

# Orange County Oil...



[www.ocarchives.com](http://www.ocarchives.com)

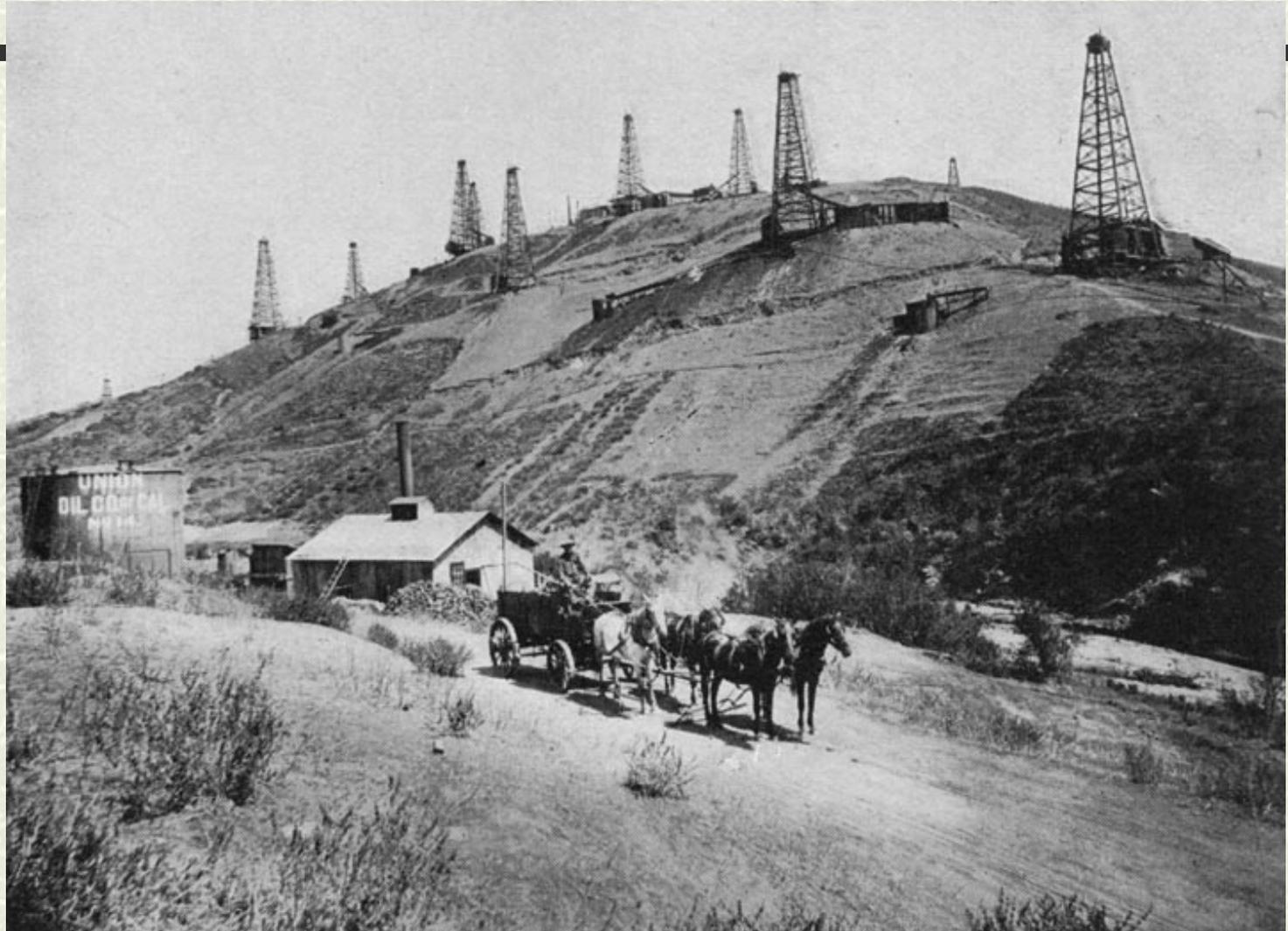


The Orange County Archives

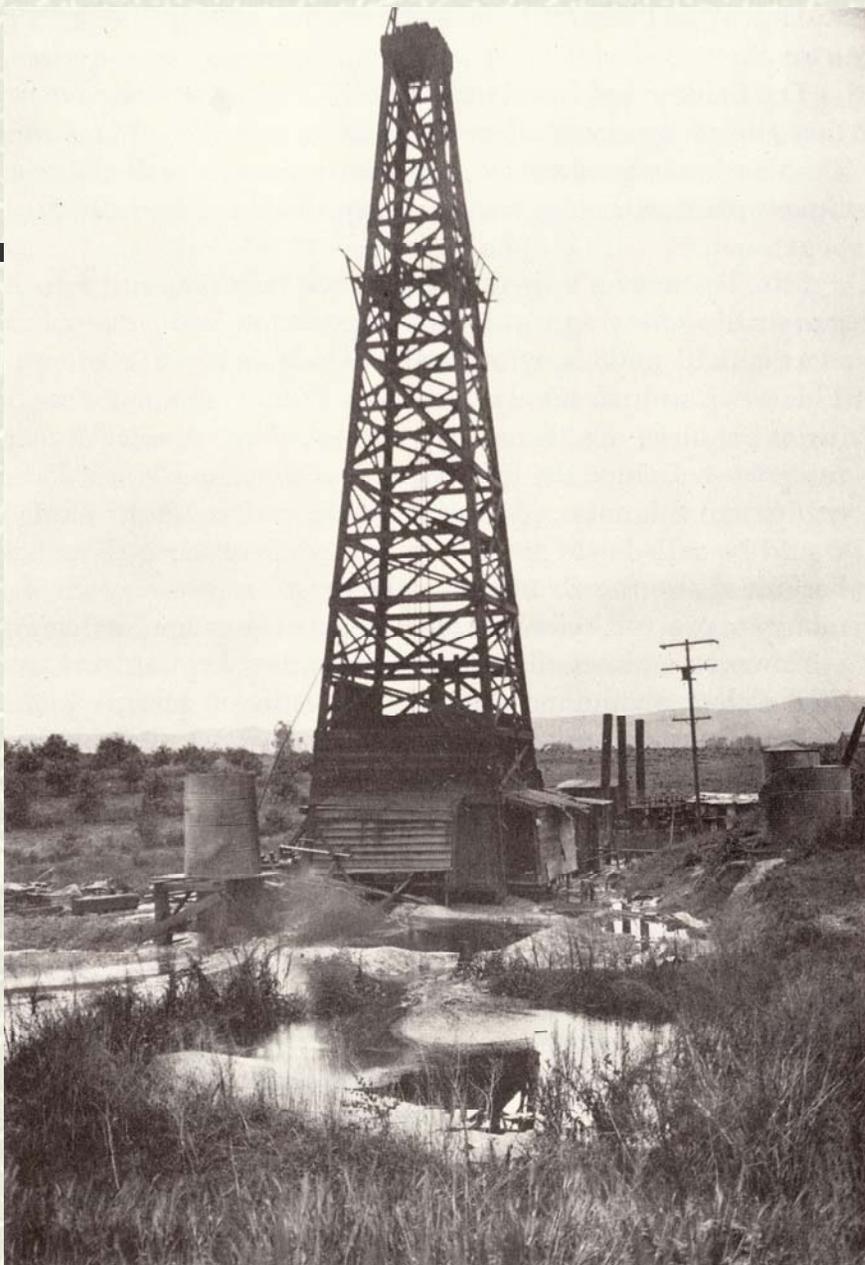
**Presented by Phil Brigandi  
to the Orange County Board of Supervisors  
March 15, 2005  
The Orange County Archives**

---

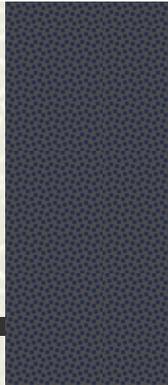
- # March 11, 1919 – that’s when Orange County’s Oil Boom really began.
  - # Oh, there was plenty oil drilling around here before then – people had been putting down wells since the 1860s – and by the 1880s they were even actually finding some oil here!
  - # Most of that early drilling was in the places you’d naturally think of if you were looking for oil – places like *Brea Canyon*, and *Carbon Canyon*. By the late 1890s, things were looking pretty good up there.
  - # Much of the activity in those days was centered around the little town of Olinda – up where Carbon Canyon Regional Park is today. Then around 1910, the new town of Brea became the headquarters of the local oil industry.
  - # But it was March 11, 1919 – that’s when the Union Oil Company’s Chapman Well #1 came in. And it was a real gusher!
-



- # The well was in the middle of C.C. Chapman's lemon orchard, a little ways northeast of Placentia. Nobody really expected they would find oil there. In fact they hadn't even made any plans for what to do with the oil if they found it – they had to scrape out some big pits really fast to hold it all. The well ran about 6,000 barrels a day.
- # (You've already heard of Mr. Chapman by the way – he's the one Chapman Avenue in Fullerton is named after – and Chapman University in Orange. But he's *not* the Mr. Chapman that Chapman Avenue in Orange is named after. I'll explain it to you some other time.)
- # Anyway, the Chapman well opened up a whole new area for oil exploration – and everybody was looking for ways to get rich quick.
- # Things got even more hectic a year later when Standard Oil Well #1 came in at Huntington Beach.

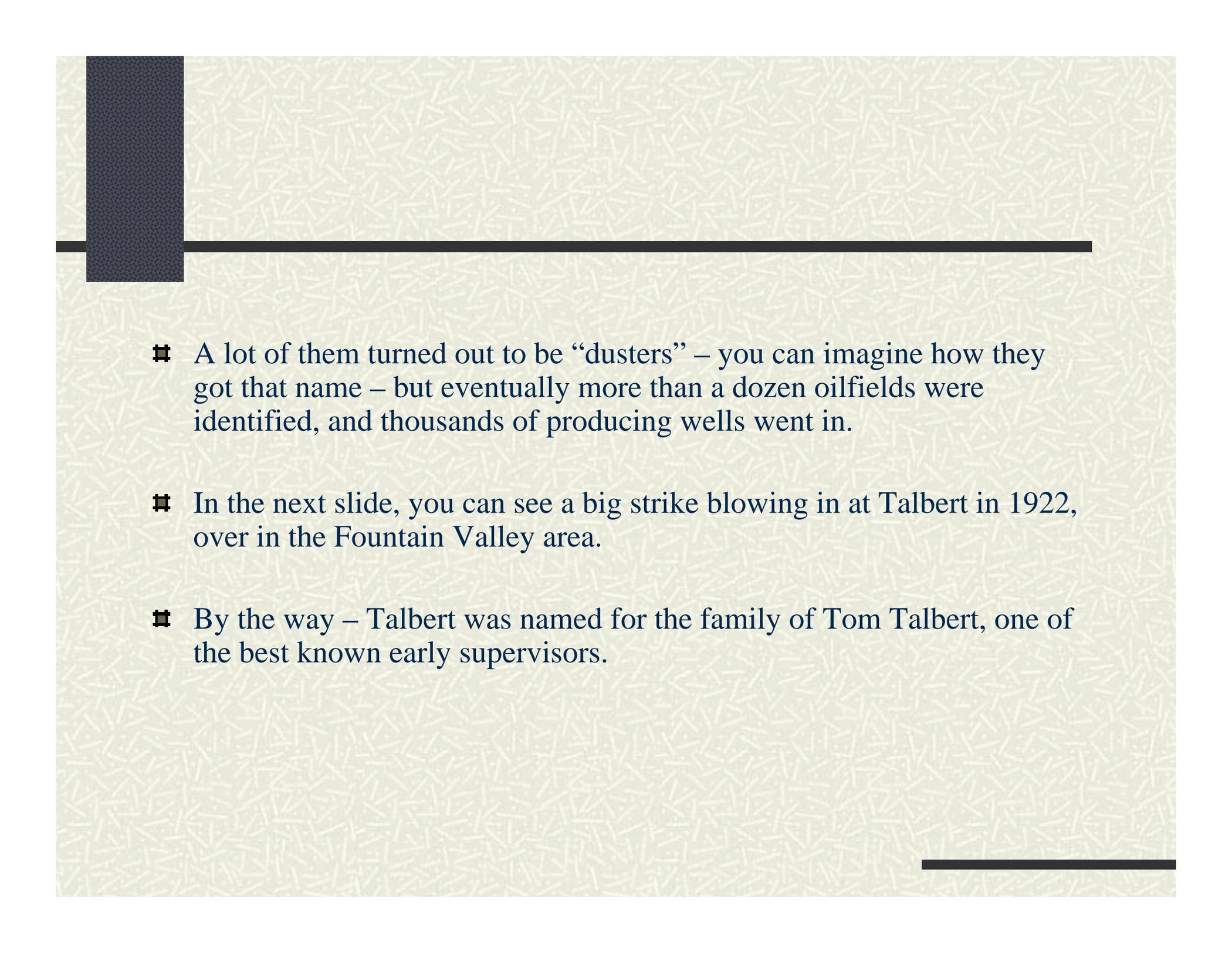


Chapman Well # 1

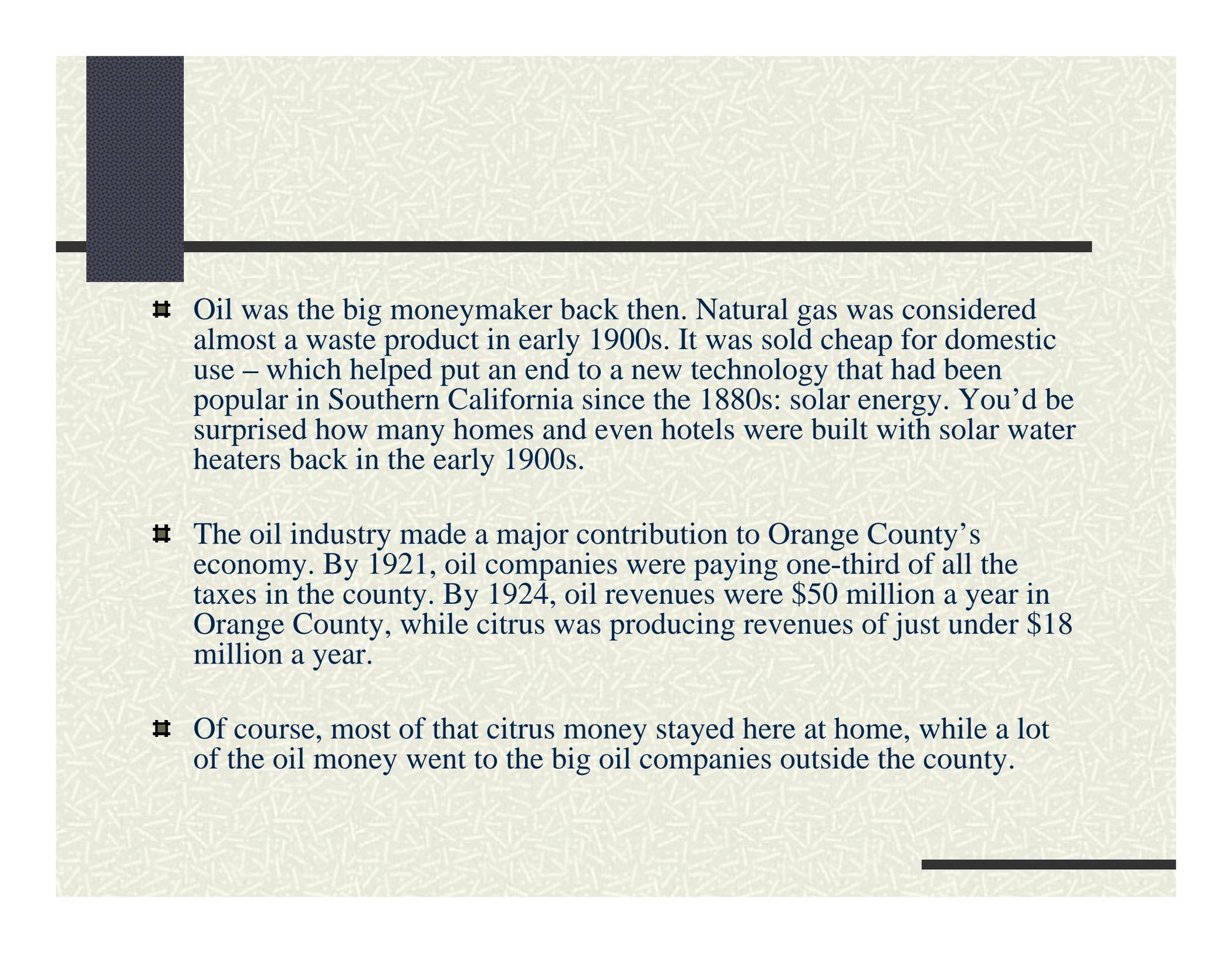
- 
- 
- # Just like that, everybody's focus shifted from the hills and canyons on the north down to the coast. And Huntington Beach – which had been a pretty quiet little beach town until then – just exploded.
  
  - # In the 1920s they went looking for oil *everywhere* in Orange County. Thousands of acres of farmland and even city lots were leased or optioned for oil exploration, and everybody was buying and selling mineral rights.
  
  - # Wildcat wells were drilled all over – in Orange, up in the Santa Ana Mountains, out in Fountain Valley, down in El Toro. Everywhere.
-



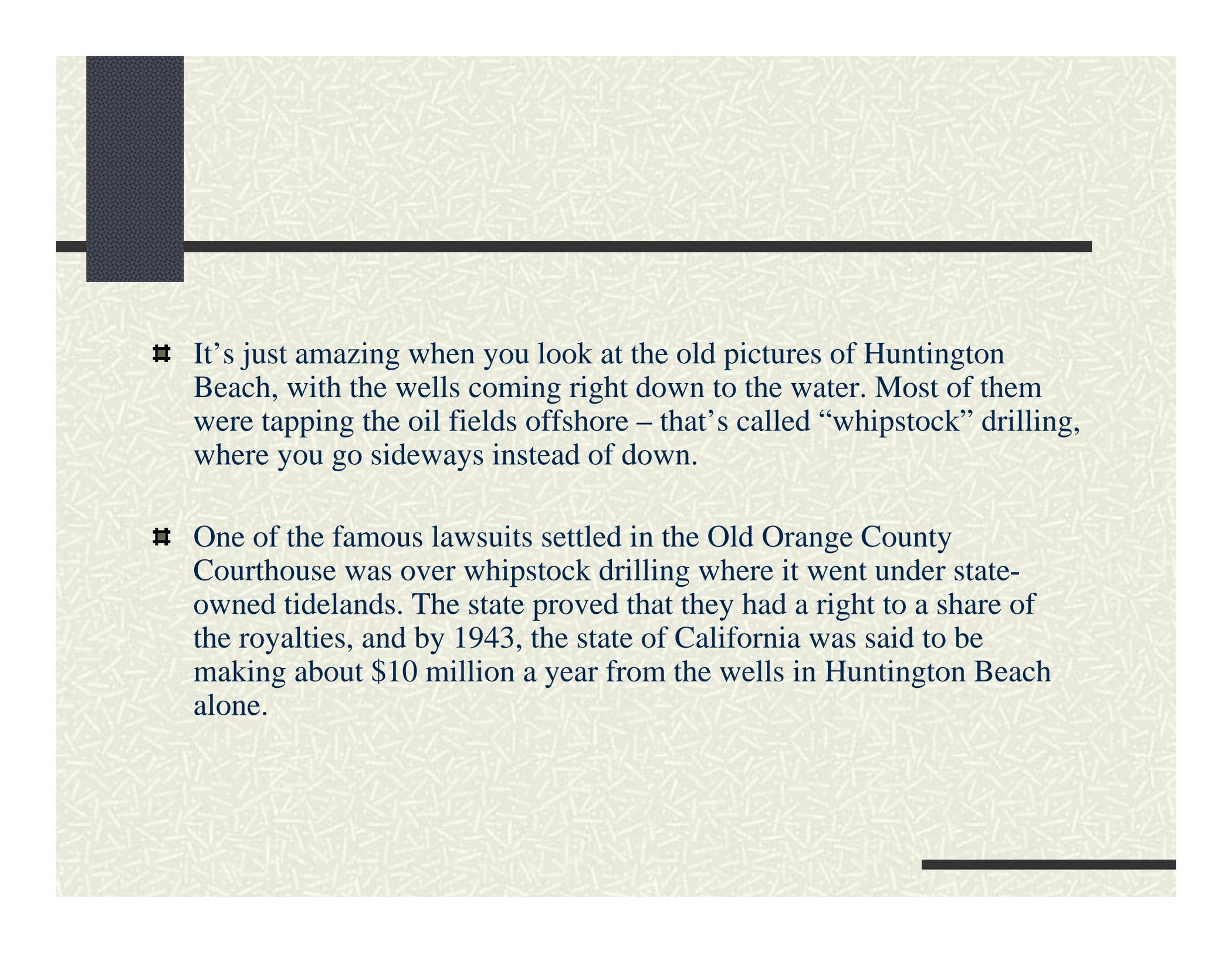
Huntington Beach, Cal.

- 
- # A lot of them turned out to be “dusters” – you can imagine how they got that name – but eventually more than a dozen oilfields were identified, and thousands of producing wells went in.
  - # In the next slide, you can see a big strike blowing in at Talbert in 1922, over in the Fountain Valley area.
  - # By the way – Talbert was named for the family of Tom Talbert, one of the best known early supervisors.



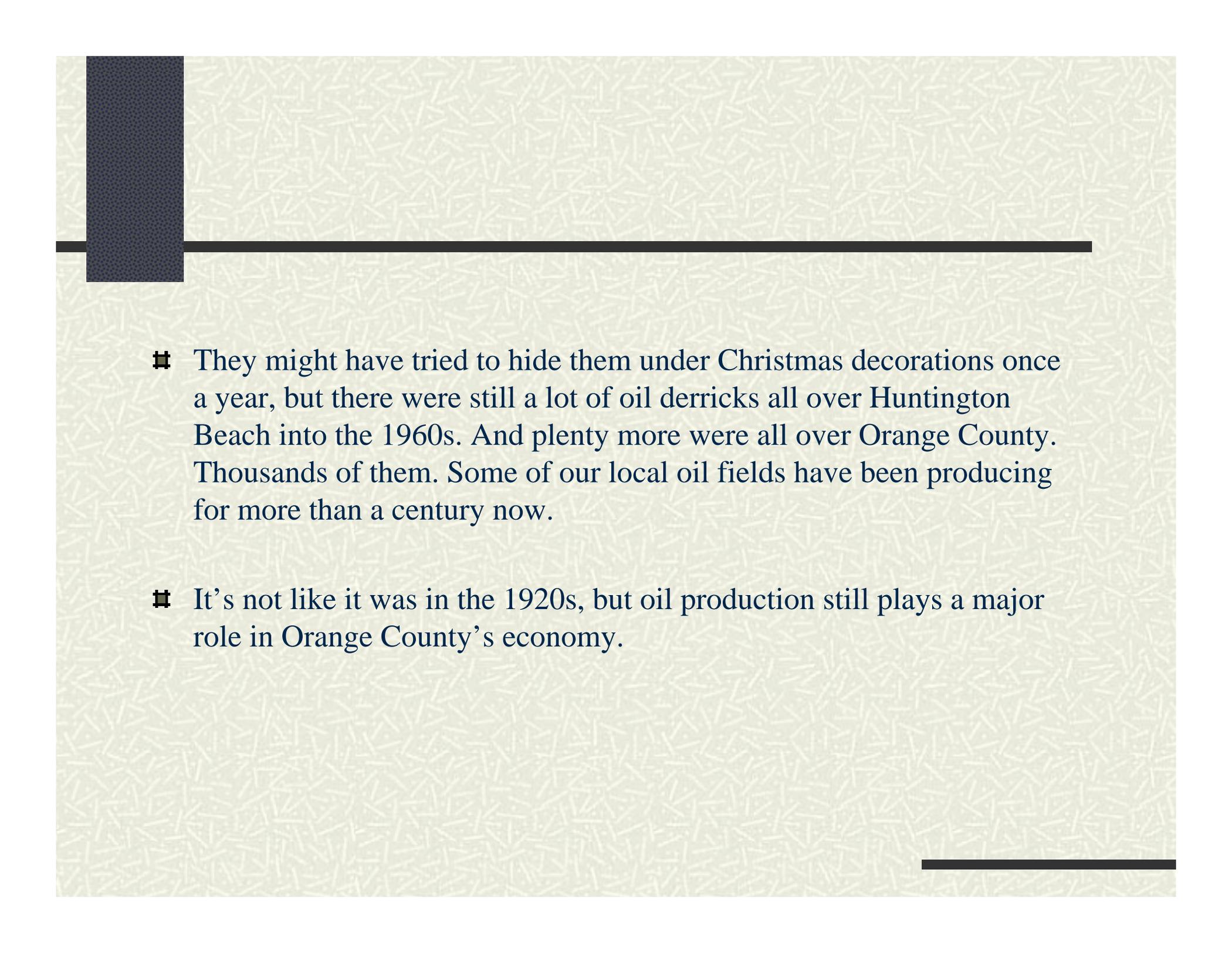
- 
- # Oil was the big moneymaker back then. Natural gas was considered almost a waste product in early 1900s. It was sold cheap for domestic use – which helped put an end to a new technology that had been popular in Southern California since the 1880s: solar energy. You'd be surprised how many homes and even hotels were built with solar water heaters back in the early 1900s.
  - # The oil industry made a major contribution to Orange County's economy. By 1921, oil companies were paying one-third of all the taxes in the county. By 1924, oil revenues were \$50 million a year in Orange County, while citrus was producing revenues of just under \$18 million a year.
  - # Of course, most of that citrus money stayed here at home, while a lot of the oil money went to the big oil companies outside the county.



- 
- 
- # It's just amazing when you look at the old pictures of Huntington Beach, with the wells coming right down to the water. Most of them were tapping the oil fields offshore – that's called “whipstock” drilling, where you go sideways instead of down.
  - # One of the famous lawsuits settled in the Old Orange County Courthouse was over whipstock drilling where it went under state-owned tidelands. The state proved that they had a right to a share of the royalties, and by 1943, the state of California was said to be making about \$10 million a year from the wells in Huntington Beach alone.
-



*Huntington Beach, Calif.*

- 
- # They might have tried to hide them under Christmas decorations once a year, but there were still a lot of oil derricks all over Huntington Beach into the 1960s. And plenty more were all over Orange County. Thousands of them. Some of our local oil fields have been producing for more than a century now.
  - # It's not like it was in the 1920s, but oil production still plays a major role in Orange County's economy.





**The Orange County Archives**

[www.ocarchives.com](http://www.ocarchives.com)

**Orange County Clerk-Recorder Dept.  
Tom Daly, Clerk-Recorder**

