

100 Years at the Wood River Refinery

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE WOOD RIVER REFINERY HISTORY MUSEUM

GROUND BREAKING

April 21, 1917 - the birth of the Wood River Refinery.

During the preceding months, Mr. Engelbregt and his assistant Mr. High spent endless hours reviewing blueprints and developing a construction plan for the Wood River Refinery. Mr. Engelbregt had gained valuable experience as the construction superintendent for the much smaller Cushing, OK facilities and had much to bring to the table in this endeavor.

By April 1917, construction materials had been ordered with the expectation that they would arrive in a few months.

Engineers were also starting to arrive to assist Mr. Engelbregt. They stayed at hotels in Alton and possibly St. Louis. It's believed that Mr. Engelbregt and Mr. High stayed in Alton since the city was closer to the construction work zone.

The facilities for the expected work crews were moved to the top of the work list since the land where the facilities were to be built had been acquired through an 18-month lease. The land was leased from the families of Mr. Smith, Mr. Wille, and Mr. Penning. The block of land was located about 140 feet north of the

railroad tracks that border the north side of the refinery property. The east boundary was the Alton-Edwardsville Road, although the road followed a slightly different path in 1917 than it does today.

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FUN FACT
 One of the original land leasers, Mr. Wille, is believed to be the grandfather of current employee Mary Brand!

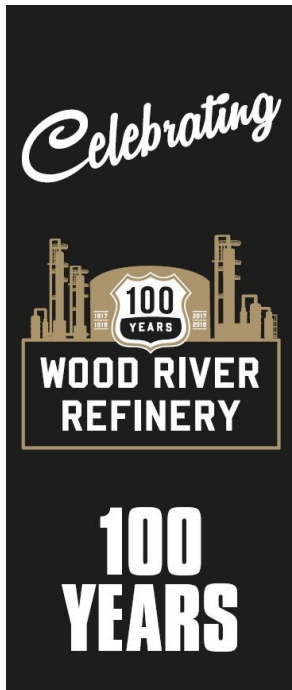
On April 21, 1917, a contract was signed with J.J. Wuellner & Sons Construction Company for the construction of the following buildings:

- Two Bunk Houses, each 24 feet wide and 80 feet long (estimated to accommodate approximately 96 workers)
- Lavatory and Latrine - 10 feet wide and 80 feet long
- Kitchen, Dining Room, and Storage - 95 feet wide overall and 144 feet long

(continued on Page 2)



Current aerial shot with graphics showing approximately where the temporary facilities were built



GROUND BREAKING (CONT.)

The completion date was to be May 20, 1917. The cost of the construction was contracted at \$5,877.11. A copy of the contract is on display at the Museum.

With construction beginning on the workers' facilities, Engelbregt and High turned their attention to the property that was going to support the refinery. The purchased 172 acres – only a portion of which would be used for the initial construction – had to be surveyed to properly position the founda-

tions for the vessels, roads, shops, and other support structures. The plot of land including the foundations for the executive homes also had to be laid out.

A clerk at one of the Alton hotels heard of the need for assistance at the location of the new refinery. On April 30, 1917, Edward M. Reed applied for and was given a job assisting the engineers in surveying the original plot of about 60 acres that would

support the first construction projects. Mr. Reed expressed great pleasure in assisting with the survey as this "was his favorite trade."

Mr. Reed is considered the first actual employee of the refinery, eventually becoming a General Labor Foreman. He was also the first to complete 20 years of service in 1937.

RUMOR MILLS

In the early months of 1917, rumors of a new refinery began to crop up over drinks at the local tavern, on street corners, and during family dinners. Real estate developers were attempting to weed out

fact from fiction. Developer's newspaper ads were beginning to paint a portrait of thrilling times for people with a pioneering spirit.

As told in *The Wonder at Wood River: 75 Years of Progress*, in

early spring of 1917, the word of the new refinery touched off a fist-swinging fight between the editor of the Alton Evening Telegraph and a local developer who apparently wanted to keep the news under his hat.

The editor's son retold the story for the first time 50 years after the event for the refinery's 50th Anniversary celebration:

"The Telegraph had published stories in the spring of 1917 ... hinting at establishment of another refinery [in Wood River] to join Standard's. The Daily Times, our competitor, had poured cold water on the whole deal and quoted a widely known real estate developer. The Telegraph came back the next day affirming its faith in its source and predicting that soon after the city election, we'd be able to demonstrate its truth.

Next day, Dad met the quoted developer on West Third. There were greetings. Then Dad got a sudden faceful of fist ... [becoming] one of the earlier reportorial public punching bags."

TRANSPORTATION TRANSFORMATION

In 1859, Edwin “Colonel” Drake, a one-time railroad conductor, drilled the first commercial oil well in Titusville, PA. Other wells followed soon after.

These first discoveries were transported by Teamsters using converted whiskey barrels and horses which soon proved to be quite cost prohibitive. At the time, it was noted that moving one barrel of oil by horse five miles cost more than moving one barrel by rail from Pennsylvania to New York City.

The first wooden pipeline, which was about nine miles in length, was built in 1862. This experiment proved to be very economical resulting in the first “real” crude oil trunk line called Tidewater, constructed in 1879.

By the 1880s, the commercial possibilities of oil were just beginning to be realized. Within a year, John D. Rockefeller had acquired half of the Tidewater line and began busily



Teamsters hauling oil

laying pipelines throughout the northern section of the country to supply his oil refineries.

In two decades, oil production grew to the point where more than 80% of the world’s petro-

leum consumption was supplied by Pennsylvania oil fields.

By 1905, the oil business was shifting from kerosene lamp oil to gasoline. Edison’s electric light bulb was replacing oil

lamps in many offices, reducing the kerosene market, while Henry Ford was changing the landscape with mass-produced automobiles. Also, crude oil pipelines carrying oil from the

prolific oil fields in Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas to the refineries in the East began to cross the country.

In 1917, the Roxana Petroleum Corporation did not have a pipeline available from Oklahoma to the Midwest to furnish crude oil for the Wood River Refinery. Therefore, part of the refinery construction project would incorporate a new line from Cushing, OK to the Wood River Refinery.

The pipeline was to be built by the Yarhola Pipeline Company. This line would later be referred to as Pipeline Number 1. The line would have capacity of about 11,000 bbl/d and cross two rivers.

Materials were ordered and construction of the pipeline was envisioned to start very soon.

Trivia Question

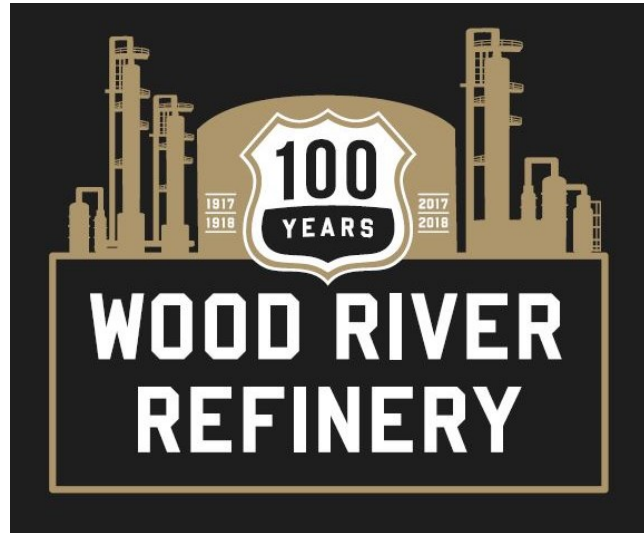
What does RMS stand for when used with a British ship? (i.e. RMS Lusitania)

Send your answer to WRR.Community.Relations@p66.com. Next month, we’ll reveal the answer and select one lucky winner to receive a 100th Anniversary trinket!

Comments or Suggestions?

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A R O U N D T H E W O R L D

World War I - The War to End All Wars

- Officially began on June 28, 1914, originating in Europe.
- More than 65 million military personnel were mobilized.
- Over nine million military personnel and nearly 10 million civilians died as a result of WWI.
- The United States remained behind the scenes in the war effort until a German U-Boat sunk the British Ocean Liner RMS Lusitania on May 7, 1915, killing over 120 Americans.
- President Woodrow Wilson and the U.S. Congress declared war on Germany on April 2, 1917, after Germany violated their agreements and resumed unrestricted warfare.
- 2.8 million American men were drafted to aid in the war effort; almost 4.8 million Americans served.
- By Summer 1918, the United States was sending 10,000 fresh soldiers to the war zone per day.
- It was the WWI United States Military Recruitment Drive that produced the iconic Uncle Sam poster.
- WWI had a direct impact on the construction schedule of Roxana Petroleum's Wood River Refinery, mainly complicating material delivery.
- The Cushing Refinery's production was completely diverted to the war effort.
- At the start of the war, horses were planned to be the primary mode of transportation. Britain entered the war with just 800 motor vehicles. By the end of the war, over 150,000 vehicles were at the disposal of the U.S. and Britain.
- WWI ended on November 11, 1918.