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Review of *Oil Booms: Social Changes in Five Texas Towns* By Roger M. Olien and Diana Davids Olien & *Oil in West Texas and New Mexico: A Pictorial History of the Permian Basin* By Walter Rundell, Jr.

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Oil Booms: Social Changes in Five Texas Towns.

By Roger M. Olien and Diana Davids Olien.
Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982.
Maps, tables, illustrations, photographs,
notes, bibliographical note, index. 220 pp.
\$16.95.

*Oil in West Texas and New Mexico: A Pictorial
History of the Permian Basin.* By Walter
Rundell, Jr. College Station: Texas A&M
University Press, 1982. Maps, photographs,
illustrations, bibliography, index. xii + 183
pp. \$24.50.

The Permian Basin covers about sixty-eight
thousand square miles of west-central Texas

and the adjacent southeastern corner of New Mexico. About two hundred million years ago the region lay beneath a salt sea that laid down a limestone floor upon which were subsequently deposited complex geologic formations that entrapped equally complex ecosystems. This combination of geological and biological evolution produced petroleum deposits that made possible a veritable marvel of the contemporary industrial world.

Before 1920, persons who considered themselves of sound mind found little attraction in the environment of the Permian Basin, for the region seems to present the worst possible combination of the least desirable Great Plains environmental features. The Permian Basin acquired a rare but different kind of beauty in 1920 when the modestly productive discovery well—the T. and P. Abrams No. 1 located in Mitchell County, Texas—brought to the surface the first evidence of the region's vast oil deposits.

The two books under review here, altogether different in content and approach, give us sound industrial history plus some level-headed analysis of the impact of that industry on five key communities.

The text of *Oil in West Texas and New Mexico*, obviously intended as background and perspective for visual material, is a fine historical survey of the Permian Basin oil industry. For his visual material, Walter Rundell scoured apparently every repository that *might* have had pertinent materials. His chief source is the Permian Basin Petroleum Museum, Library, and Hall of Fame at Midland, Texas. Fortunately, persons with photographic skills recorded Permian Basin oil history as it unfolded and, whether motivated by a native sense of historical importance or by a shrewd instinct for publicity, they left a fascinating record of an evolving industry within the framework of both time and space. Rundell's judicious selections, reinforced by their carefully written cut lines and his text, are pictorial history at its best.

Oil Booms selects five Texas towns—Midland, Odessa, McCamey, Wink, and Snyder—to study the effect of oil booms on municipalities.

The authors define the scope of their inquiry through eight specific topics that comprehend the spectrum of municipal social experiences.

Many elements common to boom towns are found in the five Permian Basin communities studied here, but the book also shows that they exhibited traits unique to *oil* booms. Moreover, a more dignified burial than was deserved is given to lurid yarns of oil-town blood and gore invented by "lorists" and perpetuated by others whose common sense should have taken over when their scholarship failed.

Roger M. Olien and Diana Davids Olien rely on a thoroughly respectable scope and depth of sources, but most conspicuously upon interviews of persons who participated in the mundane events of oil field life. From such, the authors have woven sound historical fabric.

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