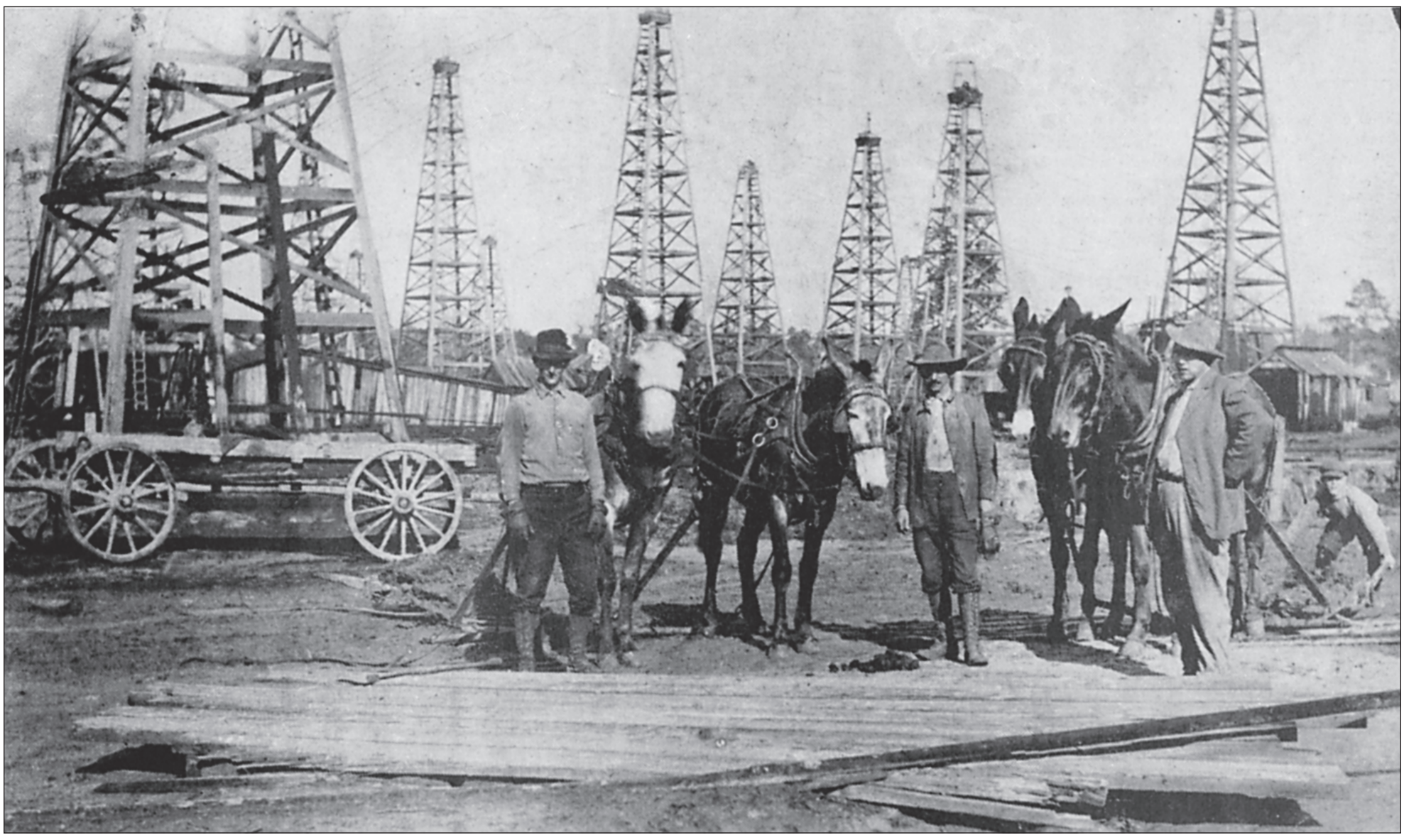
History & Folklore



From The Big Thicket Messenger, Reprinted in The Liberty Gazette, Thursday, April 14, 1977 –

Of Mules and Men

The center man in this picture is Mr. J.H. Walston, the father of Dollie Hoffman of Saratoga. Mr. Walston was a teaming contractor and the two other men shown, Mr. Crowder and Mr. Sanders, were teamsters who worked for him. I'm not too sure of their first names. The boy on the extreme right we don't have any identification at all on.

These mules and men were engaged in a dirt moving project of some kind. I can't make out exactly what, probably a pit, but they could be building a road, making a ditch or any more of a dozen things that required the moving of dirt. Before bulldozers, draglines and other heavy equipment, teams pulling slips or fresnos was what moved the dirt to build railroad dumps, road beds, canals, large pits for oil storage and anything else that needed ground level raised or lowered.

These mules here are hooked onto slips, the smaller of the dirt scoops most commonly used. These had a sharp edge on the bottom in front and two wooden handles maybe two foot long sticking out in back, one on each side. It had a yoke the double-tree was hooked to that had an end attached to each side of the slip in a way that would let it pivot. To load it, the handles at the rear were picked up slightly, the sharp leading edge bit into the dirt an inch, two, three, depended on how high the handles were raised. When it was loaded, the handles were lowered, the front come out of the dirt and it was slipped along to where the dirt was to be placed. To unload, the handles were raised until the front bottom edge bit deep enough to make the slip pivot on the yoke and turn upside down frontwards. It was usually left in this position and pulled back to the loading area where the loader flipped it right side up and loaded it again.

The fresno (I don't know where that name came from) was built on the same order but was large and had only one handle that was at the center on the back. It was iron and was much longer than the slip handles and arched up and back so a man could get his shoulder under it to flip the heavier load. It usually had a rope at the end that the loader used to turn it back to right side up. Sometimes one good big team would be used on a fresno but especially if a high dump or embankment was being built. The handle on a fresno was long enough to reach the team and, if a threeup was being used, animals.

Like most jobs there was a knack to loading and flipping slips and fresnos but even after you got good at it, it was still hard work. Especially when you was loadin' and flippin' for four or five teams on a short haul and spreading the dirt. To spread it you held back on the slip handles or the fresno rope just as it got a little past center. This fed the dirt out. They was hooked to the yoke with a triple tree. This put one animal off to the side and left plenty of room for the handle to go between the animals when the fresno was flipped. The triple tree was longer on the single animal's side to give him leverage to offset the greater pulling power of the two on the other side. With a fourup of course no offset was used, just a wider space between the two center under and smoothed it instead of unloading it in one pile. That's why I think that young feller on the right is just posing with his hands on them slip handles. I don't believe he's got the heft to handle the job.

– Bill Brett

Photo courtesy of Big Thicket Association



From Dayton Time-Herald, April 26, 1962 –

Tom Hill Laird, longtime Dayton fireman and beloved figure among all of the area's citizens, is shown above, as he recently received his 20-year service badge from the Dayton Volunteer Fire Department. Chief Bill Moreau presented badges to him and Curtis Conner. Laird recently passed away at the Veterans Hospital in Houston after a lengthy illness. Survivors are his mother, Mrs. L.H. Laird in Dayton and two sisters, Mrs. Robbie Lee Mansfield and Mrs. Thomas E. Gipson, Jr.

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