

## DRAFT

### *A History of Southern Morris County Texas* By Gilbert N. Alcorn, 1999

The vast woodlands in the hills of east Texas, up until the time of recorded land grants and titles, was occupied by the Caddo Indians. Evidence of their occupancy was still very evident in the early 1950's. Even today, the remains of this nation can still be found. They were generally friendly with the Anglo settlers and co-existed with them until the time that many were moved to reservations in southwestern Oklahoma in 1859, where their descendants still live. They were successful farmers and hunters and survived on the native resources of the area. They cultivated corn, beans and pumpkins and other food crops. The women were very adept in the art of pottery making. The Caddo Indians were known by the Spanish explorers in the mid 1400's and these explorers developed a great respect for their braves. The explorers who came from Mexico in the mid 1500's knew them as Texas or Tejas, meaning friends. Caddo is an abbreviation of "Kadohadacho", meaning real chiefs. During the 1700's, the warfare between the French and Spanish in Caddo territory, many of the Indians were killed. One of the larger settlements of the Caddos, in our area, was on a hillside in Lone Star and a part of the present day Stevens addition to the City of Lone Star. A portion of this dwelling site is still undeveloped and is adjacent to the Stevens addition's north boundary line. A Caddo burial site is located on one of the larger islands at the north end of Ellison Creek reservoir, or Lone Star Lake. In the mid 1940's when the dam on Ellison Creek was constructed and the water level in the lake reached it's



normal level, a lot of the artifacts floated into the lake. Some was recovered by Ed German. When pieces allowed the pottery to be reassembled, the pottery was carefully restored to it's original configuration. This collection was maintained in the home of Mrs. German until she donated the collection to the University of Texas. There are many sites in the southern part of Morris County that still bear evidence of the Caddos.

The history of East Texas where Lone Star is located can be traced back to March 1826 when English General Arthur Goodall Wavell and Benjamin R. Milam received a Mexican government contract to settle 400-500 families on a grant south of the Red River. However, General Wavell did not fulfil the contract and there were no land titles issued until after the Texas Revolution.

During this period of time, the Red River Land District was created by an act of the Republic of Texas December 18, 1837. The district was bounded by the Big Cypress and Red River. Among the first titles issued was to Ensign B. Smith and his wife Jane. Ensign B. Smith was a resident of Texas prior to 1836. The Smith land, consisting of "a league and labor" was surveyed in June of 1839 and certificated in 1840. The Smith plantation consisted of approximately 4600 acres of land. The east line of this property generally follows what is now known as Jefferson Street in the city of Lone Star. The present Lone Star city hall occupies a portion of the Ensign B. Smith property. In 1840, when Smith was issued the property, he was fifty six (56) years old and he and his wife, Jane, had two daughters, Susan and Sarah. They had two sons named Manuel and Vewana. Ensign and Jane operated the ferry crossing on Cypress



Creek until sometime in the 1850's when he sold the operation to John Spearman of Vertago County Alabama.

On August 18, 1870, the Spearman's incorporated under the provision of the State Legislature by the name of Big Cypress Bridge Company. The location of the bridge and ferry was located on Cypress just east of present day US highway 259. The Texas State Historical Society has marked a spot alongside the highway in the general vicinity of the crossings, on the opposite side of the highway from the Lone Star Steel company's south gate. Spearman's charter was granted for a period of twenty five (25) years which would have extended until 1875. To make a crossing with a wagon and eight horses or oxen cost one (1) dollar. Foot traffic was charged five (5) cents and other livestock was charged at a lesser rate. The eight horse hitch or the eight oxen hitch gives an idea of the difficulty of travel during this period of time.

Some of the other early families were the Dalbys, Lilleys, Freemans, Spearman's, Elisses, Skinners, Daniels, Waalkers, Cheatham's, Hampton's, Pruitt's, Coveys and Martins.

Most of the settlements being made in the 1850's in the northeast Texas area occurred along the wagon trails leading from Jefferson. One wagon trail lead from Jefferson north through Daingerfield, Cason, Pittsburgh, Leesburg, Prospect Hill (Webster) and then north through Emory and to Dallas. Prospect Hill was the crossroads of a wagon trail which ran from a crossing of the Sabine river just south of present day Hawkins and from Prospect Hill north to Clarksvill and the Red river crossing at Jonesboro. These trails remained in effect until the early 1890's when



the movement of freight was replaced by newly constructed railroads.

Generally, the more important wagon routes were paralleled by the railroads that were constructed in the late 1800's. The railroad that was constructed from Greenville in Hunt county to Sulphur Springs-Winnsboro-Daingerfield and Jefferson was one of the first railroads constructed during this time. Prospect Hill (Webster) made a bid for this railroad to be routed through Prospect Hill however, the routing was made just east of Prospect Hill and thus came the beginning of Winnsboro. The routing of the railroad was to the demise of the very prosperous and thriving community of Webster. At that time, Webster had a population of approximately nine hundred (900) people. The settlers in the Webster community arrived in the mid 1800's and were primarily from Alabama, Tennessee and Georgia. One of the earlier settlers in the Webster community was Henry Robinson, a son of Andrew C. Robinson who settled in the Henderson area in the early 1840's. Henry Robinson was a blacksmith and he set up his shop in the early days of Prospect Hill. After the demise of Webster as a major commerce center, Henry Robinson and his family moved farther west where he founded the community of Pleasant Grove.

Another early settler in the present day Lone Star was Livingston Skinner. His burial is in the Iron Bluff cemetery which is located on a portion of the L. Skinner survey. Many of his descendants are also buried in the Iron Bluff cemetery. Livingston Skinner has many descendants who still live in the area. The west boundary line of the Livingston Skinner land adjoins the east boundary line of



the Ensign B. Smith property. Present day US highway 259 is routed through the western part of the Skinner property.

Before the incorporation of Lone Star, Texas March 8, 1951, the community was known as the Iron Bluff community. It was settled in the early eighteen hundreds. Prior to its' settlement by early settlers, the area was inhabited by the Caddo Indians. There were several settlements of the Indians along the Barnes and Ellison Creeks. Their burial ground was located on what is now one of the islands in the North end of the Lone Star lake. The community derived its name from a bluff on the Barnes Creek. The bluff is still visible on the bank of Ellison Creek Reservoir (Lone Star Lake) just south of Lakeshore Drive in the Stevens Addition to the City of Lone Star. The bluff is at a location where Barnes Creek made an abrupt bend and is located directly across from the main plantsite of the Lone Star Steel Company. The bluff had a vertical bank of some thirty feet or so. One of the Caddo Indian dwelling sites was located in close proximity of the bluff. For several years in the fifties when Ollie Quarles was farming this property all types of relics would surface. A number of arrow heads and pieces of pottery were found. Houses now occupy a majority of this site, however, some of the Indian site is still undeveloped.

With the advent of the construction of Lone Star Steel Company as a defense plant, the community was in the process of being changed dramatically. The steel plant was constructed and completed toward the end of World War II. It was never operated by the Defense Plant Corporation. Some of the ore was processed and shipped for reduction to basic iron at other steel making facilities. The ore was of



low quality and all of the existing steel makers, at the time, considered the reduction of the iron ore and the steel making facility unprofitable.

Also there was an electrical power plant which became a very vital part of the test facility operated by Convair for the US Navy. The testing facility included two wind tunnels for conducting various test on different models. Originally the tunnels were equipped for speeds up to fourteen hundred miles an hour. The facility was later redesigned to accommodate speeds up to twenty eight hundred miles an hour. During the testing operations, the noise could be heard from as far away as Pittsburg. This operation was the beginning of the space age technology. As more data became necessary and the expense of modernizing the facility, the Navy opted to construct test facilities at another location, thus ending the testing at Lone Star.

Texas Power and Light Company sent geologist into the area and plans and projections were made which led to a movement by John Carpenter and others to purchase the facility from the Defense Plant Corporation. Stock was sold to raise the purchase price of the plant and land. Some of the stockholders purchased small amounts of the stock while some of the wealthier ones purchased large amounts. Some of the local people to purchase sizable amounts of the stock were Oscar Irvin of Daingerfield and Mr. Coker of Naples. The plant and all of the land holdings were purchased for a price of twelve and one half million dollars. Deeds to the facility was delivered by Congressman Wright Patman in 1948. Congressman Patman had been very instrumental in the acquisition of the steel making facility. A celebration was planned for the occasion and



took place in the pines where the "Chapel in the Pines" now stands.

E. B. Germany became the first president of the company and was very active in the day to day operation of the plant. He was well known in the east Texas oil and gas industry.

The early years of Lone Star Steel were quite a struggle. In 1948, the demand for steel and steel products were at an all time low. The labor force at the steel company was reduced to a bare minimum. There were times when the employment of some of their employees was approved for two to three days at a time. Contracts for the sale of pig iron at a price of twenty-five dollars a ton were made to anyone who wished to buy the output of "Flossie Belle", the blast furnace so named after the wife of John Carpenter. The blast furnace was a Reece Hughes furnace with a rated capacity of seven hundred and fifty tons daily. Local people, along with other buyers, purchased the pig iron which was stored alongside a railroad track complete with signs indicating the owners.

Early years of the operation of the blast furnace were also difficult. It was not until the company employed a blast furnace specialist by the name of W. R. (Bill) Bond that the furnace was successfully operated. His suggestion to increase the blast furnace charge to a higher percentage of dolomite and limestone. His theory being that due to the low grade ore and the greater amount of impurities to be separated from the ore that more slagging was necessary. This change in the burden necessitated doing away with the slag thimbles and the construction of a slag pit. Later



the second slag pit was constructed which allowed Gifford Hill to clean and process one pit while the other pit was used for slagging.

In 1949, management of Lone Star Steel Company instigated plans for an expansion program which would make the company more competitive. Plans were made for the construction of cast iron pipe making facilities. Since the cast iron pipe which was manufactured at the time was patented, the A. J. Boynton Engineering firm was employed to develop plans for centrifugal pipe casting machines along with the necessary foundry amenities. Management had approved one million dollars for the construction of this facility. Costs were accumulated against A.F.E. 405. The facility was located in a building that had been previously used to house the warehouse, automotive, electrical and carpentry shops. The facility was complete with an outside gantry yard, two number 10 Whiting Cupolas, annealing furnace, cement lining, inspection and finishing stations. Soon afterward, cast iron pipe was being furnished to surrounding towns and remote areas. This cast iron pipe is still in use in a wide area.

Plans were also being made at this time for facilities to convert cast iron into steel along with finishing facilities to manufacture oil field tubular goods. These plans along with an application were submitted to the Reconstruction Finance Corporation for a seventy five million dollar loan for the construction of steel making facilities. After all of the requirements of the loan request had been met, it was discovered that the RFC could not make a loan to any corporation unless it was adjacent to an incorporated



town. This is the reason and purpose of Iron Bluff becoming the city of Lone Star, Texas.

At this time the president of Lone Star Steel Company, E. B. Germany approached individuals that were employed by Lone Star Steel Company and who lived in the Iron Bluff community about circulating a petition calling for an election to incorporate under Title ---. An election was held in April, 1951 with twenty six certified ballots being cast. The election was held in the store building of Martin Haley on then State Highway 26. The election carried by a vote 18-8. Earlier Martin Haley had operated the only store in the Iron Bluff community in a wooden frame store building. His home and store buildings were located on the same property which occupies the property at the Northwest corner at the intersection of U. S. Highway 259 and State Highway 250 from Hughes Springs.

The name of Lone Star was selected by E. B. Germany. He stated that Texas was the Lone Star State and the steel company was named Lone Star Steel Company and since there was no incorporated towns in the state with the name of Lone Star that this would be a good name for the town. It was later learned that there were several Lone Star communities, including the one in the North part of Morris county and a Lone Star spur. Some confusion occurred in the beginning, however, this conflict soon vanished. Mr. Germany had employed his attorney and surveyor to prepare the necessary documents and the area to be incorporated.



*Serving on the original council were: Clay Byrne, mayor and aldermen were Gilbert Alcorn, F. S. Perkins, Frank Stockton, E. Warner and Ima Bassett.*

*Mrs. Bassett turned down the opportunity for making history and serving on the first city council, B. L. Martin, a long time resident of the community, was elected July 20, 1951. Some of the earlier meetings took place beneath a huge oak tree that stood on the Iron Bluff School plot of ground on the South of present day Industrial Boulevard between US Highway 259 and Jefferson Street. Later meetings were held in the Iron Bluff Methodist Church building that was located just across the street from the oak tree. The Methodist church had a very small congregation and only had a preacher every fourth Sunday. The Church building became a place for the earlier members of the community to congregate in inter faith activities. B. L. Martin and his wife were very devout in their support for maintaining the Methodist Church at this location. He was never able to accept the relocation of the church to its' new location on Highway US 259 and the use of the building for a trucking terminal. The building was later sold and moved. Later meetings of the council were held in the United Steelworkers Union hall until the present city offices were constructed on a plot of land donated by B.L. Martin.*

*To complicate the activities of the first city council, the city could not levy taxes until the following January and could not collect taxes for an additional year. Funds to purchase minute books and other miscellaneous supplies were donated by E. B. Germany.*