

# East Texas Historical Journal

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Volume 49 | Issue 1

Article 1

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3-2011

## ETHJ Vol-49 No-1

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### Recommended Citation

(2011) "ETHJ Vol-49 No-1," *East Texas Historical Journal*: Vol. 49: Iss. 1, Article 1.

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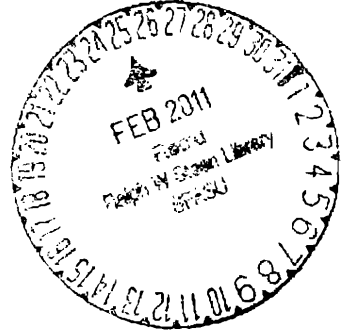
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# EAST TEXAS HISTORICAL JOURNAL



<http://www.easttexashistorical.org>

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Volume XLIX Number 1

SPRING 2011

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Vol. XLIX Spring 2011 Number 1  
ISBN: 978-1-936205-11-0

*The East Texas Historical Journal* is published biannually by Stephen F. Austin State University Press. Address correspondence, unsolicited material, membership queries to The East Texas Historical Association, Scott Sosebee, Executive Director and Editor, P. O. Box 6223, Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, TX 75962 Telephone 936-468-2407; e-mail: [sosebeem@sfasu.edu](mailto:sosebeem@sfasu.edu); Internet: <http://www.easttexashistorical.org>.

Manuscripts are read year-round and will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Cover: Photograph furnished by Jean F. Andrews  
Printed in the United States of America  
Set in Times New Roman  
Designed by René Jones and Laura McKinney

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*Editor's note: Part I of Jean Andrews' account of Leroy Colombo appeared in the Fall 2010 issue of the East Texas Historical Journal.*

## ***Leroy Colombo: The Deaf Lifeguard of Galveston Island Part II: The Later Years (1943 – 1974)***

BY JEAN F. ANDREWS

LEROY COLOMBO HAD A distinguished career as a lifeguard, a salt-water sea racer, diver, and surfer on Galveston beaches from 1915 until his death 1974. In Part I, I introduced Leroy Colombo, born into an Italian-American immigrant family who became deaf at age seven from spinal meningitis, an epidemic that spread through Texas and Louisiana in 1912. He tried to succeed at the Sam Houston Elementary School, but during this time there were no special services such as sign language interpreters, certified teachers of the deaf, speech-language pathologists or audiologists. Nor were there assistive devices such as digital hearing aids, cochlear implants, classroom FM systems, pagers, text cell phones, or videophones. When he was ten, he attended school at the Texas School for the deaf in Austin. Here he learned American Sign Language (ASL), became immersed in the Deaf culture, and made many deaf friends who were to sustain him throughout his lifetime. In 1917, he saved his first life on the beaches of Galveston when he was only twelve years-old. He joined the prestigious Surf Tobaggan Club with his two brothers, Cinto and Nick. Colombo excelled in sea-water racing, a sport that was popular during the 1920s and 1930s.

*Jean F. Andrews is a Professor of Deaf Studies/Deaf Education at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. She has published children's novels with deaf characters, co-authored two textbooks with psychologists, as well as conducted research and published in the area of language, literacy, and diversity related to deaf persons.*



Besides saving lives, Colombo was a champion salt water racer clocking records for long-distance swimming in the Gulf. Galveston's *Splash Days* was a popular, one-week long event signaling the opening of the beaches and the beginning of the summer. Thousands of tourists and locals escaping Texas' heat lined the beaches to watch salt-water sea races in which Colombo excelled, joined the parades with floats, sponsored beauty bathing suit contests, and enjoyed the nightlife entertainment at the hotels, restaurants and casinos. About fifteen thousand people or more would line the seawall to watch Colombo and other swimmers compete in the five-mile races. In the Gulf background were yacht and small boat owners who were invited by the city to parade along the water adding to the festive, picturesque scene.<sup>1</sup>

Now in Part II, I further show how Colombo's lifesaving skills and athletic prowess as a salt-water sea racer were further honed as he entered young adulthood and middle age. In this section, I explain how he became more involved with the Deaf community by meeting and competing with deaf friends in Houston and Dallas, his joining of deaf clubs such as the Houston chapter for the FRAT, and numerous reports of visits to Galveston beaches by deaf friends. From the 1920s onward, Colombo was frequently featured in deaf periodicals.

Tragically, like the celebrity fading rock star, the aging athlete, or the politician spiraling downward in defeat, during his later life Colombo suffered from bouts of declining physical health, and loneliness. He became puffy and overweight, grew depressed, engaged in excessive drinking, and inherited from his father a heart condition. Colombo's illnesses occurred during an era when he had no access to the medicine and education that would have helped alleviate his conditions or extended his life. Services specifically directed toward the deaf also either did not exist or were minimal, which also contributed to his decline. Today there are many services related to physical, mental, and social health for deaf people that are accessible with interpreters and with professionals who know sign language and know about

the Deaf culture. But despite such major health issues that none of us are immune to, Colombo had a distinguished career as a lifeguard and athlete.

In Part II, I review his athletic accomplishments in long-distance salt-water sea racing, a sport that is not practiced today in Galveston due to the dangers it poses for swimmers such as debris brought in by the tides, swirling deadly currents that pull swimmers under, uneven sea-floors caused by shifting sandbars, stinging jellyfish and unpredictable storms bringing down lightning and thunder.

It would be a thrill for any 18-year-old to be in the spotlight, to be young, handsome, and athletic, the winner of swimming races who stands in front of thousands of cheering fans. Even if you could not hear them he could see their smiling faces of adulation.

In 1923, Colombo swam a five-mile race in Galveston and won. Reporters noted:

Local swimmer makes remarkable time to finish 19 minutes ahead of his nearest competitor. While thousands cheered, he swam to the red buoy near 21<sup>st</sup> Street pier... after the race he jumped into the water to rescue a woman's purse...then swam alongside his brother Cinto to give him encouragement as he finished in fifth place. He won \$1,000.<sup>2</sup>

In 1924, at age 19, Colombo won first place beating Herbert Brenan, the amateur Athletic Union National Endurance title.<sup>3</sup> A report noted, "...Mr. Brenan could swim longer than anyone else without stopping. But Leroy beat him."<sup>4</sup>

The following year in 1925, he beat Brenan again, winning a ten-mile race and also set a new record for finishing in 6 hours and 55 minutes. Gordon B. Allen described this race.

Labor Day, September 5, 1925, when the first annual 10-mile race was held, was the crowning event of the

season and the big chance for Colombo to show them his stuff. There were 14 persons who started from the groin at 7 o'clock that morning, but only two crossed the finishing line—Colombo and Brenan. Colombo crossed the buck 45 minutes, or nearly a mile ahead of Brenan, after making the race in the record time of 6 hours and 55 minutes, a new record for Galveston. The feat of Colombo competing against the best distance swimmers in and around Galveston was the most remarkable ever seen there...<sup>5</sup>

The judge of the race, George (Dutch) Murdoch had this to say about Colombo, "Give that boy an experienced instructor, and he will make an enviable record in the swimming world."<sup>6</sup>

A Galveston *Daily News* reporter recounted the event.

After the swimmers passed the fishing pier at 21<sup>st</sup> Street, the result was never in doubt, for Colombo went far into the lead and was never passed. The three boats detailed to stay with the swimmers gave up trying to keep up with him, and stayed with the others in the party. He reached the jetties and immediately started back half an hour ahead of Brenan. Unlike other swimmers, his course never wavered as he followed a beeline down the beach just outside the breakers. He kept a uniform speed, so fast that when others joined him at 6<sup>th</sup> street, they were hardly able to keep up with him, and he never changed his pace until he reached the groin. There he sprinted and again fresh swimmers were forced to trail him. Until he climbed on the raft; after crossing the line, he was smiling and seemingly fresh as at the start.

Colombo's swimming records were tied primarily to the City of Galveston, but he also swam races in Houston, San Antonio, Biloxi, and St. Louis. The Chamber Commerce talked of sending Colombo to England to train for the U.S. Olympics, but

the city could never secure sufficient travel funds even though there were fund raising events such as dramatic performances at the community theater. The city also approached steamship companies and individuals for donations, but never could accumulate the necessary funds.<sup>7</sup>

In 1926, Colombo swam a race in St. Louis, Missouri in the Mississippi River. He beat Johnny Weissmuller of Tarzan fame. A reporter from *The Silent Worker*, a popular deaf periodical wrote this:

Leroy Colombo, of Galveston, the deaf king of the Gulf Coast ten mile swimming record, made a trip to St. Louis, Missouri, and competed in the First Annual National A.A.U. ten-mile swim race, August 21<sup>st</sup>. Though Colombo had never experienced river water before he won the eighth place...Colombo's time was 1:46:40.

Into his twenties, the young Colombo was still winning races. In 1927, he won first place in the Southern Long Distance Swimming Championship, a 15-mile race in the Gulf. One can imagine how proud the young man was when he was awarded a trophy by the Hollywood Diner's Club, a famous restaurant and night club run by the Maceo family. He completed the race in eleven and one-half hours. Behind him in second place was his brother Cinto, finishing three and one-half hours later.<sup>8</sup>

Colombo had a glorious youth, winning races in the Gulf and frequently being featured on the front page of the *Galveston Daily News*. For a young man growing into manhood this must have been an ultimate high to receive so much recognition for his athletic abilities. In fact, Colombo had won the Splash Day races five times and during the past twenty years from 1927 to 1947 he won more than thirty-five victories in swim races, most of them in the Gulf.

To celebrate his fame, in 1952 when Colombo worked at a tavern, there was on the wall hung a sign entitled, "Colombo's Records." They included all the record times for his races

ranging from one mile to thirty miles. Also, included on the wall was information that he had saved 835 people from drowning, as well as one dog.<sup>9</sup>

While Colombo was mostly well-known for his endurance and speed in long-distance swimming, he was also a graceful diver, surfer, and surfboard acrobat. One former friend related that he would often “thrill the crowds with his fancy stunt diving from a board 75 feet from the water.”<sup>10</sup>

Colombo was reputed to have brought the sport of surfing to Galveston, and he is featured in the Texas Surf Museum in Corpus Christi as one of Texas’ first surfers. “Colombo was a pioneering surfer and was among the first to ride surfboards on Galveston beach, “reported Vic Maceo and Sidney Steffens, former heads of Galveston’s Beach Patrol.<sup>11</sup>

When he was twelve years old, the Galveston born physician, Dr. Dorian “Doc” Paskowitz reported that he surfed with Colombo during the 1930s. Paskowitz and many of his children went on to become surfing champions. Eventually he set up a surfing school in Los Angeles with his grown children. He credits Colombo with teaching him how to surf. Paskowitz would often observe Colombo using surfboards to save swimmers, as well as use them for sport.

Paskowitz reports: “The first time I surfed it was under a very strange surfboard under the tutelage of a deaf-mute<sup>12</sup> lifeguard, Leroy.”<sup>13</sup> In a telephone interview, Paskowitz elaborated:

Early in the afternoon, in a small coastal town, because the sun was hot, though he spotted no swimmer in distress, the lifeguard Leroy Colombo threw his white canvas surfboard in the water, jumping on his knees, head first, he paddled his arms into the white water waves. Farther out the white water waves increasing, and the bending of the board caused by white water, catapulting him forward to a standing position, standing momentarily, his tan muscular body like an Adonis, his arms straight up in diving position, he leaps up into the

air and rolling forward, tucking his head into his curled body, spinning up, up, up, then curving his body down into a one-and-a-half somersault, he lands on his feet.<sup>14</sup>

While lifeguarding, racing, competing in sports with the S.T.C., or relaxing and pitching horseshoes on the beach occupied much of Colombo's time, he also held odd jobs throughout his life to support himself. From the 1920s to the 1950s, since Galveston was a fashionable summer resort, "the Rivera of the South," there were plenty of jobs for Colombo in the tourist and restaurant business.

Gary Cartwright lyrically described Galveston of the era thusly: "Seawall Boulevard has to be one of the most impressive marine drives anywhere. In its halcyon days, from the 1920s to the mid 1950s, the Boulevard was a glittering strip of casinos, nightclubs, and pleasure piers."<sup>15</sup>

And according to my interviews, Colombo was right "dab-smack-in-the-middle" of this action, on the beach during day and in the clubs at night.

Colombo spent much of his lifeguard life around, in, and under Murdoch's Bathhouse either saving lives as a lifeguard rescuing swimmers, renting floats, umbrellas and chairs to tourists, or eating hamburgers in one of the restaurants on the pier. Pleasure piers, like Murdoch's, were shopping malls on stilts over the water at the edge of the beach made up of souvenir shops, restaurants and gambling casinos.

The pleasure piers provided a life for Colombo. Relishing the beachcomber's style, he lived the gypsy life never having a permanent address after he moved out of his parents' home. From 1960 to 1974 and in intermittent years prior to 1960, Colombo was not listed in the Galveston City Directory.<sup>16</sup> During the summer, he lived on the beach sleeping on a cot in the concession stand storage building. He slept in his car during winter, or with friends or at his family's homes. During off hours, he was often seen pitching horseshoes at Termini Beach where he worked as a lifeguard. A newspaper reporter noted:

“Colombo once wrote a note about how he’d been able to live on the beach all his life. While he couldn’t hear the roar of the surf, he’d seen the sun and water, and felt the sand between his toes every day.”<sup>17</sup>

Colombo’s cousin, Priscilla Garbade, a young girl during the 1930s presented a picture of the activities around Murdock’s Bathhouse.

I remember Murdoch’s Bathhouse. It was a fun place. In the upstairs there was lots of room. The kids played games up there. On the second floor was a restaurant. There were benches along the back. As a young girl I spent hours watching the phosphorescent fish in the water. At Murdock’s, you could rent bathing suits and floats, change your clothes and take showers. It was a family business, the Wesloes. I wore a bathing suit as a child made of gray wool. It had a scoop neck. It was scratchy. My mother loved to swim with me. We swam in the morning, changed later but then put back on that cold, scratchy swim suit to swim again in the afternoon. As a child, I remember Leroy. He was nice to me. But I sensed he was at loose ends some of the time. He had a lot of trophies.<sup>18</sup>

During this era, lifeguards also rented umbrellas, canvass floats and chairs, and sold food at a concession stand in addition to their lifeguard duties. Colombo rented beach umbrellas and chairs with his Aunt Emma (Nick’s wife) for many years. They also sold hot dogs, hamburgers and cokes at the concession stand, and with a hundred yards of beach available to them, also rented umbrellas, chairs, and canvass floats to tourists and locals.<sup>19</sup>

At night the short, but burly and muscled Colombo worked as a bouncer and night watchman at the Balinese Room, a racy restaurant and club for entertainers, movie stars, and Galveston’s wealthy located at the 21<sup>st</sup> Street fishing pier that was also an infamous illegal gambling spot.

In 1942, the Balinese Room was opened by the Maceo family and decorated in a South Seas motif with fishnets, clamshells, and fabric-covered walls painted to look like tropical beaches. A window display at the Rosenberg Library calls it the “Nightclub of the Century” and provides quotes about it from *Texas Monthly*’s special edition, “The Best of the Texas Century.”<sup>20</sup>

From 1947 until the Texas Rangers smashed it to kindling in 1957, Galveston’s Balinese Room was the swankiest and most famous nightspot on the Texas coast. The crown jewel of the Maceo syndicate, the Balinese, with its South Sea décor, booked the top names in show business and attracted the highest of Texas’ high rollers. The casino was strategically situated at the end of a two-hundred-foot-long-pier so that, in the event of a raid, there was time to fold slot machines into the walls, and convert crap tables to bridge tables. On one occasion a raiding party was greeted by the band playing, “The Eyes of Texas” and the announcement, “Ladies and Gentlemen, we give you in person, the Texas Rangers!”

Before the Texas Rangers closed it in 1960, the Balinese Room had a colorful history. It was raided sixty-four consecutive nights without a single bust, it was destroyed by fire in 1953, its gaming rooms were closed in 1956, and it was demolished by Carla in 1961. Rebuilt in 2002 with its original chalkboard ledgers used for baseball betting, restored South Sea décor, and equipped with a piano purportedly used by Duke Ellington, entrepreneurs attempted to recapture its former grandeur. In 2006, the Balinese Room was added to the National Register of Historical Places, only to be completely demolished in 2008 by Hurricane Ike. Investors, though, are reconsidering rebuilding the Balinese Room to “be faithful to the original décor.”<sup>21</sup>

But during Colombo’s time when he worked as a bouncer, the Balinese Room had gaming rooms that predated gambling in Las Vegas and hosted entertainers such as Frank Sinatra, Bob



Hope, George Burns and Gracie Allen, Peggy Lee, and Jayne Mansfield. Fred Astaire and Arthur Murray gave free dance lessons.<sup>22</sup>

Colombo also worked the Hollywood Diners Club and the West Beach Club. According to his colleague and friend, Vic Maceo, "He liked to party and he loved Pearl beer."<sup>23</sup>

Colombo participated in lifeguarding, sea racing, diving, surfing and working on the beach and in clubs as a bouncer and night watchman during an elevated time of Galveston's history. The city attracted thousands of tourists who came in the summer to escape the heat. The city sponsored races, parades, beauty pageants, festivals, carnivals, had water parks, restaurants and concession stands all of which contributed to the city's economy. The city also had a harbor and port that supported the country's cotton commerce.

Such activity and influx of population created a need for a lifeguard patrol—of which Colombo played an important role. As I mentioned in Part I and in the beginning of Part II, I contend that there was a symbiotic relationship between Colombo and the city of Galveston. The city needed a "protector of the beaches," and Colombo gladly welcomed and cherished this role, dedicating his whole life to providing safety on the beach to local and tourist swimmers.

But there was another community—the Deaf community—which played even more of a pivotal role in Colombo's life in Galveston, Austin, Houston and Dallas.

I interviewed deaf people who knew Colombo. From the interviews, all conducted in American Sign Language (ASL), a different picture of the man emerged, a man who was more human, personal, and friendly, much like the neighborhood boy or girl who lived next door. While he was gently chided by some for braggadocio, flirting with women, showing off his trophies and scrapbooks at the local tavern, he was remembered by the Deaf community as a friend, a buddy, someone to make a trip to Galveston to visit. His name sign was the finger spelled letter, "C" on the forehead which was a sign of respect. He was cherished

by the Deaf community not only for his accomplishments but because he was loyal to the Deaf community. For example, he obtained life-guard jobs for two of his deaf friends, the Kleberg boys. He also enjoyed seeing Deaf visitors at the beach and would stop and chat with them in ASL.

The late Jerry Hassell, beloved teacher from the Texas School for the Deaf, graduate of TSD from the class of 1959, and tireless advocate for the deaf community in Austin remembers Colombo. When Jerry was a teenager, he would travel by car with his mother and father from Houston to go to Galveston's Beach.

When I was a teenager about age 14 in 1942, my parents took me to Galveston in the summer to swim. I was surprised to find a lifeguard at Galveston who used sign language. When I learned that he was a deaf person, I was absolutely astounded. Even more than that, I was flabbergasted when he told me that he attended TSD at one time. For the next 8 summers, I continued to see Leroy often while he was on duty and had the chance to talk to him many times. I knew that two of my friends, Robert Kleberg (TSD, class of 1942) and his brother Marcellus Kleberg (TSD, class of 1943) worked at the same beach renting our beach umbrellas and chairs. I even remembered that Malcolm Pace, my classmate was actually saved from drowning by Leroy.<sup>24</sup>

Jerry Hassell reported more memories.

Colombo had an "eye for the ladies," he was always flirting. He liked to be the center of attention. From 1935 to 1945, he drank a lot and got fat and puffy in his old age. Colombo also bragged a lot and was not very well liked by the younger deaf crowd. But he was admired by the older deaf crowd because of his racing and lifesaving skills.<sup>25</sup>

Another deaf man, Early McVey shared memories of Colombo. I knew Colombo when I was a younger man as I graduated from Gallaudet University in 1942. My friends and I would drive to Galveston and visit with Colombo at Steward's beach during the summer. We would often stop and chat with him. Colombo's name sign was the letter "C" on the forehead, which was a name sign of respect. Leroy on his face. He was a nice looking man. Very friendly to other deaf.<sup>26</sup>

And still another member of the deaf community, Allan Bubeck, a retired deaf engineer from Beaumont, Texas had these memories of Colombo.

Colombo once saved six deaf men from drowning. They were out in the surf chatting in sign language and Colombo was on shore chatting with this friends. From the corner of his eye, he saw that the deaf men were caught in a rip tide. The undertow pulled them out to the Gulf. Colombo saved them. One was Marcellus Kleberg. The other one was named Pace.<sup>27</sup>

Marcellus Kleberg a former deaf lifeguard at Galveston remembers Colombo very well as they were not only friends but they also worked together from 1944 to 1945.

I've known him since I was a little boy. I was a lifeguard for two to three summers from 1944 to 1945. I became one of the first lifeguards with Leroy under the Galveston Beach Patrol. Leroy was complaining once about his job. The captain warned him not to drink liquor while he worked. Finally, we both had a real job as a lifeguard and got paid. He saved a lot of people, more than 500.<sup>28</sup>

Another deaf friend (TSD class of 1942) Early McVey was a youth when he lived in Houston and remembers this about

Colombo.

I would drive to Galveston from Houston with a group of deaf friends for the day to have a picnic and to swim at the beach. We would often visit Leroy during the summer. We saw him patrolling the beach. We also saw him during swimming races in the Gulf. We would often stop and chat with him because he knew sign language.<sup>29</sup>

In adulthood, Early McVey became president of a deaf organization called the Fraternal Society of the Deaf (FRAT), which provided insurance to its members since most other insurance companies denied deaf people coverage. Established in 1901 by deaf people frustrated with exorbitant rates they had to pay to insurance companies that considered deaf people to be higher risks, in 1907 the name changed to the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf (NFSD) and continued to grow. Today the NFSD has millions of dollars in assets and insurance with sixty-eight divisions throughout the U.S.<sup>30</sup>

The FRAT had both state chapters and city chapters. For example in the Deaf periodical, *The Modern Silents*, Colombo and another deaf swimmer, Murphy Bourque were listed as members of the Houston Division No. 81, N.F.S.D. (FRAT).<sup>31</sup>

The Deaf community, much like the African American and Italian communities in the U.S. generally and in Galveston specifically, created support groups, clubs societies, newspapers, and organizations that provided opportunities for respect, personal value, common identity, spreading history and identity to the youth, as well as advocacy. These societies were in many ways "extended families." Italians in Texas formed numerous benevolent-fraternal organizations, and published Italian-language as well as Italian-English bilingual newsletters.<sup>32</sup> African Americans too formed separate social and fraternal groups such as the Negro Masonic Lodge. Geographer Susan Wiley Hardwick noted that, "the first organization for African Americans in Galveston, was established in 1875."<sup>33</sup> African Americans also merged with immigrants in labor unions to

protest the dominance of the white-ruling class. In 1879, a group of African-Americans formed the Cotton Jammer's Association, which was the first all-black labor union in Galveston. Later, the Screwman's Benevolent Association 2, another African American union, was formed in order to prevent whites from having a monopoly on the docks.<sup>34</sup> While white prejudice and bigotry toward African American and Italian American Galvestonians was the result of Jim Crow era social segregation, Deaf Americans also suffered from perceptions of inequality during the era.

Like Italian Americans African Americans, the Deaf community formed a minority group within a majority hearing society and banded together for support. They already had their own school—the Texas School for the Deaf. In addition, the Deaf community formed sports clubs, baseball teams, and swimming meets in cities with larger populations such as Dallas and Houston. There exist reports and photographs in deaf periodicals such as the *Silent Worker* and the *Modern Silents* prove that Colombo belonged to such deaf sports clubs, and would often travel to larger cities to participate in swim meets and baseball games.

In addition to the FRAT, the Deaf community had other national organizations such as the National Association for the Deaf (NAD), with state chapters in Texas and other states. The NAD was established in 1880 as a response to schools forbidding the use of American Sign Language (ASL), and today has more than forty chapters throughout the U.S. They host a national convention each year and state conventions every two years.

According to historian, Dr. Steve Baldwin, Deaf Texans formed an association called the Blue Bonnet Association of the Deaf in 1886, and held conventions in different cities around the state.<sup>35</sup> The Blue Bonnet Association of the Deaf became the Texas Deaf Mutes Association, then the Lone Star Association of the Deaf. Dr. Baldwin further pointed out that in 1932 the Texas Association of the Deaf was chartered under the laws of Texas as a corporate body. According to Baldwin, "Though it

may not have been the first association of the deaf in Texas, its basic concepts and founding ideals do date back to 1886 and its history of advocacy on behalf of the rights of the deaf has resulted in some secular accomplishments which have helped the deaf in Texas become better recognized and appreciated as useful and productive citizens.”

In his later years, Colombo faced some hard economic times. He lapsed in his FRAT dues. When he developed a stomach ulcer in later years, he asked his FRAT buddies for help with medical expenses.<sup>36</sup> In an interview, McVey stated: “Leroy contacted me when he was ill and he asked for help with his lapsed insurance dues. So I got together with some FRAT members who contributed and paid his dues so he could get health insurance benefits.”<sup>37</sup>

Like other fraternal-benevolent societies, the Deaf Americans of the FRAT banded together to provide financial aid to Colombo—he was one of them, part of the extended family.

On the day of his death, April 13, 1974, the members of the Texas Senate stood for a moment of silence in his honor and passed a resolution, “In Memory of Leroy Colombo,” in the Senate.<sup>38</sup> The City of Galveston also passed a Resolution praising his accomplishments.<sup>39</sup> The Optimist Club dedicated and installed a concrete and bronze marker on the Seawall and 51<sup>st</sup> Street. It reads the following: “In memory of Leroy Colombo, a deaf-mute who risked his own life repeatedly to save more than a thousand lives from drowning in the waters surrounding Galveston Island.”

Colombo’s story is documented in numerous newspaper articles archived in the Rosenberg Library in Galveston, and in Deaf periodicals at the Gallaudet University Archives. Even today his name is honored in an annual 5K Leroy Colombo race held each summer in Galveston. His name is frequently brought up among Deaf Texans at homecomings at the Texas School for the Deaf, at Deaf reunions, sports events and at meetings of the Texas Association for the Deaf.<sup>40</sup> In 2002, Leroy was inducted into the Texas School for the Deaf Athletic Hall

of Fame. On June 10, 2006, during the Texas School for the Deaf's one hundred fiftieth birthday celebration, by virtue of a 2005 Texas legislature act, there was an unveiling ceremony to name the campus swimming center, *The Leroy Colombo Swim Center*.<sup>41</sup> And in 2008, a Texas historical marker highlighting his lifesaving accomplishments and honoring him was installed in front of the Galveston Island Convention Center, and the street in front of the beach where Colombo patrolled was renamed "Leroy Colombo's View."<sup>42</sup>

In today's world, Colombo would have qualified for a swimming scholarship to a Texas university or Gallaudet University. He may have even qualified for the Olympics. He certainly would have been asked to help train future lifeguards as he did on the beaches of Galveston. But during Colombo's era, the lack of national standards and formalized training in lifesaving made it possible for individuals to develop into heroes. And they did. While Colombo was written about the most, there were other equally "remarkable" men, Galveston's "aquatic stars:" Red Decker, Leon Weber, Cornelius Curry, Bill Curry, H. Berneau, Jr., Max Leman, Cinto Colombo, Ducky Prendergast, Marcellus Kleburg, Captain Henry deVries, Charles Bertolino, Vic Maceo—all of whom saved hundreds of people from drowning deaths in the Gulf are heroes in the same capacity as Leroy Colombo was.<sup>43</sup>

When the media makes persons into a celebrity, superhuman figures, this can mask what in reality made these men "great." Colombo and his marine lifeguard colleagues were competent. They know what they were doing. They were exceptionally strong swimmers, had an intimate marine knowledge of the Gulf—its currents, its appearances, its changes, its weather—and were public servants working for many years as unpaid, volunteer lifeguards before lifeguarding became an established profession under the police department.

Since the 1920s, journalists have pumped up stories about Colombo with hyperbolic prose. His many monikers would even compete with a Greek mythology text:

the deaf and dumb eagle-eyed swimming marvel, Tarzan of the Sea, the deaf-mute ace swimmer, the Champion Swimmer of the South, strong, sinewy and burnt to a nut brown, suntanned deaf-mute, crack local distance swimmer, deaf-mute guard of the Beach patrol, aquatic star, best-liked character on the beach, bronzed isle swimming star, and swam like a porpoise.

But depicting him as a celebrity on the entertainment circuit or as a heroic-action cartoon figure—all of this can mask the realities that also characterized Colombo's life: poverty, loneliness, reported failed marriages,<sup>44</sup> isolation, stomach ulcers, a bleeding esophagus brought on by heavy drinking and heart disease. One reporter noted, "Even in the 1960s, he was working for \$1.00 an hour during the tourist season and was making ash trays out of seashells to get through the winter."<sup>45</sup> During Colombo's time there were no videophones that could connect him to his deaf friends in Houston or Austin. Sign language interpreter services, as they exist today, were non-existent during his time. Typically a family member would learn sign language and become the deaf person's interpreter. But no one in his family learned sign language, which was not uncommon during this time since most did not recognize sign language as a distinct, unique language.

Colombo the hero, so exaggeratedly depicted by the media as such a superhuman figure he could have been be a character in a Charles Dickens novel, is certainly romantic; Colombo the real person is unknown. Colombo's Hollywood persona, the high-spirited quipster with the tan-muscular physique, the cigar-smoking, whiskey-toting, babe-holding, trophy-collecting, glamour boy was rapaciously reported and voraciously devoured by the Galveston *Daily News* readership. After all, everyone loves a handsome hero.

But what was Colombo's life like after the sun went down and the casinos and clubs closed? Who did he spend time with? What was his life like when the spotlight was not on him? It is my contention that Colombo's personal, more human side



was best known in the Deaf community, a community that is isolated by the very nature of the fact that few people know sign language.

When Colombo arrived at the Texas School for the Deaf, he was immediately accepted into the often clannish but protective community of persons with similar experiences living in a largely, auditory hearing-speaking world.<sup>46</sup> Photos from the Texas School for the Deaf, and those shown in deaf periodicals, show Colombo with a smiling face alongside those of his deaf classmates. Other photos show him leisurely posing with groups of his deaf friends linked arm in arm, with reports of attending sporting and social events with the Houston chapter of the FRAT. There are also pictures of Colombo with his buddy, Fred "Dummy" Mahan, who was a boxing champion who fought at Galveston and was also a former student at the Texas School for the Deaf. Captions and writing in the deaf periodicals contain language like, "A crowd of Deaf folks on the Beach at Galveston," or terms referring to Colombo and Dummy Mahan as, "Two Silent Lads well up the Ladder of Fame," or referring to a meeting that Colombo attended, "The Houston Silent Club." A deaf writer reports:

They are still coming too, one by one, and Houston's population of deafies is growing gradually, and the first thing you know Houston will be in the rank of all other cities that deserve recognition of being the place for prosperity for the coming generation of Deafdom.<sup>47</sup>

More affectionate words emote from the writings of deaf journalists about Colombo. In another edition of the Deaf periodical *The Silent Worker*, a deaf writer reports that Colombo had "a brown and tanned face, big red sinewy hands, and the smoothness of his signs indicated he was a perfect athlete."<sup>48</sup> In a caption under a picture of Colombo holding the large trophy is written, "Leroy Colombo and his half-acre smile of victory." And still another caption reads, "After the Victory, Leroy Colombo

is being carried from the water by his brother clubmen."<sup>49</sup> The periodical even prints a poem written by Colombo's sister Mabel, a selective portion reported here:

...But only one could win you know,And this honor  
went to the champ Colombo The crowd yelled praise to  
their aquatic brother,But none meant so much as the  
praise of his mother Who was patiently waiting for him  
to come in, For he told her on leaving, "I'm going to  
win."<sup>50</sup>

In contrast to these warm, family-like albums of pictures and articles that read like the family newsletter found in the Deaf periodicals, newspaper journalists and his hearing relatives emphasized his greatness as a racer and lifesaver or at the opposite end of the spectrum discussed his "affliction," "of being deaf and dumb since seven," "a man who strains a great deal to make his broken language understood," his "muttering speech." Reporters repeatedly described him as the *deaf-mute*. Such negative images were not found in the Deaf community's writings about Colombo.

Instead, for Colombo's deaf friends, he had no affliction, no broken language. He was Deaf like them and he had American Sign Language. Colombo's lack of speech and hearing simply did not matter *at all*. His friends remembered him fondly and affectionately as a friend they would meet up with, chat and picnic with on the beach, meet at FRAT meetings or deaf clubs. The deaf community was very proud of him for his achievements in showing the "hearing world" what he could do, and even beat the "hearing swimmers."

Was deafness Colombo's greatest obstacle or was deafness his greatest asset? What and who would have Colombo become and achieved if he had access to more education, vocational training, and higher education? Even if Colombo were alive today, he may have been fired just as deaf lifeguards Stacey Bradley and David Schultz were even though they passed the YMCA Red

Cross certification lifeguarding tests.<sup>51</sup> While Colombo did not have the scanning training provided by the Red Cross and the legal protections of disability laws, nor did not have text cell phones or videophones or any of the visual alerting devices available to the deaf community today, he still had a life where he was a major contributor.

What he did have was a profound knowledge and a passion for the sea. He also was a great humanitarian. He loved “saving” people. He also loved Galveston, his hometown. As a youthful swimming racer, when he was pulled out of the water in Biloxi, Mississippi during a swimming race where he represented his city, a reporter quoted Colombo: “...I had to do my best for Galveston. I did my best. I never want to give up that race. I didn’t know anything about it. I fainted and they pulled me out of the water.”<sup>52</sup>

And his love for Galveston was reciprocated. Handsome in his beach tan, heroic in his lifeguarding, swift in his sea-racing, affable in his demeanor, he succeeded in a lifetime in drawing to himself the adoration of the Deaf community, the accolades of Galvestonians and Texans, and the applause of visiting tourists.

As stated in Part I, I concluded that there existed a symbiotic relationship between Leroy Colombo and the city of Galveston’s leaders. Galveston’s economic need for a “safe beach environment” to draw the summertime crowds to this small, sleepy, coastal barrier island in the South whose shipping channel was slowly slipping behind Houston’s, was a reason for the city’s leaders to find an athlete like Colombo. If they could “pump him up” in the press with hyperbole to hero status then they could generate more tourists and contribute to the island’s economy. Furthermore, there is nothing that unites a city more than a handsome, athletic man who wins races and saves men, women, and children from the treacherous waters in the Gulf, so it’s no wonder that his exploits reached mythic proportions in some of the write-ups in the Galveston *Daily News*.

But to be fair to Galveston’s leaders, they did give Colombo a respected identity as a professional lifeguard. Colombo was

a much loved and admired lifeguard who spent his life on the beach saving lives, finding lost children, selling cokes and sandwiches to thirsty and hungry tourists, and winning of salt-water sea races. So the gift-giving between Colombo and the city was reciprocal. And to witness the memorial marker on Seawall Boulevard, the marker in front of the Conventions Center and the Street sign, "Leroy Colombo's View," the city leaders did not want its citizens to forget Colombo. Thoughtful acts that ensure future Galvestonians will continue to think of him.

But most importantly, were the gifts given to Colombo by the Deaf community. The Deaf community gave him American Sign Language, a language that was fully accessible to him because it was visual after spinal meningitis cruelly robbed Colombo of his hearing. The Deaf community also gave him an education at the Texas School for the Deaf, however short it was. The Deaf community also gave Colombo a lifetime membership in a community that valued his personhood and were not concerned at all if he could speak or hear. The Deaf community provided Colombo with his identity as a person not just an idol.

And Colombo gave the deaf community a gift as well. He gave the deaf community a Texas hero who was Deaf just like them.

### **Acknowledgements**

My thanks to Carol Wood, archivist and Casey Edward Greene, Head of Special Collections at the History Center at the Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas for access and assistance with the archives. I thank Diana L. Gates, Reference and Instructional Librarian and Ulf Hedberg, Director of the Archives at the Gallaudet University Library and Archives, Washington, D.C. for their assistance with the Gallaudet University archives as well. I also thank Don Mize, Dr. Jim Marquette, and Dr. James Baer who provided invaluable documents and information. Graduate students at Lamar University whose enthusiasm for the Colombo I admire, and who assisted me in many aspects of this research, I thank. I list them in alphabetic order: Elaine

Boland, Rachel Graham, Dr. Charles Katz, Dr Ying Li, Dr. Cynthia Hargraeves Shaw, Dr. Adonia Smith and Deana Faggart Terro. I thank Lamar University's Faculty Senate for giving me the sabbatical during January 2009 to August, 2009 to conduct much of my writing. I thank all of the participants—both Deaf and hearing Texans who graciously gave me their time and their memories of Colombo during interviews by audiophone, TTY, videophone, email or in person. Finally, I am grateful to my husband, Dr. James G. Phelan for numerous trips, planned and spur-of-the-moment, to Galveston and to Gaido's Restaurant in search of more clues in the life of Leroy Colombo.

### Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> *Galveston Daily News*, September 26, 1947.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon Allen, *Silent Worker*, 38 (9), June 1926, 419.

<sup>4</sup> Dorothy Cable Holmes, *Rushmore Beacon*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> "Death Takes Famed Lifeguard," *The Deaf American*. Vol. 27 (2), October 1974, 23.

<sup>6</sup> "Death Takes Famed Lifeguard," 23.

<sup>7</sup> Author interview with Russ Colombo, August 9, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Rosenberg Library website. <http://12.185.240.15/Exhibit/webpage/May.08.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> Christie Mitchell, "Island Pickups by... The Beachcomber." *The Galveston Daily News*, June 1, 1952, 29.

<sup>10</sup> *The Silent Worker*, 38(9), June 1926, 418; A.B. (Babe Swartz) refuted this account. He said he never saw Colombo dive off of a canvass surfboard.

<sup>11</sup> Kelly Hawes, Museum to honor Galveston lifeguard.

<http://galvestondailynews.com/story.lasso?ewcd=161118d57cea5a9e>.  
(Accessed May 17, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> The archaic term *deaf-mute*, considered by today's multicultural standards to be insensitive and politically incorrect is rarely used in today's parlance. The terms *deaf-mute*, *deaf and dumb* were used during Colombo's era to describe a person who could not talk. Colombo could talk and most deaf people do speak even though their speech may be unintelligible to hearing people. Colombo was often called "*Dummy Colombo*," by his deaf friends and hearing reporters. There are other deaf athletes who also were given the nickname *Dummy* by the deaf community and hearing community: the skilled and talented professional baseball player, William "Dummy" Hoy (1862-1961), and the professional boxer, Frederico Mesa "Dummy" Mahan (1907-1930).

<sup>13</sup> Author interview with Dorian "Doc" Paskowitz, March 15, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Paskowitz interview

<sup>15</sup> Gary Cartwright, *Galveston: A History of the Island*. (Fort Worth, TX: TCU Press, 1991), 9-10.

<sup>16</sup> E-mail message to author from Don Mize, April 10, 2007. Information provided from *Galveston City Directory*, History Center, Rosenberg Library.

<sup>17</sup> Heber Taylor, "The Greatness of Hurdling Obstacles," *The Galveston Daily News*, March 23, 2006, 1.

<sup>18</sup> Author Interview with Priscilla Garbadne, September 15, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> Author Interview with Russ Colombo.

<sup>20</sup> "Lost Treasure: Balinese Room," Window display at the Rosenberg Library, April 28, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Harvey Rice, "Riding on the Waves of Change," *Houston Chronicle*, January 2, 2009. B 1-B5. Quote from attorney and real estate investor, Scott Arnold.

<sup>22</sup> "Lost Treasure: Balinese Room."

<sup>23</sup> Author Interview with Vic Maceo.

<sup>24</sup> Author Interview with Jerry Hassel, Oct. 4, 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Jerry Hassell, October 4, 2003.

<sup>26</sup> Videophone Interview with Early McVey on May 7, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Author Interview with Allan Bubeck, October 4, 2004.

<sup>28</sup> Author TTY Interview with Marcellus Kleberg, October 8, 2003.

<sup>29</sup> Author Videophone Interview with Early McVey, May 7, 2007.

<sup>30</sup> "FRAT Celebrates 100 Years! A Century of Deaf People Working to Help Each Other," *World Around You*, Winter, 2001-2002.

<sup>31</sup> Gordon B. Allen, *The Sports Journal. The Modern Silents*, October, 1937, 410.

<sup>32</sup> Valentine J. Belfiglio, *Italian Experience in Texas: A Closer Look*, (Eakin Press: Austin, TX, 1995), 60-78.

<sup>33</sup> Susan Wiley Hardwick, *Mythic Galveston: Reinventing America's Third Coast*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), 82-84.

<sup>34</sup> *Mythic Galveston*, 88.

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Baldwin, Ph.D. "The history of the Texas Association of the Deaf," <http://deaftexas.org/wp/inside-tad-2/history/> Last retrieved February 26, 2010.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with McVey, May 2, 2007.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with McVey.

<sup>38</sup> Senate Resolution, S.R. No. 459. "In Memory of Leroy Colombo," Document in Rosenberg Library, Galveston, Texas. July 12, 1974.

<sup>39</sup> "Resolution In Memory of Leroy Colombo," City of Galveston,

Document in Rosenberg Library, Galveston, TX. July 12, 1974.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Hassell.

<sup>41</sup> “Leroy Colombo Swim Center, Building Name Unveiled During the 150<sup>th</sup> Celebration on Saturday, June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2006,” *Lone Star: Journal of the Texas School for the Deaf*, Special Edition, 1856-2006.

<sup>42</sup> Author email from Don Mize, February 28, 2009.

<sup>43</sup> “Tanned Beach Boys Save Many Lives,” *The Galveston Daily News*, March 8, 1998, 15A.

<sup>44</sup> Shelley Henley Kelly, “Deaf Lifeguard Made a Career of Saving Lives.” *The Galveston Daily News*, March 8, 1998, 15A.

<sup>45</sup> Heber Taylor, “The Greatness of Hurdling Obstacles,” *The Galveston Daily News*, March 23, 2006, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Jean F. Andrews, Irene Leigh and Mary T. Weiner, *Deaf People: Evolving Perspectives in Psychology, Education and Sociology*, (Allyn & Bacon, Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2004), 16-35.

<sup>47</sup> Troy E. Hill, “The Long Horns.” *The Silent Worker*, December, 1926, 66-70.

<sup>48</sup> Gordon B. Allen, “Athletics: Leroy Colombo.” *The Silent Worker*, 38(9), June, 1926. 418-419.

<sup>49</sup> “Athletics: Leroy Colombo,” 418.

<sup>50</sup> “Athletics: Leroy Colombo,” 419.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Fleeman, “Deaf Lifeguard Makes Her Case: YMCA Firing Challenged in Lawsuit,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, March 1, 1998; David Schulz’s certification was cancelled by the YMCA after he served as a lifeguard and coach at a swimming pool for 16 years. Similarly, Stacey Bradley after one year of working as a lifeguard in California pool has been fired by the YMCA fired because of a “policy banning hearing-impaired and sight-impaired lifeguards. Being deaf, the YMCA contends, impedes a lifeguard’s ability to hear a swimmer shout for help.” Bradley was quoted by a reporter to say this about her deafness and lifeguarding which sounds exactly like what Colombo did on Galveston beaches. Bradley contended,



“With any life-threatening situation, you’re most likely not going to hear that, she said, noting the pool is always noisy with kids screaming in fun. One of the things you’re taught as a lifeguard is scanning. You never take your eyes away from the area that you are supposed to be watching. You’re always watching the pool. They don’t teach you anything about relying on your hearing. They teach you to use your eyes.”

<sup>52</sup> “Local Swimming Ace Faints Before Giving Up in 14-mile Swim Held at Biloxi, MI,” Galveston *Daily News*,

***Keeping Schools Open in Depression Era Texas:  
The CWA and the 1933- 1934 School Year***

BY LYNN M. BURLBOW

BY THE MIDDLE OF 1933 the economic condition in the United States was anything but bright. Nationally, hundreds of thousands of men and women were out of jobs. From a probable number of 5,000,000 unemployed during the 1922-1929 period, "the number of unemployed had risen to a figure which was estimated at over 10,000,000 in 1931, and in June, 1933, at 12,000,000 or more — a quarter of the number listed as 'gainfully employed.'<sup>1</sup> Hundreds of businesses had closed their doors and in the four years before 1932, "forty-five thousand miles of railway had gone into bankruptcy courts and into the hands of receivers and trustees."<sup>2</sup>

While businesses had suffered greatly during the early 1930s, schools had not escaped the effect of reduced revenues. Writing in 1937, the Information Service of the WPA reported

Lack of funds, ordinarily accruing from various tax sources for school purposes, in addition to heavy indebtedness harassed the school officials of many states, districts, and counties. New school construction, except in rare instances, had been halted. The making of extensive repairs, in thousands of cases was out of the question. In many places, school terms had been cut short so that the salaries of teachers might be saved. In many other places, because of shifts in population and for other reasons, schools were badly over crowded. Many were the instances where pupils got only half-day instruction.<sup>3</sup> In Texas, the situation was equally bad and, as businesses closed and property values declined, schools suffered. This paper looks at what the short-lived Civil

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Works Program can tell the reader about federal funding for schools in Texas during the 1933-1934 school year.

### **Civil Works Administration**

The day after the 1933 election, on November 9, 1933, "President Franklin Roosevelt issued an executive order that promised a massive work relief effort during the winter months of 1933 and 1934."

In a speech delivered in New York, Harry Hopkins, Federal Administrator of the Emergency Relief program explained the newly created plan,

I had a perfectly good speech this afternoon which was knocked into a cocked hat by the President a couple of hours ago, so I am going to talk really about a new plan which has been announced . . . Some of us are getting awfully sick of it, of these millions of people being on relief. Well, they are coming off. That is the essence of the President's new plan. Two million families are coming off relief a week from today, and they are going to be given real jobs; and two million more families are going to be given jobs within thirty days. Four million American men are going to be put to work within thirty days on real jobs. . . The Public Works Administration is going to give to me as the Civil Works Administrator—I was appointed to that office this morning by the President — \$50,000,000 a month for these two million families, and we, the Federal government, the states, the cities and the counties are going to continue to put in the \$65,000,000 a month that we are now spending for wages and materials. Second, we propose to organize in thirty days additional public works project which will not be done under contract but under what is known as force account in cities all over the United States,...

Using \$450 million borrowed from the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, Harry Hopkins found work for millions

of Americans through the Civil Works Administration. "Divided into federal, state, and local organizations, the Civil Works Administration funded projects that state and local governments could no longer afford." Freed of, and deliberately ignoring, government regulations, Harry Hopkins, through the CWA, "moved with lightening speed to employ four million workers by December 15, 1933.<sup>7</sup>

This informality would be the undoing of the CWA however.

Because the CWA had been rather haphazardly organized and not fully explained to the American public, confusion and discontent surfaced. Private businessmen believed that the CWA should utilize their services, following the pattern of the PWA, although Hopkins took care to avoid large-scale projects that duplicated PWA programs.<sup>8</sup>

The appearance, and in some cases the actual occurrences, of corruption spelled the end of the CWA program and, even as it was just beginning to improve lives, "the Roosevelt administration announced in January its plans to terminate the CWA by the spring of 1934." The initial termination date was announced to be May 1 but was later changed to April 1.<sup>9</sup>

Even though the program was short-lived, the CWA had an effect on public schools. According to the Information Service Report, across the United States, a total of 2,200 new schools were built and 41,600 schools were repaired or improved.<sup>10</sup>

Several thousand applications for aid were submitted from Texas. The actual benefit of the CWA to teacher in schools in Texas was very small as only 51 school districts out of over 7000 filed applications for supplemental salaries. Even though this is a very small percentage, by analyzing the applications, certain information about schools in Texas can be uncovered.

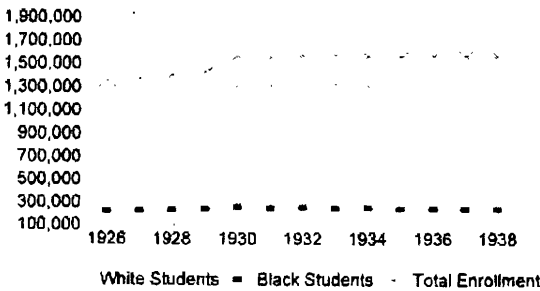
### **Changes in Texas**

Over the ten years prior to the 1933-1934 school year, the school population in Texas had increased 20%. In 1930, the

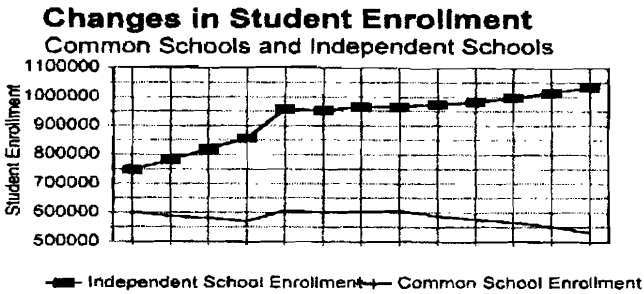
number of students of students counted as being in school increased 9.5% solely as a result of a counting change; 6 year-old students were counted for the first time. Prior to this counting 6 year-old children had been attending school but had not been counted in the official census (See Table 1: Total Student Enrollment).<sup>11</sup>

[T]he number of pupils in average daily attendance by 1932-33 exceeded the number in 1930-31 by approximately 20,000. Even though a real effort was apparently put forth to allocate a larger percentage of the Total Current Expenses in 1932-33 to Instructional Service, the increased attendance, as well as other factors leading to a larger pupil-teacher ratio, have made it decidedly difficult, and in most cases impossible, to continue the same high type of instructional services preceding this period of retrenchments (emphasis in original).<sup>12</sup>

**Total Student Enrollment**



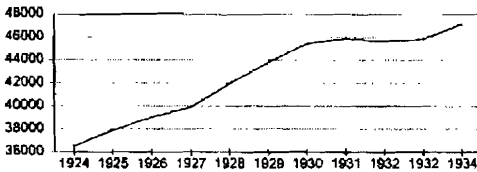
Total enrollment increased 17% between 1926 and 1933 but the increase was not evenly distributed. In common schools, those run by county school boards, the increase was only one percent while in the independent school districts, the increase was 29%. This clearly reflects the statewide move to consolidate schools and towns and cities to set up school districts independent of county school governance. The following chart shows the dramatic change in enrollments in common and independent



schools over the ten year period, 1926 to 1935.

Clearly, then, the rise in the number of students in schools created an increased financial burden on schools, both county and independent. In order to provide the instruction for the increased number of students, more teachers were needed. During the six years prior to 1931, the number of teachers employed by districts had also increased (See Chart 3: Texas Teacher Employment)<sup>13</sup>.

**Texas Teacher Employment, 1924-1934**



The chart illustrates how teacher employment, which had been increasing steadily during the late 1920s, leveled off during the first years of the 1930s even as student enrollment in the independent schools began its big increase.

### Funding Texas Schools

In 1933, Texas schools were funded through a combination of local taxes and state appropriations. This is still true of school funding in Texas today with the addition of a small percentage from the Federal government through Title programs. As economic conditions worsened in the early 1930s, the value of local property decreased and tax revenues shrank, both at

the local level and the state level. Businesses, which had paid county taxes to support schools either closed or were unable to pay their taxes as sales revenues declined. In one Frio County school district, tax collections were only 26% of the budgeted amount.<sup>14</sup>

The *Biennial Reports* give information on the annual assessed value of property in the various independent school districts. An examination of the assessed values show the following changes during the years between 1931 and 1934. The greatest change from 1931 to 1932 was 29% in the Edinburg ISD (Hidalgo Co), from 1931 to 1933 was 38% in Orangefield ISD (Orange Co),

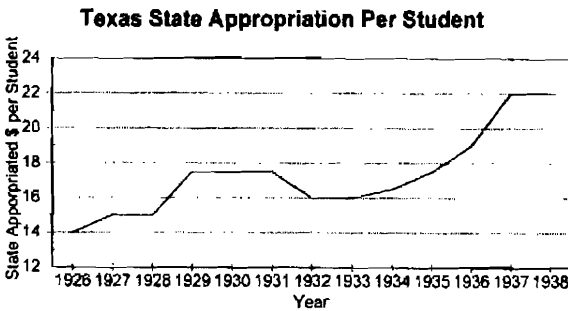
|                     | 1932 | 1933 | 1934 |
|---------------------|------|------|------|
| Change from 1931 to | 13%  | 20%  | 31%  |
| Change from 1932 to |      | 7%   | 2%   |
| Change from 1931 to |      |      | 4%   |

and from 1931 to 1934 was 51% in Rangerville ISD (Cameron Co). Two of these three districts are in far south Texas.

This condition is confirmed by the *Biennial Report of the State Board of Education, 1934-1936* where it was written:

There has been an accepted responsibility by the State which has operated to offset unjustifiable educational inequalities. The system of financing public elementary and secondary schools in Texas is characterized by its dual nature which is particularly significant because the last six-year period reveals an increasing amount of State participation, while the same period shows a marked decrease in local school support due to the apparent decline in taxable values and incident delinquency in payment of the property tax, the only source of revenue of any concern that has even been open to local effort for school support.<sup>15</sup>

Even with this statement, the actual dollar amount of the state appropriation to schools per scholastic year had been reduced



in the 1933-1934 school year to a level lower than it had been during the previous five years. The table above shows the pattern of state appropriations for the years 1926-1938.

Had the decline in appropriation been the only change in funding schools, maintaining a level budget would have been difficult. However, the appropriations were money listed on paper but not actually available to the schools to pay their obligations. Payments from the state had been in arrears since the 1930-1931 school year.

At the beginning of the biennium, September 1, 1932, a deficit of \$3.50 remained in the 1931-32 per capita apportionment. When the new administration began on January 15, 1933, the first \$1 payment on the \$16 apportionment for the 1932-33 [year] had just been made, and the problem of paying a \$16 apportionment from resources accumulated over a period of eight months instead of a full twelve-month period was faced, since the resources of the other four months were exhausted paying off the aforesaid \$3.50 deficit. Of the total of \$16 per capita apportioned for 1932-33, \$11 was paid by the end of the scholastic year, bring forward into the year 1933-34 a deficit of \$5. During the scholastic year 1933-34 this \$5 deficit was paid



and, in addition, \$14 of the total amount of the \$16 per capita apportionment for said year was also paid before the end of the year, which made a total payment of \$19 per capita to the school children of Texas during the twelve-month period ending August 31, 1934. There remained a deficit of \$2 to be carried over into the 1934-35 scholastic year. The scholastic apportionment for 1934-35 was fixed at \$16.50 per capita.<sup>16</sup>

Had districts received all of the appropriation in a timely manner (all funds were received by August but schools had been dismissed in April, May or June) the situation would not have been as difficult. One change which came out of the state's attempt to make funds available to schools in a more timely manner was the policy of allowing taxpayers to make partial payments — half in December and the other half in June.

Against this backdrop of increasing enrollments, reduction in property values and state appropriations for education, teachers' salaries became an issue for schools in Texas. Teachers' salaries in Texas had never been high. "For all the population groups and school divisions, the median salaries for Texas are exceedingly low, compared with the corresponding national medians. They are at least 25 percent below the salaries of the nation."<sup>17</sup> Texas teachers however were not the only teachers facing a bleak future as teachers across the nation were facing salary reductions and/or dismissals.

During the first two years of the depression, the great majority of American teachers and educational leaders faced the future with comparative cheerfulness. Many educators had shared in a modest way the expansive psychology which pervaded most walks of life in the late 1920's and the belief had begun to grow that the golden age of American education was just ahead. The downswing in the economic cycle was largely an academic matter to be seriously discussed in college

classrooms only.

The usual lag occurred between the downswing of business and industrial activities, and in reduction in expenditures for education. The high point in the average teacher's salary was reached about 1931, and reductions in his salary became most marked only after 1932. After 1932, the downswing became less and less an academic matter, and more and more an increasingly distasteful experience with reductions in salaries, shortening of school terms, greatly increased oversupply of certified teachers, intensified competition for teaching positions, and actual loss of jobs formerly thought secure.<sup>18</sup>

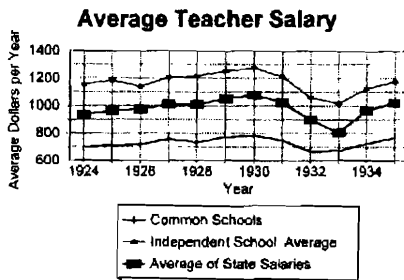
This condition was no different in Texas — funding shortages for teachers' salaries had become very a significant issue by 1932. In a *Newsweek* story, the editors had written about the New York State Teachers Association study of teachers and the reductions in their salaries:

About \$20,000,000 has been lopped from school budgets throughout New York State in the past year. This saving was accomplished largely; by cutting teachers' salaries. Salary cuts averaged 10 percent, though sometimes running as high as 33 1/3 percent. . . . In addition, such educational services as Summer schools, kindergartens, music classes, recreation and playground service, medical and dental care, evening and Americanization classes, have been curtailed or eliminated to reduce expenses.<sup>19</sup>

In the same column, *Newsweek* reported on the New York Governor's commission which released its report a week after the Association's report. Although the commission suggested a return of the school appropriation to the same level as the 1932-1933 school year; the legislature had cut the budget to a figure

10% lower than that. The Governor’s commission said it would “prefer to see classes increased in size, to see teachers adopt a heavier program of teaching, even to see salaries further cut, than to deprive children of a well-rounded education and equal opportunity.”<sup>20</sup>

The following table shows changes in the average salary of Texas teachers during the years 1924 to 1935. The average salary for the 1935-1936 school year had nearly returned to the level of the 1931-1932 school year (i.e., \$1022.00 as compared to \$1025.18).<sup>21</sup>



Districts, faced with declining revenues and increasing student enrollments, were forced to seek additional help. In November 1933 the perfect solution seemed to appear. The Civil Works Administration would make grants to districts to help with school funding for salaries, repairs, improvements, and new educational programs. Fifty-one districts completed and submitted applications requesting assistance in paying teachers’ salaries for the completion of the 1933-1934 school year. The applications of the fifty one districts form the raw data for this paper.<sup>22</sup> Records of over 7250 applications for projects were submitted from Texas for funding.<sup>23</sup> Among the various projects approved in Texas, several had a direct impact on the education of the State’s citizens, both children and parents. The aid to schools can be classified in four coding categories: E, R, S, and T. Each of these codes referred to a different type of funding support.

Code E referred to projects which improved the conditions of schools (e.g., painting of buildings and refinishing desks; rebuilding schools; landscaping school grounds for safety purposes) and access to schools (e.g., road improvement).

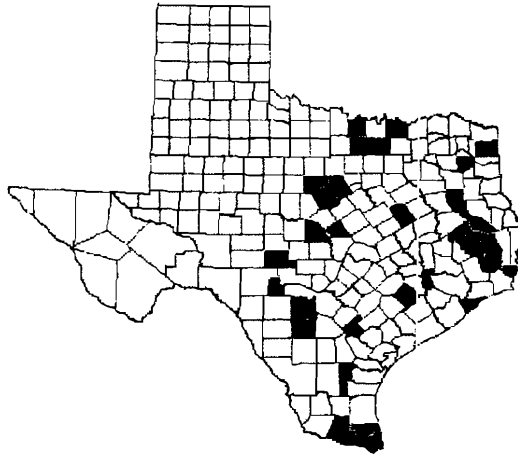
Code R referred to projects designed to improve access to school and public libraries either by lengthening hours or increasing the number of books available or provide funds to develop and deliver adult education, primarily literacy, programs. No new teachers were hired under this category's code.

Code S referred to projects where school districts needed money to finish paying teachers' salaries to the end of the school year. The teachers were already on the school faculty but the district lacked funds to pay them for nine months.

Code T referred to projects where unemployed teachers were hired to teach in schools - where the scholastic population was growing, to provide adult parenting education, to initiate bilingual programs. Some projects requested teachers who educated pre-school children while parents worked.

This paper focuses solely on the projects which were coded in the "S" category, those where districts asked a supplement to fund teachers' salaries to the end of the regularly scheduled school year. Thirty-one counties in Texas received funding to supplement teachers' salaries for the 1933-1934 school year. The majority of the counties are from the eastern part of Texas, the most populous part of the state (Map 1 on the following page shows the counties from which applications were submitted). There is a concentration of counties in the Big Thicket section of Texas where logging is a major industry as well as in far South

## Texas Counties Applications for Teacher Aid Submitted



**Texas County Map**  
 No CWA Teacher Application  
 CWA Teacher Application

**Map 1: Counties where CWA Applications Originated  
School Continuation Funding, Code S-16**

Texas and Central Texas. In the Medina/Frio area goat and sheep ranching was the major industry while peanuts and other row crops were the agriculture base in the San Saba to Eastland/Erath area of Central Texas. In those thirty-one counties, a total of fifty-one different school organizations received funding. Eighteen of the fifty-one school organizations were common school (county) districts. In twenty-five of the 51 schools organizations, the high schools were listed as accredited high schools in the *Bulletin No. 334 of the State Department of Education*.<sup>24</sup>

As stated, data for this paper was taken from the applications for aid filed by different school districts in Texas. Although the applications asked for the same standard information, not

all applications were filled out in the same detail. Differences can be found in description of the schools (variation in names and location), staff hired by the funds, and reasons for the application. All applications asked for budgets (these were uniformly completed) but not all applications include the explanations in equal detail. For some schools and teachers, gender and ethnicity are listed, but on most only the word teacher or a name. In Raymondville (Willacy Co), Waller (Waller Co), and La Feria (Cameron Co), the applications specifically listed teachers for "colored" schools. Gillette School District #4 (Karnes Co) applied for funds to keep its schools open the usual eight months and requested funding for one teacher for the "Mexican" school. The teacher in the "Mexican" school received a salary of \$.61 per hour; other teachers in the school received a salary of \$.64 per hour.

On various applications, teachers are listed by name, by subject and grade level with and without names, and just as "teacher," sometimes male or female. In the case where names are listed, one can often examine a *Biennial Report* and determine the subject taught and the teacher's tenure in the school district. On other applications, where the subject is all that is listed, it is possible to work the process in reverse and determine teachers' names.

The application asked for personnel to be paid for by the funds to be classified as skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled; however, the manner in which districts listed teachers is inconsistent. In some districts, teachers are classified as skilled whereas in others they are classified as semi-skilled. There is no pattern of classification to be discerned by looking at the salaries paid or the position of the person classified. For example, in the application from Tabasco Consolidated Independent School District (Edinburg, Hidalgo County), the superintendent, S. D. Hendrix, who taught two history classes is listed as semi-skilled and paid \$1.90 per hour. In the same district, Haupf Edwards, the manual training teacher was also listed as semi-skilled and paid \$1.08 an hour. Because of this inconsistency, and the fact that

teachers were not consistently listed by name and subject they taught, it is difficult to draw any conclusions about how many teachers/administrators were in each classification. Whether the recipient of the funds was classified as un-, semi-, or skilled on many applications may be a function of where the secretary typing the application began the listing.

### **Term of School**

The period for which the requests were being made varied from seven days (Yancey #16, Medina Co) to sixteen weeks (e.g., Nance Prairie #70, Grayson Co; Tabasco CISD; Hidalgo Co). In most cases, the request is made to keep school in session to complete the regular session. A regular session appears to have ranged from as little as six or seven months (Nance Prairie #70, Grayson Co. and Jarrett, Lampasas Co. respectively) to nine months. Twenty-eight school districts reported holding school for nine months; nine schools reported an eight month term.<sup>25</sup> These requests are consistent with the data shown in the *Twenty-Eighth Biennial Report*.<sup>26</sup>

The value the districts placed on education is evident from the language they used in the applications. Phrases such as “maintaining elementary and secondary schools . . . for a normal term” (LaFeria ISD, Cameron Co), “to enable the Garwood school to run a normal term” (Garwood, Colorado Co.), “to extend length of school term . . . to normal length of nine months” (Edna Hill, Erath Co.), and “extending the school thirty-three days in order to complete the regular school term” (Peach Tree #23, Medina Co.) demonstrate the value the schools placed on education and the importance of keeping a “normal” schedule even in times of financial difficulty.

### **Hours of Work per week**

On some of the applications, a per hour salary is listed; on others the salary is listed for the term of the application, in days, months, or weeks. Using the information provided, it is possible to calculate the hours teachers were paid per week; teachers

were either paid for a thirty-five hour week or a forty hour week. These hours per week numbers are not given in any of the *Biennial Reports* published by the State Board of Education or Superintendent of Schools.

### **Salaries**

The amount requested for teacher salaries ranged from \$.25 to \$.40 an hour for black teachers and from \$.50 to \$1.20 per hour for white teachers. Administrator, principals and superintendents, salary requests ranged from a dollar (Rangerville ISD, Cameron Co) to \$1.90 per hour (Tabasco ISD, Edinburg, Hidalgo Co). On most applications (fifty percent), salary requests were for the same dollar amount per hour for all teachers in a school, regardless of what they taught or how long they had been at the school. Tenure and subject, which was not the usual case, can be learned by reading the *Biennial Reports*. On the other applications, differences in pay rates, likely based on tenure and gender, are evident as there are multiple per-hour figures listed.

### **Summary**

During the 1933-1934 school year, Texas schools faced a severe financial strain, both in terms of absolute dollars and in access to dollars appropriated on paper, primarily due to lowered tax collections. A few districts in the state applied for and received short-term additions to their funding from the Civil Works Administration. Some of the funds were used to pay teachers' salaries for the balance of the school year.

Although the CWA program to supplements to teachers' salaries expired on April 1, 1934, Texas did receive a significant influx of money during the period of February 2, 1934, to June 30, 1934, much of it from the CWA program. The Statistical Report<sup>27</sup> prepared by the Texas Director of Emergency Education Programs, George H. Fern, reported that 847 elementary schools (784 white, 63 black) and 586 high schools (554 white, 32 black) serving 91,777 elementary students (88,979 white, 2,798 black) and 51,669 high school students (50,307 white, 1,362



black) received funding from the program. 4,999 teachers had received a total of \$619,170.36 in salary. The days worked ranged from fewer than ten (3%) to between seventy and eighty (4%). Seventy percent of the teachers worked between twenty and forty-nine days with approximately twenty-eight percent working twenty to twenty-nine days and twenty-four percent working forty to forty-nine days.

Eighty-four percent of the elementary teachers received a monthly salary of between seventy and one hundred dollars. Among high school teachers, 89% of them received a salary in the same range. The lowest paid ten percent received less than \$60.00 per month in salary. The statistical report does not contain enough detail to ascertain if there was a difference in the average salaries paid black and white teachers.

The analysis of the applications reveals several things: While there were differences in how much teachers were paid district to district, the applications usually asked for a uniform hourly rate and hours within a district, regardless of gender or time of tenure of the districts' teachers. Administrators did receive a higher salary although this, too, varied from district to district.

Only three applications indicate that the supplements were for teachers in schools where minority students were enrolled. Matching school names with classifications in the School Adequacy Survey of 1934-1935, revealed that five of the fifty-one schools were for black students.<sup>28</sup>

While only a short-lived infusion of money into the school systems, the CWA was able to support schools for the brief period in 1934, enabling them to complete their school terms of eight or nine months. The modification of tax collection and distribution of student apportionment from the state that occurred in 1934 eased some of the shortage going into the 1934-1935 academic year. The CWA program had done what Roosevelt had asked Hopkins to accomplish, ". . . American men are going to be put to work within thirty days on real jobs."

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Keohane, Robert E., Mary Pieters Keohane, and Joseph D. McGoldrick, *Government in Action*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937), 519, 522.

<sup>2</sup>Lash, Joseph P. *Dealers and Dreamers. A New Look at the New Deal*, (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 88.

<sup>3</sup>File 230B - 12550. "Federal Work Program Big Factor For Better Schools,;" Information Service (Primary File, 1936-1942 (222B-230B); Box 8, Entry 678; Division of Information, Records of WPA. Record Group 69, National Archives Building II, College Park, Maryland, 1.

<sup>4</sup>Information about projects in Texas to be funded through the CWA has been taken from the applications and project reports found in the National Archives and Records Administration's files in College Park, MD. An exhaustive search of the archival record has yet to uncover a complete listing of types of projects approved or the types of projects which were eligible for funding. The records of the CWA projects were microfilmed and the paper copies of the applications destroyed by workers hired through the WPA. The resulting films have been stored at National Archives II. The microfilm record is incomplete as only records for states Massachusetts through Wyoming and the Territories of Alaska and Hawaii are available. Archivists at the NARA have been unable to find the first part of the alphabet. Two forms provide information about the CWA projects. The first, CWA Form L 3A, is the "Application for Approval of Civil Works Projects." This form, two pages in length, explains the project in general terms of work and costs, including state and local contributions. The second form is CWA Form S-16 and is eight pages in length. This form, the "Report of Completed, Transferred, or Discontinued Projects," provides a detailed summary of the work done, the monies allocated and spent, the people hired and their salaries and an indication of the status of the project when the project funding expired. For about one-third of the project, the archival record has both forms, for the balance there is either the L 3A form or the S-16 form. The classifications of categories for the projects was based on an inductive evaluation of project descriptions and coding. Each project has a three part identification; a project number, corresponding to number given the application, a category letter, and, for a lack of other direction, a classification number. - (e.g., 20360-S-16). This number refers to project for La Feria Independent School District: 20360 was the project number, S refers to the category of funds used to pay teachers to finish out a school

year, and classification number 16 identifies it as a project for educators. Other classification numbers refer to materials purchase, labor for road work, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Dorn, Richard D. "The Civil Works Administration in Toledo, Ohio, 1933-1934." *Northwest Ohio Quarterly*, Vol 65, No. 4/Vol 66, No 1 (Autumn 1993/Winter 1994), 9.

<sup>6</sup> Hopkins, Harry L., "Unemployment Relief and the Public Works Administration." *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*, Vol 15, No.4 Current Problems of Unemployment and Recovery Measures in Operation (January 1934), 449-450.

<sup>7</sup> Dorn, "The Civil Works Administration in Toledo, Ohio, 1933-1934," 10.

<sup>8</sup> Dorn, "The Civil Works Administration in Toledo, Ohio, 1933-1934," 15.

<sup>9</sup> Dorn, "The Civil Works Administration in Toledo, Ohio, 1933-1934," 17-18.

<sup>10</sup> "Federal Work Program Big Factor For Better Schools," 2

<sup>11</sup> The numbers for this table were taken from the annual *Bulletins* published by the State Board of Education

<sup>12</sup> *Biennial Report of the State Board of Education, 1932-1934*. Austin, TX: December 30, 1934, 14.

<sup>13</sup> *Twenty-Ninth Biennial Report*, 283.

<sup>14</sup> Big Foot, Texas. "This project is to continue the Big Foot Elementary and Secondary schools for the full nine months term, by paying teachers' salaries for a period of three months. This project is necessary due to the fact that only 26% of the taxes as shown on the 1933-1934 budget were collected."

<sup>15</sup> *Biennial Report of the State Board of Education, 1934-1936*, 51.

<sup>16</sup> *Twenty-Eighth Biennial Report of the State Department of Education, 1932-1933 and 1933-1934*. Bulletin No. 341, Vol XI, no.1,

January 1935, 13.

<sup>17</sup>Cooper, Lewis B., "Salaries of Texas Teachers Are Too Low," *The Texas Outlook*: August 1935, 7-8.

<sup>18</sup>Frazier, Benjamin W., "Depression Tendencies vs. Long-time Trends Affecting Teachers," *American School Board*, Vol 91, No. 3, September 1935; 19-20.

<sup>19</sup>"Education" *Newsweek*, December 9, 1933, 31.

<sup>20</sup>"Education" *Newsweek*, December 9, 1933, 31.

<sup>21</sup>*Twenty-Ninth Biennial Report*, 283.

<sup>22</sup>See note 4.

<sup>23</sup>For the purpose of this analysis, each application number was considered as a single project. In reality though, numerous projects have multiple applications since resubmissions and modifications were allowed. Thus, a single application number may have as many as three records associated with it.

<sup>24</sup>*Bulletin of State Department of Education, Standards and Activities of Division of Supervision, 1933-34. Bulletin 334, Vol X, No. 7, July 1934*, 119-161. To be classified as an accredited high school, in addition to offering four years of high school course work, holding a minimum number of books in the library, maintaining a minimum number of degreed teachers and specified student teacher-ratio, schools had to have a term length of nine months. Thus, the specter of being unable to keep their school open for nine months was a real concern for these schools.

<sup>25</sup>*Texas School Adequacy Survey, 1935*.

<sup>26</sup>*Twenty-Eighth Biennial Report*.

<sup>27</sup>Statistical Report, Rural School Relief Program under FERA, Information Service (Primary File, 1936-1942 (222B-230B); Box 8, Entry 678; Division of Information, Records of WPA. Record Group 69, National Archives Building II, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>28</sup>*Texas School Adequacy Survey, 1935*



## *A River Creeps Through It*

BY MILTON JORDAN

Along the banks of a slough in West Virginia, not East Texas,  
an American poet considered,

A little cloud of inaudible gnats  
in a shaft of morning sunlight

He compared that cloud to the shadows of a middle-aged  
catfish in the shallows of the slough. The poet, Franz Wright,  
then asked:

God, what is the meaning of  
this minute.  
Tell me; I ask you.  
I have already been here  
forever, he replies  
and think I'm going to stay

I cannot speak to the eternal presence of the divine along  
the sloughs or back waters of our East Texas rivers. If we are  
searching for something real, though, something at least almost  
permanent, we could not find a better place to look than along  
these rivers and the sand ridges that separate them. Rivers write  
their own dissertations along their banks and under the roots of  
trees upon them. In East Texas we hear them read in low gurgles  
or occasional rushes through the narrows. We see a few visual  
aids still present in the pine forests and on the sandy meadows.

I am enough of an incarnationist to think that God chooses  
to show up in all sorts of worldly places. In one of my sources

*Milton Jordan is the immediate past president of the East Texas  
Historical Association. This was his presidential address, presented at  
the 2010 Fall Meeting in Nacogdoches.*

I learned that God came to dwell along a Middle Eastern river from which my family takes its name. Richard Donovan in his book, *Paddling the Wild Neches*, reminded me of an East Texas prophetic writer, Archer Fullinghim of the *Kountze News*. Fullinghim once wrote in his column, "Both Barrels," "I am sure the Holy Spirit lives in the bottom lands along the Neches River in East Texas." Another of our prophetic writers, Fullinghim's contemporary Roy Bedichek, used a slightly different image to describe his experience walking through a stand of uncut first growth timber along the Neches. It was, he wrote, "An island of life in the midst of a weary land."

The Neches was my father's river. He lived much of his life along it from Edgewood near its head to Beaumont and Port Neches at its mouth, Jasper and Keltys in between. My earliest memories are of a small town in Camp County along Cypress Creek. When it gets closer to Louisiana they call the Cypress a bayou. It empties into Caddo Lake. We lived in Pittsburg, up at the northern end of East Texas, for seven years. In the midst of elementary school we moved three hundred miles south and lived for ten years along Goose Creek in a town once named for that sluggish stream.

I have always been fascinated by these creeks and rivers around us, the San Jacinto and the Trinity, Buffalo Bayou, and Attoyac Bayou. Even in elementary school it dawned on me how significant the confluence of Buffalo Bayou with the San Jacinto was to the battle fought on that plain and the bogs around it. Our history is inseparable from our geography, and our geography is determined by the rivers that creep through it.

Wherever you are in East Texas geography, a river is creeping along—or dammed—very near your place. If not a river then a creek or a bayou is within easy reach. The preservation and restoration of these streams is essential to the vitality of our region. And, the identification and preservation of the scenes and stories along them is essential to maintaining our historic and cultural heritage. The scenes and the stories of our ancestors, their friends—and their enemies—keep disappearing in the face

of rapid development, poorly thought through.

Survey work at archaeological sites now inundated by Lake Wright Patman, for example, identified numerous villages occupied along the Sulphur River before major European contact with the native folks there. These sites are no longer available to us. In an interview with the archaeologist, Curtis Tunnell, Dan Utley asked how much archaeology he thought he salvaged from McGee Bend on the Angelina before that dam went in. "Probably just a fraction of one percent." Curtis said. "There must have been many hundreds or several thousand sites in that area. We only worked in a dozen or so and only took samples out of those. . . We were getting an extremely small sample out of all those sites." Those sites are now under water—or silt.

Cultural resource professionals like Curtis Tunnell are often employed to conduct mitigation research before valuable historical evidence is completely destroyed by public highway or dam construction. More often than not, private development projects make little or no effort to salvage any such evidence. Ever larger reservoirs to provide water for expanding urban areas come with a price. Quarter or half-mile wide super freeways between those areas and multi-acre asphalt parking lots in suburbs around them are at least as costly. Beyond the economic and environmental cost-benefit balance, we especially are concerned with the great loss of archaeological, cultural and historic resources and records.

Surely, we share the concerns of many for the environmental values lost to such development projects. Our concern, though, our primary concern, is with the historical and cultural records and resources we are losing. The rivers of East Texas attracted folks to them long before any written records were kept. The rivers provided a relative ease of travel and nourished life in the dense forest. Here along these rivers then are the scenes and stories of countless generations who have traveled on them and settled between them. We are the ones to identify and preserve those scenes. We are the ones to research and tell those stories.

The European segment of those stories likely begins with



Luis Moscoso, who inherited the ragged remains of the DeSoto expedition. According to Jim Bruseth and Nancy Kenmotsu, in their essay, 'From Naguatex to the River Daycao,' Moscoso came south from the Great Bend of the Red River in the summer of 1542. He may well have crossed the Neches just southwest of here in his unsuccessful effort to reach New Spain. The local folks must have thought this an odd group of travelers. Some were riding strange large animals and dressed in fancy armored outfits. Most were shuffling along draped in rags. With the help of archaeologists like Bruseth and Kenmotsu, we learn that even before these hopelessly lost Spaniards, people along these streams were encountering strange travelers.

Certainly in the four hundred-fifty years since then a remarkably diverse bunch of people have wandered through and settled in East Texas. Scattered all around us, everywhere from the Sulphur and the Cypress to Sabine Lake and Trinity Bay, are the cultural, historical, and social records and resources of these peoples, their lives and the communities they established. We are letting way too many of these records and resources slip away, not only because they disappear under various development projects, but more important for us, because we are not as active as we could be in searching out and telling their stories. I certainly regret my own failures to go with my father and later with my oldest sister to check out scenes and stories they knew well along the Neches.

In their collection, *Making East Texas, East Texas*, editors Bruce Glasrud and Archie McDonald remind us that East Texas is more than a compass reference. We do not say eastern Texas. This is a region of a state, to be sure, but it is a state of mind as well, they tell us. I take that to mean that the scenes and stories of how and where we lived with one another are essential to understanding what makes East Texas, East Texas today. When we are looking for some of those things almost permanent, look for places where, long after Moscoso, other Europeans settled the red hills and prairies along the Neches and our other streams. Search for the stories of the slaves and servants who came with

them. Think of the local folks native to this area and those driven here by European settlement elsewhere who lived around and among them. Most of their stories still wait for someone—maybe on of us—to tell them.

In his book *Texas Riverman*, William Seale tells one of these stories. Captain Andrew Smyth traveled on the Neches and the Angelina from early Republic days to the end of Reconstruction. In his Preface to the new edition of the book, Seale tells us that in those days “The riverways of East Texas provided a freedom of movement that the muddy, stump scattered frontier roadways could not provide.” Stories of rivermen and steamboaters and their families still wait to be told from Smithport to Bevilport to Port Neches.

Thad Sitton and Jim Conrad tell us of another group of East Texans in their book *Freedom Colonies: Independent Black Texans in the Time of Jim Crow*. They identify nearly three hundred of these “freedom colonies” along the river bottoms of East Texas and up on the sand ridges between the creeks. At the turn of the last century most Texas African American landowners lived in these formal or less formal communities of black farmers and stockmen scattered across the eastern half of Texas. These were people who, by fact and by law, were marginalized and shut out of opportunities open to many of their neighbors. Yet, in the face of these nearly impossible conditions they established something of permanent value. Residents of these communities built homes, commercial and agricultural enterprises, and churches and schools often housed in the same buildings. Thanks to our friends O. L. Davis, and Gwen and Ted Lawe and others, we know that many of these communities later built new schools with the help of the Rosenwald Fund. Julius Rosenwald began funding the building of schools for African Americans in the rural south at the end of World War I. In the next fifteen years over five hundred of those schools were built in Texas, more than half of those in our East Texas area. Most of their stories are yet to be told.

Jonathan Gerland, in a presentation at an earlier Association

meeting, told us of another group of folks, marginalized and shut out of most opportunities. Although they did not share fully in the rewards, crews of Mexican Americans provided labor on the rail lines and in the forests that was essential to the early East Texas timber industry. In their online digital project at Sam Houston State University, "Democracy and Diversity in Walker County," Rosanne Barker, Jeff Littlejon, Bernadette Pruitt, and others tell us several such stories like that of Boettcher's Mill. At the beginning of the twentieth century Baldwin Boettcher, an immigrant from Germany, established a sawmill in Montgomery County. When harvestable timber in that area gave out, his son Ed Boettcher re-established the mill in Walker County. The community of Boettcher's Mill, reconstructed just outside of Huntsville, housed the mill workers and their families. A significant number of these families were Mexican immigrants. The community also housed African American and Anglo American workers and their families.

These are a few stories of people who, against very difficult odds, established lives and communities that offer us glimpses, at least, of near permanent value. These are stories of people who "Make East Texas, East Texas." We can hope their stories direct our attention to the hundreds of scenes and stories like them waiting for East Texas historians to identify and to tell. Surely we are grateful that battle sites like the plain of San Jacinto are preserved. We appreciate the recording and telling of stories of military engagements and their strategies and tactics. The sites of where we fought with one another, though, are usually well preserved. The stories of how we fought with one another are oft retold.

Scenes and stories of where and how we lived with one another are often neglected. Freedom Colonies such as Fodice in Houston County, or workers' communities like Boettcher's Mill in Walker County, more often disappear and take their stories with them. We might be about our business as historians—professional and amateur—finding and preserving these sites and recording and telling these stories. Ask yourself what songs

the people sang. Find out who made the music. Look for those places where sharing and cooperation were the tactics, and where the people's strategy was to create or recreate community. Look for those places. Tell those stories.

Let me paraphrase an old Yiddish proverb from a collection called "Perek." It is not up to us to complete the task, but neither are we free to desist from it.

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## *The Crucible of Milam County: Railroad Construction and Community Competition in Late Nineteenth-Century Texas*

BY PHILIP G. POPE

Since shortly after it gained independence from Mexico in 1836, Texas began plans for building railroads. During the next twenty-five years, when railroad expansion across the Midwest gave rail cities such as Indianapolis and Chicago more power and prestige, Texas rail lines remained only in the planning stages. True railroad construction in Texas did not begin until 1851, and by the start of the Civil War, Texas had granted fifty-eight rail charters, over five million acres of land, and nearly two million dollars to various rail companies, only to be rewarded with a mere 468 miles of track among ten short rail lines located in East Texas and along the Gulf Coast. Rail conditions in Texas were much like those across the rest of the South; in 1840, forty-four percent of the nation's rail mileage could be found in the South, but by 1850 the South possessed only 26 percent of the nation's rail mileage.<sup>1</sup>

During the Civil War, attention and resources were diverted away from building and maintaining railroads in Texas. In the late 1860s and early 1870s, railroad companies resumed building and improving their rail lines in Texas at a rate that outpaced that of prewar growth. Such railroad expansion contributed directly to the prosperity or decline of existing towns in Texas. The lumber industry in the Big Thicket of East Texas, for example, advanced as rail lines penetrated the region in the 1850s, and then surged again after the war as railroad building resumed, in the process creating towns that would become economic centers in the region.

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Such activity was not limited to the Big Thicket. By 1870, the International & Great Northern Railroad Company (I&GN), whose line began at St. Louis, traveled south through Missouri, cut a southwest line through Arkansas, entered Texas near its northeast corner, and extended its line to Hearne, in Robertson County, Texas.<sup>2</sup>

In the summer of 1873, the *Galveston Daily News* reported a new town would be built along the line of the I&GN approximately thirty miles west-southwest of Hearne. The future townsite consisted of four hundred acres purchased by the I&GN from area land owners George Green, B. F. Ackerman, and Frank Smith. It was speculated that the town would be named Milam City. By that September, however, and perhaps due to the fact that a Milam City already existed in Sabine County, the town was instead named Rockdale. In November, with the aid of convict labor, workers completed the track to Rockdale, which would be the terminus of the rail line for the next two years. From the beginning, there were lofty expectations for the new town, for during this time, railroads were viewed as “the engines of change” that brought modernity and growth.<sup>3</sup> The railroad also incorporated Rockdale into a nationwide and regional network of cities associated with the railroad.

Why, when the I&GN built through Milam County, did the track not go through Cameron, an established town and county seat? The most important rail hub east of Rockdale was Palestine. At Palestine, one I&GN track headed south to Houston and Galveston, while the other track headed southwest with Austin and San Antonio as future objectives.<sup>4</sup> A straight line drawn from Palestine to Austin would cut Milam County almost exactly in half, with Cameron lying above the line and Rockdale below. There is more involved, however, in building a rail line than simply finding the shortest route between two points, as an often winding rail route from Missouri to Texas can attest to.

From its entry into Texas near the state’s northeast corner

to Austin, the I&GN Lone Star line traveled through thirteen Texas counties. Of these thirteen counties, the I&GN traveled through only four county seats: Jefferson, Marshall, Palestine, and Austin. Part of the reason for the bypassing of county seats can be explained by examining town character and finances. The railroads often sought concessions from existing towns in exchange for building a line through their town. Dallas, for example, provided the Houston & Texas Central Railroad a combination of cash, bonds, and land to build its tracks through the city.<sup>5</sup>

Just as important as town character and finances were the issues of geography and topography in relation to the sitting or location of towns. The elevation of Milam County ranges from 306 to 648 feet. The majority of the county is made up of rolling plains, but there are concentrated areas in which the elevation changes greatly. Along the San Gabriel and Little Rivers, and along Alligator and Clays Creeks, for example, the elevation often varies more than one hundred feet. When planning where to build a rail line, a route of least resistance that is within certain geographic parameters is preferred. A flat route is ideal, but if not possible, the lowest grade is most desirable. A locomotive could more easily pull a train up a gradual incline than it could a steep one. In addition, more hours, material, and money were required to build a track across a river or other type of embankment.<sup>6</sup>

The Little River flows into the county near its northwest corner and flows east-southeast through a third of the county before turning northeast toward Cameron. At that point it meanders around the south side of the county seat and cuts northward just east of town, before flowing southeast again and meeting the Brazos River. The San Gabriel River, Alligator Creek, Clays Creek, Big Elm Creek and other smaller waterways cut through the northwest quadrant of the county before flowing into the Little River and thus the Brazos. Rivers and streams course through the upper half of Milam County, the most convoluted



merging of which occurs around Cameron. The half of the county below Brushy Creek and the Little River, in contrast, has only a handful of smaller creeks and streams.<sup>7</sup>

Although Rockdale and Cameron are roughly equidistant from an imaginary line running from Palestine to Austin, the more southerly route through Rockdale provided fewer barriers to rail construction. Building an east-west rail line through Cameron would have entailed crossing the Brazos into the county, the Little River at least three times, and the San Gabriel River at least once. Over the years, these rivers had broken from their banks and caused major damage during periods of heavy rainfall. In addition, bridges crossing these rivers proved unreliable at times. When heavy rains caused area rivers to flood the surrounding land, their waters sometimes unsettled, and even washed away, the bridges.<sup>8</sup> Taking the southern route through Rockdale provided a more level grade with fewer rivers for the railroad to cross than a northern route through Cameron would have provided.

In the summer of 1873 Rockdale began to establish itself within the county. People were moving to town, houses were being constructed, and businesses were being put in place so that by the time the railroad was completed to Rockdale on January 27, 1874, the new town experienced "good local trade." Five lumberyards operated in town to support this rapid growth. Roads were being laid in all directions from Rockdale and accommodating bridges were built across the Little and San Gabriel rivers and Brushy Creek. To help support the necessary infrastructure, the citizens of Rockdale voted in May 1874 to incorporate, and in June the county judge issued the order, creating the "Town of Rockdale," which a year later was amended to the "City of Rockdale." By contrast, Cameron would not permanently incorporate until 1889, as previous attempts to incorporate in 1856 and 1873 proved temporary. In addition to its road and rail connections, Rockdale was also connected with Galveston, another city on the I&GN, through a direct telegraph

connection. Perhaps due to the connectivity of Rockdale, the county newspaper, *The Messenger*, moved from Cameron to Rockdale in 1874.<sup>9</sup>

By the late spring of 1874 Rockdale claimed a wagon trade of over one hundred miles, from the Brazos River west to Georgetown, and from Giddings north to Waco. Area farmers and merchants traveled to Rockdale to do their business instead of Calvert, Bryan, Houston, or other railroad towns. Daily stage coach service was established between Rockdale and Belton, the county seat of neighboring Bell County. At the time, no rail service existed in Bell County.<sup>10</sup> For surrounding areas, Rockdale was the closest town that had a direct connection with distant places. Because of this, Rockdale held an advantage over many nearby towns. In such a situation, the importance of a town with transportation connections was greater than its relative size may suggest.

In 1933, the German geographer, Walter Christaller, introduced the concept of Central Place Theory to help explain how urban settlements evolve and how they are situated in relation to each other. A Central Place serves a surrounding area with goods and services that are unavailable in these communities. Although Christaller formed his theory to explain urban places, one could apply the same general theory to Milam County, and as such, Rockdale could be considered a Central Place in Milam County. Other towns in the county provided basic services like basic dry goods and food. Cameron provided high order services through the functions associated with being a county seat. By having a railroad connection, Rockdale provided a high order service to the surrounding towns, including Cameron. This being the case, the spheres of influence for Cameron and Rockdale overlapped through most of the county, creating an immediate competition for dominance via each of their unique advantages. Cameron, as the county seat, had established itself in terms of governmental services.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, while Rockdale was successful as a rail point, Cameron

maintained itself as the seat of county government. On April 9, 1874, however, an event occurred which would ignite the competition between Milam County's two main towns. At one o'clock in the morning, the courthouse in Cameron was "wrapped in flames." When the fire was extinguished, it was discovered that the only item not destroyed from the courthouse was a single surveyor's book. When discussions began regarding rebuilding the courthouse, there was some debate as to where the new courthouse would be placed. The main question pertained to location: should the county seat remain Cameron, or should Rockdale, a bustling new town with better transportation, be awarded the title? In 1874, citizens voted to keep the county seat at Cameron instead of moving it south to the newer town of Rockdale. Then in 1880, after six years of sometimes heated discussion during which some in Cameron accused Rockdale citizens of torching the courthouse, the voters of Milam County decided the issue with a second vote regarding the placement of the county seat. The vote kept the status quo: by granting Rockdale 1,618 votes, and awarding Cameron 1,861 votes, Cameron remained the seat of county government. Rockdale may have lost the battle for county seat, but it proved that it could wage a good war. For the next seventy years, Rockdale waged a generally quiet but consistent war with Cameron for not only survival, but for dominance in Milam County.<sup>12</sup>

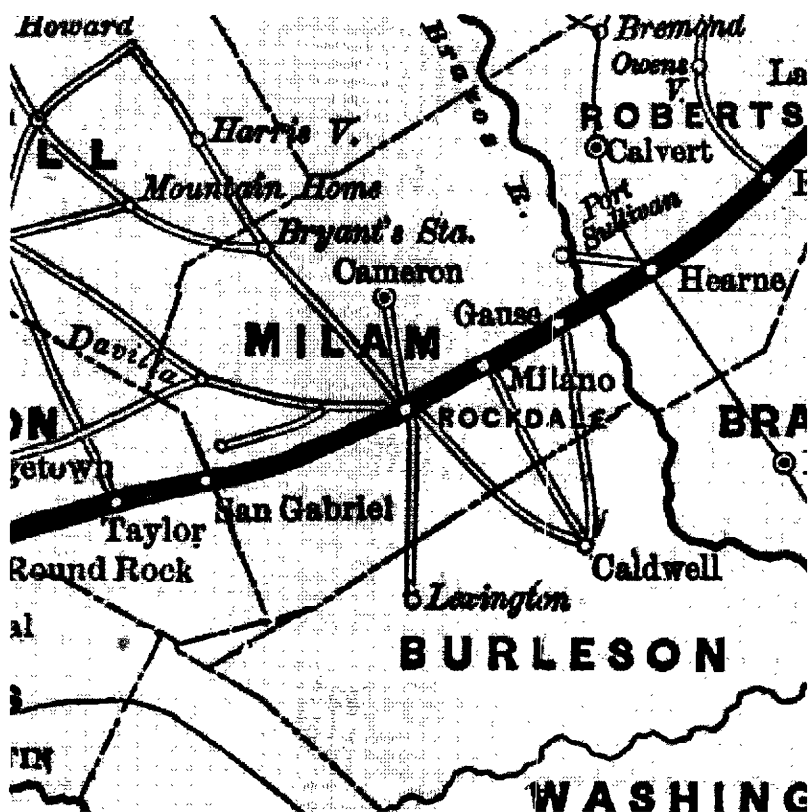
While Cameron rebuilt its courthouse, Rockdale developed networks with its hinterlands and major cities. In the fall of 1874, representatives of the I&GN and Rockdale leaders presented to the citizens of the area a plan to populate the surrounding countryside. The plan provided that within four months "hundreds of white immigrants" would be brought into the county, although they hoped that actual numbers would rise into the thousands. Their purpose would be to aid in the coming year's crop and provide local businesses with a larger consumer base. *The Galveston Daily News* boastfully reported that young Rockdale, a population estimated at 1,800, was "doing more business than a half dozen old-fashioned, gray-haired cities,"

and that it already had the look of a bustling railroad town, with “two or three banks, fifty or sixty banks merchants, and plenty of saloons.”<sup>13</sup>

Three years later, one could still find boastful commentary about Rockdale in the Galveston paper. It reported that many kinds of crops could be successfully grown in the area around Rockdale, and that the land was well suited for the raising of livestock. Available land sites were described as having plenty of trees available for fencing off the land and erecting homes, and that wells of “30 to 60 feet never fail through the driest of summers.” The mention of dry summers was a rare departure from the generally glowing reviews. *The Galveston Daily News* reported that six dry goods stores, eight grocery stores, two hardware stores, two drug stores, four churches, three schools, three hotels, an Odd Fellows hall and a Masonic lodge, and numerous other businesses could be found in Rockdale. An increasing number of Rockdale citizens, estimated at nearly two thousand, supported these businesses. Rockdale claimed to be a railroad town that conducted “extensive trade with the counties of Milam, Bell, Lee, and Burleson from its central location.” Conversely, the same paper described Cameron as being “an old town of about 500 inhabitants” that was “12 miles distance” from Rockdale which also served as its shipping point.<sup>14</sup>

Information found on maps published by the I&GN in 1878 also painted a positive picture of Rockdale and the surrounding area and recommended emigrants settle there, while casually dismissing Cameron. Visually, Rockdale appears to be the most important town in Milam County. Its name is printed in all capital letters, the only such town between Palestine and Austin to be so denoted on the map. In addition to the rail line running through town, wagon roads are shown radiating from Rockdale to the other Milam County towns of San Gabriel, Thorndale, Davilla, Bryant’s Station, and Cameron. Two other wagon roads head south from Rockdale to the Burleson County towns of Lexington and Caldwell. The wagon roads from Rockdale reach north into Hamilton County, northwest into Runnels County, and west into

Menard County. This type of promotional literature was not new, as developing towns across the country had used similar tactics to shape imaginations in the promotion of a town.<sup>15</sup>



*"The Correct Map of Texas" Woodward, Tiernan & Hale: St. Louis (1878). University of Texas at Arlington Library, Special Collections.*

This map reveals much about the other transportation routes in the area. One of Milam County's important antebellum towns, Port Sullivan, appears to only have one wagon road which connects it not with another county town, but with Robertson County's Hearne, across the Brazos River. Cameron also

appears to have but one road of service, and that road leads to Rockdale.

With direct access to the only railroad that ran through the county and numerous wagon roads, Rockdale was assuredly the transportation hub of Milam County. Although there were most certainly more roads that served these other towns, it is clear that the publishers of the map intended to provide travelers with a map that would shape their actions and attitudes in a manner that would favor Rockdale and the associated rail line. This is yet another reminder that publishers favored the enterprising towns that sought, and got, the railroad.

The narrative information on the maps also made Texas, and specifically the area around Rockdale, seem like a desirable location. The heading of the verso of 1878s "The Correct Map of Texas" states that "Texas wants one million emigrants annually for 20 years." The emigrants could purportedly enjoy "low taxes and good government" as well as "cheap land." Milam County is described as having good soil for growing numerous crops, especially around the bottomlands of the Little River. Rockdale is described as the most important town in the county, and as having a number of businesses, schools, and churches. In addition to being the main town in Milam County, Rockdale also reportedly served as "the principal shipping point for the rich and populous county of Bell." Gause and Milano, the other county towns listed on the map are described as small towns that are surrounded by good land. Cameron, however, is depicted simply as an old town, although the county seat, and is virtually dismissed.<sup>17</sup>

Cameron reasserted itself as an important town in Milam County in 1881 when the Gulf, Colorado & Santa Fe Railway (GC&SF) came through town. The GC&SF entered the county from the south, crossed the I&GN line at Milano, continued north to Cameron, and then swung west through Buckholts and out of the county. This rail line began at Galveston, bypassed Houston, ran north to Dallas and up through Oklahoma. Ten years later, the San Antonio & Aransas Pass (SA&AP) Railway

provided Cameron with a north-south line, and connected it by rail with Rockdale. Significantly, the SA&AP selected Rockdale as the site of its local headquarters. South of Rockdale, the line continued to Yoakum where it met another SA&AP line that served Houston, San Antonio, and south Texas.<sup>18</sup>

Although Cameron now became somewhat more accessible and its population increased after receiving direct rail service (500 citizens in 1878, 800 in 1884, and 2,000 in 1892), the impact the railroad made on the town was not as significant as that upon Rockdale. By the time the GC&SF and the SA&AP came through Cameron, rail service had already been established in the county. Certain ladies of Cameron's upper class during this time felt more compelled to shop for dresses in the up and coming Rockdale than in their older town. Cameron was also not as important a point on either rail line as Rockdale was on the I&GN. Rockdale was the end of the line for two years, whereas Cameron was never intended to be a destination, but rather just another town along the line. In contrast to Rockdale's designation on I&GN maps, SA&AP maps denoted Cameron in regular type, the capital letters being reserved for Waco to the north and Yoakum to the south.<sup>19</sup>

The railroad also had a greater impact on Rockdale than on Cameron because of the towns that the different rail lines connected. The I&GN connected Rockdale with the state capitol (Austin), which, at a little over sixty miles away was the closest city. Milam County was located on the fringe of Austin's hinterland, its area of influence. Houston, meanwhile, was about 140 miles away, Dallas 150 miles away, and San Antonio 155 miles away from the population centers of Milam County.<sup>20</sup> Arguably, the most important rail line to go through Cameron was the SA&AP, but because its link with Rockdale better connected it with other area towns that also led to more of Cameron's residents traveling to Rockdale and other towns for services. Cameron, in other words, lost out to Rockdale for several reasons.

However, this did not mean that Cameron gave up. There was

an attempt in 1894 to construct a railroad west from Cameron to Georgetown, close to the regional hub of Austin. For whatever reasons, the proposed Trinity, Cameron and Western line never came to fruition.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the existing and parallel I&GN line presented too much competition. Rockdale had already secured and established a line toward the regional hub, and there was just not enough demand for another such line from Milam County.

Cameron still claimed the county seat, but Rockdale seemed to have an edge in the fields of business and progressive citizens. In an 1893 publication listing prominent individuals of Milam and surrounding counties, more of the county's progressive and successful businessmen are shown as living in Rockdale than in any other county town. These Rockdale business leaders include J. S. Perry, Benjamin and Joseph Loewenstein, E. M. Scarbrough, and C. H. Coffield. In the course of running profitable businesses and being actively involved in a number of civic and fraternal organizations, these men provided business leadership during Rockdale's first twenty years. They also helped to make Rockdale recognizable as a "town of young men...and...youthful enthusiasm and energy."<sup>22</sup>

Some of these stories reveal how the town of Rockdale lured the enterprising. For example, J. S. Perry was a lawyer who, in 1874 left the established town of Cameron for the new railroad town of Rockdale. Within two years, Perry was elected County Judge of Milam County, and a few years later, elected by the people of Milam, Brazos, and Burleson counties to represent their interests in the State Senate. In the 1890s he served as mayor of Rockdale, president of the Rockdale Cotton Oil Mills, and director of the Rockdale Improvement Company. Under Perry's leadership, Rockdale "prospered as never before, and it was mainly through his management that the town acquired its very efficient system of water works and electric lights."<sup>23</sup>

Benjamin and Joseph Loewenstein came to Rockdale from Prussia in 1873, shortly before the arrival of the I&GN. Upon arriving, they opened a dry goods store that came to be one of the most successful in the area. In addition to their store, they also



operated the Rockdale Brick Works and helped build seven brick business buildings in Rockdale. The brothers were described as being “public-spirited...standing ready at all times to put their money in any legitimate enterprise and subscribing liberally for the promotion of local industries.” To this extent, Benjamin helped to establish the First National Bank of Rockdale, and served as its vice president. He also served on the bank’s board of directors. Joseph served on the local school board and was a member of a number of fraternal organizations including the Masons, Knights of Honor, and the American Legion of Honor. Both of the Loewenstein brothers were also active in the Hebrew order, B’nai B’rith. By associating with, and being active in, a number of orders and social clubs, these citizens could identify themselves as “members of the ascendant urban elite.”<sup>24</sup> Having a progressive, visionary mindset would help these, and other men, lead Rockdale to success.

E. M. Scarbrough came to Texas in 1867 and settled at Bryant’s Station, working for the merchant firm of Hale & Evans before moving to the railroad town of Hearne in 1870. In 1874, however, Scarbrough moved back to Milam County, relocating to Rockdale. He had in fact lobbied the I&GN to build through Rockdale, and eventually became its mayor. In 1882, Scarbrough partnered with Robert Hicks, forming the firm of Scarbrough and Hicks, which the 1893 publication described as “one of the largest and financially solid establishments in this section of the state.” Scarbrough’s training in Rockdale served him well. After seven years there, he departed for Austin in 1889 where he would build that city’s first skyscraper and fully air-conditioned department store. Located on Austin’s Congress Avenue, The University of Texas at Austin’s *Daily Texan* credits the Scarbrough store as having “started the downtown business district.”<sup>25</sup>

In August of 1875, C. H. Coffield arrived in Rockdale, and ever since the Coffield name has been associated with the town. Partnered with Hugh Witcher, Coffield engaged in a successful mercantile business in Rockdale, and with Benjamin

Loewenstein, helped organize the First National Bank of Rockdale and held a stake in the Rockdale Improvement Company. Coffield also participated in the fledgling local lignite industry and real estate. Like many other business leaders in the area, Coffield was a Mason and Knight of Honor. He was also one of the earliest town boosters, claiming Rockdale to be "the best town of 2,000 people in Texas."<sup>26</sup>

It is doubtful that Coffield or others would have had much success in the lignite industry had it not been for the proximity of the railroad. The existence of lignite around Rockdale had been known at least since 1866, but it was not until 1890 when Herman Vogel began his operation three miles east of Rockdale that lignite began to be mined in Milam County. The lignite in Milam County was described as being "equal to the best quality utilized and far superior to much" that was being used in Western Europe. In 1892 the Rockdale Mining and Manufacturing Company, of which Coffield was president, purchased land adjacent to Vogel's and also began mining lignite. By 1895, Vogel had demonstrated enough promise in the venture that he could be counted on to initiate other mining activities. With the aid of five other individuals, he formed the Black Diamond Coal Company. The success of these early lignite ventures was naturally due to the great amount of lignite present. The presence of good transportation facilities, however, played an equally important role. These early mines were located near the track of the I&GN, making the transportation of the lignite to other towns fairly easy.<sup>27</sup>

While business and industry were important to Rockdale, agriculture was still the most important form of business county-wide. The Farmers' Alliance had a strong presence in Milam County, as is evidenced by the number of businesses that fronted support for the Alliance. When the Alliance decided to boycott jute bags because of their artificially high prices, Rockdale merchants joined them by refusing to order any jute bags. Rockdale was the main shipping point for agricultural goods in Milam County, receiving "the larger portion of the crop of Milam

County,” an accomplishment that the local paper trumpeted. In 1887, roughly 7,400 bales of cotton were received at Rockdale, while in contrast, Cameron received only about 5,000 bales; five years later, Rockdale received over 15,000 bales, and Cameron just under 14,000.<sup>28</sup> Although Cameron narrowed the margin, Rockdale still commanded the cotton trade in Milam County.

The importance of farmers to county merchants was evident in an 1898 letter to *The Rockdale Messenger*, penned by a Cameron citizen concerning some cases of smallpox:

The statement that Cameron has attempted to make the outside world believe that the danger was insignificant, etc., is not only absolutely false but it is more. Rockdale being a rival town, and the time being at hand when the farmers make their arrangements with the merchants for the new year, one must justly conclude that it was done for the purpose of benefiting Rockdale at the expense of Cameron and was definitely malicious.

Cameron grappled with smallpox from the middle of November through the middle of December 1898. City officials downplayed the cases, saying that they were “confined to negroes,” and that the cases were “mild” and “isolated.” *The Rockdale Messenger* described the first two deaths in Cameron caused by smallpox as being “an old negro otherwise infirm with age, and a young stiff-necked negro, who refused medical assistance.” When the disease was finally contained, Dr. W. W. Greer, the county health officer called upon those in the county to come back to Cameron to conduct their business. A state health officer, after meeting with Greer, traveled to Rockdale on his way back to Austin in an attempt to ease their fears.<sup>29</sup> If there was any doubt before, the disagreements arising from the smallpox episode confirm that Rockdale was in competition with Cameron.

As evidenced by the previous letter, the press played a key role in developing ideas and opinions of those in the county. As

Blaine Brownell mentions in *The Urban Ethos in the South*, this boosterism in newspaper form was nothing new, as the press had been used in a number of successful cities as a tool of growth though boosterism.<sup>30</sup>

The first quarter-century of existence brought much change and growth to Rockdale. The town quickly went from nothing but a brushy patch of land to a busy railroad terminus. After the railroad connection was made through to Austin, Rockdale had to reposition itself and sustain itself as a destination. Although Rockdale appeared not to have a future as a major national center, city leaders could strive to establish their locale as an integral regional center, along the lines of Paris and Texarkana, which prospered due in large part to their linkages forged by the Texas and Pacific Railroad.<sup>31</sup> Through these formative years, civic and business leaders along with a local paper helped guide the growth of the town. While the realized growth of Rockdale remained somewhat muted as compared to the vision of such town leaders, the burgeoning regional center nonetheless managed to present itself as a viable challenger to Cameron for dominance in Milam County.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Frank Goodwyn, *Lone Star Land: 20th Century Texas in Perspective*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), 126-127.; *Handbook of Texas Online*, "Railroads" <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/RR/eqrl.html> (accessed November 10, 2006).; Carl Abbott, *Boosters and Businessmen: Popular Economic Thought and Urban Growth in the Antebellum Middle West*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 15, 26-27.; James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 91.

<sup>2</sup> Goodwyn, *Lone Star Land*, 129-135.; John W. Reys, *The Forgotten Frontier: Urban Planning in the American West Before 1890*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1981), 37-39.; James J. Cozine, Jr., *Saving the Big Thicket: From Exploration to Preservation, 1685-2003*, (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2004), 47-50.; *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. "International-Great Northern Railroad" <http://www>.

tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/II/equi4.html (accessed March 17, 2006).; David Rumsey Map Collection "Map of the International and Great Northern Railroad. Lone (Star) Route and Connections" Woodward, Tiernan & Hale, Map Engravers: St. Louis. Rand, McNally & Co, Map Engr's Chicago (1878) <http://www.davidrumsey.com/maps770067-22085.html>. (accessed March 13, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> *Galveston Daily News*, 16 July 1873, 30 September 1873, 1 November 1873.; Ida Jo Marshall, *Rockdale Centennial: A History of Rockdale, Texas 1874-1974*, (Rockdale: The Rockdale Reporter, 1974), 9.; *The Roads of Texas*, (Shearer Publishing: Fredericksburg, Texas, 1999), 107-108.; Katherine G. Morrissey, *Mental Territories: Mapping the Inland Empire*, (Ithica, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 116.; Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 313.; This author is indebted to Lynna Kay Shuffield for sharing her findings from the Galveston Daily News as it pertains to Milam County. A portion of Ms. Shuffield's work can be found online at [http://www.geocities.com/lks\\_friday/COLUMN-001.htm](http://www.geocities.com/lks_friday/COLUMN-001.htm).

<sup>4</sup> David Rumsey Map Collection "Map of the International and Great Northern Railroad. Lone (Star) Route and Connections" (1878) <http://www.davidrumsey.com/maps770067-22085.html>. "The Correct Map of Texas" Woodward, Tiernan & Hale: St. Louis (1878) map located at University of Texas at Arlington, Special Collections, Map Room.

<sup>5</sup> David Rumsey Map Collection "Map of the International and Great Northern Railroad. Lone (Star) Route and Connections" (1878) <http://www.davidrumsey.com/maps770067-22085.html>.; Goodwyn, Lone Star Land, 130.

<sup>6</sup> *United States Department of Agriculture, Soil Survey for Milam County, Texas*, (Washington, D.C., 2004), 11, 191.; "Taylor Sheet" *United States Geological Survey*, 1894, reprinted 1916.; "Buckholts Quadrangle" *United States Geological Survey*, 1909, reprinted 1912.; Maps located at University of Texas at Arlington, Special Collections, Map Room.; WVA-USA "The Building of the C&O Railway" <http://www.wva-usa.com/history/mthope/cando.php> (accessed August 4, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Soil Survey for Milam County, Texas, 191.

<sup>8</sup> David Ray Galbreath, compiler, Index of Road and Bridge

Commissioners Court Minutes, Milam County, Texas, Volume A thru Volume 15, 1874-1981, (Frankston, Texas: by the author, 2004); *Dallas Morning News*, 9 April, 1900.; Mabel Charles, Personal Journal, private collection. Ms. Charles (1903-2002) was born in and raised in the Duncan community, educated in Cameron, lived most of her life in the Tracy community near the San Gabriel River, and spent the last years of her life in Rockdale, living all her 99 years in Milam County. She was active in county organizations including the Milam County Heritage Preservation Society, and had a passion for local history.; *Galveston Daily News*, 4 December 1874.

<sup>9</sup> *Galveston Daily News*, 4 December, 1873, 3 January, 1874, 27 February, 1874, 8 March, 1874, 22 March, 1874.; Lelia M. Batte, *History of Milam County, Texas*, (San Antonio: The Naylor Company, 1956), 51, 85, 89.; *Rockdale Messenger*, 4 July, 1889, 22 September, 1898.

<sup>10</sup> Marshall, *Rockdale Centennial*, 9.; *Rockdale Messenger*, 1 April, 1874, 5 March, 1874.; David Rumsey Map Collection "Map of the International and Great Northern Railroad. Lone (Star) Route and Connections" (1878) <http://www.davidrumsey.com/maps770067-22085.html>.; Blaine Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Center for Spatially Integrated Social Science "Walter Christaller: Heirarchical Patterns of Urbanization" <http://www.csiss.org/classics/content/67> (accessed April 19, 2006).; Revision Notes "Central Place Theory" <http://www.revision-notes.co.uk/revision/176.html> (accessed April 19, 2006).; Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, 97.

<sup>12</sup> *Galveston Daily News*, 14 April, 1874.; Dorothy Allison, *History of the Milam County Courthouses, 1822-1991*, (Cameron, Texas: Main Printing Inc., 1991), 13-16.; Batte, *History of Milam County, Texas*, 77.

<sup>13</sup> *Galveston Daily News*, 27 October, 1874, 7 November, 1874.; Batte, *History of Milam County, Texas*, 75. According to Batte, a movement to bring immigrants into Milam County was attempted in 1873 by B.F. Ackerman, George Green, J.W. McCown, Jr., William McGregor, and C.R. Smith when they formed the short-lived Milam County Real Estate and Emigration Association.

<sup>14</sup> *Galveston Daily News*, 21 October, 1877.

<sup>15</sup> "The Correct Map of Texas," Woodward, Tiernan & Hale: St.

Louis (1878).; Morrissey, Mental Territories, 129.

<sup>16</sup>“The Correct Map of Texas,” Woodward, Tiernan & Hale: St. Louis (1878).

<sup>17</sup>“The Correct Map of Texas,” Woodward, Tiernan, & Hale: St. Louis (1878).

<sup>18</sup>*Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. “Cameron, Texas” <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/CC/hfc1.html> (accessed May 10, 2006).; *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. “Gulf, Colorado, and Santa Fe Railway” <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/GG/eqg25.html> (accessed August 10, 2006).; *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. “San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railway” <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/SS/eqs6.html> (accessed August 10, 2006).; *Rockdale Messenger*, 4 July, 1889.; “Milam County” map, (Texas) General Land Office, June 1918.; Bill Roberts’s Home Page “Map of the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railway and Connections” (1893) [http://www.wcroberts.org/Images/1893\\_SAP\\_Map.jpg](http://www.wcroberts.org/Images/1893_SAP_Map.jpg). (accessed August 10, 2006).

<sup>19</sup>Batte, History of Milam County, Texas, 88.; *Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v. “Cameron, Texas” <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/CC/hfc1.html> (accessed May 10, 2006).; “The Correct Map of Texas” Woodward, Tiernan & Hale: St. Louis (1878).; Bill Roberts’s Home Page “Map of the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railway and Connections” (1893).; *Cameron Herald*, 25 March, 1915.

<sup>20</sup>Cameron Chamber of Commerce “About Cameron, Texas”<http://www.cameron-tx.com/aboutcameron.html>. (accessed August 10, 2006).

<sup>21</sup>*Dallas Morning News*, 4 October, 1894, 14 November, 1894.

<sup>22</sup>*History of Texas Together with a Biographical History of Milam, Williamson, Bastrop, Travis, Lee, and Burleson Counties*, (The Lewis Publishing Company: Chicago, 1893), 824.

<sup>23</sup>*History of Texas Together with a Biographical History of Milam, Williamson, Bastrop, Travis, Lee, and Burleson Counties*, 344, 824.

<sup>24</sup>*History of Texas Together with a Biographical History of Milam, Williamson, Bastrop, Travis, Lee, and Burleson Counties*, 345-347.; Doyle, New Men, New Cities, New South, 208.

<sup>25</sup> *History of Texas Together with a Biographical History of Milam, Williamson, Bastrop, Travis, Lee, and Bureson Counties*, 568, 569, 636.; Austin Post Card.Com “The Scarbrough Building”

<http://www.austinpostcard.com/shistory.htm>. (accessed 10 April, 2006).; *Daily Texan Online* “2 Austin buildings get historical markers” <http://www.dailytexanonline.com/media/storage/paper410/news/2002/11/15/StateLocal/2.Austin.Buildings.Get.Historical.Markers-497676.shtml?noreferrer=200608131820&sourcedomain=www.dailytexanonline.com>. (accessed 4 April, 2006).; *Daily Texan Online* “Historic Scarbrough house to be demolished” <http://www.dailytexanonline.com/media/storage/paper410/news/2001/02/27/News/Historic.Scarbrough.House.To.Be.Demolished-698843.shtml?noreferrer=200608131820&sourcedomain=www.dailytexanonline.com>. (accessed 4 April, 2006).

<sup>26</sup> *History of Texas together with a Biographical History of Milam, Williamson, Bastrop, Travis, Lee, and Bureson Counties*, 824-826.

<sup>27</sup> Batte, *History of Milam County, Texas*, 106, 107.; Marshall, *Rockdale Centennial*, 3.; *Dallas Morning News*, 14 March, 1897.; *Rockdale Messenger*, 27 June, 1889.

<sup>28</sup> *Dallas Morning News*, 18 November, 1886.; *Rockdale Messenger*, 4 July, 1889, 18 July, 1889.; *Dallas Morning News*, 2 December, 1885, 22 November, 1887, 10 February, 1889, 7 January, 1893, 16 January, 1893.; Jute bagging was used to hold together cotton bales. At the time, the Alliance-preferred alternative was cotton bagging.

<sup>29</sup> *Rockdale Messenger*, 22 December, 1898.; *Dallas Morning News*, 23 November, 1898, 26 November, 1898, 2 December, 1898, 19 December, 1898, 23 December, 1898.

<sup>30</sup> Brownell, *Urban Ethos in the South*, 65.

<sup>31</sup> Walter L. Buenger, *The Path to a Modern South: Northeast Texas between Reconstruction and the Great Depression*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 40.





## *Oil Well Blues: African American Oil Patch Songs<sup>1</sup>*

BY JOE W. SPECHT

In 1901, William Joseph Philp was roughnecking at Spindletop, the prolific oil field near Beaumont, Texas, that roared in with the Lucas gusher, and he recounted, "Now one time there was a bunch of colored folks went out there to work and I had a brother in that gang. He says, 'Now, they won't allow no nigger to do oil work. They can drive a truck and go through there with a little lumber and anything like that, you can have nigger drivers. But you can't get out and take the brake and drill for oil. We just won't stand for it.'"<sup>2</sup> Frank Dunn also worked on a rig at Spindletop, noting, "The work [on earthen tanks] was done by the Negroes ... They decided that it would be better off to have the nigger away from the field. They felt like at that time that they were taking up jobs that some white man probably would be glad to have."<sup>3</sup> And for the next half-century, this code of exclusion prevailed in the oil fields of the Gulf-Southwest (Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and New Mexico).

Employment opportunities for black males in the patch were limited primarily to mule-skinner and teamster jobs hauling equipment and wood to the rigs, doing dirt work, building earthen tanks, and the occasional assignment on a pipeliner crew.<sup>4</sup> At Baytown, Texas, African Americans helped to build the refinery for the Humble Oil & Refining Company, and many of them hired on as unskilled refinery workers, over the protests and resistance of white workers.<sup>5</sup>

With oil and natural gas discoveries in the Permian Basin of West Texas, African Americans found jobs in oil company camps as janitors, cooks, and mechanics.<sup>6</sup> Jim Crow laws and local customs further impeded chances for a black man to roughneck

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on a rig, where mobility and the capability to move from boom to boom were necessities: restaurants and cafes regularly excluded African Americans, and public housing, always in short supply in any boomtown, whether it be a shotgun shack, tent, or flophouse cot, was off limits, too.<sup>7</sup>

Even with racial discrimination deep-seated in the petroleum industry, African American songsters and bluesmen with roots in the Gulf-Southwest were among the first to record songs with petroleum-related themes.<sup>8</sup> Twelve years after the Lucas well blew in at Spindletop, references to the Beaumont field were already circulating. Walter Prescott Webb, then a high school history teacher in Beeville, Texas, transcribed eighty stanzas of what would soon be labeled a “blues” he collected from Floyd Canada, a young black man also living in Beeville.<sup>9</sup> Webb dubbed Canada’s composition “The African Iliad.” He appended a selection of stanzas in an article published in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1915, including the following verse.<sup>10</sup>

Train I ride doan burn no coal at all,  
It doan burn nothin’ but Texas Beaumont oil;  
That’s the long train they calls the Cannon Ball,  
It makes a hundred miles and do no stoppin’ at all.<sup>11</sup>

“Texas Beaumont oil” is, of course, a reference to Spindletop, and how the abundant discovery there prompted many industries to convert from coal to oil. Even though Floyd Canada never recorded the so-called “African Iliad,” the verse referring to “Texas Beaumont oil” later turned up in Big Boy Cleveland’s 1927 “Goin’ to Leave You Blues” (Gennett 6108).<sup>12</sup>

One of the earliest known recordings of an oil field-themed song is Blind Lemon Jefferson’s “Oil Well Blues” (Paramount 12771), which dates to 1929.<sup>13</sup> Jefferson was born in 1893 on a sharecropper farm in Couchman, Texas, north of Wortham in Freestone County.<sup>14</sup> The cause of his blindness is unknown, but by the time he had reached his teens, Lemon was an accomplished musician. He started out playing country dances and picnics

in the area and on street corners in Wortham, Streetman, and Grosbeck before venturing north to Dallas and the fabled Deep Ellum district. Jefferson began recording for Paramount Records in late 1925, waxing nearly one-hundred sides over the next four years.<sup>15</sup> His impact and success was instantaneous. As blues scholar David Evans notes, “Jefferson was the first community-based folk blues singer/guitarist to become a star on phonograph records.”<sup>16</sup> Years later Yazoo Records, a company that specializes in reissuing early rural American music, proclaimed him “King of the Country Blues.”<sup>17</sup>

In the early 1920s, Jefferson divided much of his time between Dallas, Wortham, and Mexia.<sup>18</sup> 1920 was also the year the No. 1 Henry well blew in at Mexia, the first of several fields found in the Woodbine Fault-Line that stretched along the Mexia Fault Zone.<sup>19</sup> The strike set off a boom so out of control that Texas Rangers and Federal prohibition agents were summoned, along with support from the Texas National Guard, to quell the corruption and violence.<sup>20</sup> Other discoveries in the Woodbine sand included the Wortham field in 1924. With all this drilling activity going on around him, Lemon incorporated a petroleum-related motif into one of his tunes. “Oil Well Blues” was just one of several of Jefferson’s songs that dealt with the pleasures of the flesh, and he instilled the sexually charged lyrics with irony and humor.<sup>21</sup>

The terminology of the patch readily lent itself to sexual allusions: laying pipe, pump jacks rocking, rotating tool, etc. Author Bill Porterfield, who grew up in the oil fields of Texas in the late 1930s and early 1940s, observed: “A rig was sexual. Male joints fit into female, with the help of pipe dope, and between the hot plug and the hot tube there was a lot of plugging and stabbing and swabbing and gushing. If the jerker pump slipped on a soft rope, you pulled the sucker rod, pronounced it a one-lunger peckernneck with a slack wallop, and stacked it with the dead line and wished for a nipple-up horsecock.”<sup>22</sup>

In “Oil Well Blues,” Jefferson – accompanying himself on acoustic guitar – incorporated references to oil blowing in, long

distance drilling, wildcatting, and the Woodbine sand. This last reference gave the song a pointed, personal flavor as the Woodbine Fault-Line ran through his home counties of Freestone and Limestone.

Ain't nothing, mama, don't get scared at all,  
It ain't nothing, mama, don't get scared at all,  
There's a long distant well and it's blowing in oil, that's all.

Ain't nothing to hurt you, ain't nothing that's bad,  
Ain't nothing can hurt you, honey, ain't nothing bad,  
It's the first oil well that your little farm ever had.

I'm a long distance driller and wildcat the country through,  
I'm a long distance driller and wildcat the country through,  
But I'm done wildcatting if I bring in this well for you.

I'm a mean oil well driller, been a driller since I been a man,  
I'm a mean oil well driller, been a driller since I been a man,  
And I don't stop drilling till I strikes that Woodbine sand.<sup>23</sup>

Although Jefferson did not use specific drilling terminology, English blues authority Paul Oliver lists "Oil Well Blues" in the category of blues songs with mechanical and industrial themes.<sup>24</sup> And certainly record buyers could relate directly to the images of the patch, sexual symbolism aside.

Walter Davis' roots were in Mississippi, not the Southwest; Davis was born in 1912 in Grenada, Mississippi. After running away from home, he found his way to St. Louis in 1925.<sup>25</sup> Here he drew the notice of the influential barrelhouse pianist Roosevelt Sykes. In 1930, when Davis began recording for Victor Records and its Bluebird subsidiary, Roosevelt Sykes, under the pseudonym Willie Kelly, provided appropriate piano accompaniment on several early sessions, including one that took place in Dallas.<sup>26</sup> His association with Victor Records offered Davis the opportunity to tour outside of St. Louis, and he made frequent swings into the Lone Star State.<sup>27</sup> As Davis

told Paul Oliver, “We went all round Dallas, Texas ... and then there was, well down in Galveston, Texas and different places on the way.”<sup>28</sup> There were bookings to be had, too, in East Texas oil boomtowns such as Longview, Kilgore, Gladewater, and Tyler. Here Davis could observe firsthand the fast-buck artists and hustlers who swarmed to take advantage of roustabouts with paychecks in their pockets. From these experiences, he crafted “Oil Field Blues” (Bluebird B-5390) in 1933.<sup>29</sup>

Not all boomtowns were teeming with gamblers and prostitutes, but there were plenty of bustling burgs that could accommodate ‘round-the-clock temptations. George Parker Stoker, a physician who practiced medicine in the East Texas oil fields in the early twentieth century, described the gambling house atmosphere: “It was ablaze with light. Pimps, professional gamblers, drillers, gun-men, and business men stood at the bar drinking, arguing, swearing, and telling filthy stories ... Games were being played by tense, excited men ... Earnings of a week were tossed on a number or a roll of the dice and lost ... Stacks of currency, piles of gold and silver stood in front of the eager-eyed players. Numbers were droned. The click of dice, the whirl of the wheel, wild laughter, and oaths filled the air.”<sup>30</sup>

African American card sharps and dice peddlers were also part of the mix. Rembert “Itsie” Collins operated a black juke joint outside of Mineola, Texas, in Wood County, and he could shuffle a deck, too. “Lots of colored people had oil [if they had retained their mineral rights], and they didn’t know what to do with the money. Wherever gamblin’ be at, that’s where I be, and when the East Texas oil field opened up [in 1930], I made my headquarters in Kilgore ... I made so much money there, I was scared to go to sleep.”<sup>31</sup>

Davis’ recordings for Bluebird earned him a reputation as lyrical storyteller.<sup>32</sup> And “Oil Field Blues” – with buoyant piano backing from Roosevelt Sykes – encapsulated the cold calculation, deliberate preparation, and the potential for violence that was all part of the freelance professional gambler’s lifestyle.

I'm going out on that oil field, tell me it's they payday over there  
 I'm going out on that oil field, tell me it's they payday over there  
 Goin' to carry my cards and dice, and I ain't goin' to play nothin' fair.

Goin' to carry my own Winchester, my .38 Special, too  
 Goin' to carry my own Winchester, my .38 Special, too  
 Because I don't know what may happen, I may have some shooting to do."

The discovery at Spindletop set off a frenzy of drilling activity in Louisiana, too. Jennings, now the parish seat of Jefferson Davis Parish, is about ninety miles east of Beaumont. Salt domes here were similar to the ones found at Spindletop, and in September 1901, nine months after the Texas boomer, the first strike in the Jennings field came in. The Louisiana petroleum industry had come of age.<sup>33</sup>

In adjacent Evangeline Parish, Amédé Ardoin was the seventh of seven sons of black Creole parents. Born in 1898 on a farm on Bayou Nezipqué, Amédé learned to play the accordion sitting in a chair before his feet could touch the ground.<sup>34</sup> He tried his hand at sharecropping in his teens but eventually realized he could make a living solely with his music. Dennis McGee, a Cajun fiddler from Eunice, became a willing partner, and the two began playing together for white dances in "Kaplan, at Bayou Noir, Lake Charles, everywhere."<sup>35</sup> Economic times were good with the Jennings field still producing and with ever-growing refining capability at refinery centers at Baton Rouge and Lake Charles.

McGee joined Ardoin for his first recording session in 1929 in New Orleans for Columbia Records. Here the biracial duo cut such classics as "Two Step de Eunice" and "Two Step de Prairie Soileau," tunes that have become standards of the Cajun and Creole (and later zydeco) songbook.<sup>36</sup> Musician and folklorist Michael Doucet describes Ardoin as "perhaps the most elusive and influential of all Louisiana French musicians ... [he] anchored the blues in French folk songs."<sup>37</sup>

Ardoin's Columbia releases, along with those of Joe and Cleoma Falcon, who had recorded for Columbia the previous year, were

popular sellers and convinced the major record companies there was a market for Louisiana French music.<sup>38</sup> Short of stature, Ardoin earned the affectionate nickname “Tite Nègre” or “the little black guy.”<sup>39</sup> And today both Cajun and Creole musical communities claim him as their own.<sup>40</sup>

Ardoin’s brand of African American French music is characterized by a driving, syncopated accordion combined with fervent vocals sung in Louisiana French dialect. Many of the thirty-four songs he recorded are lamentations to women who have done the singer wrong. Roots music historian Tony Russell surmises: “The deepest impression left by Ardoin’s music is of a spirit near the end of its tether ... and, in a phrase that recurs in virtually every song [Amédé is] ‘tout seul’ – all alone.”<sup>41</sup>

“La Vales des Chantiers Pétrolipères” (Decca 17002) or “Waltz of the Oil Fields” certainly fit the pattern: bounding accordion, vibrant vocals, and ‘tout seul.’ Ardoin recorded the song in New York City for Decca Records at his final session on December 22, 1934.<sup>42</sup>

Oh, me, I’m going, me I’m going  
 Me, I’m going to the house all alone  
 Me, I’m going, I’m telling you  
 You, yeah, oh, come on and see me.

I’m going because of what you did  
 Me, I’m going to the oil wells  
 To go to the dance, to see the pretty women  
 Oh, it’s over there you’ll have to go.

Oh, it’s beautiful!  
 Oh, for what you’ve done I’m going off to the oil field

For me to be able to go walk  
 I’m going to the dance to see the pretty women  
 Oh, it’s over there you have to go to have a good time.

You, for what you’ve done, doll,



Me, I'm all alone, me, I'm going to the oil wells  
I'm never gonna' come back  
To see you, because of all you've done to me."<sup>43</sup>

As the title indicated, the “oil field” and “oil wells” are interwoven into Amédé’s narrative of recrimination: “Oh, for what you’ve done I’m going off to the oil field.” At the time, a black man would have been an oddity working on a rig, but for Ardoin’s listening audience, white or black, no one was immune from the specter of derricks sprouting throughout the region. “*La Valse des Chantiers Pérolipères*” provides further evidence of how the ubiquity of petroleum in the Pelican State had literally oozed into the public conscience.

In 1940, folklorist John A. Lomax arrived in Shreveport, Louisiana, with plans to record some of the local talent for the Folksong Archive of the Library of Congress. He also drove to Mooringsport, located north of Shreveport in Caddo Parish, in an attempt to contact the family of Huddie Ledbetter (Lomax had first encountered Ledbetter – aka Leadbelly – in 1933 when Ledbetter was an inmate in the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola). Here he met Huddie’s uncle, Bob Ledbetter, who took Lomax to Oil City to see his thirty-three year old grandson Noah Moore.<sup>44</sup> Noah worked in and around Mooringsport as a sharecropper, playing music on the side.<sup>45</sup> Lomax described Moore as “resemble[ing] Leadbelly physically (he would like to imitate him as a guitar player, but Noah works at his job too closely, he doesn’t practice pickin’ enough).”<sup>46</sup> Lomax decided to record both Uncle Bob and his grandson Noah on October 10, 1940, in a hotel in Oil City.<sup>47</sup>

Oil City, Louisiana, was one of the boomtowns that popped up near Caddo Lake after the discovery of oil there in 1906.<sup>48</sup> Flaming gas wells lit the sky at night, and one well is reported to have burned uncontrolled for five years.<sup>49</sup> Neighboring Mooringsport acquired the sobriquet “City of Derricks.”<sup>50</sup> Camp followers, speculators, and oil field workers quickly descended on Caddo Parish. African Americans were part of the

rush, too, although their job opportunities were confined largely to domestic and menial work.<sup>51</sup>

Noah Moore entitled one of the songs he recorded “Oil City Blues” (AFS 3993 B 1). Clocking in at nine minutes, “Oil City Blues” offered a unique chance to sample a blues song that ran beyond the confines of the three-to-four minute limitation of the 78 rpm record.<sup>52</sup> Moore’s narrative combined phrases from a variety of sources, but in selected verses, he still called forth a sense of place: Oil City, Louisiana, a town on the edge, overflowing with opportunities for good times.<sup>53</sup>

Baby, here I am sittin’ in your Oil City town  
 Baby, here I am sittin’ in your Oil City town  
 And every time some other man come around,  
 baby, you try to turn me down.

I say Oil City town is the place I’m longin’ to be  
 I say Oil City town is the place I’m longin’ to be  
 I got a brown skin woman waitin’ there for me  
 I say I got a brown skin gal a waitin’ there for me.

I stood on the corner, ‘til my feet got soakin’ wet  
 I stood on the corner, ‘til my feet got soakin’ wet  
 I was tryin’ to make friends with every Oil City girl I met.

When he was eight years old, Sam “Lightnin” Hopkins saw Blind Lemon Jefferson perform at a church social in Buffalo, Texas, and he received some impromptu guitar instruction from the bluesman.<sup>54</sup> Hopkins was born in 1912 on a farm outside of Centerville, Texas, in Leon County.<sup>55</sup> In his early twenties, he partnered with an older cousin, Alger “Texas” Alexander, who had been recording since 1927.<sup>56</sup> The pair wandered around the east central part of Texas playing for house parties and picnics in places such as Crockett, Grapeland, Patterstein, Oakwood, Normangee, Flynn, and Marquez.<sup>57</sup> Hopkins continued to master his craft, eventually moving to Houston and the Third Ward in 1939.<sup>58</sup>

Houston in 1939 was a burgeoning oil supply and equipment center. It was also a petroleum transportation hub with the presence of the Houston Ship Channel and converging railroads and pipelines. And the city was headquarters to major and independent oil and natural gas producers.<sup>59</sup> Although Hopkins stuck close to his home turf in the Third Ward busking on Dowling Street, he did have occasion to interact with Bayou City oilmen. In the early 1940s, according to Mack McCormick, who recorded and managed Hopkins for a time, the bluesman performed in the guise of “a jester by the swimming pool for the parties of the oil rich.”<sup>60</sup>

By 1946, Hopkins’s local reputation on Dowling Street as picker and singer earned him an audition with Aladdin Records in Los Angeles. Here he acquired the moniker “Lightnin’” (the record company teamed him with fellow Houstonian Wilson “Thunder” Smith and decided to promote the two as “Thunder” and “Lightnin’”).<sup>61</sup> At the initial session, Hopkins and Smith recorded “Katie Mae Blues” (Aladdin 167).<sup>62</sup> “Katie Mae Blues” was Lightnin’s homage to a “good girl ... she don’t run around at night ... Katie Mae will treat you right.” It proved to be a regional jukebox favorite.<sup>63</sup> One verse is especially relevant here.

You know she walks just like  
She got oil wells in her backyard.  
Yes, you’ll never hear that woman whoop and holler  
And cry talking ‘bout these times being hard.

“Katie Mae Blues” was a song with attitude, not only how one carried oneself but also attitude as a state of mind or disposition, and the phrase – “you know she walks just like she got oil wells in her backyard” – still resonates.<sup>64</sup> Chris Strachwitz, the owner of Arhoolie Records, met Hopkins in 1959. “To me, he was the only real folk poet, the deepest bluesman I ever knew,” Strachwitz recalled. “His mind was just full of images.”<sup>65</sup> There is also a hint of reality in the image depicting “oil wells in her

backyard.”

The oil and natural gas discoveries in East Texas provided opportunities for African American landowners to profit. Novelist and literary critic Ralph Ellison could even facetiously conjure up “a white-skinned Negro with brown freckles who owns sixteen oil wells sunk in a piece of Texas land ....”<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately, however, many black farmers who owned their own property were persuaded or duped into selling the mineral rights.<sup>67</sup> Others held on and leased the land instead. In 1958, Sally Williams Crawford of Lodi, Texas, reported proudly that she was worth nearly \$250,000. She told *Jet* magazine when her first well came in, “I was so happy about it I went and bought me a brand new car for \$2,530 cash. Now I’m going to build the finest house in Texas.”<sup>68</sup> Yes, she truly walked like she had oil wells in her backyard.

Eddie “Cleanhead” Vinson also came from Houston. Born in 1917, he was raised in a musical household (his parents were both accomplished pianists), and at Jack Yates High School, Eddie played alto sax in the school band. After serving an apprenticeship in the Houston-based Chester Boone Band, he joined Milt Larkin in 1936.<sup>69</sup> The Larkin aggregation has been described as “probably the last of the great Texas big bands.”<sup>70</sup> In addition to holding residency at the Aragon Ballroom in the Bayou City, Larkin toured extensively along the Texas Gulf Coast into Louisiana, Oklahoma, and on into the Midwest. Vinson received his nickname, “Cleanhead” or “Mr. Cleanhead,” in the late 1930s, when he started shaving his head after a lye-induced accident in an attempt, as he later told the story, to make his hair “look like white folks’ hair ... I [was] the first [to shave my head]. Yul Brynner and all of them came after me.”<sup>71</sup>

Vinson first gained national recognition in the early 1940s with the Cootie Williams Orchestra as a hard-tone, swinging alto saxophonist who “bawled the blues ... with a whooping falsetto like a piglet’s squeal.”<sup>72</sup> In 1945, he formed his own band and signed with Mercury Records. Several of the Mercury recordings, including the 1947 “Oil Man Blues” (Mercury 8067),

featured a small hot R&B ensemble with a frontline of alto, tenor, and baritone sax, the lyrics accentuated by Cleanhead's ribald, salacious sense of humor.<sup>73</sup> Readymade for jukebox consumption, these songs were considered too "raunchy" for airplay on the radio.<sup>74</sup>

I'm an oil drillin' daddy, and your ground looks very rich.  
 I'm an oil drillin' daddy, and your ground looks very rich.  
 I'm the best driller in these parts, and I've got the tools to work it with.

When you see me comin', baby, I've got my drillin' wrench.  
 When you see me comin', baby, I've got my drillin' wrench.  
 Your soil looks very fertile, striking oil will be a cinch.

When your oil starts to flowin', baby, please don't close your door.  
 When your oil starts to flowin', baby, please don't close your door.  
 'Cause everything is mellow, and I'll be back for more.

Now that you rich, baby, it's no use in savin' that gold.  
 Now that you rich, baby, it's no use in savin' that gold.  
 Come on let's have a ball before that oil starts gettin' cold.

"Oil Man Blues" offered yet another example of African American "self-assertiveness" cloaked in the context of an erotically-themed refrain.<sup>75</sup> The song also harkened back to Vinson's days with Milt Larkin, when the band played regular gigs in Houston and on the road in petroleum-rich East Texas and northwestern Louisiana in towns like Beaumont and Shreveport. Once again, the lingo of the oil patch served its purpose to produce a song that fit author and cultural raconteur Nick Tosches's yardstick for "wet metaphor [and] crypto-lubricities."<sup>76</sup>

Freddie King was born Freddie Christian in 1934 in Gilmer, Texas, the county seat of Upshur County. Along with Rusk, Gregg, Smith, and Cherokee counties, Upshur County sat atop most of the huge East Texas oil field that was discovered four years before Freddie was born.<sup>77</sup> For professional purposes,

he later adopted his mother's maiden name of King.<sup>78</sup> At age six, Freddie learned to play the guitar from his mother and uncle, Leon King, and he cited Lightnin' Hopkins as an early influence.<sup>79</sup>

Christian relocated to Chicago when he was sixteen and went to work at a steel mill. He also became active in the South Side club scene. By the time he began recording as "Freddy" King in 1960 for Federal Records, a subsidiary of King Records, he had developed a distinctive "harsh, rough-edged" guitar style, using a metal fingerpick and plastic thumbpick.<sup>80</sup> In the studio, Alfonso "Sonny" Thompson produced, arranged, and played piano on Freddie's sessions.<sup>81</sup> The combination paid off in 1961, when "Hideaway (Hide Away)," a crackling, gritty instrumental that inspired many a future guitar slinger (including Eric Clapton), reached the Top-10 of Billboard's Hot R&B Singles while also charting on *Billboard's Hot 100*.<sup>82</sup> Other instrumentals followed: "Butterscotch," "Sen-Sa-Shun," "San-Ho-Zay," "Swooshy," and "Texas Oil."

In a 1972 interview with *Living Blues* magazine, King commented on the titles of his instrumental compositions: "I wrote all the tunes, but the studio put the names to 'em. Some of 'em, I don't even know ... They got some heck of a names in there."<sup>83</sup> It's possible in the case of "Texas Oil" (Federal 12462) that Sonny Thompson came up with the title, since he is also listed as co-writer along with King and Beverly Bride. And if the name were less exotic than some of King's other instrumental titles, "Texas Oil" was still evocative and more than appropriate.

Recorded in 1962, drums were mixed upfront, rolling and tumbling with a thunderous tom-tom beat. Freddie's finger picking was steady and repetitive, driving home the pounding pulse of the oil rig floor. For brief moments, he breaks into biting, chicken-scratching licks, capturing a sense of exhilaration and expectation of a potential gusher in the works. "Texas Oil" was a fitting tip of the hat, then, to the colossal East Texas oil field that forever changed the lives of individuals in the region, including many residents of Upshur County.

Across the Sabine River in Louisiana, black musicians continued to savor the sights and sounds of the state's ever-expanding oil and natural gas industry. Joe Johnson was born in 1942 in Independence, Louisiana.<sup>84</sup> Wildcatters were drilling in Tangipahoa Parish as early as 1921, but the state's onshore oil and gas reserves were located largely west of the Mississippi River.<sup>85</sup> Johnson grew up in Greensburg in neighboring St. Helena Parish. In high school, he sang with a gospel group before joining Guitar Grady's Strings of Rhythm. During much of the 1960s, the Strings of Rhythm – with Johnson featured on lead vocals and harmonica – were fixtures on the club scene in the Greensburg area.<sup>86</sup>

Johnson also came to the attention of J. D. "Jay" Miller, a South Louisiana independent record man. Miller headquartered in Crowley, in Acadia Parish, the heartland of Cajun and Creole country, where he owned a record store and operated a small recording studio. In addition to Cajun and hillbilly performers, Miller recorded blues and R&B singers primarily for distribution on Excello Records in Nashville.<sup>87</sup> As he boasted to Paul Oliver, "Around here in this part of Louisiana, I'd say within a hundred mile radius of Crowley, we've got more blues singers than any other spot in the United States."<sup>88</sup> Crowley also fell midway between the petrochemical plants and refineries in Baton Rouge to the east and Lake Charles to the west.<sup>89</sup>

Joe Johnson waxed two sessions at Miller's studio. He recorded "Got My Oil Well Pumpin'" (Cry 1100) in late 1967 or early 1968 with Guitar Grady and His Strings of Rhythm.<sup>90</sup> Miller chose to release it on his own Cry label as the flipside of "Otis Is Gone," a heartfelt tribute to the soul singer Otis Redding, who died in a plane crash on December 10, 1967.<sup>91</sup> In the first verse and third verses of "Got My Oil Well Pumpin'," Johnson neatly mixed and matched his metaphors: oil wells, sex, and Cadillacs, along with an implied sense of wealth and power.

I got my oil well pumpin', baby, I got my baby's sign.  
I got my oil well pumpin', baby, I got my baby's sign.

I've got a brand new Cadillac, honey, all you got to do is ride.

And the Strings of Rhythm created the proper atmosphere with a funky, down home, out-in-the-country groove: Guitar Grady's chunky guitar, droning organ, burbling bass, and Johnson's bawling harp.

Lawtell, St. Landry Parish, Louisiana, was home to Joseph Roy Carrier. The Carriers were black Creoles who sharecropped for a living, and the family's musical roots reached back to pioneering Creole fiddler Joseph Bébé Carrière. As a youth, Roy, who was born in 1947, joined his father playing at house parties first on rubboard (*frottoir*), then drums and guitar before taking up the accordion. He lost part of an index finger in a farming accident, which forced him to perfect a unique "crossing chords" technique.<sup>92</sup>

By the time Roy was eighteen, he had his own zydeco band. Zydeco is the "traditional dance music – and the dance" of black Creoles, blending Creole folk music or "la-la" with blues and rhythm & blues.<sup>93</sup> Music historians and folklorists now recognize that the music developed not only on the bayous and prairies of Southwest Louisiana but also along the Texas Gulf Coast, where Creoles migrated in numbers in the 1940s and 1950s to work in the shipyards and refineries of Port Arthur, Beaumont, Orange, and especially Houston.<sup>94</sup>

Drilling for oil and natural gas off the coast of Louisiana began in earnest in 1946, and the state soon became the world's primary venue for offshore exploration.<sup>95</sup> With the Mideast oil embargo of 1973-1974, southern Louisiana was awash in petroleum-related jobs: offshore assignments as well as platform construction, ship and boat building and repair, and water transportation.<sup>96</sup> A black man could share in the moment, too, so Carrier left the rice farm in 1973 and hired to work on an offshore rig with a schedule of seven days on and seven days off.<sup>97</sup>

In 1980, Carrier purchased an old dancehall in disrepair on the north side of the railroad tracks in Lawtell and named it, appropriately enough, Roy's Offshore Lounge. The Offshore



Lounge quickly became a gathering place for young zydeco musicians.<sup>98</sup> Seven years later, Roy quit his job: “I gave up the oil field in ‘eighty-seven and started doing jam sessions every Thursday night [at the Offshore Lounge].”<sup>99</sup> He also started recording and touring the Gulf Coast zydeco corridor, or Crawfish circuit, which stretched from Lafayette to Galveston.

“Offshore Blues” is the first song on Carrier’s 2006 compact disc *Zydeco Soul* (Mardi Gras 1108), and it showcased his own brand of zydeco, flush with the blues.

Well, I’m an oil field worker, baby, Lord, I just can’t help myself.  
Well, I’m an oil field worker, baby, Lord, I just can’t help myself.  
Well, you know it so hard, so hard, baby, to love someone but I do.

They got somebody, somebody to be my baby.  
They got somebody, somebody to be my baby.  
Well, you know it so hard, so hard, baby, to love someone but I do.

“Offshore Blues” captured a sense of the loneliness that comes with toiling on a platform located miles out in the Gulf of Mexico, but the song is fragmentary, with Carrier more interested in creating a mood rather than telling a complete story. Roy’s slow, bluesy accordion complete with trill provides a swampy groove for his high-pitched, plaintive vocals, invoking the wails of Blind Lemon Jefferson.

Since the 1920s, then, the petroleum industry has inspired and continues to imbue the imaginations of African American songwriters and recording artists. However, the complexion of the workforce in the oil field has gradually changed.<sup>100</sup> In the twenty-first century, particularly in Texas, Latinos constitute the majority of workers employed on the rig floor.<sup>101</sup> But even though employment opportunities for African Americans in the patch are now a reality, longtime prejudices linger. In 2009, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) filed complaints of racial harassment and discrimination against a Houston-based oil and gas drilling company. The Associated

Press reported that white employees hung a noose in a work area and used “racial epithets.”<sup>102</sup> When a black employee complained, he was told “it is always going to be a white man’s oil field.”<sup>103</sup>

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>This paper was presented in different form at the joint meeting of the West Texas Historical Association and the East Texas Historical Association in Fort Worth on February 27, 2010. For input and suggestions along the way, thanks to Barry Jean Ancelet, John Broven, Ron Brown, David Coffey, Scott Downing, Diana Davids Hinton, Charlie Hukill, Melody Kelly, Christopher King, Richard Nevins, Mike Pierce, Chris Smith, Tyler Smith, Alice Specht, Mary Helen Specht, Chris Strachwitz, John Tefeller, and Terry Young.

<sup>2</sup>Mody C. Boatright and William A. Owens, *Tales from the Derrick Floor: A People’s History of the Oil Industry* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), 69.

<sup>3</sup>Boatright and Owens, *Tales from the Derrick Floor*, 68-69.

<sup>4</sup>Diana Davids Olien and Roger M. Olien, *Oil in Texas: The Gusher Age, 1895-1945* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 71, 176-178; Walter Rundell Jr., *Oil in West Texas and New Mexico: A Pictorial History of the Permian Basin* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1982), 164; Bobby D. Weaver, *Oilfield Trash: Life and Labor in the Oil Patch* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2010), 35, 44, 49, 150, 154.

<sup>5</sup>Olien and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 134-135; Walter Rundell Jr., *Early Texas Oil: A Photographic History, 1866-1936* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1977), 123. Similar discrimination existed for Latino refinery workers. See Emilo Zamora, “The Failed Promise of Wartime Opportunity for Mexicans in the Texas Oil Industry,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 95 (January 1992); 323-350.

<sup>6</sup>Roger M. Olien and Diana Davids Olien, *Oil Booms: Social Change in Five Texas Towns* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 118-119; Diana Davids Hinton, “Creating Company Culture: Oil Company Camps in the Southwest, 1920-1960,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 111 (April 2008); 378; Roger L. Goertz, “Life in Texon, Regan County,

Texas,” *Permian Historical Annual*, 46 (2006): 96-97; Barbara Brown Spratt, “Growing Up in Continental [Conoco] Oil Camp in Regan County, Texas: The Life of a Black Child,” *Permian Historical Annual*, 48 (2008): 41.

<sup>7</sup> Carl B. King and Howard W. Risher Jr., *The Negro in the Petroleum Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1969), 26.

<sup>8</sup>With the primary focus on performers from the Gulf-Southwest, the following were not included in the current discussion: St. Louis Jimmy Oden’s “Pipe Layin’ Blues” (1934), Johnny Shines’s “Pipeline Blues” (1968), and Big Jack Johnson’s “Oil Man” (1987). Petroleum-related songs can also be found in the recorded repertoire of country music, rock ‘n’ roll, and Cajun performers. The author plans to explore this topic further in *Smell That Sweet Perfume: Oil Patch Songs on Record*.

<sup>9</sup>David Evans, *Big Road Blues: Tradition and Creativity in Folk Blues* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 37-38.

<sup>10</sup>W. Prescott Webb, “Notes on Folk-Lore of Texas,” *Journal of American Folklore*, 28 (July-Sept. 1915); 291-292; Necah Stewart Furman, *Walter Prescott Webb: His Life and Impact* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976), 55-57.

<sup>11</sup>Webb, “Notes on Folk-lore of Texas,” 293.

<sup>12</sup>Robert M. W. Dixon, John Godrich, and Howard Rye, *Blues & Gospel Records, 1890-1943*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 165.

<sup>13</sup>Dixon, Godrich, and Rye, *Blues & Gospel Records*, 445.

<sup>14</sup>Census records indicate 1893 as the year of Jefferson’s birth, but the actual date is still in question with some sources giving 1897. See Alan Govenar, “Blind Lemon Jefferson: The Myth and the Man,” *Black Music Research Journal*, 20 (Spring 2000): 7; Govenar provides a succinct summary of what is known about the bluesman and the “numerous contradictory accounts of where Jefferson lived, performed, and died.”

<sup>15</sup>Govenar, “Blind Lemon Jefferson,” 8, 12.

<sup>16</sup>David Evans, “Blind Lemon Jefferson,” in *International*

*Dictionary of Black Composers*, ed. Samuel A. Floyd Jr. (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), 1: 607.

<sup>17</sup>Blind Lemon Jefferson, *King of the Country Blues* (Yazoo L-1069, 1985). As roots music historian Tony Russell points out, however, “Country blues is a pigoenholer’s term ... Historians and the makers of browser-dividers have forced the phrase into our vocabulary ... [that said] ‘country blues’ is represented by singers playing guitars – mostly (but not exclusively) acoustic, mostly (but not exclusively) on recordings made more than half a century ago.” See Tony Russell, “Country Blues: The Blues Pantheon,” *MOJO*, no. 197 (April 2010), 138.

<sup>18</sup>Govenar, “Blind Lemon Jefferson,” 9.

<sup>19</sup>Rundell, *Early Texas Oil*, 181-183; Carl Coke Rister, *Oil! Titan of the Southwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1949), 169-180; Julia Cauble Smith, “Woodbine Fault-Line Fields,” *The Handbook of Texas Online* <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook> [accessed November 1, 2009].

<sup>20</sup>Oilen and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 121-123; Rister, *Oil! Titan of the Southwest*, 179.

<sup>21</sup>Although “Oil Well Blues” was clearly written by Jefferson, “Lamoore,” not Jefferson, received composer credit on the label. Lamoore or LaMoore was the nom de plume of Alex Robinson, a sometime pianist and arranger for Paramount Records, who also took copyright credit on recordings by Papa Charlie Jackson, Hattie McDaniel, and George Carter. See Paul Swinton, “A Twist of Lemon,” *Blues & Rhythm*, no. 121 (August 1997); 7. “Black Snake Moan” (OKeh 8455), “Low Down Mojo Blues” (Paramount 12650), and “Bakershop Blues” (Paramount 12852) offer other examples of Jefferson’s compositions with strong sexual themes.

<sup>22</sup>Bill Porterfield, *Diddy Waw Diddy: Passage of an American Son* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 351.

<sup>23</sup>Because the production and technical quality of the Paramount recordings leave much to be desired, it is often difficult to understand exactly what Jefferson is singing. The accuracy of this transcription was verified with Luigi Monge and David Evans, “New Songs of Blind Lemon Jefferson,” *Journal of Texas Music History*, 3 (Fall 2003); 25.

<sup>24</sup>Paul Oliver, *Screening the Blues: Aspects of the Blues Tradition*

(New York: Da Capo Press, 1989), 212.

<sup>25</sup>Kevin Belford, *Devil at the Confluence: The Pre-War Blues of St. Louis, Missouri* (St. Louis: Virginia Publishing, 2009), 122-123; Sheldon Harris, *Blues Who's Who* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1979), 150.

<sup>26</sup>Dixon, Godrich, and Rye, *Blues & Gospel Records*, 204-206.

<sup>27</sup>Harris, *Blues Who's Who*, 150.

<sup>28</sup>Paul Oliver, *Conversation with the Blues* (New York: Horizon Press, 1965), 120.

<sup>29</sup>Dixon, Godrich, and Rye, *Blues & Gospel Records*, 205.

<sup>30</sup>Dr. George Parker, *Oil Field Medico* (Dallas: Banks Upshaw and Company, 1948), 20.

<sup>31</sup>James Richardson, *Willie Brown: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 12.

<sup>32</sup>Neil Slaven, "Walter Davis," in *The Penguin Guide to Blues Recordings*, Tony Russell and others (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 158.

<sup>33</sup>Kenny A. Franks and Paul F. Lambert, *Early Louisiana and Arkansas Oil: A Pictorial History* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1982), 5, 17-33; Rister Oil! Titan of the Southwest, 71-75.

<sup>34</sup>Michael Tisserand, *The Kingdom of Zydeco* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1998), 55-56.

<sup>35</sup>Ann Allen Savoy, *Cajun Music: A Reflection of a People* (Eunice, LA: Bluebird Press, 1984), 67.

<sup>36</sup>Tisserand, *The Kingdom of Zydeco*, 58.

<sup>37</sup>Michael Doucet, "Amédé Ardoin's Blues," Notes, Amédé Ardoin, I'm Never Comin' Back (Arhoolie Records CD 7007, 1995).

<sup>38</sup>Tisserand, *The Kingdom of Zydeco*, 58.

<sup>39</sup>John Broven, *South to Louisiana: The Music of the Cajun Bayous* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing, 1983), 102.

<sup>40</sup>Doucet, "Amédé Ardoïn's Blues;" Savoy, *Cajun Music*, 66; Broven, *South to Louisiana*, 103.

<sup>41</sup>Tony Russell, "Amédé Ardoïn," in *The Penguin Guide to Blues Recordings*, 12.

<sup>42</sup>Tony Russell, *Country Music Records: A Discography, 1921-1942* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 62; Savoy, *Cajun Music*, 68.

<sup>43</sup>The transcription and translation of "La Valse des Chantiers Pérolipères" is printed in the booklet notes which accompany Ardoïn, "I'm Never Comin' Back; the spelling of "pérolipères" has been corrected to "pétroliers."

<sup>44</sup>Paul Oliver, "Jerry's Saloon Blues: 1940 Field Recordings," in *Shreveport Sounds in Black & White*, eds. Kip Lornell and Tracey E. W. Laird (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), 185-188.

<sup>45</sup>Charles Wolfe and Kip Lornell, *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 92.

<sup>46</sup>Oliver, "Jerry's Saloon Blues," 186.

<sup>47</sup>Dixon, Godrich, and Rye, *Blues & Gospel Records*, 517, 660.

<sup>48</sup>Rister, *Oil! Titan of the Southwest*, 96-101; Franks and Lambert, *Early Louisiana and Arkansas Oil*, 35-67.

<sup>49</sup>Rister, *Oil! Titan of the Southwest*, 97.

<sup>50</sup>Wolfe and Lornell, *The Life and Legend of Leadbelly*, 6-7.

<sup>51</sup>Franks and Lambert, *Early Louisiana and Arkansas Oil*, 43.

<sup>52</sup>Tony Russell, "Field Recordings," in *The Penguin Guide to Blues Recordings*, 761.

<sup>53</sup>"Oil City Blues" was not commercially released until 1978

when it and other recordings from the Oil City hotel session appeared on Jerry's Saloon Blues: 1940 Field Recordings (Flyright LP 260, 1978); it has subsequently been reissued on compact disc, I Can Eagle Rock: Juke Joint Blues from Alabama and Louisiana (Travelin' Man TM CD 09, 1996).

<sup>54</sup>Michael Hall, "Let There Be Lightnin'"; How Sam Hopkins Lived the Blues," *Texas Monthly*, 35 (June 2007), 149; Alan Govenar, *Lightnin' Hopkins: His Life and Blues* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2010), 10.

<sup>55</sup>Alan Govenar has found evidence that Hopkins might have been born in 1911, not 1912. See Govenar, *Lightnin' Hopkins*, 2.

<sup>56</sup>Although it has long been assumed that Alexander was related to Hopkins, Alan Govenar suggests otherwise: "Sam claimed that Alexander was his cousin, but no direct kinship has ever been established. Sam had a very loose definition of the term 'cousin' that he tended to use more as an expression of endearment than a statement of fact." See Govenar, *Lightnin' Hopkins*, 22.

<sup>57</sup>Samuel Charters, *Walking a Blues Road: A Selection of Blues Writing, 1956-2004* (New York: Marion Boyars, 2004), 220.

<sup>58</sup>Michael Hall has Hopkins in Houston in 1939 "settling in at a rooming house in the Third Ward." See Hall, "Let There Be Lightnin'," 264. Alan Govenar places the date for the move six years later or possibly somewhere in between. See Govenar, *Lightnin' Hopkins*, 35-36.

<sup>59</sup>David G. McComb, *Houston, the Bayou City* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), 113-116; Olien and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 59-62.

<sup>60</sup>Mack McCormick, *Liner Notes, Lightnin' Hopkins, Walkin' This Road By Myself* (Bluesville BV 1057, 1962).

<sup>61</sup>Hall, "Let There Be Lightnin'," 264-265; Govenar, *Lightnin' Hopkins*, xiii-xiv, 43.

<sup>62</sup>Les Fancourt and Bob McGrath, *The Blues Discography, 1943-1970* (West Vancouver: Eyeball Productions, 2006), 227. Hopkins also recorded "Katie Mae Blues" in 1960 for Bluesville Records as simply "Katie Mae," and this version was released on single (Bluesville 825) and album ("Lightnin'" *The Blues of Lightnin' Hopkins*, Bluesville BV 1019). The Grateful Dead, with growling vocals by Pigpen, made "Katie Mae"

a staple of their concerts in the early 1970s. See *History of the Grateful Dead*, Vol. 1 (Bear's Choice) (Warner Brothers 2721-2, 1973).

<sup>63</sup>Alan Govenar speculates that sales of Hopkins's early Aladdin records "didn't do very well;" yet, he also identifies "Katie Mae Blues" as "[a] hit" for Hopkins. See Govenar, *Lightnin' Hopkins*, 44, 116.

<sup>64</sup>In 1988, Nashville wordsmiths A. L. "Doodle" Owens and Dennis Knutson used a similar image – "For that pretty little lady from Beaumont, Texas with oil wells in her yard" – as the theme for their "Pretty Little Lady from Beaumont, Texas," and appropriately enough George Jones, who grew in the Beaumont area, decided to record the song (Epic 34-08509).

<sup>65</sup>As quoted in Alan Govenar, *Living Texas Blues* (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art, 1985), 36.

<sup>66</sup>Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Random House, 1964), 252. Beat novelist and poet, Jack Kerouac, raised a similar image in the "12<sup>th</sup> Chorus" of his *San Francisco Blues*: "The furtive whore/Looks over her shoulder/While unlocking the door/Of the tenement/Of her pimp/Who with big Negro Arkansas/Or East Texas Oilfields/Harry Truman hat's/Been standin' on the street/All day." See Jack Kerouac, *Book of Blues* (New York: Penguin Poets, 1995), 13.

<sup>67</sup>James A. Clark and Michel T. Halbouty, *The Last Boom* (Bryan, TX: Shearer Publishing, 1984), 133; Alex Poinsett, "Texas Negroes Share in Nation's Richest Oil Field", *Jet*, 12 (March 27, 1958); 15; Gerald Forbes, *Flush Production: The Epic of Oil in the Gulf-Southwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1942), 210-211.

<sup>68</sup>Poinsett, "Texas Negroes Share in Nation's Richest Oil Field," 14-15.

<sup>69</sup>Harris, *Blues Who's Who*, 522; Dave Oliphant, *Texan Jazz* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 219.

<sup>70</sup>Albert McCarthy, *Big Band Jazz* (New York: Berkley Publishing, 1977), 109-110.

<sup>71</sup>Hugh Merrill, *The Blues Route* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1990), 187.



<sup>72</sup>Tony Russell, *The Blues: From Robert Johnson to Robert Cray* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 179.

<sup>73</sup>Fancourt and McGrath, *The Blues Discography*, 549.

<sup>74</sup>James Hand, "Eddie Vinson," *The Handbook of Texas Online* <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook> (accessed April 15, 2007).

<sup>75</sup>Paul Oliver, *The Story of the Blues*, New ed. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 116.

<sup>76</sup>Nick Tosches, *Country: The Twisted Roots of Rock 'N' Roll* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 123.

<sup>77</sup>Olien and Olien, *Oil in Texas*, 170-171; Rundell, *Early Texas Oil*, 225.

<sup>78</sup>Kenny Mathieson, "Freddie King," in *Encyclopedia of the Blues*, ed. Edward Komara (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2: 772.

<sup>79</sup>Harris, *Blues Who's Who*, 305; Jim O'Neal and Amy van Singel, eds., *The Voice of the Blues: Classic Interviews from Living Blues Magazine* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 365-366.

<sup>80</sup>Rich Kienzle, *Great Guitarists* (New York: Facts on File, 1985), 33.

<sup>81</sup>Randy McNutt, *King Records of Cincinnati* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 30.

<sup>82</sup>Kienzle, *Great Guitarists*, 32; Joel Whitburn Presents Top R&B/Hip-Hop Singles, 1942-2004 (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research Inc., 2004), 326; Joel Whitburn's Top Pop Singles, 1955-1996, (Menomonee Falls, WI: Record Research Inc., 1997), 336.

<sup>83</sup>O'Neal and van Singel, eds., *The Voice of the Blues*, 367.

<sup>84</sup>Harris, *Blues Who's Who*, 283.

<sup>85</sup>Franks and Lambert, *Early Louisiana and Arkansas Oil*, 186.

<sup>86</sup>Harris, *Blues Who's Who*, 283.

<sup>87</sup>John Broven, *Record Makers and Breakers: Voices of the Independent Rock 'N' Roll Pioneers*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 166-171.

<sup>88</sup>Oliver, *Conversation with the Blues*, 190.

<sup>89</sup>Franks and Lambert, *Early Louisiana and Arkansas Oil*, 173-175, 225-226.

<sup>90</sup>Fancourt and McGrath, *The Blues Discography*, 269.

<sup>91</sup>Broven, *South to Louisiana*, 149.

<sup>92</sup><http://www.roycarrier.com> (accessed May 11, 2009).

<sup>93</sup>Tisserand, *The Kingdom of Zydeco*, 2.

<sup>94</sup>John Minton, "Houston Creoles and Zydeco: The Emergence of an African-American Urban Popular Style," *American Music*, 14 (Winter 1996): 480-526; Lorenzo Thomas, "From Gumbo to Grammys: The Development of Zydeco in Houston," in *Juneteenth Texas: Essays in African-American Folklore*, ed. Francis Edward Abernethy (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1996), 139-150; Roger Wood, "Black Creoles and the Evolution of Zydeco in Southeast Texas: The Beginnings to 1950," in *The Roots of Texas Music*, eds. Lawrence Clayton and Joe W. Specht (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 192-216. Roger Wood later expanded his essay into *Texas Zydeco* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).

<sup>95</sup>Robert Gramling, *Oil on the Edge: Offshore Development, Conflict, Gridlock* (Albany: State University of New York, 1996), 43-44, 64; Franks and Lambert, *Early Louisiana and Arkansas Oil*, 207-212.

<sup>96</sup>Gramling, *Oil on the Edge*, 108-109.

<sup>97</sup><http://www.roycarrier.com> [accessed May 11, 2009].

<sup>98</sup><http://www.roycarrier.com>

<sup>99</sup>Tisserand, *The Kingdom of Zydeco*, 314.

<sup>100</sup>A perfect illustration of the integrated oil patch in action

is provided in Kermit Oliver's *Drillheads* (1973). Oliver, an African American artist and longtime resident of Waco, Texas, used acrylic and masonite (48" x 48") to depict three roughnecks – two white and one black – changing out a drill bit. The men are focused on the job at hand, three professionals each equal to the task. See *Drawing on the Past: Selections from the Bobbie and John Nau Collection of Texas Art* (Abilene, TX: The Grace Museum, in association with Bright Sky Press, 2010), 28.

<sup>101</sup>Diana Davids Olien, "Exploitationists and Depletionists," in *The Future of the Southern Plains*, ed. Sherry L. Smith. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 164; Jane Van Ryan, "Hispanic Energy Workers in Washington," <http://blog.energytomorrow.org/2009/09/hispanic-energy-workers-in-washington.html> (accessed October, 27, 2009). However, preliminary research by the author has turned up no petroleum-related recordings by Latino performers with roots in the Gulf-Southwest.

<sup>102</sup>P. Solomon Banda, "EEOC Looks Into Racial Complaints," *Abilene Reporter-News*, November 19, 2009, 9A.

<sup>103</sup>"EEOC Looks Into Racial Complaints," 9A.

## **Liberty and Slavery: The Peculiar Institution In Liberty (and Chambers) County, Texas**

BY RONALD D. TRAYLOR

As a historian and a resident of Liberty County, Texas, my research in primary and secondary source materials regarding the institution of slavery in Texas revealed few if any references to the institution in my home county. More often than not slavery studies focused on counties other than Liberty County, which led me to ask a fundamental question: Did slavery as it existed in Liberty County take the same form as it did in other Texas counties? If it did, why was Liberty County not included in the meager scholarly examinations of the topic. If it did not reflect the norm, then why not?

My research led me to this conclusion: Until the arrival of a modern transportation infrastructure, Liberty County slaveholders raised crops, such as sweet potatoes, corn, cattle and swine, not normally associated with plantation slavery. Those crops were, in the case of corn and sweet potatoes, either dedicated to local consumption, or, in the case of cattle and swine, herded overland to distant markets. The percentage of Liberty County slaves, when expressed as a portion of the total population, nevertheless closely tracked the slave population of plantation counties. What set slavery in Liberty County apart from the institution in the cotton, rice and sugar counties was the impact of transportation on crop determination. When the primitive, sometimes non-existent transportation infrastructure improved through the introduction of steamboats and the railroad, Liberty County slavery quickly made the transition to

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the plantation crops. Had the Civil War not intervened and had slavery continued to exist, slave-based agriculture in Liberty County would have likely completed the metamorphosis to a “typical” plantation economy.

Arriving at such a thesis, however, was in the future. The as yet unanswered questions led me to the Liberty County courthouse in the town of Liberty, Texas. When informed of my desire to conduct historical research by examining certain of their archived documents, the assistant Clerk of Court offered her assistance.<sup>1</sup> Her pleasure at playing a part in the process quickly changed to dismay when informed that the topic of the project was slavery. She leaned across the counter and in a conspiratorial whisper said, “Honey, slavery was not important in Liberty County during those times.”

Slavery existed in Texas, but academic examinations of bondage in the Lone Star state approach neither in number nor in detail those existing for other slave-holding states. Historian Randolph B. Campbell’s *An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas* took a major step in 1989 to rectify such a problem. He said, “in spite of its obvious historical significance, slavery has received virtually no attention as a part of Texas’ heritage.” What applied to the state of Texas as a whole also seemed to be playing out in Liberty County,<sup>2</sup> and my courthouse episode indicated that Campbell’s assessment applied not only to the academy but to the public as well. As a result, I ignored the clerk’s well-meant caveat, heeded Dr. Campbell’s admonition, and continued the research. It was the proper decision, for I soon determined that twenty years after Campbell’s groundbreaking work his judgment remains valid, especially for certain counties of the Lone Star state, of which Liberty County is one. It is also because of the dearth of historiographical sources addressing slavery in Liberty County that this paper, an initial step in correcting such neglect, is based more on primary than on secondary data.

Among the first counties of the Republic of Texas, Liberty County constituted a huge portion of what is now Southeast

Texas. Subdivided into two separate counties in 1858, the state of Texas maintained the northernmost portion as Liberty County and gave to the southernmost portion the designation Chambers County. Liberty County ultimately chose cotton as its crop of choice, while Chambers County continued to use cattle as their primary revenue producer.

The location of Texas on the western edge of what became the Confederacy did not mean that the state was a backwater with regard to the growth and importance of slavery. Slavery existed to some degree in almost all Texas counties by 1860, especially in those counties generally east of the Colorado River. In that huge area, the heavily agriculturalized counties adjacent to Galveston Bay on the middle Texas coast, such as Brazoria, Fort Bend, and Wharton, as well as certain counties in North and East Texas counties such as Harrison, Red River, and San Augustine, counted the most bondsmen. Liberty County, located to the northeast of the former and far to the southeast of the latter, is never mentioned in the same breath with any of those counties and properly so, if raw slave numbers serve as the only factor in determining the importance of slavery to a county's society and economy.

The insignificance of slavery in Spanish Texas was well illustrated in the census of 1777, which indicated twenty slaves out of a total population of 3,103. The census of 1785 enumerated only forty-three slaves (sixteen of whom resided in the Nacogdoches area) out a total population of 2,919 Texans. The 1809 census for the Nacogdoches region recorded the presence of only thirty-three slaves. The numbers of slaves in Texas, however, as well as the ownership of Texas itself, soon underwent a massive change.<sup>3</sup>

Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, by which time a small number of settlers from the United States already resided in Texas. More Americans followed when Stephen F. Austin received permission from Mexico City to establish a colony near the Brazos and Colorado Rivers. Additional settlers moved into the Atascocita District, that area of the lower Trinity

River basin located between Austin's colony and the Sabine River. The portion of the Atascocita District that later became Liberty County contained its share of slave holding settlers. Factional politics within the Mexican central government resulted in contradictory slavery laws confusing to settlers and government officials alike. Because of the lack of a concrete policy, the slavery question remained unresolved, and slave owners took advantage of the legal void by importing additional slaves.

In 1826, settlers in the Atascocita District petitioned the Mexican government through Stephen F. Austin for recognition as a part of Austin's colony.<sup>4</sup> No record exists of Mexico's action on the request, but a census taken by the settlers and included with the petition offers critical pieces of information. The census covered an area from which the Republic of Texas later carved the counties of Jasper, Jefferson, and Liberty. The 1826 Atascocita Census showed the settlement of the district by slaveholders to be well underway. Of the 331 people enumerated as residents in the area, sixty-nine, or almost twenty-one percent of the total population, were slaves. Of those slaves, forty were older than fourteen years of age and twenty-nine were younger than fourteen. Of fifty-five families (defined for this study as any group of two or more people exhibiting marriage or kinship) only ten, or eighteen percent of the total families, owned slaves. Those ten families, out of proportion to their numbers, owned sixty-one of the sixty-nine slaves in the district, or seventy-eight percent of the total. Three single persons owned the remaining eight slaves. Without exception, every settler identified as a farmer or stockman owned slaves.<sup>5</sup>

Of the thirteen slaveholders included in the Atascocita Census of 1826, nine owned five or fewer slaves (see Table 1). Most of the slaveholders likely used their slaves both as laborers in clearing the virgin timber and in cultivating the subsistence crops grown during the colonial period. As herdsmen, slaves also watched over the hogs and cattle roaming free in the forests and on the prairies.

| <b>Table 1<sup>6</sup></b>       |   |   |   |   |   |     |   |      |    |    |    |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|-----|---|------|----|----|----|
| <b>Number of Slaves per Farm</b> |   |   |   |   |   |     |   |      |    |    |    |
| <b>1826</b>                      |   |   |   |   |   |     |   |      |    |    |    |
| # of Slaves                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6-7 | 8 | 9-12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| # of Farms                       | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0   | 1 | 0    | 2  | 0  | 1  |

In early 1827, the government of the State of Coahuila, of which Texas was a part, approved a new constitution that placed additional restrictions on slavery. The constitution freed all children born in Texas of slave parents and banned the further importation of slaves. Both changes went into effect six months after the constitution's creation. Austin agonized over the effect on Texas of such an importation ban, but records from East Texas demonstrate that most immigrants, as well as many Mexican government officials, showed little concern for laws made in a seat of government so far away. Slaves continued to flow into Texas.

Contemporary with the Atascocita Census of 1826, a record exists that documents the migration of settlers into Nacogdoches, then the largest settlement in East Texas and a common entry point from Louisiana and points east. Settlers who entered there likely shared many similarities with those already settled in the Atascocita District to the south. Obviously incomplete but nonetheless instructive, the records consist of citizenship applications submitted to the Mexican government by settlers, most of whom were from the United States. These documents, from the years 1827 to 1834, are a chronicle of how one became a new citizen of Mexico. Each single man or head of household swore to be of good character and promised allegiance to Mexico, including a willingness to bear arms in Mexico's defense.<sup>7</sup>

Among those applying for Mexican citizenship, seemingly oblivious to the confusion engendered by the slavery question and the growing opposition by certain factions within the Mexican government to the institution, were numerous slaveholders. They made little or no attempt to hide the fact of their slave ownership, and periodically and casually mentioned the number



of slaves they owned, sometimes by name. American settlers insisted on their right to own slaves, and arrogantly ignored the fact that such “rights” ceased at the Mexican border. Slave owners seemed blissfully unaware of the incongruity of citing United States law to protest Mexican law, or of their audacity at assuming the rightness of an illegal institution within the boundaries of the banning nation. The incomplete records show that ninety-one heads of household applied for citizenship between 1827 and 1830. Of those ninety-one, seven declared their status as slave owners. Those seven settlers, representing almost seven percent of the settlers mentioned in the records, owned forty-two slaves.<sup>8</sup>

In early 1828, the government of the Mexican state of Coahuila made its own constitution even more confusing by legalizing the importation of indentured servants while continuing the ban on slaves. Nevertheless, some new immigrants continued to forthrightly and brazenly refer to their servants as slaves. In 1830, as the flood of immigrants into Texas threatened to replace Mexicans and Mexican culture, the Mexican central government abolished all immigration from the United States for both whites and blacks. White Americans reacted to the ban as they had to the other previous restrictions—they ignored it and continued to move into Texas. The immigration ban (and the colonists’ ignoring of it) lasted until 1834. The issue of slavery, however, had consequences.

Writing on the causes of the Texas Revolution, Randolph B. Campbell suggested that one major cause was the clash of traditions between Mexicans and Texans, and that one of the main differences between the two cultures was the institution of slavery. Unlike their indecisive Mexican counterparts, the framers of the Constitution of Texas gave their absolute approval to slavery when they created the Republic in 1836.<sup>9</sup>

Tax records exist from the early days of Liberty County, one of the original counties of the Republic of Texas. Those records clearly demonstrate the growth of the institution of slavery in the area. As noted previously, the Atascocita Census of 1826, which

enumerated the citizens of all or part of fourteen modern Texas counties, listed 331 settlers and divided them into fifty-five families. Ten of those families owned sixty-one of the sixty-nine slaves in the district.

In 1838, the second full year in the existence of the Republic of Texas and the first year for which complete, undamaged Liberty County tax records exist, 166 heads-of-household traveled to the county seat to pay their property taxes. The ledgers used to categorize the property upon which citizens paid taxes asked for limited information. Fortunately, the data gives detailed numbers concerning land, horses and cattle, and slaves, the fourth major category.

Of the 166 taxpayers in the county, fifty-nine of them, or more than thirty-five percent, paid taxes on slaves. They owned 231 slaves valued at a total of \$90,950, for an average of a little less than \$400 per slave. The value of the slaves to their owners was second only to the value of the land on which they toiled. In 1838, no slaveholder in Liberty County in 1838 owned more than fifteen slaves, and only one citizen owned that number. Thirty-nine of the fifty-nine slave owners in the county, or more than sixty-seven percent, owned three or fewer slaves (see Table 2).<sup>10</sup>

| <b>Table 2<sup>11</sup></b>      |    |   |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |       |    |
|----------------------------------|----|---|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|-------|----|
| <b>Number of Slaves Per Farm</b> |    |   |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |       |    |
| <b>1838</b>                      |    |   |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |       |    |
| # of Slaves                      | 1  | 2 | 3  | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13-14 | 15 |
| # of Farms                       | 11 | 8 | 20 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 3  | 0  | 1  | 0     | 1  |

At about this time one of the earliest private references to the slave trade specifically involving Liberty County appeared. The Atascocita Census of 1826 enumerated William B. Duncan as the eight year-old son of the elder William Duncan, one of the earliest settlers in Liberty County. In 1839, Meridith Duncan,

the older brother of the young William, made reference to the division of their recently deceased father's estate. He said in a letter, "I rec[eive]d your letter by Charles on this day in which you spoke of the offer Green has made you for your Negroes. I have no objection to you selling to Green." The elder Duncan's death obviously affected the two men, and their concerns over the division of their father's property needed resolution. Since slaves represented a major portion of a slaveholder's wealth, the subject consumed much of the sons' thoughts.

The Liberty County tax rolls for 1840 indicate that migration into the county continued at a high rate. The lists showed 437 taxpayers, up from 166 only two years earlier, an increase of 263 percent. Of that number, 134, more than thirty percent of the total taxpayers, owned 562 slaves. Those 562 slaves represented an increase of 243 percent from the 231 slaves enumerated in 1838. As Liberty County gained in total population, the percentage of growth for whites and blacks remained constant. As with the 1838 tax records, the 1840 tax records demonstrated a propensity in Liberty County toward small slave holdings. Of the 134 slave owners, 102, or seventy-six percent of the total, owned five or fewer slaves, and fifty-eight slave owners, or forty-three percent, owned only one or two slaves (see Table 3).<sup>12</sup>

| <b>Table 3<sup>13</sup></b>      |    |    |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
|----------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| <b>Number of Slaves per Farm</b> |    |    |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| <b>1840</b>                      |    |    |    |    |    |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| <b># of Slaves</b>               | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 13 | 14 | 16 | 19 | 22 | 24 |
| <b># of Farms</b>                | 33 | 25 | 22 | 12 | 10 | 9 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 2  | 3  | 1  | 2  | 3  | 1  | 1  | 1  |

As an adult, the aforementioned William B. Duncan became a prominent Liberty County cattleman and slaveholder. Beginning in 1843, he kept a diary with daily entries that spanned the Republic period, antebellum statehood, the Civil War and Reconstruction, and continued to his death in 1866. Included

in the diary are informative descriptions of how he moved his cattle from Liberty County to market, often to cities in Louisiana and Mississippi. On an 1843 drive to Natchez, Mississippi, Duncan made several diary entries that contained some of the first references to slavery other than the public records involving a Liberty County citizen. Although short, the entries addressed the casual nature of the slave trade in Liberty County and East Texas, and shed light on the value of slaves in the area during the period.<sup>14</sup>

Probably finding himself shorthanded on the cattle drive, Duncan wrote, "Thursday—[I] Let Crips have thirty-one beeves for a negro."<sup>15</sup> Four days later he penned, "Monday—Commenced trying to sell beeves: sold three 3 y[ear] olds at \$7 [per head]."<sup>16</sup> Almost two weeks later, he said, "Sunday—Booth and I rode out to Louis Garver's, the Dutch butcher, and finally sold our beeves. Booth sold to Garver at \$8.50 and I to Michael Hail for \$9."<sup>17</sup> Valuable as a record of beef prices during the Republic period, these entries also gave a clue to the dollar value of a slave in the county. Duncan purchased a slave on August 10, 1843, for thirty-one head of cattle. Less than three weeks later he sold his herd for between seven and nine dollars per head. That settles the value of the slave at somewhere between \$217 and \$279, or an average (at eight dollars per head) of \$248.<sup>18</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that Duncan appreciated the irony of the fact that the sale of the cattle paid for the cowboy who drove them.

The 1850 United States Census and its attendant Slave and Agricultural Schedules offer a wealth of information not contained in the earlier Colonial and Republic records. The 1850 Slave Schedule reveals a continuation of growth of the slave population, albeit at a slower rate both in number and as a percentage of the population, when compared to the population figures for slaves and slaveholders from the Tax Rolls of 1840. Slave numbers increased from 201 in 1838 to 889 in 1850. Natural increase cannot explain this growth rate of 442 percent.<sup>19</sup>

After Texas entered the Union as a slave state, significant

numbers of slaveholders from across the South made their way to the former republic. Many owners of worn-out land came to Texas to take advantage of the available virgin soils, and their slaves accompanied them. Former slave Jacob Branch, born in about 1851, recalled, "I was bought and fetched here to Double Bayou when I was jes' t'ree year' old. When dey split up us fam'ly dey buy my mama and de two chillen. I ain' neber see my daddy no mo' and don' 'member him at all." It is likely that many of those slaves came from the older southern states, such as Maryland and Virginia, which supplied surplus slaves for ready buyers in other parts of the South.<sup>20</sup> A final source of the increase came from illegal participation in the outlawed African slave trade.<sup>21</sup>

The ownership of more than twenty slaves usually conferred plantation status on a property. That being the case, the Slave Schedule of 1850 indicates that only seven Liberty County property owners qualified for that standing. The number of slaveholders increased from fifty-two in 1840 to 125 in 1850, and several large slave owners resided in the county. Edward Gillard's holding with fifty-one slaves was the largest, but the largest portion of the county's slaves found themselves on properties containing twenty or fewer souls. Indeed, 100 slaveholders, or eighty percent of the total, owned ten or fewer slaves, and seventy-four of those, or fifty-nine percent of the total, owned five or fewer slaves (see Table 4). While the growth of slavery in the county continued unimpeded, apparently the growth of large agricultural plantations did not follow pace.<sup>22</sup>

| <b>Table 4<sup>23</sup></b>      |    |    |     |      |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |
|----------------------------------|----|----|-----|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| <b>Number of Slaves Per Farm</b> |    |    |     |      |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |
| <b>1850</b>                      |    |    |     |      |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |
| # of Slaves                      | 1  | 2  | 3-5 | 6-10 | 11-15 | 16-20 | 21-25 | 26-30 | 31-40 | 41-50 | 51+ |
| # of Farms                       | 17 | 18 | 39  | 26   | 12    | 6     | 4     | 1     | 1     | 0     | 1   |

In 1850, the production of crops such as cotton, rice and sugar

cane—crops perhaps more common in other portions of the South in general, and in Texas in particular—was low in Liberty County. The county's failure to grow such staple crops and the dearth of large plantations go hand in hand, since the economies of scale required by such crops demand large land holdings. Liberty County farmers depended on more traditional forms of husbandry such as corn, cattle, and swine to make their living. Of the 199 farmers enumerated on the Agricultural Schedule in Liberty County, only seventeen reported the production of cotton. Those seventeen raised a total of 331 bales for an average of nineteen bales per man. Of the 199 farmers, six raised a total of 6,692 bushels of rice, or an average of 1115 bushels per farmer. Even fewer raised sugar cane. Five farmers produced 140 hogsheads of sugar, or twenty-eight hogsheads per farmer. Clearly, Liberty County farmers in 1850 did not produce the crops traditionally associated with plantation slavery. The county, however, seemed poised to move in that direction.<sup>24</sup>

Of the twenty-six farmers who raised the staple crops normally associated with plantation slavery, only two, Edward Gillard and his wife Norma, raised both cotton and rice. Three of the six rice farmers were members of the extended Gillard family, the largest slave-holding family in the county and recent immigrants from Louisiana. The production of each staple farm seemed tied to the number of slaves working for each owner. Although only twenty-two (eleven percent of all Liberty County farmers) raised staple crops, the group owned 356 slaves, or forty percent of the county's bondsmen. The potential for Liberty County's inclusion in the ranks of those other, better-studied counties existed. In fact, considering that 891 (thirty-five percent) of Liberty County's 1850 population of 2,522 were slaves places the county among the most heavily slave-populated Texas counties when slaves numbers are expressed as a percentage of the total population; only seventeen of the eighty-six slave holding counties in Texas had higher percentages. Valid reasons exist explaining the failure of the county to join the larger staple crop producing counties.<sup>25</sup>

In 1854, journalist and urban architect Frederick Law Olmsted crossed the Trinity River at the town of Liberty during his tour of Texas. While no friend of slavery and prone to write in a negative vein of the institution, Olmsted had no reason to exaggerate his descriptions of Liberty County's geography in the last decade before the Civil War. He mentioned:

...level prairies...everywhere broken by belts of pine forest...imperfectly drained, and in a wet season a large proportion is literally covered with water....The roads through them are not such as one would choose for a morning ride....No wheeled vehicles traverse the region.

It is obvious that the terrain of the county worked not only against clearing land for plantation agriculture, but was an impediment to transporting crops to market as well. In a letter to an early local newspaper, an unknown Liberty County resident painted a more optimistic picture than did Olmsted when he assessed the strengths and needs of the area. He said that steamboat service and good roads would guarantee the prosperity of the country, for all other necessary factors were in place. The soil was rich and of a slight sandy nature, making cultivation simple and enabling farmers to plant large acreage and to grow more cotton and sugar cane than they could gather. He further claimed the land had the ability to produce twenty-five to sixty bushels of corn to the acre. Again reiterating the county's greatest need, he repeated, "Liberty is an old settled county, and has remained until recently without much improvement."<sup>26</sup>

Both Olmsted and the unnamed correspondent agreed on one key point. The lack of a transportation infrastructure in the form of roads, railroads, or steamboats made the transportation of crops to market a near impossibility. Since dependable routes remained in the future, most Liberty County farmers turned to crops unaffected by hard terrain or lack of roads. In this segment of the agricultural population toiled most of the sixty percent of Liberty County slaves not involved with staple crop production.

Olmsted, in describing the lifestyle of many Liberty County residents, unintentionally described the impact of an almost non-existent infrastructure on county society. He remarked that the [white] people were herdsmen and cultivated no other crop than corn. "They live(d) in isolated cabins, h(e)ld little intercourse with each other, and almost none with the outside world....A traveler, other than a beef-speculator, was a thing unknown."<sup>27</sup> As Jacob Branch recalled, "Mos' farms was so scatter out dey can't git from one to anudder and hafter live by deyse'fs."<sup>28</sup>

Olmsted recognized the importance of cattle to the underdeveloped county, as did the previously cited *Liberty Gazette* letter writer. That writer said of the typical Liberty County farmer, "While he is engaged in...preparing his crop for market, his stock, with no expense from his arm, are running at large in the prairie, growing and increasing rapidly."<sup>29</sup> Herdsmen branded and marked their stock and then permitted them to run wild across the county. When the time came to gather cattle and hogs (a staple of the East Texas diet), cattlemen simply separated their stock from that of their neighbors. By 1850, Liberty County contained 39,777 head of cattle owned by 177 cattlemen, for an average of 222 head per owner. Additionally, 173 farmers owned the 9,500 hogs that joined the cattle on the prairies and woods of the county, for an average fifty-five hogs per farmer.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike crops that required transportation of some type to get to market, cattle drives did not depend on good roads, railroads, or steamships; cattle transported themselves. Cattlemen such as William B. Duncan gathered cattle in Liberty and surrounding counties and drove them to markets in Louisiana and Mississippi. While his diary contains no specific mention of slave herdsmen on the trail, he infers their presence with his previously cited description of the purchase of a slave in exchange for cattle while on the trail. If the majority of slaves in Liberty County lived on non-staple crop farms, they surely served an important purpose to their cattlemen owners. They provided labor for the



preparation of the cattle for the long drive, as well as on the drive itself. Additionally, they proved instrumental in raising the most common crops produced in the county, corn and sweet potatoes, crops that fed both man and beast.<sup>31</sup>

Cattlemen also drove livestock other than cattle to market. Jacob Branch recalled how his former master raised hogs for market:

He was a great one for to raise pigs. He sell sometime 500 hawgs at one time. He tek he dogs and drive dem hawgs 'cross the Neches Riber all by hisse'f to sell dem. Dat's how he git de money to buy he niggers, selling hawgs and cowhides.<sup>32</sup>

Sweet potatoes and corn, rather than cotton, rice, or sugar cane served as the crops of choice in Liberty County. Because of the difficulty in transporting other crops to market, farmers turned to sweet potatoes and corn for both consumption and the market. In 1850, 155 of the 199 farmers in the county raised corn and generated a total of 54,715 bushels of the grain, or about 353 bushels per producer. According to Randolph Campbell, the average ratio of corn bushels to cotton bales on Texas slaveholding farms possessing one to nine slaves was 155:1 during the 1850s. The average number of slaves on Liberty County farms for the same period was seven, and the ratio of corn to cotton was 165:1. A comparison of the state and county ratios show a marked similarity of Liberty County with the remainder of the state of Texas with regard to corn production and supports the notion that, for all its bad roads, Liberty County shared at least some characteristics with the mainline plantation slavery counties. In addition to the large amount of corn produced in the county, 112 farmers produced 19,700 bushels of sweet potatoes, or about 176 bushels per farmer.<sup>33</sup> Olmsted claimed that the diet of East Texans consisted of an unvaried combination of bacon or salt pork, cornbread and sweet potatoes. The numbers and the memories of the slaves support his contention. According to Sally Banks Chambers, "Dey have lots of syrup, co'n bread,

sweet 'taters and home-cure' meat w'at dey salt down and hang in de smokehouse to dry."<sup>34</sup>

Slaves performed much of the labor required to produce those crops, and many started their labor at an early age. Jacob Branch recalled that his first task as a child was to gather firewood. As he grew older, he tended livestock. By the time he matured physically, or in his words was a "good sprout," he was set to picking cotton, pulling corn and cutting cane. He was never idle.<sup>35</sup> Betty Simmons agreed with Branch. She remembered, "I sho' was glad w'en freedom come. I's jes' gittin' ready den to put my li'l t'ree year ol' boy in de field. Dey take dem young. He was to help keep de caffs."<sup>36</sup>

Of the 199 farmers in 1850 Liberty County, eighty-four of them, or forty-two percent of the total, owned slaves. If many whites in the county existed near a subsistence level, how much more primitive were the lives of slaves? Frederick Olmsted described slave quarters he saw near Nacogdoches, whose counterparts likely existed in Liberty County. He said:

The negro-quarters here, scattered irregularly about the [master's] house, were of the worst description, though as good as local custom requires. They are but a rough enclosure of logs, ten feet square, without windows, covered by slabs of hewn wood four feet long. The great chinks are stopped with whatever has come to hand—a wad of cotton here, and a corn-shuck there.<sup>37</sup>

George Rivers remembered his slave cabin in the Liberty County village of Grand Cane. One can almost hear the shudder in his voice when he remembered, "Dey was jis' 'bout 'nuff to keep de rain out. De frogs and snakes uster git in—I 'members dat."<sup>38</sup>

The abysmal conditions that accompanied slavery lent themselves to runaways. Freedman J. A. Robinson remembered, "Many times I see houn's chase niggers. I clim' up on d' fence t'

watch 'em go by. Dey run aw'ile an' trot aw'ile. Uncle Nathan say dey was runaway niggers."<sup>39</sup> Advertisements announcing rewards for the return of runaway slaves, or news of the apprehension of such slaves, appeared soon after the *Liberty Gazette* began publishing in early 1855. Typical of such articles is one from August 3, 1856, which announced the capture in the Hill Country county of Gillespie three runaway slaves from three different Liberty County owners. The article claimed that "The negroes were evidently making tracks for Mexico, and a few days travel would have enabled them to reach that country."<sup>40</sup> Jacob Branch agreed with the newspaper's assessment of their goal. He said, "All de slaves in dis part de country when dey runned off dey headed for de Rio Grande Riber. Iffen dey could reach de riber and swim ha'f way 'cross dey was free."<sup>41</sup>

That three slaves from three different Liberty County plantations successfully planned and implemented their escape together toward Mexico indicates a certain ability among slaves to meet and plan. This was possible due to the limited freedom of movement enjoyed by some slaves. The reasons for the mobility vary, but certain ones appear common. Couples sometimes lived on different plantations, with the husband normally visiting the wife and children on weekends and holidays. George Rivers recalled, "Dey was one cullud man on de place w'at uster go to see he wife on de nex' plantation lots."<sup>42</sup> Masters often loosened travel restrictions for holidays such as corn-shuckings and Christmas, permitting the slaves to introduce themselves to their slave neighbors. Freedwoman Laura Cornish said her master permitted visiting between plantations. She claimed, "Dey has dat time off to do what dey wants to, mebbe visit 'round de neighbor plantations, an' we don't have to have no pass like de cullud folks do on de other plantations."<sup>43</sup> If so, her master gave his slaves a precious right, for it was the rare master who permitted slaves to travel without written permission. As travel from farm to farm was important for slaves, so was transportation from farm to market important for slaveowners.

A new transportation era began in June 1855 with the

establishment of steamship service to newly constructed docks at Liberty on the Trinity River, which followed the dredging of the Trinity River, then and still notorious for snags and the overnight appearance of treacherous sandbars, especially from its mouth at Trinity Bay northward to the town of Liberty. Such improvements provided quick transport for county produce not only to the nearby port of Galveston, but to cities such as New Orleans as well. The Texas and New Orleans Railroad was constructed through Liberty County in 1860. The eastern leg of the line ran only to Orange. More importantly, it continued from Liberty County to Houston in the west, and from Houston it made connections with trains bound for Galveston and thence to world markets. The lack of reliable access to markets had stifled plantation agriculture in Liberty County, and forced a dependence on other crops. With the coming of steamboats and the railroad, plantation agriculture began to resemble more closely the older plantation counties of Texas where staple crops were the norm.

The census of 1860 was the first federal enumeration after the separation of Chambers County from the mother county of Liberty. It was also the first census conducted since the arrival of steamboat and railroad service, and indicates how improved infrastructure led to the growth of staple crop production. The Slave Schedules for the two counties showed a combined total of 1,527 slaves. The county had a population of 4,697, of which the 1,527 slaves represented 33.8 percent of the total, slightly down from 35.3 percent of the total county population in 1850.<sup>44</sup> This represents an additional 636 slaves over the 891 enumerated on the 1850 Slave Schedule, or an increase of fifty-eight percent. The owners of those slaves numbered 205, up from the 126 owners in 1850—an increase of sixty-one percent. The average slaveholding in the two counties was 7.4, up slightly from 7.0 in 1850.<sup>45</sup>

As in 1850, most of the slaves in the two counties lived on farms of twenty or fewer slaves. In fact, 160 slave owners, or seventy-eight percent (slightly down from eighty percent in

1850) of the total, held ten or fewer slaves, and of those, 110, or fifty-three percent (down from fifty-nine percent in 1850) of the total, owned five or fewer slaves (see Table 5). Only thirteen plantation owners, or six percent of the total (also six percent in 1850), owned more than twenty slaves. Of 482 farmers in the two counties in 1860, 180, or thirty-seven percent (down from forty-two percent in 1850) of the total, owned slaves. The growth of slavery in the two counties, in terms of percentages, seems static for the decade between 1850 and 1860. But appearances, in this case, are deceiving.<sup>46</sup>

With trustworthy transportation finally in place, the production of staple crops typical of Texas counties that had earlier turned to plantation agriculture and plantation slavery began to grow almost exponentially. By 1860, the year of the appearance of the railroad and only five years after the coming of steamboats to the county, cotton was already the staple crop of choice among Liberty County farmers. The Agricultural Schedule reveals no production of rice and the production of only twenty-three hogsheads of sugar. However, ninety-six farmers (up from seventeen in 1850) raised 1,707 bales (up from 331 in 1850) of cotton.<sup>47</sup> Evidence indicates that some farmers permitted their slaves to farm for themselves in their spare time on land set aside for that purpose. One of the crops raised in this manner by the slaves was cotton. After paying back the master for expenses, the slaves kept the remaining cash and spent it as they saw fit. Sally Banks Chambers commented on this arrangement:

Dey 'low de cullud folks Sattiday and Sunday off from de fiel'. De wimmen folks was s'pose to do dey own washin' cause dey ain't got so many diff'rent clo's. De menfolks dey ten' to de gardens 'roun' dey own house....De menfolks raise cotton and sol' it to de marster for dey spen'in money.<sup>48</sup>

All comparisons of the 1850 and 1860 slave numbers show little significant change, especially in areas such as the average

size of the slaveholdings, percentages in each size category, and percentage of farmers who held slaves. Nevertheless, production of cotton grew dramatically. The obvious reason lies in the drastically improved methods by which farmers sent their crops to market. The advent of steamships and the railroad convinced farmers who previously spurned cotton to begin its cultivation. By 1860, ninety-six, or forty-six percent (up from eleven percent in 1850) of the 205 farmers in the two counties raised cotton. Those ninety-six cotton farmers owned 555 slaves, or thirty-six percent (down somewhat from forty percent in 1850) of all the slaves in the two counties.<sup>49</sup>

| <b>Number of Slaves Per Owner</b> |    |    |     |      |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |
|-----------------------------------|----|----|-----|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| <b>1860</b>                       |    |    |     |      |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |
| # of Slaves                       | 1  | 2  | 3-5 | 6-10 | 11-15 | 16-20 | 21-25 | 26-30 | 31-40 | 41-45 | 46-50 | 51+ |
| # of Farms                        | 42 | 18 | 50  | 50   | 22    | 10    | 6     | 1     | 4     | 1     | 1     | 0   |

When farmers turned to cotton production it did not mean that they ignored sweet potatoes and corn, the traditional crops of the county. Improved transportation permitted those crops, as well as cotton, an easier journey to market. By 1860, 196 farmers in the two counties produced 117,740 bushels of corn, for an average of 398 bushels per farmer (up from 353 in 1850). The ratio of corn bushels to cotton bales in the two counties was 69:1, well in line with Campbell's figure of 62:1 for a farm of fewer than ten slaves. The average slaveholding in the two counties was 7.4 slaves. The two counties did not follow the statewide trend during the 1850s toward decreased corn production and increased cotton production on slaveholding farms. The average holding of improved land by property owners increased to 38.5, up from thirty-seven in 1850. Rather than clearing more land

for cotton production, farmers farmed more intensively on their existing cleared land. In addition to the corn production, sweet potatoes remained an important crop. Potato production for 1860 totaled 27,273 bushels, or an average of 150 bushels (down from an average of 176 bushels in pre-steamboat and pre-railroad 1850) for each of the 181 farmers who planted them. In this case, potato production did follow the widespread downward trend. Generally though, what happened in Liberty County agreed with Campbell's insistence that Texas slave owners never increased cotton acreage at the expense of food crops. He maintained that they sustained the self-sufficiency they needed to feed themselves and their dependents.<sup>51</sup>

As was the case for corn and potatoes, cattle and hog production also maintained their strength in the economy of the two counties. A total of 334 farmers raised 70,518 head of cattle, for an average of 211 (slightly down from 222 in 1850) per farmer. At the same time, 349 farmers owned 22,901 hogs, an average of sixty-five (up from fifty-five percent in 1850) per farmer. The necessities of feeding such numbers of cattle and hogs suggest an obvious reason why corn and potato production remained high in the two counties.<sup>52</sup> Slaves remained busy with the cattle, a job skill that served them well after freedom came. Hiram Mayes, just a small child at the beginning of Reconstruction, recalled how his father supported his family: "I knowed us move up de prairie a ways and my daddy hire' out to ride de range."<sup>53</sup>

| Table 6 <sup>54</sup>      |    |    |     |      |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |
|----------------------------|----|----|-----|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|
| Number of Slaves per Owner |    |    |     |      |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |
| 1864                       |    |    |     |      |       |       |       |       |       |       |     |
| # of Slaves                | 1  | 2  | 3-5 | 6-10 | 11-15 | 16-20 | 21-25 | 26-30 | 31-40 | 41-50 | 51+ |
| # of Farms                 | 46 | 23 | 65  | 50   | 27    | 19    | 6     | 3     | 11    | 0     | 3   |

By 1864, the last full year in which slavery existed in Liberty

and Chambers Counties, tax records indicate continuing increases in the numbers of slaves and slave owners alike. Of the 568 heads-of-household who paid property taxes in that year, 255 (up from 205 in 1860), or 44.8 percent of the total taxpayers, identified themselves as slave owners. Those 255 people owned 2,295 slaves (up from 1,527 in 1860) for an increase of 768, a 66.5 percent rise in only four years (see Table 6).<sup>55</sup> Only migration into the counties can explain such a phenomenal expansion of slavery in only four years. Many slave owners ran to Texas, the westernmost of what became the Confederate states, prior to and during the Civil War. These owners brought their slaves with them. According to freedwoman Sally Banks Chambers:

When de ol' marster decide to come [from Louisiana] to Texas he brung two men, two women, my mudder and her chillen fus'. He leave mos' de slaves back in de ol' home state. De nex' year he find a place on de river bottom. He come and brung us all there and go back to Louisiana and brung de res' of dem too.<sup>56</sup>

Many Liberty and Chambers County slaves probably had similar stories to tell. However, by the next full tax year, with the end of the Civil War and ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, no slaves resided in Liberty and Chambers Counties.

Slavery in Liberty County and Chambers counties underwent change until the very moment of its demise. It is impossible to separate the dynamic of slavery from the evolution of agriculture in the counties, for slaves labored at whatever their masters produced. As the products changed, so did the work of the slaves. Although never a major slave county in terms of absolute numbers, the institution remained a major factor in the two counties, and compared well in terms of percentage of the total population with other, more well-known counties. With apologies to that Assistant Clerk of Court, "Honey, slavery was important in Liberty County during those times."



| APPENDIX 1860* |                 |                 |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| LIBERTY COUNTY |                 | CHAMBERS COUNTY |
| 10419/265      | Improved Land   | 4046/110        |
| 214814/218     | Unimproved Land | 117902/99       |
| 2787/324       | Horses          | 1704/110        |
| 450/63         | Mules           | 71/25           |
| 845/189        | Oxen            | 15/91           |
| 40718/244      | Cattle          | 29800/90        |
| 17126/251      | Swine           | 5775/98         |
| 84400/198      | Corn            | 33340           |
| 0              | Rice            | 0               |
| 1556/89        | Cotton          | 151/7           |
| 12849/109      | Potatoes        | 14424/72        |
| 8423/57        | Butter          | 7605/52         |
| 23/2           | Sugar           | 0               |

\*The number following the slash represents the number of farmers engaged in that activity.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> My enthusiasm at the prospect of examining the Liberty County probate records, tax records and proceedings of the District Court received a blow the same day as my visit with the Assistant Clerk of Court when I discovered that two fires in the 1870s completely destroyed all such records. However, a visit to the Sam Houston Library and Research Center (hereafter referred to as SHLRC) in Liberty rekindled my zeal. There I unexpectedly found the Liberty County tax records from the antebellum period, saved through a quirk of good fortune. It seems that during those years, the Liberty County Sheriff, with an office separate from the courthouse, served as the Liberty County Tax Collector. Thus, the tax records survived the fire through being archived in a separate location. The SHLRC houses additional records for Liberty County and nine adjacent Southeast Texas counties from the colonial, Republic and antebellum statehood periods. Additionally, the library serves as a repository for the William B. Duncan papers, an important primary source for the study of slavery in Liberty County.

<sup>2</sup> Randolph B. Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Alicia V. Tjarks, "Comparative Demographic Analysis of Texas, 1777-1793," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LXXVII (1974), 295-299, 324-25; Carmela Leal (comp. and trans.), "Translations of Statistical and Census Reports of Texas, 1782-1836, and Sources Documenting the Black in Texas, 1603-1803" (Microfilm Publication by the Institute of Texan Cultures, San Antonio, 1979); Lester E. Bugbee, "Slavery in Early Texas," *Political Science Quarterly*, XIII (1898), 389-90.

<sup>4</sup> The Atascocita District contained within its boundaries all of present-day Chambers, Hardin, Jasper, Jefferson, Liberty, Newton, Orange, Polk, San Jacinto and Tyler counties, as well as portions of present day Galveston, Harris, Montgomery and Walker counties.

<sup>5</sup> Mary McMillan Osburn, (ed.), "The Atascocita Census of 1826," *Texana*, I (1963), 229-321.

<sup>6</sup> Osburn, "The Atascocita Census of 1826," 321.

<sup>7</sup> R.B. Blake, translator. "Book of Foreigners Settled at Nacogdoches with Date of Application and Action of the Authorities on Such Applications from 1827 to 1834," R.B. Blake Collection, Vol. XXX, transcription, SHLRC, Liberty, Texas.

<sup>8</sup> Blake, "Book of Foreigners Settled at Nacogdoches with Date of Application and Action of the Authorities on Such Applications from 1827 to 1834,". The applications for six of those seven slave-owning applicants specified the number of white and slave immigrants, indicating a total of 42 slaves between them. On October 18, 1827, the seventh settler, Jacob Garrett, avowed "my family consists of twenty-five souls, white and blackish," leaving the numbers for each race in doubt. It is presumed that the majority of his "family" of twenty-five consisted of slaves.

<sup>9</sup> Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 48.

<sup>10</sup> Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 48.

<sup>11</sup> Tax Rolls, 1838, Liberty County, Texas.

<sup>12</sup> Tax Rolls, 1838, Liberty County, Texas

<sup>13</sup> Gifford White, (ed.), *The 1840 Census of the Republic of Texas* (Austin: Pemberton Press, 1966) 99-107. The Republic of Texas, during its existence, failed to conduct a nation-wide census. White created such an enumeration by reviewing the 1840 tax records of each county (the records for six counties are missing) and transcribing each, the result of which is this "census."

<sup>14</sup> William B. Duncan, in *Duncan Papers, Journal*, August ???, 1843, SHLRC, Liberty, Texas.

<sup>15</sup> William B. Duncan, in *Duncan Papers, Journal*, August 10, 1843.

<sup>16</sup> William B. Duncan, in *Duncan Papers, Journal*, August 14, 1843.

<sup>17</sup> William B. Duncan, in *Duncan Papers, Journal*, August 27, 1843.

<sup>18</sup> Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 73. Randolph Campbell determined \$494 as the mean value of a Texas slave in 1843. The reason for the lower price paid by William Duncan for the new slave is unknown, but the age or the health of the slave might have been factors. Perhaps the seller rid himself of a chronic runaway or a slave perceived to be a troublemaker.

<sup>19</sup> Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 73.

<sup>20</sup> Jacob Branch, in George P. Rawick, *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography Series 1* (7 vols.; Westport, Conn., 1972); series 2 (12 vols.; Westport, Conn., 1972); Supplement, Series 1, (12 vols.; Westport, Conn., 1977; and Supplement, series 2, (10 vols.; Westport, Conn., 1979) (hereafter cited as *Am. Slave*), Vol. 4, part 3, 405; Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 129. Tadman maintained that each antebellum decade saw 10-15% of all young adult slaves from the Upper South being sold to owners in the Deep and Southwestern portions of the South.

<sup>21</sup> Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 51-53.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1850, Slave Schedule, Liberty County, Texas.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1850, Slave Schedule, Liberty County, Texas.

<sup>24</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1850, Agricultural Schedule, Liberty County, Texas.

<sup>25</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1850, Agricultural Schedule, Liberty County, Texas.

<sup>26</sup>Frederick Law Olmstead, *A Journey Through Texas, or a Saddle-trip on the Southwestern Frontier* (New York: Dix, Edwards, 1857; reprint, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 364-365; *Liberty Gazette*, February 26, 1855.

<sup>27</sup>Olmsted, *A Journey Through Texas*, 365.

<sup>28</sup>Jacob Branch, in *Rawick, Am. Slave*, Vol. 2, part 1, 410.

<sup>29</sup>*Liberty Gazette*, February 26, 1855.

<sup>30</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1850, Agricultural Schedule, Liberty County, Texas.

<sup>31</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1850, Agricultural Schedule, Liberty County, Texas.

<sup>32</sup>Jacob Branch, in *Rawick, Am. Slave*, Vol. 2, part 1, 405-406.

<sup>33</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1850, Agricultural Schedule, Liberty County, Texas.

<sup>34</sup>Olmsted, *A Journey Through Texas*, 60; Sally Banks Chambers, in *Rawick, Am. Slave*, vol. 3, part 2, 683.

<sup>35</sup>Jacob Branch, in *Rawick, Am. Slave*, Vol. 2, part 1, 408.

<sup>36</sup>Betty Chambers Simmons, in *Rawick, Am. Slave*, Vol. 9, part 8, 3541.

<sup>37</sup>Olmsted, *A Journey Through Texas*, 66.

<sup>38</sup>George Rivers, in *Rawick, Am. Slave*, Vol. 8, part 7, 3325.

<sup>39</sup>J.A. Robinson, in *Rawick, Am. Slave*, Vol. 8, part 7, 3349.

<sup>40</sup> *Liberty Gazette*, August 3, 1856.

<sup>41</sup> Jacob Branch, in *Rawick, Am. Slave*, Vol. 2, part 1, 413.

<sup>42</sup> George Rivers, in *Rawick, Am. Slave*, Vol. 8, part 7, 3327.

<sup>43</sup> Laura Cornish, in *Rawick, Am. Slave*, Vol. 3, part 2, 939.

<sup>44</sup> Laura Cornish, in *Rawick, Am. Slave*, Vol. 3, part 2, 939.

<sup>45</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedules, Liberty County and Chambers County, Texas.

<sup>46</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedules, Liberty County and Chambers County, Texas.

<sup>47</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedules, Liberty County and Chambers County, Texas

<sup>48</sup> Sally Banks Chambers, in *Rawick, Am. Slave*, Vol. 3, part 2, 683.

<sup>49</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedules, Liberty County and Chambers County, Texas.

<sup>50</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1860, Slave Schedules, Liberty County and Chambers County, Texas. The data for the two counties is combined in Table 5 in order to make valid comparisons between the old Liberty County records and the new records from the two new, smaller counties. The individual data for each county is contained in the Appendix.

<sup>51</sup> Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery*, 75-76.

<sup>52</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1860, Agricultural Schedules, Liberty County and Chambers County, Texas.

<sup>53</sup> Hiram Mayes, cited in *Rawick, Am. Slave*, Vol. 7, part 6, 2636.

<sup>54</sup> Tax Rolls, 1864, Liberty County and Chambers County, Texas.

<sup>55</sup> Tax Rolls, 1864, Liberty County and Chambers County, Texas.

<sup>56</sup> Sally Banks Chambers, in *Rawick, Am. Slave*, Vol. 3, part 2, 682.

**What Is Africa To Me?:  
Visions of Africa in Lillian Bertha Jones's *Five  
Generations Hence (1916):  
A Gendered Means to a Political End***

BY KAREN KOSSIE-CHERNYSHEV

“If history is the raw material of literature, literature is an artifact of history. And as an artifact, it becomes a source, and a way of knowing.”<sup>1</sup> Tiffany Ruby Patterson

By the time Harlem Renaissance Poet Countee Cullen asked “What is Africa to me?” in his famous poem “Heritage,” 30-year-old Lillian Bertha Jones, an East Texas native and black woman intellectual had already proposed a creative political answer. Jones, eventually surnamed “Horace” after her second marriage to J. Gentry Horace of Groveton, Texas, engaged in many professional and social endeavors over the course of her life, one that spanned from 1886 to 1965. She served professionally as a teacher, principal, pioneering librarian, journalist, telephone operator, and social worker. She was a devout Baptist churchwoman and a member of various fraternal, social, and civic organizations, including the Women’s Council of Mt. Gilead Baptist Church, Zeta Phi Beta Sorority (Psi Zeta Chapter); Heroines of Jericho (Viola Court. #250); Order of the Eastern Star, Prince Hall Affiliation (Eula Elizabeth Chapter No. 2000); Alphine Charity and Art Club, Progressive Woman’s Club, National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs, as well as the Texas Commission on Interracial Equality. Her many

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involvements notwithstanding, her greatest aspiration “more than any tangible thing” was “to write a book worth reading by an intelligent person, not necessarily [her] friend.”<sup>2</sup> Jones realized her dream in part with *Five Generations Hence*, a 122-page novel written as she taught in rural East Texas schools. In the absence of sponsorship from white patrons that selected artists and writers of the Harlem Renaissance later enjoyed or a cohort of supporters from the black middle class, Jones, using her secondary teacher’s pay, established a printing company with J. Dotson to publish her own work; she also received an undisclosed amount from a friend.

Similar to her southern contemporary Zora Neale Hurston, Jones and her novel were buried in obscurity for the greater part of the twentieth century until an excerpt of her novel appeared in Carol Kessler’s *Daring to Dream* (1996) and my fortuitous encounter with the Lillian Bertha Horace Papers allowed reuniting “Horace” with her earlier identity as “Jones.”<sup>3</sup> Research confirms *Five Generations Hence* (1916) as the only utopian novel by a black woman before 1950 and the earliest novel on record by a black woman from Texas.

Scholars now have the interpretive tools to appreciate Jones and the breadth and scope of her contribution thanks to the maturation of black and women’s history and of feminist methodologies.<sup>4</sup> A substantial body of historical literature examines black women’s labor and political history, and offers detailed accounts of their involvement in the club movement and nascent civil rights movement of the early twentieth century. Historians have also begun to investigate black professional women, including nurses and teachers, who along with black preachers helped set the social and political agenda for African Americans at the turn of the century. An increasing number of studies aims to ferret out regional differences and developments that affirmed the shared and distinguishing characteristics of black women’s experiences. Works treating black women’s involvement in watershed historical developments like the Harlem and Chicago Renaissances began to welcome interdisciplinary approaches

and the use of non-conventional historical artifacts, particularly creative literature.

Tiffany Patterson has argued that historians can use literature to reconstruct “past presents,” or “spoken and written documents that embodied, for their producers, a real present, but that necessarily belongs to our own real past.”<sup>5</sup> Scholars of Afro-Texas history have begun to recover and examine “past presents” in Afro-Texas creative literature, particularly those fitting the chronological framework of the Harlem Renaissance (1920s-1940s).<sup>6</sup> *Five Generations Hence* (1916), a new window into a significant “past present,” permits revisiting the past ideas and philosophies engaging black women intellectuals from the Reconstruction to 1916, the year Jones published her work. Their commitment to racial uplift meshed with discussions about racial destiny and ultimately about Africa, the focus of the ensuing investigation.

Similar to most black writers of the post-reconstruction era, Jones used *Five Generations Hence* (1916) for a sociopolitical purpose. She and her contemporaries critiqued the exclusion of blacks from American life and argued for their inclusion by creating characters that were upwardly mobile, pious, and productive. Her novel is nonetheless unique in its pre-Harlem Renaissance, pre-Marcus-Garvey call for a transcontinental dialogue between Africa and America, one that hinged on economic self-sufficiency and most particularly on the noble ideas and deeds of intelligent women. Jones initiated her project by creating “Miss Grace Noble,” the heroine teacher and leader in a backwoods community, who responds to an awesome sense of social responsibility to educate the young black masses about her. When the novel opens, she is taking a stroll in the woods with her students, whose educational and social welfare is always on her mind. Their plight weighs so heavily upon her that she takes to her natural refuge, the woods, where she has a messianic wilderness experience. She loses consciousness during an agonizing dialogue with self, soul, and the divine. The vision she has ultimately leaves her full of hope for the future. Seven



chapters later, the reader learns what that vision is: American blacks will return to Africa *Five Generations Hence*.

Like many young black women born in “the golden age of black nationalism,”<sup>8</sup> Jones the writer, much like the character she created, was driven by an intense desire to help “her people” overcome the prejudice and discrimination permeating their world in the post-reconstruction South. By 1916, when Jones published her novel, unemployment, disenfranchisement, and vigilante violence were on the rise throughout the South. Race riots ensued as blacks determined to challenge their subjugation. The racial hostility saturating the region and Jones’s firsthand knowledge that African Americans struggled everywhere in the U.S., not just the South, no doubt fueled her Africa-centered musings and separatist leanings. Africa held the economic and political answer to African Americans’ grand existential question particularly given that blacks faced opposition as they migrated to other regions of the country as well. The fact that Jones never migrated permanently out of the South except to follow her second husband to a ministerial post in Evanston, Illinois, reaffirms her realization that leaving the South for another region in the U.S. did not necessarily guarantee upward mobility, particularly for black teachers from the south. As Jacqueline Jones has shown, job opportunities in the Midwest and North were in factories and steel mills, not necessarily in educational institutions. Chicago in the 1920s counted only 138 black women schoolteachers.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, as Sarah Delany, one of the famous Delany sisters recalled, black teachers in New York city were often refused employment on the grounds that their “Southern accent... would be damaging to the children.”<sup>10</sup> Despite the unconstitutionality of “separate but equal,” the segregationist system in the South guaranteed employment for black teachers in the South in way that made some black southerners resistant to the dissolution of the system during the wake of the civil rights movement.

Jones’s novel reflected a renewed and revised vision of Africa among African Americans during the post-Reconstruction era. It was published six years after the first Pan African Congress

convened in Niagara Falls and one year after Carter G. Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (1915) and the same year Marcus Garvey left Jamaica for New York, where he founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association and eventually launched the “Back to Africa” movement, the largest of its kind in U.S. History. Garvey had been inspired by Booker T. Washington’s *Up From Slavery*, which along with his travels in the Caribbean and Central America had made him keenly aware of the transnational suffering of black people. Eleven years later, when Garvey was deported, Laura Adorkor Kofey, “a prophetess of black pride, self-help, and African repatriation” founded the African Universal Church, a rival organization to the UNIA, and named herself “Warrior Mother of Africa’s Warriors” of God.<sup>11</sup> Kofey concentrated her efforts in the US South and Southwest. Though her and Garvey’s efforts were treated as the fringe movements of demagogues, their followings suggested that their ideas found resonance among blacks throughout the country. Jones’s work affirms in an important way that Africa as a place to pursue the unfulfilled dreams of African Americans was engaged before Garvey or Kofey attempted to organize a mass physical exodus of American blacks to Africa.

As Jones could not have relied on Garvey or Kofey for inspiration, Jones’s Africa-centered reflections most readily mirrored the professional interests and spiritual aspirations of black women in the post-reconstruction south from various religious denominations. Black women of the African Methodist Episcopal Church could easily have imagined working in Africa, as the AME’s thirteenth and fourteenth districts included conferences in Sierra Leone, Liberia, South Africa, Transvaal, Cape Colony, and Orange Free State.<sup>12</sup> Pioneering Pentecostal evangelist and Houston resident Lucy Farrow, Frederick Douglass’s niece, also conducted missionary work in Africa in the early 1900s. Jones’s attention to Africa may have been further nurtured by the collective missionary efforts of black southern women, including Emma B. Delaney of Fernandina Beach,

Florida; Susie M. Taylor of Camden, South Carolina; and Elisa L. Davis of Texas, whose efforts spanned from 1901 to 1920 and included stages in Grand Bassa and Monrovia, Liberia, and in the African interior.<sup>13</sup> All were trained at Northern Baptist-affiliated colleges with active missions programs, including Shaw (Raleigh, NC), Virginia Union (Richmond, VA), Spelman (Atlanta, GA) and Morehouse (Atlanta, GA).<sup>14</sup>

Jones's most immediate exposure probably came from her education at Bishop College, established by the American Baptist Home Mission Society, and by her involvement in the National Baptist Convention, a predominantly black Baptist organization. Her involvement in the two institutions also made her awareness of the politics of race and the role that Africa played in this conundrum. Bishop College had been a site of racial strife among white Baptists of the American Baptist Home Mission Society and the Texas black Baptist convention. The American Baptist Home Mission Society supported Bishop College, established in Marshall, Texas, in 1881 by the philanthropic efforts of Carolina Caldwell Bishop, wife of Nathan Bishop, the New York native, and superintendent of the Providence, Rhode Island, and Boston, Massachusetts, school systems who envisioned the college's establishment.<sup>15</sup> But the society denied support to Guadalupe College, established by the black Baptist convention in Seguin, Texas. The American Baptist Home Mission Society argued that it supported only one school per state. Their position did not sit well with black Baptists in Texas since they supported both schools.<sup>16</sup> Though the American Baptist supported missions to Africa, the Southern Baptist Convention did not at this early date. Based on the Texas Constitution of 1866,<sup>17</sup> black Texans had never ceased being "Africans." There was little need to cross the Atlantic with so many "Africans and their descendants" already in the midst.

The perception of the black south at a "Little Africa" persisted throughout the Jim Crow era and was shared by many African Americans as well. As late as the 1950s, Arenia C. Mallory of the Church of God in Christ admitted that she wanted to do

missionary work in Africa but was reminded by her mother that she had a "Little Africa" down South that could use her services. Dr. Mallory then used her abilities to help establish an educational institution, All Saints Junior College, an offshoot of which still exists in Mississippi. Similarly, Mary McCloud Bethune (1875-1955) had a revelation also that she would become a missionary in Africa a year before she completed her studies at Maysville Institute, a school established for black children in Maysville, South Carolina, at Trinity Presbyterian Church, a black congregation affiliated with the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.<sup>18</sup> Bethune's hopes were quickly dashed when the Presbyterian Church refused to send her. After counseling and much soul-searching, she concluded that she had misinterpreted her vision and redirected her energies to establish a college for southern black girls, a dream realized in Bethune-Cookman College. Africa, then, was on the minds of African American women even when their efforts unfolded in the continental U.S., suggesting the perceived tension between Africa here or abroad that Jones attempted to flesh out in her creative work.

In the world Jones created, African American women played significant roles as mothers, missionaries, teachers, and visionaries in the intergenerational transference of hope and intent. Visions of Africa were a spiritual inheritance and legacy passed down from mother to daughter. For example, Missionary Violet Gray, the daughter of a single mother and white father, journeyed to Africa because her mother simply could not go, and Miss Noble, now resigned to helping "Africans" in Texas, nevertheless hopes her daughters will grow up to emulate Missionary Violet Gray and make literal purposeful trips to the continent of Africa. Visions of Africa were also divinely inspired and confirmed or interpreted by spiritual black women within the community. After Grace Noble shared her dream with Missionary Violet Gray, the latter convinced Noble that her immediate purpose was to liberate the African American masses first through her writings. Noble felt that her own efforts paled when compared to Gray's, but the missionary reassured Grace

that everyone had a place and contribution to make, with Noble's contribution being her ability to write. Noble eventually shared her dream, making it clear at the outset that the contemporary trials of African Americans had induced her despair. Noble's dream echoed both Christ's iconic wilderness journey as well as the spiritual journeys to Africa that were prevalent in African American folklore. Noble's vision fell shy of the imperialist bent that often predominated black male discourse on Africa. But it nonetheless affirmed just how removed Jones the writer and the characters she created were from Africa, as well as the degree to which the "white man's"<sup>19</sup> civilization had become the model to which American blacks and Africans should aspire:

I saw a people, a black people, tilling the soil with a song of real joy on their lips. I saw a civilization like the white man's about us today but in his place stood another of a different hue. I beheld beautifully paved streets, handsome homes beautified and adorned, and before the doors sported dusky boys and girls. I seemed to be able to penetrate the very walls of business establishments and see that men and women of color were commercially engaged one with the other.<sup>20</sup>

Upon hearing Miss Noble's dream, Missionary Gray posed a question underscoring another contemporary concern among black intellectuals of the era—black survival and "amalgamation".<sup>21</sup> Noble assured Gray that her worries were unfounded and then proceeded to outline the psychological damage exacted by a system, one that ultimately undermined the self-esteem of black children. The argument Jones's fictional character forwarded presaged one Kenneth Clark later used in *Brown v. the Board of Education* (1954) to help dismantle Jim Crow:

[T]he very laws and the amalgamation so abhorred are our safeguards that the perpetuation of race is

assured....As a separate and distinct people we have a destiny to weave and no force, oppression or amalgamation can deter that edict of God....Side by side the contrast is too great, the Negro ejects little originality in his dress, manner or custom because his training has ever been, that all that is lovely and desiring belong to the white man and being an easy going people he chooses to mimic rather than originate. This brings him into the contempt of his white neighbor and with it a feeling of superiority and monopoly.<sup>22</sup>

But away from these influences, where the little Negro maiden needs not to compare her little blue-eyed blonde doll baby with her “nigger boy”; divorced from the cry that our correct temperature must be taken by a physician of the opposite race; a few less bosses to advance us money for food and to bury our dead, yes away, from these conditions Negroes can see each others virtues, gain self-respect and learn the great lesson of self-reliance as a race.<sup>23</sup>

The political core of Noble’s dream and interpretation affirms that a black woman’s assessment of the “Negro Problem” could be as insightful as those of Jones’s male contemporaries, although she had to “create” a male to test her theory. Lemuel, a black farmer laden with debt who simply could not find his way in the segregationist South, was among the first to read Miss Noble’s political piece and embrace its vision for repatriation to Africa. Reaffirming the author’s call for self-sufficiency, he paid his debt with Grace Noble’s help, became a landowner, and then made his journey to Africa. Lemuel’s decision to leave may have seemed far-fetched, but it too had historical precedent. In the 1870s, for example, 274 African American men, women, and children from Georgia set sail for Africa, with 256 surviving the journey. Of the more than 57 male heads of household landing in Liberia, 40 were farmers,<sup>24</sup> and most cited racial discrimination and disenfranchisement and the opportunity to experience greater political and social freedom as motivations for their journeys.

That Jones expressed her ideas through fiction as opposed to nonfiction, however, reaffirms that conventional social standards deemed political philosophy to be men's business and therefore outside women's sphere of influence. After all, women could not vote when Jones's novel was published. Jones nonetheless found a creative way to try; she used her intellectual power and position as a teacher to suggest Africa as a place possibility for individuals if not for the masses. The political crux of the heart-to-heart conversation she created between two black women intellectuals affirmed that what Africa was to them merited a multi-generational answer that they were capable of providing.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Tiffany Ruby Patterson, *Zora Neale Hurston and a History of Southern Life*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005, p. 26).

<sup>2</sup> Lillian Bertha Horace, *Diary*, 36.

<sup>3</sup> I have presented on the Lillian B. Horace Papers at conferences sponsored by the East Texas Historical Association (Fall 2003, 2004); Texas State Historical Association (2004), *Modern and Ethnic Literature of the United States* (2004), and *Association of African American Life and History* (2004, 2006), and at "Celebrating Lillian B. Jones Horace and Other Extraordinary Women of the Jim Crow Era," a symposium held at Texas Southern University, March 6-7, 2009. I have also published a biographical sketch on Horace for Harvard University's *African American National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2008). The Lillian B. Horace Papers are held by the Tarrant County Black Genealogical and Historical Society, Fort Worth, TX.

<sup>4</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "Beyond the Sound of Silence: Afro-American Women in History," *Gender & History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Spring 1989.

<sup>5</sup> Tiffany Ruby Patterson, *Zora Neale Hurston and a History of Southern Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> The following papers were presented at the annual meeting of

the Texas State Historical Association (2001) in a session chaired by Cary Wintz (Texas Southern University); "Melvin Tolson: Playwright and Poet as Texas Troublemaker," Gail K. Beil; "Bernice Love Wiggins, El Paso Poet and Griot Narrator," Maceo Crenshaw Dailey Jr., and "Cimbee's Ramblings"; Humor as Protest in Houston's African American Community, 1919-1942." See TSHA Online, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/about/meeting/mtg2001.html> Maceo Davis and Ruthe Winegarten edited Bernice Love Wiggins, *Tuneful Tales* (Texas Tech University Press, 2002), a collection of recovered poems by Wiggins first published in 1925 that affirms a West Texas ideological and creative connection to the Harlem Renaissance (1920s-1930s).

<sup>7</sup> Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction*. (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> William Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 23-30.

<sup>9</sup> Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow* (New York: Vintage, July 1986), 180.

<sup>10</sup> Sarah L. Delany and A. Elizabeth Delany with Amy Hill Hearsh. *Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years*. (New York, NY: Dell, 1993) 168.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Newman, "'Warrior Mother of Africa's Warriors of the Most High God': Laura Adorkor Kofey and the African Universal Church," printed in Judith Weisenfeld and Richard Newman, editors, *This Far by Faith: Readings in African-American Women's Religious Biography* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 110-123.

<sup>12</sup> Richard R. Wright (b. 1868), p. 387. Last viewed at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/wright/wright.html>, June 21, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> See Sandy D. Martin in *This Far by Faith*, 225.

<sup>14</sup> Sandy D. Martin, "Spelman's Emma B. Delaney and the African Mission," printed in Judith Weisenfeld and Richard Newman, editors, *This Far by Faith: Readings in African-American Women's Religious Biography* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 200-235.



<sup>15</sup> See Jack Herman and Peggy Hardman, "Bishop College," Handbook of Texas, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/BB/kbb11.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Evelyn Brooks Higgenbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church 1880-1920*, Harvard University Press, 1993, 57-58; See also Michael R. Heintze, *Private Black Colleges in Texas, 1865-1954* (College Station, Tex.: Texas A & M Press, 1985), 31-33; Leroy Fitts, *A History of Black Baptists* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1985), 97-98.

<sup>17</sup> See "Constitution of the State of Texas," Article VIII-Freedmen," <http://tarlton.law.utexas.edu/constitutions/text/FAR08.html> (last accessed, September 21, 2009). Cited also in William R. Davis, *The Development and Present Status of Negro Education in East Texas*, (New York, NY: Teachers college, Columbia University, 1934).

<sup>18</sup> Clarence G. Newsome, "Mary McLeod Bethune and The Methodist Episcopal Church North: In But Out," printed in Judith Weisenfeld and Richard Newman, editors, *This Far by Faith: Readings in African-American Women's Religious Biography* (New York: Routledge), 123-139.

<sup>19</sup> Lillian B. Jones, *Five Generations Hence* (Fort Worth, Texas: Dotson-Jones Ptg. Co, 1916), 49.

<sup>20</sup> Lillian B. Jones, *Five Generations Hence*, 47-48.

<sup>21</sup> Lillian B. Jones, *Five Generations Hence*, 49.

<sup>22</sup> Lillian B. Jones, *Five Generations Hence*, 50.

<sup>23</sup> Lillian B. Jones, *Five Generations Hence*, 51.

<sup>24</sup> Alfred Brockenbrough Williams, 1856-1930 "The Liberian Exodus. An Account of Voyage of the First Emigrants in the Bar "Azor," and Their Reception at Monrovia, with a Description of Liberia--Its Customs and Civilization, Romances and Prospects." Electronic Edition. 31-32. Printed at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/williams/williams.html> (accessed June 21, 2006).

## Book Notes

BY ARCHIE P. McDONALD

With the tolerance and encouragement of Executive Director Scott Sosebee, this column on books continues. Full reviews of recently published books on Texas history and culture, particularly those on Eastern Texas, appear elsewhere in the Journal. Comments on publications in this section are highly personal and do not necessarily reflect the views of Director Sosebee or any other member of the Association. That said...

One might have to be my age to appreciate Heather Green Wooten's *The Polio Years In Texas: Battling A Terrifying Unknown* (Texas A&M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4354, \$45, 2009), because I can still hear the sound of the bellows produced by a functioning iron lung. Polio was the dreaded disease, the HIV/AIDS of my younger years, and I may even have experienced a touch of it—one of the lucky ones who endured a few rough days before recovery while less fortunate victims sustained paralysis and life-long disability, or worse, confinement in the aforementioned “iron lung.” (At least a country doctor in Missouri thought so; I don't really know.) But I do remember the fear each summer and the daring required to partake of the Salk and Sabine vaccines. Heather Wooten brings back all those terrible memories for old folks such as me and considerable enlightenment for later generations for whom poliomyelitis, sometimes called “infantile paralysis” because it affected so many youngsters, is but a historical oddity. Wooten does a magnificent job of telling readers what polio was (is), how it passed from one victim to another, how it was treated, and how it can be prevented. The information is universal, but Wooten's focus is on Texas. My long-time friend Bobby Johnson's story of dealing with polio is partially told, along with others. I strongly recommend this book, even to those fortunate enough to have never seen or heard an iron lung.

*Cowboy Conservatism: Texas And The Rise Of The Modern*

*Right* by Sean P. Cunningham (University Press of Kentucky, 663 South Limestone Street, Lexington, KY 40508-4008, \$40, 2010), tackles a difficult job: explaining how and why Texas, once firmly in the grip of the Democratic Party, became an even more firmly gripped Republican state. “Even more” seems reasonable when one remembers the old conservative versus liberal Democratic primary fights, such as Allan Shivers against Ralph Yarborough. In that sense, Texas really was a two-party state because the animosity between those groups flared as intensely as between Donkeys and Elephants in other states. For Cunningham, the long answer explaining Texas’ political migration involved, among other things, Texans’ persistent cleavage to independence and self reliance instead of government, the loss of government as a factor in racial control, and the migration to “extreme” liberalism by the Democratic Party; short answer: Ronald Reagan walked on water and Jimmy Carter wore cement shoes. Cunningham devotes chapters on state-wide and national election outcomes in Texas that trace the shift from Democratic to Republican control, mostly illustrating that liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans sought the same thing: getting rid of conservative Democrats. And both got what they wanted. My only difficulty is with Cunningham’s use of the term “populist conservative,” which I thought to be an oxymoron. Turns out the Oxford Dictionary sanctions such usage no matter what I think. Liberals will argue with every page while “populist conservatives” will clap their hands and shout “YeeeeeeHaw.”

*How Did Davy Die? And Why Do We Care So Much?* by Dan Kilgore and James C. Crisp (Texas A&M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4354, \$18.95, 2010), is a commemorative edition of Kilgore’s original inquiry in print, also published by Texas A&M University Press. Kilgore first posed the question in his presidential address to the Texas State Historical Association in 1977, and I was privileged to be present. As a member of the Association’s executive council, I had worked with Dan for the past half decade. He was among

the Association's leading "lay" historians in the alternation of officers and council members with "school teachers" such as me. An accountant by trade, Dan was a historian by choice with a natural gift. (Among my finest moments, I once took off a necktie he admired and gave it to him.) And I recall most vividly the storm he raised at the Association's meeting and following the publication of an expanded version of his remarks by A&M Press. I am also flattered that Jim Crisp began his portion of this retrospective with a quotation from the *East Texas Historical Journal*: "'Looking at Dan Kilgore's slender volume,' mused Archie McDonald from his editor's desk in Nacogdoches, '...you wonder How Did Dan Stir Up Such A Mess?'" After reading this new publication, I am not certain that my question, or Crisp's (*And Why Do We Care So Much?*) are answered yet. But Dan's original thesis and Jim's analysis of the reaction and confirmation of Dan's ideas about Crockett's demise still make for interesting reading. Some stories never grow stale. Strongly recommended.

*Sunrise! Governor Bill Daniel and The Second Liberation of Guam* by David Gracy II (Hill College Press, 112 Lamar Dr., Hillsboro, TX, \$30, 2010), examines the life of Governor Bill Daniel, Professor of Archival Enterprise at the University of Texas, and is the author's latest biographical work following his successful and excellent biography of Moses Austin, the almost forgotten empresario of earliest Anglo Texas. President John F. Kennedy appointed Governor Price Daniel's bother Bill as governor of Guam, an outpost of America's "empire" located in the far Pacific and one of our nation's most important naval stations in the world. The Navy controlled Guam, but its civilian population also deserved and required civic government. Daniel was Guam's fifth governor and likely its most involved "nation builder," even if it was the American nation. Daniel's familiar white suits and grey hair were a pervasive sight on the island during his memorable sixteen months as governor. Gracy's treatment of Daniel's life as governor of Guam is superb.

Also in that part of the world, William H. Bartsch's *Every*

*Day A Nightmare: American Pursuit Pilots in the Defense of Java, 1941-1942* (Texas A&M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX, \$40, 2010), examines the story of American pilots, originally meant to bolster General Douglas MacArthur's forces in the Philippines, diverted to Java to participate in the defense of the Dutch Indies from the Japanese. Many pilots, recent graduates of Air Corps flight training school with little experience in the P-40 aircraft they flew, perished. Bartsch previously published two other books on the World War II Pacific Theatre, both published by Texas A&M University Press. As we draw nearer the end of life's limits for America's Greatest Generation, we learn more and more about their service and hardships.

Joanne S. Liu's *Barbed Wire: The Fence That Changed The West* (Mountain Press Publishing Co., Box 2399, Missoula, Montana 59806, \$14, 2009), examines more than just barbed wire. Included are the roles of fences to enclose and exclude as well as the use of available materials for fence construction. And, of course, no materials were available on the Great Plains, the Great Middle of North America, before Joseph Glidden and others invented, manufactured, and provided barbed wire. I can't tell you at what age I learned to say and to spell barbed wire because my seniors all pronounced the stuff as "bob wire" or perhaps "bobbed war." East Texans talk like that sometime. Anyway, the wire came in hundreds of variations and could be as temporary or as permanent as its tenders intended. Good illustrations accompany Liu's words and textbook-like format.

*Call Her A Citizen: Progressive-Era Activist and Educator Anna Pennybacker* by Kelley M. King (Texas A&M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX, \$39.95, 2010), is a biography of the "little lady who wrote the big book," a variation of a description of Harriet Beecher Stowe by President Abraham Lincoln when referring to Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Here, the "little lady's" book was *A New History of Texas*, published in 1898 and used in Texas schools until the 1940s when Ralph W. Steen's text began to dominate the market. Pennybacker's

history of Texas became an unofficial “official” history of our state until late in the twentieth century; here is where most Texans learned what they learned about their past. King wants us to know that Pennybacker was much more than a teacher who happened to write a book—a progressive feminist at a time when progressivism and feminism were a trial and a test to Texas. Good book that provides good information and insight into both.

Contemporary disclosure rules require that I confess up front that I am a contributor to *Celebrating 100 Years of the Texas Folklore Society, 1909-2009*, edited by Kenneth E. Untiedt (University of North Texas Press, 1155 Union Circle #311336, Denton, TX 76203-1336, \$39.95, 2009), which is the LXVth publication of the Society itself and a celebration of its centennial. Untiedt includes many and better writers in this miscellany than I, including Clarence Jay Faulkner, Scott Hill Bumgardner, Vicky Rose, Lucy Fischer West, Tim Tingle, Jean Granberry Schnitz, James Ward Lee, Len Ainsworth, Al Lowman, Frances Brannen Vick, L. Patrick Hughes, Bruce A. Glasrud, Charles Chupp, Charles Clay Doyle, Jerry B. Lincecum, Elmer Kelton, Peggy A. Redshaw, Joyce Gibson Roach, Francis Edward Abernethy, Sue M. Friday, Meredith E. Abarca, Kenneth W. Davis, Lee Haile, Charlie Oden, Mary Margaret Dougherty Campbell, Sarah L. Greene, J. Rhett Rushing, Carol Hanson, and Robert J. (Jack) Duncan - a “who’s who” of the genre. Their work is divided into sections titled “What’s the Point: Why the Folk Came in the First Place;” “Books, Papers, and Presentations: Texas Folklore Scholarship;” “The Folk: Who We Are and What We’ve Done;” and “Meetings, Memories, and More.” A must for Folklore Society members, who received this volume as their annual publication, and highly desirable for all who care about Texas.

*Music In The Kitchen: Favorite Recipes from Austin City Limits Performers*. compiled by Glenda Pierce Facemier with Leigh Anne Jasheway-Bryant and principal photographer Scott Newton (University of Texas Press, P.O. Box 7819, Austin, TX 78713-7819, \$34.95, 2009), tells its contents in the title. Offerings include “Samplers—Appetizers and Groovin’ With

Soups, Stews, Salads, and Breads;” “Accompaniments—Sides, Sauces, Spreads, and Jams;” “Main Attractions—Poultry, Meats, Seafood, and Game;” “Keep the Beet—Vegetables and Legumes;” “Hit Singles;” “Sweet Sounds: Desserts;” and “Encore Buffet.” The photographs are spectacular and the recipes are as you find them.

I used the first edition of *Texas: A Historical Atlas* by A. Ray Stephens from when I began teaching Texas history in 1972 until my last offering of that class in 2008 because a sense of geography—plain, simple knowledge of where things are located in Texas—is one of the greatest needs of contemporary students. Now comes “a whole other country,” a new *Texas: A Historical Atlas*, still prepared by Stephens with cartographer Carol Zuber-Mallison (University of Oklahoma Press, 2800 Venture Dr, Norman, OK 73069, \$39.95, 2010), and this version is so much more: eighty-six essays and 175 full-color maps, more than twice the number of maps available in the original publication. No Texana library should be without this atlas.

Finally, *Lyndon B. Johnson And Modern America* by Kevin J. Fernlund (University of Oklahoma Press, 2800 Venture Dr, Norman, OK 73069, \$24.95, 2009), is an entry into the press’s Oklahoma Western Biography Series, edited by Richard W. Etulain. It is brief—164 pages of text—so mostly a biographical sketch of so large a topic. Johnson’s administration as president impacted Americans and the way they lived more than any other twentieth century presidents except Franklin Roosevelt, so any evaluation and appreciation of his role in American history is welcomed.

## Book Reviews

*The Austin/Boston Connection: Five Decades of House Democratic Leadership, 1937-1989*, by Anthony Champagne, Douglas B. Harris, James W. Riddlesperger, Jr., and Garrison Nelson (Texas A & M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4354), 2009. Contents. Acknowledgments. Introduction. Notes. Index. P. 327. \$27.95 Hardcover.

Sweeping change characterized the Roosevelt era as the nation grappled throughout the 1930s with an economic collapse of severity and duration without precedent. Some of these changes were transitory while others proved fundamental and long lasting. The Democratic Party's transformation was unquestionably among the latter. Building upon the traditional Democratic base of the Solid South and northeastern cities, FDR reached out and converted disaffected Republican progressives, organized labor, white ethnics, and academics as well as religious and racial minorities. This new coalition brought an end to seven decades of Republican dominance. Its successful functioning over the next half-century, however, required Democrats to somehow manage the troublesome sectional, demographic, racial, and ideological tensions contained within the transformed party.

*The Austin/Boston Connection* examines the manner in which this juggling act transpired in the selection of House leaders. With one brief two-year exception, *every* speaker and majority leader selected by the House Democratic Caucus between 1940 and 1989 hailed from either the north Texas – southern Oklahoma region or the Greater Boston area. The authors assert the explanation for this enduring pattern of leadership choices lies in two separate but related factors.

First, the Democratic Party faced the complicated task of balancing and placating the party's myriad factions in "the people's chamber." Districts in these two regions were uniquely suited to this purpose. One contained a rural population of conservative small farmers south of the Mason-Dixon Line



where oil interests were minimal. The other was urban, liberal, industrial, northern, and Irish-Catholic. While generally reflective of the sectional characteristics of their neighbors, both areas “were demographic outliers within their regions, particularly in terms of racial composition.” (p. 9) Their representatives, therefore, were “uniquely well-suited middlemen who could bridge the intraparty divisions endemic in the New Deal coalition in the House.” (p. 11)

Personal friendships and, more specifically, a series of mentor-protégé relationships proved equally critical to the establishment and continuation of the Austin/Boston connection. Powerful mentors groomed successors, helping secure placement on the leadership ladder and facilitating their advancement. It began early in the century with Joseph Weldon Bailey’s tutelage of John Nance Garner and Sam Rayburn. With the transformation of the party in the Thirties, Garner helped guide Rayburn and John McCormick to House leadership. Their protégés – Carl Albert, Hale Boggs, Tip O’Neill, and Jim Wright – followed in their wake. Along the way, the bridge created by this lineage of leaders ran the House for a half-century, stabilized and maintained the New Deal coalition through some of the most contentious and challenging times in American history, and tamped down partisan hostilities on Capitol Hill.

This is an impressive study. The authors persuasively argue the thesis and effectively support it with an exhaustive examination of leadership selection battles spanning six decades. Despite its multiple authors, the narrative is seamless. Students of twentieth century American politics will want this volume in their libraries.

L. Patrick Hughes  
Austin Community College

***Conflict on the Rio Grande: Water and the Law, 1879-1939***, by Douglas R. Littlefield (University of Oklahoma Press, 2008 Venture Drive, Norman, OK 73069), 2009. Contents. Illustrations. Acknowledgements. Introduction. Conclusion.

Notes. Bibliography. Index. P. 299. \$39.95 Hardcover.

No one is more qualified to write on the development of water allocation law in western history than Douglas R. Littlefield. Littlefield has researched western water rights issues for more than two decades. He and his company, Littlefield Historical Research, received one of the 2008 Excellence in Consulting Awards from the National Council on Public History, and he has served as consultant and investigator on numerous legal cases related to water rights and western land use. His book, *Conflict on the Rio Grande*, examines the battle to regulate the use of the Rio Grande River in the El Paso Valley and north into New Mexico Territory's Mesilla Valley at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Littlefield's story is a political history of the struggle between various government units, developers, settlers, federal courts, and Mexican and United States diplomats over how to ensure water continued to flow along the Rio Grande. He sees the conflict between those who called for an international dam in the El Paso Valley and the investors who wanted a dam at Elephant Butte as one of the early determining incidents in the development of western water rights. The eastern part of the United States bases water laws upon riparian rights—landowners along a waterway may utilize water, but not to the detriment of other landowners downstream. Western water rights, on the other hand, developed from the reality that much western land lacks moisture, and water is a commodity that improves land value. Thus, western water law is roughly based on a first-come, first-served ideology—whoever uses the water first has the primary claim. In the early 1900s, however, no clear precedent existed to determine where one set of water laws began and another ended. Texas used both eastern and western versions, for example, although western states generally adopted prior-appropriation laws instead of eastern states' riparian policies. The argument over where to build a dam illustrated the confusion over which water law interpretation to use and who had authority to decide. Littlefield sees the dispute over damming the Rio Grand, the

Newlands Reclamation Act of 1902, and the 1904 National Irrigation Congress as a Progressive Era solution to the debate.

Littlefield's exploration of the political and legal challenges over the construction of a dam either near El Paso or Elephant Butte has all the characteristics of a Dickens's Bleak House set in the American West. Littlefield's story reveals the personal, emotional, and financial self-interest often ignored in historical narratives that focus on various stakeholders' political and ideological claims. He challenges the prevailing historical consensus that the federal government decided the issues over western water laws in the mid-twentieth century and instead sees the Rio Grande dispute as the beginning of this resolution. He also challenges the idea that Progressive-era governmental regulation originated in Washington, DC and instead demonstrates rather convincingly that the compromise worked out in 1904 was an agreement arrived at by local interests who then demanded the federal government implement it as law. East Texas historians will find little in Littlefield's book relating to their part of the world; however, the book's focus on Progressive-Era politics, settlement in Western Texas, and the issue of water rights will no doubt pique the interest of students of Texas history and the American West.

Gene B. Preuss

University of Houston-Downtown

***Storm Over The Bay: The People of Corpus Christi And Their Port***, by Mary Jo O'Rear (Texas A&M University Press, 4354 TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-4354), 2009. Contents. List of Illustrations. Acknowledgements. Prologue. Notes. Bibliography. Index. P. 187. \$24.95 Hardcover.

Flamboyant land speculator, smuggler, and trader Henry L. Kinney arrived in the Corpus Christi Bay region in 1839 and established a trading post on the bluff overlooking the bay; thus began what is today known as the city of Corpus Christi.

Growth of the community was sporadic at first, but when Gen. Zachary Taylor placed his troops on the south side of the Nueces River in 1845 before the outbreak of the Mexican War, the community received population and economic boosts. After the establishment of the Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy ranches in nearby counties, Corpus Christi became the shipping headquarters for the ranchers' hides and tallow, further promoting the town as a commercial center. The prominent South Texas ranchers also played significant roles in the establishment of rail traffic that eventually connected Corpus Christi to Mexico.

As the town expanded, a collage of personalities with diverse backgrounds and interests dotted the Corpus Christi landscape. Each, to varying degrees, proved important in the development of the city in some way. George Blücher, son of Prussian immigrants and owner of the Lone Star Ice Factory, along with his able assistant Nicamor Mora, a Mexican migrant, worked diligently to move the icehouse into the electrical age. Irish-born Thomas Hickey settled in the Texas coastal town after the American Civil War, and within three decades he rose from virtual obscurity to head cashier and board of directors member of the Corpus Christi National Bank. African American Henry Larkin operated a successful barbershop while at the same time other black entrepreneurs contributed to the city's economic maturation. A pivotal figure in economics, politics, and the restoration of the community after the destructive 1919 hurricane was Henry Pomeroy "Roy" Miller.

The political scene in Corpus Christi and Nueces County incorporated a genuine South Texas flavor of machine politics when men such as Robert Kleberg and Miller vied with Walter E. Pope and Gordon Boone for political supremacy. Even Archie Parr, the Duke of Duvall, was periodically injected into the local political mixture. Activities of office holders at times were questionable which led to suits, counter-suits, and state investigations.

Because of the barrier islands and the bluff, Corpus Christians looked upon themselves as immune from the ravages of

hurricanes. They thought the barrier islands would lessen the impact of a hurricane's high winds, and the bluff was amply elevated to offer protection from tidal waves. This view came to a sudden and shocking halt when the 1919 hurricane surged into the coastal community, causing tremendous property damage and a consequential loss of lives. Flood waters and extraordinary stormy winds devastated North Beach and seriously crippled the downtown Corpus Christi area. Despite the belief by some residents that the city would not recover, Corpus Christi rebounded and continued to thrive.

For decades the coastal community sought to become a deepwater port to rival those at Houston and Galveston, and within seven years after the horrendous hurricane, Corpus Christi achieved its goal. The feat was accomplished through the persistence of visionary local civic and political leaders. At the national level, Congressman John Nance "Cactus Jack" Garner of Uvalde was a key figure in securing the port.

Mary Jo O'Rear has written a lively, readable, entertaining, and valuable historic work that successfully traces Corpus Christi from its beginning to the early 1920s when the city became a deepwater port. The author artfully weaves individuals from all walks of life into the narrative to demonstrate the economic, cultural, and political dynamics of the community. *Storm Over The Bay* is a worthy addition to the writings on Texas history.

Charles D. Spurlin  
Victoria, Texas

*Cuttin' Up: How Early Jazz Got America's Ear*, by Court Carney (University Press of Kansas, 2502 Westbrooke Circle, Lawrence, KS 66045), 2009. Contents. Notes. Bibliography. Index. P. 219. \$34.95 Softcover.

Scott Joplin, a musical genius from East Texas, popularized ragtime music at the turn of the twentieth century. In doing so, he contributed immeasurably to the creation and ascendancy of

jazz. Joplin's influence on music certainly is an accomplishment that brings pride to East Texas. Yet, Joplin's story, and the history of jazz, is one that music lovers everywhere should appreciate. In *Cuttin' Up*, Court Carney uses personal and local stories like Joplin's, a story intertwined with issues pertaining to race, class, identity, urbanization, migration, and consumerism, to underscore the causes, growing pains, and costs of America's modernization. "What I have aimed to construct," says Carney, "is a conceptual framework that addresses the cultural contours of the 1920s and the creation of the modern age by focusing on the development of the racialized culture of jazz music and the complex mechanizations that led to its national dominance" (5).

Carney traces the development of jazz during the first decades of the twentieth century in three segments: Creation, Dispersion, and Acceptance. He describes the racial undertones of both jazz and the American landscape and how music is both an outcome and medium of modern American culture. Carney is at his best here. More than just a jazz narrative, Carney weaves music with larger historical forces emblematic of modernizing America. He convincingly shows how jazz is best understood when considered through the dynamics of race, class, gender, residential patterns, consumerism, commercialization, industrialization, urbanization, and modernization. The best examples of this are Carney's recounting of jazz's creation in Part 1 (Creation). He highlights the process of urbanization in the creation of the musical forms of ragtime, blues, and jazz. For Carney, urbanization is a process affecting and affected by music as an actual place. Looking to urbanization, he traces the impact of the Great Migration and the incorporation of African American culture in American life. He concludes that ragtime both helped inculcate rural African Americans to urban life and reflected "the ordered chaos of city life" (17). Carney thus reveals how urbanization played, quite literally, into the creative evolution of music. With New Orleans, he perfects this story as the city "served as an urban catalyst for the development of jazz" (33). The physical and cultural structure of the city itself—affected by and reflective of Jim

Crow, not to mention racial constructions (e.g., the conflation of Creole and Black)—influenced the creation and style of New Orleans jazz. Carney deftly connects larger historical forces, like urbanization, with the local and personal, like New Orleans and Jelly Roll Morton.

The story of jazz in New Orleans or elsewhere is about more than urbanization. Carney recognizes early on that jazz did not “follow a straight trajectory from one particular source” (p. 30). Forces like technological advancement and consumer culture, for example, played significant roles too. While this is shown throughout the book, Carney best shows the influence in Part II (Dispersion). Focusing on Chicago, he highlights the development of the recording industry that helped spread jazz nationally. In New York, Carney places the popularity and dispersion of jazz squarely in terms of technology and consumerism by looking at how jazz musicians, particularly Duke Ellington, harnessed the power of the radio industry. In Los Angeles, Carney shows how “[t]echnologically driven diffusion—not music originality—delineated the city’s contribution to early jazz, and . . . succeeded in bringing jazz music to the nation” (p. 103). Specifically, Hollywood and the film industry promoted the fusion of image and sound that redefined jazz’s marketable power. Film consequently led to the acceptance and variation of jazz for a mostly White middle-class audience and represented jazz’s ascendancy from rural African American art form to national White soundtrack.

The last sentence of *Cuttin’ Up* captures well the larger meaning of the book. “Created by (and reflective of) the larger pattern of modernization reconfiguring the nation between the 1890s and 1930s, jazz music thus serves as an unambiguous articulation of the cultural transformation of America in the early twentieth century” (p. 157). At the heart of this modern cultural transformation were historical forces like urbanization, technology, and consumerism. Other forces, to be sure, scored an influence and receive Carney’s attention. Any review of *Cuttin’ Up*, however, would be remiss not to note Carney’s skillful

handling of race. In the final part of the book (*Acceptance*), Carney spotlights how White Americans largely dismissed African Americans from the early jazz story. Indeed, in a tragic irony of names, Paul Whiteman and his orchestra represented the whitewashing of jazz as he performed at Carnegie Hall in 1924 and neglected to recognize or represent African American influence and style. Jazz transformed into something palpable for white audiences, which essentially underscored the ascendancy, dominance, and manipulation of white middle class culture and values in modern America.

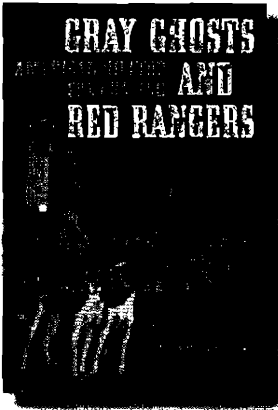
Actually, throughout the book, Carney gives attention to the dynamics of race and jazz's history. Jazz reflected the experience of African Americans in a segregated society, particularly in cities like New Orleans, Chicago, and New York. Jazz also represented a painful paradox: while providing new opportunities for many African American performers, the commercial dispersion and viability of jazz to a broader national (white) market necessitated the enforcement of gross racial stereotypes and further marginalization. The story of Hollywood and Louis Armstrong demonstrates this point. In a short film adaption (*A Rhapsody in Black and Blue*) of Armstrong's song "I'll Be Glad When You're Dead, You Rascal You," he is seen singing the song dressed in animal skins on a stage covered in bubbles and "playing both a legitimate jazz star as well as an entertaining (and harmless) clown" (p. 116). Jazz's popularity also sparked rival interpretations within the African American community as some lamented that a poor image of jazz (regardless of validity) would further contribute to negative stereotyping of African Americans. In the end, white American culture absorbed African American culture—yet again—and then dismissed their influence.

Ultimately, Carney's own words sing flawlessly in a book that underscores the significance of jazz in America's modern transformation.

Paul J. P. Sandul  
Stephen F. Austin State University



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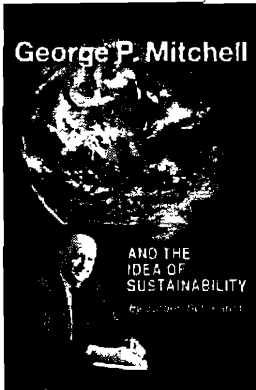
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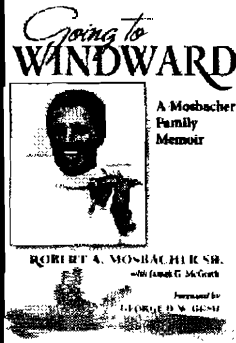
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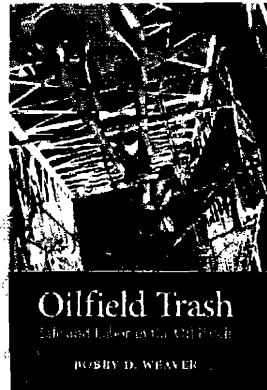


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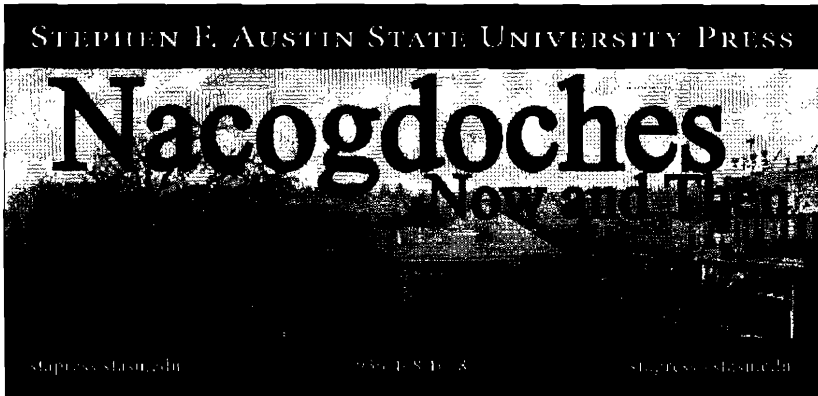


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ISBN 978-1-936205-11-0



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