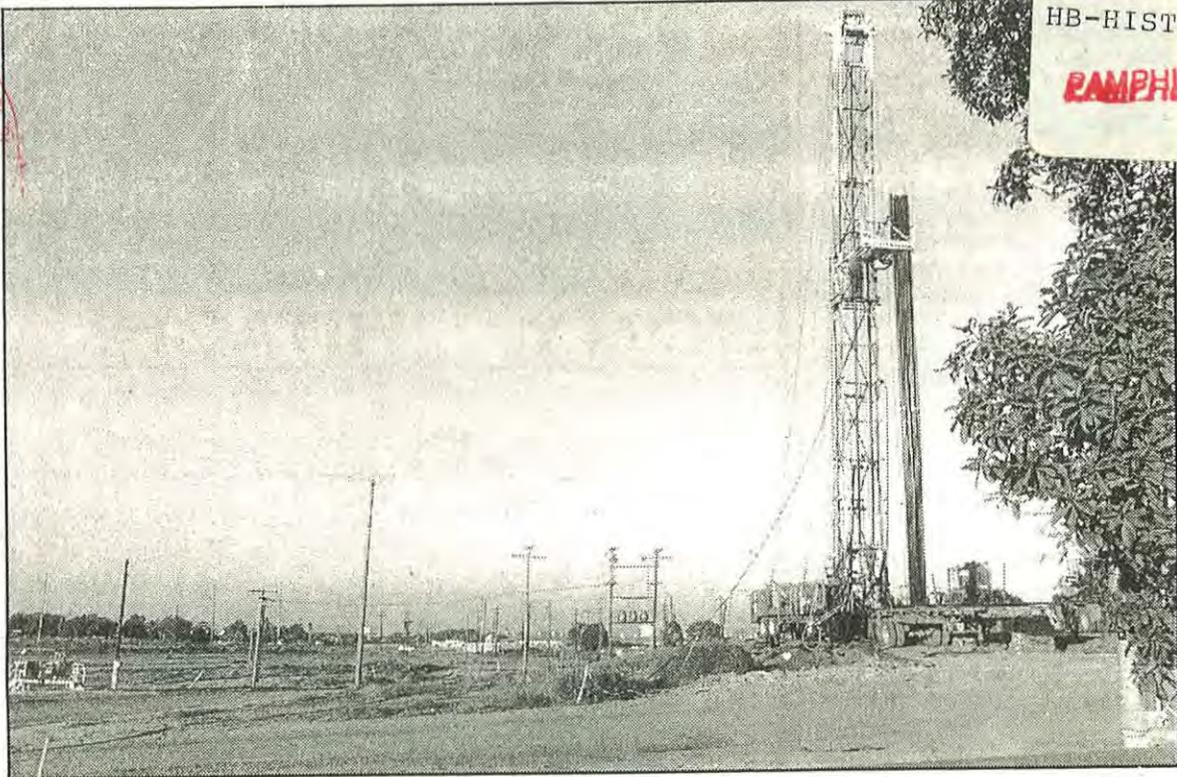


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Tim Rue/The Orange County Register

This is the oil well that triggered the oil boom in Huntington Beach in 1920.

City's first oil well to be preserved

By Ann Pepper
 The Orange County Register
O.C. Register 1-24-91

Until 1920, a tiny population made its living in Huntington Beach on little more than vegetables and sugar. Then Huntington A-1 blew in.

"Huntington A-1 was the well that proved there was oil beneath Huntington Beach," said Jerry Person, chairman of the city's Historic Resources Board. "It was the discovery well for the entire Los Angeles field."

Within a month after Standard Oil Company struck oil near Clay Avenue and Golden West Street on Reservoir Hill, the population had jumped to 5,000 from 1,500 and the city's first oil boom was under way.

In 1964, a total of 1,776 wells in Huntington Beach produced 16,095,564 barrels of oil. But as oil production peaked, the pressure of explosive population growth began pushing the wells off land that had become more valuable as sites for housing.

This past week, 71 years after



The Orange County Register

discovering oil under a field of barley, the oil company sealed the well. The old well had been dormant since 1968 and, as with any abandoned oil well, posed a safety problem because of the potential for a buildup of methane gas.

Pacific Coast Homes, a subsidiary of the Huntington Beach Co., wants to build homes in the area.

The Huntington Beach Co., which owns the property where the well once operated, has proposed building a neighborhood park of three acres to five

acres on the site, which would preserve the location of the first oil well as a historical landmark, said Bob Franklin, a planner with the city.

A boulder-mounted plaque already marks the spot, but city historians such as Barbara Milkovich would like to see some kind of interpretive display on the site.

Talks among the historians, the city and the developer will help determine how the old well will be commemorated.

"We're discussing now how this will be implemented," Franklin said. "We don't know exactly what will happen, but the minimum will be a plaque and an interpretive display."

He said the monument could be as elaborate as an interpretive center giving the history of the oil industry in Huntington Beach.

"We need to mark the end of the beginning," Milkovich said. "We need a place to be able to pause and remember the origin of our growth as a city as we embark on a new phase of development for this neighborhood."