

Whitlock

A SHORT HISTORY OF WHITLOCK GASOLINE BUSINESS

My father, Perry Thomas Whitlock and his older brother James Noble Whitlock, both sons of James Thomas Whitlock and Melissa Adaline Ausbrook Whitlock, were working for The Sinclair Oil & Refining Co. in the very early 1930s. Around 1935 they went into business for themselves and formed Crystal Oil Company. This company operated small Bobtail trucks that went to the oil fields in East Texas and bought gasoline to be sold in the Dallas area to service stations and any other buyers. This fleet grew to around seventeen trucks, so there was a need for office space. They rented a room on the second floor of the Clovis Hotel in downtown Dallas. The rest of the second floor happened to be a brothel. This worked out to better for the brothel than the oil company because when all the ladies were too busy to answer the telephone some of the drivers would handle the phone for them. Also, the drivers would sometimes bring to Dallas some girls from the piney woods of East Texas whom were looking for some opportunity for employment. Remember, this was during the time of the Great Depression and any kind of employment would keep you from starving.

The Gasoline Trucking Business was successful, however it had a few hitched to overcome. Mainly, if the truck was not completely unloaded it had to wait for another sale before it could go back to the oil fields. The Whitlock brothers built a small service station on Pacific Ave very near downtown Dallas so that the trucks would have a place to finish their loads. This station had a gravel driveway and two hand operated pumps, and to their surprise, was a very successful venture. They built a very crude extension on to the back of the station and made that into an office, so I am sure that the wives were happy that they moved out of the bordello. They sold gasoline so fast at this location that it required hiring a man just to keep the pumps filled with gas. The pumps were the type that had a glass container at the top that held around eleven gallons and had visible markers numbered so the customer could tell how many gallons he was getting. This was the first job for M.T. Whitlock who had just left Buckners Orphans Home. His older brother Raymond Whitlock was already working for the company as a truck driver. They were the sons of Monroe Turner Whitlock who had died when they were very young. Their mother placed the two boys and two sisters into the home because during the Depression Years she could not care for them. However she took a job there so she could be near them and stayed until she passed away.

In the very late 1930s , they changed the name to Whitlock Brothers Oil Co. The older brother moved to East Texas to enter into a Oil Refining venture. During this time there was more oil there than they had markets for, so to stay in business you had to enter into some shady type deals so you could compete with the larger oil companies, such as Standard Oil, Sinclair, Mobil etc. Well, the deal was made with an independent oil producer. He was supposed to sell Whitlock Oil Refinery and for every two gallons we bought, he would give us one free gallon. The deal worked out for about a year, then he refused to give the free gallon, so the refinery went bust. During this period, my father stayed in Dallas and operated the Whitlock gasoline business and it was going very well. An interesting customer was the father of the famous outlaws Clyde (Bonnie & Clyde) and Buck Barrow. Their father had a station on Singleton Blvd in West Dallas. It was

what we call a shotgun type building, having a service station in front with living quarters in the rear. People would come there to buy gas just to see Clyde Barrows' daddy. My Dad told me that so many times that the sheriff was looking him, he would be right there at that station, right under their noses.

During 1938,39 and 40 the brothers opened up several very nice stations in very good locations and they became among the top independent distributors in the Dallas area.

They went through the World War Two years okay, however in 1948 the older brother wanted to bring his son and new son-in-law into the business and create a four way split in the profits. This was not agreeable to my father who had been running the business alone since the older brother had left for the refinery business, so the partnership was dissolved and two new companies were formed. P,T. Whitlock Gas and Oil and Whitlock Oil Company. Both companies used the same logo and pump globes and decals so it was difficult to tell which station belonged to which company.

In 1949, after leaving college, I joined my father in the gasoline business full time. Naturally, I had worked in the business off and on for years as I grew up.

Gasoline Price Wars went on at a vicious pace during the 50s, so in 1958 my father and I took on the Shamrock and started marketing their products. We had to pay more per gallon for their product, however we had the advantage of having credit cards, a state recognized brand, and most important, help during gasoline price wars.

My father passed away at age 57 in 1964 so I had the business alone from then on. The Shamrock Company had wanted to expand it's market share in the Dallas Area and had built a station in the area which was the first in a major expansion. These stations were leased to my company with a minimum monthly rent and a per gallon extra after a certain amount. They had a very low maximum amount they would invest in a location so most of the expansion was created in areas not very well developed at the time. Their max was \$75,000.00 per location and at that time a good service station location was selling for around \$65,000.00 just for the property.

I had 17 locations of my own, which included owned and Dealer owned. Shamrock built 30 locations which I leased. I had to take the locations, no matter how bad the location was. Their attitude was, either take them or give up the Brand. During this period the Vietnam war was in full heat. The unemployment rate was ½ of one percent, and I really had a hard time just to find bodies to place in these stations.

My company managed to survive then the Arab Embargo hit. Gasoline was in such short supply, the refineries refused to support me during the price wars because they could sell it on the open market at inflated prices. I was losing around \$30,000.00 per month (in today's dollars that would be \$300,000.00) so I had to do something. I told Shamrock to take their stations and I would take mine and we would call it a day. I was just about broke.

I had moved to Midlothian, Texas at that time and was living on my ranch just south of

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town. Midlothian is S-W and Dallas and S-E of Fort Worth. A forty five minute drive to Dallas. I built a bulk fuel terminal in Midlothian, rolled up my sleeves and got around 375 wholesale farm and business accounts. I moved my offices there. I also built the first non-attended service station in Texas. It consisted of nine key-lock pumps with about 40 keys to each pump. If your company had a key it could access the fuel 24 hours a day. I also added three pumps for cash or credit card sales and a free carwash. This location and my bobtail truck operation were so unique that National Petroleum News sent a reporter down and they did story on my operation.

I still had my stations in Dallas and my dealer accounts so things were going pretty well. Then, in 1977 I divorced my wife. I had to give up just about all my available cash to accomplish this, then I entered into a separate business venture, an excavating business. It grew too fast and to make a long story short, I was putting money into something that I knew nothing about and did not have enough control over,. That took the remaining available cash I had. Another gasoline shortage happened and I was about to go under so I sold out. I went to work for the company that bought me out to help with the transition and ended up working for them for five years.

While looking for someone to replace me I found a young man who was the best salesman I had ever met and he wanted to be in business for himself, so we formed another oil company, Competitive Fuels Inc. It was very successful. We developed a computer program that told us when our customer needed fuel before he was aware of it. This was a bobtail truck operation (a bobtail is a truck without a trailer). We developed a customer base of 1000 customers in five years and were the top bobtail operators in Texas.

I retired in 1990.