

Sugar Land's Roots - First in a series

Sugar Land—50 Years Young!

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Though incorporated in 1959, Sugar Land's roots are deep, going back before Texas Independence. Originally part of Mexico and known as Austin's Colony after Stephen F. Austin's original 300 settlers, it was later called Oakland for the varieties of oak trees native to this area and in the mid-1800's Sugar Land for the product that would shape the city and give birth to a company town and later incorporated city.

Throughout 2009, it is our 50 years as a city that we celebrate, the period of "official" Sugar Land.

On Dec, 15, 1959, 480 voters braved a rainy day to elect Sugar Land's first mayor and aldermen. The 480 voters represented a 75 percent turnout of the 670 registered voters in the city. C.E. Ted Harman won outright in a three-person mayoral race. Five aldermen were elected from a slate of 11.
(photo)

For over 50 years before its incorporation, Sugar Land was a highly successful "company town" run in virtually all aspects by the Imperial Sugar Company established in 1906. The Imperial model was not the same as those used in the mill towns of New England or the mining towns of West Virginia where poverty persisted: this company town was more a utopia, one man's vision of the perfect melding of company worker and municipal citizen. After the deaths of the two men most responsible for the

success of Sugar Land, the company town –Ike Kempner, who poured much of his wealth into the small town, and William Eldridge, the hands-on company manager—Sugar Land began an inexorable move towards incorporation. Nearby communities were also incorporating—both Stafford and Missouri City allowed gambling and saloons—so Sugar Land residents (with the blessing of Imperial and Sugar Land Industries) hurried to build a quorum of residents and file the necessary papers.

Sugar Land was “born” as a master planned community—thanks to the visions of Kempner and Eldridge. The company provided everything its workers needed from housing to schools, shopping and doctors. Residents had a strong sense of pride and security. Homes were rented only to employees, the size based on the number of family members. It was not until after WWII that Imperial began to sell off company-owned homes and land and Imperial employees were first in line to buy them.

The first City Hall? A former shoe store on Kempner Street Imperial rented to the City for \$10 a month—the company also loaned chairs and tables to furnish City Hall.

(The Star will publish a historical article in each issue during this year—Sugar Land’s 50th!)

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