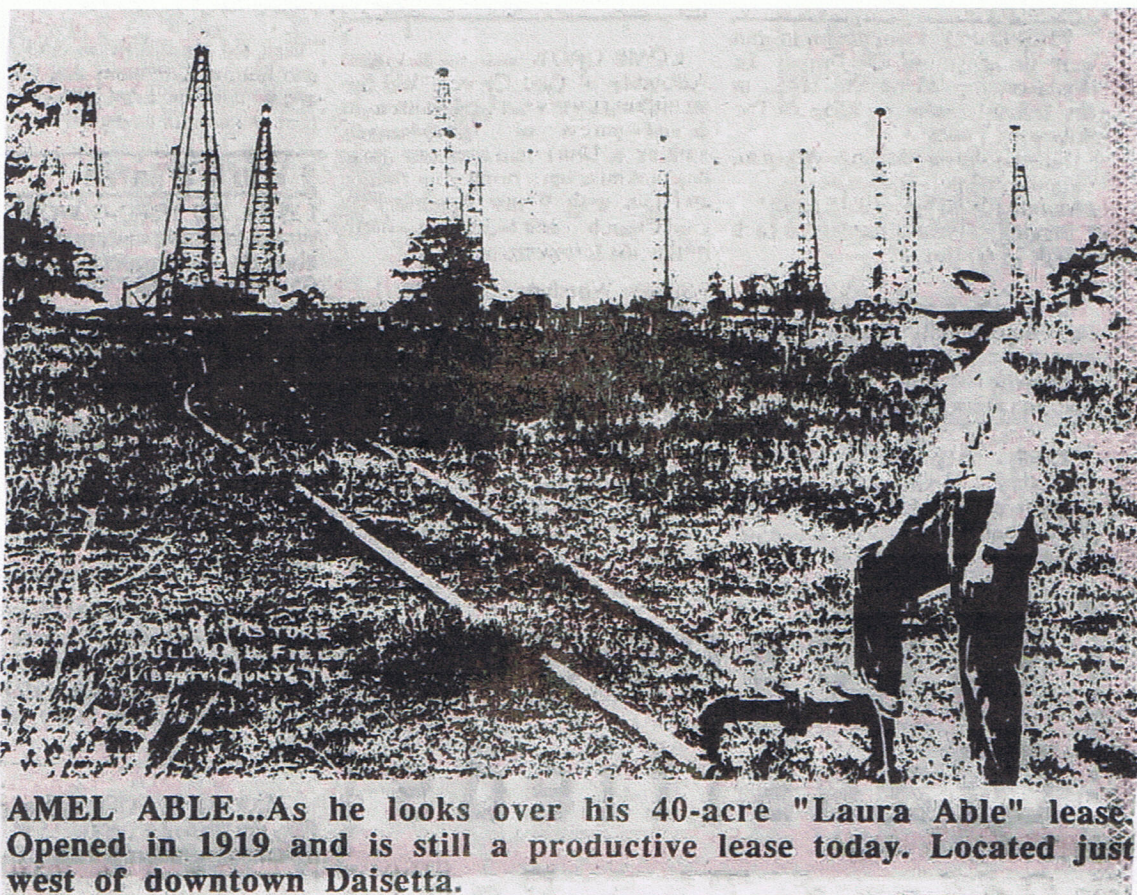


THINGS I SAW AND THINGS I WISH I HAD SEEN....

HULL-DAISETTA OIL BOOM DAYS

Phil Carrico



AMEL ABLE...As he looks over his 40-acre "Laura Able" lease. Opened in 1919 and is still a productive lease today. Located just west of downtown Daisetta.

Amel Abel and his "Laura Abel" lease – 1926

The lease lies just west of downtown Daisetta (Note that by 1926 most of the old wooden derricks had been replaced by steel derricks).

Preface:

Starting with this article – for the next few weeks, Texas Tales will deal with "Oil Boom days" in and around Liberty County – so all you "Roughnecks" listen up...

Understanding that many folks here still make their living in the industry and those who don't are likely descendents of those who did – we think these articles will have an impact on south Liberty County.

I saw wooden oil derricks built in semi swampy areas that were so close together, a person could step from one to the other for miles without ever having to touch the ground.

I saw dirt farmers, dollar a day cowboys and back woods trappers who never had two dollars to rub together – suddenly start spending money like regular plutocrats.

I saw circuit riding preachers, hard men with criminal records and schoolteachers all working together on the same crews for the “almighty” oil field dollar.

I sat on the ice house docks in mid-town Daisetta and watched the heavy ice wagons being backed up to the docks by teams of big beautiful horses. The ice house crew would load each wagon with 25 pound blocks of ice – then the wagons would deliver the ice to the various oil company housing tracts in both Hull and Daisetta.

I saw pimps, prostitutes, gamblers and rich oil moguls all eating together at the same greasy spoon.

I saw a flat bed model T pick up truck back up to the piggley wiggley grocer in Hull. The store manager had brought the meat scale from out of the store and had it setting on the truck. A couple of men were lifting a huge catfish onto the scale – when they read the scale, everyone started shouting and waving their arms around like madmen. After all, a 129-pound catfish was the biggest thing ever caught out of the Trinity River. The sign on the truck read “Gillies Fish Camp”. The location of Gillies Camp was just above Moss Hill on the East Side of the Trinity.

I saw a high school football program arise from all this mayhem and set the national record for consecutive games won. The record stood for many years and finally ended at 43 wins with the last scheduled game of 1939 – when they were finally beaten 13 to 0 by the Humble Wildcats. This winning streak sparked a flame that brought the community together with a cohesiveness that has been handed down through each generation of Bobcats – and it still burns brightly to this day. We call it “Bobcatmania”.

Again in 1979, I saw an underdog Bobcat football team win the Texas State Championship – primarily on guts, tradition and a touch of “Bobcatmania”. Still today, this is liberty counties only state football championship. (During the win streak of the 30’s – high school teams could not go beyond regional so the Bobcats had to share the state championship with the other regional winners in ‘36, ‘37, and ‘38.

I saw “Oil Field Willie”, who was one of the unusual characters of that day, unusual because Willie wore a heavy topcoat both winter and summer, unusual because he always had cold biscuits in his pockets and unusual because even the veteran chemical engineers went to him concerning vital details of any of the hundreds of local drilling operations. I often wonder what ever happened to Willie.

I saw the Daisetta Theater in her full glory – when she was the undisputed queen of entertainment for the community. She reigned as an icon from 1925 until the mid 50’s and in those 55 years – most folks say that of the 3 shows shown every Saturday, there was never a vacant seat.

I saw entertainment in the form of mobile roller skate rinks come into both cities at different times of the year. This activity provided entertainment for the community. However, I think most folks came to watch the fights. Boys would come in from Batson, Sour Lake, Saratoga, Hardin and Liberty; and then the fights would commence. There would be a different fight going on at all 4 corners of the rink at the same time. The law finally put a stop to this particular activity.

I saw old time cowboys who would not give in to the big oil money and they continued to graze their herds in the mist of the oil operation. The biggest problem confronting these men was pulling their stock out of salt-water tanks and finding them clean water to drink. Oil patch beef became quite a joke here in East Texas and caused the oil companies many problems when trying to open up the West Texas ranch lands for oil production.

I saw my good friend and classmate, Doug Landry, inherit "Oil Field Production Company" from his dad. The company blossomed under Doug's leadership and at its height, had 10 separate work-over units that did work all over southeast Texas. During the bleak years after the boom was over – this company kept providing jobs and feeding families in this area until Doug finally sold out in 1997. (It's been rumored that the Landrys raised more Bobcats, including non-family members, than anyone in the area)...

Some things I didn't see but wish I had...

The Hull Playhouse was a two story building sitting just north of the tracks in Hull. The building had a lighted stage with beautiful draw curtains, seats for 200 guests, and a second floor balcony across the street side on the west with a ramp going down to the tracks. Troops of actors would be contracted for out of New Orleans or St. Louis – come in on the Missouri/Pacific, do a show and leave the next day. Some troops would stay over and do more than one show – but most were one-niters.

The famous boardwalk that connected Hull and Daisetta was built in the earliest days of the boom. The oil companies built the walk to permit foot traffic to get from Hull to the Hill (Daisetta) without getting their feet muddy. I have heard so many tales, legends and lies about this infamous walk that some of 'em must be true. I'm sorry to say that by the time my family got here in '36 the old walk was long gone.

The Hull Rotary Club was the most famous and appreciated of its kind at the time. Membership included most of the business community of both cities and many people from outside the community became members. The only fraternal organization of its kind (some say in the world) to own its own property and building. The building was built of logs in the shape of a rotary. The club was most famous for its Thursday lunches – it had a top of the line kitchen, its own signature silverware and dishes, its own cook and a very productive vegetable garden. The club had a ladies auxiliary that was very active and Rotarians flocked to Hull from several counties every Thursday for these lunches. According to his son, Emerson, E.A. Johnson who was one of the founding fathers of the Hull Rotary – used his mules, wagons and crew to cut and haul the trees to the Hull location for the construction of the building. The trees were cut from Batson Prairie, called Sam's Prairie at the time, a few miles north of Hull.

The first water well drilled on the Hill (Daisetta) was drilled by E. A. Johnson Hauling Company (later, E. A. Johnson & Sons trucking). E.A. came to the boom in style – he brought his wagons, teams, swamper and other equipment in via the Missouri/Pacific. E.A. brought his outfit across the marsh from Hull and settled on the old Palmer tract on the Hill (Daisetta). There he built corrals, a mess hall for his hands and drilled the first water well on The Hill for his mules and men. E.A. Johnson hauled freight, pipe and equipment from the Hull depot to the working rigs for over 50 years. During his years

here, he gradually changed over from mule and wagons to motorized transport and has left deep footprints on East Texas.