

“Gilday Gas Station ~~ A Piece of Americana”

Gilday Station, formerly a White Eagle station at the corner of Fifth and Holliday Streets, in Osage City, Kansas, was built in the 1920's. In its heyday, the station serviced lots of traffic on what was then Highway 31 (Holliday Street). Later, the building and grounds became the property of Ed Gilday, then mayor of Osage City Gilday, who earlier had been a Skelly Oil and White Rose dealer, founded the Gilday Truck Line in 1943. After that time, he used the station as a place to park and fuel company vehicles. When the company moved its headquarters to Kansas City, the building, for all intents and purposes, ended its working life.

For years, the service station sat abandoned until an interest group in Osage City chose to save & renovate the old service station. The continued restoration allows the station to serve as a combination petroleum museum and community visitor's center. Since the restoration, many cars have parked in the driveway of the old gas station for a nostalgic photograph, bringing back memories.

One of the identifying icons of the 20th century is surely the gas pump. There are a million of them in the country, and most of us use one 50-100 times a year without giving much thought to their origin or evolution. However, gas pumps and gas station memorabilia are treasured by thousands of collectors.

The gas pump didn't just happen, but was invented by several people and developed to its present state over a period of 100 years. For

40 years before the automobile, kerosene was the main petroleum product and was sold in hardware stores. When the automobile came into use, owners had to buy gasoline in cans from the hardware store, as well.

In Fort Wayne, Indiana, back in the 1880's, a young man had an idea for a new kind of pump which utilized a plunger below the surface of the liquid in a barrel and which would be used to push the liquid up through a pipe. By precisely sizing the pipe and plunger, he was able to deliver an exact measure of liquid with each stroke of the pump handle. The young man, Sylvanus Bowser, had the idea of using the pump in a barrel of kerosene and began selling the pumps to store owners. By 1889, his efforts had grown into a factory operation.

Since gasoline was a lot more combustible than kerosene and presented many fire and safety hazards when dispensed inside a store, another merchant, John Tokheim, began to develop a pump that was better suited for gasoline. He built a pump in 1898 which lifted the fuel from an underground tank and dispensed it through a hose into a tank or car. Thus the gas pump was born. The pump at Tokheim's store became so popular that he started the Tokheim Manufacturing Company in 1901 to manufacture the device.

Later, Bowser adapted his measuring pump to outside operation and mounted the equipment in a wooden shed – the precursor of the “filling station.”

In the earliest days of the auto age, gas pumps were located at curb side on the street, just like fire hydrants. With more and more cars on the road the congestion at the gas pumps became so great that cities passed laws regulating the sale of gasoline. This problem

was solved in 1913, when Gulf Oil opened the first “Filling Station” in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. Within two years, gas stations were popping up across the country.

The biggest problem with the pumps at this time was that the customer had to place a lot of trust in the honesty of the merchant and the pump manufacturer because there was no real way of verifying the quantity of fuel that was being dispensed.

This problem was solved in 1916 by 19-year old Jack Fleckenstein. Jack developed a glass measuring device that could be fitted to most existing pumps and later built a pump and dispensing system. In 1918, the Wayne Pump Company, started in 1891 by some of Sylvanus Bowers employees, entered, the business with its own self-contained visible pump system.

The glass cylinders of the visible pumps were common sights for the next twenty years, but they were marked for extinction when the first mechanical measure pumps were introduced in 1925. These first pumps used a clock dial to indicate the gallons pumped. Gas station attendants used a printed chart to figure the cost of the fuel sold. In 1934, Wayne Pump introduced the first “computer pump with odometer style rotation numbers that indicated both the quantity of gas pumped and its cost.

From about 1912 to the mid 1950’s, gas pumps were crowned by illuminated globes which identified the brand of fuel dispensed. These globes varied from the simplest circular white glass with black lettering to the most colorful and unique of shapes. Over time more than 4,000 different globes were manufactured. Today, both gas pumps and globes are actively collected and traded.