



Spindletop Boom Days (Clayton Wheat Williams Texas Life Series)

Paul N. Spellman

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Spindletop. The word conjures images of Texas oil: roustabouts, roughnecks, oil barons, and endless rows of wooden derricks. The discovery of oil at Spindletop in 1901 revolutionized the oil and drilling industry in the United States: before Spindletop's seventy thousand barrels of oil a day, no other well in the United States had produced more than three thousand barrels in a whole month. In *Spindletop Boom Days* Paul Spellman weaves together first-person narratives to tell the story of this moment in history and to describe the day-to-day life of those involved with the Spindletop gusher. These are stories of people, men and women of differing backgrounds and ethnicity, who touched the lodestone of the American frontier character. Some were culturally polished; most were ragged and forthright and completely honest. They were self-reliant to a fault, but they knew exactly when and how to cooperate in the necessities of the moment. They were fiercely independent and democratic in their beliefs. Although many stayed, most were transient in their lifestyle, arriving with great expectations, working with compulsive diligence, and moving on—some without a trace—when the next horizon beckoned. Spellman provides informative accounts of innovation in the petroleum industry such as new drilling techniques, the use of “drilling mud,” and improvements in derrick construction. Through the experiences of the men and women who lived it, from Big Hill to Sour Lake to Batson, we learn about the deadly fires and other dangers of working on the oil rigs, unruliness in the streets, and the comedy and tragedy of daily life. And Spellman entertains with stories of characters such as former Texas governor Jim Hogg and other legendary names in Texas' oil industry, including Walter and Jim Sharp, David Beatty, and Joseph Cullinan. Like no other story of Spindletop and the oil boom, this narrative history is a “slice of life” seen through the eyes of the men and women who lived through those rowdy, entertaining, exciting days in Southeast Texas.

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