

History of Sherman

Sherman, Texas: Rich Past - Exciting Present - Solid Future
Grayson County

In December 1845, Texas was annexed into the Union. The first State Legislature organized several new counties, one of which was Grayson County. It was created from a part of Fannin County and authorized on November 17, 1846. Grayson County was named for Peter W. Grayson, who was attorney general in President Burnett's Cabinet in 1836. Grayson was one of the signers of the treaty with Santa Ana. He was sent by President Burnett to Washington as one of the commissioners to obtain recognition on the part of the United States and seek friendly mediation and assistance in obtaining recognition from Mexico toward the independence of Texas as a republic.

The Beginning of Sherman

Sherman was founded in 1846 by the Grayson County commissioners. It was located in the center of the county, four miles west of its present site, near highways 56 and 289. Because of a lack of wood and water, the town was moved in 1848 to its present site.

Sherman, the county seat of Grayson County, was named after General Sidney Sherman, a hero of the Texas Revolution. Sherman was the captain of a volunteer company in the Kentucky State Militia. He raised a unit of 50 armed men and came to Texas to present himself to General Sam Houston. The regiment arrived too late to fight at the Alamo; however, at the decisive battle of San Jacinto, Sherman commanded the left wing of Houston's army. He led his regiment with the now famous battle cry, "Remember the Alamo! Remember Goliad!" Sherman and his family moved to Texas permanently in 1837 and settled in Houston. In 1842, he served as a representative in the Congress of the New Republic of Texas. In 1852 and 1853, after Texas joined the Union, he served in the State Legislature. Sidney Sherman is also remembered for building the Buffalo Bayou, Brazos and Colorado Railway, which was the first railroad in the state and the original unit of the Southern Pacific System in Texas.

The Pecan Tree: The Center of Sherman

In 1848, the City of Sherman was transplanted to its present location, determined by the spreading branches of the mammoth pecan tree that stood on the southeast section of what is now the public square. Even from the beginning, the "pecan tree" played a big part in the development of Sherman.

Mr. T.J. Shannon began clearing the land by hitching six yoke of oxen to a large pecan tree and dragging it through the brush. After the town was laid out, Shannon's 12-year-old daughter, Julia, was given the honor of naming the streets using the names of Texas heroes and native trees. Thus, Mulberry, Pecan, Elm, Walnut, Cherry, Crockett, Houston, Jones, Rusk, Lamar and Travis streets were born.

As Sherman grew, life centered around the pecan tree on the square. Court sessions were held in its shade; it served as the community center, church, post office and general meeting place. On Sundays, people gathered under the pecan tree for religious services while men leaned their guns against the tree trunk as a precaution against Indian raids. During the week, visiting traders hung their saddle bags from the lower limbs as they went about their business; and letters awaited in the pockets of an old coat hung from the tree, as trail drivers going in other directions transferred them closer to their destinations.

Development

From the beginning, Sherman was known as an educational and religious center. The first school was a log cabin with a dirt floor and a hole in the roof to emit the smoke. It was founded in 1849 by Benjamin Willis Bradley and located in the 100 block of North Crockett Street.

Sherman's first cemetery was established the same year. It was located in the southwest part of town at

what is now South Austin Street.

Sherman began its growth and, in 1852, the business section of Sherman consisted of a row of clapboard stores on the east side of the square, a few log saloons and a double log house used as a hotel on the north side of the square. On the south side of the square was the District Clerk's Office and the Post Office, combined.

Sherman was incorporated in 1858. Also in 1858, on September 20th, the Butterfield-Overland Stage arrived in Sherman. The stage line was the first mail route west of the Mississippi. This first stage had left St. Louis on September 15, 1858, arrived in Sherman on September 20th and continued on to San Francisco, arriving on October 9th. The stage route covered a distance of 2,795 miles, the longest stage line in the world. It was operated for 20 years, until the railroads came.

Civil War & Reconstruction

As the Civil War came, Sherman and the State of Texas were in turmoil. In 1861, Texas seceded from the United States and a strife-ridden, bloody time ensued. A period of lawlessness opened; and Sherman's streets were filled with outlaws who were known by the names of Quantrill, James and Younger, along with their men. The community was having border troubles; and the downtown streets were nothing but vacant stores. The farms in the area were run-down; and there was little money and no industry. Business was at a standstill due to the unrest in the area. The war ended; and Reconstruction came.

As the Reconstruction period was coming to a close, Sherman was beginning to recover. Wheat and cotton buyers flooded the town. Trade flourished and new industry was built. The 1870s brought railroads and more industry. New banks, colleges, hotels and an opera house were started.

The Rise of Sherman & Its Educational Institutions

It was in the 1870s that Sherman earned her nickname, "The Athens of Texas," as many institutions of higher learning found their way to Sherman. Captain L.H. LeTellier, a Civil War hero, organized an all-male school here in 1871. The Sherman Male and Female Academy was opened in 1870, and, in 1876, St. Joseph's Academy (today, St. Mary's School) opened in the 700 block of South Travis Street. In the same year, Austin College was moved to Sherman from Huntsville, Texas. Then, in 1877, Mary Nash College was founded in Sherman.

During the 1880s, Sherman reached a pinnacle in Texas economic history. Grayson County had the largest population of any county in Texas in 1880. In 1881, Merchants and Planters Bank was the largest banking firm in Texas. Later, in 1885, Dunn and Bradstreet listed Sherman as the financial center of Texas.

The Sherman public school system was established in 1883; and Carr-Burdette College opened in Sherman in 1894.

Evolution of the Sherman Academy

In 1888, Lucy A. Kidd arrived from Mississippi and took over presidency of the Sherman Academy. The school had been closed for two years, but was reopened. Originally known as the Sherman Male and Female Academy, the school was opened in 1870 and instruction was offered, beginning with the primary grades. On April 13, 1873, the property was deeded to the Conference of the Methodist Church, and the school became North Texas Female College. The school was closed in 1887, without the original building ever having been completed. When Mrs. Kidd arrived in Sherman, she assumed responsibility for the North Texas Female Institute, which was already closed. Before the school term began the first year, she travelled throughout the state to raise funds. Not only were the finances to be considered, but Mary Nash College was directly across the street and thriving at the time. The college was reopened with an enrollment of almost 100 and later grew to 500. Under her leadership, seven brick buildings, several cottage units and a gymnasium were built. In 1892, Mrs. Kidd married Bishop Joseph S. Key. That same year, the name of the institution was formally changed to North Texas College and Kidd-Key Conservatory of Music. In 1905, the Mary Nash property, which was across the street facing Mulberry, was purchased. Kidd-Key became a major music conservatory.

Even before Mrs. Kidd-Key's death on September 13, 1916, she recognized the trend toward standardization in education and worked toward establishing criteria for the school to become a junior college. In 1916, it became a junior college. The Kidd-Key property had been purchased by the North Texas Annual Conference in 1920, with the understanding that Edwin Kidd, son of Lucy Kidd-Key, could keep it for four more years.

The depression coupled with the growth of state institutions were major factors in the gradual decline of the enrollment. By 1933, there were only 165 students. Therefore, in the fall of 1933, the five Methodist Conferences of Texas recommended that support be withdrawn. Without this assistance, the school could not survive. Kidd-Key College was closed on May 31, 1935. The property reverted to bondholders and, in 1937, the City of Sherman purchased the property for \$40,000. The Municipal Building was opened in 1938.

Growth & Tragedy

During the time of the big colleges, Sherman continued to thrive; businesses opened and industries flourished. Today, Sherman's oldest industry is Washington Iron Works, which opened in 1876, and still exists today, over a century later!

It was, however, during this same time that the worst disaster ever struck Sherman, the cyclone of 1896. It was Saturday, May 16, 1896, at approximately 5:00 pm when the cyclone hit the southwest part of Sherman, near where [West Hill Cemetery](#) and Houston Street are located today. When the cyclone was gone, 66 people were dead and hundreds were injured. 40 others died later from injuries they had received. Property damage was estimated at \$50,000.

As Sherman reached the 1900s, it faced another surge of growth. The first electric interurban in the state was established between Sherman and Denison, and later extended to Dallas. New construction included St. Vincent and Sherman hospitals, a new city library, a federal building and post office and the Grayson Hotel. In 1930, Sherman boasted a population of 15,713.

One of the most tragic days in Sherman history occurred during 1930. On May 9th, a maddened lynch mob burned the courthouse in an effort to get to a black man accused of raping a white woman. The man had been placed in the courthouse vault for protection from the crowd. When the mob was refused custody, gasoline was thrown inside and the building burned. Attempts to extinguish the blaze were thwarted when the mob slashed the fire hoses. A new courthouse was built in 1936.

1930s Onward

As the 1930s ended, Sherman's growth continued. A municipal airport and city swimming pool were opened; and the Red River Dam, which was to bring Lake Texoma, was authorized by Congress. Perrin Field opened in 1941 and Sherman's population rose to 17,150. Lake Texoma was completed in 1944 and boasted 1,250 miles of shoreline. In 1950, Sherman's population reached 20,150 and, during the 1950s and 1960s, the city saw a surge in industrial growth. Plants that located in Sherman during that period include IBM, Johnson and Johnson, Texas Instruments and Texoma Inc. To this day, Sherman maintains an exceptional industrial base for a city her size.

The Future of Sherman

Sherman faces a solid future based on its location, superior infrastructure and proven track record of attracting major employers. Sherman's location dictates that it must grow, being directly in the path of the rapid northward expansion of the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. Furthermore, Sherman's infrastructure is outstanding. The transportation system is anchored by the crossroads of U.S. Highway 75 and U.S. Highway 82 and is bolstered by the excellent airport facilities at the North Texas Regional Airport (formerly Perrin Field) and Sherman Municipal Airport. Additionally, Lake Texoma guarantees a bountiful source of water. Finally, the sales tax for economic development, administered by the Sherman Economic Development Corporation (SEDCO), provides the necessary incentives to attract large, high-quality employers. Sherman eagerly awaits a future that will be worthy of its proud heritage.