

Dexter, Cowley County, Kansas had Gas Problems!

The discovery of helium in Cowley County led to an experiment that remains one for the books. Dexter became a town in 1876 when the Dexter Town Association filed the town plat map with the register of deeds. Dexter is situated 3.9 miles from Winfield, Kansas and it is located on Grouse Creek. When it was incorporated, there were three or four stores, a blacksmith shop, hotel, and other businesses. Captain James McDermott, who came to the area from New Orleans, settled in the Dexter area in 1870, and he is considered the founder of the town. Dexter was named for a famous trotter that just happened to be traveling through the area with its owner Mr. Robert Bonner of New York when the founding fathers were looking for a name. The horse ran 50 races, 48 of which he won. According to Melvin Bruntzel, Dexter is probably the only town in Kansas named for a horse. Dexter was immortalized by Currier & Ives in this painting seen here.



Currier and Ives painting, "Dexter."
Found at, <http://currierandives.net/Dexter/>



Dexter Helium Plant, Cowley County, Kansas. Found at, <http://www.eccchistory.org/HeliumOID.jpg>

In 1903, helium was discovered in the Dexter area. The town's residents did not realize what it was at first and by 1907; they had set up the necessary piping to use the gas in their homes. Of course, we know that helium does not burn, which they soon

found out! Fortunately, the residents soon recovered, and by the end of 1908, twenty-two helium wells had been dug in the area. The citizens

did not build the helium plant until after World War I. A Kentucky corporation constructed it in 1923. At this time, they used the plant not only for the production of helium but also for a research center for nitrogen uses. In 1927, the government took over the helium plant, and in later years, helium became essential for the operation of nuclear reactors and ballistic missiles. The plant pictured here is now closed.

Dexter residents continued to be ingenious, in 1956, Pat Henry, Sr. started Henry's Candy Kitchen. This candy factory still exists today and puts out about 20,000 pounds of candy every year. So even though the population of this town has diminished over the years, the innovative thinkers of this community keep it going!

Sources: Dexter Scrap Book, n.a. 1976. Found on, <http://www.eccchistory.org/DexterScrapBook.htm>

Melvin Bruntzel, Quick Reference to Kansas: Lost-Found-Missing, Towns and Places with Selected Trivia and Truths, 2010.