

An Oil Fire!

Over the years, usually in March, I do a column about the Fountain Disaster. Today I am only mentioning it because of an incident that happened in the Santa Fe yards in Colorado Springs a year or so afterwards. In those days there were very few "tank cars" and oil traveled in box cars which carried it in big tubs or even barrels. This was a box car with two big metal tubs. At 9 a.m. a worker in the yards noticed a glow coming from under the car. The cause of the fire was never found, but by the time the worker got to the car it was blazing.

The oil in the tanks was not burning, but the car was! He ran to the yard office to get some help. A switch crew working in the yards came to the rescue. They moved any nearby cars that were threatened away from the ever-growing blaze. The car itself was burning so wildly that attempts to move it were abandoned.

Soon even the oil in the tanks was burning. Big thick clouds of smoke rolled into the air.

Colorado Springs did not have a fire department as such, but several private "hose" companies. Soon a fire company was on the scene. A few attempts to squirt water on the fire provided only entertainment! A crowd had gathered on the east side of Shooks Run. That area was mainly weeds, but there was a new hospital under construction a block or two away. The burning car sent a huge smoke cloud skyward. The oil in the big tanks inside the car was burning with an intense fire. When one of the tanks exploded, a fireball spread toward the crowd and there was a scramble to get clear. It was said the women and children on the hill fainted and screamed.

The fire brought hundreds to the scene. The street cars were running at capacity. The blaze burned well into the evening hours, and a large crowd stayed on until the sky was dark. Most of the exciting moments were finished before midnight. Additional explosions happened, each time a gasp from the crowd was heard, and scrambles, but it was luck that among the spectators there were no serious injuries. All trains to the north and south had waited for the fire to go out; passengers got a great view as they rolled past in the morning! It was a car like this in the Fountain disaster, because it was next to a car with explosives!



Pages of the Past

(1958 - Present)



Sixty Years Ago (1962) GLORIOUS GALAXY OF GLAMOROUS GALS

This group of ladies was ready to perform and entertain the community for a public event to meet with the candidates of Fountain who were running for election to the seats of Mayor and Town Councilmen April 3, 1962. (Fountain Valley News file photo)

Fifty Years Ago (1972) NEW FOUNTAIN POSTMASTER

Earl H. Schmidt was sworn into office March of 1972. At the Fountain post office for the ceremony were (left to right) Richard I. Lyles, Dale Wetzel, Earl H. Schmidt, Clair Miller, Irene Nugent, and Wilbur Snyder. (Fountain Valley News file photo)



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Forty Years Ago (1982) 1800S CAVALRY BROUGHT TO LIFE

Bill Brown, in period attire of the 1800s, stood by his tent, a replica that was used by the 6th U.S. Cavalry in the 1800s. (Photo by Jane Forsberg)

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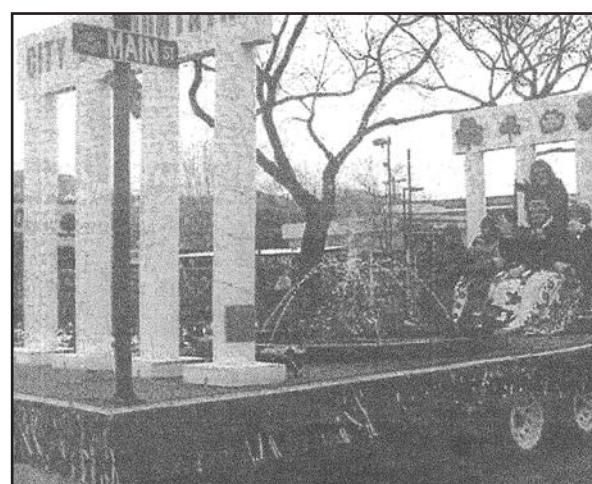
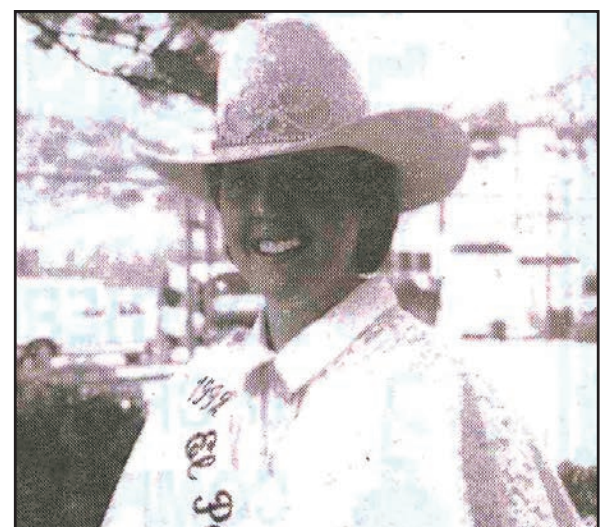
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Thirty Years Ago (1992) TERA ELLEFSON THE FAIR QUEEN

Tera Ellefson was 18 when she was selected as the 1992 El Paso County Fair Queen at the annual competition held at Penrose Equestrian Center. The judges for the horsemanship sequence included: Wayne Ball, Pat Green and Carl Wiese. (Fountain Valley News file photo)



Twenty Years Ago (2002) LUCK OF THE IRISH

The city of Fountain entered this float in the 2002 St. Patrick's Day Parade held in Colorado Springs. (Fountain Valley News file photo)