

HISTORICAL SHAMROCK

The town of Shamrock, Texas, a municipality of fewer than 1,800 people, is possibly most well-known for its famous Conoco Tower Station & U-Drop Inn Cafe — so much so that its art deco design was replicated for Ramone's House of Body Art in the hugely successful Pixar film, *Cars*. Undeniably, along the Mother Road, it's a great stop. However, there's another spot, a small service station less

than a mile south of it, that also salutes the town's wonderful history. Located on the corner of 2nd and Madden Street, the Magnolia Gas Station's gravity-fed gas pumps no longer fill car tanks, but the site actually predates the U-Drop Inn by seven years and carries the visual splendor of classic Americana in the heydays of Route 66.

The station was developed by the Magnolia Petroleum Company, a company later acquired by Standard Oil of New York. Or, as it's known today: Mobil. The company had much business in Wheeler County for several years. Because of that, they decided to build a station that was more widely accessible from the community's business district. Construction began in March 1929 by the Blake brothers, who were local contractors in the area. Per the specifications of Magnolia's gas stations, the station's size became 24 by 60 feet, with speckled buff brick and equipped with the latest technology in modern conveniences at the time, such as hydraulic greasing facilities and a wash rack. The station had its grand opening on May 18, 1929, with each customer receiving a "worthwhile" gift — history does not remember what they received — and a service card worth one dollar.

The town's chamber of commerce rerouted the Postal Highway — designated State Highway No. 75 in 1923, then eventually Route 66 — to go through the city's business district in 1924. Before this, most tourists would bypass Shamrock because the route was two blocks north of town. "Even though Route 66 was three years old when the Magnolia Station was built, it was still in its infancy, as was its development commercially in Shamrock," said town historian Mickey Mitchell. "While there was some



development on Route 66, I suspect that many tourists during that time would still take the old postal highway route through the commercial portion of town." Because of this effort by the chamber of commerce, businesses started moving nearer to the Magnolia Station, including Reynolds Hotel, which would eventually become the Pioneer West Museum. The station was just one block away from Main

Street, so it became an ideal location for business.

"The paving, especially of U.S. Highway 66, impacted our community tremendously and continues even today. Many businesses began to locate on Route 66. There were numerous service stations that would spring up on 66. Eventually, at its peak, there were over 25 service stations in our little town, with most of those located on Route 66," said Mitchell. It's unknown when the location stopped operating as a service station or when it ceased being company-owned, but it's estimated to be between 1945 and 1959. By 1959, the building was purchased to be used as an office for E.C. Hunter, the owner of Hunter's Department Store, who also did business in real estate. The details of the station's history become fuzzy after that point, but the final owners were Bill and Carolyn Potter, who bought the shop in 1992 and operated it as a tanning business called Carolyn's European Tan.

In May 2002, the property became part of the Pioneer West Museum. A restoration followed, led by Donald Vearner, a respected member of the community. To assist with the restoration, Vearner hired local muralist, Tye Thompson, who wanted to be involved after he saw the progress on the building. His contributions included the lettering and the Magnolia red Pegasus. The restoration was completed around 2005.

While no longer in business as a functioning filling station, the Magnolia Gas Station has become a popular attraction among tourists passing through Shamrock. The location acts as a time capsule to show passersbys how much the world has changed in the nearly 100 years since it was built. And yet, in this quiet little corner of Texas, much has also, thankfully, remained the same.