

HISTORY OF MARKHAM, TEXAS

Markham is located in the Austin Land Grant which was instituted in January, 1823. When Texas became a Republic, the settlers acquired leagues of land, and our section was part of Etherton League No. 29. This league was conveyed to Daniel Etherton and Richard Graves by the Republic of Texas July 10, 1845. Time passed and Abel Pierce became the owner of this particular area. It was used for ranching and grazing until the Moore-Cortes Canal Company purchased it for rice farming.

Progress necessitated a railroad and the New York, Texas and Mexican Railroad, Southern Pacific System, built their line through this section of Matagorda County. This was a boon to the rice farmers whose homes were scattered here and there over the prairie and miles of muddy roads lay between them and Bay City where they did their business. Then the Markham Town Company was formed and 344.6 acres of land was purchased from the Moore-Cortes Canal Company at a price of \$50 an acre. The total sum of \$16,120.00 was paid as 22.2 acres was given to the railroad.

One day a box car was placed on a side track, a sign was hung up, and thus on May 23, 1903 what is now the town of Markham came into being. Ten days after the first train arrived, the townsite was laid off and the first lots were sold. People came by train, wagon and horseback and lived in tents until houses could be built. For a time the village was called "Tent City" but was named Markham for Charles Henry Markham, who was at that time the General Manager of the Southern Pacific Lines. Charles Markham was dedicated to helping those that were served by the railroads and encouraged diversified farming and businesses in the areas served.

At one time there were two trains a day going through Markham. It had a freight depot and a passenger depot. The first shipment of freight to be unloaded at the new townsite was a cargo of whiskey in kegs, and with this whiskey, Markham's first saloon was established. It was housed in a tent in the vicinity of Fifth Street and Avenue H. Markham became noted for her saloons /^{as} there were ten in number at one time. Since gambling was against the law, there was usually a hide-away in the rear or above the saloons. Rice field workers and cowboys alike flocked to the new town on Saturday night. There were fisticuffs and a few knifings but only one killing was reported - a druggist was supposed to have killed one of the town's doctors. There was no jail so when someone got out of hand, a box car served as a jail until they could be taken to Bay City.

The new town flourished quickly and at one time rivaled Bay City. In its earlier days it supported five general merchandise stores, two drug stores, three warehouses, a rice mill, two lumber yards, cattle shipping pens, a cotton gin, two blacksmith shops, two boarding houses, a bank, two meat markets, one cafe, a pool hall, a hotel, three doctors, and the ten saloons. Mule traders also did a flourishing business. The mules, which were needed for farming, were brought in by car loads from Missouri. Corn, oats, and tons of hay were consumed by the mules and other work stock so ^{THE} feed business was good.

The first post office was at Cortes, close to the west bank of the Colorado River and approximately one mile north of ^{the present} State Highway 35. The Moore-Cortes Canal Company had its headquarters there and a small boat was used to transport mail across the river. Mrs. A. A. Moore

owned and operated a hotel at Cortes and was postmistress. When the railroad was built and the town of Markham formed, the post office was moved to Markham. The first post office was a small wooden building located at Broadway and Fourth Street, across from the bank. Dick Robertson was the first postmaster and Mrs. Mary Perry worked in the post office. It was moved from this location in 1962 to its present location on the corner of Broadway and Seventh Street.

Joe Whiddon built the first house in Markham and also rendered a great service for his community by drilling water wells by hand. Mr. and Mrs. Grover McElrath built the first brick home in town. A man by the name of Martin Christian brought the first automobile to Markham. He purchased it from a mail order house, some say it was Sears and Roebuck. Old timers say that when he cranked it up the exhaust could be heard all over town. This automobile had the appearance of a buggy with high wheels.

Mrs. W. F. Jesse (the former Nellie Gullett) was the town's first telephone operator. She was one of the few women in the business world when she became a saleslady in the A. B. Turner Drug Store in Markham in 1908. The telephone switchboard was in the drug store when she became the first telephone operator.

The Markham State Bank was established by the first settlers of the Markham area and was located on Broadway and Fifth St. It was owned and operated by two men, Mr. W. A. Furber and Mr. W. J. Luder. Mr. Luder also served as cashier. The bank closed in the early 1920's and has been used as a residence since. At one time there was a dance hall atop it.

The hurricane of 1909 did quite a lot of damage to property and crops but this was soon forgotten for the next year the Colorado River dried up and the rice farming was doomed. The discovery of oil saved the town

from an early death. The oil field furnished employment for the idle rice farmers, bridging the gap between the crop failure and the time another could be put in.

The Japanese government sent one of its well-educated and wealthy citizens named Katayama to Markham to learn progressive rice farming. He brought quite a number of Japanese laborers and acquired 600 acres of land on the west end of the canal and a few miles west of Markham. Mr. Katayama bought rakes and hoes and was going to level the land by hand, but after much persuasion from local rice farmers, he purchased a land leveler. He bought mules and when he outfitted them with harnesses, he put a saddle on each one, thinking it part of the gear. He and his men furnished much amusement for the local townspeople, for regardless of how much he desired to learn the American way of life, he still clung to the ways of his country. He lived here six years and at no time was he ever disrespected. It is not known whether he profited from our American way of life or the methods of rice farming that he learned.

In 1903 the Moore-Cortes Canal Co. contracted to have a hotel built to lodge the boom town's important business visitors. Cypress lumber for the construction of the hotel was brought from Louisiana by barge across the Gulf of Mexico and the Colorado River to the boat landing at Cortes. It was then hauled by oxen across the prairie to the center of the new townsite where the two-story structure was erected. Mrs. Steve Perry, Sr. became the manager.

Then in 1905, a banker and unmarried businessman from Illinois named William Alard Furber bought the hotel as an investment. His widowed sister, Mrs. Caroline B. Fisher, came down from Illinois with

her daughter to run the hotel. Soon afterwards her daughter died of diabetes, the same ailment which had claimed the life of her husband earlier.

Mrs. Fisher had a knack for entertaining. A story has it that she kept a red carpet in the hotel to be rolled out to the street to welcome prominent guests during the rice and oil boom days. Mr. Katayama was reported to have been the hotel's most distinguished guest. Mrs. Fisher's grace and charm as a hostess became so well known that the "Markham Hotel" became known as the "Fisher Hotel". In the 1930's teachers from the Markham and Blessing schools occupied many of the rooms. The teachers needed cooking facilities of their own so Mrs. Fisher remodeled into apartments. Mrs. Fisher was their consultant, confidant and friend. Teacher gatherings, Christmas parties for the town, summer picnics, church socials and money-raising events for the schools were common events beneath the pecan, cottonwood and magnolia trees at the Fisher Hotel.

Mr. Furber died in 1935 after having lost his fortune in the stock market crash during the depression. The hotel was closed for many years and has been used as a residence since. Furber Switch, a railroad siding with cattle loading pens, was located west of Markham and was named after William Furber.

A dirt road with wooden bridges followed along the south side of the railroad westward toward Midfield. The present Farm Road 2431 was later paved along the north side of the railroad to Midfield. Early residents of the area traveled to Buckeye along the present route of Farm Road 1468. The original road to Bay City left Markham along the present Farm Road 2157 and then followed along canals to the river. The first bridge

across the Colorado River was built in the early 1900's, had an iron span with wooden approach, and was located upstream of the existing State Highway 35 bridge and the railroad bridge. In 1930, a larger iron bridge was built across the Colorado and the present State Highway 35 was completed through this area. In 1931, a two-way road to Markham from Highway 35 and one lane was paved along the present Farm Road 1468 to Clemville. Also, Markham's dirt and shelled streets were paved in 1965.

The Markham Cemetery is located on land donated by the railroad for black section hands. A section of Markham was built by the rice company for its black laborers and the houses were painted red - thus the name of "Red Town" was given the northeast part of town.

Weather has taken its toll in Markham. A hurricane in 1909 toppled houses and oil wells, killed live stock, and did much damage. Hurricane Carla, in September, 1961, was also very destructive. There was a serious freeze in 1924 that left cattle standing frozen to death in the fields.

During World War II many things were done for the war effort. The ladies baked goods for the USO at Camp Hulen near Palacios and rolled bandages. The town collected scrap, iron on the school yard and bought a jeep with the money. Troop trains passed through Markham going to and from Camp Hulen. There have been men from Markham serve in both World Wars and some lost their lives serving.

The first school in Markham was a two-story wooden building. The bell which is displayed on the schoolyard was the school bell from atop the school. The building was replaced in 1935 by the present structure

which has since had several additions. Black students attended classes in a school building located at Avenue D and Tenth Street and later at the Jefferson School in El Maton until desegregation in 1965. In 1930, the Markham High School was organized. The consolidation of Clemville, Northern Headquarters, Buckeye and Markham schools took place in 1935. Students from the Danevang area also attended classes in Markham for a short period. The school buildings in Buckeye and Northern Headquarters were moved and placed behind the Markham School. Buckeye's school was purchased by the Markham Methodist Church, torn down, and the lumber used to add on to their existing church. The Tidehaven consolidation in 1950 included the Markham School District and students have attended high school at the Tidehaven campus since then. Since 1965, students have attended Junior High at the Tidehaven Intermediate Campus.

The Markham Municipal Utility District was formed in 1963 and brought water and sewer service to the town. In 1967, the Markham Gas Company was formed to supply natural gas to the community.

Today Markham is a thriving town with numerous small businesses. The population has grown to near 2,000 with the influx of workers for the construction of the South Texas Nuclear Power Plant south of Markham.

Nearby on Farm Road 2157 is the Marathon Oil plant which was built in 1951. It is still producing oil and gas and drilling of new wells in the vicinity still goes on. *(no longer in operation)*

Transcontinental Pipeline also has a plant on Farm Road 2157 and began construction and operation in 1979. *It is now called Williams Field Services.*