

# **RAILROAD COMMISSION OF TEXAS**

## **NEWS RELEASE - December 9, 2008**

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MICHAEL L. WILLIAMS  
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### **RAILROAD COMMISSION AWARDED NATIONAL ARCHIVES GRANT TO PRESERVE RECORDS OF HISTORIAL SIGNIFICANCE FROM THE EAST TEXAS OIL BOOM**

AUSTIN— Texas Railroad Commission records that document the emergence of the Texas oil and gas industry in the East Texas oil field region will be preserved and published as national historical records as part of a \$146,861 grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission.

The Railroad Commission—which is the state's top energy regulator—will match the federal grant. The award places the state agency records in the company of other national historical documents also awarded grants this year by the NHPRC, such as the papers of Ben Franklin, George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.

The federal grant and state matching funds from the Commission will digitize records of national historical significance from regulatory hearings involving fields in the East Texas region beginning in 1932 through 1972—the peak year of oil production in Texas. The East Texas oil field region was the site of the most prolific oil boom in the state's history. Included in this region is the East Texas Oil Field, which encompasses five counties, and was instrumental in helping the United States and its Allies win World War II by providing a large, and reliable domestic source of fuel for the war effort. By 1931, the field produced more than one million barrels of oil per day, which far exceeded demand and led the Commission to establish prorated production levels.

Commission Chairman Michael L. Williams said, "I appreciate the National Historical Publications and Records Commission assistance in preserving a rich part of our state and nation's history. This grant enables four decades of Commission hearing files for the East Texas field to be archived as documents of nationally historical significance. These files document the emergence of the oil and gas industry in Texas-the nation's largest oil and gas producer. In

addition to illustrating the foundation of the nation's energy industry, these records also provide a unique case study for the evolving field of environmental history and regulatory law."

Commissioner Victor G. Carrillo said, "These files capture the legal and technical history of how the oil and gas industry has been regulated in Texas. Along with archiving the records as national historical documents, the grant will also allow us to provide the public with free access to these papers. Additionally, we will be publicizing the availability of these records on our website as well as notifying academics and historians about the files, which are an unexplored historical resource."

Commissioner Elizabeth Ames Jones added, "It has been said that the Allies floated to victory in World War II on a sea of American oil. East Texas oil gave us the strategic advantage over Hitler and his brutal regime. In keeping with the recent 67th anniversary of Pearl Harbor, it is appropriate that the importance of these historical documents, which include seismic, geological data, well logs, plats, maps and more, is recognized, not only for their potential commercial use in maximizing future recovery with advanced technology, but also as a reminder of Texas' contribution to our national security. Production of our country's energy resources is as critical to a strong America today as it was then."

From Jan. 1, 2009 to Dec. 31, 2010, the Railroad Commission will contract with Neubus—an Austin-based company that is currently contracting with the Commission for other digitization services—to digitize the East Texas region hearing files. Hearings are conducted at the Commission when operators request exceptions to rules or contest enforcement actions. Neubus is one of the leading providers of digital imaging and document management solutions to state, local and municipal government agencies, school districts, universities and public corporations.

The grant also will enable the Commission to provide the historical files as searchable on search engines such as Google and Yahoo and on Texas Heritage Online. Additionally, the Commission will develop an enhanced electronic finding aid that will allow users to locate hearings files by county, railroad commission district, field name or hearing date. The aid also will include a descriptive narrative detailing the hearings files' purpose.

The files to be archived under the grant represent about three percent of the Commission's hearings file collection. Unlike other Commission files that have been digitized, these files are in paper format only and have no backup for preservation in case of disaster. These files have not yet been archived as they are materials that are used daily to support the Commission's ongoing regulatory role. Once digitized, the Commission will transfer the documents to the Texas State Archives for proper storage.