



CHAPTER 20 Section 1 The Oil Industry in Texas

Pattillo Higgins and Anthony Lucas Oil Pioneers



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Pattillo Higgins (1863–1955) and Anthony Francis Lucas (1855–1921) formed a legendary partnership at the turn of the twentieth century. Together they struck oil at Spindletop.

Pattillo Higgins, the “Prophet of Spindletop,” grew up in Beaumont, Texas. He quit school after the fourth grade and went to work with his father, a gunsmith.

Anthony Lucas lived in Austria but, after visiting an uncle in Michigan, decided to emigrate to the United States. He worked across the country as a mechanical and mining engineer.

Trouble and Salvation At 17, while tormenting some African Americans, Higgins got in a gunfight with sheriff’s deputies. One deputy died, and Higgins was shot in the arm. The arm was amputated, and he was acquitted of murder, claiming that he shot in self-defense.

Despite the fact that he avoided jail, Higgins’s life changed. While working as a logger in 1885, he attended a religious revival meeting. He joined the Baptist church, began teaching Sunday school, and became a real estate broker.

Lucas in America Right around this time, Lucas was becoming an American citizen. A mining engineer by trade, he began to search for salt and gold mines in the South and West. While working on salt mines in Louisiana, he became the leading expert on salt-dome oil reserves in the Gulf Coast.

Bricks and Oil Higgins was not satisfied with his real estate business, so he opened a brick manufacturing company in Beaumont. Because he was impressed with brick factories that burned oil and gas, Higgins planned an industrial city on the salt-dome formation near Beaumont called Spindletop Hill. He believed that there was oil under the hill.

With the financial help of a friend, Higgins bought half of Spindletop Hill. The two formed a partnership with the man who owned the other half of the hill, who also believed it contained oil. In 1892 they began drilling. After several failed attempts, Higgins placed ads in newspapers and magazines looking for an engineer. Lucas answered the ad.



Higgins



Lucas

In 1899, after more failures, Lucas found new financial backers in Pittsburgh. They agreed to finance the project as long as Higgins had no money invested in the venture.

Gusher On January 10, 1901, Lucas struck oil. The gusher spewed 150 feet in the air and changed the economy of Texas forever. Higgins, who had started the entire project, stood to gain nothing from the discovery. He sued Lucas and his company, settled out of court, and went on to form his own oil company near Spindletop. This company turned out to be even more productive than his original one.

Lucas moved to Mexico in 1902 and worked on oil wells in Russia and Romania, and around the United States. Anthony Lucas died at his home in Washington, D.C., in 1921.

Maverick Higgins spent the next 50 years moving from one promising oil field to another. Like his first project, most of these followed a pattern: He would open a field, move on, and leave others to reap the majority of the profits.

Pattillo Higgins died in 1955 in San Antonio.

Review Questions

1. How did Higgins lose his arm?
2. What did Lucas work as before striking oil at Spindletop?

Critical Thinking

3. **Analyzing** Was Higgins justified in suing Lucas? Explain.
4. **Understanding Cause and Effect** What business venture led Higgins to drill for oil at Spindletop Hill?