

## How We Worked in Southwest Kansas, 2012 Tour

In 1926 a wildcatter named Walter L. Sidwell discovered the Hugoton Field, one of the nation's largest gas fields, while seeking oil in Stevens County. The discovery was announced on May 15, 1927 and a boom began. That year, the Hugoton Hermes newspaper reported \$100,000.00 in improvements in town, including fifteen new homes and the brick Hermes building.

Natural gas reached Hugoton on August 3, 1927. W. F. Hubbard, a local newspaper owner, burned the first gas in town at his home. Argus Gas Company was awarded a twenty-six year franchise in October 1927 to extend gas lines from the field to Hugoton, Dodge City, and sixteen other southwest Kansas towns for retail sales.

The industry brought prosperity to the area. By 1928, the valuation for property in Stevens County surpassed one million dollars for the first time. Pipeline and compressor companies were brought in. Power plants began using natural gas for fuel at a cheaper rate than diesel. Cities hired contractors to build sewer systems and disposal plants for the growing communities.

Lines soon piped natural gas to Chicago and Cleveland, and the area railroad arranged for shipment of the gas for local distribution.

At a celebration on December 21, 1929, Hugoton was officially named the Gas Capital of the Southwest by Governor Clyde M. Reed. He dedicated the area by lighting a gas flame at the top of a forty-foot pipe at the high school football field.

By 1930, oil and gas leases resulted in a total of 3 ½ million dollars in revenue for southwest Kansas counties and forged an industry that has helped keep the people of southwest Kansas working.