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A look back at the nation's oil & gas industry.

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The nation's, as well as Oklahoma's, oil and gas industry is rich in history. As part of a new partnership with the American Oil & Gas Historical Society (AOGHS), Exploring Energy will bring you energy stories from the past in each publication. Also catch "Remember When Wednesday" each fourth Wednesday of the month with AOGHS Executive Director Bruce Wells joining the discussion on KECO 96.5's Exploring Energy show from 8 to 9 a.m. and on 102.3 KWDQ, sponsored by Big Chief Plant Services. For more articles, photos and features, or to support AOGHS, visit www.aoghs.org.

Sour Lake produces Texaco

BY BRUCE WELLS
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As the science of petroleum geology evolved at the turn of the 20th century, some geologists believed oil might be trapped at Sour Lake Springs, similar to nearby Beaumont's 1901 Spindletop Hill field, which produced from a salt dome.

Known for its sulfurous spring water popular for its healing properties, Sour Lake Springs had its own gushers beginning in 1902, attracting more exploration companies to southeastern Texas. The oil reportedly was found along with "hot salt water impregnated with sulfur between 800 and 850 feet...and four oil sands about 10 feet thick at a depth of approximately 1,040 feet."

Joseph "Buckskin Joe" Cullinan and Arnold Schlaet were among those who rushed to Sour Lake Springs when they heard about the discovery. Of the hundreds of companies founded in the prolific oil region, their Texas Company would be among the few to rise to the top of the industry.

Cullinan and Schlaet established the Texas Company in April 1902 to transport and refine oil from the Sour Lake field. "Buckskin Joe" had worked in booming Pennsylvania oilfields before moving to Texas. By 1898 he had become one of the most prosperous operators in the Corsicana field, according to historian Elton Gish. Cullinan operated the Petroleum

Iron Works, building oil storage tanks in the Beaumont area, where he was introduced to Schlaet.

When the Spindletop arrived in January 1901, Cullinan had decided to visit Beaumont, where Schlaet was managing oil business interests of New York investors. "Schlaet's field superintendent, Charles Miller, traveled to Beaumont in 1901 to witness the Spindletop activity and met with Cullinan, whom he knew from the oil business in Pennsylvania," Gish notes. "He liked Cullinan's plans and asked Schlaet to join them in Beaumont."

Cullinan and Schlaet formed the Texas Company by absorbing the Texas Fuel Company, which had organized one year earlier to purchase Spindletop oil, develop storage and transportation networks, and sell the oil to northern refineries. By November

1902, their company was operating a refinery in Port Arthur as well as 20 storage tanks, building its first marine vessel, and equipping an oil terminal to serve sugar plantations along the Mississippi River.

But competition was intense and funding increasingly scarce. Then, the company's Fee No. 3 well struck oil in 1903, "after gambling its future on the site's drilling rights," a company historian later explained. After leasing 365 acres at Sour Lake Springs, Cullinan and Schlaet drilled three exploratory wells. The third well struck oil on January 8, 1903, flowing at 5,000 barrels of oil a day from 683 feet deep.

"The discovery, during a heavy downpour near Sour Lake's mineral springs, turns the company into a major oil producer overnight, validating the



A monument marks the site where in 1903 the Fee No. 3 well helped launch the Texas Company into becoming Texaco.

risk-taking insight of company co-founder J.S. Cullinan and the ability of driller Walter Sharp," noted one historian.

Sharp, owner of a successful drilling-contracting business, in 1902 had formed a partnership with Howard R. Hughes (they would test a dual-cone drill bit in 1907). Sharp also organized the Producers Company, which became a production subsidiary of the Texas Company. Other successful wells in the Humble oilfield (1905), secured the financial future of the Texas Company.

The telegraph address of the company's New York office was "Texaco" — a name soon applied to its refined products. By 1909, with its Texaco brand gaining recognition for refined products, the Texas Company registered its first trademark, a red star with a green capital letter "T" superimposed on it.

By 1928 Texaco had more than 4,000 gasoline stations in 48 states. The Texas Company officially renamed itself as Texaco Inc. in 1959. Today it is a subsidiary of Chevron Corporation.



Texaco was the first petroleum company to market its products in all U.S. states. Photo of an exhibit at the National Route 66 Museum in Elk City.

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