



Staff photo by Steve Earley

Delta's first headquarters

A crowd gathered today at the First Methodist Church parking lot on Whaley Street for the unveiling of a historical marker at the site of the first corporate headquarters of Delta Drilling Co. At left is Keating V. Zeppa of Tyler, Delta's president and board chairman, and a

son of one of the founders. At center is master of ceremonies Bob Cargill, Longview oil operator and businessman. At right is Gregg County Precinct 1 Commissioner Barry Henderson, who accepted the marker for the county's Historical Commission. See story, page 3-A.)

Texas Historical Commission Staff (FR), 5/24/83

18" x 28" Official Texas Historical Marker with post
Gregg County (Order #7130)

Location: 107 East Whaley St., Longview

DELTA DRILLING COMPANY*

IN RESPONSE TO THE EAST TEXAS
OIL BOOM, DELTA DRILLING COMPANY
WAS FOUNDED IN 1931 BY BOB STACY,
SAM DORFMAN, AND JOSEPH ZEPPA.
ORIGINALLY HOUSED IN AN APARTMENT
AT THIS SITE, THE FIRM MOVED TO
TYLER IN 1937. DELTA DRILLED MANY
OF THE OIL WELLS THAT BROUGHT
WEALTH TO THIS PART OF THE STATE
AND SOON EXPANDED OVER MUCH OF
THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE AND INTO
PARTS OF AFRICA AND EUROPE. THE
ENTERPRISE NOW INCLUDES GAS
PROCESSING PLANTS, EXPLORATION AND
PRODUCTION DIVISIONS, AND HAS BECOME
A TECHNOLOGICAL LEADER IN LAND-
BASED DRILLING OPERATIONS.**

*3/4 inch lettering
**1/2 inch lettering
***1/4 inch lettering

APPROVED

[Handwritten signature]
7-5-83

DELTA DRILLING COMPANY

By Wes Williams

In 1930, C. M. (Dad) Joiner, a 70-year-old wildcatter triggered the beginning of the great oil boom in East Texas by finding oil near Henderson with the Daisy Bradford No. 3, an exploratory well. By the latter part of 1931, the East Texas area around Longview, Kilgore and Tyler was wild with oil fever.

Because the greatest oil boom in the history of the United States was under way, the depression in which the nation's economy was wallowing didn't affect East Texas the way it did other areas. For three Texans, it was a time of opportunity and eventual prosperity.

Bob Stacy, an employee for United Gas Company, wanted to enter the contract drilling business, and knew a Longview doctor who had a lease and wanted it drilled. All Stacy needed was money and equipment.

Stacy conferred with a couple of his friends to see if they would be interested in forming a partnership.

The first was Sam Dorfman, who owned a used equipment yard in Longview. His one-third partnership in the proposed new company would come from the equipment he put into the operation, two junked out drilling rigs, worth about \$20,000.

The other friend was Joseph Zeppa, an Italian immigrant who lost his job in Dallas when the depression forced his employer, McMillan Petroleum Company, to fold.

It was then the name Delta Drilling Company, a derivative of the Greek letter, "Delta", was created and chosen to represent the three interests--Stacy, Dorfman and Zeppa.

On November 17, 1931, Delta received its charter from the Texas secretary of state.

Delta Drilling Company first operated out of a small apartment located at 107 East Whaley Street in Longview. Zeppa and Stacy slept over their offices in the modest headquarters.

After the company had been formed, the three entrepreneurs began seeking drilling contracts in the East Texas oil field. Bob Stacy recalled an old friend of his and Joe Zeppa's who had an oil lease he wanted developed. After the contract was signed, Delta drilled its first well in the north end of the large East Texas oil field, an area known as "the Big Woods."

In 1937, Delta moved its corporate offices from the East Whaley Street location in Longview to Tyler, where it has remained.

Because cash was scarce, many of Delta's invoices were paid in oil shares or in land. As the fledgling company

worked to build business, president Joe Zeppa began acquiring a financial interest in some of the wells the company drilled.

The first land transaction made by Delta proved to be a pivotal point in the company's early years and was probably the one that started the company's thrust to the top. The acquisition of a tract known as the Hughey-Ross lease, which put the contract drilling firm into the oil production business for itself, was a milestone for Delta. After purchasing the surface rights and seven-eighths of the mineral rights of the lease located north of Kilgore, Delta put up a campsite and later constructed a maintenance yard which continues to serve the company today.

Delta played a significant role in the development of the East Texas oil boom in the '30s, drilling many of the wells which brought wealth to the region.

As the country's energy needs grew, Delta also expanded to meet the demanding challenges. In 1944, the company experimented with its first foreign venture--drilling in Nova Scotia. In 1945, Delta formed the Etexas Producers Gas Company and built a gas processing plant the following year near the Chapel Hill Community near Tyler. By the end of the '40s, Delta had opened an office in Denver, Colorado, thus forming the Rocky Mountain Division of the company. Also, Delta acquired the J. C. Hawkins Drilling Company which led to operations in West Texas and the Gulf Coast.

The fifties also meant a period of expansion for Delta. The company's Northeast Division was established in Bradford, Pennsylvania, and Delta became the first drilling company to successfully drill with air in the Appalachian Region. By the end of the decade, Delta had international operations in Spain, Venezuela, Libya, Australia and Argentina.

In 1959, Joseph Zeppa served as president of the American Association of Oilwell Drilling Contractors, forerunner of the International Association of Drilling Contractors (IADC).

In the mid-sixties, Delta opened its Ozona Gas Processing Plant in West Texas and began operations in Brazil. The Delta Digger, the first employee newsletter was published in 1967, and two years later, the company's Southeastern Division was formed with an office in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

By 1971, Delta began a training program for the safe and proper handling of hydrogen sulfide (H₂S) gas and Joseph Zeppa was named "Grand Old Man of Drilling" by IADC. In 1972, Delta hired the industry's first woman roughneck, Claudine Shapley.

On July 4, 1975, Joseph Zeppa died and his son, Keating Zeppa, was named President and Chairman of the Board five days later. He continues to serve in that role in 1983. Delta's Gulf Coast Division was moved to Lafayette, Louisiana in 1976 and the same year, Delta built Rig #76, the largest land-based drilling rig in the world at that time, capable of drilling to 30,000 feet.

Following in his father's footsteps, Keating Zeppa was named president of IADC in 1978. The South Texas Division opened with offices in Victoria, Texas. Delta opened its Training Center in Tyler, Texas and received certification from the United States Geological Survey for its Pressure Control School and the Pressure Control Refresher Course.

Realizing the importance of exploration and production operations, Delta opened offices in Midland, Houston and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and began building in these areas. The highlight for Delta in the 1970s was when Rig #78 served as an exhibit for the Smithsonian Institution's 12th Annual Festival of American Folklife in Washington, D. C.

In 1981, Delta celebrated its 50th Anniversary, and that same year, the company's corporate offices moved into the new People's Plaza Tower in downtown Tyler, Texas.

From its meager beginning as a small company with two junk drilling rigs, Delta has grown into one of the nation's leading land drilling corporations, operating 59 drilling rigs with operations in East Texas, Louisiana, West Texas, New Mexico, South Texas, the Gulf Coast states and the Appalachian region of the Northeast, as well as an overseas division in Italy. Recognized today as a technological leader in the contract drilling business, Delta has served the energy industry as an innovator and a leader in safe drilling practices.

While none of the original three Delta founders are living, their spirit and determination still permeate the corporation, which in late 1982 employed nearly 1,800 people and contributed an annual payroll of some \$58 million to the economy of Texas.

(Note: Much of the information for the preceeding was exerpted from "Never in Doubt", a corporate history of Delta Drilling Company, published in 1981 and written by James Presley.)



Gregg County Historical Commission

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December 12, 1996

DELTA DRILLING COMPANY HISTORICAL MARKER

DISCREPANCY:

While sacnning the Minutes of the Commissioners Court I found an entry dated December 13, 1982 in which the Court gave permission to erect this historical marker "in front of the parking lot at 107 E. Whaley Street."

The marker is located on the north side of the strret in the 200 block of East Whaley Street. Apparently, this is where it has always been because a photograph of the unveiling of this marker is in this file. It clearly shows the marker to be on the parking lot of the Methodist Church on the north side of the 200 block of E. Whaley street.

Mrs. Belding must have decided, for some reason, to place this marker, not where it was supposed to be, but in its present location. At any rate it is in a safe, highly visible place.

NWB