

NOT EVEN PAST



Pipelines along Uncle Tom's Cabin: Standard Oil in Louisiana

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This is part of an occasional series of articles highlighting the fascinating collection of historical documents in the Briscoe Center for American History at UT Austin.

by *Henry Wiencek*

The January 1919 edition of *The Lamp*, Standard Oil Company of New Jersey's nationally circulated trade publication, marvels at the firm's gleaming new refinery in Baton Rouge. After [being spun off from John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company](#), the newly independent company was eager to grow its business in the Bayou State. And the Baton Rouge plant had done just that, becoming an enormous industrial concern refining over 40,000 barrels of crude each day.

This issue of *The Lamp*, which Standard Oil-NJ sent to its employees, stockholders, and outside subscribers, tries to assuage [contemporary anxieties over big business](#) by celebrating the economic development and social uplift occurring in Louisiana. Thanks to company investment, a productive and modern industry is replacing fallow cotton fields and the primitive, old ways they represent. *The Lamp* even presents Baton Rouge's new refinery as an agent of Post-Reconstruction reconciliation, a harmonious project of regional collaboration between northern expertise and southern natural resources. Oil refining represents nothing less than societal transformation: a "New South" of productivity, sectional reconciliation and affluence, all brought to Louisianans by the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey.

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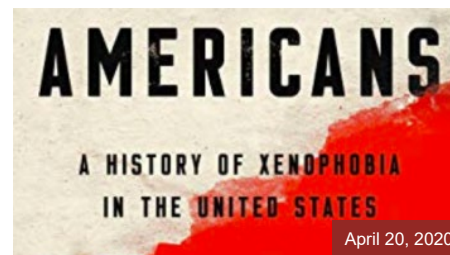


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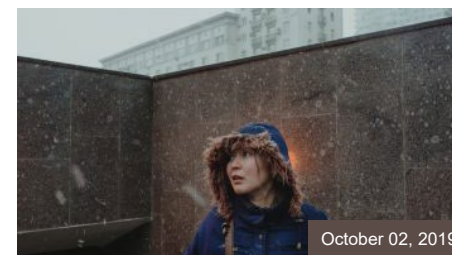
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Company photographs depict Louisiana as a landscape in transition—a space where farming is slowly giving way to modern industry. Under the title, “The Transformation of the ‘New South’ Under the Magic Wand of Industry,” two large horizontal photographs spread parallel across the page. The top image depicts a 1909 cotton plantation of overgrown weeds and ramshackle fencing set against a winding dirt road. The photograph directly below displays the same patch of land ten years later, where an enormous refinery dominates the horizon and bears no mark of any agricultural predecessor. This striking visual comparison offers a clear and proud juxtaposition: the old giving way to the new.

By working towards a future of economic modernity, Louisiana was also escaping a legacy of north-south antipathy. *The Lamp* depicts the refinery as a *national* project in which northern industry and southern land work in concert towards a productive future. “A Southern Business Home,” which discusses the company’s Baton Rouge headquarters, inscribes this language of regional partnership into the building’s very architecture. Elegant colonial windows look upon orderly refining processes and converging railway

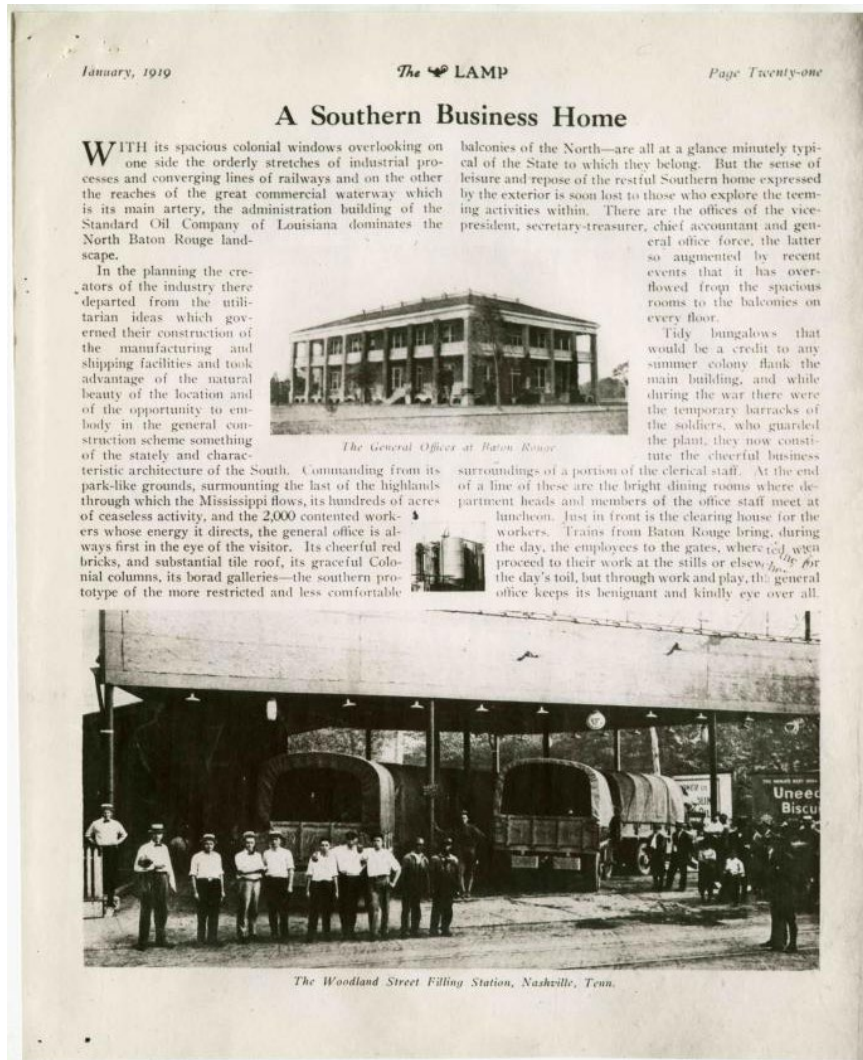
lines, creating a dynamic interplay between old world repose and modern productivity. Standard Oil-NJ's headquarters physically embodies peaceful collaboration: the industry and expertise of the north working alongside the abundant lands and bucolic lifestyle of the south. Even as pipelines and factories consume more and more Louisiana bayou, the form and *style* of Standard Oil-NJ's development promotes an image of peaceful coexistence with the southern landscape.

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Yet despite all the enthusiasm for the company's role in Louisiana, *The Lamp* also conveys a quiet anxiety as it ponders the bucolic, pre-modern past that industry is steadily replacing. Photographs and articles simultaneously celebrate industrial change and commemorate the people and lifestyles that are vanishing as refineries engulf plantations. In "Pipe Lines in the South," C.K. Clarke, manager of the company's Pipe Line and Producing Department, describes the intersection of industrial expansion and romantic traditions in Louisiana, whimsically imagining Standard Oil's pipelines stretching within sight of **Uncle Tom's cabin**. Although Clarke concedes that Louisiana's old ways are incompatible with the modern

world, he strikes a nostalgic tone as he considers the lamentable, if necessary, end to a romantic, pre-modern time.

For just a moment, *The Lamp's* narrative of progress and optimism pauses to consider the consequences of industrialization. The company publication creates a wistful historical record of the wild landscapes and wild characters of the "Old South" before they disappear—a kind of strange recompense for its own role in their destruction. Changes in land use represent progress, but also the end of an era. To be sure, this is a "history" told entirely on company terms, reinforcing the backwards and fundamentally un-modern character of old Louisiana. But it does suggest that Standard Oil-NJ officials were, at very least, conscious of their public—and *historical*—image. *The Lamp* accordingly presents company men not as mindless capitalists, but as thoughtful stewards of the past, rightly or not.

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Pipe Lines in the South

By C. K. Clarke

Director of the Standard Oil Company of Louisiana and Manager of the Pipe Line and Producing Departments


HISTORICAL associations are a part of the South, and the work of the pipe line department of this Company has been in sections where romantic traditions are abundant. Both Henry W. Longfellow and Harriet Beecher Stowe have thrown the glamour of their genius over these ancient lands. If Uncle Tom were still in the cabin from which Mrs. Stowe introduced him to the world, he could almost see our pipe line from its door, and nearby on the banks of the Cane River are the tumbled ruins of the plantation home from which Mrs. Stowe is said to have drawn the inspiration of her famous book.

It was in another section of our activities, the Atchafalaya River country, near Melville, to which Longfellow in his most famous poem brings Evangeline, and there his heroine lands from her bateau and begins her long journey overland into the wilds of the West in quest of her lover.


The storied past, however, it must be confessed, can find no great place in the thoughts of those whose part of the industry it is to construct and maintain pipe lines

streams occasion much trouble and require constant watchfulness to anticipate breaks and prevent the destruction of these crossings.

At the outset it was found that the nature of the soil throughout practically the entire length of the system was such that the deterioration of steel pipe laid in the ground was very rapid. Tests proved that five years' exposure to the chemical actions arising from soil ingredients would practically end the life of a line. Soils were analyzed and expert tests were made to determine if sufficient currents existed to occasion electrolysis from external sources. Various means that had been adopted heretofore for line protection were investigated and it was finally determined that the only adequate protection



Pipe line cemented ready to be covered by earth



Cementing Pipe Lines in the South to Protect Them from Chemical Action of the Soil

would be encasing the lines in cement covering. This occasioned a very large expenditure, and the Company has at present encased two eight-inch main lines of a total of 540 mileage, and probably within the next year or two will encase the twelve-inch line.

The operative office of the pipe line system is located in the Commercial National Bank Building in Shreveport, Louisiana, where Superintendent James Anderson, Jr., and Assistant Superintendent E. Ray McGrew are directly in charge of all operations and construction and from which point operations are controlled. Chief Dispatcher J. W. Davis is in charge of all movements of oil, and W. S. Pillow is Chief Accountant.

The Company started the construction of the system in May, 1909, and completed an eight-inch line from Ida, Louisiana (where connection was had with the Prairie Oil & Gas Company), to the Baton Rouge Refinery the total length of line being 270 miles. Originally four main line pumping plants were installed, viz.:

Amidst a national climate of anti-monopolism and trust busting, *The Lamp* unapologetically promotes the

benefits of big business in Louisiana. Articles and photographs celebrate rapid changes to the state's landscape as symbols of progress and betterment. Pipelines and refineries engulfing cotton fields augur a "New South" of industry, profitability and sectional reconciliation.

But for all the confidence its narrative exudes, *The Lamp* cannot help but consider what is being lost in the march to modernity. Company officials remain deeply fascinated by the vanishing "Old South" and the nostalgia it conjures. At certain moments, *The Lamp* reads like a romantic history book, chronicling the quaint ways of the old bayou before it becomes just another factory. While the employees of Standard Oil-NJ are undoubtedly proud of their work in Louisiana, they remain highly attuned to contemporary fears over industrialization and its potentially corrosive impact on American society. *The Lamp* is ultimately both confident and defensive: optimistic about the future Standard Oil-NJ is creating and nostalgic for the past it is destroying.

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