

## **Recycling Then and Now in Sugar Land**

Today's focus on recycling precious resources was a common strategy in Sugar Land more than 100 years ago. It's a positive example of history repeating itself, though the City's forefathers were a resourceful group whose emphasis was the cost savings associated with sustainable strategies.

Sugar Land's main industry in 1908 was sugar refining, but the town also boasted a paper mill, an acid plant, a cotton gin, a feed mill, a meat packing plant, a potato dehydrating plant and the original Sealy Mattress Company. Operational efficiencies were often the product of recycling.

For example, fibers from ground sugar cane were creatively used for other purposes. Known as bagasse, the fibers were burned in boilers to make steam and electricity to run the plants.

Raw sugar was shipped in burlap sacks, then refined and sold in cotton bags. Resourceful consumers used the cotton sugar bags to carry other items or to make clothing or quilts. As paper improved, it replaced the cotton bags, and bagasse was used to make paper bags in Sugar Land's paper mill, which was conveniently located where bagasse was discarded after use.

A short distance away from the paper plant was the acid plant. Weak acids break down fibers to make paper, so it was convenient to the acid and paper plants in close proximity. The stronger acids were used to make batteries for industrial use.

The fertile lands of Sugar Land were well known for cane, but cotton was a big crop as well. After harvesting, cotton needed to be baled, cleaned and

fluffed so it could be used commercially.

There was a Cotton Gin at the present-day site of Nalco. It was common for cotton to be utilized in the tufting of mattresses. As a point of fact, **Sealy Mattress Company began in Sugar Land -- the slogan "Sleeping on a Sealy is like sleeping on a cloud" was coined by Mr. E. E. Edwards who lived in the Sugar Land Flats in the 1920s.**

**Local livestock processed in Sugar Land's meat packing facility (close to the current water tower near Main Street and U.S. Highway 90A) and sold to U.S. markets may also have been used as a food source for the town. Manure was commonly used as fertilizer in many agricultural operations during this period. Seeds from local crops were important for two reasons – they facilitated the following year's harvest and provided feed for livestock and fowl.**

A blend of stock feed patented by Eldridge in 1913 was sold at the Mixtrite Feed Mill and was popular among stockmen. The mixture included 50 percent of molasses black strap, 30 percent of ground alfalfa or prairie hay, 15 percent of cotton seed hulls and 5 percent of specially prepared Irish beef.

There was a potato dehydrating plant at State Highway 6 and First Colony Boulevard; however, locals say they commonly stored potatoes under pier and beam houses to dry. Easy to retrieve for cooking purposes from under the house, the potatoes were generally good for about a year, and the eyes could be dug out and replanted for new potatoes in the garden.

There is a rumor that nails were straightened and reused rather than

discarded by Imperial Sugar and Sugarland Industries workers. And great efforts were taken to recycle and reuse the bone char that was used to purify liquid sugar.

Sugar Land continues to place an emphasis on sustainability, as evidenced by City-provided curbside recycling service for cans, paper, plastics, and cardboard, as well as permanent drop-off locations for bottles, plastics and other items. The Lions Club recycles eye glasses, and Keep Sugar Land Beautiful educates the community on environmental topics, including hosting annual events to collect and recycle paint, electronics and shreddable materials.

KSLB has scheduled a Recycle for Reuse event on Oct. 10, from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., at the Fort Bend ISD Administration parking lot, 16431 Lexington Blvd. Clothing, books, games, puzzles, flash cards, videos, DVD's, CD's, eyeglasses, hearing aids, hearing aid batteries, furniture, household items and cell phones will be collected.

For more information on recycling locations and a recycling quick finder guide, visit [www.kslb.org](http://www.kslb.org).

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Money Magazine and CNNmoney.com rank Sugar Land as one of America's Best Places to Live.  
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