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In common usage "history" simply means the past. To historians it means to search for meaning either of the past or in the past. The word comes from an old Greek word, *historien*, which means "to inquire." History then is inquiry into questions that have meaning for us, using past events as subject matter. It involves gathering information about those questions and attempting to formulate meaningful answers. "Why did Europeans come to North America?" "What was the origin and program of the Democratic Party?" These are good examples. Other disciplines are similar; biology, for example, is inquiry using the biological world as subject matter.

The findings of any inquiry will depend on the questions that are asked and the "research" method used. They will also depend on the perspective (or point of view) used by the investigator. For example try looking at the room you are in from opposite entrances - everything is now seen from a different angle and it looks different. That is analogous to using a viewpoint based on your nationality, sex or gender, economic status, or religious affiliation.

Inquiry, of any kind, will be shaped by the information available. There is so much information available to us that we cannot ever look at all of it, and yet there is too little (it may have been lost or never even recorded) so that we are always looking at a partial record of the past. We make choices - choices based on the amount of information, on whether we judge the information accurate or not, and the amount of time that we have. History is based on facts known at the time of writing, it follows rules of logic and reason, but it is ultimately subjective, based on the perspectives and philosophy and values of the historian. Each person and each generation sees new and surprising meanings. Hence, all history is "revision." These thoughts give us an understanding of history that it is both objective (based on fact) but also subjective (based on perspective and limited information). Good history is not "opinion," it is more accurately labeled "interpretation," "conclusion," "judgment," or "evaluation." "Opinion" implies a looseness of both fact and reasoning that the other terms do not. (hint: please don't tell me your opinions, tell me your interpretations, etc.)

Part of historical interpretation is periodizing - identifying blocks of time by some common characteristics. For example the Colonial Period, from the beginnings ("beginnings" - that in itself is an interesting issue of definition) to 1763. Events happen every day, but we usually don't see their importance until later when we have gained the perspective that time gives us - when we can see how widely separated events have influenced each other.

There are "root" questions that form the basis of historical study. Here are some of them, but there are many more.
Why are things the way they are now? or, How did things get this way?
What happened in the past? Why?
What was it like to live then (during any time period)?
What kinds of historical events are most significant? Why?
How can I learn what happened in the past (sources, records)? How do I reconcile conflicting accounts?
How can we best understand actions in the past?
How does study of the past help me understand present situations and problems?
To understand this present-day problem, what sort of historical background do I need, and how can I find and assess it?
Is there progress? or, Do things get worse? Do they always stay the same?
Do people shape their times or do the times shape people?

All of this addresses the issue of historical significance, which is one of the three primary goals of the study of history. Significance, or importance, in many ways is the same as "causes and consequences." It is partly "pulling" events together to "show" the meaning of something, or what is symbolizes. For example the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825 shows us the importance of transportation in the development of the US. Significance is also partly the results of something. Again, for example, the American Civil War is the result of the inability of Americans to solve the issue of slavery peacefully.

"Presentism" is the judging of the past in today's terms. If the lesson of history is judgment which we learn that by what others have done and experienced in the past, then we have to guard against the natural tendency to write history in terms of what the issues of today are. Not really guard against, but to be careful that those issues do not distort how we evaluate the past (how we write\do "history").

A course consists of three parts: the instructor, the textual material, and the student. Of those three the most important is the student. I am your guide, and the written material is the collection of facts and viewpoints. When you see their meaning you are "making" history.

As you read and reflect and write, when questions and confusion come up, ask me. Remember that the only dumb question is the one not asked. (that is a pun, you know)

Does History Repeat Itself?

Enough students and others have said to me over the years that history repeats itself, that I thought that I should address that concept. The idea comes from what seems to be a normal human desire to understand causation - why do things happen? It is also the misquotation of George Santayana (who really wrote): "Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness .... Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to fulfill it." "Fulfill" is not same as "repeat."
If history (or the past) truly repeated itself, then we would not be able to make any real decisions and hence have no responsibility for any of our actions. We would be mere automatons doing the same thing over and over. Circles.

In looking at the details of past events, I do not see any kind of events recurring exactly. What I do see is that certain types of situations are illustrated by humans acting in similar ways. This is probably because individual people tend to respond to similar situations in similar ways. We are after all, human and there is probably some consistency in "human nature." Or perhaps in basic human psychology. We all want food and shelter and love. There things of which we are afraid. Such is the connection between psychology and history - see Freud, Maslow, and others.

The view that history repeats itself is not usable
It is not possible to discern the features of the face in the old grainy photo. His stance and composure, nonetheless, reveal courage and dignity which, under the circumstances, are unforgettable. The military clothes—long belted jacket, riding breeches and tall riding boots, the pith helmet that shades the face—are typical of a cavalry officer in the 1920s. His right arm waving goodbye. The press, including an American correspondent, was present during his court-martial…and public execution. Thus we have the picture, thus the report of his last word, spoken in English. I had first seen that photo many years ago, along with hearing some intriguing stories. Years later I decided to find out more about what led to the events of Oct. 6th 1927 in México and about General Alfredo Rueda Quijano, portrayed by the press as courageous and “brave to the last.”

To understand why Rueda Quijano was executed for rebellion against the government, one needs to review the environment of his times and some of the historical events of this turbulent era. Rueda Quijano’s family was from Matehuala, in the central state of San Luis Potosí. Rich in silver mines since colonial times and geographically located between central México and the coast, San Luis Potosí was politically and militarily involved in México’s history throughout the 19th century. Its strategic location made it Benito Juárez choice to house the exiled Mexican government at the time of the French Intervention. Moreover, control of Matehuala alternated between Juárez and Maximilian forces at various times during this conflict. The defeat of the French continued the economic development of the rich mineral resources found in the region. By 1890 when Alfredo Rueda Quijano was born in Matehuala, railroads connect the city south to México City, east to the bustling port of Tampico on the Gulf, and north to the United States. This region, with its substantial political and military heritage thus emerges as a thriving mining and commercial center. Reared in Matehuala and aware of the intensifying political restlessness of the times, young Rueda Quijano was drawn to pursue a military career. He attended the Escuélita Militar de Aspirantes (Officer Candidate School) and in 1913 joined the insurrectionist Ejército Constitucionalista. This Ejército was converged on the aftermath of the 1910 elections and the ensuing political upheaval of 1913. The aim of the Ejército Constitucionalista was to depose the
dictator Huerta, to maintain order, and to return to the principles of the Mexican Constitution.

By 1910, frustration with the government was widespread and long endured. Porfirio Diaz had nullified the Constitution’s principle of “no-reelección” so as to remain in power throughout multiple terms. Since 1876 he had dictated over a strong oligarchy, favoring an elite who enjoyed lucrative political appointments and profited from vast land appropriations. Still feeling secure in spite of a few localized uprising, Diaz declared in a published interview that the coming 1910 elections would be free and democratic. The opposition, the Anti-Reelectionist Party, eager for valid elections and aiming to restore the principle of no reelection, selected Francisco I. Madero as their candidate. However during the ensuing electoral campaign, President Diaz had candidate Madero arrested. Soon after, Diaz once again was re-elected. Madero escaped to San Antonio Tex. and issued a proclamation, Plan de San Luis Potosí published in Rueda Quijano’s native state, declaring the elections null and void and calling for armed insurrection against the Diaz regime.

The country’s discontent with the corrupt and persistent dictatorship incited the Revolution. One of the first to respond to Madero’s call to arms was Pancho Villa, a known guerilla bandit with innate military abilities. In May 1911 Villa, along with other revolutionaries, attacked and captured the border city of Juárez. Presently, Madero traveled to Cd. Juárez wherein he promptly established a provisional government. Facing the manifest and escalating rebellion, eighty-one year old Diaz relented and was hence forced to sign the Tratado de Ciudad Juárez (May 21, 1911). This Tratado called for Diaz’ resignation and for an interim president who would call for new general elections. With the new elections, Madero, who with his demand for effective suffrage and no re-election had given voice and focus to the revolt, was duly elected president of México.

However, once in power, Madero was unable to control the intense emotions and multiple antagonistic movements unleashed against the established order. Supporters felt betrayed by the delay in expected reforms; hacendados feared expropriations; peons clamored for land; taxes levied on foreign companies intimated an anti-business environment. Consequently, Madero was in turn betrayed and deposed by one of his generals, Victoriano Huerta. Huerta (who by this time had instigated the arrest of Villa) was wary of the escalating insurgency. In a reactionary attempt to revert to the autocratic status quo, Huerta conspired with U.S. Ambassador Henry Lane Wilson in this treachery. Soon after being deposed, Madero was assassinated. The Embassy Pact stipulated the need for a provisional president. Huerta assumed the office and promptly established a military dictatorship. Madero’s assassination and Huerta’s duplicity and usurpation further inflamed an already volatile situation. The bloodiest
years (1913-1917) of the Revolution ensued. In 1913, twenty-three year old Cavalry Officer Rueda Quijano joined the Ejército Constitucionalista.

In the upheaval of the Mexican Revolution, officer Rueda Quijano would have opportunities to distinctively advance his military career. Although the Ejército Constitucionalista had been decreed the supreme commanding army in the insurrection against Huerta, various other factions throughout the country had also taken up arms to aggressively pursue their own ideological aims and territorial ambitions. Along with the aim to eradicate the dictatorship and to participate in effective suffrage, the yearning and promise of land reform roused laborers and campesinos to the insurgency. Poor, untrained, and unruly, insurgents joined as revolutionaries not as conscripts, willing to fight but only alongside their own regional groups and only under the command of their own chosen jéfes. Moreover, they were free to leave the fight as long as weapons and horses were returned. These men became the troops commanded into battle. Trained military officers were scarce in this amalgam of hardscrabble revolutionaries. Thus, to promote collaboration amongst these groups, the Ejército granted honorary officer status to revolutionary chieftains. Furthermore, with the general aim of coordinating the combat operations against Huerta, Ejército military officers were commissioned to assist these forces.

In the north, the División del Norte was one such assemblage organized into an army at the onset of the conflict. Composed of various guerilla groups rallied to fight Huerta, the División lacked a unifying leader. By early 1913 Villa had escaped prison and due to his charisma and earlier feats, was regarded as the favorite to lead this force; Villa was elected Jéfe of the División. Thus Villa, along with Emiliano Zapata in the south (Ejército Libertador del Sur) aligned their forces under Constitucionalista command. Venustiano Carranza, as leader of the Ejército Constitucionalista, was the supreme Primer Jéfe. In August of 1913, Ejército Constitucionalista military officers, including young Rueda Quijano, reinforced the División del Norte and participated in the battle against Huerta’s federal forces to take the city of Torreón. Soon Villa, as leader in command of the División, controlled much of the state of Chihuahua. In a letter (Dec. 18, 1913, Cd. Juárez) written by L. Meza Gutiérrez and reporting to the Primer Jéfe, Meza Gutiérrez states that Pancho Villa, who by now had been made general brigadier honorario (honorary general) and also, temporarily the state’s governor, had made some interim appointments to replace those of Huerta’s administration. Meza Gutiérrez writes that Mayor Alfredo Rueda Quijano, who had fought under Villa’s División, had been appointed Jéfe de Hacienda (in charge of revenue).

“Como Jéfe de Hacienda encontré nombrado al Mayor Alfredo Rueda Quijano, quien ha militado bajo las órdenes de Villa.” ¹
Writer Martin Luis Guzmán, having also served with Villa, later chronicled the events in his Memoirs of Pancho Villa. Guzmán writes that during this time the young mayor’s responsibilities included being the paymaster for the División. At its most powerful, the División reached a force of around 50,000 men, the largest and most powerful force within the coalition. It had its own railroad hospitals and was well equipped with horses and armament. As Jefe de Hacienda, Rueda Quijano was in charge of the profitable Customs House in the border city of Juárez. Guzmán quotes Villa: “...I left only fifty men in Juárez, with the paymaster Alfredo Rueda Quijano, who had custody of the funds in the Customs House.”

Although Villa enjoyed ample autonomy in the north, his army was still, seemingly, under Carranza’s command. By mid 1914, the combatants’ divergent aims and personal ambitions crumble the flagging alliance. Weary of a troublesome Villa and apprehensive of the powerful División, Carranza aimed to constrain Villa’s notoriety and further territorial advances. Still fighting against Huerta and prior to a major engagement at Zacatecas, Carranza ordered Villa to divert and lead some of his forces towards a minor campaign. Moreover, he ordered that men from the División be dispatched to reinforce general Natera’s army at Zacatecas. Villa questioned Carranza’s order. In Life and times of Pancho Villa, author Katz details Villa’s assessment: “There was only one way…that Zacatecas could be taken…by Villa himself taking the lead…at the head of his own División del Norte.” Carranza stood firm. Villa then resigned his command of the División. Carranza, wishing to avoid further conflict with a cunning Villa, willingly accepted the resignation and ordered the División’s generals to select an interim Jefe to replace Villa. However, the generals serving under Villa rejected such mandate. They telegraphed back asking Carranza to reconsider, then elected to retain Villa as their Jefe. Thereupon Villa still in command of the División, proceeded on to Zacatecas for the decisive battle against Huerta.

After Huerta’s defeat, the enmity between Carranza and Villa was patent. In an attempt to iron out the differences, Carranza convened the discordant parties to a convention. The Convention determined that both leaders should refrain from presidential ambitions, then appointed an interim president. Villa ostensibly acquiesced; Carranza demurred and refused to recognize the interim appointee. Therefore, the end result of the Convención de Aguascalientes (Oct. 1914) was the break out of hostilities between Villa, now aligned with Zapata supporting the Convention’s decrees (Convencionistas) and Carranza’s faction, rejecting such decrees (Constitucionalistas).

Following the convention and throughout 1915, there were numerous battles between the two factions. Rueda Quijano backed the Convencionistas and continued serving with Villa’s División. Now a colonel, he was attached to the Brigada Morelos, under the command of chieftain and honorary general Tomás Urbina, an old associate of Villa from before the Revolution. A 1914 studio photograph suggests a respectful
acquaintance between Urbina and the junior officer. The sepia image depicts a seated Urbina flanked by a standing Rueda Quijano.

In March of 1915 Villa ordered General Urbina to capture the strategic port of Tampico on the Gulf. Colonel Rueda Quijano, commanding a unit within Urbina’s Brigada assisted in this campaign by defeating Constitucionalista forces at San Mateo and El Bañito. Urbina with his main forces proceeded towards Tampico. Fifty-five kilometers on the path to Tampico is El Ébano (where rich oil deposits had recently been discovered). Urbina’s advance encountered fierce resistance at El Ébano, including one of the first reported uses of airplanes for reconnaissance and bombardment in this conflict. By late May, Urbina was overwhelmingly defeated. Compelled to hastily abandon valuable ordnance and forced to retreat after enduring the loss of many of his forces, Urbina determined to leave the struggle and retire to his hacienda. Villa, having also been defeated at recent battles in Celaya, was not pleased. Villa suspected his old outlaw compadre of treason and ordered one of his generals (Fierro) to assassinate Urbina. According to the article “Pensar el Villismo” by Salmerón Sanginés, several military officers on learning of Urbina’s assassination defected from Villa. Salmerón names Rueda Quijano as being one who, along with his unit, in protest of Urbina’s assassination deserted Villa and joined Constitucionalistas:

“…que Rueda Quijano comandaba una de las brigadas Morelos…que con sus pares Petronilo Hernández y Donato López Payán desertó del villismo al frente de sus huestes cuando supo que Fierro, por órdenes del Centauro, había ultimado al compadre Urbina.”

A contemporary account in the El Paso Herald of Oct. 15, 1915 also reported Rueda Quijano leading 800 men in this change of allegiance. Thus beset by defeats and defections, the famed División del Norte was officially disbanded in late 1915. Thereupon Villa with a smaller following, continued his fight with Carranza by resorting to guerilla raids, looting, murdering, and terrorizing the population. While these tactics enabled him some victories, they also cost him much popular support. Constitucionalistas kept up their pursuit of Villa as well. Furthermore, a 1916 Villa incursion into U.S. territory provoked American retaliation. Carranza then allowed a U.S. Punitive expedition into Mexican territory to also pursue Villa.

By 1917 Rueda Quijano, now a Constitucionalista general, was back in Chihuahua campaigning against Villa. Writer and choreographer Nellie Campobello remembered when her childhood home was ransacked by the general and his men. Talking loudly
and trampling through the home, the search for Villa’s stashes of weapons and money frightened the young girl and her mother. Writing years later, she takes comfort in reading the reports of the same man with the “bigotes güeros” (blonde mustache) being executed. Katz also details a 1917 incident when government forces under Rueda Quijano went to the assistance of a village militia fighting Villa guerrillas. However, Katz writes, conflict with the militia group ensued when the general attempted to force the militia volunteers into his unit and into further pursuit of Villa. That same year a new Mexican Constitution enacted reforms and reaffirmed the principle of no reelection. The Primer Jéfe was elected president of México.

Although enacted, political and land reforms were rarely implemented. Thus, by 1920 turmoil over the presidential succession ensued. Carranza’s regime was deemed corrupt; his handpicked successor was regarded unsuitable for the presidency. Another proclamation, the Plan de Agua Prieta supported by Rueda Quijano and a majority of officers repudiated the corruption around Carranza and the dubious election of his successor. Issued by supporters of presidential candidate Alvaro Obregón, another general with the Ejército, the plan disavowed the 1920 elections and called for a junta to elect a provisional president who would then call for new elections. The plan had wide support throughout the country and Obregón had the backing of the Ejército. Obregón had commanded the Ejército’s northwest forces in the struggle against Huerta. Moreover, Constitucionalista forces under Obregón had defeated Zapata and also effectively derailed Villa’s advance at the aforementioned 1915 battle of Celaya. Although initially appointed Minister of War, Obregón soon had a falling out with Carranza and resigned. In 1919 Obregón had declared his candidacy in opposition to Carranza’s handpicked successor. The military revolt started with the Plan de Agua Prieta advanced towards the nation’s capital. With the Ejército against him, Carranza was ousted and later assassinated. Obregón was elected president.

Documents generally show Rueda Quijano commanding forces in Chihuahua until 1922. He was reportedly in that state’s capital when he declared support for the Plan de Agua Prieta insurrection. Alongside other rebelling generals, he participated in the fierce battle to wrestle control of that state’s government from the Carranza regime. Still in Chihuahua two years later, a letter from the Secretaría de Guerra y Marina informs a petitioner that Rueda Quijano is Jéfe de la Guarnición de la Plaza (garrison commander) stationed there. Although by 1920 Villa had been granted amnesty and had retired to his hacienda, there would still be occasions to subdue remaining Villistas. By 1923, still perceived as a threat, Villa was assassinated.

However, the four year cycle of presidential elections and armed insurrections spins again. Nearing the end of his four year term, President Obregón picked his successor, Plutarco E. Calles. This method, whereby the current president selects his successor, again engendered conflict. In late 1923, another presidential hopeful Adolfo de la
Huerta, led a sequent rebellion, *movimiento delahuertista*. As turmoil among presidential contenders resumed, Rueda Quijano was named Military Commander of the Southern Territory of Quintana Roo. He was dispatched by sea to fight the *delahuertista* rebels who had taken over the government of this territory. Arriving at the southmost port of Xcalak his ship foundered; even so, the troops landed. In command of federal government forces “*obregonsistas*” Rueda Quijano liberated the town of Payo Obispo, now known as Chetumal. Rueda Quijano’s forces deposed the rebel governor and by May 1924 the rebellion was subdued. Obregón’s handpicked successor, Calles, was elected president.

Years later, Don Justino Palomares a war correspondent and onetime Villa’s secretary, reported on an encounter with several generals in México City. He relates that around 1924 while covering the *movimiento delahuertista* he encountered generals Hector Ignacio Almada, Alfredo Rueda Quijano, and Félix C. Lara having drinks and playing dominoes. Assessing the affable mood and wishing to learn more about the assassination of Villa (which had occurred in Parral, Chih. where Lara had been Jéfe de la Guarnición de la Plaza) Palomares casually asked Lara about the still unsolved slaying. General Lara spoke freely and gave the reporter the full story that General Calles (now the president) had ordered the assassination of Villa. Lara and his garrison had conveniently been ordered out of town the day Villa was ambushed and killed. Palomares then quotes Rueda Quijano’s cautionary comment to Lara:

“Cómo eres bruto, Félix! Tú no sabes que el vate Palomares fue secretario de Villa y en la primera oportunidad va a publicar todo lo que le desembuchaste.”

The twists and turns between allies and adversaries would affect Rueda Quijano’s fate one last time. Alvaro Obregón, after serving his presidential term (1920-1924) and remaining a major influence during the ensuing years of his chosen successor, coveted the presidency again. With the support of then President Calles, Obregón prevailed upon the legislature to amend the Constitution to allow re-election and to change the presidential term from four to six years. This amendment now allowed Obregón to seek the presidency anew.

Anti-Reelectionists object. In June 1927 Obregón announced his candidacy and opposition rallied once again. The group which Rueda Quijano, Hector Ignacio Almada, and several others joined was led by General Francisco Serrano, a presidential candidate who had been Obregón’s Minister of War. Serrano’s group planned to arrest Obregón on Oct. 2nd. Following the plan, Serrano left México City, traveling to nearby
Cuernavaca. However, Obregón and Calles got word of the plot. General Serrano and twelve other co-conspirators were arrested and driven back to the capital. Before reaching their destination however, the convoy was intercepted on the highway by an additional armed contingent sent by Calles and Obregón. Following Obregón’s orders, all thirteen prisoners were then summarily shot by the roadside.

Meanwhile, General Rueda Quijano commander of the 26th Cavalry Regiment was now stationed in the sector of Texcoco, near México City. According to trial accounts, he marched his troops out of the sector the evening of Oct. 2nd. Pursued by government forces, bombarded by military airplanes, and with some regimental troops mutinied, he was forced to abort his operation. A telegram from President Calles ordered him to México City. On arriving at the train station, the general and his second in command were surrounded by federal armed soldiers. Thus escorted and to the accompaniment of somber beating drums, the prisoners were marched through the streets of México City towards San Lazaro Military Prison. On midnight of Oct. 5th he was taken to Santiago Tlatelolco Military Prison for a court-martial. Prosecutors claimed he was leading his forces in a rebellion against the Calles regime; defense attorneys claimed he was following orders. Defense contended that his superior, General Hector Ignacio Almada commander of the México City garrison, had also mobilized his regiment and had ordered the 26th regiment’s deployment. In answering the charges Rueda Quijano repudiated the policy of re-election. The trial, held throughout the night, lasted until 7:30 the next morning. After retiring one hour in secret session, the tribunal, composed of four generals, returned with the verdict. Contemporary accounts questioned the fairness of his trial and concluded that the outcome was predetermined. The tribunal as well as Rueda Quijano well knew the eventual outcome. The New York Times reporter present at his trial related that while the tribunal deliberated, the accused asked one of the photographers to buy him a pack of cigarettes, then “…cooly read the morning newspaper, looking keenly for report of his trial. His sang froid can scarcely be imagined.” 7 After hearing the sentence, he turned to the journalists and thanked them. Shaking hands with his attorneys he equally thanked them saying, "I am grateful to you.” 8 When his defense attorney asserted that he had done his best to defend him, “…the condemned man answered, ‘I am a soldier.” 9

Moreover, it is Rueda Quijano’s equanimity in the face of death that becomes memorable. He was taken back to San Lazaro Prison. In this Escuélita de Tiro (shooting range) stripped of his badges and insignias and only three hours after sentencing, he was led outside to the courtyard towards a pile of stones to face the firing squad. It was a public event and along with army troops there was a large crowd, a military band, street vendors, and members of the press assembled to witness the execution. The New York Times describes: “With head erect, the prisoner walked along, waving adieus to acquaintances until he reached the spot where he was to be
executed.”

Rejecting the stones, he elected to stand before a wall. He refused the blindfold. When the firing squad was in position, he found it unsuitable and undauntedly commanded it to come closer, once, then a second time, “…a meter or so more, before he stated that he was content.”

Taking one last look at the sun and around at the crowd, recognizing the correspondent who had been present during his trial, and others from the Associated Press and the New York Herald Tribune he waved to them and said, “Goodbye!” Photos and press reports documented the execution.

“…at the last moment, when he invited the firing squad to come closer, he seemed to square himself up and go to meet the bullets rather than to shrink from them.”

Another correspondent’s eyewitness account also attests to the brave demeanor.

“…such a degree of composure and fortituded [sic] that even the soldiers who killed him murmured: ‘Que hombre! Que hombre!’

…cleanshaven and showing perfect self control in every line of his clear-cut face, he strode across the courtyard without hesitation, selected a place before the granite wall and stood rigidly erect, a commanding figure, more than six feet tall of powerful build.

…solders aimed their rifles. Silence gripped the courtyard…Quijano pushed the pith helmet back a bit on his forehead. The smile had vanished and his jaw was firmly set. He leaned forward, his hands behind him and his shoulders hunched, precisely as a man steeling himself for a plunge into cold water.”

“As an example, not of bravado but of serenity and absence of fear of what was about to happen to him, a parallel to the death of General Quijano is difficult to imagine….He was a fine specimen of manhood, six feet tall and of noble bearing.”

It was 11:25 the morning of Oct. 6th. He was thirty-seven years old. From 1913 through 1927, Rueda Quijano participated in some of the major developments in México’s
revolutionary era. Joining the Ejército Constitucionalista insurrection in 1913, he was
dispatched to the División del Norte. Earning Villa’s trust he became paymaster of the
powerful División and fought against Huerta and, after the Convention against
Carranza. Prompted by Urbina’s assassination, he turned against Villa and relentlessly
pursued him throughout the next five years. After 1917, armed insurrections occurred
with every presidential election cycle. His participation in conflicts both for and against
the federal government illustrates the turmoil and characterizes some of the
personalities involved. In 1927 he opposed the re-election of Obregón. No re-election
had been the issue in 1910; it was again in 1927.

In general, and in spite of the era’s turmoil and conflicted allegiances, most
revolutionaries seem to have fought for reform and genuine ideals. For some, these
ideals were due more loyalty than any man or government could claim. Most knew the
consequences inherent in their loyalties and in their actions. Few faced them as
courageously as Rueda Quijano. As in other insurrections, not all goals were attained;
some did prevail nonetheless. Although re-elected, Obregón never served his coveted
second term. He was assassinated before taking office. The principle of “no
reelección” was restored and remains in the Mexican Constitution to this time.
Endnotes


   “…that Rueda Quijano commanded one of the Morelos brigades…that with his associates Petronilo Hermández and Donato López Payán, led his forces in deserting villismo on learning that Fierro, on orders of the Centauro [Villa] had assassinated the compadre Urbina.”

6. Justino N. Palomares. Anecdotario de la Revolución. Mexico: s.l., 1958. p. 230. “You’re such a fool, Felix! You don’t know that this guy Palomares was a secretary to Villa and in the first opportunity, he’s going to publish all that you spewed.”


11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.


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Before and Beyond Spindletop: The ‘Other’ Texas Economy

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The economy of Texas has always been characterized by the never ending boom cycles of the region. The elements driving the economy of Texas have included land grants to qualified settlers, the booming cattle industry, the birth of the oil industry in Texas, and the rise of modernization and industrialization to support the oil and service industries.

The first period in the development of the economy of Texas was based on the availability of land and agricultural production. The Spanish and Mexican governments sought to increase immigration to Texas, and revenue from Texas, when they implemented the policy of giving land grants to settlers interested in moving to the unprotected and hostile lands of Texas, in an effort to quell the Native American attacks against Mexico.

Initially, the Mexican government sought to colonize areas that were deemed suitable and to bring Mexican citizens into these territories. Mexican families that sought to colonize these lands were provided transportation, maintained for a period of one year, and afforded the best land for agriculture. However, immigration from other areas surrounding Texas was forbidden. This policy changed after 1830 due to increasing difficulty in maintaining populations, and did not allow for the sale and transfer of land granted to individuals unless it was cultivated. Similarly, the prohibition of immigration kept many prosperous individuals and industrialists from entering the territory. Those coming to Texas had little or nothing to lose.

This period was characterized by the inability of Mexican colonists to develop the agricultural production necessary to colonize much of Texas. However, because of the difficult policy of the Mexican government, its refusal to send adequate defensive forces to the region, and its inability to maintain large scale plantations in the region, the Tejano population felt unrepresented and unprotected by their government.

Land was promised to those individuals who volunteered to serve with the armies fighting for independence from Mexico. The large scale immigration prompted many land speculators to enter Texas and buy land in the hopes they could make their

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3 Pace and Frazier, Frontier Texas, 38-41.
fortunes selling this land to future settlers. It is important to note that even during the period from 1820-1835 the United States was actively attempting to renegotiate the border with Mexico in favor of the United States ownership of Texas. In 1833, President Andrew Jackson opted not to loan Mexico $5,000,000 in exchange for a lien on Texas, knowing the loan could never be repaid and the transaction would amount to a sale of Texas as previously proposed. However, during the Texas revolution, this interest was somewhat diminished because of the necessity for the United States’ neutrality in the conflict. During the Republic and later statehood, land for settlers remained an important incentive offered by governments to spur immigration.  

The second major force in the economy of Texas was the booming cattle industry of the nineteenth century. The Cattle Kings, as they came to be called, developed large tracts of land for grazing cattle and employed many individuals to assist in the daily tasks necessary to care for their large livestock herds. Spanish colonists originally moved cattle into Texas in the sixteenth century, but were forced to abandon their colonies and cattle when faced with such challenges as Native American raids and starvation. The natural increase in the number of Spanish cattle aided colonists in the eighteenth century in establishing profitable colonies in the region.

In the 1820s and 1830s American colonists brought another type of cattle to Texas that came from English ancestry. The combination of the two unique cattle breeds became known as the Texas Longhorn. This breed was extraordinarily hardy and survived well in areas that could support little to no agricultural endeavors. Perhaps one of the most recognized ranches in Texas began in 1852 when Richard King and Gideon Lewis created a cattle camp on the Santa Gertrudis Creek. While much of the region was wracked with ethnic tension, the Anglo ranchers in the cattle industry relied on the Vaqueros, of Mexican descent, to maintain their daily operations. For example, King hired all the members of a small Mexican village to work on his ranch because severe drought had decimated their crops. Among the tasks requiring numerous men to accomplish was the sale of cattle at market. By the late 1860s, there were some local markets for beef, but the majority of cattle had to be driven across the land to a railroad depot or other collection point for sale in other markets. This was desirable because buyers in other states would pay a great deal more money for Texas beef than would the Texans themselves. The system was made possible by the open ranges that dominated the Texas frontier.

The cattle industry created jobs for immigrants to Texas. Much of the land that was not suitable for agriculture was suitable for the robust and hardy cattle of the state. It was the Mexican government’s poor agricultural support, in the form of military forces to guard crops and villages, that spurred interest in the cattle industry. Cattle required much less security than did agriculture. Cattle were often allowed to breed naturally

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5 Pace and Frazier, Frontier Texas, 72-82.

6 C.L. Douglas, Cattle Kings of Texas (Dallas, Texas: Cecil Baugh, 1939), 107-116.
across community lands until it was time to drive the cattle to market. In any examination of the cattle industry in Texas it is necessary to note that cattle were not the only livestock raised. During the 1850s interest in sheep's wool caused a surge in sheep herding. Sheep were not as profitable as cattle in Texas because of a lack of markets and poor environmental conditions, but sheep leave an impact on the ranching society of Texas. This is evident in sheep roping at modern rodeos.\(^7\)

The cattle industry received much support from the birth of the oil industry. Many of the individuals who were struggling to make ends meet found wealth in royalty and bonus payments for allowing companies to drill wells on their lands. It is virtually impossible to find an old cattle ranching family that doesn't receive a portion of its income from oil and gas royalties. Similarly, many of the old ranching families let their land go fallow because they no longer needed to operate the ranch in order to profit from their land.

The single largest economic change in Texas was brought about by the discovery of oil and the ensuing growth of the oil industry. In 1901 oil was discovered at a location known as Spindletop near Beaumont, Texas. The giant discovery of oil at Spindletop naturally brought in every oilman who could make the trip. Apart from oilmen, numerous people came to the area to witness the first great gusher. Interest in this development not only drew in throngs of people, but reached all the way to a former governor. James S. Hogg formed a syndicate of very powerful individuals to help him explore the area around Spindletop for oil. The Hogg-Swayne syndicate began operations in 1901 with the purchase of a 15-acre tract of land, bought for the bargain price of $180,000. Within the first three months after oil was discovered, the price of a single acre of land skyrocketed to more than $100,000.

It was during this early period of unregulated speculation and drilling that many oil derricks were placed on tracts of land no larger than 50 feet by 50 feet. It is also claimed that many derrick workers built catwalks from the top of one derrick to surrounding derricks in order to escape if there was a blowout.\(^8\)

With the surge in production and drilling there was a need for service workers and laborers. The boom happened so quickly that there was no place for the new inhabitants to live or board. People slept in backyards, bars, and barns. The lack of service workers also made tensions rise in the towns of Beaumont and Spindletop. People had to wait for any service required and some individuals even profited from standing in lines. People would stand in line at the Post Office and bathrooms and sell their spot in line as they reached the front. Upon payment they would file back in at the end of the line and wait for several more hours to reach the front of the line. This was most commonly done by the

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children of oil field workers and the orphaned children of the area. Bribes became the norm in the service industry surrounding the immensely profitable oil fields. Telephone operators took bribes to connect long distance phone calls, and many people began using their personal vehicles as taxis to carry people from Beaumont to Spindletop for fares of $5 each.9

Several major companies made their debut in Beaumont in the period after Spindletop. The most recognizable of these was the Texas Company, now known known as Chevron-Texaco and Gulf Oil. No longer actively participating in Texas exploration, Gulf was absorbed by Chevron. Only two years after the discovery, production declined, causing many producing wells to require pumping and many others to simply produce more salt water than oil, making them economically unviable. The Spindletop discovery, however, spurred interest in Texas oil exploration that could no longer be ignored by the large companies that operated elsewhere, Standard Oil being the most prominent.10

Twenty years after Spindletop, the oil industry had pushed into North, North-Central, and Southwest Texas, with oilmen mainly locating oil and gas through surface signs. There were several booms that happened in gradually successive order in North Texas, but one of the most important accompanies the discovery at Ranger that produced high quality crude in large quantities for the area. This boom caught the attention of people across the nation and pushed citizens in other communities to explore for oil in their respective counties. A good oil well today produces 200-500 barrels of oil per day, but there were single wells in this period producing in excess of 2,200 barrels of oil per day.11

The largest boom, however, was in East Texas with the discovery of the largest oil field in the state. The East Texas field alone supported the majority of demand during World War II. The drastic overproduction associated with the East Texas boom also led to dramatic decreases in the price of oil, and calls for both federal regulation and further regulation by the Texas Railroad Commission.

During the 1940s, Texas produced more than 36 percent of all domestic oil, and this amount was severely limited because of proration units and production limitations placed on oil companies by the Texas Railroad Commission. Despite restrictions on production, Texas produced more than a trillion cubic feet of natural gas per year. Throughout most of the state there was no available market for the gas, and it was simply flared off. By 1940, the Texas oil industry was more valuable than the agricultural industry, and more than a quarter of a million people worked in the petroleum industry. The industry paid almost half of all state and local taxes during the war. After the beginning of World War II, many of the markets for Texas oil were closed until 1941


11 Olien and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 75-103.
when the United States went to war. Even after the markets reopened for Texas oil, federal wartime regulations crippled the oil industry by defining where a well could be drilled and regulating who could get drill pipe and the spacing of wells.\textsuperscript{12}

With the growth of the oil industry came the development of service industries and suppliers. The economy of Texas was dramatically affected by the modernization and growth of industrial and service industries. Many of these industries initially were related to the oil industry. For all of the individuals actively working in the petroleum industry there were other people working in the service industries to support them.

The success of the oil industry in Texas coupled with the birth of the automobile made it possible for people to reach formerly distant destinations in reasonable periods of time. The automobile is often credited for the population movement from the cities to the suburbs, but the automobile made it possible for people to live farther away from large cities and still reap the benefits of the services available in the big cities and to further support the service industry in major metropolitan areas. Chemical companies were created to provide the materials necessary to process the crude oil, and steel companies were employed in the creation of everything from drilling rigs to pipes, and even pump jacks for later production.\textsuperscript{13}

One of the most important contributors Texas economy in the last two decades has been the technology industry. After the revolution of the dot-com boom, the Dallas-Fort Worth and Austin areas became a common place for companies to create their headquarters. One of the primary reasons for the rise in the technology industry is globalization of worldwide commodities, but the most important reason is global competition. After the 1950s, technology companies were forced to focus more on research for patents and continued development of products than their typical goals of publishing and receiving awards. Dallas was an especially popular location for geophysical companies because of the large workforce and the ready supply of new technologies. Many individuals active in geophysical companies later joined Texas Instruments.\textsuperscript{14}

Perhaps the greatest of these individuals is Everette Lee DeGolyer. DeGolyer is credited as the pioneer in establishing geophysics and seismographic detection as an indispensable tool in the oil industry. DeGolyer insisted that he was a geologist and not a geophysicist, but he supported numerous endeavors, and inventors, in the field of geophysics. Notably, it was DeGolyer, his “great associate” J.C. Karcher and Lewis MacNaughton that founded Texas Instruments.\textsuperscript{15}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{12}Olien and Olien, \textit{Oil in Texas}, 219-237.
  \item \textsuperscript{13}Yergin, \textit{The Prize}, 82-87.
  \item \textsuperscript{15}Lon Tinkle, \textit{Mr.DE: A Biography of Everette Lee DeGolyer} (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970), 222-225,373-376.
\end{itemize}
It was during the 1950s that Dallas became one of the largest technology centers in the nation. Companies like Texas Instruments cleared the way for organizations that now have their headquarters in city. Some examples of these are AMR, parent company of American Airlines; Electronic Data Solutions owned by Hewlett-Packard; and Kimberly-Clark, an industrial paper and toiletry company. ExxonMobil is headquartered in nearby Las Colinas.

During the 1980s, many oil companies moved their headquarters to Houston in order to better manage their global and offshore interests. Because the oil companies left Dallas there was the opportunity for other businesses to step in and take over the buildings and resources that were previously held by prominent oil companies. The technological boom in the 1980s and 1990s brought in many computer and telecommunications companies. The rapid growth of these companies during this period helped the state minimize the amount of damage done by the recession that overtook the rest of the nation. It was also during this period that the areas around Dallas and Austin became known as the Silicon Prairie.\(^{16}\)

Houston became a prominent location for oil companies for the same reason Dallas was initially attractive. However, Houston had several benefits that could not be matched by Dallas. The most important of these benefits is the location of Houston near the Gulf of Mexico. Prior to the discovery of oil along the Texas coast in 1901, Galveston had been the major shipping port in Texas. A massive hurricane that devastated Galveston the previous year left the commercial centers ill prepared to deal with the massive demand for commercial shipping created by the oil boom. The channel from Houston to Galveston was deepened in order to accommodate the large oil tankers necessary for refining operations, and Houston became the oil capital of the world. Likewise, the myriad of oil companies that owned assets in Texas flocked to be nearer to Houston, and their resources there, in order to more efficiently operate their companies.\(^{17}\)

The economy of Texas is characterized by agriculture, cattle, oil and technology. Each industry had a period of rapid growth, and all of these industries maintain some presence today. Texas has become known for its high tech industries in recent years, but the other industries that shaped Texas’ economy as it grew from a frontier colony established Texas as an invaluable part of the United States. Texas is known for each of the individual components vital to its economy, but it is important to note each of these industries is and has been dependent on the others during periods of economic instability.

The oil industry bolstered the cattle industry, and, while the rest of the nation suffered from unemployment and economic crisis, farmers and ranchers were able to survive from the royalties and jobs created by the oil industry. The agriculture and technology industries stabilized the economy while the oil industry was suffering during


\(^{17}\) Olien and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 98.
Since the initial sighting of oil in Texas in 1543 by Luis de Moscoso, a DeSoto expedition, oil has been one of the most important aspects of life in Texas. Oil exploration began in the late nineteenth century and became viable after the discovery of the Corsicana field in 1894. Texas oil provided the majority of oil for the war demand during World War II, and created to take Texas oil to the eastern markets. Texas oil is responsible for the surge of growth and movement of industry to the state. The following address getting access to land in order to begin the first step necessary in the production of oil and gas. This is typically accomplished by an oil and gas lease, but can be accomplished by the purchase of the mineral estate or fee estate, on which the company seeks to drill.\textsuperscript{18}

The Saint of the Impossible Smiles on West Texas: Memory, Myth and Making of the Big Lake Oil Field

by Paula Marshall Gray, Ph.D., Professor of History and Anthropology, Midland College

The women asked me to take the rose back to Texon with me and climb to the top of the derrick and to scatter the rose petals over the rig and to say “I hereby christen thee Santa Rita.” I faithfully carried out these instructions.

Frank Pickrell – 1969

The saga of the Big Lake Oil Field has all the makings of a made-for-television movie. It is a tale of local dreamers, of West Texas businessmen, of famous wildcatters, of twists of fate, of strokes of luck, and even intervention by the supernatural. The story of the field and its famous discovery well, the Santa Rita No. 1 for decades have taken on legendary proportions. While providing an insightful look into history, the legends regarding the Big Lake field also reflect a great deal of nostalgia. Historian John Tosh, in The Pursuit of History, identifies the construction of both “real and imaginary facts” as nostalgia and argues that nostalgia allows the “past” to become simpler and better than the “present.” Consequently, it becomes important for the historian to understand, analyze, and interpret nostalgia or what Raphael Samuel calls the “enchanted space of the past.” 19 Who told the story? Why did they tell the story? How did the story change over time? How did the “imaginary facts” (myth) become intertwined with the “real facts?” The story of the Big Lake Oil Field, which is based on both real and imaginary facts, reflects this “enchanted space of the past” – a space where the field’s founders constructed and re-constructed its history as they were “making” the field. As historians and folklorists have examined oil field narratives from across the country they have noted that recurring themes, based on memory and myth, are woven into the histories. From Titusville to Gladys City to Burk Burnett to Big Lake myths of “chance and luck” coupled with memories of larger-than-life characters repeatedly emerge in the lore. This article examines the role of the founders and promoters of the Big Lake Oil Field and the ways in which memory and myth converged to create its rich history.

Why is the story of the Big Lake Oil Field so important in the overall scheme of both regional and national history? Since 1923, the Big Lake Oil Field has yielded a

continual supply of oil from ancient geologic formations in the oil-rich Permian Basin. In 1883, the Eighteenth Legislature of the State of Texas set aside one million acres, which included acreage from 18 West Texas counties, to enhance the Permanent University Fund (PUF). The revenues from university land oil leases served as a lucrative endowment vehicle for the University of Texas. Due to the fact that the Big Lake Oil Field and other West Texas fields were so prolific, the University of Texas became one of the more well-funded universities in the United States. Plenteous oil production in the Big Lake field propelled it into the national spotlight which, in turn, enticed people from all over the United States to come to this no-man’s land known as the Permian Basin. As people from all walks of life came to the Big Lake Oil Field, they birthed a history that is full of colorful oilfield characters and repeating motifs such as “chance and luck.”

Stock oilfield characters such as the dreamer, the oil promoter, and the geologist (as well as “Lady Luck”) permeate the history of oil fields. The Big Lake Oil Field story begins with a local “dreamer” by the name of Rupert Ricker who had hopes of finding oil on university lands in Reagan County. In homage to Ricker, long-time friend Winter King, noted that Ricker’s purpose in developing the Big Lake Field was altruistic in nature. King asserted that Ricker wanted to enrich his alma mater, The University of Texas, while helping the drought-stricken ranchers in Reagan County by finding oil. While this observation certainly is valid, Ricker also became an astute, profit-oriented oil man who went on to head El Capitan Oil Company.

Ricker’s humble beginnings coupled with his knowledge of Reagan County terrain ultimately piloted him into the oil business. At the age of sixteen, Ricker and his

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22 Handbook of Texas Online., s.v. “Permanent University Fund” http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/TT/dot3.html. (accessed 05 August 2008). In 1931 the state legislature set up the split in the revenues giving the University of Texas three-quarters of the revenues and Texas A & M one-quarter of the revenues.


25 Rupert Ricker File Manuscript, Unknown Author, 1926. Permian Basin Petroleum Museum Archives, Midland, Texas. Chartered in 1926 the officers of El Capitan, except for one, were all graduates of the University of Texas.
family moved from Corsicana, Texas and took up ranching in north central Reagan County, Texas near the town of Stiles. A regional drought in 1907 compelled his father to leave the ranch and move to Big Spring to find work. To help support his family young Ricker took various jobs around West Texas. He worked on the ranch, served as the editor for three consecutive West Texas newspapers, toiled on a chain gang, and ultimately became a brakeman for the Texas and Pacific Railroad. After a few years of hard and sometimes unsteady labor, Ricker decided to go to Austin where he worked his way through the University of Texas Law School and became a lawyer. Upon receiving his law degree in 1915, Ricker moved to the town of Big Lake in Reagan County, set up a law practice, and represented the Orient Railroad for a short period of time. In 1917, as the United States officially entered World War I, Ricker joined the army and worked his way up through the ranks where he eventually became a captain in a Military Intelligence unit. As the Great War came to a close, however, the environs of the Permian Basin beckoned Ricker to return to the still drought-stricken ranchlands of Reagan County – it was then that he decided to seek his fortune in the oil business. High oil prices, due to World War I, coupled with the fact that there was no proration of Texas oilfields (yet) peaked Ricker's interest in the oil business in West Texas. Ricker’s friend, Winter King, noted that the gushers erupting in the north Texas oil fields at Burkburnett, Ranger, and Desdemona led Ricker to speculate that oil might exist under his boyhood homelands in Reagan County. He also had heard of a “buried mountain range” that held prospects of oil in West Texas.

Ricker, aware that the University of Texas owned most of the lands in the county, decided to pay a visit to an old friend, University of Texas professor Dr. Edwin Shurter. Shurter, who also was interested in the development of Reagan County lands, steered Ricker toward the mineral reports of University of Texas geologist J. A. Udden. In 1916, Udden issued a report to the Board of Regents of the University of Texas in which he asserted that there was oil, and possibly gas, in the Marathon Fold that lay beneath Permanent University Fund (FUF) lands in Reagan, Pecos, Upton, Irion, and Crockett counties. Because the Texas legislature had made it illegal to sell PUF lands, only nominal grazing fees (five to ten cents per acre) had been collected over the years. But if oil could be found under university lands, the oil royalties (three-quarters of which went to the University of Texas) would make a substantial difference

26 “Ricker Once Owned the Big Lake Oil Field,” San Angelo Standard Times, 28 May 1926.
28 King. 1940, 5.
29 “Basin Oil Promoter Had Oil in Hands,” San Angelo Standard Times, 12 October 1958. The buried mountain range was the Marathon Fold.
30 Ibid.
31 Marvin Schwettmann, Santa Rita, (Austin: The Texas Historical Association, 1943), 3.
in the income going into the coffers of the school.\textsuperscript{32} Dr. Udden’s report, however, called for further geological exploration of the area in order to pinpoint a good location for a test well.

To encourage drilling on university lands in West Texas, the Texas legislature passed the “permit law of 1917.” The law allowed anyone to file for a permit to explore for oil and gas on university lands by paying a one dollar filing fee to the county clerk in the county of exploration and a one dollar filing fee to the General Land Office in Austin. Drilling applications then had to be recorded in each county as well as in the General Land Office in Austin.\textsuperscript{33} For ease of permitting, the law also grouped PUF lands into four sections of 640 acres each and required that drilling start within a year. If there was no production on the acreage within a year, then an additional ten cent per acre fee had to be paid to the state land office along with proof that an attempt to drill on the land was being made.\textsuperscript{34}

In 1919, armed with the knowledge of Udden’s 1916 geological report and of the “permit law of 1917,” Ricker decided to contact businessmen in Abilene and Austin to raise money to finance a drilling venture on PUF lands. He first turned to P.G. Stokes of Abilene, and later Dr. E.D. Shurter, Hugh Heflin, George Walling, and Tom Walling of Austin for backing to file for permits on 674 sections (431,360 acres) of lease lands in Reagan, Irion, Crockett, and Upton counties.\textsuperscript{35} One other contingency of the “permit law of 1917” was that a person could file on four sections in a row, then four sections had to be skipped before the same person could file on the next four sections. Because of the size of the tract of land that Ricker was permitting, most all of the partner’s names were used on the filing. Ricker and Stokes, however, put up the initial money to secure the permits.\textsuperscript{36} Ricker’s vision was to raise money for a test well and then develop the field.

The permit law, however, turned out to be both friend and foe to Ricker. As the one year deadline for drilling came to an end, Ricker rapidly needed $43,146 to pay the additional permit fees. He subsequently traveled to Fort Worth (which at the time was the hub of the oil business in Texas) to solicit companies to fund his project. Ricker’s vision of developing the field quickly deteriorated as company after company refused to sink money into the “oilfield graveyard” known as the Permian Basin.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{32} King, 1940, 5.
\textsuperscript{33} Schwettmann, 4.
\textsuperscript{34} Houck, 141-142.
\textsuperscript{35} King, 6.
\textsuperscript{36} King, 6.
\textsuperscript{37} Schwettmann, 4.
As time ran out to pay for the permits, “Lady Luck” (a common thread in oil field histories) intervened in the situation. Ricker, by chance, ran into Frank Pickrell an old army buddy who had served under him in Military Intelligence in World War I. Pickrell was de-boarding the train in Fort Worth with wealthy El Paso merchant-manufacturer Haymon Krupp. The two, who had been looking at producing wells in Wichita Falls and Burk Burnett, were eager to invest in the oil industry. Ricker told them of his fund-raising debacle and the three men spent the rest of the day at the Worth Hotel going over Ricker’s business proposition. Frank Pickrell recalled the negotiations with Ricker: “I asked him to explain to us what it was that he had filed upon and the situation, that we might be interested in his proposition . . . we spent the balance of the day going over the details of his proposition. We finally wound up by paying him $500 for his situation and taking over his venture.”

This is a significant turning point in the story of the Big Lake Oil Field. Had it not been for Ricker’s “dream” of finding oil on university lands it might have been years before anyone else tried to develop the Permian Basin. As Ricker, the “dreamer,” passed the baton to Pickrell and Krupp, the “promoters,” the shape of the oil business in Texas would be changed forever. Pickrell and Krupp provided the necessary cleverness, business savvy, and capital to create the first big boom in West Texas. Their goal, first and foremost, was to make money.

Pickrell and Krupp took over Ricker’s venture with the notion of selling the leases for a quick profit rather than developing the field. Because Rupert Ricker had not filed the leases with the Land Office in Austin, Pickrell hurriedly went back to El Paso where he hired four stenographers to crank out the filings. While Pickrell was writing the filings, Haymon Krupp packed his bags and went to New York City to try to sell the leases to his friends. He rapidly found that his connections in New York were not interested in oil leases in an unproven field in the middle of nowhere. With only three days left to complete the filing Pickrell and Krupp had to come up with the additional sum of $43,136 with which to pay the Texas Land Commissioner. Krupp, who was a well-connected businessman, borrowed the money from the Hanover National Bank in New York City and wired it to the Land Commissioner in Austin just in time to safeguard the lease permits.

Krupp’s business savvy and his New York connections, however, soon came in handy. In 1919, Krupp and New York attorney Nathan I. Sachs organized a group of

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38 Frank Pickrell, Interview by Bert Haigh, 04 June 1969, Permian Basin Petroleum Museum Archives, Midland, TX. Krupp had made his fortune selling shoes and clothing to Pancho Villa for Villa’s men during the Mexican Revolution of 1910.

39 Ibid. They actually paid a total of $1500. Ricker kept $500 of the $1500 and the rest went back to the businessmen who had backed him. King’s account says that they paid him $2500.

40 Pickrell Interview, 04 June 1969.

41 King, 6.
“friends” in New York and set up a corporation in Delaware known the Texon Oil and Land Company. Laws in Delaware allowed for quick and easy formation of corporations. In order to comply with Delaware laws an ersatz board of directors was elected that included Haymon Krupp, President; Shalom Goldberg, First Vice-President; Nathan I. Sachs, Second Vice-President; Robert A. Keeler, Treasurer; J. M. Murphy, Secretary; and Elias Krupp, Assistant Secretary. After the corporation was up and running, all of the board members resigned except for Haymon Krupp and Nathan Sachs. At this point, Frank Pickrell was appointed Executive Vice-President and assumed the day-to-day management of the company. According to Pickrell, “the Texon Oil and Land Company was . . . listed on the New York curb market and was offered to the general public.”

The development of the Big Lake field, however, faced many challenges during its early years. In 1919, G.A. Loomis and Company was put in charge of selling the Texon Oil and Land Company stock. By 1920, however, stock sales were almost non-existent and the value of the stocks plummeted. In addition to the stock moving slowly, another critical problem that the Texon Oil and Land Company faced was the Texas law that required a well be drilled on each four-section block of land within one year of the date of issuance of the drilling permit. The four-section law, coupled with the drilling time limit, made development in West Texas’ broad expanses unrealistic. Pickrell, subsequently, contacted Texas Land Commissioner, J. T. Robison to try to get the laws changed.

In a 1969 interview, Pickrell claimed that his political expertise and his friendship with J.T. Robison saved the day. Pickrell asserted that that when he was child his mother ran the Hancock Hotel in Austin where senators and representatives spent a lot of time. He noted that, as a child, he watched the politicians and learned how they conducted business which, in turn, shaped his successful dealings in the oil business. He also noted that Commissioner Robison was one of his “oldest and dearest friends” and he always went to Robison to get help in changing oil industry laws. He contended that Robison was in favor of rewriting laws that would boost oil prospecting on the University of Texas lands. In 1919, the Texas legislature indeed changed the grouping of drilling lands from four sections to sixteen sections and by 1921, the law that required drilling to begin within 12 months was changed to allow drilling to begin within five years. According to Pickrell, Robison used his clout with the legislature to get the law


43 Pickrell Interview, 04 June 1969.

44 Myres, 203. The directors subsequently authorized Loomis and Company to issue, transfer, and register 2,000,000 shares of company stock.

45 Houck, 141.
This change benefited not only drilling in the Big Lake Oil Field but also in fields all around West Texas.

However, in 1921 and 1922, it was still difficult to sell the leases due to the instability in the cost of Eastern crude oil and the opening of new fields in Texas and Mexico. In the spring of 1921 a decline in crude prices was followed by a temporary recovery later in the fall. The recovery, however, was short-lived and by January of 1922 the price of high-grade Eastern crude fell by fifty cents per barrel. Pennsylvania crude most notably dropped from $4.00 a barrel to $3.50 a barrel that year. Mid-Continent Oil also was predicted to fall by twenty-five cents a barrel by the end of January in 1922. The decline in oil prices directly affected the oil securities market creating a great anxiety among investors. A *New York Times* article, in 1922, reported that shares in Standard Oil of New Jersey, Standard Oil of California, Mexican Petroleum, Houston Oil, Pan American Petroleum, and California Petroleum were down anywhere from one to three points. Some oil men noted that the decline was caused by factors such as heavy speculative buying by small jobbers who intended to upset the market. R. D. Benson of Tidewater Oil noted that the rapid expansion of the Mexia Field in Texas and the development of fields in Mexico were driving prices down.

In addition to an unstable market, one complaint voiced by prospective investors was that the Texon Oil and Land Company had no actual oil production. Subsequently, G.A. Loomis and Company found it difficult to sell stock in a wildcat company that had no producing wells. Because drilling had not yet started in the Big Lake field Krupp and Pickrell came up with an ingenious scheme to side-step the objections. They went to Burkburnett, Texas and purchased producing wells in Block 28 of the Burkburnett Town site. Pickrell and Krupp now could tell investors that the Texon Oil and Land Company had “producing wells” even though the production was not on university lease lands in the Permian Basin. Krupp personally furnished $125,000 for the purchase taking a credit on the Texon ledger for the advance. Pickrell noted that while the Texon Oil and Land Company was strengthened by the Burkburnett purchase that money for the development of the field still had to be raised. At this point in time, Pickrell and Krupp began to hone their skills as “oil promoters.”

Folklorist Mody Boatright, contends that the oil promoter is one of the more “vivid” folk characters in oilfield lore and oftentimes can be equated with the role of the trickster. With the rise of the oil industry and finance capitalism new doors of opportunity opened up for the promoter that required all kinds of “creative” sales schemes. Boatright notes that an oilfield promoter crosses the line and becomes a

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46 Pickrell Interview, 04 June 1969.

47 “Eastern Crude Oil Prices are Reduced” *New York Times*, 4 January 1922.

48 “Eastern Crude Oil Prices are Reduced” *New York Times*, 4 January 1922.

49 Frank Pickrell, Interview by Bert Haigh, 21 August 1969, Permian Basin Petroleum Museum Archives, Midland, Texas.
trickster if he sells interests in his development that total more than 100 percent. This sort of practice was not uncommon in the oil industry. From the beginning of the industry in 1859, with “Colonel” Edwin Drake’s discovery well in Titusville, Pennsylvania, oil promoters used various promotional schemes to lure investors. Some of the schemes were totally above board, some fell into an ethical “gray” area, and some were fraudulent paper empires.

According to Boatright, the “oil promoter” expects to make money off of his promotion whether oil is found or not. Some legitimate means of promotion, however, erred toward the tricky side. Boatright supplies the following example of “artful” promotion: “In the past, let us say a promoter secures a lease on a town lot in Breckenridge in 1918. He estimates that he can sink a well to the producing sand for $50,000. He sells seventy-five one-per-cent interests in the well for $1000 each. He has $25,000 above the expected cost of the well.” If the promoter finds oil, he keeps the profits after deducting the landowner’s royalty and can legitimately say that he has not deceived anyone. Songs, poems, and cartoons from this period satirized the varied schemes of the oil promoter (and sometimes trickster). Published in 1865, the song Famous Oil Firms provided a timely satire regarding oil firms and their promoters. This song was found by Boatright in The Oil on the Brain Songster.

FAMOUS OIL FIRMS

By E. Pluribus Oiulm

There’s “Ketchum and Cheatum,”
And “Lure ‘em and Beatum.”
And “Swindleum” all in a row’
Then “Coax’em and Lead ‘em,”
And “Leech ‘em and Bleed ‘em.”
And “Guzzle’em, Sink ‘em and Co.’


51 Boatwright, 91.

52 Boatwright, 92-93.
There’s “Gull ‘em and Skinner,”
And “Gammon and Sinner,”
“R. Askal and Oil and Son,”
With “Spongeum and Fleece ‘em,”
And Strip ‘em and Grease ‘em,”
And Take ‘em in Brothers and Run.”

There’s “Watch ‘em and Nab ‘em,”
And “Knock ‘em and Grab ‘em,”
And “Lather and Shave ‘em well,” too;
There’s “Force ‘em and Tie ‘em,”
And “Pump ‘em and Dry ‘em,”
And “Wheedle and Soap ‘em” in view.”

There’s “Pare ‘em and Core ‘em,”
And “Grind ‘em and Bore ‘em,”
And “Pinchum good, Scrapeum and Friend,”
With “Done ‘em and Brown ‘em,”
And “Finish and Drown ‘em,”
And this I go to the end.

Pickrell and Krupp came up with their own creative promotion scheme in order to develop the Big Lake Oil Field. Pickrell formed investment groups, each of which held certificates of interest on blocks of acreage. He explained the certificates of interest in a 1969 interview with Bert Haigh: “I conceived the plan of forming groups consisting of sixteen sections each (10,240 acres) and of paying for the drilling of a well on each group’s holdings by selling individual interests in the block. Each certificate of interest represented a 5-acre equity. Through this plan each group was made independent of
Texon’s earnings. The problem of financing was by no means solved.“53 The dilemma of where and how to sell the certificates was Pickrell’s next challenge.

At this juncture Pickrell really refined his “oil promoter” skills. Selling the certificates was no easy task, so Pickrell went to New York City where he claims to have opened an office in the World Tower Building at 10 East 40th Street. He then hired a sales manager and set up a sales training school to educate his salesmen about the oil business. Pickrell asserted that at the beginning of the week he started out with about 150 salesmen and by the end of the week only a few or none were left in the class. Pickrell and his sales force, however, successfully sold 685 certificates of interest to Group No.1 in New York City at $200 each ($137,000 gross) which provided a reserve for initial drilling purposes.54 A perceptive Pickrell also knew that the credibility of the project would be critical to certificate sales.

To lend credence to his project Pickrell decided that the company needed to hire a geologist with good name recognition.55 Pickrell found just such a man as he was reading an El Paso newspaper article about the geologist for Sunshine Oil Company – that man was Dr. Hugh Tucker. Pickrell knew that hiring Tucker could provide the impetus needed for increased certificate sales. Tucker, a San Angelo physician, was not a professionally-trained geologist but rather a man whose geological training had come through apprenticeship.56 Because Tucker had good name recognition in West Texas oil fields (plus the credential of “Dr.” in front of his name) he lent validity to Pickrell’s promotion of the field. In his sales letters to prospective investors, Pickrell “coaxed ‘em and led ‘em well.” He asserted that the Texon Company “was in the hands of responsible businessmen . . . and that geologists Hugh H. Tucker and Donald Mackenzie had predicted significant production on the property . . . and that even limited production could make a $200 certificate worth $5,000 “57 With this boost in credibility, Pickrell noted that “every week we would make ‘X’ number of sales and we kept on doing that until finally we sold them [the certificates of interest]. And that’s what drilled the well.” 58 The initial certificates were sold to “Group No.1” which was the first subsidiary of the Texon Company in Pickrell’s promotional scheme.

53 Pickrell Interview, 04 June 1969. While the certificates represented a five-acre equity, no one owned a particular five acres.

54 Ibid. The World Tower building at 10 East 40th Street had yet to be built, so the address that Pickrell gives in this particular interview is not correct.

55 Ibid.

56 San Angelo Standard Times, 27 April 1937.

57 San Angelo Standard Times, 27 April 1937. No references were made to Donald Mackenzie regarding his background.

58 Pickrell Interview, 04 June 1969.
“Group No. 1” plays a significant role in the story of the Big Lake field for two different reasons. First, the certificates sold to the group, provided the funds for initial drilling in the field. Second, “Group No. 1” included a cohort of Catholic women from New York City who wanted to invest in the fledgling oil fields of West Texas. At this juncture in the legend of the Big Lake Oil Field, due to the participation of the Catholic women, “divine intervention” steps in to facilitate the success of the initial well – The Santa Rita No. 1. This folkloristic element in the history of the field has been told, recorded, and changed time-and-time again.

The discovery well was named for the Italian Patron Saint of the Impossible, Santa Rita of Cascia. Pickrell claimed that the name of the well originated in New York when some of his salesmen persuaded the group of Catholic women to invest in “Group No. 1” certificates. Pickrell maintained that the women, worried about their investment, consulted their priest who suggested that they invoke the help of Santa Rita, the Patron Saint of the Impossible. Pickrell recounted the following series of events in a 1969 interview:

As I was leaving New York on one of my trips to the field two of these women handed me a sealed envelope and told me that the envelope contained a red rose that had been blessed by the priest in the name of the saint. The women asked me to take the rose back to Texon with me and climb to the top of the derrick and to scatter the rose petals over the rig and to say: “I hereby christen thee Santa Rita.” I faithfully carried out these instructions.59

Historical memory is interesting in that it changes over time. Pickrell, in an interview with Dr. Samuel Myres on September 2, 1971, gave a slightly different account of the story: “They [the Catholic women] sent me dried rose petals. I kept them in the package and I went up there and christened it in the way that they wanted it christened. It was a very simple ceremony, ‘I christen thee Santa Rita,’ and sprinkled a few petals and only a few persons were there. Many workmen were there but not very many onlookers.”60 Pickrell went on to say “I am not a Catholic, you understand. I am a Protestant. But they [the Catholic Women] educated me on certain words to say . . . of course all Catholic religious people firmly believe that was the reason for the success of the venture.”61 In this same interview, Pickrell’s story changes slightly again. He claims that there were no more than ten people there. He recounted that “They [the Catholic women] gave me a sack full of roses. I took those roses and crumpled them

59 Pickrell Interview, 04 June 1969.
60 Pickrell, Interview by Dr. Samuel Myres, 02 September 1971, Permian Basin Petroleum Museum Archives, Midland, Texas.
61 Ibid.
and scattered them to the winds and I said, 'I christen thee Santa Rita. That's all.' A *San Angelo Times* article, in 1964, provided another version of the story that said a nun in El Paso gave Pickrell a white rose and asked that he christen the well the Santa Rita.63

When Pickrell was asked if the Catholic women from New York invested heavily or moderately he replied: "I have no way of knowing. Our financing was in the peoples' hands who were the financiers [Guy Loomis and Company]."64 He goes on to say that the Guy Loomis Company had taken over the actual sales from his sales force. This raises the historical question as to if Pickrell actually had any personal contact with the Catholic women in New York City or not.

The story becomes important in the overall analysis of the history of the Big Lake Oil Field because a "folkloristic element" was transformed into a "historical fact" that was passed down from generation-to-generation in both verbal and written accounts. Again, the historian must ask: Who told the story? Why did they tell the story? How did the story change over time? How did imaginary facts (myth) become interwoven with the "real facts?" One possibility is that Pickrell concocted the story to use as a promotional tool to raise the money that he desperately needed to develop the field.

Permian Basin historian Julia Cauble Smith noted that Pickrell’s changing tale raises doubts as to its authenticity. She maintains that Pickrell most likely did not personally know the Catholic women because G. A. Loomis and Company handled the sale – not Pickrell’s hand-picked sales force and certainly not Pickrell. In her Master’s thesis, she also suggests that the Catholic women would not have invoked the help of a patron saint for their own personal gain.65 Cauble Smith asserts that the Santa Rita tale reflects Pickrell’s doubt about the success of the well rather than his concern for these women investors. In her thesis, she goes on to say that it would have been “out of character” for Pickrell to show any doubt about the well particularly as he was trying to raise monies for drilling. She contends that Pickrell needed a “talisman,” a saint of the impossible, to give him an advantage.66 This hypothesis cannot be ruled out as Krupp, and possibly Pickrell, had ties to the copper mining town of Santa Rita in New Mexico before their venture in the Big Lake Oil Field.

Period newspaper articles, verbal accounts, and photographs provide insight regarding their connection with this booming mining town. Pickrell, orphaned at the age of 15, moved to El Paso to live and work with his uncle. His uncle owned one of the

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62 Ibid.

63 The *San Angelo Times* (San Angelo), 1964.

64 Pickrell, Interview by Dr. Samuel Myres, 02 September 1971.


66 Julia Cauble Smith, iv.
largest confectionaries in the United States, *The Elite Confectionery Store*, which was located in the heart of downtown El Paso. However, before World War I, Pickrell got tired of the confectionery business and went to work for a local bank. He saved his wages, and like many El Pasoans, invested in New Mexico copper mines. His investment yielded him a $250,000 profit before the war began. A major copper mine in New Mexico after 1910, the Santa Rita Mine, took its name from a nearby geologic formation that looked like a “kneeling nun.” The Chino Copper Corporation (later Kennecott), whose primary investors were from New York, owned the mine and built a company town for its employees. Both the mine and the town were named for the Patron Saint of the Impossible, Santa Rita. Pre-1919 photographs of the Santa Rita business district show one store with signage that read *Confectionery – Cigars and Tobacco*. Adjacent to it was another store called the *Elite Café and Saloon*. There is the possibility that Pickrell’s uncle, and subsequently Pickrell, had ties with the town of Santa Rita either through business ventures or through investments or both. According to an El Paso Herald article in 1917, many El Paso businessmen were closely tied with Santa Rita and had created business connections there. Haymon Krupp, also, was one of those men.

On March 17, 1917 an El Paso Herald Newspaper article read “Pep Crowd Makes 4 Towns in a Day.” The “pep crowd” consisted of El Paso businessmen who were traveling by rail from El Paso to mining towns such as Santa Rita, Hurley, and Silver City, New Mexico in order to foster closer “business and social relations” with them. In each town the El Paso “pep crowd” was given “warm greetings from the townspeople” complete with military bands and demonstrations of the only steam shovel mining in the southwest. The cordial welcome was a courtesy of the mining companies. The “pep crowd” consisted of bankers, hoteliers, oil company executives, and entrepreneurs from a wide range of businesses. Leather companies, printing companies, cigar companies, and dry good companies were among the many listed as handing out souvenirs to the crowds at each stop. The article noted that Haymon Krupp, who was promoting his dry goods store *Krupp and Company*, “distributed pencils in the form of cartridges” to the townspeople. Krupp, subsequently, not only had knowledge of the legend of Santa Rita but also connections with mining company

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71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.
executives and investors from New York. This may have led Krupp and Pickrell to have linked to the name of the discovery well in the Big Lake field to the name of the successful Santa Rita mine in order to attract New York investors. As promoters, Pickrell and Krupp's knowledge of, and their connection to, the Santa Rita mining district would have served them well in the promotion of the Big Lake Oil Field. In the end, the legend surrounding the Santa Rita No. 1 received plenty of attention both locally and nationally. Newspapers, magazines, and verbal accounts all recanted Pickrell's romanticized tale which in turn would get the attention of investors who could finance the field. The story is most likely a blend of “real and imaginary” facts that served as an “artful” promotional tool for financing the venture.

One last element of the Big Lake Oil Field saga that merits discussion revolves around who chose the drilling site for the Santa Rita No. 1. Memory and myth have made this subject quite controversial and even led to a lawsuit in 1925. Much like the different stories surrounding the naming of the Santa Rita No. 1, there are varied accounts regarding who actually chose the site for the well. Was it geologist Hugh Tucker? Was it promoter Frank Pickrell? Or was it “Lady Luck”? Of these, “Lady Luck” has been the most glamorized over the years. In oilfield histories, “Lady Luck” is a central motif (or character) that appears time-and-time-again. Texas folklorist, Mody Boatright maintains that if “luck played no part in the oil business” there would be no legends, no myths, and no stereotypical characters to write about. The role of “luck” is a central motif in oil field lore that is repeatedly manifested in what Boatright calls the lucky “Breakdown Story.”

Boatright asserts that the “breakdown” story supports the notion of “Lady Luck” in finding a successful drill site which in turn makes a great promotional story to tell potential investors. The lucky “break down” story generally revolves around a breakdown in transportation which forces the driller to drill on the spot. The result is generally striking oil. The “breakdown story” repeatedly occurs in throughout Texas oil histories from Shackelford County to Burk Burnett to Big Lake. The following accounts are just a couple of the several versions of the breakdown story in the Big Lake field. The Austin-Statesman in 1940, wrote a colorful breakdown story that claimed there was an intense rainstorm as Pickrell tried to get his drilling equipment to the designated drilling spot: “Mud clawed at the wheels and sucked at the mules’ feet . . . “Just seven miles to go,” encouraged Mr. Pickrell . . . Then the rain came down in torrents . . . “Boys,” he said, “this thing’ll keep up. Another day we’ll be two weeks getting to that place. Unload her. We’ll dig our well right here.” Yet, according to old-timers in Reagan County there had been a long drought in West Texas and there wasn’t a cloud in sight during January of 1921.

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73 Boatright, 72.

74 Boatright, 66-69.

75 Austin-Statesman Newspaper, 23 January 1940.

76 Schwettmann, 14.
Another version of the drilling or “spudding” of the well is found in A. Cullen Akins’ address to the Desk and Derrick Club in Odessa entitled The Romance of the Oil Industry. Akins related that Pickrell’s equipment was being hauled by truck rather than by a mule-pulled wagon: “Legend has it that the truck or trucks which were moving the rig and rig material to the location for the Rita Santa No. 1 broke down some distance from the location and, because of the time element [to meet the drilling deadline], it was decided to drill right there. Myth? Truth? Regardless it makes a most fascinating story.” 77 In this story, mechanical problems rather than weather dictate the lucky location for drilling. Both of the tales were refuted in a letter from Houston Attorney, Clarence R. Wharton to Professor Walter Prescott Webb in 1940. Wharton notes that the first well drilled in the field was a water well not an oil well:78 “The legend that Pickrell’s truck broke down and he drilled where this occurred and found oil is not true. . . . the spudding of the water well and the Santa Rita oil well were two different operations. The water well was spudded in order to validate the lease. It was originally called “well number one” but was subsequently completed as a fresh-water well.” 79 Wharton went on to note that the water from the water well was used to drill the Santa Rita Number One.

In a 1969 interview, Pickrell gave his own account of staking the well in which he noted that the last day of grace for spudding the well was January 8, 1921. As he was in New York, trying to secure enough money for drilling, he realized that time was running out and so he telegraphed the Texas Land Commissioner, J. T. Robison, to see if he had to actually start drilling on January 8 or if he just had to “prepare” to start drilling. Robison wired Pickrell back saying that the law said he had to actually start drilling and that he [Robison] could not grant an extension. Pickrell hurried back to San Angelo, and on January 6, he began to buy drilling equipment to take to the location. By January 8th he was on his way to drill the well and had the Orient Railroad people delay the westbound freight train so he could load his equipment. Pickrell recalled: “The load included a wagon, 2 men and 2 horses riding the train with the equipment. We reached the sheep loading siding about 4 miles east of the location the evening of January 8, the last day of grace. We hurriedly transferred the load to the wagon and were able to drive the four miles, rig up and spud in on the water well before midnight.” 80 Pickrell did not elaborate on the fact that he spudded a water well rather than an oil well.

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78 Handbook of Texas Online, s.v. “Clarence Ray Wharton” (accessed 10 November 2007) http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/TT/dot3.html Clarence Ray Wharton was a lawyer and historian who moved to Houston in 1901 and went to work for the law firm of Baker, Botts, Baker, and Lovett. In 1906 he was made full partner and was counsel for the Houston Lighting and Power Company, Houston Gas and Fuel Company, and Houston Electric Company.

79 Schwettmann, 16-17.

80 Pickrell Interview, 04 June 1969.
In order to legally validate the site, a survey report written by a licensed surveyor had to be sent to the Texas Railroad Commission. Pickrell subsequently hired J. J. Goodfellow of San Angelo to survey the well on January 19 and 20, 1921. Goodfellow says in a letter that he “located [surveyed] the position of the Texon Oil Well for Frank T. Pickrell. At that time there was a water well derrick at the point and a well had been spudded, called by Pickrell, the oil well; however, later it was made a water well and the oil derrick was located a few feet to the north west, probably, from 20 to 40 feet from the water well.”

It appears that there may have been some concern as to the legality of the first well because it was a water well rather than an oil well. In another letter Goodfellow noted that: “It appears, from my Field Books, that the Water Well (called oil well at spudding) is 87 feet North of the Orient R.R., while the measurement from the present Oil Well, in the Texon Oil Field, to the Railroad, is 174 feet [a difference of 87 feet].” Pickrell, however, was successfully able to skirt the oil well drilling deadline by drilling a water well instead. Whether he asked permission from J.T. Robison to do this, or whether J.T. Robison suggested off the record that he do this, or whether Pickrell took it upon himself to do this may never be known.

There also has been much controversy over who actually staked the discovery well – was it geologist Hugh Tucker or was it Frank Pickrell? This controversy would lead to a lawsuit between Tucker and the Texon Oil and Land Company. This may be the reason for Pickrell spinning the story, in 1969, that he had spudded the well. Pickrell’s account of who chose the site for the discovery well changes dramatically from 1923 to 1969. In a 1923 account, Pickrell gave Hugh Tucker credit for choosing the site. Tucker was upset by rumors circulating in West Texas that he had not staked the well and that the rumors were hurting his reputation. In a letter from Tucker to Pickrell, dated 1923, Tucker related that “Some of the geologists are circulating stories that I had nothing to do with the locating of your well and that I did not drive the stake for it. This story is preventing me from getting work that I could get if the facts are known and I would certainly appreciate your writing me a letter giving your version of the facts.”

Pickrell wrote a letter for Tucker that read, “To Whom It May Concern: This is to certify that Dr. Hugh H. Tucker drove the stake at the present site of the Santa Rita, the discovery well of Reagan County, Texas and it was upon his recommendation that this well was drilled. Texon Oil & Land Company,” (signed) Frank T. Pickrell, Vice President.

In his account dated August 1969, Pickrell recalled that Tucker told him that an oil and gas producing structure existed in the field that was 10 miles wide and 30 miles

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81 Schwettmann, 16. Schwettman wrote that since water is essential in drilling an oil well that Pickrell’s plan was to drill the water well first. This, however, seems unlikely.

82 Schwettmann, 16.

83 Schwettman, 17.

84 Ibid, 17. A letter from Haymon Krupp to C.B. Hudspeth, in 1923, also verifies this.
long and that it extended in a northeast-southwest direction. Pickrell contended: "Mr. Hugh Tucker had recommended and staked the location for the drilling of our first test. It appeared to me that the unfavorable terrain surrounding it would entail prohibitive hauling and other operating expenses . . . I could see no reason why a location involving considerably less expense would not be satisfactory. On this basis I selected my own location."  

As Pickrell was promoting the field to investors, he characterized Dr. Hugh Tucker as a well-respected geologist who predicted good production in the field. In 1925, however, Tucker filed a lawsuit against Pickrell in which he claimed that Pickrell had promised him a substantial interest in the field in return for his staking the field. Pickrell’s characterizations of Tucker after this became more negative. By 1971 Pickrell asserted that: “Hugh H. Tucker was not an educated geologist. He was not a professional; he was not licensed. He didn’t have a degree in geology. But I didn’t know those things and when they said geologist I didn’t question it.”  

Subsequently, who actually staked the site for the test well may never be known but as memory and myth converged they made for a compelling story with elements that included “lady luck,” the “breakdown story,” and a lawsuit.

Regardless of who actually staked the Santa Rita No. 1, Pickrell was smart enough to know that he needed an experienced driller to bring in the drill the well and seasoned oil men to pour plenty of money into the development of the field. In June of 1921 Pickrell hired widely-renowned driller Carl Cromwell who brought the well in on May 28, 1923. As oil men from all over the country came to view the Santa Rita No. 1, a self-confident Pickrell told the San Angelo Daily Standard on June 12, 1923 that he was going to open up the Reagan County field to all companies – both “big and little.” However, major companies, including Gulf, Texas, Sinclair, Humble, Magnolia, and Empire, as well as a number of small independents, surveyed the area but were not impressed enough to work with the Pickrell and the Texon Oil and Land Company. Pickrell, subsequently, presented his venture to the famous wildcatter Mike Benedum in Pittsburgh. As reports came back for favorable development of the field, Benedum approached the directors of the Texon Company with a proposal that would create the Big Lake Oil Company. The Big Lake Oil Company, by April of 1927, had built a company town (Texon, Texas), a gasoline plant, an oil-treating plant, and a pump.

85 Pickrell Interview, 21 August 1969.

86 Pickrell Interview, 02 September 1971. Pickrell consistently denied this agreement and settled out of court with Tucker for $16,000 in 1925.

87 San Angelo Daily Standard (San Angelo, Texas), 12 June 1923.


89 Pickrell Interview, 04 June 1969.

90 Myres, 224-225.
station and had contracted with Marland Oil to build pipelines for more economical transportation of the oil. As the owner of three-quarters of the stock in the Big Lake Oil Company, Benedum subsequently set up the Plymouth Oil Company as its management company. This allowed him to drill other fields in West Texas independent of his partnership with Pickrell and Krupp. Benedum had a strong belief that Reagan County was only a small part of the fields to be tapped into in the Permian Basin. He would be right!

From its inception to its completion, the development of the Big Lake Oil Field was driven by pioneers who were both profit-driven and pragmatic. As local dreamer, Rupert Ricker, initiated interest in one of the most phenomenal oil fields in Texas, he also set into motion a series of events that would draw characters from both near and far to develop the multi-million dollar Big Lake Oil Field. As his chance meeting with Frank Pickrell and Haymon Krupp propelled them into the role of “oil promoter” their creativity and tenacity got the field developed. As a result of their hard work and “artful” promotion of the field they not only created an empire but also an “enchanted space of the past.”

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91 Myres, 226-229.

The Presidential Election of 1924 and the Railroads

by William Morris, Ph.D., Henry Chair of History, Midland College

The presidential election of 1924 was between the Republican candidate Calvin Coolidge, who had gained the office on the death of Warren Harding in 1923, the Democrat John Davis, and the Progressive Robert LaFollette. The possibility of a LaFollette victory frightened railroad executives more than did that of Davis and they organized themselves against him.

In a history of American railroads, 1924 marked a temporary end to growing government regulation and the beginning of a brief resurgence of laissez faire concepts. That year “progressives” led by presidential candidate Senator Robert LaFollette of Wisconsin made a serious attack on railroads. The manner in which his campaign was viewed by the industry, how that view was influenced by business’ concept of itself, and the methods by which these became part of a public relations program indicate the concern railways had of public opinion and their fear of a LaFollette victory. A favorable attitude on the part of the voters was thought essential in order to avoid the election of a president who would increase regulation and perhaps even establish full federal ownership. Even if LaFollette did not win, the railroad executives thought that his campaign if unchallenged might encourage Congress to enact restrictive laws.

Railroads, viewed historically, have held an important position in the development of the American economy. W. W. Rostow described them as the ingredient responsible, or “stimulator,” for the “take-off” stage of United States economic growth in the mid-1800s. Their need for high quality steel rails aided the iron and steel industry and ultimately produced large scale growth in other sectors of the economy as well. However, in the later part of the 19th century, reactions to them varied. Farmers who were more at the mercy of the railroads than most economic groups first began the cry of abuse and rate discrimination in the mid-1800s. States such as Illinois began regulation with the Granger laws of the 1870s. When in 1886 such laws were under attack in the United States Supreme Court (the Wabash case), pressure from agricultural and other shipper interests forced Congress to establish the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC). The ICC’s power to end unfair rate practices was seriously hindered in 1897 when the Supreme Court ruled that the ICC might set aside unfair rates, but not establish fair ones in their place. A shippers’ lobby and pressure from the public helped President Theodore Roosevelt pressure Congress into passing the Hepburn Act in 1906 that did give the ICC power to establish “fair” rates.

In November 1905 while Congress was debating the Hepburn Act, the Senate Interstate Commerce Committee under Republican Senator Nelson Aldrich of Rhode Island held hearings but it called only pro-railroad witnesses. Ray Stannard Baker, the
muckraking progressive, had an article published in McClure’s Magazine that discussed railroad “propaganda.” He wrote that company publicity bureaus, under the leadership of the president of the Southern Railway, had sent out press releases that had been written by special publicity men; small newspapers printed them without crediting the source. The small newspapers reported that conventions favoring the current level of limited regulation were called, but further investigation revealed that they had never been held. Passing mentions of the issues were inserted in free weekly newsletters. These inserts suggested that future increases in shipping rates resulting from increased regulation might yield lower prices on farm crops. Baker reported that the entire campaign had been based on a central card file that noted the hobbies, prejudices, and weaknesses of editors of small newspapers. Public opinion became very anti-railroad.¹

The Mann-Elkins Act of 1910 gave the ICC, among other powers, the power to initiate proceedings in a rate case but without any request for action. A later law in 1912 granted the Commission authority to establish the value of railroad property and use these figures as the standard on which to base fair earnings and reasonable rates. The famous “5% case” was the next major attempt to influence public opinion, this time not to change legislation, but to apply pressure that would produce a more favorable usage of existing laws. Again publicity bureaus were set up to provide copy for newspapers. These stories were designed in part to create a false impression among the voters as to the power of the ICC, and in part to gain the aid of the ICC in furthering railroad interests.² The executives of the railroads were evidently learning more circumspection in their attempts at public relations.

With United States entry into World War I, the east coast experienced a massive railroad traffic snarl. The federal government took away private control of the railways in order to “rationalize” traffic. Government operation was not ended until the Transportation Act of 1920. Against a background of the Plumb Plan for public ownership (which was supported mainly by organized labor) and a proposal to consolidate all railroads into a few gigantic systems, the Esch-Cummins law retreated to “normalcy.” The progressive forces were pleased when the ICC was given instructions to plan a consolidation and to attempt the creation of efficient and economical rates. Business owners could hope for a fair return on their investment from such rates. Included was a recapture clause which put one half of all excess profits (over 6%) into a government-controlled contingency fund that would be available for loans to financially weaker railroads. Rail employees received a Labor Board to help settle disputes.

Heavy regulation and the threat of more attacks from “radicals” and severe competition from motor transport forced a “propaganda” campaign in 1924 different from what had been done previously. There existed three levels of public relations; first, is the level of what railroad interests said among themselves which indicates to a limited
extent, at least, what their motivation in the campaign was and how they hoped to implement it. Here can be seen a basic world view and system of values at work. Second, the advertising campaign in various popular magazines and newspapers “telling the story” of railroads shows the extent to which individual companies followed the advice and recommendations of national associations. Third, a general non-advertising program of bettering employee-management contact, government support, and public services can be called a “scatter” level. Also railroads engaged in a campaign of pressure on newspaper editors and politicians.

Throughout the 1924 election campaign, many railroad executives felt that the “radicals” in Congress were attempting to destroy private ownership by “… creating conditions which will make continuance of private ownership impossible ….” One such “condition” was LaFollette’s new plan of valuation which was to be based on actual investment and the cost of service rather than on stock prices. *Railway Age*, a trade magazine, expressed the opinion that this was just the Senator’s latest move toward railroad nationalization, because re-valuation would lead to government ownership of the industry. In March 1924, F. W.W. Sargent, a high official of the Chicago and Northwestern, spoke before the Annual Dinner of the American Railway Engineers Association in Chicago. Earlier LaFollette had used the term “prudent investment” when speaking of his plan. The decisions of prudence, Sargent said, would be up to a radical Congress, and “… who would be willing to trust his or her savings invested in securities to the hindsight of men who have never assumed the responsibility of a payroll or financed the rolling of a steel rail?” Nowhere in *Railway Age* is there any coherent explanation as to why the new plan, if adopted, would place private enterprise one step closer to nationalization. One vague statement was made that the radicals’ tactic hoped to raise expenses and cut income at the same time through a wage increase. The impression created is one of uneasiness at the possibility of even stricter control rather that fear of immediate destruction.

At the same dinner, Sir Henry Thornton, president of the government-owned Canadian National Railway, delivered a talk that received favorable comment from those men working for increased public relations. Nothing was said about the conflict of interest in the president of a state-owned railroad speaking against the manner in which his own industry was run. Thornton’s analysis of how to avoid publicly owned industries was financial responsibility and consideration of discontent, but above all, education of employees and citizens. One area definitely considered in need of education, and incidentally one being wooed by the LaFollette forces, was rural areas. *Railway Age* called for more and better local relations concentrating on the transportation needs and the feelings of the rural population.

As an attempted proof of how inefficient government-owned railways were, *Railway Age* pointed out that the nations with such a system were returning the
railroads to private control, or at least adopting the methods of capitalistic management. Usually the railroads linked the advocates of further regulation with socialism and bolshevism. Perhaps they did so in order to draw attention away from the lack of specific reasons why the new valuation plans would lead to nationalization. Even Dr. Arthur T. Hadley, the former president of Yale University, felt that a conspiracy of the anti-capital group in Congress was advocating policies which were destroying the efficiency of railroads. The general conclusion was that any form of government ownership would hurt the American economy. During March and April, Railway Age ran a series of articles by Professor Homer B. Vanderblue that showed the very close relationship between rail traffic and the business cycle. President of the American Railway Association, R. H. Aishton, in a lengthy speech pointed out how the prosperity of many industries depended on purchases by railroads. He felt this fact could help to destroy much of the effectiveness of anti-railroad propaganda.  

Senator Robert Gooding (Republican) of Idaho introduced a resolution for the ICC to investigate suspected propaganda. Railway Age said that it welcomed this investigation, but wanted if definitely carried out and not used just as a platform from which to launch anti-railroad statements. If the investigation was not carried out it could be charged that the railroads had the proposed law defeated because of fear of exposure. But, the editor continued, they had nothing to fear because their public relations (not “propaganda” mind you) had caused public opinion to be fair and intelligent. The editor wanted misconceptions created by LaFollette’s Peoples’ Legislative Service “special bulletins” cleared up. “Railroad Propaganda, What It Costs, and Who Pays the Bills,” written by Basil M. Manly, said that “secret documents” show $1 million had been spent during 1919 and 1920 to create a better image of privately owned railroads and to ensure a return to the system of private control. Manly charged that the $1 million came from operating expenses and caused higher rates—the public was paying to be influenced. This, said the editor, was misrepresentation. The money came from government rental fees which could be seen because the ICC had all the records. Besides, it had been only $3/4 of a million spent at the time when unions were seeking public support of the Plumb Plan and William McAdoo (railway director and former presidents Woodrow Wilson’s son-in-law) was attempting to gain five more years of government control. The railroads, the editor continued, were in debt and needed a rate increase to remain solvent. Railway Age ended with the statement that the expenditure should be viewed as a necessary part of management’s duty to the stockholders and the public.

At another time, Alfred Thom, a lawyer for the Association of Railway Executives, testified before a Senate committee that it was necessary to defend against attacks which might ruin the railroads’ chance of public service. The $1 million spent in 1920 (or the $3/4 million) represented only 12/10,000 of 1% of all the operating expenses of
railroads that year and had no effect on rates. He said that advertising was designed, not to influence or effect legislation, but to present the facts of the situation to the public. Thom was supported by Senator Simeon Fess (Republican, Ohio) who felt that since the ICC watched railways so closely, that the industry should have a “pretty free field” to seek support. Statements of this nature indicate that to a great extent the industry had realized the power of voters in the United States and, therefore, keeping private operation and what he called “fair” regulation, depended on public sentiment being favorable. To this end it was necessary to present the facts. Railway Age did not advocate partisan politics during the presidential campaign, but told its readers not to be idle – lack of activity would let misinterpretation stand and let down the stockholders and the public.7

Senator Key Pittman (Democrat) of Nevada saw a difference between advertising to increase traffic and of propaganda to change public opinion. He, therefore, suggested a law to prohibit using operating expense money to carry out lobbying. Railroads, he said, should present their case to the ICC or to Congress. Railway Age asked why they could not go to the voters if the politicians could. Pittman, the publication said, would force the railroads to be quiet and do as Congress said—which, being under the influence of radicals, wouldn’t listen. The radicals wanted them to go to Congress because then it would be easier to destroy private ownership. Perhaps, the editor wrote, the views of all anti-railroad Senators, should be spread to the voters in their home states.8

Railway Age attacked what it called the “perfidy” of the LaFollette camp, and its controlling element, the leaders of organized labor, and attempted to blacklist what it called forty “farmers’ friends” in Congress. Supposedly the Progressive party would try to better the rates on agricultural products—La Follette had asked for such in the Senate. The forty blacklisted congressmen were those who had voted against a bill to raise the wages of railroad employees. Seventeen had voted for the McNary-Haugen bill, among them were the leaders of the “farm bloc”. No one, however, was blacklisted for favoring the labor bill and not the farm law. The railroads said the agricultural interests would join this party at “their own peril.” And the union leaders were not even true to their own membership, because no vote had ever been taken to see if the individual members favored the position taken or wanted any funds spent for such purposes.9

Economic historians have identified the “world view “of businessmen during the 1920s. The previous summary of the views of railroads on the campaign of 1924 supports these findings. The dogmas are:

- a concept of the nature of a man which establishes a doctrine of the elite and a materialistic standard of values;
a theory of society based on the preeminence of economic interests and necessity of social stability;
- government must support individualism and oppose popular control of business;
- and leaders should emphasize the Constitution (property rights) rather than the Declaration of Independence (individual rights)

During the 1920s advertising man Bruce Barton had another view of the role of businessmen. His book The Man Nobody Knows presented Jesus as the world’s first modern businessman who stressed the idea that success comes from service. The general public was likely more familiar with Barton’s book, which except for the Bible, was the best-selling book in the mid ‘20s, rather than with any trade journal

Railway Age, in keeping with its advocacy of the importance of railroads and the need for good public relations, stated that if given a chance only five years would be necessary to make railroads the most “popular” industry in the nation. The public would “want” the industry to earn a net return in keeping with its importance. To that end all railroad executives should use good techniques of persuasion. Since Congress was looking on them unfavorably, any policy which invited attack should be abandoned. The editor continued:

It will be necessary … to give the public good treatment and good service … [railroads] should spare no pains to inform them as to the facts regarding your business … you should exercise a high type of statesmanship …. Although by March 1924, Railway Age reported that 80% of the nation’s newspaper editors favored keeping the present rates, the journal said that the railroads must keep up their public relations campaigns in order to keep the support from being reversed.

From June 18 to 20, 1924 the annual meeting of the American Association of Railroad Supervisors focused on public opinion. A committee report said that public opinion could be improved by stories concentrating on improved operation and service and obeying governmental rules and regulations. Service is the idea that Burton attributed to Jesus. All advertising should it should stress service, and it should be simple, brief, and sincere. The report stressed that the most important element was sincerity because the public could sense insincerity. Officers from the New York Central and Pennsylvania railroads, as well as the Eastern Railroad Council stressed the need for employees to remind the public of the nation’s dependence on transportation.

P. L. Thomson, President of the Association of National Advertisers, told the Chicago Association of Commerce in October that advertising was a defense against “radicals” who would ruin the smooth-running, but delicate, machinery of business (and
hence the nation). The editor agreed heartily. Even after the election and LaFollette’s defeat in November, railroad advocates said that there could be no slacking in effort.\textsuperscript{13}

Regardless of all these admonitions and recommendations, the actual manner in which the public relations advertising was carried on presents a slightly different picture. The pages of the \textit{Literary Digest}, \textit{Saturday Evening Post}, and \textit{American Magazine}, three of the largest circulating publication of 1924, show that the theme most mentioned was service. A random sampling of the \textit{New York Times} reveals similar findings.

Other systems with similar programs not appearing in those sources were the Illinois Central and the Gulf Coast Lines. In September 1920, The Illinois Central system, whose president also activity supported public relations advertising, began writing a series of monthly messages. Subjects included were: equipment, new installations, taxes, aid to education, development of agriculture and industry, schedules, subsidies to competitors (unexplained, but possibly in the form of taxes going to federal highways and helping the motor truck lines), unfair transportation policies (again, unexplained), and human interest. This series appeared in all 438 newspapers along the line. The \textit{Railway Review}, another railroad trade journal, reprinted three advertisements of the Gulf Coast Line. One concerned taxes paid by railroads that went for schools and highways. Another presented their cost of operation. Another asked for more business activity to enable the company to serve the public better.\textsuperscript{14}

Public speakers also told the railroad “story.” C. H. Markham, the Illinois Central’s president, spoke to the American Bankers’ Association in Chicago on October 1. He said, with a slogan later made famous by a Secretary of Defense: “What is best for the nation is best for railroads.” To prove his point he quoted statistics:

- The United States had 265,000 miles of track, \(\frac{1}{3}\) of the world’s total;
- American railroads paid $336 million in taxes during 1923;
- American railroads held $20 billion in property which was \(\frac{1}{2}\) the value of industry and used \(\frac{1}{4}\) of all the bituminous coal mined in the country;
- American railroads used 30\% of all iron and steel produced;
- American railroads used 25\% of the lumber; and
- American railroads had hauled 400 billion tons of freight one mile and 38 billion passengers one mile at the cost of one cent and one mil per ton for freight and three cents per million for passengers.

These shipping prices were not cheap, Markham said, but it must be remembered that all prices were rising. He said that service was better than ever with no shortage of cars or locomotives. The railroad systems maintained and made possible the complex organization of the American economy. They enabled the farmer to get his product to
market soon enough to take advantage of the current prices. Smooth flowing traffic had stimulated the business revival after the post-war re-conversion recession. Since service cannot be stockpiled, they needed adequate earnings, but had to rely on the ICC and Labor Board to make money. In his final words Markham turned his attention to the presidential campaign. The United States, he said, was the world’s greatest supporter of the individual and of private property, in which the railroads were the first line of defense against “… those who would make this country a second Russia.” He saw government ownership of any kind as a step toward communism and bad for the public as a whole.  

Similar in form was the Louisville and Nashville’s practice of the “goodwill” tour by the president of the railroad and his staff. In the tour the executive staff spent one hour at each stop along the line to get the public view, to give speeches, and to have refreshments. The Louisville and Nashville also sponsored programs to help in agricultural and industrial development. The Baltimore and Ohio had a farm program that spread better seeds and breeding stock. Prize-winning fair exhibits listed the university extension service first, then the county agent, and last the railroad. Some did as the New York, New Haven, and Hartford did, spending $5000 to plant roses alongside their tracks. Other scattered attempts to improve the image of railroads included the hope of using “romantic” paintings of railroad scenes by famous artists as the English were doing; and conferences on how to increase the safety of crossings for automobiles. Railway Age mentioned a new game, the object of which was to travel across the continent by rail on the twenty largest roads. The game’s inventor showed no evidence of being commissioned by a railroad. Radio was used to broadcast various speeches of railroad and government officials.

One of the most imaginative public relations events took place on April 24 when a special Chicago, Rock Island, and Pacific train loaded with 200 children ran 20 miles through Chicago powered by burning powered milk. The event had been requested by Dr. Herman N. Budesen of the Chicago health commission in connection with the campaign to promote milk-drinking: “Milk is to the human body as fuel is to the locomotive.”

Employee relations were deemed important for the obvious reason that if working conditions were bad, negative comments by workers would undo every bit of good done by the roses and advertising. Therefore, the companies sponsored athletic teams for their employees and Railway Age printed their pictures. Executives recommended that employees buy company stock. Articles showed that wages in railroading were better than in other parts of industry. Railway Age findings indicated that contrary to charges made by what it called “radicals,” workers were better off in terms of compensation and hours worked in 1923 than under earlier government control. Not all techniques proved successful - Railway Age ran an essay contest on the “Best Methods for Bringing About
Co-operation Between Railways and their Employees to Promote Efficiency.” An officer of the Rock Island won with a glittering display of platitudes. Several readers wrote to the magazine to complain that nothing practical was offered.\(^{18}\)

There is a lack of specific information available on the pressure applied to various groups to force a change with respect to railroads and the election. If, Railway Age asked, the Navy can take 50 editors out to the fleet and allow them to watch operations with the hoped for result of better understanding (and hence support for larger budgets), why cannot the railroads do the same? Perhaps they were, because two of the six articles of railway public relations in the New York Times of 1924 were reprints of articles or editorials from Railway Age. At least three cartoons appeared in the New York Tribune before the election – all concerned LaFollette. The first was a cartoon showing him riding a bucking locomotive – illustrating his fight to control and “tame” the “wild” railroads. Since they were now “tame,” he should attack something new. The second was another cartoon that showed the Soviet dictator, Lenin, telling the Russian workers to kill all their railroad experts and run the roads themselves. The next panel illustrated the Soviet government soon asking for an American expert to help them reorganize their railroad system – in other words to reform the reform. A railroad man pondered the proposed trip to the Soviet Union in light of LaFollette telling the voters how to “ruin” the American rail system. The last cartoon showed “Battling Bob” LaFollette painting a caricature of the Big Railroader as it was in the years before government regulation and not at the current time.\(^{19}\)

Congressional debate on the Esch-Cummins Act in 1920 provided indications of pressure on Congress. Senator Robert Howell (Republican) of Nebraska said that local businessmen were being pressured to oppose repeal of the section on fair returns. They were told to send letters to their senators. When Senator Howell asked why the letters were all so similar, he was told that if the businessmen were too busy to write their own letters, then railroad agents would furnish a letter ready to be signed. Senator Smith Brookhart of Iowa (Republican) charged that New York “money pirates” controlling the railroads were trying to defeat him. Their tactics involved paying a Cedar Rapids newspaper $5000 for a four-page anti-Brookhart advertisement. A special query by the New York Times to both papers in the Iowa town received two denials.\(^{20}\)

Experience with regulation and fear of more regulation caused the railroads to respond with the beginnings of a new type of public relations campaign. They feared the radical program because popular control would destroy their individualism. This self-proclaimed elite responded that the continual stress placed on the importance of the railroads and their “spirit of true service” was necessary because railroads, as a public utility, were controlled by legislation and administrative agencies whose policies were directed by public opinion. Their need was to make public opinion more constructive. Their concern did not die out with the end of the Progressive party after 1924. In
1944, an industry subcommittee published a short report on the principles, organization, and public relations program both by individual railroads and by the Association. In 1950, a study done at the University of Illinois compared the programs of 85 large corporations. The individual companies were broken down according to type of operation; railroads and public utilities were lumped together, and both felt that the major reason for public relations was self-defense because the life of a public utility depended on good public sentiment. Not only did they carry on the largest campaign, but they also attempted to measure its effectiveness. However, they could not give a “satisfactory” answer as to what service their program performed for society. The report’s summary said there was little concept of public relations among those surveyed and only 1/3 had complete programs. However, here the report did not indicate the number of companies in that 1/3. Regardless, it can be seen that public utilities and railroads, the two industries subject to the most regulation, had the largest public relations program seeking to make public opinion more favorable.

The Golden Rule Pledge of the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce expressed the railroads’ basic view in 1924:

Our representative government is controlled by public opinion. Public opinion is based upon ignorance, illusion, prejudice or knowledge, truth, judgment. Representative government will be maintained or destroyed by public opinion! Public opinion is what men think. Our problem is … to make facts the basis for thinking.

In a representative society interest groups have a right to present their views and case to legislative bodies and to the public; this is what the railroads did before 1924, in 1924, and after. But they did it with partial truths, clumsily - almost laughily, and against weak targets. Coolidge won the election easily; he received 54% of the popular vote, Davis got 29%, and LaFollette 17%. LaFollette received only the 13 electoral votes from his home state of Wisconsin. How much support LaFollette would have gotten without the railroad campaign against him is unknown, but probably not much – the popularity of Coolidge and the Republican party’s pro-business orientation was simply too great.

The railroad public relations campaign in that election year reflected the fading of anti-business sentiment in the 1920s that was the forerunner of the national pro-business orientation later in the century after the Great Depression and the New Deal.
Notes:


3. Railway Age, March 13, April 12, April 26, June 7, 1924.

4. Ibid., March 13, April 26, 1924.

5. Ibid., January 5, March 13, March 22, April 5, April 19, April 26, May 10, June 18, 1924.

6. Ibid., April 26, 1924.

7. Ibid., January 5, April 26, May 3, June 7, 1924.

8. Ibid., May 10, 1924.

9. Ibid., July 12, August 2, September 13, 1924.


11. Railway Age, January 5, March 8, 1924.

12. Ibid., June 28; Barton, pp. 151, 157-158.

13. Railway Age, October 18, November 15, 1924.

14. Editor and Publisher, August 20, 1960; Railway Review, May 17, 1924.

15. Railway Age, October 4, 1924.

16. Railway Review, May 17, Railway Age, March 4, July 19, August 2, August 9, various, 1924.

17. Railway Age, May 3, 1924.

18. Ibid., April 12, June 28, July 19, September 6, September 13, 1924.


22. Railway Age, March 1