



#9: Oil is Discovered in Humble

The discovery of oil at Spindletop (Beaumont) in 1901 started the Texas oil boom. Since the highly productive Spindletop well was located on a salt dome, oil prospectors went along the Texas coast looking for other salt domes. They found one in Humble. The Echols Ridge sat on top of a salt dome that rose barely more than 20 feet around the surrounding plains. Humble resident James H. Slaughter had noticed oil bubbles coming to the surface of the San Jacinto River in the area as early as 1887. For years, he struggled fruitlessly to get businessmen interested in drilling for oil in the Humble area.

After Spindletop, and the realization that there was a salt dome in Humble, people were suddenly interested in drilling for oil in Humble. S. A. Hart, a jeweler from Houston, partnered with James Slaughter in 1902 and unsuccessfully drilled a well in Humble. During the two-year period from 1902-1904, many famous oilmen from across the State came to Humble. In fact, when laying out the town of Humble in 1904, Charles Bender named the east-to-west streets in Humble in honor of the men that were drilling for oil in Humble at the time: C. E. Barrett (now Main Street), Henry Staiti, Prentiss Granberry, and Pattillo Higgins. Charles E. Barrett drilled several wells in early 1904. Each one was damaged by a gas blowout. But, the longer the gas was allowed to escape, the more impregnated with petroleum it became. Mr. Barrett was a serious promoter of the Humble oil field. He invested a lot of his fortune in trying to develop the field. In October 1904, the well sunk by Pattillo Higgins (the prophet of Spindletop) resulted in a powerful gas well. As the well blew, small drops of oil slowly covered the derrick. So, there was ample evidence that oil was here, but not one had sunk a true oil well.

It was the Moonshine Company that is credited with the first strike. The company was owned by Walter & James Sharp (of Spindletop fame), Ed Prather and Howard Hughes, Sr. Their company erected a derrick in Humble in early October 1904. Their drill had been working day and night for four weeks when suddenly it was turned off by the operator, Mr. Young. This caught the attention of many roughnecks working other drills in the area. Mr. Young sent for the company's field manager, and tried to hide the fact that oil had been struck until the field man arrived. However, oil was coming up through the well and covering the well's slush pool with oil. Many people from Houston traveled the 20 miles to Humble to confirm that oil had indeed been struck. Both the Houston Chronicle and the Houston Post celebrated the success of the Moonshine Well in the November 7, 1904 editions. Property values in the area skyrocketed. Land that had been selling for as little as \$10 an acre the previous month was now going for \$16,000 per block (equating to \$250,000 per acre)! By the end of 1904, twenty-five wells were in operation in Humble. However, the first "gusher" in Humble field did not occur until January 1905, when D. R. Beatty's No. 2 well began producing over 8,500 barrels of oil per day!

The Moonshine Company. They were the first. In fact, just a few years later (1907), the area of the first oil strike was no longer known as the Echols Ridge....it became known as Moonshine Hill.