

106 SUCCESS STORY

Interpreting the Site Where World Energy Production Changed Forever Spindletop Oil Field, Beaumont, Texas



“Spindletop is one of the most significant places in America’s industrial heritage. And now, with FERC’s support and AGL Resource’s excellent stewardship, this important place can continue to teach us about energy production in Texas and the impact of the petroleum industry on our state and the nation.”

— MARK WOLFE
Texas State Historic
Preservation Officer



THE STORY

At the end of the 19th century, oil prospectors, called wildcatters, drilled exploratory oil wells in a large salt dome known as Spindletop Hill. On January 10, 1901, they struck oil with the Lucas Gusher, yielding 100,000 barrels of oil per day. The history of Texas, and the United States, changed after the Spindletop discovery. Before Spindletop, petroleum had limited uses such as in lamps and lubrication. After the discovery, which led to the first large-scale petroleum extraction in the world, petroleum became a major energy source, fueling ships and trains previously powered by coal, leading the way for new engine inventions for airplanes and automobiles. From early on, Spindletop and surrounding communities accommodated diverse and energetic groups of land and oil speculators, investors, settlers, shopkeepers, and common citizens flocking to the oil field to make their fortunes in “black gold.” In 1979, the Lucas Gusher and the Spindletop Oil Field, comprising industrial and residential structural and archaeological remains dating to the Oil Boom periods of 1901-1908 and 1925-1936, were listed as a National Historic Landmark (NHL).

THE PROJECT

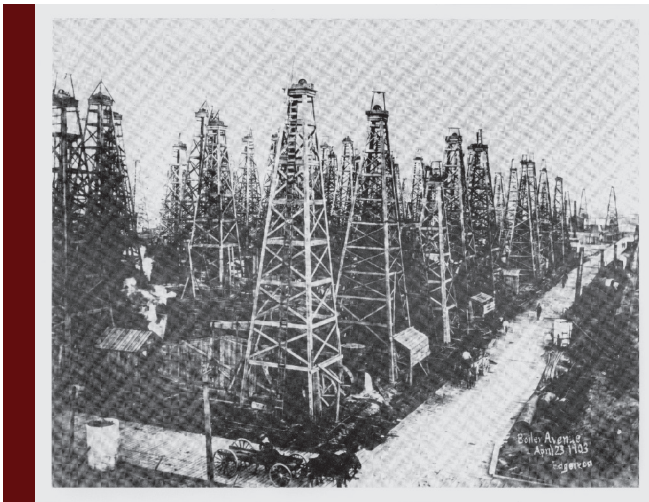
Once a byproduct of oil production, natural gas has become an increasingly versatile and sought after energy resource. Storing natural gas helps manage changes in market demand, stabilize natural gas prices and protect against supply disruptions. Underground storage is considered the safest means of storing natural gas, and in 2007 Golden Triangle Storage, Inc. (GTS), a wholly owned subsidiary of AGL Resources Inc. (AGL), proposed building the Golden Triangle Storage Project (GTS Project), a 90-acre storage facility approximately a half-mile to a mile deep hollowed out of the Spindletop salt dome near the original Lucas Gusher.

THE 106 PROCESS

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), the federal agency permitting the GTS Project, was responsible for conducting the Section 106 process under the National Historic Preservation Act. Section 106 requires federal agencies to identify

Photos: Above, modern gusher (photo courtesy Beaumont Convention and Visitors Bureau); Left, archaeologists working on the site (photo courtesy James Karbula); Right, the Big Thicket Outlaws re-enact life at Spindletop (photo courtesy Beaumont CVB)

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Photos: Left, the oil field's Boiler Avenue, April 23, 1903; Above, excitement at Spindletop/Gladys City (photos courtesy Beaumont CVB)

historic properties and assess the effects of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit on these properties. Federal agencies also are required to consult with parties that have an interest in the fate of the property when adverse effects are likely to ensue.

FERC, GTS, and the State Historic Preservation Office agreed that the GTS Project would have adverse effects on historic structures and archaeological resources and entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to mitigate the effects to Spindletop resources. The National Park Service and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation also consulted on the MOA. The MOA streamlined the project reviews and provided for extensive historic archival research and archaeological investigations including 21 separate field investigations. The Boy Scouts of America and volunteers from the Jefferson County Historical Commission participated in extensive “hands-on” activities in the field. A comprehensive artifact collection is being prepared for museum and interpretive displays. GTS is interested in providing matching funding for refurbishing the Spindletop Park Interpretive Center overlooking the flagpole site of the original Lucas Gusher. Plans are underway for evaluation, preservation, and archival documentation of eight 10-foot-tall wooden oil storage tanks for eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places and as potential contributing elements to the NHL and located in three groups on the 90-acre Central Storage site.

THE SUCCESS

GTS has been an unsurpassed steward of the remaining Spindletop cultural resources, which consist of both standing structures and archaeological resources. Through Section 106 consultation on the GTS Project, GTS made a significant contribution to the documentation and understanding of an important industrial landscape. The research and archaeological surveys increased understanding of evolving petroleum technology and everyday activities of the people living and working on the Lucas Gusher/Spindletop Oil Field NHL. GTS has consistently promoted public involvement in the project, from talks and lectures to safety training of volunteers, and production of publications and brochures. In the face of expanding development, the Section 106 process provided new insights into this changing historic oil field settlement where the modern petroleum industry and many of the major oil companies operating today had their origins.

Consulting Parties:

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
Texas State Historic Preservation Office
Golden Triangle Storage, Inc.

For more about Section 106 and the ACHP go to www.achp.gov

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