

EARLY SALT EXPLORATION AND PRODUCTION EFFORTS AT ANSE LA BUTTE SALT DOME: 1890s TO 1920s

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Abstract

The Anse La Butte salt dome, which is located 2 miles (3.2 kilometers [km]) west-southwest of Breaux Bridge, was one of several Louisiana salt domes that were investigated by the notable explorationist Anthony Lucas during the late nineteenth century. Lucas, who drilled his well at Anse La Butte in 1899, and the wildcatters who followed him focused on oil rather than salt. In 1901, after Lucas' discovery of oil at the Spindletop Dome in Beaumont, Texas, drilling at Anse La Butte by multiple prospectors intensified. Although oil was the focus, the domal salt was first penetrated in 1901, and two separate companies eventually solution-mined salt at Anse La Butte during the 1920s.

Rock salt was first penetrated in the Martin-Simpson (LeDanois Company) Well No. 1. In 1901, Dr. C. F. Z. Caracristi generated his report on the hydrocarbon potential and salt production options at Anse La Butte based on the findings from the Lucas and Martin-Simpson No. 1 wells. Caracristi laid out early concepts for solution mining and for sinking a salt shaft. Sixteen years later, Andre Martin and Harry A. Benners formed the Benners Salt Company to sink a shaft after confirming salt at depths ranging between 160 feet (ft) (47.8 meters [m]) and 3,600 ft (1,097.3 m). The company was organized in 1917 but folded in 1918 without breaking ground.

Between 1920 and 1930, two competing companies—the Lafayette Salt Company and the Star Salt Corporation—solution-mined at Anse La Butte to produce table salt. The Lafayette Salt Company was incorporated on September 1, 1917, with Benners as its president. The Lafayette Salt Company drilled its test well in 1918 and, during the next 3 years, drilled three production wells within or near the northern boundary of the Flat Lake swamp. The first two production wells caved in quickly and produced little brine. The third production well, which was drilled to 1,800 ft (548.6 m) in 1921, produced brine until 1927 when the company abandoned operations at its plant on the Begnaud tract after producing enough brine to make 30,174 short tons of table salt. Evaporative methods of salt production were simply too costly to compete with the mines at Avery Island, Weeks Island, and Jefferson Island.

The rival Star Salt Corporation drilled its well and began making table salt in 1923. Its single brine well was located in close proximity to the Lafayette Salt Company wells on the Begnaud tract. Salt in their well was penetrated from 240 ft (73.2 m) to 1,600 ft (487.7 m) (total depth).

The Star Salt Corporation plant was constructed off of the dome on a parcel adjacent to a lumber mill along Vermilion Bayou on Guidry Street in Lafayette, Louisiana. The brine was pumped from the well through a cypress pipeline to the plant where it was evaporated in vacuum pans. Steam from the adjacent lumber mill was used to speed the evaporation process.

The Star Salt Corporation plant operated until 1930. During its 8-year life, 89,456 short tons of salt were produced. In total, 119,630 short tons of salt were produced by the two companies at Anse La Butte by 1930. Salt production then ceased until Gordy Salt opened its plant in 1941, which marked the beginning of the modern era of salt production at Anse La Butte.