after the family moved there in 1942. A young Jones began busking with his guitar for nickels and dimes on downtown Pearl Street, and by 1949, he was playing in beer joints like the Teacup Inn on Sabine Pass Avenue and Lola's and Shorty's near the shipyard on the Neches River. After a hitch in the US Marine Corps, Jones returned to Beaumont, where he made his initial recordings in 1954 for newly established Starday Records. The next year "Why Baby Why" reached number five on *Billboard's* country charts, kicking off the career of one of the most influential country music singers of all-time. George's link to the Golden Triangle area continued over the years. In 1984, he opened the George Jones Country Music Park in nearbyTyler County.[8]

Jones's version of "Pretty Little Lady from Beaumont Texas" appeared on the B-side of his 1988 Top-ten remake of Johnny Horton's proto-rockabilly "I'm a One Woman Man" (Epic 34-08509).[9] Featuring dobro, fiddle, and tinkly piano, it is a lighthearted account of a man insisting that he would love his "pretty little lady" even if she did not have oil money rolling in.

8. *Joel Whitburn's Top Country Singles, 1944-2001* (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research, 2002), 174; Bob Allen, "George Jones," Kingsbury, *Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 268-269; and *George Jones: The Saga of an American Singer* (New York: Doubleday/Dolphin, 1984), 58; Rich Kienzle, *The Grand Tour: The Life and Music of George Jones* (New York: Dey St., 2016), 196-197.

9. Kienzle, *Grand Tour*, 177. "Pretty Little Lady from Beaumont Texas" is also a track on George Jones, *One Woman Man* (Epic FE 44078, 1989). This was actually the second time Jones had recorded the song. In 1956, he waxed "One Woman Man" for release on Dixie, a subsidiary label of Starday Records. See Kevin Coffey, Notes, George Jones, *Birth of a Legend: The Truly Complete Starday & Mercury Recordings, 1954-1961* (Bear Family Records BCD 16100, 2017), 63-64. Dixieland cornetist and singer Ernie Carson also recorded a version of "Pretty Little Lady from Beaumont Texas" in 1998, included on *Ernie Carson and Rhythm* (Jazzology Records JCD-89, 2003).

I'd love her if she didn't have
Those paid up credit cards . . .
All that stock in Texaco
Don't mean a thing to me
I buy my oil at Kmart
I buy one and get one free.

Songwriters Owens and Knutson weave generic images of the oil patch into the chorus, a further reminder of Beaumont's petroleum-soaked history.

It's not because she's barrels of fun
That my heart pumps so hard
That pretty little lady from Beaumont, Texas
With oil wells in her yard

In 2001 on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Spindletop strike, residents celebrated Beaumont's history with a blowout of their own. Darragh Doiron, a staff writer for the *Port Arthur News*, reported, "By now locals are excited about The Big Day recreating Spindletop's blow. The publicity is out, but the big question remains where to park?" The schedule of events included a program at Gladys City with George H. W. Bush and Tracy Byrd on stage. The former President spoke and reminisced about his eighteen years in the oil field, and Byrd premiered "The Spindletop Song," a composition he wrote especially for the occasion. The local chapter of the Desk & Derrick Club later presented Tracy with a special award for writing the song.[10]

Tracy Byrd was another Southeast Texas native who found success in country music. Born in 1966 at Vidor, he got his start in the music business singing with local bands in Beaumont before taking over Mark Chesnutt's regular booking at Cutter's Club in 1990. After signing with MCA Records in 1992, Byrd had a string of Top-ten entries on *Billboard*'s country charts over the next decade, including "Holdin' Heaven," "The Keeper of the Stars," and "Ten Rounds with José Cuer-

10. Darragh Doiron, "Locals Excited About 'The Big Day," Jeanie Wiggins, "Lucas Gusher Blows Again," and Samuel Adams, "Nine Contributors Honored for Spindletop," *Port Arthur News*, January 9, 11, and 15, 2001.

vo." Tracy grew up with the music of Bob Wills, Merle Haggard, and George Strait. "I'm a big Bob Wills fan," he explained. "I used to listen to my dad's 78s when I was a kid. There's a line connecting Wills and Haggard and Strait. That's the line I'd like to be in." There is clearly a line, too, linking Byrd, along with Mark Chesnutt, to George Jones, and the Golden Triangle's country music heritage.[11]

Byrd also has a petroleum-related connection. His father worked in the petrochemical industry for 30 years employed by DuPont, and as a longtime resident of Beaumont, Tracy has a clear understanding of the 1901 event and its significance. "The Spindletop Song" is a booster's delight.

> Yeah some folks went broke and some folks got rich
> Poking holes in the ground out here in the sticks
> Well, that black gold went spewing way up in the sky
> Spindletop blew into town, Beaumont came alive

Byrd mentions the Hamill Brothers, who "were out there working / Curt up on the rig and Al down below," along with Anthony Lucas, "The captain, he was off in town." He acknowledges their accomplishments. "Thank God they had the vision to see what they couldn't see / Now they're a part of Texas history." In addition, his lyrics depict an epic struggle. "Like there was a big battle going on"—man versus nature. "Till they brought in that new [fishtail drill] bit / And the big hill was about to give up its secret." Byrd also recorded "The Spindletop Song" live at the centennial ceremony with Brett Godwin on acoustic guitar. Available for limited distribution, it has yet to appear on an album or as digital download. A copy does reside in the Spindletop-Gladys City Boomtown Museum preserved for future generations to listen to and relive the day when "Spindletop blew into town / And Beaumont, she came to life."[12]

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11. Rick Mitchell, "Tracy Byrd," Kingsbury, *The Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 71; *Joel Whitburn's Top Country Singles, 1944-2001*, 51-52

12. Troy B. Gray to the author, May 2, 2017 (email); Barry McCloud, *Definitive Country: The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Country Music and Its Performers* (New York: Perigee, 1995), 122

There were others preparing to commemorate the centennial event. Paul N. Spellman, historian at Wharton County Junior College, had a contract with Texas A&M University Press to write a detailed account of the 1901 petroleum discoveries in Jefferson County, along with those that quickly followed at Sour Lake, Saratoga, and Batson Prairie. Using first-person narratives to tell much of the story, *Spindletop Boom Days* earned the designation as an "official" book selected by the Spindletop Centennial Celebration Committee. During his yearlong research on the project, Spellman found vintage sheet music in an archived file in the library at Lamar University. "The Lucas Geyser" with words by Frederick G. King and music by Fannie Lamb dates from 1901. Spellman recounted, "When I happened on to the sheet music, I knew I had to record it!" He enlisted the participation of Gerald Brewer, who sang in the choir at First United Methodist Church of Houston, and Barbara Bamberg, the rehearsal accompanist. Spellman not only produced the session, he also read a passage from his book as an introduction, providing brief commentary on Beaumont citizens King and Lamb. Bamberg contributed the "period" piano riffs, and Brewer sang along to the jaunty march tempo.

"The Lucas Geyser March Song" (Spellman self-release) made its debut in an initial run of fifty copies to join the centennial observance. The insert for the compact disc is a reproduction of the front cover of "The Lucas Geyser" sheet music with a photograph of the Lucas well erupting, along with a portrait of Anthony Lucas. W. L. Pace, the Beaumont wholesale, retail music, and piano house, copyrighted the song and priced the sheet music for sale at five cents each.[13]

King's lyrics, laced with dry humor and hyperbole, focus on what happened after "the geyser spouted up green oil" and how it affected Beaumont and the town's residents. "With eighty thousand barrels spouting daily out the pipe / The railroads brought a million to see the wonderful sight." The demand for sleeping accommodations was, of course, overwhelming. "The Crosby [House Hotel] got so full of folks with four men in a bed / And before the rush was over they stood them on

13. Paul N. Spellman, *Spindeltop Boom Days* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001); Spellman to the author, March 5, 2012, and May 1, 2017 (email).

their head." But do not attempt to equate the gold discoveries in the Canadian Yukon with Spindletop. "You talk about your Klondike rush and gold in frozen soil / It don't compare with Beaumont rush when Lucas struck the oil." The concluding lines of the chorus further impart the fervor of the moment. "They tried to lease the Public Square or any place to bore / The happy owners of the land, this lucky Beaumont soil / Had to have a gun to keep the gang from boring there for oil."

King was Johnny-on-the-spot in 1901 with "The Lucas Geyser," but his choice of the word "geyser" was already becoming passé. In the mid-1880s, the wells that flowed continuously without pumping near Baku in the Russian Caucasus region were classified as "fountains." "Spouter" and "geyser" were terms in use in the United States, but the ferocity and height of the Spindletop outburst required a different sobriquet altogether. According to petroleum historians James A. Clark and Michael T. Halbouty, a roustabout employed on the crew constructing the levees to capture the runoff quipped to a newspaper reporter, "Mister, that's some gusher, ain't it?" As Clark and Halbouty submit, "From that day on the well was referred to as the Lucas gusher and the dictionaries soon had a new application for the word."[14]

On April 29, 2001, King and Lamb's song received additional recognition when the Lamar University Grand and A Cappella Choirs presented a choral concert, including "The Lucas Geyser" along with hymns, spirituals, minstrel tunes, patriotic anthems, and other turn-of-the-20th century selections highlighting "the 1901 event that put Beaumont on the map." The featured presentation was the premier of "Gusher! Gusher!" a composition written by Joseph B. Carlucci, set to a poem by Violette Newton. And even though "Gusher! Gusher!" has not been recorded, it deserves a mention here.[15]

At the time, Carlucci, a retired music faculty member at Lamar University and former conductor of the Beaumont Symphony Orchestra, was serving as conductor emeritus of the Symphony of Southeast Texas.

14. Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 61, 85; Clark and Halbouty, *Spindletop*, 67-68.

15. "Choral Concert Celebrates Spindletop," *Port Neches Mid County Chronicle*, April 25, 2001.

Newton was a nationally recognized poet and the 1973-1974 Poet Laureate of Texas. At the request of Evelyn Lord, chair of the Spindletop Centennial Celebration Commission, Newton sent her poem "Gusher! Gusher!" to Carlucci, who was taken with "its humor [and] atmospheric representations of Southeast Texas [which] provided just the right blend for what I conceived as a semi-serious, yet lighthearted, view of January 10, 1901." He was inspired by verses such as the following:

> And that slick black muck gave a roaring boom
> As it shot up the Texas sky!
> With a gushing roar, it spewed out a stream,
> Shot the moon in her good right eye!

Carlucci scored the music for mixed chorus and piano accompaniment, crafting what he described as "a solo cadenza for the piano which attempted to imitate the actual moment when the gusher came in!"[16]

Echoes of Spindletop continue to resound in a variety of musical genres. Two recent examples are album cover art from the Boxcar Preachers and the Sons of Santos. The Boxcar Preachers, a jug band based in Austin, Texas, harken to an earlier era of string band music, proudly stating, "We have become an old timey machine that tries hard to stay on the rails." The cover art collage of their 2002 compact disc, *Spindletop Strike!* (BCP Music), is the silhouette of the Lucas gusher, a pair of dice showing "boxcars" (double sixes), and a freight train barreling down the track, a reminder of the interconnectedness early-on between railroad companies and the petroleum industry. Oddly, there is nary a hydrocarbon-related song on the album. When asked, Boxcar Preachers' founder Bruce Gardner offered this simple explanation. "The cover spun out of some research I had been doing on Beaumont, Texas, in the early part of the

16. Ibid.; Joseph B. Carlucci, "Music Created for Spindletop 2001," in Penny Clark and Evelyn Lord, eds., *On Our Way to the "the Big Day" (and Beyond!): The Hundredth Anniversary of the Lucas at "Spindletop"* (Austin: Nortex Press, 2002), 175. Violette Newton's "Gusher! Gusher!" along with "Refinery, East Texas" was previously published in her *Is a House to Stand: Poems of Heroes and Pioneers* (Beaumont: A Newton Notebook, 1986).

Boxcar Preachers, "Spindletop Strike!" (BCP Music). From the author's collection.

20th century. Much of our music is derived from that period in American history. A compelling period."[17]

The Sons of Santos are also headquartered in Austin, and all four members—Luis Soberon, Nick Soberon, Mason Hankamer, and Tré Carden—are originally from Beaumont. Luis and Nick are the sons of Santos Soberon, a Beaumont physician—thus, the name of the band. The group's 2016 self-released album, *The Spindletop Blues*, has a simple likeness of a wooden oil derrick on the front cover. The boys characterize the thirteen tracks as "a conflicted love letter to our hometown," sung and played to cello, double bass, and piano accompaniment. Yet despite the album name and the cover art, there is only a whiff of the oil patch in the title song: "I can hear that Spindeltop calling me home."[18]

17. Bruce Gardner to the author, March 1, 2017 (email); Boxcar Preachers (www.boxcarpreachers.com).

18. Beth Rankin, "Grab Some Kleenex Before Streaming Sons of Santos' New EP," *Beaumont Enterprise*, November 13, 2013; "Sons of Santos," Kickstarter (www.kickstarter.com).

Further east in Orange County, the first wells were drilled in 1903, but the first oil strike would not occur for another ten years. In 1913 the Rio Bravo Oil Company hit pay dirt with the No. 1 Bland well. Other strikes occurred in 1919-1921, but Orange County was a minor player when it came to poking holes in the ground. The city of Orange has produced at least one petroleum-related recording of note: Woody Burch's "Aquagell Blues" (Kay-Bar Dane Records KBD 023). Not much is known about the label other than the company was located in Orange, issuing approximately 50 singles from 1962 to 1968, with many of the recording sessions taking place in East Houston. "Aquagell Blues" was released circa 1963.[19]

Information on Woody Burch is even more obscure. It is possible he was from Louisiana.[20] And with the name Woody Burch, combined with primordial vocals to match, he could just as easily have stepped out of the bayous and marshlands. The production is minimalistic with doghouse bass and drums backing primitive electric guitar (Burch perhaps?), replicating Eddie Tudor's licks on Ernest Tubb's 1948 hit "You Nearly Lose Your Mind." Burch is credited with writing "Aquagell Blues," and his use of knowledgeable terminology indicates he also might have worked in the oil fields.

> Well, the wind did blow, and the mud did flow
> The motor man rang his bell
> Well, the driller said plug it with Aquagell
> Got the Aquagell blues from his head down to his shoes

Aquagel, the correct spelling with one "l," is a trade name for specially prepared Bentonite clay used to mix with water and mud in the bottom of the borehole. Drilling mud was invented by the Hamill Brothers at Spindletop to facilitate the rotary drilling operation as both a lubricant

19. Spencer, *Texas Oil and Gas*, 27; Olien and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 95; Micha Gottschalk and Pascal Perrault, "Notes," *The Texas Box: 1950s & 1960s Oddball Labels* (Be! Sharp Records, 2013), 80.

20. With such a unique name, possible candidates are Woody E. Burch (1945-2011) or his father Woods Eastland Burch (1923-1983), both residing in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana. US Social Security Death Index, 1935-2014, Ancestry.com (www.ancestry.com).

Woody Burch, "Aquagell Blues" (Kay-Bar Dane Records KBD 023). From the author's collection.

and to provide greater stability in the hole to help prevent cave-ins. The process eventually became more sophisticated with Bentonite furnishing greater consistency to the mixture.[21]

As for the situation Burch describes, the lyric "the mud did flow/the motor man rang his bell" indicates that the crew hit a gas pocket, and the motor man, the worker responsible for maintenance and operation of the rig's engines, is warning of a possible blowout. The driller's instructions to "plug it with Aquagell" is an attempt to stabilize the hole and prevent the blowout. But as Burch reminds the listener, plugging a well does not always guarantee success. The driller has "got the Aquagell blues from his head down to his shoes."

The Louisiana connection to Southeast Texas runs deep. Even though there are large refineries and petrochemical plants at Lake Charles, Ca-

21. Mark Mau and Henry Edmundson, *Groundbreakers: The Story of Oilfield Technology and the People Who Made It Happen* (Peterborough, UK: Fast Print Publishing, 2015), 21-22, 66-68; Lester C. Uren, "History of Drilling Fluid," in J. E. Brantly, *History of Oil Well Drilling* (Houston: Gulf Publishing Company, 1971), 1123-1125.

juns and Creoles have often looked to the Texas side of the Sabine River for similar employment opportunities. Their presence, drolly alluded to by some as the "Louisiana Lapland" where southwestern Louisiana appears to have "lapped over" into Texas, actually extended down the Gulf Coast as far as Corpus Christi. This Lapland state-of-mind is much in evidence in the McKay Brothers' "Port Artu′r."[22]

Noel McKay was born in Corpus Christi in 1969. His brother Hollin was born in 1974 in Lubbock. They had been playing together for a decade in-and-round Bandera, Texas, where the family lived, before recording their first album in 2003. Their second outing, *Cold Beer & Hot Tamales* issued in 2006, prompted *Dallas Observer* music critic Darryl Smyers to pronounce, "Noel and Hollis make music that celebrates Texas without succumbing to dimwitted clichés or pandering to the lowest hayseed denominator like so many slick, Nashville hustlers who erroneously claim a link to authentic country music." Now days Noel is in Austin, most often teamed with real-life partner Brennen Leigh, while Hollin is still based in Bandera.[23]

"Port Artu′r" is a track on *Cold Beer & Hot Tamales* (Media River Records) and features Noel's electric lead guitar with nifty mandolin picking by Corby Schaub. Noel explained that the song is based on "a story that my dad, Bill McKay, told me many times." In 1966, the elder McKay was enrolled at Texas A&I University (now Texas A&M University-Kingsville) and paying the bills by toiling on an oil rig as a derrick man. The derrick man, perched on a platform high above the rig floor, works with the drill pipe. There was only one problem, according to McKay, "My dad has a fear of heights." Even though he was earning a good wage, Bill quit.

22. Martin V. Melosi and Joseph A. Pratt, "Introduction," in Melosi and Pratt, eds., *Energy Metropolis: An Environmental History of Houston and the Gulf Coast* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007), 5; Roger Wood, *Texas Zydeco* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 5

23. Arthur Wood, "McKay Brothers," *Kerrville Chronicles*, October 2010; Darryl Smyers, "The McKay Brothers," *Dallas Observer*, October 19, 2006.

> Now throwing chain through the summer break was not
> the way to go
> So I took a job on a work boat in the Gulf of Mexico.
> The port of Corpus Christi was where we let out from
> And the crew was mostly Cajun boys too old for Vi-
> et-Nam.

The boat ferried freight and oil field equipment up and down the Texas coast from Corpus Christi to Aransas Pass. Noel continues, "The Cajun boys thought poorly of Texas and missed their home State. As the ship worked its way up the coastline and passed the port of Houston, the guys began to get excited. Nearing Beaumont, they said to one another, 'Goodbye Texas, Hello Port Artu′r.'"[24]

> Aransas Pass to Matagorda, Freeport to Galveston.
> It didn't matter which side of that old state line that Port
> Arthur was on.
> Them Cajun boys were lonesome for Louisiana, that's for
> sure
> And they'd say "Goodbye Texas, hello Port Artu′r

Cajun folklorist Barry Jean Ancelet has pointed out that "Texas has long been important as a place of adventure and opportunity in Louisiana French tradition." Ancelet refers to it as "the now-ubiquitous theme of going away to Texas." As early as 1929, Joseph Falcon with Clemo and Ophy Breaux waxed "Quand Je Suis Partis Pour Le Texas (When I Left Home for Texas)," and Steve Earle's "Telephone Road," recorded in 1997 for his album *El Corazón* (Warner Brothers 46789), is similar in theme with petroleum-related associations.[25]

Steve Earle, whose singing voice has been characterized as "Tom Waits meets Hank Williams," was born in Virginia in 1955. He grew up in Schertz, northeast of San Antonio. Living in Houston in 1973, Steve met Townes Van Zandt, and later in Nashville, he connected with Guy

24. Noel McKay to author, January 9, 2017 (email).

25. Barry Jean Ancelet, "Notes," *Louisiana Cajun and Creole Music, 1934: The Lomax Recordings* (Swallow Records LP 8003-2, 1987), 13; Tony Russell, *Country Music Records: A Discography, 1921-1942* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 334.

Clark, another legendary Texas singer-songwriter. Earle's breakthrough album, *Guitar Town* released in 1985, is a combination of country-folk-rock with lyrics to match that helped define his sound.[26]

Earl's "Telephone Road" is the saga of three brothers, two of whom, Jimmy and Jack, are now in the Bayou City working in a refinery along the Houston Ship Channel. The younger brother is back in Louisiana employed at the Texaco refinery in Lafayette—"I'm workin' all week for the Texaco check / Sun beatin' down on the back of my neck"—although as Earle later clarified, "The Texaco refinery is actually in Port Arthur. I just took a bit of poetic license." Jimmy and Jack continue to urge their brother to join them in Houston, where after-hours partying is the name of the game, and all in keeping with the roughneck's image for rambunctious carousing.

> Come on come on come let's go
> This ain't Louisiana
> Your Mamma won't know
> Come on come on come let's go
> Everybody's rockin' out on Telephone Road

Telephone Road, a major thoroughfare in southeastern Houston, has both a storied and sordid history. Earle offers his own description: "Telephone Road . . . was sort of a white trash strip during the '50s and '60s. In the '70s, when the song is set, people were starting to come up from Louisiana and the area was really booming."[27] Little brother does eventually follow his siblings but not without a sense of regret. "I guess Houston's 'bout as big as a city can get / Sometimes I get lonesome for Lafayette / Someday I'm goin' home but I ain't ready yet." And backed

26. Simon Hattenstone, "Steve Earle: My Wife Left Me for a Younger, Skinnier, Less Talented Singer," *The Guardian*, June 14, 2017; Mark Schone, "Steve Earle," Kingsbury, *Encyclopedia of Country Music*, 160.

27. "Steve Earle's Song by Song Description of *El Corazón*," SteveEarle.net (www.steveearle.net). Burton Chapman's *Telephone Road, Texas* (Houston: Burton Chapman, 2007) provides a brief history and guide to Telephone Road and southeastern Houston. Rodney Crowell and Mack May have also written songs about Telephone Road. Crowell's "Telephone Road" is on *The Houston Kid* (Sugar Hill SUG 1065, 2001) and May's is on Mack May and the Agitators, *Telephone Road* (Priority-Icehouse Records P2 50690, 1998).

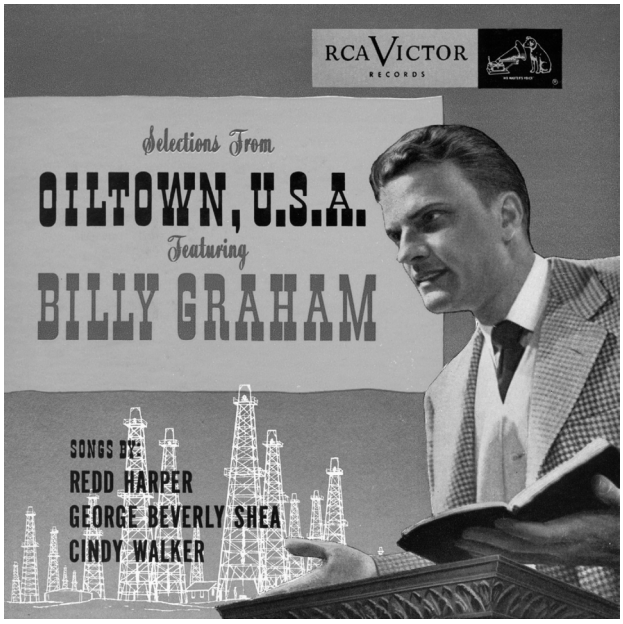
by the gospel harmony of the Fairfield Four, Earle recites the story to a rock-steady beat with organ and baritone sax-drenched accompaniment.

Prior to the mid-1980s bust that left the oil industry reeling, Houston had been on a six-decade roll with management, production, processing, and shipping all consolidated there. Because of the proximity to Spindletop, the city soon became the hub of the petroleum industry in Southeast Texas and the upper Gulf Coast. The Texas Oil Company was the first to relocate corporate headquarters from Beaumont to Houston in 1908, and others soon followed. When the Houston Ship Channel opened in 1914, refineries, and later chemical plants, sprang up along both banks. Newly constructed pipelines brought crude from the surrounding region and much of the Southwest. Petroleum historians Martin V. Melosi and Joseph A. Pratt have pointed out that "Houston became synonymous with oil much as Pittsburgh was with steel [and] Detroit with automobiles," or as Bryan Burroughs author of *The Big Rich* (2009) puts it, "In Houston, oil was *everywhere* and *everything*."[28]

Evangelist Billy Graham recognized the pervasiveness of "black gold" in the dynamics of the city's life, and he used this as the backdrop for the "petro-themed" *Oiltown, U.S.A.*, a 1953 movie project of Graham's World Wide Pictures, distributed by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.[29] The film tells the story of Les Manning, a ruthless, wildcatting Houston oil tycoon estranged from his daughter Christine, who is believed to have been killed in a fire in Texas City similar to the 1947 disaster. The oilman is forced to take stock of his life, and he finds redemption while watching a Graham broadcast on television. Six songs from the motion picture are included on the soundtrack album, *Oiltown, U.S.A.* (RCA LFM 3000). The title song and "Christian Cowboy" are Cindy Walker compositions.

28. Melosi and Pratt, "Introduction," 3; Burroughs, *The Big Rich*, 252; Spencer, *Texas Oil and Gas*, 60; Olien and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 98-99; Walter Rundell, Jr., *Early Texas Oil: A Photographic History, 1866-1936* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1977), 136; David G. McComb, *Houston, the Bayou City* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), 114-117.

29. Darren Dochuk, "Blessed by Oil, Cursed with Crude: God and Black Gold in the American Southwest," *Journal of American History*, 99 (June 2012): 59.



Billy Graham, *Oil Town, U.S.A.* (RCA LFM, 3000). From the author's collection.

Cindy Walker, a member of the Country Music Hall of Fame, was born in 1918 in Mart, Texas. She made a name for herself in Hollywood during the 1940s and early 1950s as actress, singer, and most importantly as a songwriter with an ability to compose what she called "tailor-made songs." After attending Graham's 1949 citywide revival in Los Angeles, a seven week preaching event that established him as "America's Sensational Young Evangelist," Walker offered her services to the Graham organization. She starred in the first World Wide Pictures feature, 1951's *Mr. Texas*, and also appears in a supporting role in *Oiltown, U.S.A.*[30]

For the title song, Ralph Carmichael composed the score and conducted the orchestra and vocal chorus. With timpani booming and French

30. Joe W. Specht, "Put a Nickel in the Jukebox: The Texas Country Music Tradition, 1922-1950," in Lawrence Clayton and Specht, eds., *The Roots of Texas Music* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 84-87; Marshall Frady, *Billy Graham: A Parable of American Righteousness* (Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 191-202.

horns, piccolos, and trumpets soaring, "Oiltown, U.S.A." is sung at a galloping, enthusiastic pace. "Oiltown, everyone knows that it's great / It's the pride and joy of the Lone Star State / That's Oiltown, U.S.A." Walker's lyrics embrace a passel of stereotypical images: "oil wells pumpin' . . . shootin' high in the sky . . . cowboys, saddles . . . cattle, skyscrapers looming high on the Texas plains" (the 36-story Gulf Building in downtown Houston was the tallest structure west of the Mississippi River when constructed in 1929). Clichés aside, "Oiltown, U.S.A." is a rousing anthem touting the importance of the Bayou City.[31]

> Oiltown, queen of the rollin' southwest
> You will find her name up among the best
> London, Paris, New York, Houston
> That's Oiltown, U.S.A.!

Jon Hogan arrived in Houston in 2008 with "Oil Town" already in his hip pocket. Hogan, born in 1972, hails from the Pacific Northwest. He was playing guitar at 14 and writing songs at 20 years old. Hogan rode the rails—albeit Amtrak—honing his craft, and he cites Woody Guthrie, Townes Van Zandt, and Blaze Foley as influences. In 2006, Hogan relocated from Seattle to Austin, then on to the Bayou City, immersing himself in the local music scene. The roots of "Oil Town," as Hogan explained, "began in 2004 when I was living in a pulp mill town. I called it 'Mill Town,' in fact, for the first couple of years after I wrote it before changing the title."[32]

The buoyant pace of "Oil Town," delivered by acoustic guitars and doghouse bass, belie the fact that the lyrics focus on the stark reality of the singer's life and his acceptance of it. In the song, "Jack" goes to work at 6 a.m. each morning. "He smokes Camel straights and he don't give a damn." Jack's been on the job for ten years with prospects of "workin' like this for twenty years more." He "never worries about deforestation

31. Spencer, *Texas Oil and Gas*, 60. The residents of Tomball in northern Harris County could easily have taken exception because their community had been using the nickname, "Oil Town U.S.A.," since the 1930s. Mike Dennis and Lessie Upchurch, "Tomball, TX," Handbook of Texas Online.

32. Jon Hogan, *The Jon Hogan Songbook* (Second Edition, Houston: DFI Arts, 2009), 35; Hogan to the author, March 30, 2010 (email).

. . . about the hole in the sky . . . [or] when we finally lose our oil supply."

> We live in an oil town baby
> We live in an oil town
> We live in an oil town baby
> If you don't believe me then smell that smell

A live version of "Oil Town," recorded at KPFT (90.1 FM) in Houston, is available on the 2010 *Jon Hogan Sampler* (DFI Arts S3/10). Hogan provides additional insight into the story behind the song. "It's primarily about the ways that, for good or ill, industrialization has deeply wound itself around the cerebellum of the American consciousness. It didn't take on its true form and purpose, however, until after I came to Texas in 2006. *Then* it took on its own life, so to speak. *Then* it truly became 'Oil Town.' If you don't believe me, '*then smell that smell*.'"[33]

Robert Ellis is a songwriter who also explores the influence of the oil industry on the Bayou City. He was born in 1988 in Lake Jackson, 60 miles south of Houston in Brazoria County, with the smell, the scent, the odor of the Dow Chemical Company plant in his nostrils. In addition, Brazoria County has several other refineries and petrochemical facilities, including those at Alvin, Brazosport, Old Ocean, Pearland, and Sweeny. By the time he was 17, Ellis had dropped out of school and moved to Houston's Montrose neighborhood. There, he began concentrating on his own songwriting, sampling and exploring the city's musical palette. Two albums followed with the third, 2014's *The Lights from the Chemical Plant* (New West Records NW 6266), receiving high praise. Andy Langer of *Texas Monthly* went so far as to declare, "The record heralds the arrival of Texas's next great singer-songwriter."[34]

The title song, "The Lights of the Chemical Plant," a droning, slowly paced reflection, is Ellis's homage to his great grandparents, who lived

33. Hogan to the author, March 30, 2010.

34. Max Blau, "Robert Ellis: In It for the Long Haul," *Paste*, February 4, 2014; Andy Langer, "The Perfectionist, *Texas Monthly*, 42 (February 2014): 62; "Brazoria County," *Texas Almanac, 2016-2017* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 2016), 253.

their entire lives in Lake Jackson. "In a small town down the highway to the coast / Factories and churches laid on dusty gravel roads / This is where they first met such a long time ago." Ellis explained that the song is "half a love story and half about the chemical plant."[35] The Dow plant is clearly visible from Lake Jackson, cathedral-like with horizontal pipes and tanks a-glow in the dark.

> The lights from the chemical plant
> Burn bright in the night like an old kerosene lamp
> When all else seemed unstable, like a watchtower they were there
> The lights from the chemical plant

Ellis elaborates. "I grew up with those chemical lights, and I wanted to use them in a song. Everyone in town's getting sick off it and hates it, but at the same time, they couldn't get by without it. Rather than complain about the pollution, it seemed more interesting to flip it around."[36]

In addition to the narrative of a young couple falling in love and growing old together, also hovering in the background, then, is the dilemma facing those employed in any refinery town. Residents understand the health hazards caused by the carcinogenic emissions, yet depend on the facility for their livelihood. Ellis's comparison of the chemical plant to a kerosene lamp is also a subtle reference to refinery production in the late 19th century, when kerosene was the primary end-product.[37]

As the refining process has become more advanced and diverse over time, the nature and responsibilities of the workforce have changed. The need for boilermakers or tank builders, however, has remained constant. When crude oil arrives at a refinery via pipeline, it has to be stored prior to processing. "Tankies," as they were labeled in the early

35. Ellis quoted in Blau, "Robert Ellis."

36. Ellis quoted in Geoffrey Himes, "Roots Rocker Robert Ellis Finds Beauty in Unexpected Places," *Washington Post*, June 12, 2014.

37. Melosi and Pratt, "Introduction," 4, 8.

days, are responsible for assembly, installation, and repair of large "vessels," industry parlance for tanks.[38]

The father of songwriter PJ Liles worked as one of these tankies. The younger Liles was born in Lubbock in 1955. Out in West Texas, storage tanks were often needed to hold the crude until it could be sent down the line to the refineries on the Coast. As a tankie, Liles's father kept the family on the move to Snyder, Pampa, Midland, and then to Baytown and the Exxon refinery. The son took up the trade cutting down old tanks at Baytown, while working for Chicago Bridge & Iron. He also spent time at the Gulf Refinery in Cedar Bayou and the DuPont Victoria plant. Liles eventually came to Austin in 1998 and started his own welding business, using these skills to create "scrap art" on the side. There, PJ met Eric Leikam, a singer-songwriter-radio disc jockey, and the two formed Steelbeam. Liles's "Boilermaker Blues" is on the band's first album, *Good Ol' Fashion Blue Collar Sound* (Right on Records). Not completely satisfied, they re-recorded the song three years later in 2005 for *Fit That Steel* (Right on Records)."[39]

"Boilermaker Blues" is an autobiographical snapshot. "Seeded a boilermaker by a boilermaker's son / Oilfields of West Texas, always on the run." Liles offers wry commentary on his reception after moving to the city that has become the Lone Star State's version of Silicon Valley. "Settled here in Austin, what do those yahoos think? / They think a boilermaker is some kind of freaking drink." Furthermore, "It seems this damn computer chip city / Needs some good ol' fashioned blue collar sound / I got the boilermaker blues." Liles pledges allegiance to his Gulf Coast oil patch roots. "You know what our motto is? Tankies 'til we die." And the rest of the band joins in on the chanting chorus with pounding drums and jangly electric guitar further punctuating the description of the bite and grit that goes into a tankie's work day.

> It goes swing that hammer, boy, fit that steel
> Pass the cutting torch, another grinding wheel.

38. "Boilermakers," Occupational Outlook Handbook, Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor (www.bls.gov).

39. Weaver, *Oilfield Trash*, 115; PJ Liles interview with the author, September 25, 2010.

Welding overhead, ten and twelve hour days
Barely make enough to eat but you get paid.
Paid just enough, enough to sing the boilermaker blues.

The songs of Ellis and Liles reflect a lingering nostalgia for the boom years. In 1982, as one reporter later reflected, "Houston's oil industry was in the midst of nearly a decade of opulence," but the market began a steady decline after OPEC producing countries significantly reduced prices by 70 percent over the next four years. The decline forced numerous bankruptcies and massive layoffs throughout the industry. During the boom decade, Houston itself attracted thousands of folks, largely from "rust belt" states, to fill employment needs in the energy sector. Even as the bottom dropped out (more than 250,000 jobs disappeared in the city), out-of-staters continued to arrive with expectations of work.[40]

Rock 'n' roll troubadour and iconic superstar Bruce Springsteen saw firsthand what was happening. For two days in November 1984, he and his E Street Band performed in concert at the Summit in Houston as part of his worldwide *Born in the U.S.A.* tour. Springsteen had an affinity for the travails of the working class having been raised in a similar environment in Freehold, New Jersey. Interestingly, one of the sections of Freehold was known as "Texas," because emigrants from the South first made their homes there.[41]

Springsteen wrote "Seeds" in response to what he observed taking place in the Bayou City and began playing the song in concert performances on the third leg of the tour in Europe. By the time the band got back to the United States to finish up in August-September 1985, they regularly included the song on the playlist and recorded it on September 30, 1985, at the Los Angeles Coliseum.[42] The group included "Seeds"

40. Collin Eaton, "1980s Oil Bust Left a Lasting Mark, *Houston Chronicle*, August 31, 2016; Yergin, *The Prize*, 750, 755.

41. "Songs Played by Tour: Born in the U.S.A., setlist.fm (www.setlist.fm); David Remmick, "We Are Alive: Bruce Springsteen at Sixty-two," *New Yorker*, 90 (July 30, 2012): 43.

42. Jimmy Guterman, *Runaway American Dream: Listening to Bruce Springsteen* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2005), 162.

on their 1986 box set *Live/1975-1985* (Columbia C5X 40558). "The Boss" offers a gripping, unflinching introduction:

> We were down in Texas on the first part of our American tour. We were down around Houston. We saw a lotta folks down from the Northeast—outta Pittsburgh, the Monongahela Valley, out of Gary, Indiana, outta Youngstown, outta Detroit—who'd moved South lookin' for work on the oil rigs, in the oil fields. And when they got down there the price of oil dropped and there wasn't any jobs. They'd be there with their wives and kids, with nothin' to do, no place to go. You'd see 'em sleepin' in tents out on the side of the highway or in their cars at night with nothin' to do but move on. This is called "Seeds."[43]

Springsteen had already referenced the oil patch in "Born in the U.S.A." When the Vietnam veteran in the song returns from overseas, he learns he no longer has a job. "Come back home to the refinery / Hiring man says 'Son if it was up to me.'" "Seeds" is bleaker still with poetic first verse as preamble.

> Well a great black river a man had found
> So he put all his money in a hole in the ground
> And sent a big steel arm drivin' down down down
> Man now I live on the streets of Houston town

The E Street Band—revved-up organ, relentless drum kit, sax and electric guitar howling—set a frantic, desperate pace for Springsteen to sling-out depictions of frustrated helplessness. "Tents pitched on the highway in the dirty moonlight / And I don't know where I'm gonna sleep tonight." The family is forced to hunker down in their car. "Parked in the lumberyard freezin' our asses off / My kid's in the back seat got a graveyard cough." The mean streets of Houston are unwelcoming and unforgiving. "Billy club tappin' on the windshield in the middle of the night / Says 'Move along man move along.'" And Springsteen concludes the song with finality offering little hope for the future.

43. Bruce Springsteen quoted in Dave Marsh, *Glory Days: Bruce Springsteen in the 1980s* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 381.

"You ain't gonna find nothin' here friend / Except seeds blowin' up the highway in the south wind / Movin' on movin' on it's gone gone it's all gone."

For many, then, the petroleum industry's tailspin seemed to be permanent. Gwil Owen reached a similar conclusion in "Tumbleweed." Owen, born in 1960 in Syracuse, New York, turned-up in Nashville in 1983. He fronted a band, the Thieves, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, also waxing some solo sides along the way, but his true forte proved to be songwriting. "A Soft Place to Fall," sung by Alison Moorer for *The Horse Whisperer* movie soundtrack, earned an Academy Award nomination for Best Original Song. In Music City, Owen crossed paths with Toni Price, prior to her move to Austin in 1989. Price, born in 1961 in Philadelphia, took a special liking to Owen's talents with the pen. The two began an informal association, much like that of Jimmy Webb and Glen Campbell—Owen providing the song, Price interpreting. "Gwil writes the things I wish I could write—the things I need to say," Price told journalist Brad Buchholz. "When I lived in Nashville, his songs gave me my first clue about connecting 'song' to 'heart.'"[44]

In Austin, Price quickly captivated the Capital City listening crowd, first at Antone's and then at the Continental Club for her long-running Tuesday evening residency, "Hippie Hour." "Tumbleweed" is on Price's second album, *Hey* (Antone's Records 77022), released in 1995. At the 1996 Austin Music Awards, the songbird walked away with the Female Vocal Award, Album of the Year for *Hey*, and "Tumbleweed" won Song of the Year. Recorded with several of the musicians who regularly sat in for Hippie Hour—Scrappy Jud Newcomb, Casper Rawls, Champ Hood—Price gives "Tumbleweed" a whirling, haunting spin with Champ's laconic fiddle prominent in the mix.

> Well the price of oil went to hell
> This town dried up like a desert well
> No one left anymore, but a few old men
> I'm tired of hearing those stories 'bout way back when

44. David Goodman, *Modern Twang: An Alternative Country Music Guide & Directory* (Nashville: Dowling Press, 1999), 241-242, 259; Brad Buchholz, "What Price Glory?" *No Depression*, 1 (Winter 1996): 27.

Regarding the origins of the song, Owen explains, "I wrote ["Tumbleweed"] in the late '80s while on tour with my band, The Thieves. I saw homeless families with young children camped out in the median along the highways of Houston." The Thieves's tour also took the band to Odessa and Midland, where he viewed "half-built skyscrapers with plywood on the windows . . . there were a lot of powerful visual images in Texas at that time."[45]

Owen sent a tape of "Tumbleweed" to Price. "I didn't write it with her in mind; it was just a mash-up of a lot of different things I had seen and felt. She changed it from second person to first."[46] And like the narrator of "Seeds," the singer has no other choice than to move on. "When someone asked where was I going / I tore that map up, I flipped the coin / And it landed somewhere a long, long ways away." The image of a tumbleweed further captured Owen's imagination. And similarly to Springsteen, he infused the ever-present Texas wind into the lyric as an agent of change.

> Oh tumbleweed that's the way it always goes
> Oh tumbleweed that's the way it always goes
> That's the way it always goes
> Everywhere the wild wind blows."

Robert L. Platt was one of the many who lost their jobs during the great downturn. He was born in 1937 in Macon, Mississippi. After high school, he served four years in the US Navy before beginning a three-decade career in oil field equipment sales. The last 22 years, he worked for Dresser Industries in New Orleans, then Houston, selling and managing Security Rock Bits. Platt injured his hand in a car wreck in 1962, and the doctor recommended learning to play the guitar as therapy. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, he served as lead singer and "top instigator" of "Dresser Country," a group of co-workers who played together for shop openings and private parties. Platt also wrote songs, and with the encouragement of family and friends, he put to-

45. Gwil Owen to the author, April 30, 2012 (email); Goodman, *Modern Twang*, 259-260; "1995-96 Austin Music Awards," *Austin Chronicle Austin Music Awards SXSW Supplement*, March 21, 1996.

46. Gwil Owen to the author, May 4, 2012 (email).

Robert L. Platt, "Please Give Us One More Boom" (JB-133). From the author's collection.

gether an album of his compositions after the 1986 lay-off at Dresser. He recorded *Please Give Us One More Boom* (JB-133) in 1987 at Gilley's in Pasadena, Texas, and sweetened with vocal chorus and strings in Nashville at Sound Track Studio.[47]

The front cover of the album is a photograph of Platt, guitar case by his side, and standing in front of the Texas Unemployment Commission (now the Texas Workforce Commission) office in Conroe. The title song is set inside the building, as jobless workers are waiting to draw unemployment pay.

I heard a man in line ahead
When he prayed out loud and said.

Oh, Lord, please give us one more boom
The last one ran out way too soon

47. Kenny Platt and Jim Platt to the author, October 12, 2009 (email); "Notes," Robert L. Platt, *Please Give Us One More Boom* (JB-133, 1987).

If you'll give us one more chance
We'll make the next last
Dear, Lord, won't you give us one more boom

The singer readily agrees. "I said, Amen, brother, I'm with you," while the supplicant standing in line ahead confesses, "You know it's really sad / We didn't take care of what we had," before bringing his petition to a close.

But sure as I'm standing here today
You can believe me when I say
If you'll give us one more chance
We'll make the next one last
Dear, Lord, won't you give us one more boom

Platt's song generated local interest, but he suffered a stroke, making it difficult to promote the song and album. He died in 2005, never fully recovered from the aphasia.[48] Platt's words express the wistful sentiment of the day. But the message, in a sense, is timeless: the consequences of boom and bust have been a reality in the petroleum industry pretty much from the get-go at Spindletop. The inability to consistently manage the cycle of expansion and contraction will persist in varying degrees in the future, even as technology evolves to further lower the costs of extraction and production. And singers and songwriters with roots in the Gulf-Southwest will, no doubt, continue to capture the yin and yang of the oil patch in song.

Joe. W. Specht is collection manager of the McWhiney History Education Group, Abilene, Texas, and formerly served as director of the Jay-Rollins Library, McMurry University. Among other works, he is the author of *The Women There Don't Treat You Mean: Abilene in Song* (Rev. Ed., Texas Star Trading Company, 2017) and co-editor with Lawrence Clayton of *The Roots of Texas Music* (Texas A&M University Press, 2003). For input and suggestions along the way, the author thanks Ross Burns, Penny Clark, Kevin Coffey, Jinni Finlay, Troy B. Gray, Paul Hedges, Alex Hunt, Sidnye Johnson, Melody Kelly, Noel McKay, Margaret Mooney, Gwil Owen, Jack Pierce, Mike Pierce, Jim Platt, Kenny Platt, Gary Shanafelt, Tyler Stoddard Smith, Alice Specht, Mary Helen Specht, Paul Spellman, Jeff Spencer, Bobby Weaver, and Stan West.

48. Platt and Platt to the author, October 12, 2009.

A Southeast Texas Catastrophe

The Regional Impact of the 1947 Texas City Explosion

Ken Poston

On April 16, 1947, the *Grandcamp* docked at Texas City with a load of ammonium nitrate. It exploded, and with the resulting conflagration, killed over 500 workers, firefighters, and townspeople. The accident remains the worst industrial disaster in the United States in terms of lives lost and property damaged. Myth and misunderstanding obscure the circumstances of the detonation. In addition, fire, rescue, and police departments from as far away as Beaumont responded, demonstrating the wide, regional impact of the emergency.[1]

According to the official report released by the Fire and Engineering Bureau of the State of Texas and the National Board of Fire Underwriters, stevedores discovered a fire around 8:00 a.m., Wednesday, April 16, while resuming the loading of ammonium nitrate onboard the *Grandcamp* at Warehouse (Pier) O. The initial explosion occurred at 9:12 a.m. and destroyed the entire dock area, numerous oil storage tanks, the ad-

1. With *The Texas City Disaster, 1947* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), Hugh W. Stephens highlights how misleading explanations and accusations of guilt and culpability reigned in the Texas City disaster. In *Disaster at Texas City* (Fredericksburg, TX: Shearer Publishing, 1987), Ron Stone chronicles the first-hand experiences of the survivors he interviewed. Bill Minutaglio's *City on Fire: The Explosion that Devastated a Texas Town and Ignited a Historic Legal Battle* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003) traces the events and the legal battle that followed. Ivy Stewart Deckard's, *In the Twinkling of an Eye* (New York: Vintage Press, 1962) gives her own account of what transpired that day. None of these works focus on the outlying impact on the Golden Triangle or the effect it had on those residents who volunteered to help, or lost loved ones in the historic blasts.

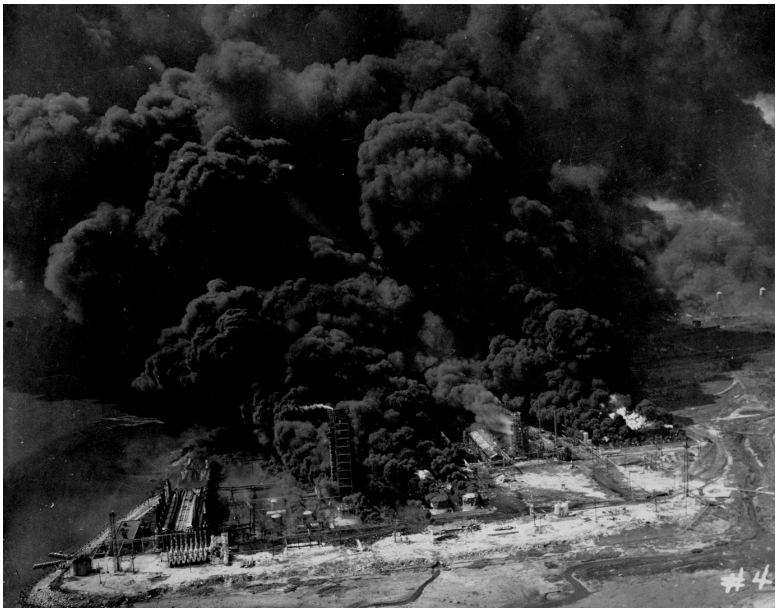
jacent Monsanto Chemical Company, and many homes and businesses. The *Beaumont Journal* described it as "nuclear type explosion" that generated "smoke billowing like an atomic bomb cloud." Two other ships docked near the *Grandcamp* sustained serious damage, including the *High Flyer* which also carried ammonium nitrate. When firefighters were unable to control the flames, the *High Flyer* exploded 16 hours later at 1:10 a.m., April 17. The freighter *Wilson Keene*, berthed adjacent to the *High Flyer*, sustained considerable damage and sank.[2]

The explosions demolished an area nearly one mile long and one mile wide. Over 1,000 structures, both residential and commercial, suffered damage or destruction. Few windows remained intact in Texas City and Galveston with some shattered as far as downtown Houston 40 miles distant. A seismograph monitor in Denver, Colorado, recorded the blast. Residents of Shreveport, Louisiana, reportedly "felt the earth move." Steel fragments, some weighing several tons, and portions of the cargo littered an area of two to three miles. According to the Engineering Bureau report, "A great number of balls of sisal twine, many afire, were blown over the area like torches." Steel shrapnel skewered and flattened tanks used for storing chemicals and various categories of refined oil. Several of these damaged tanks caught fire. In addition to the ammonium nitrate, the *Grandcamp* also contained 30-foot, 2,700-pound drill stems, and the explosion propelled them like projectiles for over two and a half miles.[3]

The report also states that the first explosion caused a total breakdown in the sprinkler system, as well as the water supply needed for the fire department. Intense heat and pressure waves melted or obliterated hoses, pumps, trucks, and other fire-fighting equipment. The Texas City Fire Department responded to the scene to fight the initial flare-up and 27 firemen perished as they desperately tried to put out the fires raging

2. M. M. Braidech, H. H. Davis, and Hugh V. Keepers, *Texas City, Texas, Disaster April 16, 17, 1947, Report by Fire Prevention and Engineering Bureau of Texas and National Board of Fire Underwriters* (New York and Dallas, 1947); "35 Catastrophes so far This Year," *Houston Post*, April 17, 1947; "Like Atom Explosion say Men who Saw Blast on Way Here," *Beaumont Journal*, April 16, 1947.

3. Braidech, et al., *Report*; "Denver Seismograph Records Explosion at Texas City Plant," *Beaumont Enterprise*, April 18, 1947.



Monsanto Plant. *Courtesy Moore Public Library, Texas City, TX.*

in the Grandcamp's cargo hold. The official casualty toll numbered 581 people killed and between 3,500 and 5,000 injured. Of those killed, 113 people were listed as missing since searchers failed to find enough physical remains to provide positive identification. Some 60 unidentified bodies lie buried in a memorial park in Texas City.[4]

Ammonium nitrate, the material that exploded aboard the *Grandcamp* and later the *High Flyer*, gained a well-deserved reputation as an explosive agent beginning in World War I. Mixed with TNT, it produced amatol, the material used in most conventional bombs and artillery shells. The addition of the chemical increased combustion, dramatically increasing the destructive power of bombs or artilery shells.[5]

Paradoxically, this same material can be used to increase crop yields in most edible grains, legumes, and tubers. It contains nearly 35 per-

4. Braidech, et al., *Report*; Stephens, *Texas City Disaster*, 100.

5. Minutaglio, *City on Fire*, 44.

cent nitrogen, a natural element crucial to the germination and growth of plants. The *Grandcamp* loaded ammonium nitrate at Texas City for use as fertilizer needed in war-devestated Europe. The Marshall Plan, a multi-billion dollar relief program funded by the United States, devoted a significant amount of its money to the dissemination of such fertilizers. Of the compound, renowned chemist Harry Gray ironically noted that the "blasting agent that had spread death in World War I would help nourish the continent after World War II."[6]

Categorized as an incombustible salt, ammonium nitrate is not very flammable at atmospheric temperatures. As the Engineering Board's report confirms, however, the material becomes highly combustible when combined with a carbonaceous or burnable material. The coating that prevented the material from caking or cementing together could act as a fuse and increase the possibility of spontaneous combustion. Extreme heat or a shock could also detonate a large quantity of ammonium nitrate.[7]

Investigators and other researchers have identified two possible explanations for the ignition of the tons of fertilizer grade ammonium nitrate. Some studies point to the likelihood that a cigarette, not properly extinguished, fell among the paper sacks containing the fertilizer stacked in the hold of the ship. Workers smoked around cargo being loaded or on the docks next to ships in 1947 with no restrictions. Further, neither the crew of the *Grandcamp* nor the bulk terminal officials at Texas City claimed receipt of any notification that they were handling a potentially hazardous cargo. Consequently, they failed to initiate or enforce special safety precautions. During wartime, shipments of ammonium nitrate contained a red label to warn of its explosive potential. Because the war was over, the cargo was not desginated as hazardous material. A slow-burning cigarette could have set fire to the paper covering a sack, leaving it to smolder for nearly a week since the loading of the material began the previous Friday and extended to Wednesday morning. The wax coating on the grains of the material, meant to in-

6. Braidech, et al., *Report*; Harry Gray and John Simon, *Braving the Elements*, (University Science Book: New York, 1995), 184-208.

7. Braidech, et al., *Report*.

Damaged ship and debris at Slip No. 2. *Courtesy of the Houston Public Library*.

hibit moisture damage, was a flammable material. Investigators noted that several sacks had split open, spilling the material out into the hold, providing easy access to any flames seeking to spread thus adding "fuel to the fire."[8]

The disaster at Texas City did not constitute an isolated incident. Records indicate other explosions involving ammonium nitrate dated back to World War I. In 1918, at an amatol loading plant in New Jersey, a blast killed 100 people. Another such disaster at Oppau, Germany, in 1921 killed 450 and left a crater more than 50 feet deep and 250 feet in diameter.[9]

8. Minutaglio, *City on Fire*, 238; Stephens, *Texas City Disaster*, 28; John Ferling, "Texas City Disaster," *American History*, 30, (January-February 1996): 49.

9. Braidech, Davis and Keepers, *Report*.

At Texas City, however, dockworkers had successfully loaded and shipped over 75,000 tons of ammonium nitrate before April 1947. Just a week before the arrival of the *Grandcamp*, the freighter *High Flyer* took on nearly 1,000 tons of the material and lay tied up in a slip next to the *Grandcamp* waiting to receive more. In all that time, no incident occurred to give any of the dock workers pause about smoking near the material or the vessels. Successfully extinguishing small fires was routine at the Texas City docks, leading some researchers to conclude that a cigarette was unlikey the cause of the accident. Once discovered, putting out the fire posed no problem. Experts considered extinguishing it a routine matter. Things like that took place before on other ships, involving other cargoes, and nothing of note happened. However, as the National Board of Fire Underwriters later determined, another cause, heretofore unconsidered, loomed as the reason for the apocalyptic detonation of the *Grandcamp's* cargo.[10]

The National Board of Fire Underwriters later determined that zinc was the likely culprit. The Number 2 and Number 4 cargo holds of the *Grandcamp* already held approximately 2,341 tons of ammonium nitrate when loading began on the morning of April 16, with several sacks already split open as previously noted. Workers stacked the bags on pallets covered in thick paper intended to compensate for such things as a torn bag discharging its contents. These pallets rested on zinc covered steel bilge plates in the bottom of the ship. Laboratory tests revealed that when granules of ammonium nitrate came in contact with zinc, a chemical reaction ensued, resulting in spontaneous combustion. Given the right conditions of heat, humidity, the presence of extraneous material such as paper fragments or dust and a catalyst to initiate the reaction, an explosion occurred. Furthermore, ammonium nitrate does not require an outside oxygen source to sustain combustion. The decomposition of the material generates its own oxygen supply. Once dock hands removed the hatch covers at 8:00 a.m. that morning, the unusually gusty winds prevalent that day caused, as a later Coast Guard report said, "a rapid, intense fire . . . impossible to manage fire because the burning surface was not exposed," meaning that firefighters could

10. Ferling, "Texas City Disaster," 50; Minutaglio, *City on Fire*, 238.

Damaged cars in a parking lot one-half mile away from explosion site. *Courtesy of the Houston Public Library*.

not see the flames—just curls of smoke because the density of the packed cargo. The infusion of massive amounts of water, flooding the entire storage area, might have restricted the growth of the blaze, but stevedores on the scene only had access to drinking water containers and two five-gallon fire extinguishers.[11]

Another telltale sign of looming disaster materialized in the billowing orange-colored clouds of smoke emitting from the burning ship. More lab tests indicated that burning ammonium nitrate created just such colorful fumes before an explosion. Awareness of this by fire officials and cargo handlers, as well as the crew, might have allowed for an evacuation of the area in the hour and 20 minutes between the discovery of the fire and the explosion. No doubt that the crowds of curious onlookers would have been dispersed, preventing more unnecessary loss of

11. Stone, *Disaster at Texas City*, 10-11; Ferling, "Texas City Disaster," 51-52.

life. Approximately a month prior to the explosion of the *Grandcamp*, a Department of Agriculture circular reported that four incidents of ammonium nitrate fires and explosions in New Jersey and Wisconsin. Sadly, no one in Texas City that day indicated an awareness of seeing or reading that publication.[12]

The awesome blast that slashed through this section of Galveston Bay occurred at 9:12 a.m. Most surviving observers reported two blasts, seconds apart. The first, obviously involved the ammonium nitrate. The second most likely included the various other combustible materials also on board the doomed ship—fuel oil, paint, gasoline, and the aforementioned rolls of twine. Several crates of ammunition occupied sections of the storage hold. Workers managed to remove some of those potential bombs that morning, but some still remained when the captain of the ship finally called for the evacuation of the craft shortly before 9:00 a.m.[13]

Less than 100 miles away from the disaster scene, the Golden Triangle—Beaumont, Port Arthur and Orange—quickly mobilized people and resources to the aid of Texas City. The *Beaumont Enterprise* and the *Beaumont Journal* chronicled the contributions of material, compassion, and kindness made by Southeast Texans. The *Journal* reported that by 11:00 a.m., April 16, the Hotel Dieu, Beaumont's premier hospital at the time, sent a team of doctors and nurses to the disaster area. Beaumont Fire Chief Steve O'Connor immediately dispatched a truck and Assistant Fire Chief Frank Estes, Assistant Chief Austin Manuel, and seven firemen. Beaumont Police Chief Artie Pollock and nine officers made the hour and a half trip to assist the beleaguered Texas City Police Department in a variety of capacities, while Port Arthur City Commissioner J. E. Pullen used his personal airplane to ferry nurses. Both the Salvation Army and the local chapter of the American Red Cross mustered volunteers and relief supplies and delivered them to the tragedy shortly after noon that day. Brad Wallace, a former Navy man and one of those volunteers who worked 36 straight hours in the may-

12. Stephens, *Texas City Disaster*, 3; Ferling, "Texas City Disaster," 53.

13. "Witness to First Explosion Gives Graphic Account," *Beaumont Journal*, April 16, 1947; Stone, *Disaster at Texas City*, 9.

hem, struggled alongside nurses Roxie Peterson and Eugene Edmonton of Port Neches, caring for the distressed, bandaging and treating war-like shrapnel wounds and burns, as well as participated in the grisly work of gathering bodies and body parts strewn up and down the dock area and the town itself.[14]

Radio station KPAC announced local governmental messages. Ham radio operators such as the Palmer family used their shortwave sets to send messages from Texas City until regular communications could be repaired. Renowned broadcaster Gordon Baxter was one of the first radio operators on the scene. Eventually, the Mutual Broadcasting Network picked up his reports and aired them nationally.[15]

Nearly everyone in the area exhibited an awareness of the calamity before they turned on their radios or got their copy of the local newspapers. People working in the San Jacinto Building reported that on the morning of the explosion, the windows rattled and shook for several seconds. Rumbling sounds echoed on College Street and at the police and fire stations. Workers at Beaumont City Hall said that the building suffered some surface cracks and smashed windows. French doors flew open wildly. Many feared an accident at the Magnolia or other local refineries. Longtime residents of the area likened the events of April 16 to one 20 years prior. In 1927, an explosion in the ship channel near the Gulf Refinery rattled the windows and shook buildings. In 1928, an aviation gas tower at the Texas Company Refinery in Port Arthur exploded causing smaller, but similar results.[16]

Oral histories conducted in 2014 by late Lamar University History Department instructor Tim Knight revealed that some in the Golden

14. "Beaumont Sends Aid to Blast," *Beaumont Journal*, April 16, 1947; "Beaumont Pours out Personnel, Supplies to Assist Texas City," "Magnolia Nurses Fly to Scene of Explosion Prepared to Aid and go to Work Immediately," and "Nurse tells of Two Days' Work Aiding Injured Victims of Blasts in Disaster-Stricken Texas City," *Beaumont Enterprise*, April 17 and 19, 1947.

15. "Port Arthur Station and Couple of 'Hams' Send Disaster News," *Beaumont Enterprise*, April 19, 1947.

16. "Blast Smashes Window, Cracks Walls in City Hall," *Beaumont Enterprise*, April 18, 1947; "Explosion in this Area Recalled," *Beaumont Journal*, April 16, 1947.

Triangle retained vivid memories of that day. Byron Jarrett sitting in a third-grade classroom on the second floor of the Tyrrell School in Port Arthur saw the windows begin to shake. He recalled that his teacher moved among the rows of wide-eyed students settling their anxieties. At St. Mary's Elementary School across town, Sister Annarita assumed that it must have bene an explosion at a local plant. She feared that the roof might cave in and shepherded her young charges away from the windows. The entire school evacuated that day with bewildered teachers and students alike wondering what was going on.[17]

An even more harrowing experience befell Leroy Myers and Pete Blanchard. At the time that the *Grandcamp* blew up, Myers and Blanchard hung suspended some 150 feet off the ground, installing safety valves on Gulf Refinery equipment known as the 700 Stills. They felt a violent shudder, heard a rumble, and the towers to which they were attached began to sway back and forth. The pair clung to their safety harnesses until the movement subsided and then hastily scrambled to the ground. Myers, a World War II veteran who saw action in the Philippines, readily admits that he was frightened, saying that the experience surpassed any of his wartime experiences.[18]

Knight also spoke with the late Father Greg Robinson about his experiences on April 16. At the time, Robinson was a student at the Catholic Seminary in LaPorte, a mere 24 miles from Texas City. He and his fellow seminarians made their way to the scene, rendering what aid and comfort they could to the victims. Robinson stumbled over an object on the ground. He looked down to find the charred head of a man. Horrified, he faught against nausea, and the soon-to-be priest carefully picked up his gruesome discovery and carried it to a nearby aid station, turning it over to a Red Cross nurse. The good father carried the memory of that moment and that day with him the rest of his life.[19]

17. Byron Jarrett and Sister Annarita interviewed by Tim Knight, Port Arthur, TX, March 2014.

18. Leroy Myers and Pete Blanchard interviewed by Tim Knight, Port Arthur, TX, March 2014.

19. Tim Knight interviewed by the author, Beaumont, TX, March 2014.

First responders searching the rubble. Aid arrived in Texas City from across the region including from Southeast Texas. *Courtesy of Moore Public Library, Texas City, Texas*.

The Texas City disaster also took the the lives of several Southeast Texans. Edith McGrew, a 27-year-old native of Beaumont and a former resident of Port Arthur, worked as a secretary at the Monsanto Chemical Company. She reported for work at 8:00 a.m. to the building which stood adjacent to the dock area occupied by the ill-fated *Grandcamp*. When the explosion gutted the office building and manufacturing facilities, nearly 200 employees died. McGrew had only recently begun working there after several years on the payrolls of various petrochemical establishments in and around Port Arthur. Another former resident of Port Arthur, Basil M. Stewart, was a chemical engineer at Monsanto and perished in the firestorm. Salvation Army volunteer, C. J. Smith lost his leg when the second ship, the *High Flyer*, also loaded with am-

monium nitrate, exploded early the next morning despite massive efforts to tow it away from the scene of the original conflagration and into the waters of the Gulf of Mexico.[20]

On April 19, the *Beaumont Enterprise* reported that the US government had planned to transport ammonium nitrate through the Port of Beaumont. F. H. Frederick, traffic director, revealed that about a month before the disaster, the federal authories considered transporting 40,000 tons of the fertilizer through the port for overseas export, but Beaumont suffered a shortage of dock space, and the material shipped to Texas City instead. At this time, the vast majority of wharf and warehouse space in Beaumont remained under leases executed to the United States during World War II. Utilizing that space required approval from the government, but records do not indicate why local or federal officials did not seek such endorsement.[21]

Tragedies like the Texas City explosion often teach crucial lessons. In the case of the 1900 Galveston hurricane, city planners developed innovations such as seawalls, better weather reporting, and cooperation between governmental agencies. The 1937 New London school explosion led to the introduction of ethyl mercaptan into odorless natural gas. The resulting "rotten egg" smell serves as an alert to possible leaks. In the case of the Texas City accident, the federal government mandated

20. "Young Beaumont Woman Killed in Texas City Blast" and "B. M. Stewart, Former Port Arthurian, is Texas City Victim," *Beaumont Enterprise*, April 19, 1947. Edith Williford was born in 1919 in Beaumont to Ernest Williford and Dora Phillips. She married James C. McGrew after 1940. She was buried in the Magnolia Cemtery, Beaumont, Texas. Basil Meredith Stewart was born in 1908 at Gatesville, Texas, to Leslie Stewart and Jane Wiesen. He appears as a resident in the census and city directories for Port Arthur between 1910 and 1931. His death certificate listed his occupation as director of industrial relations for the Republic Oil and Refining Company. He was buried in the Oakland Cemetery, Navasota, Texas. Edith McGrew and Basil M. Stewart death certificates, Bureau of Vital Statistics,Texas Department of Health; census and city directory serach, ancestry.com (website); Magnolia Cemetery, findagrave.com (website)

21. "Shortage of Storage Facilities Forced Port of Beaumont to Turn Down Proposal to Handle Nitrate," *Beaumont Enterprise*, April 19, 1947; David H. Falloure, *Deep Water: The Story of Beaumont and its Port*, (The Donning Company Publishers: Virginia Beach, 2016), 111.

Overturned boxcars and debris in the water at Slip No. 2. *Courtesy of the Houston Public Library*.

proper hazardous material warning labels for all types of containers that might contain ammonium nitrate. Updated regulations also banned shipments of the volatile cargo in close proximity to densely populated areas and enacted new rules regarding the proper handling of such materials.[22]

Despite the tragic lessons learned concerning the storage and handling of ammonium nitrate, a similar accident occured in another Texas community. On April 17, 2013, a day after the 66th anniversary of the Texas City catastrophe, a fire at the West Fertilizer Company in West, Texas, detonated the stored chemicals. The explosion killed 15 people, including 12 first responders, and injured over 150 others. The blast destroyed the plant, nearby residences, and commercial property. It demolished the West Middle School building. Improperly stored

22. "35 Catastrophes so far This Year," *Houston Post*, April 17, 1947; Stephens, *Texas City Disaster*, 112-114.

ammonium nitrate subjected to the heat of a suspected act of arson as well as lax enforcement of storage safeguards caused the explosion. Two years later, in 2015, the Texas legislature passed House Bill 492 that specifically regulates the storage of the volatile fertilizer. The legislation pointed out that voluntary compliance with existing laws failed to sufficiently prevent future accidents.[23]

Today at Texas City, the Department of Homeland Security restricts access to the Port of Texas City and the site of the disaster. Refinery extensions, miles of gleaming piping, and a park occupies the damaged area and dock-side location where the *Grandcamp* and the *High Flyer* exploded. In 1962, the city officials placed an anchor blown off the *Grandcamp* at the mass gravesite of unidentified victims in Memorial Park, Texas City.

Ken Poston is a Lecturer in History at Lamar University. A long–time educator, he taught history, social studies, and government at Odom Academy and West Brook High School in Beaumont. He would like to thank Cassandre Durso for her assistance in preparing this article for publication.

23. Amber Adamson, *The Last Alarm: First Responders' Stories of the West Explosion*, edited by Sharon Braken (CBM Publishing: Waco, 2014), 1-5; Rudiger Dornbusch, Wilhelm Nowag, and Richard Layard, eds., *Postwar Economic Reconstruction and Lessons for the East Today* (Boston: The MIT Press, 1993), 184-208.

Roaring Red

South Park Junior College in the 1920s

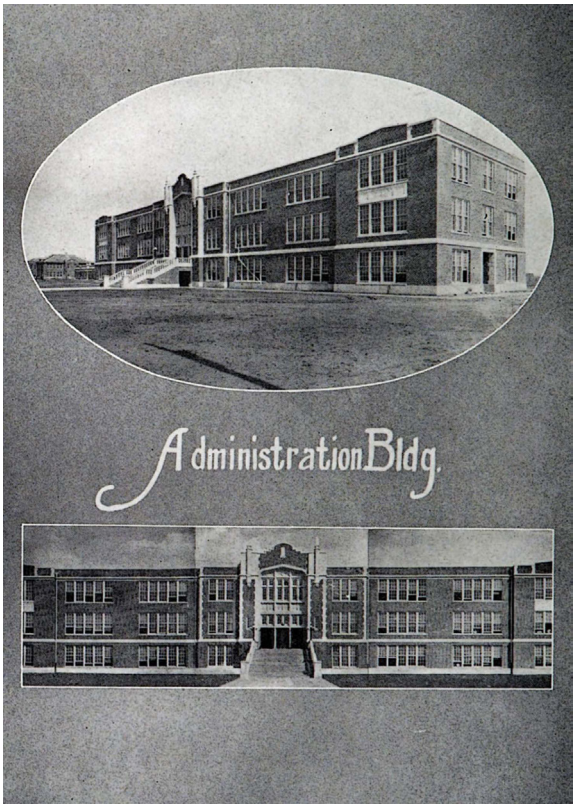
Rebecca Phillips

Winner of the 2017 Dr. Andrew J. and Betty H. Johnson Editor's Prize

Lamar University was founded in 1923, during an era remembered as the Roaring Twenties or the Jazz Age. During this period, the United States benefited from an economic boom after World War I. A sense of strong nationalism empowered citizens across the country to work towards fulfilling the "American Dream," the idealistic vision of bettering oneself by creating a new life filled with fortune and happiness. Women of the period embraced the idea of the "modern woman" or "flapper." These feisty young ladies broke away from their mother's Victorian upbringings and engaged in sports, dancing, and sexual activities. The pages of South Park Junior College's yearbook, *The Navigator*, not only chronicles the formative years of the university, but also provides a glimpse of Southeast Texas educational life during the 1920s.[1]

The city of Beaumont, Texas, also experienced both positive and negative effects of the political, social, and economic climates of the 1920s. At the start of the century, the Spindletop oil derrick emitted seemingly endless amounts of oil, allowing the city to create an economy based on the petroleum industry. The Magnolia Oil Company remained

1. Joshua Zietz, *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women Who Made America Modern* (New York: Broadway Books, 2006), 65. See also Niall Palmer, *The Twenties in America: Politics and History* (Edinbrugh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2006); and Chip Rhodes, *Structures of the Jazz Age: Mass Culture, Progressive Education, and Racial Discourse in American Modernism* (New York: Verso Books, 1998).



South Park building razed in 2010. From *The Navigator* (1924). *Courtesy of Special Collections and Lamar University Archives*.

one of the most influential businesses in the Southeast Texas area throughout the decade. Hundreds of oil derricks lined the Beaumont countryside. Due to the influx of oil, motor vehicle distributors such as Ford produced more cars now that the engines had means to sustain power, allowing these companies to profit from the liquid gold. The large quantities of oil attracted both men and women from all over the country to pack up their belongings and move to the Gulf Coast in search of a bright new future.[2]

The economy of Beaumont also benefitted from other industries. Shipping flourished after the city council of Beaumont decided to

2. Ray Asbury, *The South Park Story, 1891-1971. and the Founding of Lamar University, 1923-1941: A Documented 80 Year History* (Fort Worth: Evans Press, Inc., 1972), 23.

transform the channel, allowing it to hold ships of larger size and connected the port to global trade. Agriculturally, rice remained Beaumont's "money crop" since it could be stored for long periods before consumption, and the introduction of rice mills paved the way for a more industrial form of agriculture.[3]

Beaumont also became a hub of artistic entertainment in the 1920s. The Jefferson Theatre opened its doors in November 1927, which provided a way for moviegoers to watch silent cinema spectacles featuring stars like Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, and Charlie Chaplin. Designers and architects also equipped the Jefferson with state of the art technology to produce sounds in perfect sync along with the films. The movies inspired viewers to create new lifestyles for themselves based upon the celebrities of the time. The Little Theatre also served as center of entertainment performed by members of the community. Most entertainment establishments in Beaumont, however, did not admit African-American patrons. The People's Theater remained one of the few buildings that allowed men and women of all races through their doors.[4]

After the ratification of the 18th Amendment in 1920, the selling and distribution of alcohol became illegal, so many individuals secretly bootlegged the potent substance across state lines or opened underground speakeasies to host willing partakers in the consumption of alcohol. Beaumont experienced very little repercussions obecause they were aware of ramifications from bootlegging in the larger cities like New York and Chicago. According to author Judith Walker Linsley, "most bootlegging around Beaumont was by individuals or small groups." The local police enforced the law on a daily basis, but alcohol still managed to flow despite the efforts of those behind the Temperance movement.[5]

3. Judith Walker Linsley, "A Social History of Beaumont, Texas, in the 1920s" (MA thesis, Lamar University, 1977), 19-23.

4, Jeanette Robinson, "Beaumont's Golden Era for the Performing Arts" (MA thesis, Lamar University, 1976), 35; Ara Ryherd Roden, "The Jefferson Theatre: The Design and Construction of Beaumont's Movie Palace," *The Texas Gulf Historical and Biographical Record*, 50 (2014): 263-271; Linsley, "Social History of Beaumont," 60.

5. Linsley, "Social History," 121.

The Klu Klux Klan remained an ominous presence in Beaumont until it disbanded towards the end of the 1920s. Before they fell from power, Klan members lived throughout the city and held high positions in businesses and organizations, such as the government, as well as local churches. These white-hooded figures marched through the streets of Beaumont, spreading their ideas about morality. In addition to racial issues, the Klan also violently reacted against bootleggers and abortionists.[6]

Aside from their economic stability, the citizens of Beaumont also prided themselves about their school districts. They recognized the value of education as a useful tool for both men and women. Beaumont operated under a dual system that segregated black and white students. The South Park Independent School District housed an elementary school, a high school, and the Trades School by 1920.[7]

The idea of creating a junior college in the South Park school district started with Louis R. Pietzch. He was born in 1880 to a pair of German immigrants in Weimar, Texas. The family lived there until they moved to East Bernard. Pietzch attended the University of Texas and graduated with a degree in electrical engineering, but decided that career path did not suit his future. He decided instead to apply for a teaching position in the mathematics department at Beaumont High School. He soon realized that his life's passion was teaching and molding the young minds of students. He eventually migrated to the South Park Independent School district and obtained the position of superintendent in 1913.[8]

In 1918, Superintendent Pietzch took some time away from his duties at South Park to embark on his graduate studies at the University of Chicago. It was during his time that he discovered the innovative idea of bringing the junior college system to Texas. Although reserved to

6. Ellen Walker Rienstra and Judith Walker Linsley, *Historic Beaumont: An Illustrated History* (San Antonio: Historical Publishing Network, 2003), 61-63; Ben Woodhead, *Beaumonter at Large: From an Ex-reporter's Reservoir of Random Reminiscences* (Beaumont: Ben Woodhead, 1968), 54.

7. Asbury, *South Park*, 20, 32-33.

8. Asbury, *South Park*, 56.

white students, he wanted to offer both young men and women the opportunity to further their education without having to attend a four-year university miles away from home or resign themselves to pursuing a career in agriculture like so many of their family members before them.[9]

On September 17, 1923, South Park Junior College opened its doors to 125 students with their hearts set on earning a two-year degree. The classes took place on the third floor of the recently constructed South Park High School building. Since the new high school had plenty of vacant space, it was a perfect fit for the junior college and symbolized room for growth and expansion if the venture proved successful. The classrooms contained the proper equipment and facilities to instruct college level courses such as chemistry, physics, biology, and other courses in the scientific field of study, and the college students had access to the high school library.[10]

Students attended South Park Junior College for the original tuition of $10.00 per month. If a student was a South Park High School graduate, they would only have to pay a $5.00 entry fee. However, on April 15, 1924, tuition rose up to $15.00 per month, but the college offered opportunities to help hard working students earn a way to receive their education. Local businesses also provided loan programs and scholarships to assist students in their endeavors as well. Many students, like future South Park president John E. Gray, worked throughout their time at the junior college, trying to support themselves as well as their families.[11]

The courses offered at South Park covered the basic core requirements needed to obtain a four-year degree at any Texas university. Registration was open to any incoming freshmen or sophomore students with

9. Asbury, *South Park*, 47.

10. The South Park school district merged with West Brook in 1986 to conform to court-ordered desegregation of Beaumont schools. In April, 2010, the city of Beaumont demolished the former South Park High School building. Louise Wood, *75th Anniversary, 1923 to 1998, Lamar University* (Beaumont: University Advancement, 1998), 2; Asbury, *South Park*, 43.

11. Asbury, *South Park*, 42, 74; Linsley, "Social History," 87.

transfer credits. The junior college also made it possible for girls to receive teacher certification after completing a full two years of study. It also enabled boys to attend the proper courses needed in pursuing a career in either the law or medical field. The admission standards of South Park Junior College matched those at the University of Texas. Entry to this school was not an easy feat. South Park Junior College yearned to be a beacon of educational excellence in the state of Texas.[12]

On May 26, 1923, the Board of Trustees named Louis R. Pietzch president of South Park Junior College. He had served the South Park School district in various positions for over ten years, and both students and faculty alike appreciated the efforts. According to the freshman and sophomore students from the class 1924, Pietzch was "at all times our friend and advisor." The student editors of the *Navigator*, the school's yearbook, dedicated its debut volume to President Pietzch as a way to express their gratitude.[13]

President Pietzch only served in his position from 1923 to 1924. The city offered him the position of city manager and he reluctantly relinquished his duties to Carl W. Bingman, who, at the time, was serving as principal of South Park High School. No matter how hard he tried, President Pietzch could not stay away from the world of academia. After resigning from his post as city manager, he became superintendent of three different school districts between 1924 and 1939. He died after a heart attack in 1940, leaving behind a strong and lasting legacy amongst the community of South Park.[14]

Carl W. Bingman assumed the position as the second president of South Park Junior College in 1924. Born in Coalville, Ohio, he obtained his bachelor's degree at the University of Ohio and then his master's in educational administration from the University of Texas. He served five years as dean at East Tennessee State Normal School, a teachers college in Johnson City, Tennessee. At South Park, students affectionately

12. Asbury, *South Park*, 45; Linsley, "Social History," 88.

13. Holland Elery, ed., *The Navigator* (Beaumont: The Students of South Park Junior College, 1924), 12-13; Wood, *75th Anniversary*, 3.

14. Wood, *75th Anniversary*, 11; Asbury, *South Park*, 58.

called him "Skipper" because he kept the school running in tip-top shape while maintaining the job titles of both high school principle and dean of the college until 1925.[15]

The young college grew under the leadership of President Bingman. He employed professors such as D. W. Boitnott, "Miss Mary" Campbell, and O. B. Archer. His biographical page featured in the fourth volume of the *Navigator* states, "Mr. Bingman has kept his faculty well selected. There is not a school in the state with a better faculty and this is due to the good judgment of Mr. Bingman." South Park Junior College also began to offer night classes and summer sessions to students under his presidency, creating a more flexible school schedule for working students, and he established the football program.[16]

President Bingman stepped down from the presidency in 1941, but remained superintendent of the South Park school district until he died from a heart attack in 1947. Author Ray Asbury notes that "it's doubtful that any person in his position ever enjoyed the rapport that "Skipper" did with his students, and even though this friendliness was genuine he still maintained the respect that his position required." Much like Pietzch, Bingman formed strong bonds with the students under his tutelage.[17]

South Park Junior College also enjoyed a strong teaching faculty. Today Lamar University is famous for its engineering department, which would not exist without the influence of professor O. B. Archer. He served as head of the engineering program at South Park Junior College. He assisted in developing the Engineers' Club in 1925, which the enthusiastic fellows founded in order to establish connections between the school and businesses such as the Magnolia Petroleum Refinery and the Magnolia Gas Products plant. He also taught the first summer courses offered at Lamar. During his years at South Park Junior College and Lamar University, Archer served as dean of the college,

15. Wood, *75th Anniversary*, 11; Asbury, *South Park*, 61, 106.

16. Hill Sanders, ed. *The Navigator* (Beaumont: The Students of South Park Junior College, 1927), 21; Asbury, *South Park*, 65.

17. Asbury, *South Park*, 63-66, 106; Wood, *75th Anniversary*, 11.

acting president, and vice president. After dedicating the majority of his life to watching South Park grow and prosper, professor Archer retired in 1961. The university recognized his legacy by dedicating the Archer Physics Building in his honor.[18]

Another influential faculty member was Mary Campbell. She would became one of the most endearing figures around the South Park Junior College campus. She was a fixture of the South Park school district since its early beginnings as a one-room schoolhouse. At the time, many in Beaumont embraced the progressive movement towards women's rights, allowing Mary to work and continue to sustain a happy marriage without enduring judgment from the community. She served as head of the mathematics department and was the "unofficial" dean of the women's college at South Park. Students took to calling her "Miss Mary." In the 1928 issue of the *Navigator*, the students confessed that "everyone went to Miss Mary with their troubles. They know that she will listen with an open heart . . . . She is a friend to everyone." Aside from teaching mathematics, Campbell also taught courses in medicine and pre-law. In 1957, after 60 years of service, Lamar University dedicated Campbell Hall to Miss Mary.[19]

Early graduates of South Park Junior College also made lasting impressions on the school and its history. By 1928, South Park enrolled 280 students, making South Park the largest junior college in Texas. Some students went on to continue their education at the University of Texas or Texas A&M. [20]

Dr. John E. Gray is perhaps the most recognizable former student of the junior college. He attended South Park Junior College from 1923 to 1926, where he played center on the football team. He worked as a janitor throughout his time at the junior college, which delayed his

18. C. J. Strack, ed. *The Navigator* (Beaumont: The Students of South Park Junior College, 1925), 54; Wood, *75th Anniversary*, 65.

19. During times of war, Miss Mary kept a log with the names of each student enlisted in the army. She wrote letters and correspondence to those boys while they served overseas. Raymond Komcgay, ed. *The Navigator* (Beaumont: The Students of South Park Junior College, 1928), 26; Linsley, "Social History," 63.

20. Asbury, *South Park*, 71, 82; Linsley, "Social History," 88.

"Miss Mary Campbell. Dean of Women." From *The Navigator* (1925). *Courtesy of Special Collections and Lamar University Archives.*

completion in in three years instead of two, but he still managed to graduate as the class valedictorian. He went on to study at the University of Texas for one year until President Bingman offered him the position of athletic director and head coach of the football team at South Park. Gray accepted the job and became the youngest coach in South Park history. He stated that "football was not a well organized sport in those days," but he won over 35 games for the fighting "Brahmas," named after the intimidating bull. In 1932, Gray changed the team to the Cardinals.[21]

Gray eventually worked his way to becoming a mathematics teacher and principle of the South Park Trade School. He impressed President Bingman with his professionalism and dedication. From 1942 to 1951, Gray served as South Park Junior College's third president. At the

21. Bonnie Oglethorpe, "Gray Praises LU Profs," *Beaumont Enterprise*, August 26, 1973; Asbury, *South Park*, 72, 78; Wood, *75th Anniversary*, 3.

beginning of his presidency, he took a leave of absence to serve in the US Navy during World War II. On his return, he sought to transform the school into a four-year university, but his dream did not happen during his initial stint as president.[22]

After occupying the position for almost ten years, Gray left South Park Junior College to become an executive officer of First Security National Bank in Beaumont. In 1972, he accepted the position of president once more and remained at Lamar University until 1976, making him the only man to serve as president more than once. Like many of his former mentors, his memory is also commemorated through two recognizable structures at Lamar University are dedicated to both Dr. Gray and his wife Mary—The Mary and John Gray Library and the John Gray Center.[23]

South Park graduate, Otho Plummer is another influential character in the legacy of the college. He graduated in 1924 and played on both the baseball and basketball teams. He also held a position on the editorial staff of the *S'Park Plug* and the *Navigator*, two organizations that influenced his career at the *Beaumont Enterprise* and in publishing. In 1932, Beaumont held an essay contest to allow contestants to choose a new name for the university. Plummer suggested naming the school in honor of Mirabeau B. Lamar, the second president of the Republic of Texas who was remembered as the "Father of Texas Education." Plummer received a full-year scholarship to the college in return for winning the contest. Because he had no need for the scholarship, Plummer gave the money to his younger brother Wesley.[24]

Like many universities in Texas, South Park Junior College offered a plethora of extra-curricular activities for both men and women to engage in when they were not busy with their studies. Football remained the most popular sport at the college. In the 1920s, young men equipped themselves with leather helmets and very little protective padding to

22. Asbury, *South Park*, 74-75; Wood, *75th Anniversary*, 52.

23. Rienstra and Linsley, *Historic Beaumont*, 80-81.

24. Wood, *75th Anniversary*, 70; Asbury, *South Park*, 90; Mary L. Scheer, "Mirabeau B. Lamar: Poet, President, and Namesake for a University," *East Texas Historical Journal*, 52 (Spring 2014): 60.

South Park Junior College Brahmas defeat Rusk College Indians 23-0. From *The Navigator* (1925). *Courtesy of Special Collections and Lamar University Archives*.

engage in the exciting game against rival colleges and neighboring high school teams. A male cheerleader often accompanied the football club to games to encourage the team and instill school spirit into the fans. Beginning in 1926, a group of ladies called the Loyalty Squad assisted the cheerleader in supporting the team at games and parades.[25]

Other sports offered included baseball, track and field, tennis, basketball, and golf—an extremely popular leisure sport in the 1920s. South Park maintained a strong athletic program throughout the decade. The teams recruited both freshman and sophomore students, encouraging them to partake in tournaments and long practices. The college also offered women the opportunity to engage in sports such as basketball and standard gym classes. On many occasions, the girl's athletic teams proved more successful than their male counterparts in some of the tournaments and games against rival schools.[26]

25. Linsley, "Social History," 136; Strack, *Navigator*, 54; Bruce Synnott, ed. *The Navigator* (Beaumont: The Students of South Park Junior College, 1926), 122.

26. Holland, *Navigator*, 57, 60; Linsley, "Social History," 136; Asbury, *South Park*, 16-17.

In 1924, a group of 20 young boys decided to set themselves a part from the rest of their peers by forming the first fraternity at South Park known as the College Club or Kollege Klub. The fraternity held annual dances and banquets at posh locations such as the Beaumont Country Club to promote awareness for the organization, raise money for the college, and celebrate the accomplishments of their fellow students. To ensure no "provocative" dances such as the Charleston or Lindy Hop took place, the school assigned chaperones to supervise events held by student organizations.[27]

By the end of the decade, the Kollege Klub remained around the same size as the original founding group. Soon enough other all male groups formed, including the Lion Tamers' Club and the Sons of the Sahara. Both organizations promoted "rivalry between the upper and lower classmen" in attempt to generate school spirit from the incoming freshman, a tradition still carried on by modern day fraternities.[28]

The female students also formed their own precursors to sororities at the college to promote lady-like behavior and philanthropy. The Sacred Order of the Famished Thirteen dedicated their efforts "to perpetuate the human race." The organization only admitted 13 of the most suitable young women in the college to join the roster. Each received a pin after their imitation. The Rounders was another notable female group at South Park. Headed by Miss Mary Campbell, they organized "weekend dances" and "matinee parties" to encourage sisterhood and charitable activities. They also hosted co-ed dances, holiday parties, or theme nights accompanied by the Beaumont orchestra. The Rounders' events always attracted a large crowd of students and faculty. In a era during which women shortened their skirts, wore heavy makeup, and bobbed their hair, these young ladies sought to maintain traditional values of the past.[29]

27. Holland, *Navigator*, 71; Strack, *Navigator*, 92.

28. Strack, *Navigator*, 80; South Park Junior College, *The Navigator* (Beaumont: The Students of South Park Junior College, 1929), 75.

29. Holland, *Navigator*, 81; Sanders, *Navigator*, 101; South Park Junior College, *Navigator*, 70; Synnott, *Navigator*, 103.

With a strong influence from the artistic scene in Beaumont, South Park Junior College was home to an array of performing art clubs including a theatre arts troupe, Glee Club, choir, and other musical groups like quartets and trios. Eventually, the Glee Club became so popular the college split the group into separate men and women's clubs. The Symphony Club and marching band both promoted classical music throughout the Jazz Age and even performed a radio broadcast on KDFM in 1926. Members of the marching band had to create their own uniforms and pay the marching director out of their own pocket. Every year the Curtain Club would put on lively one act and full length plays such as "Little Women" and "Twentieth Century Portia" for the community and the student body. This club remained a fixture of student development throughout the entire decade. Benefactors such as the Lions' Club, the Masons, and the Klu Klux Klan provided funds to put on plays and other public performances.[30]

Mahjong was a controversial, yet enjoyable activity for young women in the early twentieth century. The young ladies attending the junior college formed a Mahjong Club in 1924. The native Chinese game caused much grief throughout the era, due to the suspicion that mahjong was one of the many reasons behind women abandoning their traditional roles in society. Author Annelise Heinz argues "mahjong matrons symbolized social changes, including female independence and leisure, that destabilized traditional notions of white domesticity." The students met every two weeks to engage in a fun afternoon of competitive frivolity. The girls dressed in costumes similar to traditional Chinese attire. Eventually, the craze came to end during the later part of the decade.[31]

Reading was another popular activity at South Park and throughout the entire city. Most of the female student body enjoyed diving into a well-written novel, so on November 12, 1923, the Pallas Athena Literary

30. Synott, *Navigator*, 123; Sanders, *Navigator*, 92; Komcgay, *Navigator*, 80; Strack, *Navigator*, 125; Asbury, *South Park*, 77; Linsely, "Social History," 146.

31. Holland, *Navigator*, 65; Annelise Heinz, "Performing Mahjong in the 1920s: White Women, Chinese Americans, and the Fear of Cultural Seduction," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies,* 37 (2016): 32.

Society was born. The literature enthusiasts discussed their favorite books from the year in their weekly meetings and "put their learning to the practical use of repartee." Debates and sessions of criticism also took place during their gatherings, allowing the girls to develop noteworthy public speaking skills. Students flocked to the South Park library and the Tyrrell Library, given to the city by Captain W. C. Tyrrell in 1926. They read 1920s, authors such as Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Edith Wharton, and they also enjoyed romances like *The Shiek* (1919) by E. M. Hull and other scandalous works about wives leaving their husbands and other unconventional themes.[32]

During the college's first year, the students desired to establish a school newspaper. The *S'Park Plug*, became very popular, but many citizens of Beaumont were not so keen on the jokes and subject matter featured in each issue. Originally, the students created the paper to report on student life, but then turned into more of a comedic publication in 1927. Elery Holland served as head of the editorial staff during the first year. Under the supervision of Holland, the paper produced four issues between 1923 and 1924. Throughout the decade, the student editorial remained a popular activity until the stock market crashed in 1929, and the expenses became too great to produce numerous issues. Eventually, the *S'Park Plug* changed its name to the *Redbird* in 1932 and then to the *University Press* in 1971.[33]

In 1924, South Park students established a yearbook entitled *The Navigator*. The slim volumes featured sections on the faculty, class favorites, athletics, and the other aspects of student life. Students filled the pages with photographs of their classmates, along with witty and humorous commentary underneath each picture. Sometimes, the captions consisted of crude jokes, risqué sexual innuendos, and racial slurs. Overall, the students showed great interest in preserving the memories and achievements of their classmates and professors.[34]

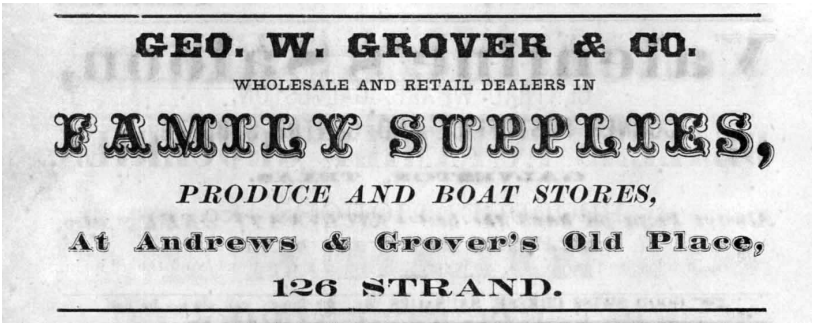
32. Sanders, *Navigator*, 91; Komcgay, *Navigator*, 74; Linsely "Social History," 102-104.

33. Wood, *75th Anniversary*, 48; Linsley, "Social History," 111.

34. Synnott, *Navigator*, 135, 140; Linsley "Social History," 87.

Although the initial home of South Park Junior College is no longer standing, Lamar University serves as both homage to the past and a beacon of hope for ambitious young minds, much like the original educational institution. Today the university campus consists of numerous buildings named after former faculty members and graduates of the South Park as a memorial to their lifetime of dedication and contribution to the school system. The university has also maintained many traditions from the past such as the distinguished athletic program, Greek life, and the marching band to name a few. Without President Pietzch and his innovative idea to bring the junior college system to Beaumont, the university would not have become a crucial symbol of the area's rich legacy.

Rebecca Phillips graduated in 2017 with a BA in History from Lamar University. She is a member of the Phi Kappa Phi and Phi Alpha Theta honor societies.



Geo. W. Grover & Co. advertisement. *Galveston City Directory* (1870). *Courtesy of the Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas*.

Biographical Notes

George Washington Grover

Matthew Pelz

The Galveston City Company, comprised of businessmen seeking to establish the principal port of the Republic of Texas, founded the city in 1838. Since the very first efforts to develop the island, the city has balanced two identities. In one direction, Galveston looked eastward to create trade networks with other port cities on the Gulf and Atlantic Coasts. Strong trade relationships with New Orleans and New York, in particular, made it possible for Galvestonians to enjoy goods and lifestyles largely unavailable for those in cities farther west. At the same time, the city could not ignore its origins as a western outpost. Any plans for its economic success hinged on the production of goods, mainly cotton, in the Texas hinterlands. As events unfolded in the settlement of Texas and the American frontier, Galveston simultaneously served the West, as a conduit to eastern markets, and the East, as a representation of the growing western economy.

Such a balance entailed cultural influences that made it difficult to sustain. As the commercial dominance of the Galveston port grew, the city's merchants became increasingly fixated on maritime trade relationships which put them in league with men like Charles Morgan from New Orleans, Thomas Peirce from Boston, and New York's Mallory family. At the same time, the development of railroad networks afforded western farmers new options for transporting their goods. Consequently, Galveston's eastern cultural ties subsumed the western ones at the end of the 19th century and the city's pioneer traditions slowly withered.

For those living in Galveston during the booming 1880s and 1890s, one man survived as the embodiment of the early days. George Washington Grover, by then an aging mainstay of the city, had participated in the defining moments of frontier settlement to an extent that strains belief. He fought in the Battle of Plum Creek in response to the Linnville Raid of 1840. A year later, he joined the Texan-Santa Fe Expedition. He was captured with his cohorts and sent to a Mexican prison. At the end of the decade, he went to San Francisco as part of the Gold Rush. In 1851, he settled in Galveston to run a wholesale business, and he became active in civic affairs. When the Civil War came to Galveston, Grover served as Mayor pro-tem, and in the absence of other leaders, he represented the city in meetings with military officers. As Grover reached old age in Galveston, he willingly shared the stories of his experiences. In doing so, he served as a reminder of the city's pioneer origins and became one of the its first historians. When he died in 1901, the *Galveston Daily News* noted that "he was identified with the settlement and upbuilding of Galveston."[1]

Grover also enjoyed painting as a hobby. Two of his works survive as important portrayals of mid-nineteenth-century Galveston. The first depicts the capture of the U.S.R.C *Harriet Lane* during the battle of Galveston. His second, *Galveston as Seen from the Main Top of Ship at Central Wharf – October, 1855*, is a grand view of the waterfront. Both curently reside at the Rosenberg Library. The second was a gift from the Galveston Historical Foundation.[2]

By comparison, Grover's life as a civic figure in Galveston has received little attention. Newspaper accounts and early biographical sketches offer fragmented details about his career and personality. Combined, they portray Grover as an ambitious man brought to the port city by the same entrepreneurial aspirations that brought so many others during the 1840s. Initially, Grover's business success and political involvement

1. "G.W. Grover Dead," *The Galveston Daily News* (hereafter GDN), December 22, 1901.

2. Walter E. Grover, presentation, Galveston Historical Society, November 30, 1949, Preservation Resource Center, Galveston Historical Foundation, Galveston, TX (hereafter GHF).

seemed to match those of better-known figures like James M. Brown or Henry Rosenberg, who amassed tremendous wealth during the second half of the 19th century. However, Grover's business career stalled, and during the booming years of the 1880s, he held middle-class, professional positions rather than corporate offices. Nonetheless, he remained a public figure through his efforts to relay his early experiences. His biography offers an opportunity to examine the life of someone who was not merely an interesting figure, but one with a deep-rooted awareness of his perspective of ongoing events and a willingness to record his observations for the sake of posterity.

Various brief biographical sketches provide consistent details regarding Grover's early life. He was born on November 9, 1819, in Sacketts Harbor, New York, to Nathan and Frances Grover, but he spent most of his childhood in Cincinnati. As a teenager, he worked as a bookkeeper for the Cincinnati Type Foundry and the Louisville Type Foundry. His experience in publishing, though not the focus of his career, remained a hobby and subject of interest throughout his life.[3]

In 1839, his father moved the family to a farm seven miles south of Austin, where Grover quickly immersed himself in the pioneer life. In 1840, Comanches and Kiowas cut a swath through Texas, raiding warehouses, stealing horses, and killing 23 people. On the evening of August 11, 1840, several groups of Texan volunteers came together near Plum Creek to repel the attack. Among the group was Grover and his father.[4]

The following year, Grover volunteered to serve the Republic of Texas once again, this time as part of the artillery company for a trade expedition to Santa Fe, New Mexico. President Mirabeau Lamar urged the trip in the hopes of expanding Texan influence. In Santa Fe, Grover was one of the members of the group selected to meet the Mexican contingent. The endeavor proved to be disastrous when a Texan officer surrendered all the men as prisoners to the Mexican authorities. Grover and his cohorts remained imprisoned until April 1842. While detained,

3. "Grover Dead," December 22, 1901.

4. Grover, presentation; "In the Indian Times," GDN, March 18, 1895; Craig H. Roell, "Linnville Raid of 1840," Handbook of Texas Online (www.tshaonline.org/handbook).

he edited a weekly newspaper called *True Blue* under the pseudonyms "Simon Pure" and "Snooks." In a total of six issues written by hand in April and May 1842, the single-page newspaper reported on the expedition and prison life.[5]

After his release from Mexico City, Grover returned to the city of his childhood, Cincinnati, and married Hepzy Dana Andrews in May 1844. Andrews was the younger sister of Grover's lifelong friend and future business partner, Wright S. Andrews. The marriage was brief as Hepzy died of unknown causes that September. Grover remained in Cincinnati until February 1849 when he and Wright Andrews joined a gold expedition to California. After departing from New Orleans, their ship made stops in Panama. During the Pacific voyage, a storm blew their ship off course, requiring a stop in Hawaii. When they finally reached San Francisco, Grover and Andrews established a supply store and gathered gold. During their return trip, they stored their gold in a trunk and buckskin belts, but lost thier fortune when their boat caught fire. Grover would later survive a second boat fire when the steamship *Louisiana* of Port Lavaca caught fire off Galveston, killing 40 people.[6]

In 1850, Grover settled in Galveston. When he arrived, the city had been growing for over ten years since its founding by Michel Menard and the Galveston City Company. Menard, a Quebec-native fur trapper, represented the group of earlier pioneers who sought to develop the land as the primary commercial port for Texas. During the 1840s, wharf facilities grew rapidly, spurred by a group of early investors that included Samuel May Williams, Thomas McKinney, and brothers John and Augustus Allen. Settlers like Grover, James M. Brown, Henry Rosenberg, and many others anticipated sustained growth in the decades ahead, and eagerly positioned themselves to take advantage.[7]

5. George W. Grover, "Minutes of Adventure from June 1841," Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, TX (hereafter THC); H. Bailey Carroll, "Texan Santa Fe Expedition" and Diana J. Kleiner, "*True Blue*," Handbook of Texas Online; William Manning Morgan, *Trinity Protestant Episcopal Church, Galveston, Texas, 1841-1953: A Memorial History* (Houston: The Anson Jones Press, 1953), 304.

6. Morgan, *Trinity Protestant Episcopal*, 305; Grover, presentation.

7. Grover, presentation.

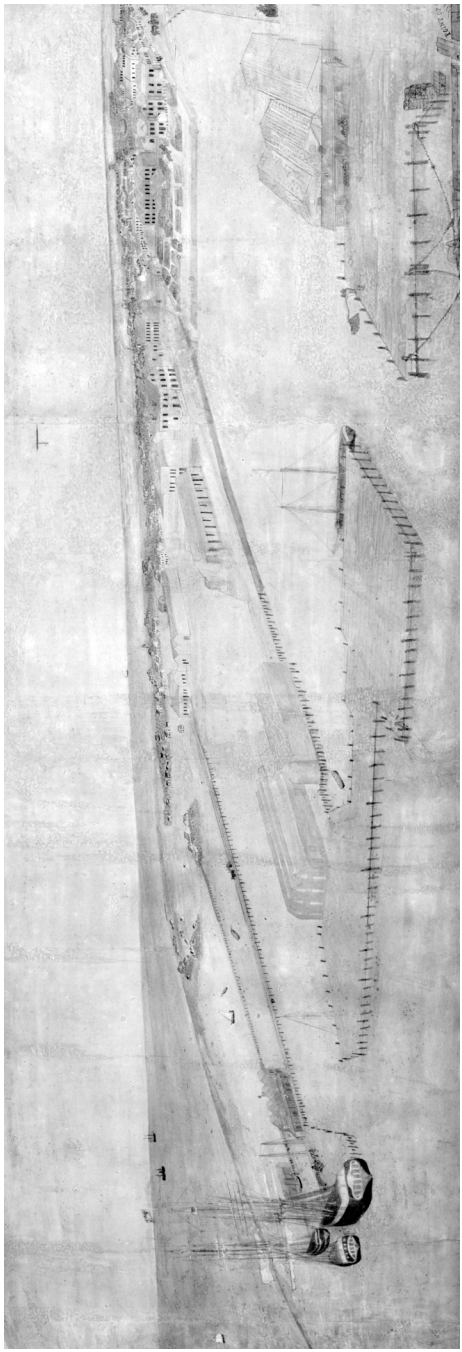
In December 1851, Wright Andrews and his brother Henry joined Grover in Galveston. The trio formed a wholesale and retail grocery and ship chandlery firm at the corner of Strand and 22nd Street in the heart of the city's downtown business district. Henry left the partnership in 1852, leaving Grover and Wright to manage the mercantile house Grover and Andrews in tandem. Advertisements suggest that they operated without a specific focus, offering a variety of groceries and supplies. By 1857, they may have specialized in canned oysters. In establishing their firm on the Strand during the 1850s, Grover and Andrews stood among a class of entrepreneurs that included many of the men who would dominate the city's commercial interests in the second half of the century.[8]

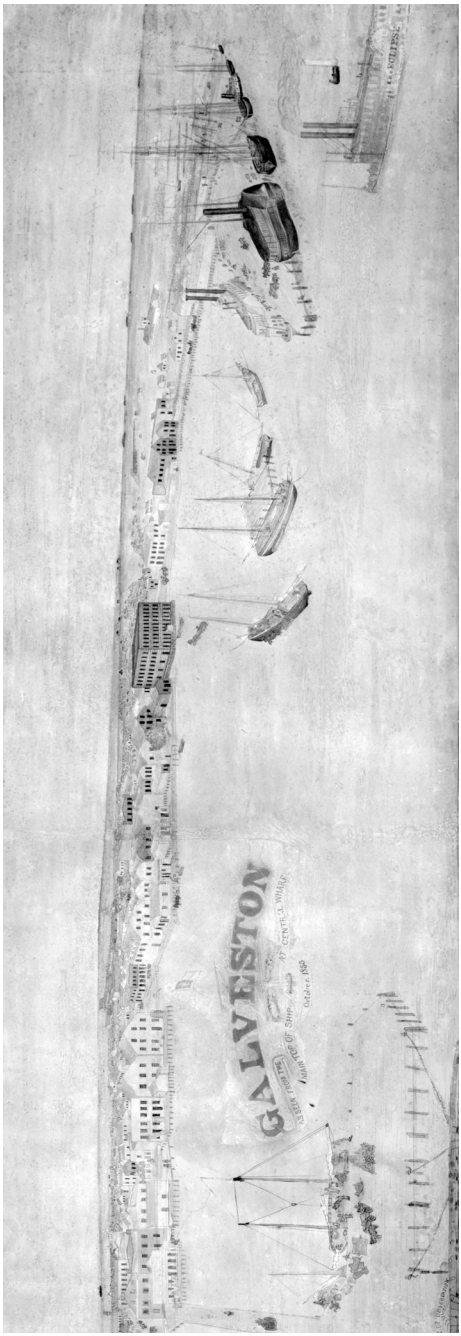
In August 1852, Grover married Eliza Ann Crane. She was the daughter of Ambrose Byron Crane, Galveston's Deputy Collector of Customs serving under Gail Borden Jr. Eliza was born in St. Marks, Florida, in 1834, and her family moved to Texas in 1837. After the marriage, the Grover family grew with the births of children Louise, Mable, Sidney, and Walter. The last, born on April 17, 1869, became a prominent booster of Galveston and Texas history. He served as president of the Galveston Historical Society, a precursor of the present-day Galveston Historical Foundation.[9]

The 1857 *Galveston City Directory* lists the Grover family as residing on Market Street between 19th and 20th streets. In 1859, they lived at the corner of Mechanic and 15th. The latter address is nearer to the lot at 1520 Market (then designated as 460 East Market) that Grover had purchased in 1858-1859 with the intention of building a house for the family. The two-story brick house that he built in the following year still stands on the site. Judging from the house's scale and its carpentry and masonry details, Grover likely employed an unknown designer or

8. Notices and "Wright S. Andrews," GDN, August 7, 1853, and March 26, 1906; *The Texas Almanac for 1857* (Galveston: Richardson & Co., 1856); Walter E. Gover, personal statement, November 30, 1949; Morgan, *Trinity Protestant Episcopal*, 305.

9. Galveston County Court Records (Microfilm No. 1008865), Family History Library, Salt Lake City; "Mrs. E. A. Grover," "Walter E. Grover Dies; Services Slated Monday," and "Two Historic Waterfront Paintings Restored," GDN, May 21, 1913, February 7, 1960, and August 18, 1968; Grover, presentation.





George W. Grover, *Galveston as Seen from the Main Top of Ship at Central Wharf—October, 1855*. 16.5 x 66 in. Pen and ink with watercolor on paper (1855). *Courtesy of the Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas.*

utilized a pattern book drawing to help complete the project, just as James M. Brown had when constructing Ashton Villa in 1860-1861.[10]

The location and stature of the house indicate Grover's wealth at the end of the 1850s. The house of Henry Rosenberg, also built in 1859, stands just three blocks away at 1306 Market. These two houses are the oldest surviving brick residences in Galveston. As Walter Grover later noted, the bricks for the Grover House came from Brown's brickyard on Galveston Island. Further indicating Grover's economic status was his ability to import building materials from eastern sources. The marble window sills came from Vermont, the granite steps to the western entrance came from New Hampshire, and the pine for the flooring came from Pensacola, Florida.[11]

The earliest detailed description of the house, published in a 1936 newspaper article, provides an overview of the house's interior as well as some notes on its original construction. The article details:

> ceilings of unusual height, bordered with attractive hand-made friezes, and with hand-made center designs built about the ceiling gas fixtures. Throughout the house are hand-cut stained glass panes, and all window and door sills are of marble. The mantel and hearth in the great parlor on the ground floor are of black marble, and the fireplace on the second floor is of white marble. The old kitchen at the rear was built over a large underground cistern which supplied water to firemen when fires broke out nearby. Two other cisterns and a cellar are under the house, and one of the cisterns is still being used, supplying the family with cool water during summer months.[12]

10. W. and D. Richardson, *Galveston Directory, 1856-57* (Galveston: Galveston News Book and Job Office, 1857); and *Galveston Directory for 1859* (Galveston: "News" Book and Job Office, 1859); "Galveston County Tax Roll, 1859, GHF; Insurance Record for 1520 Market, THC.

11. "Many of Heroes of Battle Buried Here," GDN, July 11, 1936; "War, Storms, Fire Fail to Destroy Island Home," *Houston Post*, November 10, 1966; Grover, presentation; J. D. Claitor, "Walter E. Grover—'Mr. Galveston'" (1951), GHF.

12 "Many of Heroes," July 11, 1936.

According to the recollections of Walter Grover, upon its completion the house was the second largest dwelling in Galveston, surpassed in size only by Brown's Ashton Villa. The Grover House was certainly among the most finely detailed antebellum houses in the city, and it quickly became a neighborhood landmark. In 1872, an article in the *Galveston Daily News* describeed the enduring beauty of the home, noting the scored stucco applied to the house by Nick White, a slater and plaster from Ireland, using a technique then called "rough casting." The author asserts that the stucco "looks to-day almost as good as new. It certainly improves the appearance of a building most-wonderfully." After its construction, the house "became a social center," according to Walter Grover. "Many gay parties were held there, and, according to the custom of the time, friends and relatives visited there from distant places and enjoyed their hospitality."[13]

The lavish details and prominence of the Grover House represents the owner's stature and ambitions in the years immediately prior to the Civil War. The design also demonstrates the western influences that shaped Grover's tastes in comparison with those of Brown and Rosenberg, who followed eastern design trends in building their homes. The house is a surviving manifestation of Grover's ties to the early pioneer settlement of the Texas—a rare example in the state's "eastern" city.

Within two years of the construction of his home, Grover suffered a series of business calamities. Three fires hit the Grover and Andrews store in succession. The incidents are noted only in Grover's obituary, written 40 years afterwards and lacking in details that would help identify the dates and circumstances of the disasters. After the third in 1861, the two men decided to dissolve the firm in face of the looming war.[14]

The year of 1861 marks the beginning of Grover's transition away from intensive business activity and towards a civically oriented life. That year, he won his first election a city alderman. He ultimately held office for a decade, helping to navigate the city through the difficult years of

13. Claitor, "Grover;" Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, US National Archives and Records Administration (1459 rolls, Microfilm Publication T9), roll 1305; "In Our Perambulations," GDN, March 10, 1872; Grover, personal statement.

14. "Wright S. Andrews," March 26, 1906; Morgan, *Trinity Protestant Episcopal*, 305.

war and Reconstruction. When other members of the city government retreated to Virginia Point, Grover served as Galveston Mayor pro tem. When the Union Army took control of the city, it was Grover who met with their officers. After the deaths of Union leaders Capt. Jonathan Mayhew Wainwright and Lt Cdr. Edward Lea during the battle of Galveston on January 1, 1863, Grover aroused controversy when he offered his own family's plot in the Episcopal section of Broadway Cemetery for their burial.[15]

Following the war, Grover's decisions to treat Union soldiers with respect remained controversial. In 1869, the aldermen elected him as the city treasurer by a vote of five to four. Newspaper accounts of his election reveal a lingering debate over his actions during the Civil War. City Alderman Benjamin Rush Plumly protested the election, saying that Grover had not been forthcoming about the extent of his support for the Confederate cause. Plumly charged that Grover took the oath of loyalty to the Union in 1869, four years after the conclusion of the war, only to serve his political interests. As the *Galveston Daily News* reported that Plumly "desired his protest entered upon the minutes, a protest not against Mr. Grover, but against the easy conscience that swears that it did not do what it did do." Despite Plumly's assertion that he was not "aspersing the character of Mr. Grover," his remarks make it clear that in a public setting he presented Grover's conduct as an example of the post-war dishonesty and lack of accountability during the reconstruction years.[16]

Plumly may not have fully understood the subtleties of Grover's conduct as a city representative during the war. A dedicated abolitionist from Pennsylvania, Plumly moved to Galveston in 1866 after serving as a Union legislator and administrator. He likely knew of the city government's support for the Confederates, and consequently associated Grover with those views. Accounts suggest that his accusations did not compel Grover to defend himself. Instead, fellow Alderman Theodore Wagner came to his defense. Wagner reminded the group that Grover

15. Edward T. Cotham Jr., *Battle of Galveston: The Civil War Struggle for Galveston* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 138; Grover, presentation.

16. "Local Intelligence," *Flake's Galveston Bulletin*, May 15, 1869.

had been condemned during the war for being too pro-Union. Wagner did not specifically mention the burials of Wainwright and Lea, but that episode certainly supports his characterization of Grover as a man with personal allegiances that were perhaps conflicted, and certainly subservient to his role as a civic leader. After Wagner's remarks, Plumly capitulated. The debate reveals an instance in which incoming Northern legislators lacked awareness of the subtleties of local politics in the war-time South.[17]

Following the war, Grover made efforts to restart his business career. In 1865 and 1866, he worked as the bookkeeper for the First National Bank of Galveston. Demonstrating the decline of his business career as compared to his contemporaries, Henry Rosenberg served as the bank's president during the same era. By 1870, Grover launched his own grocery company at the old Grover and Andrews location at 22nd Street and Strand. An advertisement in the 1872 *Galveston City Directory* lists the firm as retail dealers in "family supplies, produce and boat stores." The company was out of business by 1874.[18]

After the demise of his grocery store, Grover never again operated his own business. Between 1874 and 1881, he was an employee of the firm Rice and Baulard, sellers of paints and oils from a store at 213-217 23rd Street. The firm had begun in 1853 as the partnership of Joseph W. Rice and Victor Baulard. They traded throughout Texas and western Louisiana. Grover served as the company's bookkeeper and may have added other duties during his tenure. As Grover edged to retirement, he devoted increasing portions of his energy to community engagement. He was a member of the vestry of Trinity Church, the Order of Cincinnatus, the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, the Grand Encampment, and the Howard Association for the care of victims of Yellow Fever.[19]

17. "Local Intelligence," May 15, 1869.

18. W. Richardson & Co., *Galveston Directory for 1866-67* (Galveston: W. Richardson & Co., [c. 1866]).

19. "Baulard, Victor Joseph," *Handbook of Texas Online*; Various Galveston directories, 1870-1881; Mrs. E. A. Grover," GDN, May 21, 1913; Morgan, *Trinity Protestant Episcopal*, 305.

As Galveston's business leaders acquired unprecedented wealth through trade relationships with markets in eastern cities, Grover remained active primarily through recounting his experiences from the pioneer era. He offered accounts, both in speech and in print, of his early exploits in the battle of Plum Creek, the Texan-Santa Fe expedition, and the battle of Galveston. For his paper on Plum Creek, presented to the Texas Historical Society of Galveston, he built upon both his personal experiences as well as gathered sources. Through his willingness to engage, Grover reinforced Galveston's ties to the history of the settlement of Texas. Within the context of an era that saw the city obsessed with modernization and economic advancement, his efforts served as meaningful contributions to the development of Galveston's appreciation of its history. His association with historical organizations continued with his son, Walter, who related his father's experiences during the first half of the 20th century.[20]

Grover died on December 21, 1901, after a fall. His wife Eliza died in 1913 as one of the oldest citizens in the city. By then, the family had sold the house on Market Street. Descendants of the famous Chambers family of Texas owned the house for much of the 20th century, obscuring its association with Grover. In the 1990s, the current owners restored the elements designed by Grover. The house is now part of Galveston's East End neighborhood. Among the city's oldest buildings, Grover's house stands alongside those of Michel B. Menard and Samuel May Williams as an embodiment of Galveston's roots as a western city. True to Grover's own life, in which he served as a link to the city's past, his house was one of the last built using older, retrospective design styles.[21]

Matthew Pelz works for the Galveston Historical Foundation, where he focuses on the integration of resilience and sustainability into historic preservation. He developed the Center for Coastal Heritage, which explores the intersection between natural and built environments in coastal settings. He now serves as a special projects consultant, researching buildings and people connected to Galveston's history. Pelz recieved his BA in history from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and MS in historic preservation from Clemson University and the College of Charleston.

20. "Indian Times," March 18, 1895.

21. "Mrs. E. A. Grover," May 21, 1913; "Grover Dead," December 22, 1901.

Primary Sources

The Rolfe and Gary Christopher Negative Collection

Charlotte A. Holliman

In his landmark book *Reading American Photographs* (1989), Alan Trachtenberg explores the concept of photographs as history. He considers their depictive value but also indicates that they have a component of interpretation and perception and even a point of view. Photographs have meaning and historical content and by their very nature illicit a response from those who look at them. Viewers want to know who is in the image and who took it, what the circumstances were, where it was taken, and when it was taken. This perspective helps create an understanding and relationship with the past represented by the photograph that also "serve[s] the present's need to understand itself and measure its future."[1] In Southeast Texas, local photographers have used their viewfinders to capture moments in time and preserve them for current and future generations to explore Beaumont and the region—past and present.

The Rolfe and Gary Christopher Negative Collection, housed at the Mary and John Gray Library in the Special Collections Department is one of the area's richest photographic resources. In the summer of 1986, Gary and Cheryl Christopher with the approval of Rolfe Christopher offered to donate the family's trove of negatives. Maxine Johnston, director of the Mary and John Gray Library, recognized the potential of the collection and gladly accepted the gift.

1. Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989) xvii.

The Rolfe and Gary Christopher Negative Collection begins in 1946 and continues into the 21st century, documenting the history of Beaumont, Texas. It contains images of commercial and industrial progress, aerial views of various industrial sites and oil refineries, land development, significant news events, catastrophes, political meetings and rallies, product illustrations and grand opening promotionals. The images also depict politicians, social events, family and wedding portraits, insurance related materials, legal and court case reconstructions, high school classes, reunions and graduations, athletic events and teams, and other events and personalities. The initial donation consisted of 520,000 negatives with an additional 800,000 in 2006. Ten years later in 2016, Gary Christopher gifted 15,000 portrait negatives dating from 1970-1979, 3,000 commercial negatives, and images filed on DVD dating from 1948 to 2006.[2]

Rolfe C. Christopher was born on November 24, 1919, in Converse, Louisiana. He was the son of John William and Eutha Pearl Christopher. After his parents moved to Beaumont, Rolfe grew up in the South Park neighborhood and attended the high school there. He was vice-president and eventually president of the Hi-Y Club during his senior year. He graduated in 1936. His family later donated his football letterman sweater to the South Park Heritage Association building located at 4390 Highland Avenue.

Christopher married Virginia Mae Wood in 1942, and they lived in the South Park neighborhood. They had three sons—Craig born in 1943, Gary born in 1946, and Todd born in 1950. After a stint in the US Navy as an aerial photographer, he returned to Beaumont and contributed photographs to the *Pennship Log*, the newspaper for the Pennsylvania Shipyard. In 1946 at war's end, he and his wife opened Christopher Studio.[3] He also worked as a contract photographer for the *Beaumont Enterprise* with many of the commissioned negatives perserved in the collection. The residents of the city and the surrounding areas valued

2. Letter from Gary Christopher documenting additional donation, June 16, 2016, The Rolfe and Gary Christopher Negative Collection, Special Collections and Lamar University Archives, The Mary and John Gray Library, Lamar University.

3. *Beaumont Enterprise*, November 15, 1992.

his work and saw the need to capture and preserve moments in time, document history, and document their families and communities.

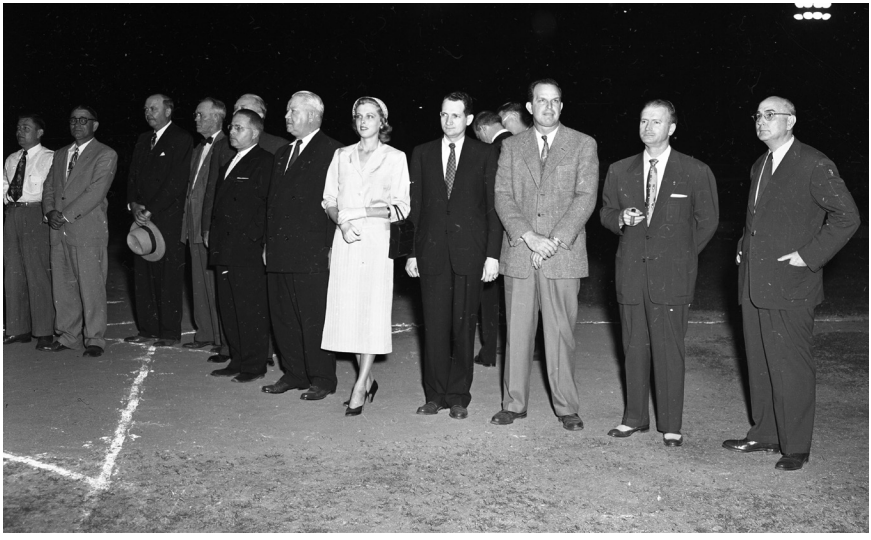
Volume 46 of *The Record* (2010: pp. 32-41) featured an article by this author that highlighted political images from the Christopher Collection. As this essay demonstrates, the collection contains a diverse range of subjectcs that capture the social, cultural, and economic life of Beaumont. For example, the collection holds thousands of images from the Neches River Festival. The event began in 1949, now celebrated every year in April, recognizes the river's impact on the local economy. The festival also celebrates the graduating seniors of local high schools.

Special Collections continues to use the original index compiled by the Christophers at their studio. It often includes the date of the photo and limited description about the subject. Many times, however, the index does not identify the subjects in the photos or files the negative under the name or entity of whomever contracted the photos. For example, the index catalogues some spectacular images of the Beaumont Exporters under "Enterprise" because Christopher took the photos for the local newspaper. Sometimes by sheer serendipity, researchers and Special Collections staff discover fabulous images while searching for unrelated negatives. A past student assistant, Tim Wyatt identified a photo of New York Yankee greats Joe DiMagggio and Gil McDougald that Chrisopher captured for the April 8, 1951, issue of the *Enterprise*.

The collection is open to researchers and offers a wealth of opportunities to utilize photographs to help us better understand who we are as a community, what significant events shaped our past, and the continuities and distinctions that make up the histories of the people and cities of Beaumont and surrounding areas. Patrons who visit the archive may access the index electronically. For more information, visit Special Collection's website at www.lamar.edu/library/services/university-archive/index.html.

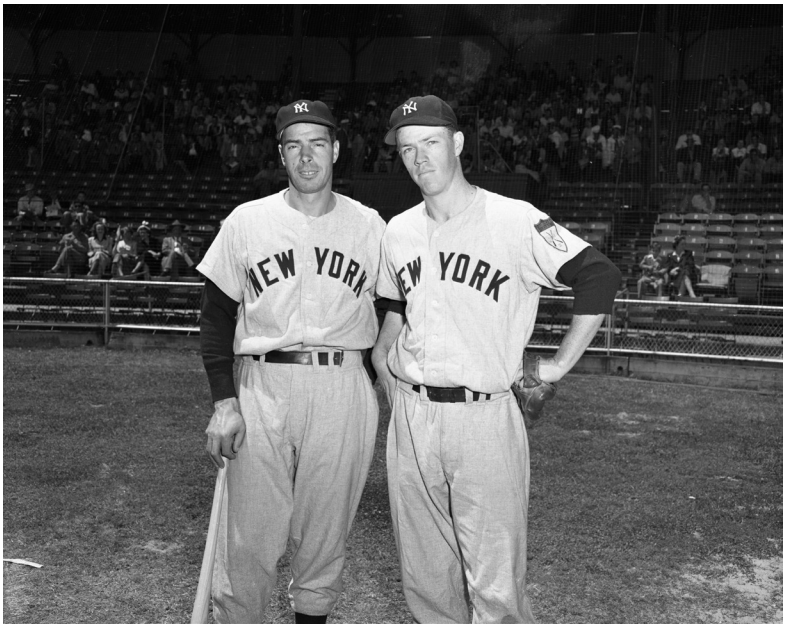
Charlotte A. Holliman is a library associate for Special Collections and University Archives at the Mary and John Gray Library, Lamar University. She holds a BA and MA in History from Lamar University. She has previously authored several articles for *The Record*.

Rolfe Christopher with camera, May 10, 1960. (Neg. No. 16643.1). Rolfe and Virginia Christopher opened a photography studio in Beaumont in 1946. Later, their son Gary took up the camera, and together they produced over 1 million photographic negatives that document the history and culture of the region. In 1986, the family donated the archive to the Special Collections Department of the Mary and John Gray Library at Lamar University.



Lyndon B. Johnson for the *Beaumont Enterprise*, June 1953. (Neg. No. 9923.3). The Christophers documented the moments when national poltical leaders visited Beaumont like Senator Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas. As is often the case, the index to the Christopher Collection does not identify the woman or the sailor in the photograph that she is holding.

Jack Brooks and others at Beaumont Exporters Opening Game, April 23, 1953. (Detail, Neg. No. 9523.8). In 1952, Southeast Texans elected Jack Brooks to represent them in the US Congress. He stands in the center of this photograph fourth from the right.


NEW YORK
EW YORK


MMEL
GUARANTEED
USED

New York Yankees, April 7, 1951. (Neg. No. 7883.4). The Christophers also documented those occasions when national celebrities visited Beaumont. On this date, the defending World Series Champions New York Yankees played an exhibition game against their farm team, the Beaumont Roughnecks. A large crowd of 6,747 baseball fans watched the Yankees defeat the Roughnecks 3-2 at Stuart Stadium. The veteran Joe DiMaggio (*left*) doubled and rookie Mickey Mantle homered. The game also featured Yankee players Gil McDougald (*right*) and Clinton Courtney who had played for the Roughnecks on their 1950 Texas League championship team, a season during which McDougald won Most Valuable Player honors. Christopher sent the Enterprise six photos, including one that shows DiMaggio congratulating Mantle at home plate after the latter hit a home run. The newspaper published them as a montage in its sports section. *Beaumont Enterprise*, April 7-8, 1951.

Bob Hope, May 23, 1958. (Neg. No. 14749.6). On this date, Bob Hope spent the day in Beaumont to benefit the Babe Didrikson Zaharias Cancer Fund. The comedian had beeen friends with the late sports star. In addition to writing a personal check for $1,000, Hope attended a television and radio press conference at the Hotel Beaumont, played an exhibition game of golf, participated in a downtown parade, and performed a monologue at the Jefferson Theatre premier of his movie *Paris Holiday*. *Beaumont Enterprise*, May 24, 1958.

Sprott Hospital Staff, Feburary 2, 1967. (Detail of Neg. No. 25243.2). The Christopher Collection provides a visual documentation of Southeast Texas business and professional leaders. Dr. Edward D. Sprott (*front row, third from the right*) was one such leader. During the era of racial segregation in Beaumont, local hospitals would not admit African-American patients except for dire emergencies. In 1942, he and his brothers, Dr. Maxie Sprott and Dr. Curtis Sprott, established the clinic to provide quality health care to the region's black community. Edward Sprott was an active leader in Civil Rights, serving as president of the local and statewide chapters of the NAACP.

The Neches River Festival Executive Board 1985. (Detail of Color Neg. No. 85000). The NRF Executive Board consisted of many of the region's influential business leaders. *Left to right, front row*: Lee Griffin, Wilton White, Dr. Charles Turco, George Adams, Otho Plummer. *Far left between middle and back rows*: James Potter. *Middle row*: Tommy Tomlinson, Rolfe Christopher, Will Wilson, George McLaughlin, Peter Wells, Jerry Nathan. *Back row*: Homer Howell, George Faires, Winston Proctor, Doak Proctor, Frank Adams, Jeff Munro.

Neches River Festival, 1956. (Neg. No. 12128.1). Since 1949, the Neches River Festival has become one of the highlights of Beaumont's social scene. *Left to right*: Patty Petit, W. C. Tyrrell Jr., Katherine Ross.

Neches River Festival, 1955. (Neg. No. 12103.2). Historians of fashion, social, and material culture will find that the Christopher Collection holds a trove of images. *Left to right*: Spencer Blaine, Lettie Wheat, Kay Bland, Beeman Strong, Carol Kolter, Tanner Hunt, Carolyn Carmichael, Danny Wheat.


PUREOIL CO.
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To
ORGANIZED LABOR
OWIU LOCAL # 228

Rail yard workers, Southern Pacific, October 19, 1953. (Neg. No. 9315.5). The Christophers preserved glimpses of working-class lives in Beaumont that might otherwise be lost.

Pure Oil Company strike, June 23, 1947. (Detail, Neg. No. 538.6). The Christopher Collection documents labor strife. In 1947, union members across the country went on strike against the Pure Oil Company. The image here likely shows picketers at the company's Port Neches refinery.


RAY McGILL BARBERS
GARAGE


COLORED
WAITING ROOM
NEW ORLEA

Photographs for Gray Claim Service, n.d. (*Top*, Neg. No. 10013.2). A significant portion of the collection includes negatives produced when Rolfe Christopher accepted work for insurance companies. The resulting photographs may appear innocuous, but they provide a rich, if unintentional, compilation of local history. This image shows the drive way of the Continental Trailways Bus Center at 401 College Street, but it also captures two used car dealers, Ray McDill (*left*) and H-H Motor Sales (*across street*). The skyline of downtown appears in the upper background with the familiar Hotel Beaumont sign. A closer look, however, will remind viewers of Beaumont's history of segregation with the seemingly ubiquitous "White Waiting Room" sign. (*Bottom*, detail of Neg. No. 10013.1). A view from the opposite direction shows a bus bound for New Orleans and a sign for "Colored Wating Room" at the other end of the building. *Beaumont City Directory 1954* (Dallas: Morrison & Fourmy Directory Co., 1954), 109, 213, 341.


Pyramid
Drive In Theatre

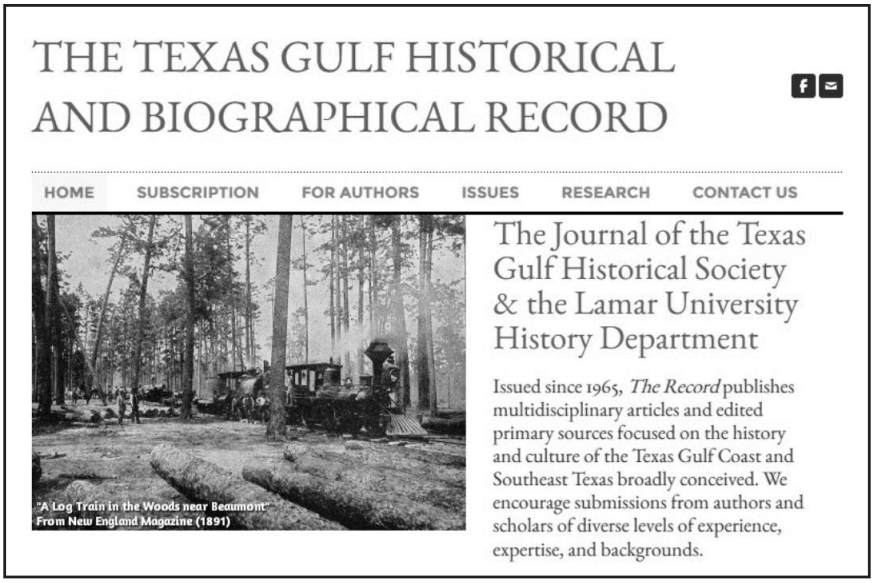
Photograph for the *Beaumont Enterprise*, Beaumont Exporter player no. 8, n.d. (Neg. No. 10501.1). Beaumont supported a minor league baseball team since at least 1920 and started playing at Stuart Stadium in 1930. The team changed names several times, becoming the Exporters in 1953. The Christopher Collections includes numerous images of Beaumont's baseball teams of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Pyramid Drive-In Theatre, 4555 Port Arthur Road, n.d. (Neg. No. 7542.1). The drive-in movie theater boomed in popularity during the 1950s. According to the website Cinema Treasures, this drive-in opened on July 28, 1950, and featured a pyramid constructed of stainless steel. The Provost Umphrey Stadium at Lamar University currently occupies the site.


FOUNTAIN

White House Dry Goods Co., Inc., April 26, 1960. (Neg. No. 16587.1). The Christopher Collection is rich in images that document rare glimpses of buidling interiors. The lunch-counter was a mainstay in many US cities during the 1950s and 1960s and famously became a battleground during the Civil Rights Movement. Most southern cities, including Beaumont, prohibited African Americans to patronize local lunch counters. The wall features images of Lamar State College of Technology.

Beaumont Club at Christmas, December 17, 1953. (Neg. No. 10045.1). This interior scene captures the 1950s fascination with modernist decor inspired by the futurism of the Atomic Age.



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Book Reviews

The Long Shadow: The Lutcher-Stark Lumber Dynasty. By Ellen Walker Rienstra and Jo Ann Stiles (Austin: Tower Books of the University of Texas Press, 2017. 640 pp. 212 b&w photos. 2 b&w illus. $45.00 cloth).

This is, at one level, an expansive biographical exploration of an enduring Texas dynasty born of the Gilded Age and the bonanza era of timber production in the South. The sweep of history is impressive, drawing on familial connections that reach far beyond the central characters of Henry Jacob Lutcher (The Visionary), William Henry Stark (The Capitalist), and Lutcher Stark (The Philanthropist). Each individual in the book is duly treated with great respect, dignity, and honesty within a layered context that provides rich meaning and depth. Utilizing a wide range of resources, many of which have never been mined by historians before, authors Ellen Walker Rienstra and Jo Ann Stiles add countless new dimensions to what has previously been written about the family. Of particular note in this work are the integral roles of the women, including Frances Ann Lutcher, Carrie Brown, Miriam Lutcher Stark, Nita Hill Stark, and Nelda Childers Stark.

The Long Shadow—aptly named for its portrayal of a remarkable transgenerational saga—is much more than a family history. It includes, as would be expected, the evolving story of a vast timber empire centered on Orange in Southeast Texas, but myriad twists and turns along the way introduce profound drama and complexities in ways that draw the reader into a greater appreciation of what might otherwise seem to be a regional story. There are, for example, the layers of philanthropy, political intrigue, community building, conservation, industrial diversifica-

tion, education, and commercial infrastructure. Readers more familiar with the business side of the Lutcher-Stark enterprise may be surprised to discover connections to such seemingly disparate issues as the University of Texas Longhorns, a West Texas astronomical observatory, a Presbyterian church, libraries and art collections, the Homer Rainey affair, a women's club, a public garden dubbed Shangri-La, and a high school girls' band known as the Bengal Guards. Throughout that broad cultural landscape, too, run defining realities of life and death, success and failure, and promise and perseverance that add significant human texture and make the overall story accessible and relatable.

The Lutcher-Stark saga could have ended, as did countless others tied to the "cut out and get out" mentality of the national timber industry in the era before the widespread acceptance of sustainable conservation efforts. While others foolishly gambled their fortunes on hopes of an impractical market resurgence or followed the tide of resource exploitation westward, the Lutchers and Starks survived economic downturns by pursuing such innovations as selective harvesting and timber grade-marking, and by dramatically diversifying their business interests for the long run. Ultimately, their saga endured historically because they decided to stay put and invest in their adopted community, unselfishly plowing back sizable portions of their wealth over time for broader societal gains that are still paying dividends in education, the arts, religion, science, conservation, and heritage tourism.

The Long Shadow is a significant work that will stand the test of time. Well written and thoroughly researched, it sets a high standard for future biographical treatments of the state's industrial leaders, not just those involved in timber production. Its contribution to the field of forest history, though, cannot be denied. It ranks among the best in that regard, complementing such seminal works as *East Texas Lumber Workers: An Economic and Social Picture, 1870-1950* (1961) by Ruth A. Allen, and *Sawdust Empire: The Texas Lumber Industry, 1830-1940* (1983) by Robert S. Maxwell and Robert D. Baker. *The Long Shadow* represents a second collaboration for authors Rienstra and Stiles, who partnered with Judith Walker Linsley (Rienstra and Linsley are former editors of this journal) for another industrial study, the acclaimed *Giant*

Under the Hill: A History of the Spindletop Oil Discovery at Beaumont, Texas, in 1901 (2002). Rienstra and Stiles have demonstrated once again their ability to convey complex, multi-layered historical concepts in meaningful ways for the general public while also preserving and interpreting the human side of the narrative. Their work is engaging, insightful, and thorough. Publication by the University of Texas Press serves as a fitting coda to the story line, given the school's key role in the overall narrative and the fact that both W. H. Stark and Lutcher Stark served as regents at pivotal times in the institution's history.

The components of *The Long Shadow* are at the same time unique and universal. Readers will experience compelling elements of a story well told, one that reaches far beyond preconceived notions of an important family's place in the past. The book delivers on many levels and should be considered an essential read for those who appreciate the unmistakable rhythms of time and place.

Dan K. Utley
Texas State University

Thursday Night Lights: The Story of Black High School Football in Texas. By Michael Hurd (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017. 248 pp. 49 b&w photos. $24.95 cloth).

Michael Hurd is managing editor of the Texas Black History Preservation Project and director of the Texas Institute for the Preservation of History and Culture. A journalist, he has written articles for the *Houston Post* and the *Austin American Statesman*, covering sporting events such as the NFL, the NBA, the NCAA, and the Olympics. Hurd is also the author of *Black College Football, 1892-1992: One Hundred Years of History, Education, and Pride* (1998), and he serves on the selection committee for the Black College Football Hall of Fame.

With the title, *Thursday Night Lights*, Hurd alludes to H. G. Bissinger's *Friday Night Lights* (1988) that details the story about football at Odessa's Permian High School during the 1960s-1980s. Popularized in a movie and on television, the book examines the devotion of a town and a school made up of a mostly white population to a football team composed of white and black players. The Permian Panthers produced winning records year after year, competed for district and state championships, drew crowds of 20,000 to the home stadium. Under the "Friday night lights," the people of Odessa cheered the team, the school, and their community.

In *Thursday Night Lights*, Hurd lifts "the veil of segregation" and presents "The Story of Black High School Football in Texas." Citing a select bibliography and using newspapers, interviews, recollections, and anecdotes, he provides historical perspectives on Jim Crow segregation. He cites the US Supreme Court decisions of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the first approving racial segregation and the second outlawing it. In Texas, before the Brown decision, segregation in public schools was strictly enforced, and athletic teams from white and black schools were not permitted to play in the same contests. Football games for white high schools were played on Friday and Saturday nights, while games for black high schools were

played on Wednesday and Thursday nights. All athletic activities at white schools were scheduled and regulated by the University Interscholastic League (UIL), while all such activities for black schools were scheduled and regulated by Prairie View Interscholastic League (PVIL). At that time, the PVIL was headquartered at Prairie View A&M College, a traditionally black school.

Using the PVIL for sources and perspectives, Hurd offers a 50-year history (1920-1970) of football for African Americans, surveying black high schools across the state. He also includes some information about other sports such as basketball and track and field. A graduate of Worthing High School in Houston, Hurd provides information about other Houston schools such as Yates, Wheatley, and Washington. He also writes about Southeast Texas schools like Hebert and Charlton-Pollard in Beaumont and Lincoln in Port Arthur. Often he mentions black high school stars who went on to win fame in college and professional football. For Beaumont, he points to achievements by Bubba Smith, Tody Smith, Jess Philips, Wayne Moore, Jerry Levias, Warren Wells, Mel Farr, Miller Farr, Anthony Guillory, Charles Ford, and Bob Pollard.

For the Houston region, Hurd focuses on Yates, Wheatley, and Washington, often citing names of long time coaches and outstanding football players. At Yates, Coach Andrew "Pat" Patterson served many years, training numerous good players including Eddie Hughes, Rhome Nixon, and Thurman Thomas. The three Houston schools competed during regular seasons for the right to play in the famous Thanksgiving Turkey Day Classic. Beginning in 1927 and ending in 1966, the Thanksgiving Day games featured outstanding black teams along with cheerleaders and marching bands, attracting large crowds that often included prominent black citizens like political leaders Barbara Jordan and Mickey Leland.

After graduating from black high schools, many African Americans went on to play football at black colleges such as Prairie View, Texas Southern, Wiley, Texas College, Bishop, and Jarvis Christian. And later, black players were drafted as professionals by teams in the AFL and the NFL, and some won admission to white colleges and universities. Then,

after the Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. The Board of Education* (1954), which outlawed racial discrimination in public schools and colleges, the UIL for Texas merged with the PVIL in 1967, thus putting an end officially to racial segregation in football, basketball, and other interscholastic sports in Texas. And three years later, in 1970, the PVIL was closed officially. Thus, after 1967, the "Thursday Night Lights" were no longer needed and "were turned off."

Robert J. Robertson
Lamar University

Proceedings

Texas Gulf Historical Society Minutes

Ann Creswell

Fall Meeting
November 17, 2016

The Texas Gulf Historical Society met in the McFaddin-Ward House Visitor Center. President Ben Woodhead called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and Marilyn Adams offered an opening prayer.

Prior to this meeting Recording Secretary Ann Creswell provided copies of the minutes of the April Meeting and they were approved as presented.

Treasurer Joe Fisher Jr. presented the Financial Report. The Net Operating Fund totals $16,600.00. Income received since April 2016 is $1,070.00 including dues and sales of *The Record*. Expenses to date include the $500.00 Johnson Editor's Prize, $309 for April speaker expense reimbursement, $140.00 P.O. Box rental, and $150.00 for mailing.

Dr. Bryan announced Alecia Machele Ross as the winner of the Dr. Andrew Johnson and Betty Johnson Editor's Prize. Her essay on the Beaumont Race Riot of 1943 is included in the upcoming *Record*. Also included is Part II of Theresa Hefner-Babb's oral history of soldiers who served with 373 CSB in Uzbekistan in 2002-2003.

Judith Linsley introduced Dr. Mary Scheer, Chair of the Lamar History Department and director of the new Center for History and Culture of Southeast Texas and the Upper Gulf Coast. Dr. Scheer explained

that the CHC is a multicultural and interdisciplinary center dedicated to preserving, creating, and transmitting knowledge of the rich history and culture of this region. An upcoming series of free public events hosted by the CHC will begin this mission and an article in the next *Record* provides more information.

There being no business before the organization, Judith Linsley introduced our speakers for the evening, Ellen Rienstra and JoAnn Stiles, authors of *The Long Shadow-The Lutcher-Stark Lumber Dynasty*. Both authors are well known for their previous works and for their involvement with this organization.

Rienstra thanked everyone for coming and the many who helped with the book including the Stark Foundation and Judith Linsley who edited for clarity and consistency. Commissioned by the Stark Foundation 13 years ago to tell the story behind the history of the Stark family, their work evolved into the first in-depth book-length study of three generations of this remarkable family. Rienstra focused this evening on H. J. Lutcher Stark who by the end of 1877 had transferred operation of his lumber business to Orange, Texas. He bought private and public lands in Louisiana as well as Texas with the intention of developing the manufacturing and exportation of the abundant cypress and long leaf yellow pine. It was the first large-scale lumber operation in Southeast Texas and became one of the nation's best. There is no doubt about his incalculable impact on this region. Rienstra gave us a brief look at some of the facts in their lives, some details of how the family came to Orange, met their future spouses and expanded their influence, but reminded us there are many more stories in the book.

Stiles spoke about Lutcher Stark and Nita and concentrated this evening on his ties with the University of Texas. Lutcher met Nita while attending the university and they were married in 1911. They adopted fraternal twins Homer and Bill Stark in 1923. They remained involved in Austin because of her family and his love of UT. He had extensive connections with the university being the first student graduate to serve as regent. He became a regent in 1919 and served until 1945. While regent he experienced the discovery of oil on UT land in the Permian Basin and was "in the middle" of how UT built McDonald Observatory. One of

his goals was to build Memorial Stadium and that story and the details about the observatory are among the many found in the book. Consult the book to read the details of the firing of UT president Rainey and the subsequent "blowup" and senate investigation. Disillusioned when his term expired, Lutcher retreated to his beloved Shangri La.

This evening was a glimpse of some of the information gathered from the original source material to which they were given access. *The Long Shadow-The Lutcher-Stark Lumber Dynasty* contains fascinating tales and details of three generations of the Lutcher-Stark family and their achievements. Stiles reminded us there were over 200 pictures in the book and to check the footnotes for lots of interesting details that did not fit in the text.

President Woodhead thanked everyone for coming and our speakers for a wonderful program. He reminded all to enjoy the refreshments after the meeting and thanked Ann Winslow and Sue Philp for providing those for the book signing prior to the meeting as well. The meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

Spring Meeting
April 25, 2017

The Texas Gulf Historical Society met in the McFaddin-Ward House Visitor Center. President Ben Woodhead called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m., and Marilyn Adams offered an opening prayer. New members Brenda and Ron Johnson were introduced.

Prior to this meeting, Recording Secretary Ann Creswell provided copies of the minutes of the Fall Meeting and they were approved as presented.

Treasurer Joe Fisher Jr. presented the Financial Report. Cash at Capital One is $17,888.00. Subtracting $1,500.00 for the Andrew and Betty Johnson Scholarship Fund leaves a Net Operating Fund total of $16,388.00. Income received from dues and sales of *The Record* is $1,480.00. Expenses since November 11, 2016, are $713.00 for mailing and $931.00 to Lamar University Literary Press for printing *The Record* for a total of $1,644.00. We were also reminded to please pay dues.

Business for the meeting included two items.

Ann Winslow moved to designate James Potter to continue as the authorized representative of the Texas Gulf Historical Society for the McFaddin-Ward House Corporation Board of Directors per its bylaws. Suzanne Stafford seconded and the motion carried.

Robert Robertson announced Bill Yoes for the office of President with the other officers remaining for another term unless they notify otherwise. The office of Genealogist was removed. Action was approved.

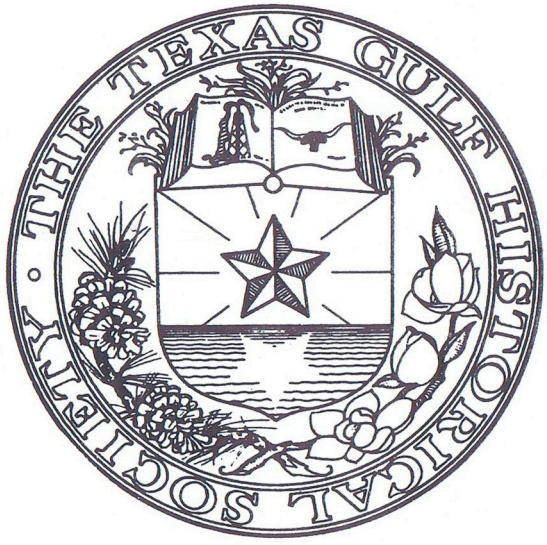
Judith Linsley introduced our speaker for the evening, Dr. Steven Lewis, who is a retired Lamar University Biology professor, collector, and photographer. He spoke this evening on "Beaumont Then: 1977 and Beaumont Now: 2017 Forty Years after 'SPARE' Beaumont."

"SPARE" Beaumont (Survey and Preservation Analysis of Resources and Environment) was a 1977 survey to draw attention to notable old buildings of Beaumont. It was to identify distinctive architectural resources, determine their importance and suggest priorities. Dr. Lewis briefly explained the time consuming and painstaking process he undertook to determine what has happened in the 40 years since then. This involved locating properties on a map, going to the location to photograph and then attempting to learn when the buildings were demolished. He emphasized what he called "soft" research and noted more detailed research is needed especially on when they were demolished. The city was divided into sections and each studied for evidence of structures still intact, and those totally or partially demolished. He provided extensive photographic evidence of then and now in each section that showed demolition in some areas such as downtown, the area including College and MLK and the area including Laurel and Liberty in the 70 percent range. Some areas such as the one including the Old Fair Grounds ranged around 63 percent while the area including Ave A and Orange St. only 47 percent. The area including the John J. French museum showed zero percent. Of the total included in the original SPARE, 66 percent have been demolished.

It was quite evident that Dr. Lewis has undertaken an extensive effort to compare and document what has happened to buildings identified in

SPARE Beaumont 1977 through photographic evidence of demolition of many of those properties. Three updates to the original survey have been made, and Dr. Richard Gachot is working on a fourth upgrade with the assistance of Lamar students. Regrettably many notable landmarks have disappeared.

President Woodhead thanked everyone for coming, expressed our appreciation for a wonderful presentation and thanked Kay Eastman and Sue Philp for the refreshments.



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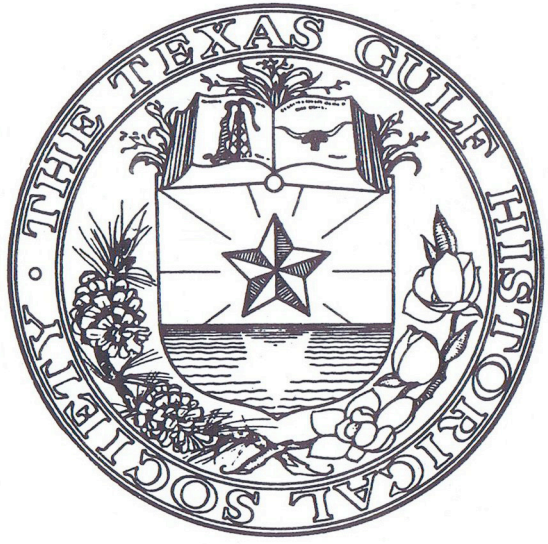

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