

THE EFFECTS OF WORLD WAR II ON THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE CITY OF BAYTOWN

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Prior to the advent of World War II, the Tri-Cities area of southeast Texas, composed of the smaller townships of Cedar Bayou, Goose Creek, Baytown, and Pelly, located about thirty miles east of Houston near Galveston Bay, existed primarily as a farming district. The discovery of oil and the eventual construction of the Humble Oil and Refining Company changed the complexion of the region. However, these changes did not occur without problems. The oil boom and the influx of a transient population not interested in establishing a permanent society made difficult the development of a cohesive community. Long time inhabitants of the area, particularly the residents of Cedar Bayou, resisted these changes by disassociating themselves from incoming oil field workers. Local residents viewed the refinery employees, though more permanent residents, in the same light as they viewed the oil field people. (Anderson). The fact that the oil field industry gave rise to the construction of the refinery fostered the feelings expressed by long time residents. Despite such stormy beginnings, these feelings slowly subsided and the construction and subsequent wartime expansion of the refinery proved the beginning of a stable community. Even with the seeds of unity planted by the formation of the Humble Oil And Refining Company, sectionalism hung on in the several towns that survived. It took the drastic and rapid changes brought about by World War II to weld these separate districts into a single homogeneous city. While these changes initiated the breakdown of the old social, economic and geographic barriers, they also encouraged the ultimate consolidation of Goose Creek, Pelly and Old Baytown into the present day City of Baytown. By precipitating these changes, World War II provided the catalyst that sped this consolidation (Tilton).

The many changes in the community due to the war effort included the government funded expansion of the Humble Oil And Refining Plant. The company received the first government contracts for toluene (toluol) production, an intrinsic part of the make up of TNT, in 1941. The toluene project, built on Humble Refinery sites at a cost of twelve million dollars, employed two hundred people, and included a barracks that would accommodate three hundred workers (*Daily Sun*, "Toluol Unit"). On January 9, 1941, the local newspaper, the *Daily Sun*, ran an article stating that Humble Oil Company had bid on a government funded project for the construction of a synthetic rubber plant (*Daily Sun*, "Humble to Submit"). Another article in the *Daily Sun* dated January 19, 1941, indicated that as soon as authorities hacked through governmental red tape and cleared obstacles concerning government funding, construction would begin (*Daily Sun*, "Rubber"). By June of 1942, construction of the rubber plant was under way (Henson, 124-125). Along with these government financed additions to the refinery complex, Humble Oil, using company resources, expanded its existing operations. This expansion enabled Humble to supply the new plants with the raw materials necessary to their successful operation. (*Humble Bee*, "Humble To Make"). In conjunction with the construction of these plants, the improved roadways and transportation facilities needed to expedite incoming and outgoing shipments proved instrumental in erasing boundaries existing between communities (Tilton).

Enlargement of the Humble complex proved advantageous not only to Humble Oil and its employees, but also to other area businesses. Local concerns such as Brown and Root, Fisk Electric and Texas Water Supply rode the coat tails of Humble's growth. The *Humble Bee*, the house organ of Humble Oil's Baytown refinery, dated October 30, 1941, gives an idea of the magnitude of the area's industrial development. It stated:

Even from the roadway . . . tall towers of the hydroformers with their tops wreathed in plumes of snow-white steam was (sic) an inspiring sight. Visitors sensed . . . that here was national defense in action (*Humble Bee*, "Humble Produces").

Industrial expansion markedly changed the employment picture, created an unprecedented demand for people, and profoundly affected the labor force in the area. An article in the *Humble Bee*, dated April, 1944, illustrated the need for workers. The *Bee* observed that for the first time in Humble Oil's history the company embarked on a special campaign to recruit new workers; the goal was to hire one thousand people by July 1, 1944. To encourage applications for employment the company ran ads in local papers and bought time on local radio stations, appealing for workers (*Humble Bee*, "Humble Company"). Plant Manager Gordon L. Farned's plea indicated the desperate need for people in industry.

Almost any man under 45 years of age or any woman under 35 years of age who can meet our physical requirements will be accepted, while those with physical requirements may be accepted as war emergency employees for the duration (*Humble Bee*, "Humble Company").

This churning of the labor front affected many groups. Unions saw the dire need for labor as a godsend. Severe industrial manpower shortages allowed labor unions to obtain concessions from employers, but at times the concessions sought by the unions precipitated labor-management disputes. For example, in April, 1941, the steel workers union called for a strike, demanding a pay increase of thirteen cents per hour with the overtime rate set at twice the hourly rate. Humble Oil and Refining, the parent company, had no comment on the labor discussions (*Daily Sun*, "Steel"). While these negotiations progressed, the *Daily Sun* stated that Humble Oil and Refinery workers received a wage increase of five cents per hour (*Daily Sun*, "4200"). On April 8, 1941, the *Daily Sun* ran another article stating that the company had given its oil terminal workers a five percent raise in pay. The article related this increase to the increase received by Humble's refinery workers (*Daily Sun*, "Humble Raises"). The employment situation and the common ground of national defense coupled with the solidarity fostered by unions served to unite the people of the area (Tilton). Social divisions crumbled under the weight of an increasing and diversifying population (Anderson). Collapsing social barriers affected even old, established families. Margaret Sjolander, a member of one of the old families, exemplified how changes in employment practices affected established local families. As one of the women entering the work force at this time, her willingness to associate with the newcomers demonstrated how the larger sense of community generated by the war effort provided the adhesive that began to cement the area into one (Henson 123).

Miss Sjolander's entrance into the industrial labor force also illustrates how the status of women changed dramatically due to World War II, possibly more dramatically than any other group. Before the war fraternal organizations and church

groups, like the Precilla Club and the Women's Club both circa 1920-24, provided the major social outlets for women. These garden club type organizations served to keep women aware of happenings through books and discussions on current events (Henson 122). At the beginning of the war, women assumed duties similar to those performed by women during the Civil War (Henson 123). Traditional "women's duties," such as rolling bandages and housekeeping in hospitals, lasted only a short time, and as men entered the armed forces, women stepped in, filling the vacancies in the work force thus created. In 1941, the community established a women's ambulance corps. Women completed training in first aid and in emergency procedures to be used in the event of enemy attack. Incorporation of women into the civilian emergency labor pool foreshadowed what followed in industry. The depletion of the work force that prompted Humble Oil to advertise for people forced acceptance of women in traditional male roles. Although many women continued to labor in conventional clerical positions, by late 1941 or early 1942, women also worked in mechanics shops and in area plants as laborers (*Humble Bee*, "Humble Women").

Not all the changes occurred without incident. The *Humble Bee* dated January, 1943, expresses some of the frustrations with change.

They (women) not only create a pleasant picture, but they also create a problem in the matter of costumes that are safe and attractive. hairdos, safety shoes etc. ("Humble Women", p 5).

The same article further illustrates the stereotype that industrial management had given women:

She is there to do a man's job . . . and must not be hindered by impractical clothing. However, style must not be forgotten. Give a woman an unattractive costume and down goes her morale (*Humble Bee*, "Humble Women").

In spite of some negative attitudes on the part of industry, women persisted, training in firefighting, incendiary bomb control, and chemical warfare. A women's home defense organization was formed and its members took on many additional duties, training in general disaster relief techniques (*Humble Bee*, "Women's Home Front"). The climate of war forced the integration of women into the work force, hastening the breakdown of prevalent social distinctions by throwing together women from vastly different social and economic backgrounds. These women found they worked well together and their differences were not as important as they once thought. Long time resident Lelia Tilton is convinced that this attitude was carried from the work place into society thus creating a more congenial community atmosphere.

Nineteen forty-two brought the creation of the civilian defense program to the area (*Humble Bee*, June 1942). Because both civilians and Humble workers all trained in civil defense procedures, this program brought together several local businessmen and Humble employees in the role of program division directors. Men like L.G. Sanders, a Goose Creek businessman; William Marshall, a physician; and L.A. Loving of Humble Oil, worked together to implement the program and coordinate training (*Humble Bee*, "Preparedness"). With this citizen interaction came the necessity of cooperation among the various town governments. Wartime defense drills like blackout exercises made collective cooperation of these separate political entities necessary. The *Daily Sun*, January 8, 1942, stated that East Harris County scheduled a blackout drill for that date. Municipal authorities in conjunction with civil defense commanders assumed responsibility for coordination and execution of

the drill (*Daily Sun*, "East Harris"). Inter-community cooperation became very necessary; the various communities affected could no longer remain isolated from one another.

The population increase brought by the new employment opportunities aided this increase in community cooperation. In 1930, the geographical area now comprising Baytown and Highlands had a population of 14,360, broken down as Baytown, 5200; Cedar Bayou, 300; Goose Creek, 5,208; Highlands, 200; and Pelly, 3,452 (*Texas Almanac*, 1939-1940). On the eve of World War II, the population had grown by 7,255 to a total of 21,615. Baytown's population was now 5,986; Cedar Bayou grew to 1,227; Goose Creek increased to 6,971; Highlands had the largest growth, now at 2,044; and Pelly now posted a population of 4,338. Two other areas now part of present day Baytown, Wooster and Busch Terrace had populations of 788 and 261 respectively (Henson, 127). By 1950, one year after consolidation, the area's population had swelled to 31,169. The population of the City of Baytown, now comprising Old Baytown, Pelly and Goose Creek, ballooned to 26,863. This number had doubled since 1940. Cedar Bayou rose to 1,880, while Highlands posted a population of 3,647 and Wooster reported 1,779 (Modern City Directory). These figures show that the population of the Baytown area more than doubled in the twenty years from 1930 to 1950. The fact that the population only doubled in the thirty year period from 1950 to 1980 shows that even the oil boom years of the late seventies and early eighties did not cause the swell in population that World War II did. (Though only Baytown, Goose Creek and Pelly comprised the Tri-Cities proper, all other areas mentioned, with the exception of Highlands, now comprise the City Of Baytown. Highlands, however, remains in Baytown's extraterritorial jurisdiction, and as such cannot incorporate as a city without permission from the city of Baytown).

This influx of new people looking for work helped abolish the distinct physical boundaries that had existed between communities. Increased population demanded better thoroughfares. Bridges and concrete overcame such geographic and physical boundaries as Goose Creek Stream and dirt roads made impassable by heavy rains. With the disappearance of these boundaries, the individualism of the communities also disappeared (Henson 127). Newly created governmental agencies such as the Harris County Tire Board, set up to deal with the rubber shortage, further eroded community singularity (*Daily Sun*, "Tire Board"). This board organized scrap drives in which the whole area participated. The *Daily Sun* of June 16, 1942, had two articles concerning these drives. One stated that shortages forced the U.S. military to cut their rubber consumption by twenty-five percent. The other observed that the ongoing scrap collection netted tons of scrap rubber collected at the price paid by Humble of one cent per pound (*Daily Sun*, "Rubber Drive"). Ironically, while in January of 1942, the U.S. Government increased production of synthetic rubber to four hundred tons per year, this effort did not increase domestic supplies (*Daily Sun*, "Humble Listed").

Tragedies and emergencies also helped to join the communities. The war emergency and resulting rationing programs did unify the nation as well as the community, but on a local level, a hurricane in 1943, erroneously predicted to be a small storm, caused much severe damage to homes and businesses in the area, uniting the local people. War security possibly contributed to the lack of accurate information available to the public. The rationing program affected the ability of residents and businesses to make repairs. People had difficulty obtaining material, and some had to improvise to make repairs (Henson 127). Building supply shortages

forced local inhabitants to rely on one another for help, promoting interdependence on a personal level. This need hastened the breakdown in the existing barriers (Tilton). A captioned photograph in the *Daily Sun* dated January 4, 1945, brings out another side of the war that, ironically, catalyzed this breakdown. The caption stated simply that Cecil Montgomery had been killed in naval action in the Pacific (*Daily Sun*, "Photograph"). Paradoxically the sense of loss served to give area residents a stronger sense of "being in this together." Montgomery's death in and of itself did not unite the area, but his death represented the loss suffered by many area residents. When a serviceman was killed, neighbors assisted the victim's family as best as they could. This brought together people who, otherwise, would not normally socialize (Anderson).

But more than crises, benefits changed the community's perceptions of itself. Area communities grew due to the increase in jobs and the coming of people to fill them. In April of 1941, the local Jaycees wired Congressman Albert Thomas asking him to have the Tri-Cities declared a defense area. This action would qualify the area for special consideration under a Federal Housing Administration building loan program (*Daily Sun*, "Defense Area"). The *Humble Bee*, April 1943, in an article titled "Humble Employees eligible For War Housing," announced that Humble employees could purchase or rent houses built by the National Housing Authority (*Humble Bee*, "Humble Employees Eligible"). In 1945, the *Daily Sun* ran an ad stating that houses built at Camp Butyl, near the rubber plant, could be purchased and the company would deliver the house to the purchaser's lot (*Daily Sun*, "Houses For Sale"). These housing programs and offers helped pull the area together by giving many residents, who had up to this time been renters, the opportunity to become homeowners. Once renters became homeowners, they had a vested interest in the welfare of the area. This community interest, in conjunction with the many other changes brought by the war, welded the area together (Tilton).

World War II, with its rationing, increased demand for industrial output, and creation of new employment opportunities caused the Tri-Cities area to grow and served to unite the area. New people coming into the area helped combine the separate groups that existed before the war into a single, more homogeneous group. Old geographic boundaries were being rapidly erased, and old community isolationism disappeared. Rapidly occurring changes lent a feeling of oneness to the area. In this sense World War II became a major contributing factor for change when earlier attempts at consolidating the Tri-Cities had failed. In 1949, the area communities joined together and incorporated into one city, the city of Baytown.

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Aerial view of Baytown shortly after World War II. Galveston Bay is at the extreme top.



Humble Oil and Refining Company president, Mr. H. C. Weiss, presents the Billionth Gallon of 100-octane aviation gasoline in a special ceremony December 14, 1944.

Photos courtesy Sterling Municipal Library, Baytown, Texas