

Sugar Land Avoids Houston Annexation

During the 1950s with the City of Houston annexing everything in sight, I.H. Kempner went on the offensive with annexation plans for his company town.

At that time, Imperial Sugar operated everything in town.

The Sugar Land company town was run by W.T. Eldridge, but the land was owned by I.H. Kempner from Galveston. The acreage consisted of both Imperial Sugar and Sugarland Industries. What was the difference? Imperial Sugar was involved in the process of refining sugar, and Sugarland Industries was involved in farming, ranching and retail operations because all the stores were company owned at that time.

The sugar company provided for the town's every need, including housing, water, sewage, education, medical services and more. Some – including former Mayor and Sugarland Industries employee Bill Little – referred to the town's operation as a benevolent dictatorship. The company even provided the electricity and natural gas system, though these utilities were sold prior to the City's incorporation.

To ramp up for incorporation beginning in 1957, company houses were sold to employees living in them, creating homeowners who could vote to become a "General Law" city.

An election was held Dec. 29, 1959, and the City's first mayor – T.E. Harmon – and five aldermen held their first City Council meeting on Jan. 19, 1960. The newly incorporated City spanned four square miles with a

population of approximately 2,500.

Throughout the 1960s, the company began transitioning services to the new City government. The City hired its first City employee – City Secretary Hazel Majungen – and scheduled two Council meetings on the first and third Tuesdays of each month, a practice that continues today.

One of City Council’s first actions was to approve building codes, plumbing codes and electricity codes. This was followed by the implementation in 1961 of a comprehensive city plan, which allowed for the incorporation of zoning.

Another important step during the 1960s was the creation of a City police force. Sugar Land hired Joe Burke to the newly created position of city marshal. When the City assumed responsibility for the water and sewer system, a third employee was hired.

Those early hires laid the groundwork for Sugar Land’s current workforce of 641 employees, who provide comprehensive services for the City’s population of 79,573.

Money Magazine and CNNmoney.com rank Sugar Land as one of America’s Best Places to Live.
2700 Town Center Blvd. North | Sugar Land, TX 77479-0110 | tel: (281) 275-2700 | fax: (281) 275-2318

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