

# Longview's Railroad, Cotton and Oil Industries

What do railroads, cotton and oil have in common? Well, maybe not a whole lot, unless you're referring to the city of Longview, Texas where these three industries are deeply rooted. The city's earliest roots come from the railroad industry. In the 1870s, railroads were gaining popularity in the U.S., and the land which is now Longview was bought for the expansion of the Southern Pacific rail line. The town quickly began to develop and prosper.

Longview's next set of roots is found in cotton. As the railroad industry was drawing people in from near and far to settle in the town, cotton became the central crop and principle foundation of the local economy. Cotton occupied about one-half of the cultivated acreage of the county. However, in the late 1920s, Longview experienced economic instability, with most of the blame attributed to cotton. Growing cotton in the same field every year depletes the nutrients, and on top of soil exhaustion problems, beetles called boll weevils attacked the cotton buds and flowers. At about the same time, the Great Depression struck, which put this city in very hard times.

Fortunately, and with impeccable timing, the third root of the city blossomed; oil was discovered in the area! The discovery of the East Texas oil field was incredible because of its immense size. It stretched 45 miles long and 3 to 12 miles wide. Covering 140,000 acres, the find proved to be the largest known oil field in the world. Thanks to the "black gold", the Great Depression was soon forgotten in the city. Within a decade, the oil boom had caused the local economy to grow and thrive more than anyone could have predicted, with the population nearly tripling.

Oil allowed Longview to play a significant role in the early years of World War II. The industry built the "Big Inch" pipeline because German U-boats had been sinking U.S. oil tankers on their journey to the East Coast. The pipeline began in Longview and ran 1,400 miles to the East Coast. The "Big Inch" was in actually two-feet in diameter and delivered 300,000 barrels of oil each day to East Coast refineries. Famed Texas oilman H.L. Hunt was quoted saying, "The Allies floated to victory on a sea of East Texas crude."

If you have a chance to visit Longview, a premier tourist attraction is the East Texas Oil Museum. The site gives visitors a historic look at the discovery of oil in the area and its impact on East Texas life. It is a full scale re-creation of the scenery, the stores, the equipment and the people who came to East Texas to strike it rich.

Longview's railroads, cotton and oil industries have served a very important role in the city's history and continue to do so today. Over the years, Longview's rich, deep roots have nourished one fine community.

## Source(s):

East Texas Oil Museum.(2009). Retrieved February 1, 2011 from <http://www.allacrosstexas.com/attractions/east-texas-oil-museum.htm>

Longview Convention and Visitors Bureau. (2010). Retrieved February 1, 2011 from <http://www.visitlongviewtexas.com/home>

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