Texas: The Lone Star State

By Cynthia A. Malecki

"Texas, Our Texas! All hail the mighty State! Texas, Our Texas! So wonderful, so great! Boldest and grandest, withstanding ev'ry test, Empire wide and glorious, you stand supremely blest."

1st stanza of the Texas state song

They say that everything is big in Texas-big farms, big ranches, big cities, big money, and even big hair. Texas is the biggest of the 48 contiguous U.S. states, with 267,277 square miles (692,244 square km), which is bigger than the 14 smallest states combined.(1) It is approximately 850 miles (1,370 km) from north to south and from west to east. The biggest ranch in Texas is The King Ranch in Kingsville, which is larger than the state of Rhode Island. The cities of Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio are among the nation's ten largest. The Port of Houston handles more foreign cargo than any other U.S. port. Texas is the second largest producer of electronic components in the U.S. and the nation's second leading exporter. Worldwide television viewers might remember the TV show "Dallas" featuring the Ewing family who lived on the South Fork Ranch in Dallas, Texas. Weekly shows featured the extravagant lifestyle of oil barons and their wives with big hair. (Usually found in the southern United States, big hair is the result of combing the hair and spraying it to produce a hairstyle puffed up two or three times its normal volume and capable of withstanding even the strongest winds.) Former Texas governor Ann Richards even declared an official Texas Big Hair Day in 1993.

History and Independence

The history of Texas is unique for it has had six different national flags since the early 1500s, when the Spanish began their explorations there(2). Spanish explorer Álvarez de Piñeda mapped the coast of the Gulf of Mexico in 1519, from the tip of the Florida peninsula to Vera Cruz, Mexico, looking for a passage to India. He produced remarkable drawings of what is now known as the Texas Gulf Coast. Although Piñeda's group never came ashore, his expedition marked the beginning of Spain's rule in Texas. In the autumn of 1528, Cabeza de Vaca and his crew were shipwrecked on the coast near present day Galveston Island. Only 15 of 80 men survived that winter. In the spring, he and the remaining crew members began an extraordinary eight-year trek that would take them overland through Texas into northern Mexico and finally south all the way to Mexico City. They met many Indian tribes during their trek who talked of golden cities, and

the Spaniards came to believe in the fabled Seven Cities of Cibola-legendary cities of great wealth in northern New Spain, what is now the southwestern United States.

In 1540, the Spanish conquistador Vasquez de Coronado set out to find the seven cities of gold. For two years he and his men trekked through present-day New Mexico, West Texas, and as far north as Kansas, fighting Indians and leaving behind horses and cattle, but never finding any gold. During his search, Coronado encountered the Teyas (or Tejas) Indians. Some scholars believe that Texas got its name from those Indians; others believe it came from the Caddo Indian word tayshas, which means "friend."

In the 1600s, in an attempt to prevent the French from making any claims in Texas, the Spanish crown authorized the establishment of towns. The settlements were divided into three parts: military (presidio), civilian (pueblo), and religious (mission). The first Spanish mission and pueblo was Corpus Christi de la Isleta, established near present-day El Paso in 1682. In 1685, the French explorer, Sieur de La Salle established Fort St. Louis in the Matagorda Bay area. Two years later, however, La Salle was killed by his own men, and by 1690, Indian attacks and disease had killed the remainder of the French force. This ended France's claim to Texas.

The Spanish continued to colonize, and in 1718, the Mission San Antonio de Valero was established in what is today the city of San Antonio, and Franciscan padres began converting local Indians to Catholicism. However, the mission faced numerous problems over the years. The local Indian population dwindled because of disease introduced by the Europeans, and Apache and Comanche Indians attacked the mission. The bell tower and the roof of the chapel collapsed, so the mission was closed in the late 1700s.

The settlement in San Antonio reopened in 1803 with cavalry soldiers. The Second Company of San Carlos de Alamo de Parras used the mission as a fort and gave it its common name-the Alamo. In 1821, when Mexico declared its independence from Spain, the soldiers came under the rule of the Mexican army. Texas became part of the state called Coahuila y Texas in the Republic of Mexico, and people living in Texas were called Tejanos.

Soon after Mexican independence, Stephen Austin, an American businessman, received permission from the Mexican government to settle 300 families in Texas. Austin's settlement, known as the Old Three Hundred, was the beginning of the Anglo-American colonization of Texas. The land grants were generous and no taxes were charged for several years. The settlers, mostly Protestant Anglos, agreed to convert to Catholicism and pledge allegiance to the Mexican constitution of 1824. Following Austin's original 300 settlers, Anglo-Americans flooded to Texas, and by 1835, there were almost ten times as many English-speaking Tejanos (or Texans in English) as there were Spanish-speaking ones.

Tensions began to grow in Texas. The American immigrants were not assimilating into the Mexican culture. They refused to learn Spanish and were not converting to Catholicism. Many immigrants wanted annexation by the United States. Austin was held prisoner in Mexico for over two years after failed negotiations over the future of Texas. Talk of war and independence from Mexico spread.

In October 1835, Mexicans soldiers were sent to the small town of Gonzales to reclaim a cannon that had been used for defense against Indian attacks. The American immigrants who lived there filled the cannon with nails and scrap iron then raised a homemade flag bearing the words "Come and take it!" before firing it at the soldiers. A brief skirmish ensued. That cannon shot at Gonzales is generally considered the start of Texans' war for independence.

Texans marched on to fight the Mexican troops garrisoned at the Alamo. In December 1835 an army of Texans and American volunteers won another skirmish and seized the Alamo. They released the Mexican soldiers and their general, who was the brother-in-law of Mexican ruler General Santa Anna. News spread across the United States that a war with Mexico for Texas independence was imminent. Volunteers from Tennessee led by Davy Crockett, a frontiersman and former Congressman, made their way to the Alamo. Sam Houston, another well-known Tennessean, was put in charge of the new Texas army. Houston had advised that the Alamo should be destroyed, but others decided to stay and defend it.

General Santa Anna was outraged at the humiliating defeat of his brother-in-law and organized a campaign to drive the American "traitors" from Mexican land. Four thousand soldiers set out from central Mexico on an excruciating winter march to the Alamo. Santa Anna arrived in February 1836 and sent a courier to demand the surrender of the Alamo. Texan Colonel William Travis replied with a cannonball- they would not surrender. Approximately 200 fighters, comprised of Texas immigrants and American volunteers, took refuge inside the Alamo. The Mexican army pounded the Alamo with artillery for 12 days. Santa Anna ordered an assault on the outnumbered Alamo contingent. On the morning of March 6 the Mexican soldiers attacked. The battle lasted only 90 minutes. Mexican casualties were high, but all the defenders of the Alamo were killed.

Cries of "Remember the Alamo!" fueled the Texans' fight for independence. In April 1836, just six weeks after the futile bloodshed at the Alamo, Houston and his men caught Santa Anna and his army by surprise. In the resulting Battle of San Jacinto, the Mexicans were badly defeated. Santa Anna signed a treaty recognizing Texas as an independent republic.

The Republic of Texas lasted for only 10 years. It joined the United States in 1845 as the 28th state. Texas seceded from the United States and joined the Confederate States during the American Civil War. In 1870 Texas was officially readmitted into the Union following the period of Reconstruction.

Geography and People

Texas is a diverse geographic area with a long coastline, wide open plains, rolling wooded hills, flat prairies, dry desert, and rugged mountains and canyons. In simple terms, the "Lone Star State" can be divided into East, South, West, Central, and North Texas.

East Texas is known for its bayou swamps, pine woods, Gulf coast beaches, fishing, and barbecues. The East Texas city of Houston is the state's largest city (population 1,800,000) and an international capital for commerce, technology, and oil. Houston is home to the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center. The space center is a training ground for astronauts, design center for

building spacecraft, and mission control for space flights The first words heard from space were "Mission Control, Houston." Houston is also home to the Texas Medical Center, the largest medical center in the world. More than 52,000 people work at the center and each year approximately 4.8 million patients visit it. Houston is home to the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, the largest rodeo in the world, with more than 1.8 million visitors a year. More than 90 languages are spoken throughout the Houston area.

South Texas is known for its ranching, agriculture, and Mexican heritage. San Antonio (population 1 million), the home of the Alamo (now a museum) is in this area. The King ranch was the foundation of the western cattle industry, developing the first American breed of cattle (the longhorn) and the quarter horse. The big cattle drives that made Texas famous as home of the cowboy began from the southern part of the state during the 1860s.(3) Ranchers needed to get their cattle to railroads, which then transported the animals to slaughterhouses and markets in other parts of the country. The most famous route, the Chisholm Trail, started in San Antonio and went northward to Kansas. In 1992, San Antonio was the site for the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Both Spanish and English are used to conduct business in this part of Texas.

West Texas is a dry desert that has frequently been used as the backdrop for cowboy movies and television shows. El Paso is the only large city in this area (population 600,000) and one of the most historic cities in Texas. This is where the first Spanish settlement was established. The city has mountains on one side and the Rio Grande river on the other. With the large Mexican city Ciudad Juarez (population 1 million) just across the river, this urban area is also a large international border crossing for products and people going north and south. El Paso is home to the U.S. Border Patrol Museum. West Texas has two national parks: the Guadalupe Mountains with Guadalupe Peak, the highest point in the state at 8,749 feet elevation (2,666 m), and Big Bend with the Chisos mountains and canyons of the Rio Grande.

Central Texas was originally settled by Germans and Czech immigrants and is perhaps the least Texas-like area of the state. Austin (population 550,000), the capital of Texas, is one of the fastest growing cities in the country. It is famous for the state capitol building, which was completed in 1888 using native stones of pink granite and limestone; the University of Texas at Austin, with 50,000 students; and the number of high tech industries that have moved to the area recently, creating a Texan version of Silicon Valley. The two sprawling cities of Dallas and Fort Worth are in this part of the state. Dallas (population 1 million) is primarily an office town, with headquarters for large corporations such as American Airlines, J.C. Penney's department stores, Mary Kay cosmetics, and Texas Instruments. It is also the home of the famous Cowboys professional football team and the site of President John F. Kennedy's assassination. Fort Worth (population 500,000) is more like an Old West town. There's an old adage: Dallas is where the East ends and Fort Worth is where the West begins. Although it is primarily an oil and cattle town, Fort Worth features the Carter Museum of Western Art and Richardson Collection of Western Art. Both house fine collections of paintings and sculptures by Charles M. Russell, Fredric Remington, and other western artists whose work gives the true flavor of the Old West. In fact, there are more of Russell's paintings in Fort Worth than in his home state of Montana.

North Texas, unlike the other regions of the state, does not have a large city. The flat, treeless land is devoted to farming and ranching. The weather on the wide open plains of North Texas is constantly changing. In the summer, for example, the big blue sky could suddenly turn into a tornado, a hail storm, or a dust storm. The region around Wichita Falls in North Texas reports more tornadoes than any place else in the world. Amarillo (population 200,000) is the largest city in the North Texas area and an important center of the cattle trade. More than 300,000 cattle are sold at the livestock auction every year. "The Pride of Texas on a Bun" is what *The New York Times* called Lone Star hamburgers in a 1998 story. One such hamburger, found at Arnold Burgers in Amarillo, weighs three-quarters of a pound (340 g) and measures almost 6 inches in diameter. They also make a burger that can feed twelve to fifteen people. Everything is bigger in Texas!

Conclusion

Its tumultuous history, geographic diversity, and proud people make Texas unique. What really is Texas? Perhaps the American writer John Steinbeck put it best in his book *Travels with Charley*, when he wrote, "Texas is a state of mind. Texas is an obsession. Above all, Texas is a nation in every sense of the word."

Web Sites Worth Visiting

http://www.governor.state.tx.us is the Web site of the office of the governor. It has everything you want to know about Texas.

<u>http://www.tsha.utexas.edu</u> is the Handbook of Texas online. This is a multidisciplinary encyclopedia of Texas history, geography, and culture. It includes more than 23,000 articles on people, places, events, and institutions.

<u>http://www.50states.com</u> contains interesting facts (such as official state songs and nicknames) and other information on all 50 states.

<u>http://gotexas.about.com</u> is a wonderful assortment of information with links about Texas. You can find famous Texans, Texas recipes (such as chicken fried steak), and a guide to over 700 sites in Texas.

Facts

Texas has a large population of Native Americans. More than 90,000 live in mostly urban areas of the state, with the largest concentration in Dallas and Fort Worth. Many people who read about the frontier days in Texas think that there were only a few Native American groups there, such as the Apaches, Kiowas, and Comanches. Actually there were over 100 Native American tribes in Texas during the time period 1528 to 1750. Not only were there many tribes, but they became highly mobile thanks to the Spanish, who introduced the horse to North America during

the expedition of Coronado. On horseback the Indians were able to reach distant places, and they attacked both Spanish and American settlements across Texas, the southern United States, and northern Mexico. They hunted for food and traveled long distances to find trade items, such as salt and flint.

Quannah Parker

One of the most famous Native Americans and a household name in Texas history was Quannah Parker, a leader of the Quahadi Comanche. Quannah Parker was the son of Cynthia Ann Parker. In 1836 at the age of nine, Cynthia was captured by Comanches. Her father was killed during the raid, which took place in east Texas. Several years after her kidnapping, she was spotted by a party of white traders along the Canadian River in northern Texas. When Cynthia was spotted again seven years later, she told the traders that she had married a Comanche warrior and had two sons, one of whom was Quannah.

She was a full-fledged member of the Comanche tribe and had no desire to return to her birth family. In 1860, Cynthia was recaptured with her daughter Topsannah at the battle of Pease River; ironically during this raid and capture, her husband was killed. Cynthia could not adjust to life back with white people, and she made several unsuccessful attempts to reunite with the Comanches. Unfortunately, she never saw her Comanche family again. In 1864, her daughter Topsannah died, and according to some sources, a few weeks later Cynthia Parker died at the age of only 37. They say she died of a broken heart.

Her son Quannah, now orphaned, took refuge with the Quahadi Comanches and eventually become their leader. He was reported to be a participant and sometimes a leader of horseback raids on settlements throughout Texas. In 1874 he joined with 700 warriors of the Kiowa, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Comanche nations in one of the last Indian battles in Texas-Adobe Walls, near Amarillo. The Indians were defeated. Disorganized and dispirited, they surrendered the following year. They were moved to a reservation in southwestern Oklahoma. Quannah adjusted to life on the reservation and was named the Chief of the Comanche. Over the next quarter century he helped improve the Comanches' way of life on the reservation. Quannah Parker died in 1911. Today he and his mother, Cynthia Parker, are buried together in Ft. Sill, Oklahoma.

Notes

- **1.** Rhode Island, Delaware, Connecticut, Hawaii, New Jersey, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, Maryland, West Virginia, South Carolina, Maine, Indiana, and Kentucky.
- **2.** Spain, France, Mexico, Republic of Texas, Confederate States of America, United States of America.
- **3.** For more on the cowboy, see the January 1992 (vol. 30, no. 1) issue of the Forum.