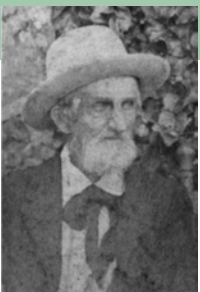


# History of Smith Oaks

The Smith Oaks Sanctuary began with purchase by Houston Audubon of an undivided interest in the 11.3-acre George and Charlotte Smith homestead property in 1987, followed by a major donation of 110.9 acres by Amoco Petroleum in 1994, then purchases by Houston Audubon of the 20.6-acre "Tank Farm" Tract in 1995 and 34.53 acre Wiggins Tract in 2003. The Smith Oaks Sanctuary is now made up of 177.33 acres of oak mottes, ponds, wetlands, and coastal prairie, and a rookery in the middle of Claybottom Pond that provides roosting and nesting for thousands of waterbirds.

Smith Oaks was named for George and Charlotte Smith, who acquired the property in 1879 from Charlotte's parents, John and Mary Ann Brown. George Smith owned cattle and raised peaches, pears, oranges, strawberries, cabbage, sugar cane, cotton and tobacco. He also operated a sugar mill and cotton gin on the property. However, he was most famous for his mineral water enterprise. Smith dug several water wells on his property and reported that he has 21 "distinct" waters. The deepest well, dug in 1882, was 32 feet deep. Smith received a trademark and bottled and sold his "High Island Mineral Springs Water" along the Texas Gulf Coast. He claimed that the water would "...cure Brights disease, liver and kidney troubles, Catarrh-the cause of consumption, Asthma, Hay Fever, restore hair on bald heads, and remove Dandruff on the Scalp and all the Pimples and Blotches from the face." The ruins of one of these wells can still be seen in the woods across from the map shelter at the Winnie Street Entrance.

The Smiths' home, dismantled in 1985, stood for over 100 years. The site of their house is easily identified, as the garden paths, flower beds and ornamental plants they planted in their yard are still obvious.



## Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary Visitor Information



[houstonaudubon.org](http://houstonaudubon.org)



# Smith Oaks Information

Smith Oaks Bird Sanctuary is 177 acres of fields, woods, wetlands and ponds. Sixty-four acres were purchased by Houston Audubon with the help of Houston Audubon members, friends, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The remaining 110 acres were donated to Houston Audubon by Amoco Production Company.



## The Rookery

The Rookery in the middle of Claybottom Pond has become a favored roosting and nesting place for thousands of waterbirds. Claybottom Pond was dug to increase the water supply available to the town and to provide water for the sulfur plant that was east of the pond.

Located to the West of Claybottom Pond you will find the new Rookery Platform that provides excellent views.



## Smith Pond

Smith Pond was dug to hold the water supply for the High Island community. The "dock" that is on the east side of the pond held the pumps to pump water to the Sulphur plant. On the levy on the northwest side of the pond are old cement pipes that were part of the system that pumped water into the pond. Water came from the Neches River the same river that currently provides water for the Bolivar Peninsula. The pond was never totally excavated and the smaller ponds, Grackle Pond and the Frog Pond may have been dug to supply clay for plugging wells.



## Pump House

Property donated by Amoco had many uses during the years of petroleum production. The brick building was built in the 1920s and housed large pumps that pumped oil from the oil field into pipe lines. The field to the east of the brick building once held large oil storage tanks which were dismantled in 1993. Prairie restoration on this site has erased all traces of the storage facility.



## Water Features

With the help of many volunteers, Don Verser donated time and materials to renovate a drip at the old homestead area of Smith Oaks.

Around the corner from Don's Drip is Norma's Niche another drip that attracts birds using the Old Homestead area.

Behind the pump house you will find Katrina's Corner with a drip and some comfortable benches. This site was developed as a memorial to Katrina Ladwig a long time supported of Houston Audubon.