

Texas Region of the Tour d'Italia

Ellis, Navarro, and Hill County

The Tonkawa tribes were the earliest inhabitants of this region, although Wacos, Bidaís, Anadarkos, and Kickapoos often hunted in this area. Spanish missionaries worked with the Tonkawas, and as the American settlers began to move into the region in the middle of the nineteenth century; they offered little organized resistance. By 1859 the Tribes had been removed to Indian Territory (Oklahoma). Before the Texas Revolution, the Mexican government granted land in what is now Ellis County to Thomas Jefferson Chambers, Rafael Peña, and Alejandro de la Garza. In 1841 and 1842 the Republic of Texas granted land to group of investors led by William S. Peters in the northern half of Texas known as the Peters Colony project. One of the first settlers in the area was William R. Howe, who settled late in 1843 near the site of present day Forresteron, just north of future site of Italy.

Navarro County was established from a portion of Robertson County in 1846 after citizens campaign against the county seat being 100+ miles away. At that time Navarro County included all of what would become Hill County, portions of McClennan, Ellis, Tarrant, Parker, and Somerville Counties, i.e., most all the lands between the Trinity and Brazos Rivers. Corsicana was designated the county seat in 1848. Acting on a bill sponsored by Gen. Edward H. Tarrant, the state legislature officially established Ellis County on December 20, 1849. It was drawn from Navarro County, organized in February of the following year, and probably named for Richard Ellis, president of the Convention of 1836. Waxahachie was named the county seat and established on land donated by E. W. Rogers in August 1850. Gen. Tarrant established a plantation on Chambers Creek (whom he had named in honor of his friend Thomas J. Chambers) north of Italy. Hill County was organized in May 1853, with Lexington (southwest of present day Hillsboro) designated as county seat until a properly selected, centrally located site could be selected and would be, by legislation, required to be named Hillsborough (later changed to Hillsboro when Post Office changed all town names ending in “-borough” to “-boro”). Hill County was named for Dr. George Washington Hill, the Secretary of War for President Sam Houston and legislator from Navarro County.

The Battle Creek Fight

Also identified as:

- o The Battle Creek Massacre
- o The Surveyors' Fight

In 1838 a surveying party of approximately 25 out of Franklin, Robertson County, were mapping what is now the southern part of Navarro County (then still part of Robertson County) near (now) Richland Creek for bounty and headright grants for soldiers who had served in the Texas Revolution. On Monday, 8 October they were approached by a Native American hunting party of approximately 300 Kickapoos, Wacos, Tehuacanas, Caddoes, and Ionies. Initially interaction was peaceful, although resentment of the White man moving into their lands was obvious and the parties camped close for three days. On Monday, 8 October, Kickapoos chief told the survey party to leave their hunting grounds as the Ionies were determined to kill them. Soon the Natives attacked in mass. The battle lasted 24 hours with about thirty of the Native Americans and eighteen of the survey party killed. Three of the surviving seven surveyors made their way to a friendly Kickapoo camp, who helped them reach Fort Parker to report the incident. Several of the surviving surveyors returned to the battle site several days later to bury their dead in a mass grave.

[Battle site and historical marker is on Tx31 west of Dawson, east of Battle Creek (south of Navarro Mills Lake).]



Italy, Texas

Just a few miles to the west of present-day Italy* passed the first major route used by the cattle trailing method to deliver Texas Longhorns to the Midwest. Settlers coming into Texas in the 1830s from the north followed old Native trails down thru Oklahoma on what became known as the Texas Road. When the first cattle drives began in the early 1840s the cattlemen simply reversed the Texas Road route. Longhorns were gathered from south Texas (and Mexico) and driven north from Austin, to Waco, thru this area up to Dallas, crossing the Red River at Preston, Tx, into Oklahoma on into Kansas and Missouri to railheads in Sedalia, Missouri, and further on to Kansas City and St. Louis. With Sedalia being the primary objective the trail was often referred to as the Sedalia Trail. There is no conclusive story on how it later became known as the Shawnee Trail. †

Settlers had already begun to take root in the area before the 1860s, but Italy traces its roots to the Aycock brothers, Robert and T.J., who built their house on the present site of what would become Italy in 1879. This structure was used it as a home, grocery store, and post office for the area. Settlers found this area very good for growing cotton, corn, sweet potatoes, and wheat.

Italy bears no cultural ties to the "Old Country" of Italy. The name was contributed by the postmaster of 1880 who imagined the climate of Texas comparable to that of Italy. The town was split over what the name should be - some wanting Egypt and some Italy. Gabriel J. Penn, the Waxahachie postmaster, settled the matter for them by filling in the blank on the application with the name Italy. The postal authorities gladly accepted Italy (there was already an Egypt in Wharton County).

In 1888-1890 the Dallas & Waco Railway Company (as a subsidiary of the Missouri Pacific Co., later the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad (MKT, later more common "the Katy")) built thru Ellis County creating an alternate route from Denison thru Dallas, thru Waxahachie, Italy, Milford, onto Hillsboro (a direct route from Dallas south to Waco and Austin versus having to ship thru

* Pronounced **It'lee**

† The western television show Rawhide was set on the Sedalia Trail.

Fort Worth). In 1901-1903 the International & Great Northern Railway Company (I&GN) arrived from Waco, Irene, Mertens, Milford, thru Italy to meet the rail line coming down from Fort Worth, Everman, Lillian, Venus, meeting at the midpoint in Maypearl. By 1913 the rail line of the Dallas to Waco electric interurban railway, the Southern Traction Company, soon to be Texas Electric Railway (referred to as "The Interurban") had reached Italy from Waxahachie and Dallas and on down to Waco, running down the middle of Main Street and Clark Street. The Texas Electric even made Italy a freight exchange point with the MKT which more-so established Italy as a freight and commerce center.

With three rail lines Italy grew into a major cotton center and had five gins, a cotton compress, and a cottonseed oil mill, by the mid 1920s the population soared past 1,500. The Great Depression took a major toll and thus started the decline of Italy for the next three and half decades.

Early growth included the establishment of many schools and churches. Italy Institute, Southwestern Normal College, and Hope Institute educated the youth of the community and the surrounding counties. By 1894 more than 350 students were attending classes. In 1925 the Italy Independent School District was established.

The main road through Italy, a graded dirt road stretching from Dallas to Waco, was known as the King of Trails Highway.

Although the local ice plant produced some electricity for the town, most electricity was brought in from Waco by transmission towers built by the Texas Electric Railway.



Katy depot, Italy, date unknown



I&GN Depot, Italy (1910)



Katy Depot, Italy (1946)



Interurban leaving Italy for Hillsboro, 3 July 1948



*The I&GN passing over the KATY and US77 north of town
(the middle and right abutments remain over US77)*

Dale Evans

- o “Queen of the West”
- o “Queen of the Cowgirls”



Dale Evans was born Frances Octavia Smith 31 October 1912 in her grandparents' home at Uvalde, Texas, though her family lived in Italy, Texas. She was her parents first child. Her father, Walter Smith, was a middle-class farmer who also owned and operated a hardware store in the small town of Italy, which had about 1,000 residents at that time. Her mother, Betty Sue Hillman Smith, was a homemaker. The evidence of her birth was an affidavit from her parents saying she was born Frances Octavia Smith on 31 October 1912, which she used for her driver's license and passport until it was misplaced in 1954. Requesting a birth certificate from the Texas Bureau of Vital Statistics, she was surprised to see it in the name of Lucille Wood Smith, born on October 30. Her mother insisted that she was born Frances Octavia and that the record keepers were wrong, though even her mother was unsure of the date, so October 31 was officially adopted.

At the age of three, she made her gospel singing solo debut at the Baptist church in Italy. In 1919, when she was seven, the family—including her younger brother, Hillman—moved to Osceola, Arkansas, after her father's brother told stories of bountiful cotton fields in the Arkansas community along the Mississippi River. He failed to mention floods, boll weevils, and mosquitoes, and she later said the family's first year in Arkansas was “neither financially rewarding nor joyous.” The next year was more successful.

At age 14 she eloped with Thomas F. Fox and bore a son. A year later he abandoned her for third time, this time staying gone. She married again, that marriage being short. She found work in Memphis and there her singing on the radio began in Memphis, Chicago, Louisville, and back to Dallas. She adapted the showbiz name of Dale Evans during these years.

Her son became ill, and she decided to return to Texas so that he could stay with her parents, who had left Arkansas returning to their farm near Italy, they helping with his care. She found work as a singer at radio station WFAA in Dallas, joining her family in Italy on weekends. While in Texas, she heard from Robert Dale Butts, a pianist and orchestra leader she had known in Louisville. He moved to Dallas, also finding work at WFAA, and they were married in 1937 (lasting until 1945).

In 1943 she played female lead in the western film "The Cowboy and the Senorita" with Roy Rogers, "The King of the Cowboys". They played together in four more films before her third marriage divorced and Roy Roger's wife died. Roy and Dale married 31 December 1947.

And the rest is "Happy Trails"

And now you know why you find yourself humming that song as you pedal along.

Frost, Texas

Texas State Highway 22 and FM667

Frost was established in 1881 when the St. Louis, Arkansas, and Texas Railway (later St. Louis & Southwestern (Cotton Belt) Railroad) built a line from Corsicana to Hillsboro. There was a small farming community called Cross Roads (or Crossroads) located approximately two miles south and that community quickly relocated to the railroad. The town was named for Judge Samuel R. Frost, a well-respected attorney and judge for Navarro County (and a local attorney for the railroad).

With the railroad, and being the halfway point between Corsicana and Hillsboro, Frost grew rapidly, a post office being established in 1887, a school in 1888 (Frost Common School District forming in 1890), a Methodist church in 1887 and Baptist church in 1890, city water works in 1890 (tapping the railroad's lake), and the town incorporating in June 1893. By the early 1900s there were six cotton gins, an oil mill, several butcher shops, seven grocery stores, multiple dry-goods shops, two banks, three drugstores, and a population pushing past 700. Frost peaked in 1929 with a population over 910, with the Navarro, Ellis, and Hill Counties area being the greatest cotton producing region in the country, if not the world.

The school at Cross Road also moved to the new town of Frost, using the Masonic Hall for their classrooms. They formed the Frost Common School District in 1890. In the late 1910s the school term was increased from seven months to nine. A new school was built in 1910. Numerous other small schools consolidated into the Frost district in the 1920s and 1930s. the tornado of May 1930 severely damaged the schoolhouse, but the town rebuilt it, only to lose it completely to fire in January 1949. Newer schools were built over the years. In 1967 a new primary school, home economics department, business office, and cafetorium - and the best part, it was air-conditioned!

The town prospered on the rich blackland prairie of this area that proved great for the production of cotton. Cotton was King into the 1920s and 1930s and continued to the 1950s, Navarro, Ellis, and Hill Counties being the top cotton producers in the world. when cotton moved west. The agricultural economy changes of this area took much of the land out of cultivation and returned it to pastureland or the grain crops of wheat, oats, and maize.



Frost, Nov 1921





Frost, 1914



Frost, 1908

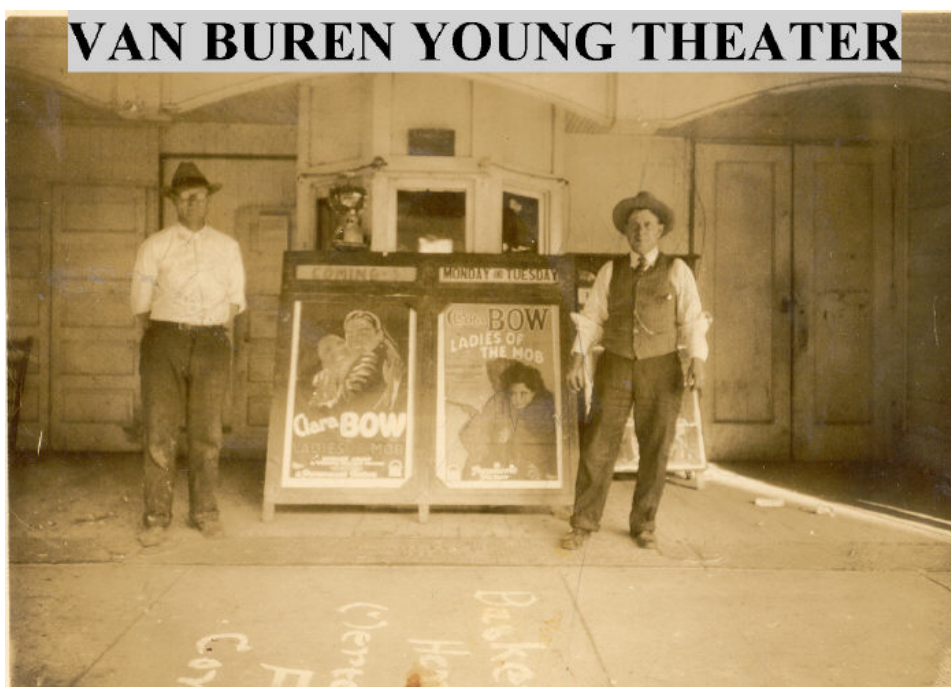


Frost, 1908



Frost High School, Frost Texas

Frost High School, 1948



Frost Tornado of 1930

Around 3:26pm on 6 May 1930 a tornado struck Frost killing at least 22 and injuring over 50 folks locally. The tornado resulted in a total of 41 dead and 200 injuries along its 35-mile path across Hill, Navarro, and Ellis Counties. The storm tracked for 10 miles starting in the Bynum / Irene / Mertens area (killing 16), striking Frost, before continuing to track to the northeast and the towns of Ensign and Bardwell. The tornado was estimated to track a total of 35 miles, have a maximum width of 500 yards, and a roar that was heard 10 miles away. At the time this was the worse tornado disaster recorded in Texas. By today's standards the tornado was estimated as a F4 with winds of 260mph. It is still ranked as the #6 deadliest tornado in Texas history.

Many survived by seeking shelter in storm cellars, the jail, the bank vault, and at the McCord school (4 miles southwest) teachers wisely taking the students far out into a cotton field and having them lie flat as their schoolhouse was torn to splinters. Aide came from all over the area, including special trains down from Corsicana. There are many stories of the oddities of the storm – a bowl of fresh flowers undisturbed atop a piano in a house stripped of its roof a

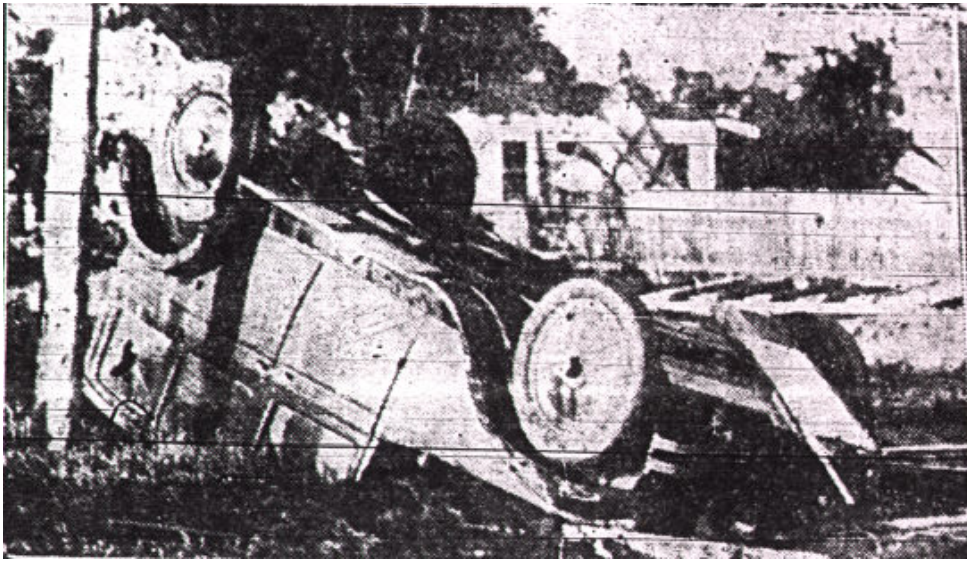
nd walls and its floors left bare, the horse still standing grazing in the pasture even though it had a 2x4 impaled thru it, the piece of straw thru the telephone pole, the family huddled together in the center of their small house unharmed while the whole house had been lifted and scattered to the winds, the sheet music on the piano still as it was before the storm even though the house was gone, and the piece of a metal barn blown thru a telephone pole. A mass funeral was held for most the dead.

The storm destroyed most the whole town, including the business district and school; only three brick buildings remained standing. The town rebuilt but never fully recovered as the Great Depression took its toll afterwards. The railroad line ceased operations in the late 1930s. Frost continues primarily as an agricultural town along TX22.



Cotton Belt Train Depot after the tornado of 6 May 1930





Blooming Grove

Texas State Highway 22 and FM55

Blooming Grove originated on ranchland being used to raise sheep as the village of Gradyville in the late 1860s. The town originated in a general store operated by R. J. and W. D. Grady and Sam Andrews shortly after the War Between the States. When a post office was established in 1871, citizens met at the White Church Cemetery (approx. 1½ mile ESE) to choose a name for the community. The town was named either for a grove of blooming trees or for the son – Blooming Davis – of a Doctor Davis.

After 1881 the community moved a mile north to be on the St. Louis, Arkansas, and Texas Railway (later St. Louis & Southwestern (or 'Cotton Belt') Railroad) as they were building a line from Corsicana to Hillsboro. At this time Blooming Groove merged with the community of White Church. The new town grew rapidly from a population of 200 in 1884 to 800 in 1890, when townspeople sought incorporation. The city limits and boundaries were officially set on 31 March 1890.

Sam Fordyce, becoming president of the St. Louis, Arkansas, & Texas Railway (SLA&T), in 1887 decided to compete with Jay Gould in railroad branch-line operations in north and central Texas thru Texarkana and on to Memphis and St. Louis and build a line from Corsicana to Hillsboro. This railroad soon began advertising itself as the Cotton Belt Route, a moniker that stuck and grew onto the St. Louis Southwestern (SSW) that eventual obtained control over the SLA&T. The line thru Blooming Grove (passing thru about where Doc Garrison City Park is now) was completed and on to Hillsboro in 1888. Blooming Grove quickly became an agriculture shipping and trade point resulting in rapid growth, up to 1500 folks in the 1930s. The town soon had four cotton gins, four churches, several grocery stores, several cotton buyers, two gristmills, two lumberyards, two restaurants, two hotels, and a community fair. With the Great Depression the decline and damage to the town was severe, made worse with the railroad abandoning the line in March 1940. During and after World War II many residents left to work in nearby factories and cities, Blooming Grove's population dropping by half in just a few years.

The earliest church in the community, the White Church, began as the Methodist Mission in 1869, but was used by all faiths, as a school, and community hall. As the community moved to "New Town" blooming grove the Baptist organized in 1887, the Christian Church in 1888, Cumberland Presbyterian in 1895 (only lasting to 1905), Central Baptist in 1909, and the Presbyterian USA in 1911.

The first public school in then Gradyville, 1869, was held in a 24'x24' building serving as combination church, school, and community meeting hall. School sessions lasting only three months of the year and depended upon donations received. In 1878 a community school was built and in *(1884 or 1887?)* the Blooming Grove Common School District No. 45 was established. There was also a private school in the community. In 1917 the school district became Blooming Grove Independent School District.

University Training School, a college preparatory school, was opened in Blooming Grove under the backings of the Corsicana District of the Northwest Methodist Conference in 1899. The school was located at the southern end of Fordyce Street. In 1909 a Junior College curriculum was established and the school renamed Central Texas College. The school closed in 1912.

Blooming Grove's contributions to the Wars includes a dog. "Snitch" was a German Shepard belonging to Bob Lane and his 10-year-old son Bruce. In March of 1942 they volunteered their dog to the Army's World War II effort. Snitch served in the Army's K-9 operations in the European Theater until war's end in 1945 and he was returned home to his family.

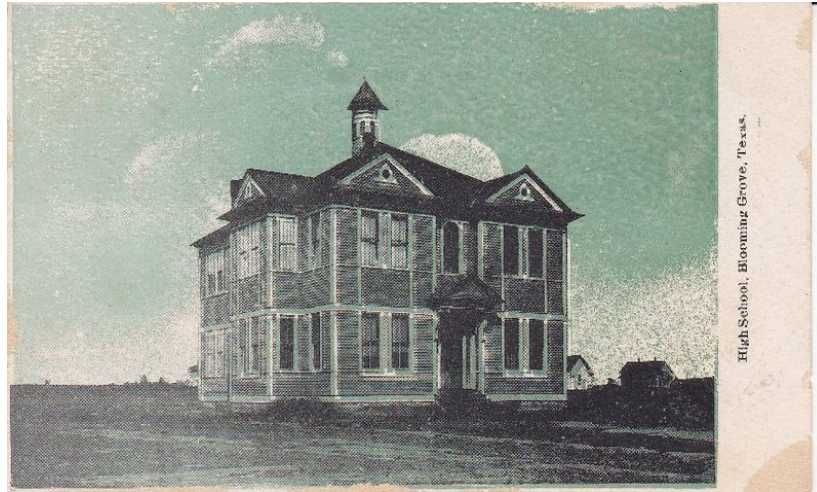




Postcard of Fordyce Street, ~1910



Blooming Grove Public School - 1900 (1890-1913)



Blooming Grove High School, ~1900



Postcard Blooming Grove High School, ~1910

Central Texas College



The University Training School was projected with the backings of the Corsicana District of the Northwest Methodist Conference in 1899 with Reverend J. W. Atkinson as president. The Northwest Texas Conference Journal of 1904 reported: "This pioneer training school, known as University Training

School, was put into operation, providing secondary education and training students in preparation for university entrance." A few years later, in 1909, a Junior College curriculum was established and the school renamed Central Texas College. Central Texas College was located at the south end of Fordyce Street (the principal street) in Blooming Grove. It was a co-educational junior college offering academic and fine arts courses. The campus covered fifteen acres and consisted of three buildings and an athletic field.

The faculty members and their families plus the boarding students brought new and interesting college life to this fast-growing town which at that time boasted a population of fifteen hundred.

Central Texas College failed in the fall of 1912. This failure was indeed a blow to the cultural pride of Blooming Grove. The buildings were used for several years as a business college and boarding houses. Finally, the campus was divided into town lots known as the Training School Addition.

[Central Texas College of Killeen / Copperas Cove is not affiliated to CTC Blooming Grove]

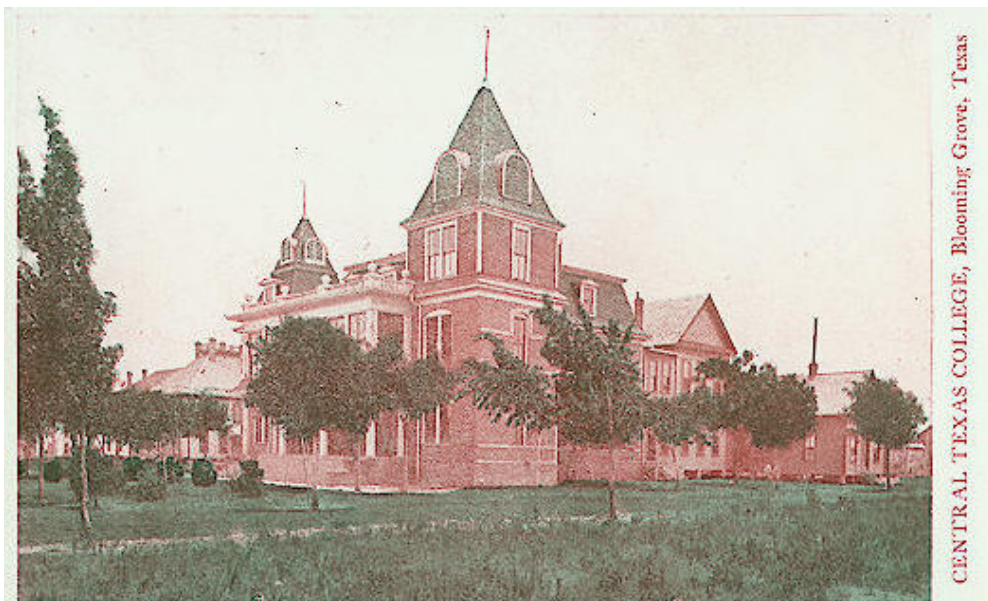


University Training School, Main Building, 1908





Postcard Central Texas College, postmarked 1913



Central Texas College, ~1908

Dresden

FM55 and FM744

Dresden was mostly a one street town running from current intersection of FM55 and FM744 west to the Dresden Cemetery. Its location along the road between the two major towns of Navarro County of the time, Corsicana and Spring Hill and the excellent farm and ranch land promoted the early growth of Dresden.

Jacob Hartzell had a trading post near the present townsite as early as 1836 and traded mainly with the Indians. Ethan Melton (of the Texas Army of Independence) moved to the area in the 1840s, of which he had a Spanish Land Grant, and established a general store where many of the early settlers received their mail. The early site was known as Spanky, but when the regular post office was established in 1846, the name was registered as Melton. It was the first post office in the county. Records show the post office name as Richland in 1849. In 1852 the name was changed to Dresden after Dresden, Germany, in those days considered the world's medical center. Postal service was discontinued in 1907. Near the store there was a campground where settlers stayed until their houses were built. The first county elections were held at the campground on 13 July 1846. A three-acre townsite was set aside in March 1847 with Jacob Hartzell, Ethan Melton, and Henry Cook as trustees. In the 1850s a Methodist church was established. In 1872 a two-story building was constructed a mile northeast of town to house Dresden College. In 1896 the community had a population of 200, a high school, a bank, a general store, a cotton gin, and a gristmill. In 1906 the school had two teachers and fifty-nine students. The decision in the late nineteenth century to run the railroad track through Corsicana ended Dresden's prominence in the county (first the Houston & Texas Central, followed by the Texas & St. Louis Railway (Cotton Belt)). In 1939 the population of the town was estimated to be 127.



A prominent store in Dresden was the Hartzell Store. The wooden logs of the structure were originally of the blacksmith shop of Noah Turner Byers in Washington-on-the-Brazos where in this shop it is thought the Texas Declaration of Independence was drafted. In 1842 Byers disassembled his shop and moved it to Dresden reassembling it as his cabin. Dan Hartzel bought the cabin in 1851 and converted it into a

general store. The structure is now on display at the Pioneer Village in Corsicana.

The Justice Tree of Dresden –

The picnic grounds at the Dresden Cemetery (1/2 mile west on FM744) are just outside the cemetery gates. There are many large and beautiful oak trees. Just where the road turns to go into the picnic grounds is a large tree on the right. Old timers named this the Justice Tree.

In the early days of Dresden when there was little merchandise to be obtained, it was not unusual for peddlers to come around. These men traveled by wagon, and because of the unusual amount of tinware strung around on the wagon, they were called tin peddlers. They brought buttons, needles, thread, braid and embroidery, and some nicer dress goods. One of these peddlers showed up and in his stock was some rather good-looking cloth. One man was strongly attracted towards this dress material, so he followed the peddler and that night killed him and pushed his body into a ditch by the side of the road. Next day the wagon and his body were found.

For some reason or other suspicion was directed towards this man and a search of his cabin revealed the peddler's merchandise. He was brought to the stores at Old Dresden and tried by the Justice-of-the-Peace Squire B. F. Carroll and sentenced him to be hanged.

A crude coffin was hastily constructed and a rope obtained. The stores were closed and everybody adjourned to the big tree just outside the cemetery where the sentence of hanging was carried out.

Stormy Weather –

Sunday afternoon, 21 Sept 1890, Dresden, "had the locks of her beauty ruffled by a severe wind storm" as reported by the *Blooming Grove Rustler*. About 4 o'clock that afternoon dark clouds with green lining appeared out of the southwest. Terrific winds hit the area and a small cyclone soon passed thru. The old hotel, a large two-story frame building, was unroofed but otherwise, uninjured. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church was completely destroyed. The damage to the cotton crop was enormous. The fields had been white with open bolls. The wind

blew the bolls out on the ground and the rain pounded it in destroying the crop. The Presbyterian church was never rebuilt.

Silver City

Texas State Highway 31 and FM 55

Silver City is a farming community at the junction of State Highway 31 and FM 55, two miles north of Purdon. It was established before the Civil War. Supposedly, local farmers began referring to the settlement as Silver City after an incident with a German merchant who during the War refused to accept Confederate currency and demanded silver coinage instead. At its height during the 1920s and early 1930s, Silver City included a cotton gin, a church, gas station, and two stores. In 1940 its population was reported as twenty-five, but it began to decline after World War II, and by the mid-1960s the town consisted of a store, a cemetery, and a few houses. In 1990 Silver City was a dispersed rural community. The population, however, increased to 100 in 2000.



Navarro Mills

FM667 @ Navarro Mills Lake dam

“As the buffalo goes, so go the Indians of Navarro County.”

The Tonkawah tribe had their homes on Richland Creek. The waters of the Navarro Mills Lake now cover their camp site, the last tribe of Native Americans in Navarro County. There were approximately 800 in this tribe when they left in 1856. (Most the Tonkawah from across Texas were relocated to the Brazos River Reservation in Texas about this time; later to be relocated to Oklahoma around 1881.) The “Tonks” were a peaceable tribe and were descendants of the Caddo tribes of Texas.

Navarro Mills was settled in the 1850s and became known as the site of the first flour mill in Navarro County, the location being approximately halfway between the towns of Dresden and Spring Hill. The town soon included a post office (from 1874 to 1891), several businesses including a blacksmith shop, a general store, and, naturally, a saloon, and by the early 20th century, it had two schools, one for white students, one for Black students. Settlers traveled from all over Navarro County and adjacent counties to get their flour. At times this could take a week and for entertainment horse racing became a popular sport.

The Navarro Mills was located near and below the present location of the dam on Treadwell Branch before it flows into Richland Creek. The only covered bridge in Navarro County (a toll bridge) was located just south of Navarro Mills at Richland Creek.

In 1891 there was a school north of Navarro Mills named Alliance. In 1895 the name was changed to Alliance Hall. By 1901 there was a school named Navarro Mills. In 1917 Alliance Hall consolidated with Navarro Mills to become Alliance Hall School District No. 75. Alliance Hall consolidated with Blooming Grove in 1938.

In the 1950s, community leaders in Corsicana and Navarro County recognized the need for a larger water supply and flood control. This led to the construction of Navarro Mills Lake, beginning in January 1959 and the dam across Richland Creek was completed in May 1963. The lake's construction resulted in the flooding of some existing lands and structures,

including parts of the original town. Today, Navarro Mills is a dispersed community with a church, cemetery, and a few scattered houses.

Bigfoot in Texas

Navarro Mills, Navarro County

Some of the highest number of documented sightings of Bigfoot in Texas are along the Red River and in Navarro County, most notably near Trinidad on the banks of the Trinity River, and Navarro Mills.

The Navarro County sightings have come to the attention of the Texas Bigfoot Research Conservancy, a non-profit scientific-research organization dedicated to testing the hypothesis that a large, undocumented primate species does exist. Sightings were thoroughly researched and the witnesses were found to be creditable, their stories plausible. Over the years the group has collected witness testimony, plaster casts of what might be Bigfoot tracks, hair samples, and compelling but inconclusive photographs.

Many consider the area around Navarro Mills and the Lake the home of the Texas Bigfoot clan.

Raleigh

near present day intersection of FM667 and FM744

Raleigh was an early settlement in the southwestern part of Navarro County. Raleigh's post office was established in 1900. Raleigh had a church, grist mill, blacksmith shop, and a school. Raleigh Cemetery, located approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ mile east on Navarro County Road NW3020, was first recorded in county records not till 1885 but the first marked grave is of Louretty Frost (1852-1854).

Emmett, Texas

FM744 and FM639

The Emmett community was settled sometime after the War Between the States by the Osburn and Goodson families. A post office was established in 1888. The community grew so that by 1890 it had two combo corn mill / cotton gins, a grocery store, a school, a church, a blacksmith shop and a local population of 250. With the establishing of Frost in 1887 and the railroad coming thru Frost, the population drifted toward Frost with Emmett hanging on as a farmer's community. The post office closed in 1905. In the 1930's the community was less than 120 in population with only a few stores remaining, a school, a church, and the cemetery. After the Great War (World War I) the remaining stores had closed and the school consolidated with Frost. All that remains of Emmett is the Prairie Grove Baptist Church (now Emmett Church) and the Prairie Grove Cemetery.

Pelham, Texas

1½ mile south on FM744 from the FM744 (to Malone) / FM1946 (to Irene) split

Pelham was settled in 1866 by newly freed slaves on what was first called Forks of the Creek, with Richland, White Rock and Ash Creeks merging just to the south (now under Navarro Mills Lake). Many of the settlers walked from Tennessee taking about 3 years to complete the journey having to stop and work to earn their traveling money. A post office was granted in 1898 and the postmaster's wife renamed the town Pelham for her home in Alabama.

In 1877 the Wesley Methodist Church was formed (the current structure build in 1934), followed by Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church formed in 1905 and Union Baptist Church in 1916.

The Ash Creek School District No. 105 was formed in 1899 at the Wesley Methodist Church, relocating to a two-story brick structure near the cemetery in 1908, replaced in 1921 with a new 12-grade school that was able to send many students on to college. This school was replaced in 1962 but the high school closed in 1965 and by 1968 the remaining school consolidated with Dawson ISD.

Pelham is an agricultural community, but it flourished during the oil boom of Navarro County from the 1890s thru 1920s gaining a post office (until 1908), schools, cotton gin, stores, a café, a gas station, and a telephone company. The Pelham Telephone System operated for the folks who had a telephone using a single party line. The Pelham Cotton Gin was built in 1920 but burned in 1931. Its population peaked around 350 in 1926 but declined to a fifth of that during the Great Depression.

The Pelham Community History Museum is housed in the old school of 1899 (in 1922/23 becoming the community and lodge hall).

Museum:

Open by appointment

Call: (254) 678-3233

Irene, Texas

FM308 and FM1946

Settlement of the area around Irene began around 1848. Sam Houston had signed treaties with the Indians of the area in 1846 moving them out and opening it up for settlers, but there weren't many Indians in this particular area [more down toward the Brazos River; see Fort Graham (now under Lake Whitney's northern shore) history]. One of the earliest settlers was Edwin Zollicoffer (of Alabama), purchasing a large track of acreage and using slave labor, cleared and built homes, a gristmill, and a cotton gin. The area became known as Zollicoffer's Mill. In the early 1870's brothers J.T., Everette, and Ramsey Armstrong, Methodist ministers also from Alabama, moved into the area with a small following of additional settlers. By 1876 J.T. Armstrong built a general mercantile. In 1878 the area gained a post office, which was named Irene, supposedly suggested by one of the Armstrong brothers to honor his daughter. A one-room school was built in the late 1870's. By 1896 the community reported a population of 100 with businesses including a drugstore and two gin/mill operations.

In 1903 the International & Great Northern Railroad (I&GN) extended its tracks from Waco thru Leroy, Penelope, Malone, to Irene, and on to Mertens, Italy, and up to Maypearl where it met the I&GN tracks coming down from Fort Worth thru Everman, Retta, Lillian, Venus and Maypearl. (The I&GN was fond of using family female names for towns it could develop.) Typical of railroad expansions of the day, the I&GN's affiliate Smith Land and Improvement Company bought and sold lots in Irene, improving the community with more substantial buildings and creating a shipping point for local farmers and ranchers. By the mid 1920's the local population had grown to 400 and a bank and water system had been established. But with the mechanization of farms and ranches, improvements in roads and access to larger towns, Irene began to fade. The Missouri Pacific Railroad (successor to the I&GN) pulled up the tracks in the late 1960's.

Irene was visited by the President of the United States three times.[‡]

[‡]Well - actually FDR in his travels rode his train thru Irene three times during the World War II years.



International & Great Northern Railway Irene Depot



Irene School, 1927

Hotel Irene (1905 – burned 1910)

Irene gin



Brown Batton's Store – Irene



Brown Batton's Store - Irene TX

J.M. Lewis General Merchandises

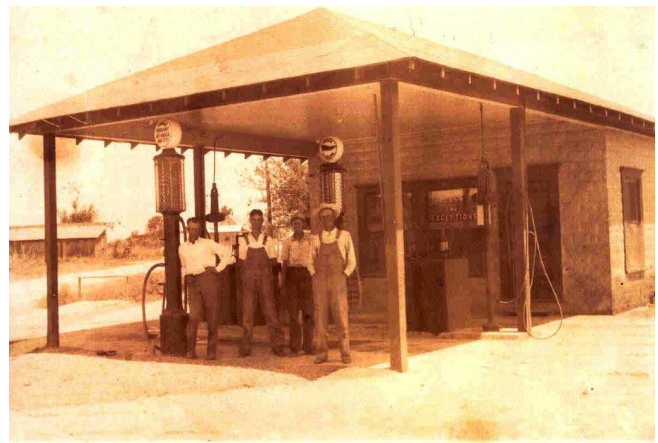


Joe & Bob Mason's Store (~1910)

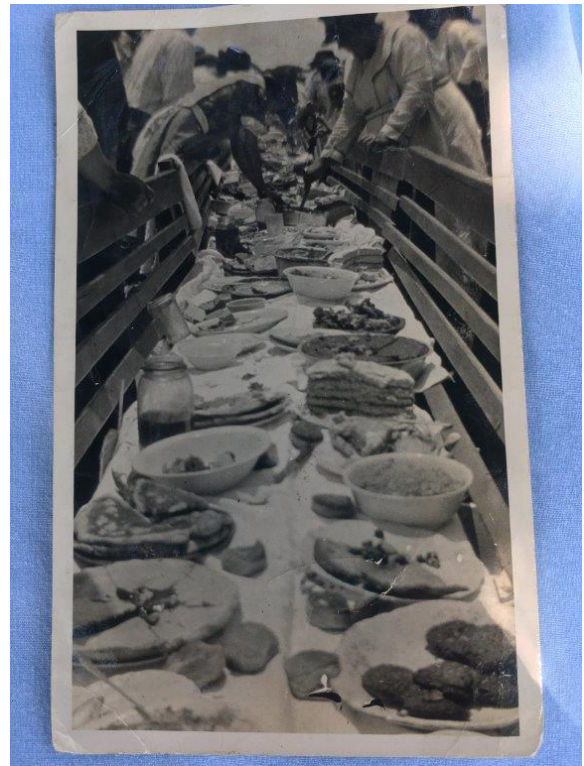


Joe & Bob Mason's Store - Irene Texas, approx. 1900 - 1910
Left to right, Joe Mason, Jim Dale, Henry Batton, Langgard, Bob Mason

Sinclair Service Station



Salem Church Annual Meeting and Dinner on the Grounds



Mertens, Texas

Texas State Highway 22 and FM308

The Mertens settlement was founded in the far northeastern corner of Hill County in 1894 by Mr. A.L. Coleman who had a cotton yard in the area by 1893, but some claim the town was founded by Mr. J.K. Walling. Mr. Walling had been the first settler in the area, arriving from Tennessee and was farming in the area on 135 acres on Richland Creek in 1884. Mr. Coleman arrived from Mississippi, settling 100 acres on what is now Mertens in the late 1880's. The St. Louis, Arkansas, and Texas Railway (later St. Louis & Southwestern (Cotton Belt Route) Railroad) came thru in 1887 from Corsicana on its way to Hillsboro and had a siding on Mr. Walling's property, the railroad naming it Mertens for the wife of the engineer of the first train. Mr. Walling built a general store, acted as the railroad station agent and as postmaster. The community grew to 75 by 1890 with several businesses, doctors, carpenters, general stores, blacksmith, gristmill, and cotton gin. But the bigger boom came when the International & Great Northern Railroad (I&GN) came north from Waco in 1902-1903, from Irene and continued north to Italy, to meet their line they were building south from Fort Worth at Maypearl. One can find bits and pieces of an argument between Coleman, Walling, the Cotton Belt, and the I&GN railroads on the plotting of the town and how it came to be located where it is now east of the old Mertens siding but not enough to put together the whole story. But being a railroad intersection was a big boom for the community, the population growing to 340 in the 1920's. An Interlocking Tower No. 181 (railroad crossing control tower) protected the crossing of the east-west Cotton Belt and the north-south I&GN railroads. The town had their first bank by 1902 and a second by 1910. The community incorporated as a city in 1913 and built a high school in 1914 (later to merge with Frost ISD in 1948). The city quickly grew to include six churches, a weekly newspaper, waterworks (1930), and two cotton gins (one was lost to a tornado in 1944 and the Williams Gin moved up TX22 to a location splitting between Mertens and Frost in 1978). The city was doing so well they had electric power and concrete sidewalks by 1916. And when improvements to TX22 came thru they built in 1936 an overpass over the I&GN RR that lasted until 1979. The Cotton Belt abandoned the Corsicana – Hillsboro route in 1940, and the I&GN (now under Missouri Pacific) abandoned in 1967.

Population of the area around 1890 was 75 but the city grew to 637 by 1929 but was to decline to 200 by 1943 (following the Depression and changes to the agricultural economy and mechanization, plus improved roads and availability of automobiles for access to the larger

towns). Since 1980 population has been around 110 folks and holding. You can still see the brick Masonic Lodge and Eastern Star Chapter building and the old City Park in old downtown a block south and east of the highway intersection.



Milford, Texas

US Highway 77 and FM308

Though initial settlement of the area occurred in the 1840s, in the early 1850s several men from Cherokee County (Rusk) came to the Mill Creek valley and bought land from Ellis County landowner Colonel Arvin Wright at fifty cents an acre. The new landowners arrived with their families in 1853. In 1854 Wright, William R. Hudson, and J. M. Higgins laid out town lots atop a ridge just south of the creek, and Hudson named the new community Milford after a factory town near Boston, Massachusetts he had read about. In 1853 the first house, Hudson's combined residence and general store, was built; Hudson was also the first postmaster when a post office was granted the next year. A two-story stone schoolhouse built in 1853 served as a church and community hall until it burned during the War Between the States. The first school in Ellis County was organized at Milford in 1855. The Old School Presbyterians organized in June 1855, the Milford Baptist Church organized in July 1855, and the Cumberland Presbyterians organized in 1855. A gristmill began operation in the community in 1857. Milford incorporated in 1888, with W. R. McDaniel as the first mayor. Two years later, in 1890, the Dallas & Waco Railway tracks reached the community of 150 and established Milford as an important shipping point for area cotton farmers.

By 1892 Milford had a population of 800, three churches, a weekly newspaper (the *Courier in 1890*), a bank, a hotel, two cotton gins, some two dozen other businesses, and two schools – Mollie Poe's private Lone Star Institute and the community-financed Milford Academy.

In 1902 the Presbyterian Synod of Texas accepted the town's offer to open the Texas Presbyterian College for Girls in Milford. For the next twenty years the town flourished.

During the Great War (World War I) Milford provided numerous young men, many performing heroically, even an air ace, with many now buried in the Milford Cemetery.

In 1888-1890 the Dallas & Waco Railway Company (as a subsidiary of the Missouri Pacific Co.) built thru Ellis County creating an alternate route from Denison thru Dallas, thru Waxahachie, Italy, Milford, to Hillsboro (versus thru Fort Worth). By 1913 the rail line of the Dallas to Waco electric interurban railway, the Southern Traction Company, soon to be Texas Electric Railway (familarly referred to as "The Interurban") had reached Milford from Waxahachie and Dallas and on down to Waco, running down the middle of Main Street. With the railway connections, in

a few years the population soared to 1,200. Milford began a slow decline during the Great Depression. The Presbyterian college closed in 1929 because of lagging enrollment, and by 1931 the population of Milford was 747. The population continued to decline over the next several decades, especially after World War II with better roads between Dallas and Waco for transportation of farm goods, improved and more efficient farm and ranch equipment requiring less manual labor. The Interurban pulled out in 1948 (you can faintly still see the markings of the tracks down the center of Main Street / US77 and the rails at the depot on the east side of Main and Crossmain Streets). The Missouri, Kansas, and Texas (KATY) was bought by Union Pacific thru its subsidiary Missouri Pacific (MoPac) in 1988-1989. Lines south of Italy were soon abandoned.

The town reached a low of 490 population in 1968 and thirty businesses. In 1990 Milford, with good roads in US77 and I-35E had a population of 711 and has remained in that population.

In November 2013, approximately 1½ miles south of town, just off FM308 a gas pipeline was punctured resulting in an explosion and fire that forced the evacuation of the whole town. It also forced the postponement of the high school's 6-man football playoff game as they could not retrieve their gear.





Milford Hotel (photo in 1975)



Presbyterian Church (photo 1975)



First Baptist Church, Milford (photo 1975)



Milford Calaboose (photo in 1975)



Texas Electric Railway Interurban 301 down Main Street, 9 Sept 1941

Texas Presbyterian College for Girls ~



Texas Presbyterian College, also known as Texas Presbyterian College for Girls, was a women's college and high school in Milford, Texas. It was founded by the Texas Presbyterian Synod. The Milford community had offered for the proposed school \$25,000 and ten acres of land. The cornerstone was laid 15 May 1902 and the school opened for its first session 24

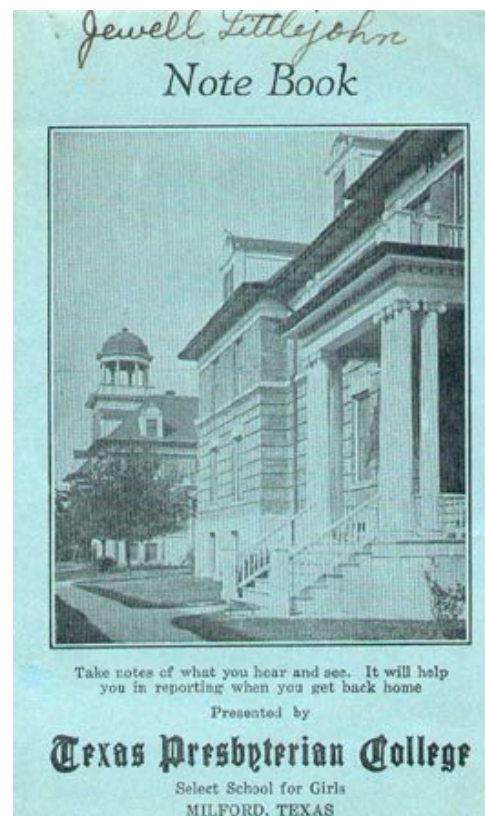
September 1902 with thirty-three boarding students, twenty-two day students, and nine faculty members. The school's motto was "Christian Women for Christian Homes".

The first president was Henry Clay Evans. The school had opened with no regular financing and a \$5885 debt. Student fees did not cover costs. The school also suffered in that it had inadequate boarding facilities and thus had to turn away potential students. The Cumberland Presbyterian Church made donations to the institution but it was not until an aggressive fund-raising campaign to establish an endowment was held in 1917 that Texas Presbyterian College was stable financially.

In 1911 the high school was separated into a separate academy and in 1917 the college was reorganized into a fully accredited college. Academically, two years of Bible study were required of all students.

The school opened with only the main building even though five buildings, and later seven, were planned. Only five were ever built on what would expand from ten to forty acres. In 1929 Texas Presbyterian College closed and merged with Austin College in Sherman, Texas, another Presbyterian school. Over 4,000 students attended the school during its existence.







Tesla Tower, *Out Here – huh!*

Across I-35E you will see a strange looking tower. Those now driving Tesla cars delving into their cars' legacy Nikola Tesla, might make the connection with the Tesla Wardendyffe Tower of Long Island, New York if the early 1900s.

Like the Wardendyffe Tower, this tower outside of Milford was too a research facility. In 2018, Waco based Viziv Industries experimented in harnessing the phenomenon called Zenneck Surface Wave to transmit electromagnetic waves skimming the surface around the earth. Initially the idea was the transmission of communications, navigation,

and broadcasting. Long range plans were to investigate the transmission of wireless electrical power – Tesla's dream.

Viziv filed for bankruptcy in 2021.



