

HISTORY OF LAMPASAS

The Lampasas River was given its name by early Spanish explorers who were in the region in the early 1700's. Some believe the name was derived from a mission named "Lampazos" in Mexico, while others suggest that it came from the Spanish name used for the "water lilies or cockleburrs" found in the vicinity. When it was officially created in 1856, the county was named for the river flowing through it, and soon thereafter, the community originally called "Burleson," took the name Lampasas.

The Spaniards, like the Indians before them, were attracted to the mineral springs along the Sulfur Creek branch of the Lampasas River, and hardy pioneer families came to avail themselves of the healing qualities of the springs. One of these families was that of Moses Hughes, who became the first known permanent resident when he built a stone house just west of Lampasas in about 1850. In 1855, George and Elizabeth Scott laid out the town which became Lampasas, and the curative power of the springs attracted entrepreneurs and speculators. Despite the hostile Indians still active in the area, the town flourished, and the usual collection of hotels, saloons, churches and schools were established. The first census of the county, in 1860, recorded a population of 872 residents. The preferred route to Lampasas from the southeastern states, which furnished the majority of settlers, was through New Orleans, to Galveston, and then on to Austin by train. They reached their final destination by stagecoach or wagon.

During the Civil War, migration was slower, but mills and other commercial enterprises prospered. With protection by the Army and other authorities reduced, Indian depredations were renewed and outlawing increased. In the period following the war, during the era of "carpetbag" government, feuds, fires, and floods destroyed property, took lives, and created a loss of confidence by the residents.

The coming of the railroad connecting Lampasas with Galveston raised the hopes and spirits of Lampasas and motivated speculators and developers. In May of 1872, the first passenger train arrived in Lampasas, cementing the Galveston/Lampasas connection that has had a long-standing influence on the community. In the five years following the arrival of the railroad, Lampasas experienced an extraordinary boom. The present courthouse was built, many of the existing downtown stone buildings were erected, and parks were established. Lampasas became not only the commercial center of the area, but the cultural, social, medical and educational Mecca also. Fine homes, some still existing today, were built to reflect the prosperity of their owners, and to provide the settings for parties and social events.

The focal point of many of the cultural activities was a large hotel, the Park, built by a syndicate of Galveston investors in 1883 to take advantage of the well-publicized curative properties of the mineral springs. The two-story frame hotel was three hundred feet long, contained two hundred electrically lighted rooms, and offered hot and cold mineral baths with separate enclosures for men and women. Remnants of the stone bath buildings still exist. A two-mile trolley, drawn along its tracks by a mule, carried passengers from the train depot to the hotel. Dancing, horse racing, shooting contests, and other amenities were available to those not "taking the waters."

Lampasas, during this period of expansion and exuberance was the birthplace of the "Farmer's Alliance." These and other organizations, groups, and political parties held their statewide meetings and conventions in the city such as Texas Banker's Association. The population by some estimates soared from ten to fifteen thousand people.

Disastrous fires destroyed a number of the downtown frame buildings in 1884, resulting in the organization of a Hook and Ladder Company. In 1885, the railroad was extended west to Brownwood, and much of the commercial activity and many of the jobs associated with a rail terminus moved with it.

The Park Hotel occupancy declined, and it was converted into a recovery clinic for alcoholics, and then into a school before it burned in early 1885. Tourism and the agricultural economy both dropped significantly. Medical science and advances in treatment of disease replaced the need for the curative properties of mineral waters.

As Lampasas entered the twentieth century it found stability and solid growth. It "modernized" its utility systems, some of its buildings, and a few homes, to keep up with technology and style. Through World War I it continued to establish itself, despite the setbacks of floods and fires, as a prosperous rural community serving a region with an agricultural economy. Two local physicians established the Rollins Brook Hospital in 1935, and it is still in operation. During World War II Camp Hood was opened twenty-five miles east of Lampasas and the community enjoyed the role of a rest and relaxation center for homesick soldiers. Camp Hood is now Fort Hood, one of the largest of U.S. military bases, and Lampasas continues to have a mutually beneficial relationship with the huge Army complex.

The locally infamous Mother's Day Flood of 1957 saw Sulphur Creek on a rampage, sending a tide of five feet or more water surging through the downtown business district. Only five lives were lost, but homes, businesses, cars, and other property, including county records of the Courthouse were destroyed or damaged. Fort Hood soldiers, the Red Cross and neighboring communities combined to help restore order, clean up, and get back to normal living. A series of levees and reservoirs were constructed to reduce the possibility of future floods.

Lampasas today is a comfortable place to live, with good schools, attractive parks along the creeks, a variety of recreational opportunities, and a solid base of agricultural and commercial

businesses. It has a modern hospital, excellent highway connections, railroad facilities, an airport capable of landing jets, and an up-to-date utility system with a good supply of water. Lampasas is an interesting place to visit and a fine place to live.

For more details see: Lampasas County Texas -Its History and its People; 1991, Lampasas Historical Commission Stories of Lampasas; reprinted 1986, Prime Baker Moses Relighting Lamplights 1974, Jonnie Ross Elsner First in Lampasas for 100 Years; 1984, First National Bank The First Century - The Texas Bankers Association; 1985, T. Harry Gatlon Taking the Waters in Texas; 2000, Janet Mace Valenza .