

# Eagle- the forgotten refinery

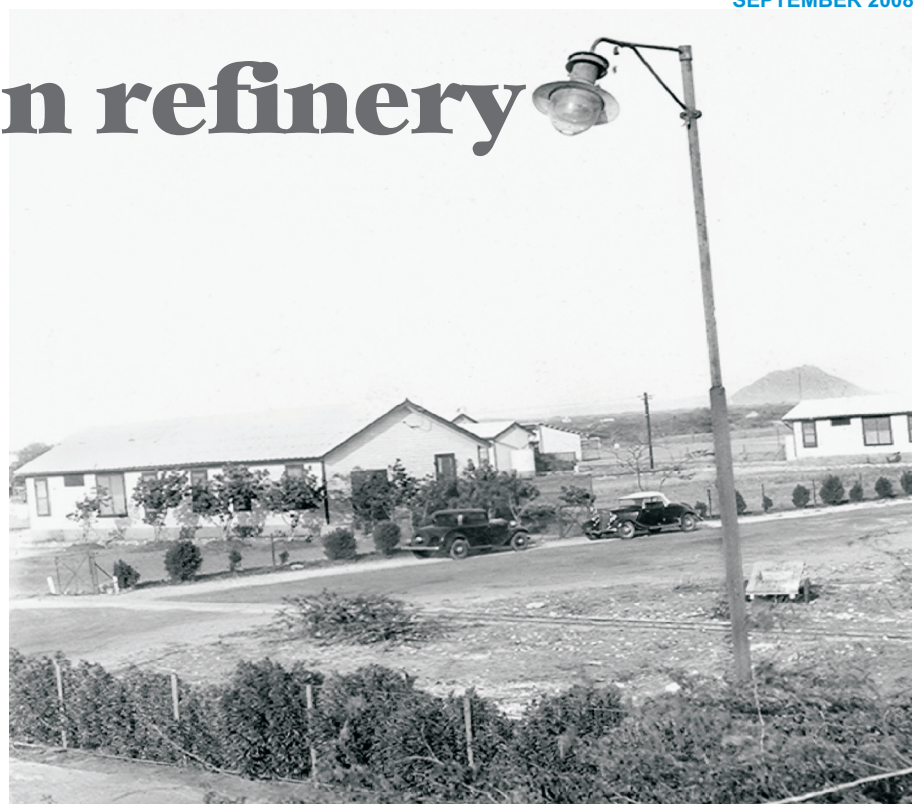
**M**ost people automatically think of the actual refinery, now Valero in San Nicolas, as Aruba's refinery and of the Colony, its former compound reserved for Lago employees and their families, still reminiscent of a better past at the far end of San Nicolas, in regards to real estate.

But between 1928 and 1953 Aruba was haven to two refineries. In 1928 Royal Dutch Shell built the Eagle oil refinery and this was immediately followed by a refinery built by Lago Oil and Transport Company Ltd. in San Nicolas. And like the Colony in San Nicolas, there too was a secluded compound with housing and a private hospital. But unlike the Colony, this compound has become a part of Oranjestad and is not so clearly distinguishable any more and has integrated into the outskirts of Oranjestad over the years.

The reason why these refineries were built is that both oil companies were looking to expand there business and Aruba was a safe haven to transport oil and both companies back then were already in fierce global competition.

The Eagle, being virtually one of the first areas to be developed outside the capital in the late twenties of the former century, was clearly distinguished by its straight raster of streets and white and green houses. This design was typically for the refinery, probably a reminder of the Roman ways of building. To build this neighborhood, however, a first pier, located between nowadays *Manchebo* and *Casa Del Mar* had to be erected in the sea to allow building materials for both the community and the refinery to be transported from sea vessels to the shore. Our harbor view of Oranjestad as we now know it was completely different. Until the mid forties the coastline of Oranjestad and up to the area of the big supermarkets was part "*Salina*" (Brackish part of land, that filled during heavy downpours) and part beach. After the Second World War it was decided that the then harbor of Oranjestad, the *Paardenbaai* was not good enough, since bigger ships had a hard time maneuvering because of their size. From this pier a railway was laid out to transport construction and operating materials from and to the refinery. The refinery area occupied most of Druif Beach. Just to give you an idea; the Eagle refinery stretched from as far as *Quinta Del Carmen*, the hospital for the Eagle community, in Bubali to *Franklinstraat*, where nowadays *Heineken* (and the former *Toyota auto parts*) can be found. The location of *Playa Liquor* is where the remittance for the trains of Eagle was situated. At this time, the *Sasaki highway* did not exist. Close to the *DA* building you can still see the sand that was sprayed to make this land and most older residents of eagle still remember playing in that white sand, when it had being completed. And like the Colony this community was guarded with a fence and patrolled entrance points. During the years these all have vanished, but behind the Eagle tennis club the clearly distinguishable wooden white homes with green roofs can still be seen. At the time it was customary to build with wood, since it was cheap imported from Surinam and durable. Mind you the homes that are still standing have lasted for over 80 years. All the homes were laid out in the same kind of fashion, with difference for bachelors, higher ranking officials and families. In one home, an addition was made to accommodate their 13 children. The bachelors were all set up close to the Eagle club. The compound had its own water supply that ran along one side of the compound, in separate tanks to ensure water pressure and each house was fitted with two water tank to collect rainwater from the roof. Between every few homes, a set of maid's rooms and washing facilities was built, to accommodate live-inns.

*The remains of a bomb shelter*



*Old picture of the Eagle compound courtesy of Dan Jensen, webmaster of <http://www.lago-colony.com>*

Only four homes, belonging to the top officials had private maid's quarters and were made out of concrete. Since the compound was guarded, the way people were living there was quite easy. Some of the people who lived here remember that nobody ever had a key to the house, if privacy was needed; the screen doors were provisory closed with a chair. The compound was not built at once. Since the refinery was having difficulties getting good labor, the compound was built in different stages. As a book from 1932 published by Pan-Am, which still can be found in the Arubiana/Caribiana part of the National Library, states, The Eagle community now has two concrete tennis courts, a Club House called *Astoria*, a private beach area with wooden beach huts, a private golf course and a hospital, that by 1932 could accommodate 16 patients. The community started out as being strictly for Eagle employees and their families, but very soon, more Arubans were allowed to live at the compound.

During the Second World War, Aruba sidelines played an important role, not only because it was part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, who officially were at war, being occupied by the German forces in 1940 until they were freed by the Allied Forces in 1945. Primarily because of the refineries, Aruba became a British protectorate from 1940 to 1942 and a US protectorate from 1942 to 1945. Since Shell was part British, during the war, Scottish troops came to defend the refinery. Today some of the homes still have a bomb shelter. In the event of an attack, people could take cover.

In 1942, there was the famous incident of a German submarine that launched three torpedoes, of which one ended up on Eagle beach. When this projectile was detonated, it unfortunately cost the lives of 4 Dutch marines, so the treat that seemed so far away was more eminent then hoped for.

After the war ended, the eagle refinery lost most of its use, since it was primarily used to refine aviation fuel. Most employees got relocated to Curacao, to the Isla refinery and the compound itself was used as a deposit. In 1954, the refinery closed and the compound was sold back to the Aruban government. The piers that kept the refinery alive still were reminiscent of its brief glorious pas, but the last pier, in front of then soon to be built hotel, was demolished in 1974 together with the last trains to ensure a clear view for the guests. With the *Sasaki highway* being built the last trace of the railroads disappeared. However, if you take a stroll down Eagle, you'll find that there are still a lot of accents that are reminiscent of its original purpose.

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*A watertank, still good after over 80 years*