

SARATOGA

Pioneers

Saratoga history began on a heavily forested salt dome in the heart of the Traditional Big Thicket. W. E. Cotton and William H. Hart settled in the 1850s. The Richard Teel family came in 1863. The first schoolhouse was built in 1870, and in 1874, the Rev. D. M. Jordan organized *Friendship Baptist Church*. In 1879 P.S. Watts established a health resort with cabins, a bathhouse and a hotel. On July 11, 1885 the *Galveston Daily News* reported that Saratoga, with a population of 70, established a post office near the hotel."

Early Oil Exploration

In 1865 Cotton contracted Edward von Hartin of Galveston "for the purpose of obtaining petroleum". Von Hartin used a crude tripod derrick and "pounded" the first well to 100-feet but could go no deeper.

Ben Hooks, his brothers and Dr. A. W. Roark formed the *Saratoga Oil and Pipe Line Company*. November 16, 1901 the Hooks #1 came in, producing 25-100 barrels per day at 980 feet. Hooks No. 2 blew out on March 13, 1902. Almost overnight, Saratoga became a bustling boom town of 10,000 residents.

W. E. Bryce bought 80 acres from Cotton in 1902 and laid out the *Old Town* township. *Middle Town* was further west where the present Saratoga sits, and *Depot Town* was located near today's Precinct #3 Country Barn, the southern terminus of the branch line.



These 1910 folk of Saratoga appear more interested in the photographer than in their stump speaker on the right.

-Sun Oil Co.

Vines Hotel

Matt, the brother of Thomas Vines, built the Vines Hotel. The two-story structure had 14 rooms which housed 14 table shifts during boom times, and where family meals were served around a table seating thirty. "Aunt Matt" later married Robert Evans.



Lance Rosier, "Mr. Big Thicket"



Lance Rosier grew up in his Aunt Matt's Vines Hotel. A self-taught naturalist, he "exercised a kind of benign witchcraft over all who had even the briefest encounter with him" (Alice Cashen, 1970). He was the bridge between the East Texas Big Thicket Association from 1930 to 1957 and the present Big Thicket Association founded in 1964.

Producers Oil Company (1918)
Note Depot Town and Middle Town.