

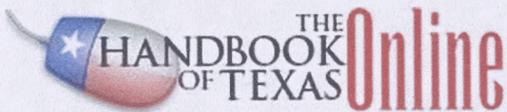
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THE BROTHERHOOD OF SLEEPING CAR PORTERS

African Americans in Corsicana, Texas

N.D.

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- IMAGES
- ALL MEDIA

*Estevanico*

**AFRICAN AMERICANS.** People of African descent are some of the oldest residents of Texas. Beginning with the arrival of Estevanico<sup>qv</sup> in 1528, African Texans have had a long heritage in the state and have worked alongside Americans of Mexican, European, and indigenous descent to make the state what it is today. The African-American history of Texas has also been paradoxical. On the one hand, blacks have worked with others to build the state's unique cultural heritage. But on the other hand, African Americans have been subjected to slavery,<sup>qv</sup> racial prejudice, and exclusion from the mainstream of state institutions. Their contributions to the state's development and growth in spite of these obstacles have been truly remarkable.

From the beginning of European settlement in Texas, people of African descent were present. In 1528 Estevanico, a Moor, accompanied Spanish explorer Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca<sup>qv</sup> across the territory known today as Texas. Estevanico was an important member of Cabeza de Vaca's mission because he could interpret the languages of many of the Indians that the expedition encountered. Along with the other members of the expedition he was captured by Indians and enslaved for five years. After escaping, Estevanico and the surviving members of the expedition made their way to Mexico. In 1539 he accompanied a second expedition into the Southwest. This time he was murdered by the Zuñi Indians and the mission failed. Other pioneer Africans accompanied the Spanish into the Southwest, and some settled with them in the region known today as Texas. By 1792 Spanish Texas<sup>qv</sup> numbered thirty-four blacks and 414 mulattoes. Some of them were free men and women.

*slavery*

Unlike Estevanico and some of the Africans who inhabited the province prior to settlement by Anglo-Americans, most African Americans entered the area as slaves. The first Anglo-Americans who settled in Texas came from the southern United States and were accustomed to using African slaves as an important source of labor. During the first fifteen years of white settlement in Texas, from 1821 to the Texas Revolution<sup>qv</sup> of 1836, slavery grew very slowly. On the eve of the Revolution only about 5,000 blacks were enslaved in Texas. With independence from Mexico, however, whites made African slavery an integral part of the state's economic development, and the institution of slavery grew rapidly. By 1840, 11,000 African Americans were enslaved in Texas. By 1850, 58,000 were enslaved, and by 1860, 182,000-30 percent of the Texas population. According to historian Randolph Campbell, slavery in Texas

slave run away

was similar to that in other parts of the American South. The records gathered by Campbell as well as the testimony of African Americans enslaved in Texas attest to the fact that black slaves in Texas had as harsh and as easy a lot as slaves in other parts of the South. Two cases illustrate this fact. In 1861 a Canadian newspaper published the story of Lavinia Bell, a black woman who had been kidnapped at an early age and sold into slavery in Texas. She escaped from bondage and told of being forced to work naked in the cottonfields near Galveston. She also told about how after her first escape attempt, she was physically mutilated and beaten severely by her owner. Other African Americans who were enslaved in Texas told similar stories of violence and cruelty by their owners. Hundreds sought escape, especially to Mexico. But there were also cases such as that of Joshua Houston,<sup>qv</sup> one of the slaves of Sam Houston.<sup>qv</sup> Joshua, owned initially by Houston's second wife, became an important member of Houston's family. He was treated well, taught to read and write, and prepared well for his eventual emancipation by the Houston family. After the Civil War<sup>qv</sup> Joshua became a politician in Huntsville, and, as if to underscore his loyalty to his former owners, on one occasion he offered to lend money to Sam Houston's widow when she faced financial difficulties.

free blacks 1850

While the treatment of African Americans enslaved in Texas may have varied on the basis of the disposition of individual slaveowners, it was clear that white Texans in general accepted and defended slavery. Moreover, slavery in Texas had all of the characteristics that had made it successful in other parts of the South. For instance, slaveholders dominated the state's economic and political life. The government of the Republic of Texas<sup>qv</sup> and, after 1845, the state legislature passed a series of slave codes to regulate the behavior of slaves and restrict the rights of free blacks. The census counted about 400 free blacks in 1850, although there may have been close to 1,000. White Texans also restricted the civil liberties of white opponents of slavery in order to suppress dissent about the institution. When rumors of a slave insurrection circulated in the state in 1860, Texans virtually suspended civil liberties and due process in the state. Suspected abolitionists were expelled from the state, and one was even hanged. A vigilante group in Dallas lynched three African-American slaves who were suspected of starting a fire that burnt most of the downtown area. Other slaves in the county were whipped.

June 19, 1865

The Texas vote for secession<sup>qv</sup> in February 1861 hastened the end of slavery and set in motion the eventual liberation of the state's African-American population. For blacks in Texas, freedom did not come until Juneteenth,<sup>qv</sup> June 19, 1865. In contrast to other parts of the South, where the approach of the Union Army encouraged thousands of enslaved blacks to free themselves and run away, Texas blacks remained enslaved until the end of the Civil War. Few were able to run away and enlist in the Union Army, as black men did in other parts of the South.

The Reconstruction<sup>qv</sup> era presented black Texans another challenge. Many had to rebuild their lives, locate lost family members, and begin to

live their lives as self-sufficient, free men and women. The establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau<sup>qv</sup> in the state aided this transition from slavery to freedom. But given the continuing racial animosity that separated blacks and whites after the war, this was not an easy task. The state legislature and several Texas cities passed Black Codes<sup>qv</sup> to restrict the rights of blacks, to prevent them from having free access to public facilities, and to force them back to the rural areas as agricultural laborers. The use of the political and legal system to regulate black behavior was accompanied by a literal reign of terror in the state. From 1865 to 1868 white Texans committed over 1,500 acts of violence against blacks; more than 350 blacks were murdered by whites. These were attempts to reestablish white supremacy and to force blacks back into their "place." Only the intervention of Congress and the imposition of military rule in the state after 1867 eliminated the Black Codes and brought a modicum of safety to African Americans. The arrival of military and Congressional efforts to protect black rights ushered in the second phase of Reconstruction in the state. In this period African Americans made a substantial contribution to the transition of Texas from a slave-labor state to one based on free labor. Ten African-American delegates at the Constitutional Convention of 1868-69<sup>qv</sup> helped to write a constitution that protected civil rights, established the state's first public education system, and extended the franchise to all men. Between 1868 and 1900, forty-three African Americans served in the state legislature, and they helped to move the state toward democracy. Such black Reconstruction leaders as George T. Ruby and Norris Wright Cuney<sup>qv</sup> became important members of the Republican party<sup>qv</sup> and, along with other blacks, dominated state Republican politics through the turn of the twentieth century. During the course of the Reconstruction period, many African Americans moved from the state's rural areas to cities such as Dallas, Austin, Houston, and San Antonio. On the outskirts of these cities they established "freedmantowns," which became the distinct black neighborhoods that still exist today. Black labor also contributed substantially to the economic development of these cities and helped the state to begin the transition from its near-total dependence on agriculture to industrialization. In 1879 a few thousand black Texans moved to Kansas seeking greater opportunities. Other black Texans participated in the postwar cattle boom (*see* BLACK COWBOYS), while the presence on the frontier of black soldiers, called Buffalo Soldiers<sup>qv</sup> by their Indian foes, exemplified the desire of many blacks to enter into the military responsibilities of citizenship.

of KKK story  
Reconstruction

Reconstruction

Migration to  
state's cities

Overthrow of  
Reconstruction  
Voting  
segregation

As in other parts of the South, Reconstruction lasted only a short time in Texas. Democrats regained control of the state in 1873 and proceeded to reverse many of the democratic reforms instituted by black and white Republicans. Between 1874 and 1900 the gains that African Americans had made in the political arena were virtually lost. In the 1890s, for example, more than 100,000 blacks voted in Texas elections. But after the imposition of a poll tax in 1902 and the passage of the white primary<sup>qv</sup> law in 1903, fewer than 5,000 blacks voted in the state in 1906. In addition, segregation was established in all facets of public and private

life in Texas for African Americans. In Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio, public transportation and accommodations, schools, and, eventually, neighborhoods were segregated by law. Blacks in Houston and San Antonio challenged segregation on public transportation by forming their own bus and jitney companies. Dallas blacks won a case in 1916 that overturned a residential segregation ordinance. But nothing succeeded in stemming the tide of segregation that restricted the rights of black Texans by the early twentieth century. The victims of lynching,<sup>qv</sup> which did not end until the 1940s, were predominantly black. Riots<sup>qv</sup> destroyed black neighborhoods. African Americans became disfranchised, second-class citizens, denied the basic human rights other citizens in the state took for granted. As a result, several thousand black Texans moved out of the state to the North and West in the twentieth century. Although the percentage of blacks in Texas fell to 20 percent of the population by 1900 and declined further in the twentieth century, their numbers grew to more than 600,000 in 1900 and 900,000 in 1940.

lynching  
Hit

Migration to  
North & West

Social  
Institutions

Farming

Despite their second-class status, African Americans still built viable and progressive communities throughout the state. Almost immediately after Civil War, they established churches, schools, and other social organizations to serve their own needs. They established newspapers (the *Dallas Express*, *Houston Informer and Texas Freeman*, and *San Antonio Register*<sup>qv</sup>), grocery stores, funeral homes, and other business establishments that served a predominant African-American clientele. In the late nineteenth century black farmers formed a cooperative to encourage black land ownership and to raise crop prices. From 1900 to 1940 a majority of black Texans remained in farming, with about 20 percent owning their land while most rented farms as tenants. The Great Depression<sup>qv</sup> of the 1930s hastened a trend toward urbanization. In the same period blacks in Dallas organized a cotton-processing mill, but it failed in less than five years. These self-help and economic development efforts by black Texans indicate that they did not allow the oppression of white racism to deter them from striving to build successful communities. After the Civil War, African Americans also developed their first educational institutions. Black colleges<sup>qv</sup> such as Bishop, Paul Quinn, and Wiley were founded by several religious denominations, primarily Baptist and Methodist organizations. African-American churches<sup>qv</sup> such as Boll Street African Methodist Episcopal in Dallas also started the first schools in that city for black children. The city of Houston provided schools for its black citizens beginning in 1871. By 1888 the city government in Dallas followed suit.

African Americans also contributed to the state's social and cultural heritage in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Musicians such as Blind Lemon Jefferson, Huddie (Leadbelly) Ledbetter, Eddie Durham, Scott Joplin,<sup>qv</sup> Bobbi Humphrey, and many others became innovators in blues, jazz,<sup>qv</sup> and ragtime. Singers such as Julius L. C. Bledsoe<sup>qv</sup> and Osceola Mays sang songs from the African-American folk tradition as well as their own contemporary compositions. Such writers as Maude Cuney-Hare, J. Mason Brewer, and Sutton Griggs<sup>qv</sup> wrote biographies

and novels and recorded the folklore of black Texans. Artist John Biggers of Houston became one of the nation's most important mural painters and an internationally recognized artist. In sports, such black Texans as Charlie Taylor, Ernie Banks, Jack Johnson,<sup>qv</sup> and George Foreman earned national fame in football, baseball, and boxing. After the integration of the state's universities, black Texas athletes such as Earl Campbell of the University of Texas at Austin, Elvin Hayes of the University of Houston, and Jerry Leveas of Southern Methodist University had outstanding college athletic careers.

One of the most significant achievements of blacks in the state was their participation in the Texas Centennial<sup>qv</sup> of 1936. This event was important because it allowed African Americans to highlight the contributions that they had made to the state's and the nation's development. Through the efforts of A. Maceo Smith<sup>qv</sup> of the Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce and Samuel W. Houston<sup>qv</sup> of Huntsville, the Hall of Negro Life<sup>qv</sup> was built at Fair Park<sup>qv</sup> in Dallas to bring to the state the works of Harlem Renaissance painter Aaron Douglass as well as to exhibit the paintings of Texas artists Samuel A. Countee of Houston and Frank Sheinall of Galveston. More importantly, the Negro Day event held in Dallas as the black celebration of the Texas Centennial proved to be an important opportunity for black Texans to meet and plan strategy to end the segregation and discrimination that they faced. Three organizations emerged from the Negro Day celebration of 1936: the Texas State Conference of Branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Texas State Negro Chamber of Commerce, and the Texas Negro Peace Officers Association (now the Texas Peace Officers Association<sup>qv</sup>). All three organizations had as their objective to improve the lot of blacks in Texas.

The Texas Centennial was indeed a watershed event for African Americans. After it they launched a campaign to win the citizenship rights that the state's segregation laws and racist tradition denied them. Texas blacks won two of the nation's most significant civil-rights cases. They renewed challenges to the state's white primary system four times, and, eventually, they won a Supreme Court decision in Smith v. Allwright (1944), which declared the white primary unconstitutional. This landmark case won by black Texans opened primaries for blacks throughout the South. In 1950, black Texans also won one of the major legal cases that eliminated segregation in the South's graduate and professional schools. The Sweatt v. Painter<sup>qv</sup> case, filed by Thurgood Marshall, legal counsel of the NAACP, and local NAACP attorney William J. Durham of Dallas, forced the University of Texas Law School to admit black students. Although the Sweatt case was one of several cases that the NAACP filed to gain entry for black students into graduate and professional schools, it also became one of the cases that laid the groundwork for the NAACP's challenge to segregation in public schools in the famous Brown v. Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas case.

Despite the notion among some historians that Texas did not need a civil-

precursor  
CR  
cases

CRM

rights movement<sup>9v</sup> to end its legacy of racial discrimination, African Americans had to use both the courts and direct action in the 1950s and 1960s to win access to public services throughout the state. Using a variety of methods, black citizens won the right to sit on juries, equal pay for equal work for black teachers, the elimination of residential segregation in the state's major cities, jobs on the police forces of Dallas and Fort Worth, and open seating on public transportation throughout the state. They also used sit-ins in Houston and Marshall to end segregation in public accommodations. By the mid-1960s, only one area of citizenship rights continued to elude black Texans: serving in elective office. In 1958, Houstonian Hattie White became the first African American to win an elective office in the state since Reconstruction by winning a seat on the school board. But many citizens thought that she was white and voted for her in error. She served ten turbulent years on the Houston school board, fighting constantly to force other members of the board to implement court-ordered desegregation of the school system. After Mrs. White's election black Texans did not win another elective office until 1966, when several black candidates throughout the state won political races. Among the pioneers were Joe Lockridge of Dallas, who won a seat in the state house of representatives, and Barbara Jordan of Houston, who won a seat in the Texas Senate. In 1971, Judson Robinson became Houston's first black city councilman since Reconstruction. A year later Barbara Jordan was elected to the United States House of Representatives, thus becoming the first African American in Texas history to represent the state in Congress.

Her election symbolized the progress that blacks had made in the state after over 100 years of racial segregation and exclusion. Despite the lingering effects of the old racist and segregationist legacy, African Americans continued to achieve in both the private and public spheres in the state. They won elective office on the city, county, and statewide levels. In 1992, for example, Morris Overstreet of Amarillo became the first African American to win a statewide office when he was elected a judge on the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals.<sup>9v</sup> Employment opportunities also increased significantly for black Texans, especially in the larger urban areas such as Dallas and Houston. In 1983, for instance, Dallas was named "one of the ten best cities for blacks" because of the social, political, and economic opportunities available there for African Americans. In addition, African Americans continued to participate in the state's social and cultural life and to add their creative talents to the state's as well as the nation's artistic development. Two of many examples are the works added to American literature by Houston playwright and author Ntozake Shange and short story writer J. California Cooper of East Texas. Shange's work "for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf" played on Broadway and toured the country for several years. Her novels *Sassafras, Cypress, and Indigo* (1982) and *Betsey Brown* (1985) were national best-sellers. Cooper's short stories in *A Piece of Mine* (1984) and *Family* (1991) also earned her national acclaim.

These achievements were the result of black Texans' ongoing struggle for

equal opportunity and human dignity. African Americans have lived in the area known as Texas as long as any other ethnic group except American Indians. Throughout their history in the state, they have contributed their blood, sweat, and hard labor to make Texas what it is in the 1990s. Although the 2,000,000 black Texans in 1990 formed only 12 percent of the state's population, blacks had made major contributions to Texas history and culture. The previous thirty years of African-American history in Texas had been quite eventful. During that period black citizens had taken major steps toward reversing the negative aspects of the previous 100 years. Yet, they had only begun to reap the benefits of their labor and persistence.

*See also* CIVIL RIGHTS, ANTEBELLUM TEXAS, TEXAS TROUBLES, SLAVE INSURRECTIONS, ABOLITION, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE, ELECTION LAWS, BLACK EXTENSION SERVICE, COLORED FARMERS' ALLIANCE, FARM TENANCY, *and* DALLAS BLACK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE.

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W. Marvin Dulaney

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## Self-Determination and Local Black Leaders in Texas

Barry A. Crouch

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By BARRY A. CROUCH

## Self-Determination and Local Black Leaders in Texas

IN A RECENT ARTICLE on the origins of early Texas Republican leadership James Alex Baggett correctly contends that in the Lone Star state a "few Negroes held local offices of responsibility in predominantly black counties during and following Reconstruction. At the state level nine Negroes served in the 90-man constitutional convention of 1868-69, eleven were legislators in the 120-man legislature of 1871, and thereafter the number of Negro legislators diminished." Unlike other Southern states during this era "not a single Negro occupied an important executive or judicial post in Texas."<sup>1</sup> With the exception of the Populist movement in the 1890s, black participation in the political process reached its heights during the years following the Civil War. Though not elected to the upper echelons of state government, black politicians were active in their local communities, attempting to insulate their constituents against the onslaughts of racism and violence and organizing them in the direction of self-determination.

In the two years previous to the elections for the 1868 constitutional convention, when black males were first allowed to vote, Texas freed-people were outside the mainstream of politics. In many respects these thirty-one months were of critical importance to Texas black communities. The disruption brought by the war and the tremendous influx of Negroes taken into the Lone Star state for safe-keeping had, at least according to some accounts, more than doubled the black population residing in the state.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the statewide search for better economic opportunities and attempts to stabilize family life were considerations that were of basic importance to the strength, institutionalization, and cohesiveness of blacks. Without these, the black enclaves

<sup>1</sup> James Alex Baggett, "Origins of Early Texas Republican Party Leadership," *Journal of Southern History*, XL (August, 1974), 442, note 3; "Birth of the Texas Republican Party," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LXXVIII (1974), 1-20; "The Rise and Fall of the Texas Radicals, 1867-1883" (Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, North Texas State University, 1972), *passim*. See also, Edward Magdol, "Local Black Leaders in the South, 1867-75: An Essay Toward the Reconstruction of Reconstruction History," *Societas: A Review of Social History*, IV (1974), 81-110.

<sup>2</sup> In early 1866, Edgar M. Gregory, assistant commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, estimated there were about 400,000 blacks in Texas and that 20,000 to 50,000 laborers could be absorbed at once due to a shortage. Gregory to Oliver Otis Howard (National Commissioner), January 31, 1866, Assistant Commissioner (AC), Letters Sent (L.S.), Texas, Vol. 4, p. 123, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105 (National Archives, Washington, D. C.). Unless otherwise indicated all references will be to the Texas Freedman's Bureau records. U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Compendium to the Federal Population Census Schedule, 1870* (Washington, D. C., 1872), pp. 65-66, enumerated only 253,475 blacks in Texas. For omissions and undercounting in taking the 1870 census in Harrison County, which had the second largest black population in the state see James Tunner (Marshall) to E. J. Davis, January 6, 1871, Governor's Papers, E. J. Davis (Texas State Library, Austin). Hereafter these manuscripts will be referred to as the Davis Papers. An idea of the number of slaves brought into Texas during the Civil War may be gleaned from James Arthur Lyon Fremantle, *Three Months in the Southern States: April-June, 1863* (New York, 1864); John Q. Anderson, ed., *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861-1868* (Baton Rouge, 1955); J. Thomas May, "The Medical Care of Blacks in Louisiana During Occupation and Reconstruction, 1862-1868: Its Social and Political Background" (Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Tulane University, 1970).

Corsicana

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**CORSICANA, TEXAS.** Corsicana, county seat and largest city of Navarro County, is in the central portion of the county fifty-eight miles southeast of Dallas at the junction of Interstate 45, U.S. highways 75 and 287, and State highways 22 and 31. It was established in 1848 to serve as the county seat of newly-established Navarro County. José Antonio Navarro,<sup>qv</sup> a hero of the Texas Revolution<sup>qv</sup> after whom the county was named, was given the honor of naming the new town; he suggested Corsicana after the island of Corsica, the birthplace of his parents. David R. Mitchell, an early area settler, donated 100 acres for a townsite, and with the assistance of Thomas I. Smith, platted the land and began selling lots. The new town was centered near a log tavern built in 1847 and owned and operated by Rev. Hampton McKinney. The first courthouse, a two-room log structure, was constructed in 1849, and served as a church, meeting hall and civic center until a new frame building was constructed in 1853. The first school, taught by Mack Elliot and a man named Lafoon, opened in the old courthouse in 1847, and a short time later the Corsicana Female Literary Institute<sup>qv</sup> began operating. Within a few years of the town's founding, a large number of mercantile establishments opened on and around the courthouse square, and new brick courthouse—a symbol of the town's growing prosperity—was erected in 1858. The first newspaper, the *Prairie Blade*, was founded in 1855; it was replaced by the *Express* in 1857, which in turn was replaced by the *Observer* on the eve of the Civil War.<sup>qv</sup>

By 1850 Corsicana's population had already grown to some 1,200, 300 of whom were reportedly black slaves. Not surprisingly given the town's large number of slaveholders, Corsicanans supported Breckinridge over the Fusionist slate of candidates in the presidential election of 1860; and in February 1861, when had the election was held on the secession issue, the vote was almost unanimous, 213 in favor and only three opposed. At outbreak of the war in April 1861 townspeople held a mass demonstration on the courthouse square in favor of the Confederacy, and appeals were made for volunteers to serve in the Confederate Army in Virginia. The first company, the "Navarro Rifles" commanded by Capt. Clinton M. Winkler,<sup>qv</sup> was organized in August 1861; four additional companies were organized in the town by 1863. After the war Union soldiers, commanded by Capt. R. A. Chaffee, occupied the town. Corsicana, however, witnessed little of the bitter strife experienced by many Texas towns during Reconstruction:<sup>qv</sup> Chaffee enlisted a number of former slaves as policeman, but avoided provoking the townspeople, and at one juncture even came out in support of former Confederate officer C. M. Winkler who had caned a Union soldier after the man had insulted him. The town's economy suffered a serious setback during the war and the early Reconstruction years, but by the beginning of 1870s business had begun to recover. In 1871 the town's first bank opened, operated by two men named Adams and Leonard, and in 1874 Union troops finally were withdrawn.

The greatest spur to the town's development, however, came in November 1871 with the completion of the Houston and Texas Central Railroad. The coming of the railroad brought numerous settlers and new merchants, among them the Sanger Brothers,<sup>qv</sup> the Padgitts and others, who established stores near the new depot on East Collin Street. The construction of

the Texas and St. Louis Railway (later the Cotton Belt) in 1880 prompted further commercial development, and by the mid-eighties Corsicana had become the leading trading and shipping center for a large area of the northern blacklands. In 1872 the town was incorporated with a mayoral form of government, and in 1880 a public school system was organized. The decade of the eighties also saw the establishment of a city fire department, a municipal water works, the installation of the first telephone system, and the construction of the State Orphans Home and the Odd Fellows Orphans Home. By 1885 Corsicana had a population of approximately 5,000, three Presbyterian, a Catholic, a Baptist, and three Methodist churches, as well as three blacks churches, an oil factory, a gristmill, two banks, and four weekly newspapers—the *Courier*, the *Observer*, the *Messenger*, and the *Journal*; principal products included cotton, grain, wool, and hides.

railroad

By the early 1890s the rapidly expanding city had outgrown its water supply, and the following year civic leaders formed the Corsicana Water Development Company with the aim of tapping a shallow artesian well in the area. Drilling began in the spring of 1894; but instead of water, the company hit a large pocket of oil and gas. The find—the first significant discovery of oil west of the Mississippi River—led to Texas's first oil boom: within a short time nearly every lot in the town and in the surrounding area was under lease, and wells were being drilled within the city limits: five in 1896, and fifty-seven the following year. The first oil refinery in the state was built in 1897, and by 1898 there were 287 producing wells in the Corsicana field.<sup>qv</sup> The oil find attracted numerous oil men from the East, among them Edwy R. Brown,<sup>qv</sup> H. C. Folger, W. C. Proctor, C. N. Payne, and J. S. Cullinan,<sup>qv</sup> founder of the Cullinan Oil Company, which later evolved into the Magnolia Oil Company. The discovery of oil transformed Corsicana from a regional agricultural shipping town to an important oil and industrial center, spawning a number of allied businesses, including the Johnston-Akins-Rittersbacher shops (later known as American Well Prospecting Company), producer of the newly-invented rotary drilling bits. In 1900 Corsicana had grown to 9,313 inhabitants, with three banks, twelve newspapers, eight hotels, forty-nine retail stores, a cotton mill, thirty-two doctors, and thirty-five saloons. The presence of the latter was a cause of great concern to many Corsicanans and led to a growing temperance movement in the city that culminated in the passage of prohibition law in November 1904. The closing of the saloons had some short-term benefits, but bootleggers rapidly filled the gap, serving the needs of the legions of oilfield workers.

oil  
boom

The oil boom brought a new wave of prosperity to the town. A new courthouse—the one still in use in 1990—was completed in 1905, and in 1917 the Corsicana Chamber of Commerce was founded. The decades after 1900 also saw significant improvements in transportation. The Corsicana Transit Company converted from mule-drawn cars to electric trolleys in 1902; in 1912 the Trinity and Brazos completed a line between Corsicana and Houston; and in 1913 the Texas Electric Railroad instituted hourly service to and from Dallas. In 1923 a second, even larger oil deposit, the Powell oilfield, was discovered, unleashing a new oil boom. Within a few months Corsicana's population swelled to unprecedented heights; some estimates placed the number of residents as high as 28,000 during the peak months of the oil frenzy. New construction transformed the face of the city, and street lights were installed for the first time to control the increased traffic. During the height of the Powell field boom 550 wells in and around the city produced an estimated 354,000 barrels per day. As the boom subsided, the population dropped—to 11,300 in 1925—but it rebounded at the end of the decade, reaching 15,202 in 1930. With the onset of the Great Depression in the early 1930s many Corsicanans found themselves out of work. The number of rated businesses declined from a high of 780 in 1931 to 500 in 1936. Particularly hard hit was the cotton wholesale and processing industry, which suffered from the combined effects of falling prices and the boll weevil.<sup>qv</sup> The oil

industry helped to mitigate the worst effects of the depression, however, and by the end of the decade the Corsicana economy was already beginning to show signs of a rebound. On the eve of World War II<sup>qv</sup> Corsicana had five banks, a daily newspaper (the *Daily Sun*), three movie theaters, three hospitals, three hotels, a cotton mill, a refinery, and two oil pumping stations. The reported population in 1940 was 17,500, of whom 77 percent were white and 23 percent black. Corsicana grew again during the war. In 1942 Air Activities of Texas opened a large flight training center where thousands of pilots received basic training, and in 1942 Bethlehem Steel took over the American Well Prospecting Plant, expanding the production of rotary drills.

Corsicana's leading industries during the 1950s included the Texas-Miller Products Company, a leading producer of hats; the Oil City Iron Works; the Wolfe Brand Company, producer of chili and tamales; several textile plants; the Bethlehem Supply Company; and the Collin Street Bakery,<sup>qv</sup> a leading producer of fruitcakes. The latter, founded at the end of the nineteenth century by German immigrant August Weidmann and William Thomas McElwee, developed into one of Corsicana's best known industries, shipping their DeLuxe fruitcakes to all fifty states and 195 countries around the world. The oil business, however, continued to form the mainstay of the town's economy. Huge oil profits fostered great wealth in Corsicana, and during the early 1950s there were said to be at least twenty-one millionaires in the town; the per capita income—\$1,222 in 1953—was claimed to be the highest of any Texas city. In 1956 a new oilfield was discovered in East Corsicana, and within months 500 wells—nearly one in every backyard—had been drilled.

Since that time Corsicana has experienced steady, if not spectacular, growth. The population reached 20,750 in 1965 and 25,189 in 1991. The number of businesses saw a sharp drop, from 550 in 1965 to 394 in the mid-1970s, but the number rebounded, and in 1991 the town reported 485 businesses. The leading industries in 1991 included oil and gas extraction, meat packing, fruit and vegetable canning, the printing of business forms, and manufacture of prepared foods, furniture, chemical and rubber products, and oil field machinery. The population was 24,485 in 2000, with 1,219 businesses.

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*Christopher Long*

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# Corsicana, Texas

Coordinates: 32.09248° -96.469407°﻿ / ﻿32.09248°N -96.469407°W﻿ / 32.09248; -96.469407

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia  
(Redirected from Corsicana)

**Corsicana** is a city in Navarro County, Texas, United States. The population was 24,485 at the 2000 census. It is the county seat of Navarro County<sup>GR6</sup>.

## Contents

- 1 Geography
- 2 History
- 3 Demographics
- 4 References
- 5 External links

## Geography

Corsicana is located at 32°5′33″N, 96°28′10″W﻿ (32.092480, -96.469407)<sup>GR1</sup>.

According to the United States Census Bureau, the city has a total area of 56.2 km<sup>2</sup> (21.7 mi<sup>2</sup>). 53.7 km<sup>2</sup> (20.7 mi<sup>2</sup>) of it is land and 2.5 km<sup>2</sup> (1.0 mi<sup>2</sup>) of it is water. The total area is 4.42% water.

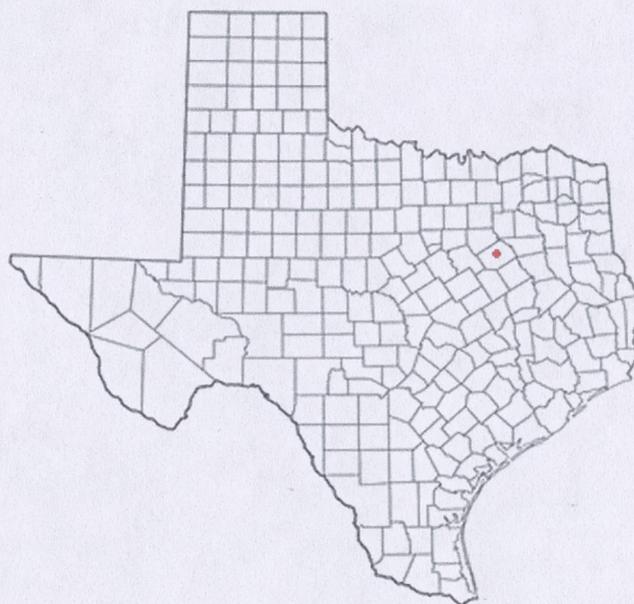
## History

Founded in 1848, it was named by Texas Revolution hero José Antonio Navarro after the Mediterranean island of Corsica, the birthplace of his parents.

Corsicana Female Literary Institute opened in 1857 and was closed by 1870.

Discovered in 1894 by accident, the nearby Corsicana Oilfield was the first commercially significant oilfield in Texas. During World War II, a primary flying school called Corsicana Field was in operation.

Corsicana is best known as the home of the Collin Street Bakery, which has been making fruitcakes since 1896. Oil City Iron Works, Inc., responsible for high quality ductile and gray iron castings since 1866 also calls Corsicana home.



## Demographics

As of the census<sup>GR2</sup> of 2000, there were 24,485 people, 8,762 households, and 5,966 families residing in the city. The population density was 455.8/km<sup>2</sup> (1,180.4/mi<sup>2</sup>). There were 9,552 housing units at an average density of 177.8/km<sup>2</sup> (460.5/mi<sup>2</sup>). The racial makeup of the city was 59.28% White, 23.59% African American, 0.49% Native American, 0.63% Asian, 0.47% Pacific Islander, 13.64% from other races, and 1.91% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race were 22.47% of the population.

There were 8,762 households out of which 34.2% had children under the age of 18 living with them, 48.6% were married couples living together, 15.0% had a female householder with no husband present, and 31.9% are classified as non-families by the United States Census Bureau. Of 8,762 households, 374 are unmarried partner households: 333 heterosexual, 0 same-sex male, and 41 same-sex female households (Note: The number of same-sex households reported does not necessarily represent the actual number of such households. Stigmatization of homosexuality can prevent same-sex couples from reporting themselves as such on the US Census, especially in more conservative areas). 27.3% of all households were made up of individuals and 13.7% had someone living alone who was 65 years of age or older. The average household size was 2.64 and the average family size was 3.21.

In the city the population was spread out with 27.3% under the age of 18, 12.6% from 18 to 24, 26.6% from 25 to 44, 18.6% from 45 to 64, and 15.0% who were 65 years of age or older. The median age was 32 years. For every 100 females there were 94.2 males. For every 100 females age 18 and over, there were 89.9 males.

The median income for a household in the city was \$27,203, and the median income for a family was \$33,078. Males had a median income of \$27,516 versus \$19,844 for females. The per capita income for the city was \$14,001. About 17.4% of families and 22.3% of the population were below the poverty line, including 29.4% of those under age 18 and 15.1% of those age 65 or over.

## References

## External links

- City of Corsicana (<http://www.ci.corsicana.tx.us/>)
- Corsicana/Navarro Chamber of Commerce (<http://www.corsicana.org/>)
- Corsicana, Texas (<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/CC/hec5.html>) from the *Handbook of Texas Online*
- Collin Street Bakery, Corsicana (<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/CC/dic1.html>) from the *Handbook of Texas Online*
- Corsicana Field (<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/CC/qbcmx.html>) from the *Handbook of Texas Online*
- Corsicana Female Literary Institute (<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/CC/kbc44.html>) from the *Handbook of Texas*

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- Corsicana Oilfield (<http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/CC/doc3.html>) from the *Handbook of Texas Online*
  
- **Maps and aerial photos ([http://tools.wikimedia.de/~magnus/geo/geohack.php?params=32.09248\\_N\\_-96.469407\\_E\\_type:city\\_region:US](http://tools.wikimedia.de/~magnus/geo/geohack.php?params=32.09248_N_-96.469407_E_type:city_region:US))**
  - Street map from Google Maps (<http://maps.google.com/maps?ll=32.09248,-96.469407&spn=0.11,0.18>) , or Yahoo! Maps ([http://maps.yahoo.com/maps\\_result?lat=32.09248&lon=-96.469407&mag=4](http://maps.yahoo.com/maps_result?lat=32.09248&lon=-96.469407&mag=4)) , or Windows Live Local (<http://local.live.com/default.aspx?cp=32.09248|-96.469407&style=r&lvl=13&v=1>)
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  - Topographic map from TopoZone (<http://topozone.com/map.asp?lat=32.09248&lon=-96.469407&s=200&size=m&layer=DRG100&datum=nad83>)
  - Aerial image or topographic map from TerraServer-USA (<http://terraserver-usa.com/image.aspx?s=14&lon=-96.469407&lat=32.09248&w=2>)

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Categories: Texas geography stubs | Cities in Texas | Navarro County, Texas | County seats in Texas | Micropolitan areas of Texas

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## History

The County was named after Jose Antonio Navarro and the town after his parents' birthplace of Corsica. Navarro was a signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence and early Texas Legislator. Other famous sons include "Lefty" Frizzell and Governor Beauford Jester.

Corsicana was one of the first cities in Texas to use natural gas for lighting and fuel. Oil boom occurred years before the famed Spindletop in Beaumont Area. Corsicana's downtown remains occupied and vibrant. The dates on buildings show a boom period between the end of WWI and the Crash of '28.

In 1985, Corsicana was designated as an official Texas Main Street City. [The Corsicana Main Street Project](#) works to assist in the revitalization of the downtown area through the use of historic preservation and economic development strategies.

### Did you know.....

- Corsicana is where oil was first discovered west of the Mississippi. In 1884, the city hired a man to drill a city water well. Instead of hitting water, oil spurted from the well. The city fathers were so unhappy they refused to pay him. Thus Corsicana became the first Texas oil boom town.
- In 1897 the state's first oil refinery was built by a new local company called Magnolia Oil (better know today as Mobil). Another local startup, The Texas Company (Texaco) began shortly after
- In 1895, Lyman T. Davis made chili in downtown Corsicana and delivered it by wagon to saloons where it was sold for five cents a bowl with all the crackers you wanted. He later opened a meat market where he sold his chili in brick form, using the brand name of Lyman's Famous Home Made Chili. In 1921, he started to can chili in the back of his market and named it "Wolf Brand" in honor of his pet wolf, Kaiser Bill. A picture of the wolf is still on the label. In the 1920s, Davis quit the chili business when his ranch was found to have lots of oil. The company is now owned by The Quaker Oats Company.

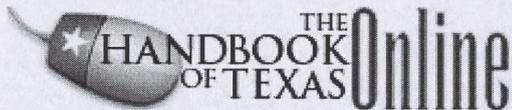
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**AMERICAN WELL AND PROSPECTING COMPANY.** In Kansas in 1890 Charles Rittersbacher and Horace Greeley Johnston organized a water-well-drilling business that they named the American Well and Prospecting Company. In 1894 they contracted with the Corsicana Water Development Company for three water wells in Corsicana, Texas. Work began on the first well in June at a site on South Twelfth Street, a few blocks from the business district. At a depth of 1,035 feet they struck oil and thus opened the state's first commercial oilfield. By 1900 the Corsicana oilfield<sup>qv</sup> was producing more than 800,000 barrels of crude annually and had the first refinery west of the Mississippi River.

Although they continued drilling some wells, Rittersbacher and Johnston soon concentrated primarily on repairing drilling rigs and other equipment. They had opened a small shop in Corsicana to repair their own equipment, but meeting demands for repairs from other drillers became a full-time endeavor. About 1900 Rittersbacher and Johnston purchased patent rights for hydraulic rotary drilling equipment from M. C. and C. E. Baker, brothers who had pioneered in that field. From that time the American Well and Prospecting Company began manufacturing and distributing oilfield equipment under the trade name Gumbo Buster. A rig manufactured by American Well and Prospecting and operated by the Hamill brothers of Corsicana was used to drill the A. F. Lucas<sup>qv</sup> well at Spindletop in 1901, thus ushering in the petroleum industry on the Texas Gulf Coast (*see SPINDLETOP OILFIELD*). Eventually Gumbo Buster equipment was used in every major oilfield in the world.

With the outbreak of World War II,<sup>qv</sup> American Well and Prospecting, like many other industries, converted its operations to the production of war-related materials. Among the items manufactured by the company were 1,000-pound semi-armor-piercing bombs and 240-millimeter shells. The plant operated around the clock and employed 1,000 people during peak wartime production.

American Well and Prospecting was a family-controlled operation for the first several decades of its existence. Johnston served as president until his death in 1930. Rittersbacher died in 1919, but his sons, Elmer and Edgar, held management positions in the company, as did Eliot Johnston and Lowell Estes, son and son-in-law of Johnston. On June 30, 1944, Bethlehem Steel of Pennsylvania purchased all the outstanding stock and assets of American Well and Prospecting Company. At the conclusion of

the war Bethlehem resumed production of oilfield equipment at the Corsicana plant. Increased competition in the business of manufacturing oilfield equipment and hard times in the petroleum industry forced Bethlehem to close the plant in 1959.

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*Tommy W. Stringer*

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**Soldiers of Democracy: Black Texans and the Fight for Citizenship, 1917-1921**

Steven A. Reich

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# Soldiers of Democracy: Black Texans and the Fight for Citizenship, 1917-1921

Steven A. Reich

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This is the country to which we Soldiers of Democracy return. . . . But by the God of Heaven, we are cowards and jackasses if now that that war is over, we do not marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land.

*We return.*

*We return from fighting.*

*We return fighting.*

Make way for Democracy! We saved it in France, and by the Great Jehovah, we will save it in the United States of America, or know the reasons why.

—W. E. B. Du Bois, *Crisis*, May 1919

The world can never be made safe for democracy as long as America is unsafe for its own citizens.

—C. F. Richardson Jr., *Houston Informer*, June 7, 1919

On the night of December 8, 1918, Black residents of Kildare, an unincorporated hamlet nestled in the northeast corner of Texas, gathered at the local African Methodist Episcopal Church to hear a lecture "on the War and after the War." The audience, composed mostly of farmers and sharecroppers who struggled to make a living out of the stubborn piney woods soil, listened to the preacher describe how, despite their bravery abroad and sacrifice at home, Blacks were "still being treated badly by the White man." The United States, he grieved, "forced the Negro to go 3000 miles away to fight for Democracy when they should have been fighting for Democracy at home." Now that the war was over, Blacks must no longer "close ranks" with whites but demand their rights as citizens, even if

Steven A. Reich is a Ph.D. candidate in United States history at Northwestern University. This essay received the Louis Pelzer Memorial Award for 1995. An earlier version was presented at the 1994 Southwestern Historical Association-Southwestern Social Science Association Annual Meeting.

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