

# TEXAS FORTS TRAIL

R E G I O N

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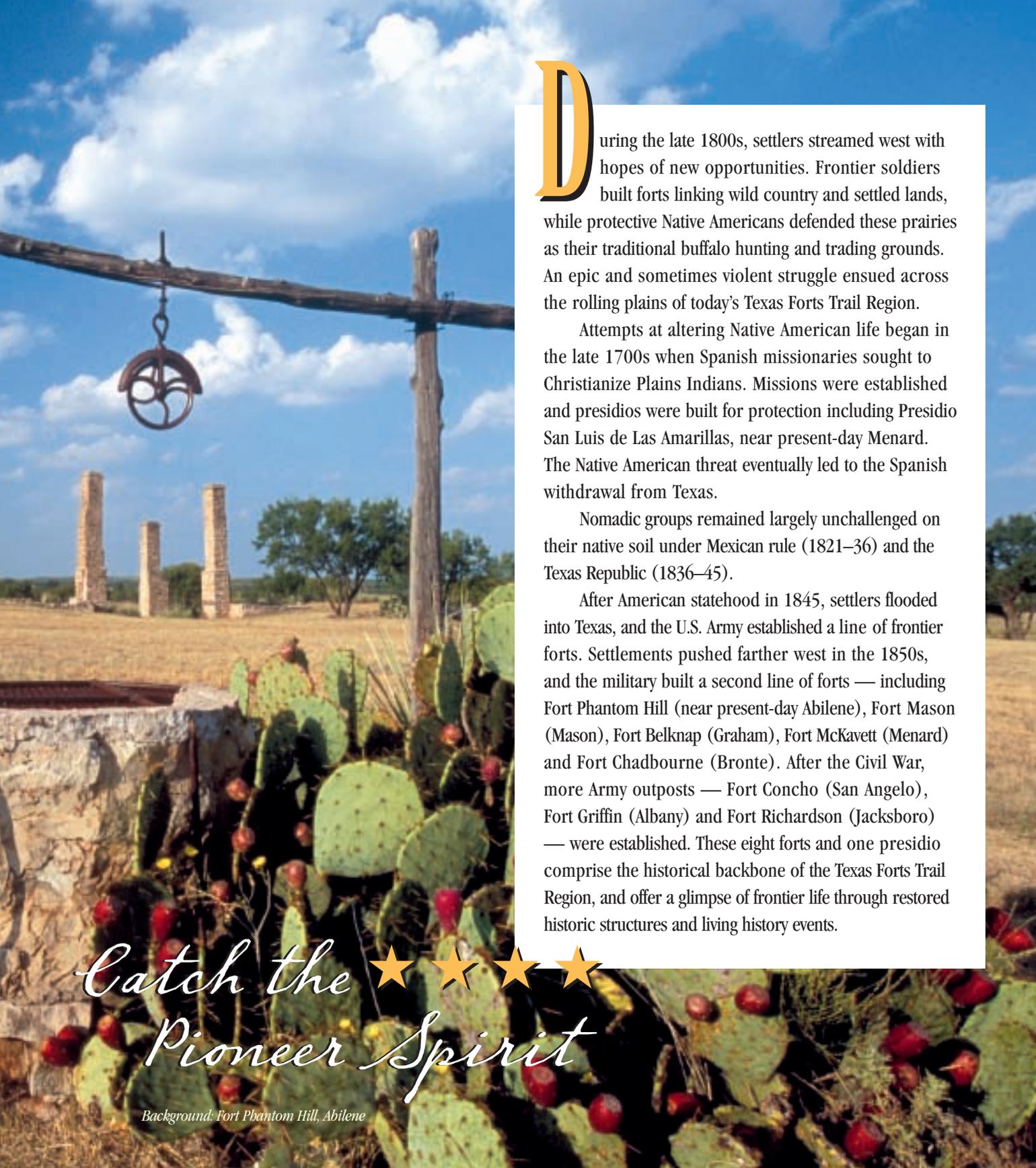
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Background: Fort McKavett, Menard

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## EXPLORING THE HERITAGE OF WEST CENTRAL TEXAS



**D**uring the late 1800s, settlers streamed west with hopes of new opportunities. Frontier soldiers built forts linking wild country and settled lands, while protective Native Americans defended these prairies as their traditional buffalo hunting and trading grounds. An epic and sometimes violent struggle ensued across the rolling plains of today's Texas Forts Trail Region.

Attempts at altering Native American life began in the late 1700s when Spanish missionaries sought to Christianize Plains Indians. Missions were established and presidios were built for protection including Presidio San Luis de Las Amarillas, near present-day Menard. The Native American threat eventually led to the Spanish withdrawal from Texas.

Nomadic groups remained largely unchallenged on their native soil under Mexican rule (1821–36) and the Texas Republic (1836–45).

After American statehood in 1845, settlers flooded into Texas, and the U.S. Army established a line of frontier forts. Settlements pushed farther west in the 1850s, and the military built a second line of forts — including Fort Phantom Hill (near present-day Abilene), Fort Mason (Mason), Fort Belknap (Graham), Fort McKavett (Menard) and Fort Chadbourne (Bronte). After the Civil War, more Army outposts — Fort Concho (San Angelo), Fort Griffin (Albany) and Fort Richardson (Jacksboro) — were established. These eight forts and one presidio comprise the historical backbone of the Texas Forts Trail Region, and offer a glimpse of frontier life through restored historic structures and living history events.

*Catch the* ★ ★ ★ ★  
*Pioneer Spirit*

*Background: Fort Phantom Hill, Abilene*

**W**estern military posts composed of wood and stone structures were grouped around an open parade ground. Buildings typically included separate housing for officers and enlisted troops, hospital and morgue, bakery and sutler's store (provisions), horse stables and storehouses. Troops used these remote outposts to launch, and recuperate from, periodic patrols across the immense Southern Plains.

Settlements often sprang up near forts for safety and Army contract work. Many were dangerous places with desperate characters.

*Experience the region's dramatic past through historic sites, museums and courthouses — as well as historic downtowns offering unique shopping, dining and entertainment.*



While millions of buffalo roamed the Great Plains in the 1870s, underpinning the Plains Indian way of life, the systematic slaughter of the animals had decimated the vast southern herd in Texas by the time the first railroads arrived in the 1880s. Buffalo bones still littered the area and railroads proved a boon to the bone trade with eastern markets, producing buttons, meal and calcium phosphate.

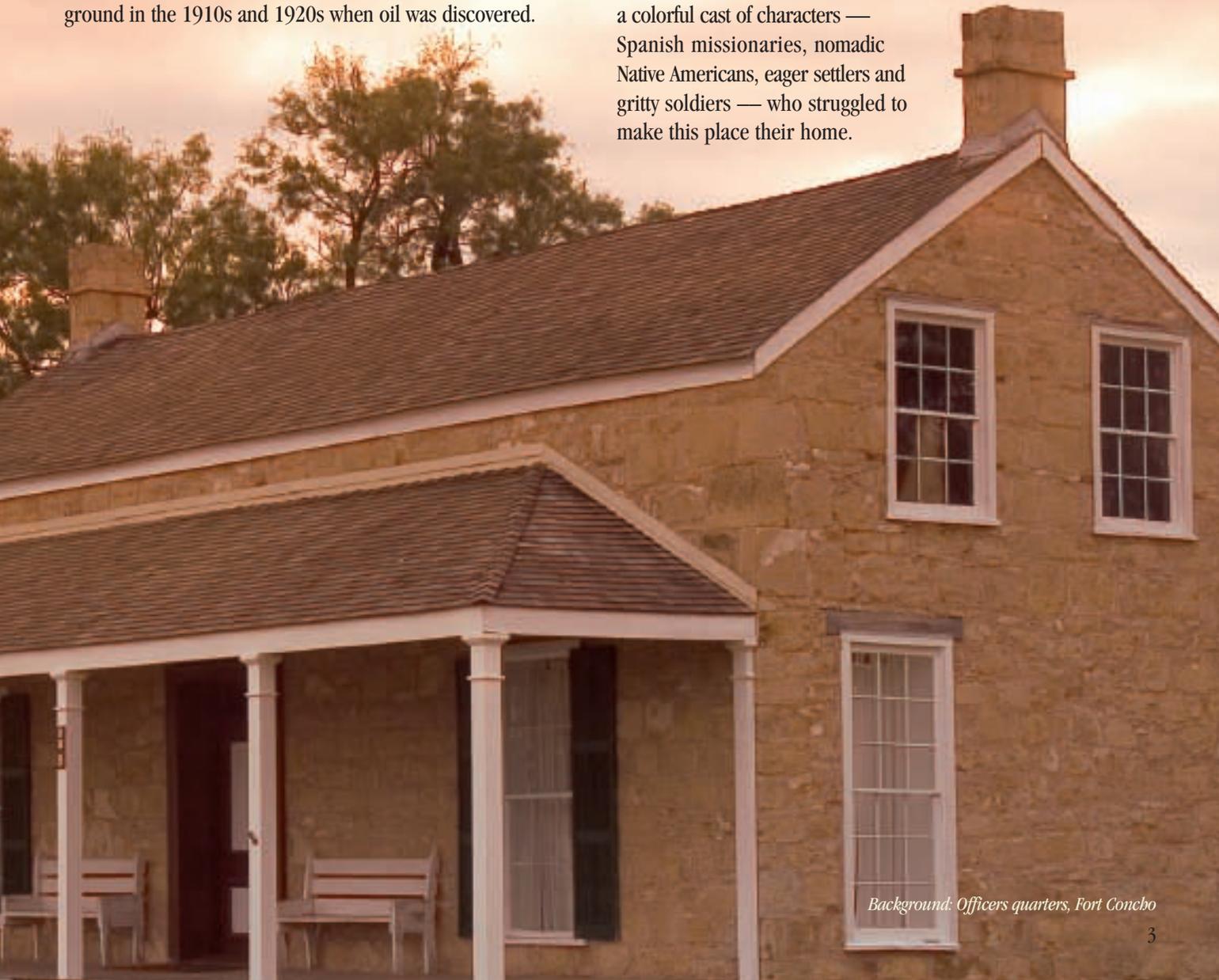
The Army had other motivations. It encouraged the kill-off as a way to drive Plains Indians onto reservations. Comanches, Kiowas and Kiowa Apaches responded with raids on settlements, wagon trains and troop movements, sometimes kidnapping individuals and stealing horses and supplies. Soldiers stationed at frontier forts launched a relentless military campaign, the Red River War of 1874–75, which forced the state's last free Native Americans onto reservations in present-day Oklahoma.

The westward push of settlements also relocated cattle drives bound for railheads in Kansas and beyond. Cattle drovers who once used the Chisholm Trail in Central Texas began using the Western Trail in the 1870s. Today, U.S. Highway 283 roughly traces the route through the heart of the Texas Forts Trail Region.

Railroad expansion gave pioneers unprecedented access to distant markets, boosting the local cattle and cotton economies. Towns formed along, or moved to, rail lines and prospered. More prosperity burst from the ground in the 1910s and 1920s when oil was discovered.

During World War II, the vast land proved perfect for military flight and infantry training bases. After the war, towns and cities swelled with new people. The economy, rooted in farming and ranching, grew with new business opportunities.

Communities in the 29 counties of the Texas Forts Trail Region invite visitors to experience the region's dramatic past through historic sites, museums and courthouses — as well as historic downtowns offering unique shopping, dining and entertainment. Along the way, visitors walk in the footsteps of a colorful cast of characters — Spanish missionaries, nomadic Native Americans, eager settlers and gritty soldiers — who struggled to make this place their home.



*Background: Officers quarters, Fort Concho*

The following cities are described in this guide and the number refers to the city's location on the map.

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**TEXAS FORTS TRAIL REGION**

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- NUMBERS ON MAP MATCH CITIES IN GUIDE
- TEXAS FORTS TRAIL
- FORT

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## ABILENE

The region's largest city, Abilene preserves the traditional heritage of the old West while providing the advantages of a contemporary city. Frontier Texas! welcomes travelers with a dramatic sight-and-sound experience of frontier life from 1780 to 1880. Animated video characters personify Spanish explorers, frontier soldiers, Comanche warriors, buffalo hunters and pioneer families. Frontier Texas! also serves as a visitors center for the city of Abilene and the Texas Forts Trail Region.



*Above: The Grace Museum, Abilene*

*Left: Spirit of the Frontier Festival, Abilene*



Housed in the 1909 Grace Hotel, The Grace Museum contains art, history and children's museums. History exhibits include a recreated 1940s boot shop, Texas and Pacific Railway memorabilia and period rooms on early-20th-century lifestyles. Just down the street is the restored Spanish Colonial Revival-style 1930 Paramount Theatre, which stages movies and live performances.

Also downtown is the 12th Armored Division Memorial Museum. Extensive displays chronicle the exploits of the "Hellcat" division which, during World War II, captured 72,000 German soldiers and liberated Nazi death camps. Airborne military heritage captures the spotlight at the Dyess Air Force Base Heritage Museum and Memorial Park. Visitors should call ahead to view 30 historic aircraft at the base's Linear Air Park.

North of town stands Fort Phantom Hill, a federal outpost (1851–54) where signs mark three restored structures and nearly a dozen ruins. The outpost's elevated site seems to flatten upon approach, hence the name "phantom" hill. During its brief duty, the garrison experienced only peaceful encounters with Plains Indians. It later served as a stop on the Butterfield Overland Mail route and as a sub-post of Fort Griffin, near Albany.

The railroad brought major changes in the 1880s. Named after the Kansas railhead, Abilene became a shipping center on the Texas and Pacific Railway. Nearby **Buffalo Gap**, once the county seat, was bypassed by the railroad and subsequently dwindled. Today, tiny Buffalo Gap has several restaurants and art-souvenir shops. The 1880 Taylor County Courthouse and jail rest on their original sites inside Buffalo Gap Historic Village. The complex of 20 relocated historic structures — including pioneer log cabins, railroad depot, blacksmith shop, schoolhouse, bank and gas station — interprets the years 1883, 1904 and 1925.

## ALBANY

Overlooking the Clear Fork of the Brazos River, Fort Griffin (1867–81) was the hub of frontier defense between Fort Richardson at Jacksboro and the mountains of Big Bend. Several cavalry and infantry regiments including Buffalo Soldier units were stationed here. Today's state historic site offers restored structures and ruins, and occasionally hosts a living history reenactment. The park also manages the Official State Longhorn herd, recalling the days of the Western Cattle Trail.

Albany boasts one of Texas' most charming historic downtowns, dominated by the restored 1883 Shackelford County Courthouse. The town celebrates its heritage each June with an outdoor musical pageant, the "Fort Griffin Fandangle," performed by local citizens since 1938. Albany is also home to one of the state's finest small-town art museums, the Old Jail Art Center. Located in an 1877 limestone jail, the museum exhibits Old World masters and contemporary Texas artists, and houses the Robert E. Nail, Jr. Archives.

1867–81  
FORT GRIFFIN



## ANSON

The settlement at Fort Phantom Hill relocated to a site that its founders mistakenly thought would be on the Texas and Pacific Railway lines. The town, and later Jones County, was named after Anson Jones, the last president of the Republic of Texas.

The Anson Jones Museum occupies the 1929 First Presbyterian Church. Displays include a miniature reproduction of the town square in 1904, Anson Jones' desk and chair, plus a host of local memorabilia. The town's post office lobby features a 12-foot mural, "Cowboy Dance," painted in 1941 by Jenne Magafan for a Depression-era federal government program employing artists. The scene depicts westerners at a frontier dance, similar to Anson's real-life Cowboys' Christmas Ball held in December since 1885.

Anson's historic district also features the restored Beaux Arts-style Jones County Courthouse, built in 1910, and the 1907 Opera House, which hosts monthly live music shows.



*Anson Post Office mural*



*Jones County Courthouse, Anson*

## BAIRD

Hundreds of thousands of cattle passed through here along the Western Cattle Trail. A local railhead was established with the arrival of the railroad in 1880, and the site was named for Texas and Pacific Railway Director Matthew Baird. The Callahan County Pioneer Museum displays early ranching and agricultural artifacts in the county courthouse basement. Surrounding the square is a historic district with more than two dozen antiques malls and stores. Baird also hosts an antiques market each June.



## BALLINGER

The Santa Fe Railway established this town in 1886 and named it after the line's attorney, William Pitt Ballinger. Railway advertisements attracted settlers, spurring a boomtown atmosphere. In 1909 a new library opened in Ballinger, courtesy of philanthropist Andrew Carnegie. The restored structure remains one of the few Carnegie libraries in Texas still used as a public library. In 1911 the town erected a Spanish Revival-style Santa Fe depot, now used for city offices and the chamber of commerce. The restored 1939 city hall/fire station also embodies Spanish Revival architecture and now houses municipal offices.

Rising from the spacious Runnels County Courthouse lawn is the Charles H. Noyes Monument. Created in 1919 by famed Italian sculptor Pompeo Coppini, the life-sized bronze statue depicts a horse beside a young Charles H. Noyes, a rancher's son who died in a range accident. Near the square is the Memory Lane Car Museum, home to more than a dozen classic cars and early oil company signage.



*Memory Lane Car Museum, Ballinger*

## BRADY

Brady sits near the geographical center of Texas. Established on Brady Creek in the mid-1870s along the Western Cattle Trail, the town quickly became a cattle-shipping point when rail service arrived around 1900. The same year, the Romanesque-style McCulloch County Courthouse was built. A decade later, Brady's town square added a new county jail, a three-story red-brick Romanesque Revival building now housing extensive historical artifacts in the Heart of Texas Historical Museum. The museum includes information on Brady's World War II prisoner of war camp and Curtis Field, a World War II flight training facility. Strains of country music fill Brady's Heart of Texas Country Music Museum, where visitors view stars' personal items including Loretta Lynn's gowns and shoes, Patsy Cline's stage dress and Jim Reeves' tour bus. Exhibits also highlight local country music legends Big Bill Lister and Cowboy Slim Rinehart. Brady's historic Santa Fe depot has been refurbished as an art gallery and restaurant.

## BRECKENRIDGE

Named the seat of Stephens County in 1876, the town remained a quiet trading center until a 1920s oil boom, when it grew from 1,500 to 30,000 people in one year. Growth required a larger courthouse, and the current Classical Revival edifice was completed in 1926. A portal of the older courthouse — an Italianate 1883 structure designed by noted architect J.E. Flanders — still stands as a reminder of former glory.

Wall murals honor the past on half a dozen downtown buildings. The murals depict boomtown scenes inspired by early photos of local photographer Basil Clemmons.

Many of Clemmons' photos are in the Swenson Memorial Museum. Housed in the Beaux Arts-style 1920 First National Bank building, the museum features pioneer artifacts and traveling exhibits. An adjacent annex chronicles the oil boom.

Located at the municipal airport, the Breckenridge Aviation Museum recalls World War II with several restored fighter planes, including a Grumman F8F-1 Bearcat and the FM-2P Wildcat.



*Swenson Memorial Museum,  
Breckenridge*

## BRONTE

Twelve miles north of Bronte lies Fort Chadbourne (1852–68), a frontier post named for Lt. Theodore L. Chadbourne, a U.S. soldier killed in the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846–48. Due to the fort's location at the frontier's edge, buffalo stampedes and Native American skirmishes were common, including a raid inside the fort in 1856. The site also served as a stop on the Butterfield Overland Mail route. A water shortage contributed to the fort's abandonment. In 1874 Thomas Odom bought the Fort Chadbourne site, and eight generations of his family used remaining stone structures for ranching operations. Today, heritage tourists can visit the fort's ruins and two restored buildings — a barracks and an officers quarters. Fort Chadbourne hosts living history reenactments each May.

## BROWNWOOD

In the early 1900s, cotton was king and Brownwood was the major cotton-buying center west of Fort Worth. The economy burgeoned in the 1920s during an oil boom and again during World War II with the construction of Camp Bowie, a vast military training installation. The Brown County Museum of History interprets these and other aspects of local history in a fortress-like Romanesque Revival jail built in 1902.

Two railroads once served Brownwood. Today, the recently restored 1909 Santa Fe Railroad depot and adjoining Harvey House restaurant contain the chamber of commerce. Nearby sits the massive Santa Fe steam engine #1080, first put into service in 1902.

Howard Payne University offers tours of the Douglas MacArthur Academy of Freedom. The facility has display and study rooms featuring personal items from Gen. Douglas MacArthur, replicas of Egyptian tomb statues and a replica of an English castle hall.

# ★ FORT CHADBOURNE ★

## 1852–68



*Fort Chadbourne, Bronte*

## CISCO

Henry Mobley was lucky to build his two-story hotel in 1916. When oil blew in a year later, the Mobley stayed so full it rented rooms in eight-hour shifts. In 1919 a young entrepreneur named Conrad Hilton arrived to buy a Cisco bank. When the deal fell through, Hilton ventured

into the hotel business, buying the Mobley instead. Upon purchase of his first hotel, he “dreamed of Texas wearing a chain of Hilton hotels.” Exhibits at the Mobley

recount the Hilton legacy. Other exhibits recall local history, including the famous Santa Claus bank robbery of 1927 where a quartet of men, one donning a Santa Claus suit, stole \$12,400, killed two police officers and prompted the largest manhunt in the state at the time. The restored hotel also contains the chamber of commerce and offers performances by the Cisco Junior College theater department.



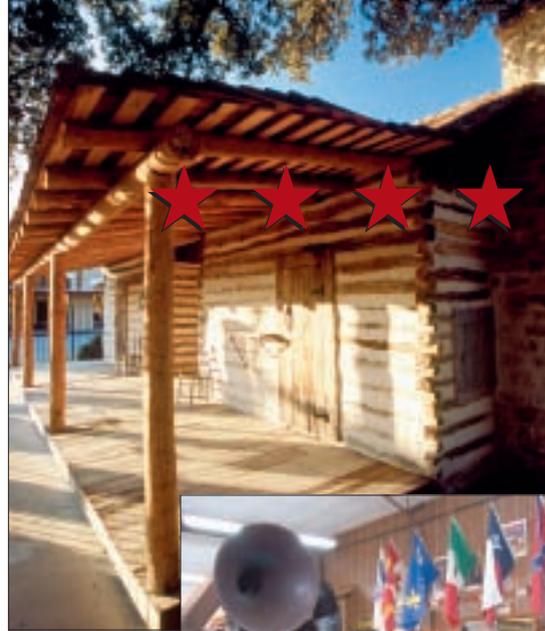
*Conrad Hilton Museum, Cisco*

Cisco's 1915 city hall houses the Lela Latch Lloyd Museum. Named after a local historian, schoolteacher and author, the museum interprets artifacts dating from prehistoric times to the town's formative years. Items range from a 1,000-year-old Anasazi clay pot to a collection of antique metal detectors.

## COMANCHE

The town and county are named for the Comanche Native Americans who dominated the plains for a century. A military road named the “Corn Trail” came through in 1850, supplying area forts and encouraging settlement. By 1857, Cora, a town along the road, became county seat, a title relinquished to Comanche in 1859. Today, this Texas Main Street city's refurbished downtown centers around the 1939 Moderne-style Comanche County Courthouse. Beside it sits the relocated log Old Cora Courthouse, one of the oldest standing wooden courthouses in Texas.

The Comanche County Historical Museum chronicles county history from frontier times to the mid-1900s. Exhibits include a blacksmith shop, filling station and doctor's office. A replica saloon interprets the original Comanche saloon where gunslinger John Wesley Hardin killed a deputy in 1874.



*Old Cora  
Courthouse,  
Comanche*



*Comanche County Museum, Comanche*

## DE LEON

Situated near the Leon River, the town was laid out by the Texas Central Railroad in 1881. Cotton and peanut production made it an agricultural center in the early 1900s. In 1914 the town held the Peach and Melon Festival, a tradition which still draws crowds each August for a parade, domino tournament, fiddlers contest and watermelon seed spitting competition.

A trio of heritage sites make downtown De Leon a nostalgic stop. Weaver Drug offers a 1920s soda fountain that still dishes up old-fashioned milkshakes and floats. The Blue Moon Café has fine dining in one of the town's oldest structures, the 1892 Higginbotham Brothers building. And the Terrill Antique Car Museum displays 10 drivable vintage vehicles (1901–41), including a 1915 REO Speedwagon and a rare steam-powered 1901 Coffin carriage. Also exhibited are 90 vintage hubcaps from the 1920s.

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*Opposite page, background: Fort Griffin, Albany.  
Insets, clockwise from top: Presidio San Luis de Las Amarillas, Menard;  
Living historians depict Fort Phantom Hill soldiers, Abilene;  
Fort Richardson, Jacksboro.*

**T**he heart of this region, eight frontier forts and one presidio, testify to the state's early pioneer days. Some provide a complete picture through beautifully restored grounds and buildings, while others only hint at past events with crumbling walls and solitary chimneys. The forts reflect the stories of the people — African Americans, Anglo Americans and European immigrants — who traveled westward to Texas' remote regions. As frayed tents gave way to barracks, existing towns were revitalized, and new communities sprang up alongside federal posts. Explore West Central Texas' famous forts, discover unique towns and experience a day in the life of a frontier soldier.

- Fort Belknap, Graham
- Fort Chadbourne, Bronte
- Fort Concho, San Angelo
- Fort Griffin, Albany
- Fort McKavett, Menard
- Fort Mason, Mason
- Fort Phantom Hill, Abilene
- Fort Richardson, Jacksboro
- Presidio San Luis  
de Las Amarillas, Menard



*Heart of the Frontier —*

## DUBLIN

Dublin is the official Irish Capital of Texas, but the origin of the town's name is debatable — possibly from the capital of Ireland or for the double-log cabins used by early settlers.

There's no doubt that Dublin is home to the world's oldest Dr Pepper plant. Built in 1891, the Dublin plant is also the only bottler still making Dr Pepper using the original pure cane sugar formula. The plant offers tours, complete with free samples.

A small museum displays Dr Pepper memorabilia — vintage signs, bottles and clocks, plus classic posters of the Pretty Peggy Pepper advertising icon. Old Doc's Soda Shop, a restored 1920s soda fountain at the plant, serves food and of course, Dr Pepper.

Housed in a former newspaper office (ca. 1900), the Dublin Historical Museum showcases common and unusual artifacts — from dairy equipment to an electric shoe-fitting machine and from historic photos to paintings by native son and noted artist Ed Bryan. One exhibit honors Dublin native and golf legend Ben Hogan. Nearby Wright Historical Park features the 1882 Miller Grist Mill and the 1855 Turnbow-Barbee log cabin.

From 1937 to 1959, Dublin was also famous for its World Championship Rodeo, which supplied stock for top rodeos. The Rodeo Heritage Museum chronicles rodeo history with memorabilia, historic photos and films including one showing cattle herded through downtown to Dublin's railhead.



*Dr Pepper Museum, Dublin*

## EASTLAND

The 1917 Eastland County oil boom put this county seat on the map. In 1920 noted Texas architect Henry T. Phelps designed the First State Bank, which now houses the Eastland County Historical Museum, a repository of area history. That same year, town founder C.U. Connellee built a Western-themed Art Deco theater for films and stage shows. Now the Majestic Theatre, the restored venue hosts first-run films and stage productions.

Eastland made national news in 1928 when the current Art Deco-style courthouse replaced the town's 1897 courthouse. The old structure's cornerstone was opened, and, according to witnesses, inside lay a Texas-horned toad, supposedly still alive after a 31-year slumber. Dubbed Old Rip, the toad died after a nationwide tour and was enshrined in a glass-top casket, still on view at the courthouse.

## EDEN

Incorporated in 1910, this hunting community was named for pioneer rancher Frederick Ede, a native of England. When England came under German attack during World War II, an Eden native came to the rescue. Gen. Ira C. Eaker commanded the U.S. Army's Eighth Air Force bombing campaign against Germany. He also invented navigational devices and piloted the first transcontinental flight solely dependent on aerial refueling.

An exhibit at the Don Freeman Memorial Museum recounts Eaker's distinguished career. The museum also tracks Concho County development from the frontier to the present.



*Don Freeman Memorial Museum, Eden*



*Opposite page, background: Railway Museum of San Angelo. Insets from top: Bud Matthews Switch of the Texas Central Railway, Albany; Santa Fe depot, Brady.*

**B**y the end of the 1870s, the nation was rising from an economic depression, and the long-awaited southern transcontinental railroad was heading to Texas. The Texas and Pacific Railway, stalled between Dallas and Fort Worth until 1876, worked its way across West Texas, connecting with the Southern Pacific near Sierra Blanca in 1881. A major economic force, the railroad industry created, destroyed or nurtured towns. Today, visit a museum, gather information at a visitors center or grab a bite to eat in a building once bustling with pioneers and travelers. The following Texas Forts Trail Region communities celebrate their railroad history with restored and revitalized train depots.

- Abilene
- Baird
- Ballinger
- Brady
- Brownwood
- De Leon
- Menard
- Ranger
- San Angelo

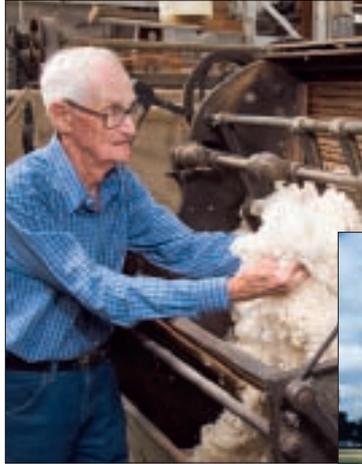


*All Aboard —*

## ELDORADO

In 1930 rail service finally reached Eldorado, where sheep production was rising along this arid crest of the Edwards Plateau. Established in 1939, West Texas Woolen Mills flourished under U.S. Army contracts for wool blankets during World War II. Eldorado became the top wool-processing center in the Southwest. The mill closed in the 1980s, but visitors can arrange a tour at the chamber of commerce of the landmark mill's looms and carding machines, some dating from the 1880s.

Eldorado is the seat of Schleicher County, which was established in 1887 and named for German immigrant and engineer Gustav Schleicher. Schleicher, who weighed more than 300 pounds, was also a U.S. congressman. The three-foot-wide chair he used in the House sits in the Schleicher County Historical Museum, housed in the 1922 Eldorado Hardware Store.



*West Texas Woolen Mills, Eldorado*



*Fort Belknap, Graham*



*Downtown Graham*

## GOLDTHWAITE

The Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railway established Goldthwaite in 1885 and named it after a railway official. One of the town's first stone buildings, built in 1893, now houses the Mills County Historical Museum. The museum offers natural history exhibits and period room settings including a post office, drugstore, beauty shop, general store, schoolhouse and dentist office. The refurbished structure also displays a law enforcement exhibit and houses the chamber of commerce.

Fifteen miles east, the community of **Star** boasts a 1940s stone building that has served as an electric company office, gas station, feed store and Masonic Lodge hall. It's now home to the Star Historical Museum, which preserves local memorabilia and historic photos.

Twenty miles southwest, the last vernacular wire highway bridge constructed in Texas spans the Colorado River in the community of **Regency**. The restored Regency Suspension Bridge remains one of the state's last suspension bridges still in use. Completed in 1939, the 340-foot, single-lane bridge on County Road 574 swings on wire cables 25 feet above the river.

## GRAHAM

The 1932 Young County Courthouse anchors this Texas Main Street city's spacious square. A picturesque downtown features antiques stores, boutique shops and historic bed-and-breakfast lodging nearby. Entertainment venues showing current movies include the 1919 National Theatre and the 1950s Graham Drive-In Theater.

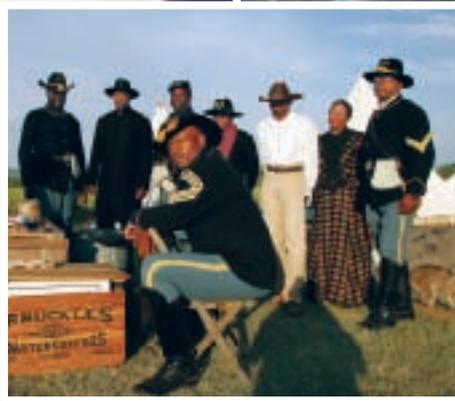
The town's restored 1936 post office and its Depression-era mural by Alexander Hogue evoke the 1930s oil boom. The Art Deco structure houses the Old Post Office Museum and Art Center, a history and fine arts museum. The museum highlights the Cattle Raisers Association, which was created in 1877 to prevent cattle rustling. High-flying heritage awaits at Graham's airport. The Robert E. Richeson Commemorative Air Force Cactus Squadron Museum displays World War II artifacts, and its hangar contains the world's only flyable Curtiss SB2C-5 Helldiver, a 1942 Navy dive bomber.

*Opposite page, background: Buffalo Soldier reenactor, photo credit: TPWD. Insets, clockwise from top: Young Buffalo Soldier, photo credit: Old Jail Museum; Fort Griffin reenactors, photo credit: TxDOT; Henry O. Flipper, photo credit: U.S. House of Representatives.*

# We Can, We Will —

**I**n 1866, Congress reorganized the U.S. Army and authorized several African American regiments, including the Ninth United States Cavalry. These Buffalo Soldiers, reportedly named by Native American tribes for their courage and bravery, were typically assigned to desolate posts; however, they received the unprecedented benefit of the same work and pay as Caucasian soldiers.

Charged with protecting and defending the vast region of West Texas, the Ninth Cavalry kept the vital San Antonio-El Paso road safe for travel and commerce, protecting it from Native American raiders, cattle thieves and bandits. Constant patrols, pursuits and frequent bloody clashes turned the cavalry into a tough and combat-wise regiment, proving their effectiveness and vanquishing any doubt of their abilities.



## GRAHAM *(continued)*

In 1941 the first major reservoir on the Brazos River was completed. Possum Kingdom Lake snakes its way up the Brazos, within 14 miles of Graham, offering scenic outdoor recreation at county parks and at the 1,615-acre Possum Kingdom State Park.

Thirteen miles northwest of Graham lies Fort Belknap (1851–67). The 1850s garrison safeguarded travelers along a network of frontier trails, most notably the Butterfield Overland Mail route. State troops of the Frontier Regiment occupied the post during the Civil War. After the war, Fort Griffin was completed nearby, and Fort Belknap was abandoned in 1867. A handful of buildings remain in the park-like setting, and a museum in the old commissary chronicles frontier history.



*Possum Kingdom State Park, Graham*

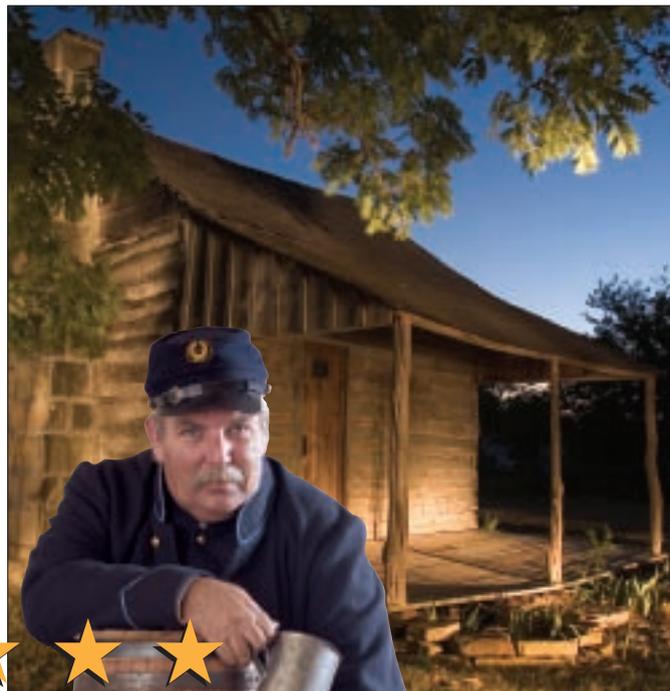
## HAMLIN

Hamlin's economy boomed twice in the early 20th century — when three railroads inaugurated service between 1906 and 1910 and again when oil was discovered nearby in 1928. The headquarters of Cooper Oil Company tips its hat to Hamlin's oil heritage with displays of vintage Indian Oil & Refining and Texaco signs, a gas pump and other memorabilia.

By 1876, buffalo hunters had thinned Northern Plains bison herds to the point that hide buyer Charles Rath forged a trail from the Dodge City, Kansas railhead to a site near Hamlin. His trading post, Rath City, harvested Southern Plains buffalo and shipped hides and bones to Eastern markets. Despite Native American resistance, the buffalo slaughter took only three years, then the town and trail vanished. The Hamlin Chamber of Commerce displays artifacts about the short-lived community.

## JACKSBORO

With troops largely absent from the frontier during the Civil War, Native American raids increased. To restore order after the war, Fort Richardson was established by the federal government in 1868 as the state's northernmost frontier fort, located only 70 miles from Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma). The fort was a regimental headquarters and one of the nation's most well-defended posts. In 1871, visiting Gen. William T. Sherman and the fort's commanding officer, Col. Ranald S. Mackenzie, captured Native Americans who raided a local wagon train. Two raiders were convicted in Jacksboro in the first case of Native Americans facing a Texas civil court. Fort Richardson (1868–78) served as a staging base for the Red River War of 1874–75, the final assault on free Texas Native Americans. With the frontier secured, the fort was abandoned in 1878. Fort Richardson State Park and Historic Site maintains seven restored structures including barracks, a hospital and commander's house, all furnished to showcase a frontier soldier's life.



*Above: Jack County Museum, Jacksboro*

*Left: Fort Richardson soldier, Jacksboro*

★ ★ ★ 1868–78 ★ ★ ★  
**FORT RICHARDSON**

Pioneer life is interpreted through artifacts at the Jack County Museum, located in an 1882 residence. Local teacher and county agent Tom M. Marks lived in the house in 1907, when he founded the local “Corn Club,” a forerunner to the 4-H Clubs of America. The site also features the 1887 Powell log cabin, filled with period furnishings.

## MASON

German immigrants settled the town after Fort Mason (1851–69) was built in 1851. Many influential military leaders served here, and several were generals on opposing sides during the Civil War including Albert Sidney Johnston, George H. Thomas and Robert E. Lee. During the war, troops left for far-off battlefields, and Native Americans resumed attacks on unprotected settlers. Troops returned in 1866, raids diminished and the fort was closed in 1869.

A replica officers quarters sits on the old fort grounds. Only one original fort structure, a cavalry stable, remains in town. Building materials from the fort helped construct homes and businesses in Mason’s picturesque historic district, centered around the 1909 Mason County Courthouse.



*Mason County Museum, Mason*

## MENARD

In 1757, Spanish authorities built Presidio San Luis de Las Amarillas to protect nearby Mission Santa Cruz de San Sabá from Native American raids. After nearly a decade, protection proved impossible and the fort was abandoned. Nearly a century later, Menard grew up near the fort ruins, now partially reconstructed. Menard’s other historical claim to fame is a 10-mile-long ditch, built in 1876 to divert river water to irrigate farmland and power gristmills. The rock-lined irrigation canal still flows along Menard’s historic Ditch Walk.

Twenty-three miles west lies Fort McKavett State Historic Site (1852–83). Established at the headwaters of the San Saba River, the post housed companies of each of the four regiments of African American troops formed after the Civil War. These men, called Buffalo Soldiers by their Native American opponents, earned a reputation for bravery and tenacity on the battlefield. Today, 16 historic structures survive including the post headquarters, schoolhouse, bakery, barracks, hospital, morgue and officers quarters, four of which are furnished. Volunteers in period attire gather annually to demonstrate life on a frontier military post during the fort’s living history event.



*Ditch Walk, Menard*

## MINERAL WELLS

An early pioneer found healing powers in well water tapped here in the 1880s. Because of miraculous tales of medicinal mineral waters, the town touted itself as “the South’s greatest health resort.” Out-of-towners drank and bathed in water from as many as 400 mineral wells, including the “crazy water” well of the Famous Mineral Water Company. Since 1913, the company has bottled and sold mineral water nationwide and remains the only place to sample the town’s namesake drink. Hikers and bikers now trek the 20-mile Lake Mineral Wells State Trailway between Mineral Wells and Weatherford, along an 1899 rail line where hundreds of thousands of health seekers traveled to local spas.

# ★ FORT MASON ★ ★ ★ 1851–69

An 1887 school building houses the Mason County Museum, where extensive displays interpret fort history and county development. One display features the travel trunk of John O. Meusebach, founder of Fredericksburg and peacemaker with the Comanche Indians. Another chronicles the 1875 Mason County Hoodoo War, a local cattle rustling feud.

Mason County is also known for topaz, the official state gem, and for Mexican free-tailed bats, which visitors view each summer at the Eckert James River Bat Cave.

## PAINT ROCK

For several hundred years, the shelter of a 70-foot cliff near the Concho River proved a worthy resting place and crossroads for nomadic Native Americans. Here, they painted some 1,500 pictographs on a half-mile stretch of the cliff's limestone rock.

Measuring several inches to several feet, these mostly red and black, story-telling drawings show animal and human figures, including a Spanish mission scene. One of Texas' major rock art sites, the pictographs are accessible via a guided tour by the landowner, whose family has owned and protected the site since the 1870s.



*Pictograph, Paint Rock*

The Earnest and Dorothy Barrow Foundation Museum in the nearby community of **Eola** began with memorabilia collected by local ranchers and world travelers, the Barrows, and subsequently expanded by other donors. Diverse artifacts span from prehistoric times to the early 20th century. Unusual artifacts include a 1930s tractor-powered sheep-shearing rig, a 1929 drugstore fountain and an antique pipe organ.

## RANGER

Named to honor the Texas Rangers whose 1870s camp guarded settlers, the fledgling town moved two miles west in 1880 to the Texas and Pacific Railway line. The T&P's 1923 depot now houses the Roaring Ranger Oil Boom Museum, which tells the town's story after oil was discovered. After a drought hit farmers in 1917, town leaders encouraged W.K. Gordon, vice president of the Texas and Pacific Coal Company in nearby Thurber, to explore for oil locally. Gordon's second wildcatter, the McClesky No. 1 well, blew in, flowing 1,700 barrels per day. The boom ended in 1921, when the wells dried up, but the Ranger discovery well opened the door to oil fields in West Texas.

The depot museum uses artifacts, historic photos and a vintage drilling rig to retell the fascinating saga.



## SAN ANGELO

The U.S. Army established Fort Concho in 1867 on the Concho River. For the next 22 years, the garrison served as regimental headquarters, sending troops and supplies on Indian war campaigns. Troops also scouted and mapped uncharted portions of West Texas. In 1870, the raucous village of Santa Angela (later San Angelo) formed across the river from the fort. After the fort closed, locals saved its buildings for residences and commercial activity. Today, 28 original and restored structures comprise Fort Concho National Historic Landmark (1867–89). Authentically refurbished buildings — including post headquarters, barracks, officers quarters, chapel/school and hospital — recapture the spirit of the frontier. On some weekends, living history events fill the fort with mounted cavalry and infantry units, Buffalo Soldiers, and women reenacting officers' wives and laundresses. Also on site are the E.H. Danner Museum of Telephony and the Robert Wood Johnson Museum of Frontier Medicine.

San Angelo became a shipping center with the arrival of two railroads around the turn of the 20th century. The Railway Museum of San Angelo, located in the restored 1909 Orient-Santa Fe depot, showcases railway memorabilia such as an 1890s track gauge, teletype equipment, freight scales and historic photos. Near the museum, "The Iron Horse" mural depicts steam locomotive #503. It is one of several heritage-themed downtown murals.

Fort soldiers once crossed the river for entertainment in Santa Angela. Visitors now stroll the same crossing along a heritage trail, El Paseo de Santa Angela, which links Fort Concho and the historic depot with the Concho River and downtown. The trail's tiered plaza is adjacent to the new San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts, itself an architectural masterpiece.



*Fort Concho, San Angelo*



*Opposite page, background: Stephenville Historical House Museum. Top inset: John T. Lytle, photo credit: GenealogyMagazine.com; Bottom insets: Fort Griffin festival, photo credit: TxDOT*

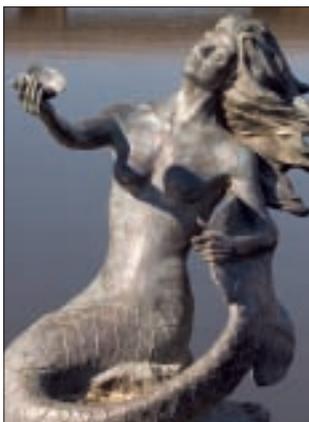
# Hard Days, Long Nights —

**I**n 1874, John T. Lytle guided 3,500 longhorn cattle along the leading edge of the frontier from South Texas to Nebraska. Known as the Western Trail, Lytle's route supplanted the Chisholm Trail to the east, and by 1879 was the principal thoroughfare for Texas cattle bound for northern markets. Over the course of the Western Trail's 20-year run, nearly five million cattle traveled the route to northern pastures and markets, blazing through communities such as Fort Griffin, Buffalo Gap and Throckmorton. Ultimately, Texas cattle fever played a role in shutting down the trail, decimating herds and creating quarantines, but the legacy and lore linger throughout the Texas Forts Trail Region.



## SAN ANGELO *(continued)*

The Concho River was named for the mussels that produce unique pink pearls found for centuries in the waterway; they are still sold in local jewelry stores. A four-mile nature trail along the river skirts beside San Angelo's first street, Concho Avenue. An eclectic mix of shops and eateries in this Texas Main Street city occupy restored historic buildings, which include Miss Hattie's Bordello Museum, an early 1900s brothel ornately furnished in its original quarters. The city's cultural center is now housed in the ornate 1929 Cactus Hotel, one of Conrad Hilton's first luxurious hotels. San Angelo also offers visitors a look at the stars at the Angelo State University Planetarium, the nation's fourth largest university planetarium.



*Concho River statue, San Angelo*



## STAMFORD

U.S. Army Col. Ranald S. Mackenzie blazed military trails across the frontier in pursuit of Native Americans. Ranchers later settled along these routes. Descendants of early ranchers honored the military leader by erecting the Mackenzie Trail Monument just outside of town. Ranching heritage also looms large on the square at the Cowboy Country Museum. The site displays its archive of historic photos along with family heirlooms such as a chuck wagon, antique furnishings and period clothing. Cowboy culture abounds at the annual Texas Cowboy Reunion, hailed as the world's largest amateur rodeo. During the reunion, the Old Timers Association opens its 1935 stone bunkhouse, allowing visitors to peruse cowboy artifacts such as hats, boots and guns.

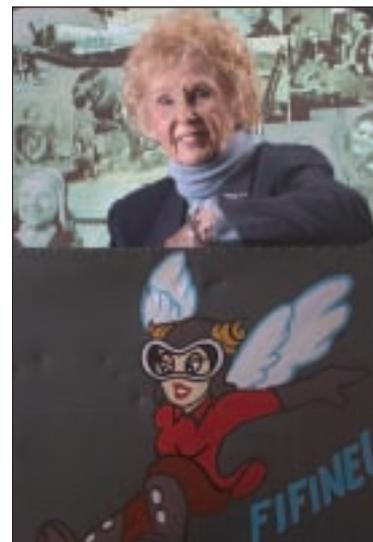
Stamford also is home to the 1908 Carnegie Library, one of 32 public libraries built in Texas by philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in the early 20th century. It is still used as a library today.



## STEPHENVILLE

Town namesake John M. Stephen donated land for the town site, which was laid out by county namesake George B. Erath. Today, downtown Stephenville offers 1890s-era stone buildings surrounding the Romanesque Revival-style Erath County Courthouse, completed in 1892. Made of red sandstone and white limestone, the restored edifice, one of the state's most picturesque, was designed by noted architect J. Riely Gordon.

In 1869 former Civil War Col. J. D. Berry built a two-story stone cottage, which remains the town's oldest house and a good example of a residential Gothic Revival craftsmanship. It's also the signature component of a historical village at the Stephenville Historical House Museum. The village features another Gothic-style structure, the 1900 Stephenville Presbyterian Church. The museum recreates pioneer days with relocated 1850s log cabins and several late-19th-century buildings — a ranch house, schoolhouse, carriage house and blacksmith shop. Inside exhibits deal with natural history, military and science topics.



*WASP pilot Deanie Parrish, Sweetwater*

## SWEETWATER

Named after Sweetwater Creek, the town built a lake to attract the steam locomotives of the Kansas City, Mexico and Orient Railway, which arrived in 1903. Three years later, Judge R.A. Ragland built a large home, which now houses the Pioneer Museum. More than a dozen display rooms recall Nolan County's settlement era through historic photographs, farm and ranch implements and Native American artifacts.

In 1943–44, Avenger Field became home to the nation's only all-women World War II flying school. More than 1,000 Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) trained on every kind of U.S. warbird and, upon graduation, flew 60 million miles of stateside non-combat duty, freeing more male pilots for overseas combat missions. The National WASP World War II Museum honors these pioneering aviators with exhibits housed in a 1929 Avenger Field hangar. Also on airport grounds is Texas State Technical College West Texas, where a memorial and a life-size bronze statue further celebrate WASP trainees. A sculpture honors 38 who died in service.

## THROCKMORTON

At the center of Throckmorton's quaint downtown sits the Italianate-style Throckmorton County Courthouse. Constructed in 1890 of tan and buff quarry-faced sandstone, it was substantially altered in 1938. The historic county jail remains much as it did when built in 1893. The two-story stone building was typical of late 19th-century jails, featuring iron cells upstairs and living quarters for the sheriff downstairs. Today, the Throckmorton County Historical Museum occupies the jail, where various displays preserve local historical artifacts and vintage photos. Historic lodging — without bars — lies a few blocks away at Lazy T Lodge, a schoolteacher dormitory built in 1910.



*Throckmorton County Courthouse, Throckmorton*

## THURBER

In the early 20th century, a prosperous coal and brick operation made Thurber a thriving city between Fort Worth and El Paso. Owned by the Texas and Pacific Coal Company, the booming company town became America's first totally unionized town and one of the first with electric service. In 1917, the company's entrepreneurial executive, W.K. Gordon, struck oil at nearby Ranger, setting the stage for the West Texas oil boom. Ironically, steam locomotives began burning oil instead of locally-mined bituminous coal. The company continued operation of the brick plant, but by the late 1930s Thurber was a ghost town.

The W.K. Gordon Center for Industrial History of Texas, a component of Tarleton State University, uses lively interactive exhibits to trace Thurber's boom to bust story. The museum and research center also highlights the broader industrial past of Texas and the Southwest. The adjacent Thurber Historical Association Park preserves relocated and restored Thurber originals — a miner's residence, bandstand and St. Barbara's Catholic Church, named for the patron saint of miners. Thurber's original mercantile store houses a popular restaurant, standing in the shadow of Thurber's 148-foot-high, century-old brick smokestack.



*W.K. Gordon Center exhibit, Thurber*

## WINTERS

Founded in 1890, the town was named for rancher and land agent J.N. Winters. The Z.I. Hale Museum bears the name of a local optometrist whose office now houses displays on early-day businesses, farming and ranching, education and home life. Visitors find more exhibits in the museum's Rock Hotel Heritage Center, a former railroad travelers' hotel, built in 1909. It features a restored 1920s honeymoon suite and memorabilia from baseball legend Rogers Hornsby, a Hall of Fame inductee born in 1896 in Winters. The museum also presents an extensive collection of early farm implements housed in the 1927 farm equipment dealership of local farmer-inventor Gus Pruser. On display is a horse-drawn cotton picking machine that Pruser invented in 1912.



Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University

*W.K. Gordon Center historic photo, Thurber*



*The pioneer spirit awaits  
each traveler to the  
Texas Forts Trail Region  
through timeless forts,  
unique museums and  
charming towns.*

## FESTIVALS IN THE TEXAS FORTS TRAIL REGION

From rattlesnakes to powwows, the Texas Forts Trail Region thrives with time-honored festivals. Below is a sampling of the region's diverse entertainment.

For more information request the *Texas Events Calendar* by writing to TxDOT, Travel Division, P.O. Box 149249, Austin, TX, 78714-9249.

- Spirit of the Frontier Festival, Abilene
- Western Heritage Classic, Abilene
- Fort Griffin Fandangle, Albany
- Cowboy Christmas Ball, Anson
- Texas State Festival of Ethnic Cultures, Ballinger
- World Championship Barbeque Goat Cook-Off, Brady
- Fiesta De La Paloma, Coleman
- Comanche County Pow-Wow, Comanche
- Peach and Melon Festival, De Leon
- Old Rip Festival, Eastland
- Fall Fest, Eden
- Wild Horse Prairie Days, Hamlin
- Christmas at Old Fort Concho, San Angelo
- Texas Cowboy Reunion, Stamford
- World's Largest Rattlesnake Roundup, Sweetwater
- Rocky Mountain Oyster World Championship and BBQ Cook-off, Throckmorton



*De Leon's Peach and Melon Festival is one of the oldest festivals in the region.*



TxDOT

*Volunteers dress in period attire at festivals around the region.*

## ADDITIONAL TEXAS FORTS

Texas boasts several other historic forts outside the Texas Forts Trail Region. For more information on location and hours, contact sites directly.

- Fort Bliss Museum, El Paso  
915/568-4518
- Fort Davis National Historic Site, Fort Davis  
432/426-3224  
[www.nps.gov/foda](http://www.nps.gov/foda)
- Fort Hood Museums, Killeen  
254/287-1110  
[www.hood.army.mil/fthood](http://www.hood.army.mil/fthood)
- Fort Lancaster State Historic Site, Sheffield  
432/836-4391  
[www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us)
- Fort Leaton State Historic Site, Presidio  
432/229-3416  
[www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us)
- Fort Martin Scott, Fredericksburg, TX  
830/997-9895  
[www.fortmartinsscott.com](http://www.fortmartinsscott.com)
- Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio  
800/531-1114  
[www.cs.amedd.army.mil](http://www.cs.amedd.army.mil)
- Historic Fort Stockton, Fort Stockton  
800/336-2166  
[www.ci.fort-stockton.tx.us](http://www.ci.fort-stockton.tx.us)
- Old Fort Parker, Groesbeck  
254/729-5253  
[www.oldfortparker.org](http://www.oldfortparker.org)



*Fort Davis National Historic Site*

THC



## TEXAS MAIN STREET CITIES

Visitors can stroll the sidewalks and peruse shops in one of the region's three Texas Main Street cities. Partnering with the Texas Historical Commission, these communities work to revitalize their historic downtown commercial areas.

- Comanche
- Graham
- San Angelo



*Downtown San Angelo*

## TEXAS HERITAGE TRAIL REGIONS

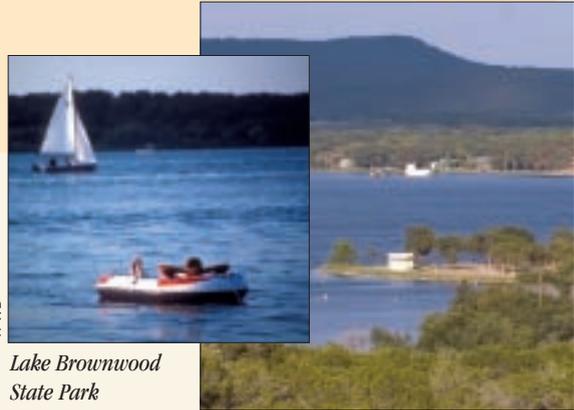


## REGIONAL STATE PARKS AND HISTORIC SITES

Travelers to the Texas Forts Trail Region can visit the area's beautiful parks and historic sites owned and operated by Texas Parks and Wildlife.

For more information on the following sites, please call 800/792-1112 or visit [www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us).

- Abilene State Park, Abilene
- Fort Griffin State Park and Historic Site, Albany
- Colorado Bend State Park, Bend
- Lake Brownwood State Park, Brownwood
- Possum Kingdom State Park, Graham
- Fort Richardson State Park and Historic Site, Jacksboro
- Fort McKavett State Historic Site, Menard
- Lake Mineral Wells State Park and Trailway, Mineral Wells
- San Angelo State Park, San Angelo



TPWD

*Lake Brownwood State Park*

*Possum Kingdom State Park*

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Texas Historical Commission offers free travel guides on the people and places that shaped Texas history. To request copies, visit [www.thc.state.tx.us/travel](http://www.thc.state.tx.us/travel) or call 866/276-6219.



TEXAS  
HISTORICAL  
COMMISSION

*The State Agency for Historic Preservation*

[www.thc.state.tx.us](http://www.thc.state.tx.us)

# COMMUNITIES IN THE TEXAS FORTS TRAIL REGION

For more information on the sites in this brochure, refer to the *Texas State Travel Guide* or contact the sources listed below for site locations and hours, as well as details about events and other local attractions. Many information centers are closed weekends; please contact in advance. To obtain a free *Texas State Travel Guide*, call 800/8888-TEX or visit [www.TravelTex.com](http://www.TravelTex.com).

## ■ ABILENE

Convention & Visitors Bureau  
800/727-7704  
[www.abilene.com](http://www.abilene.com)

## ■ ALBANY

Chamber of Commerce  
325/762-2525  
[www.albanytexas.com](http://www.albanytexas.com)

## ■ ANSON

Chamber of Commerce  
325/823-3259  
[www.cityofanson.com](http://www.cityofanson.com)

## ■ BAIRD

Chamber of Commerce  
325/854-2003  
[www.bairdtexas.com](http://www.bairdtexas.com)

## ■ BALLINGER

Chamber of Commerce  
325/365-2333  
[www.ballingertx.org](http://www.ballingertx.org)

## ■ BRADY

Brady/McCulloch County  
Chamber of Commerce  
325/597-3491  
[www.bradytx.com](http://www.bradytx.com)

## ■ BRECKENRIDGE

Chamber of Commerce  
254/559-2301  
[www.breckenridgetexas.com](http://www.breckenridgetexas.com)

## ■ BRONTE

Chamber of Commerce  
325/473-3263  
[www.brontetxs.us](http://www.brontetxs.us)

## ■ BROWNWOOD

Chamber of Commerce  
325/646-9535  
[www.brownwoodchamber.org](http://www.brownwoodchamber.org)

## ■ CISCO

Chamber of Commerce  
254/442-2537  
[www.ciscotx.com](http://www.ciscotx.com)

## ■ COLEMAN

Chamber of Commerce  
325/625-2163  
[www.colemantexas.org](http://www.colemantexas.org)

## ■ COMANCHE

Chamber of Commerce  
325/356-3233  
[www.comanchetx.org](http://www.comanchetx.org)

## ■ DE LEON

Chamber of Commerce  
254/893-2083  
[www.deleontexas.com](http://www.deleontexas.com)

## ■ DUBLIN

Chamber of Commerce  
254/445-3422  
[www.dublintexaschamber.com](http://www.dublintexaschamber.com)

## ■ EASTLAND

Chamber of Commerce  
877/265-3747  
[www.eastlandchamber.com](http://www.eastlandchamber.com)

## ■ EDEN

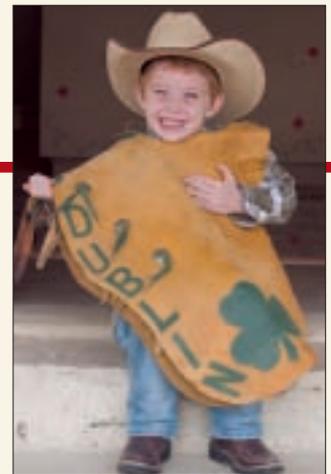
City of Eden  
325/869-2211  
[www.edentexas.com](http://www.edentexas.com)

## ■ EL DORADO

Chamber of Commerce  
325/650-9553  
[www.eldoradotx.com](http://www.eldoradotx.com)

## ■ GOLDTHWAITE

Mills County/Goldthwaite Area  
Chamber of Commerce  
325/648-3619  
[www.goldthwaite.biz](http://www.goldthwaite.biz)



## ■ GRAHAM

Chamber of Commerce  
800/256-4844  
[www.visitgraham.com](http://www.visitgraham.com)

## ■ HAMLIN

Chamber of Commerce  
325/576-3501

## ■ JACKSBORO

Chamber of Commerce  
940/567-2602

## ■ MASON

Mason County Chamber of Commerce  
325/347-5758  
[www.masoncoc.com](http://www.masoncoc.com)

## ■ MENARD

Chamber of Commerce  
325/396-2365  
[www.menardchamberofcommerce.com](http://www.menardchamberofcommerce.com)

## ■ MINERAL WELLS

Chamber of Commerce  
940/325-2557  
[www.mineralwellstx.com](http://www.mineralwellstx.com)



*Charles H. Noyes Monument, Ballinger*



*Historic Odeon Theater, Mason*



*Fort Chadbourne, Bronie*



*Living history events are abundant throughout the region.*



*Fort Mason, Mason*

■ **PAINT ROCK**

City of Eden  
325/869-2211  
www.edentexas.com

■ **RANGER**

Chamber of Commerce  
254/647-3091  
www.ranger-tx.com

■ **ROBERT LEE**

City Hall  
325/453-2831  
www.robertleetexas.com

■ **SAN ANGELO**

Chamber of Commerce  
325/655-4136  
www.sanangelo.org

■ **STAMFORD**

Chamber of Commerce  
325/773-2411

■ **STEPHENVILLE**

Chamber of Commerce  
254/965-5313  
www.stephentexas.org

■ **SWEETWATER**

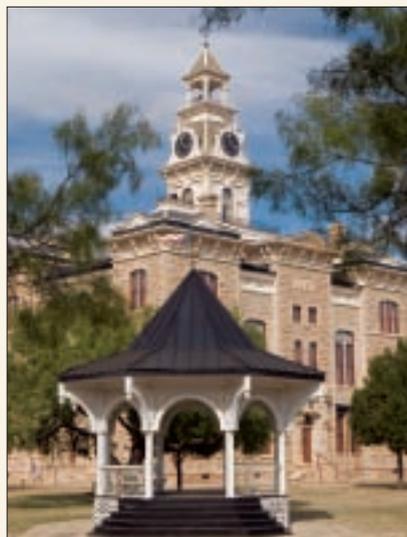
Chamber of Commerce  
800/658-6757  
www.sweetwatertexas.org

■ **THROCKMORTON**

Chamber of Commerce  
940/849-3076  
www.throckmortontx.com

■ **WINTERS**

Chamber of Commerce  
325/754-5210  
www.winters-texas.us



*Shackelford County Courthouse,  
Albany*

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION



TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
TEXAS HERITAGE TRAILS PROGRAM

www.thc.state.tx.us/travel  
www.texasfortstrail.com

The Texas Historical Commission promotes the highest national standards for historic preservation and does not endorse the relocation of historic structures without thorough documentation of the building on its original site. The professional processes required for such action are intended to record and preserve historic properties for the full enjoyment and education of present and future generations.

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