

Historical Background

Odessa was established in 1881 as a railroad construction campsite on the Texas and Pacific Railroad. It is believed that Odessa was named in 1884. Records state that the name was acquired from founding promoters that thought that the wide flat prairies of the local terrain resembled the good wheat country like Odessa, Russia, which was the wheat distribution center of the world. The actual chartering of Odessa as a town did not occur until 1886. The original town site contained only 300 acres comprising about 78 platted blocks, which continue to be the central part of the community today.

While the coming of the railroad shortly after 1880 established Odessa as an actual town, there were less than 1, 000 people in the entire county up until late 1920. The discovery of petroleum in Ector County during 1926-1927 caused rapid changes in the area. The population increased to 4,000 people by 1930 and 15,000 by 1940!

History of Oil in the Permian Basin

Today Odessa's main industry is oil and gas. Oil and natural gas are the most valuable minerals produced in Texas. If we look back at this area 230 million years ago, we can find out why. That long ago, during the time of the dinosaurs, the Permian Basin was actually the Permian Sea. The oceans of that time period were teeming with life. Not only with fish and reptiles that could be seen, but also with tremendous amounts of microscopic life. All of this life, both big and small, eventually died and sank to the bottom of the sea where it accumulated with mud and silt. Over millions of years, hundreds of feet of this mud was deposited on the ocean floor. Forces deep within the earth caused parts of the earth to rise and sink and layer upon layer of mud, sandstone and limestone began to form.

The tremendous weight of these sediments caused the mud to compress. Chemical reactions caused bacteria and the added pressure and heat slowly caused the organisms to turn to oil.

It wasn't until the early 1900's that this part of West Texas was even considered for oil and gas production. Two oil wells were finally drilled which pointed to the Permian Basin as an extremely productive oil and gas area. The Abrams No. 1 was drilled in Mitchell County in 1920 and then the discovery well for the entire Permian Basin – the Santa Rita No. 1, drilled in 1927 – confirmed the promise of the area. Both wells were commercially productive, however the Santa Rita marked the beginning of large scale production, making the Permian Basin the most important oil producing region of Texas and the United States. Some 25 billion barrels of oil have already been produced from West Texas and Eastern New Mexico.

Odessa had been a small cow town for over 40 years, located on the western edge of the Permian Basin. Then in 1927, it's population of about 400 residents jumped to more than 3,000. Vacant houses were non-existent. During the first 10 months of 1927 a water system, electric light and power, an improved telephone system and five blocks of brick buildings downtown were completed. Odessa was well on its way to becoming the supply center of the Permian Basin.

(Petroleum Museum, Midland, TX)

Legend of Odessa's Name

Legends have persisted for a hundred years about where Odessa got its name. Some believe the Russian railroad workers were reminded of their Odessa, Russia. To add to the list there are stories that Odessa was named after a beautiful young Indian woman, the son of a prominent rancher that was killed in a gunfight, a young girl that was killed in an Indian raid, the first settler, and so on. The truth is that there are no records of any Russian workers on the railroad or any settlers by the name of Odessa. Indians had been out of the area for at least seven years before Odessa was established. There is one record however, that the founding promoters named Odessa in 1884 for Odessa, Russia, wheat distribution center of the world, because the local terrain looked like good wheat country.

Ector County

Odessa was originally in Tom Green County. The law required that in order to create a county there had to be at least one hundred and fifty residents in the area. It took nearly four years for Ector County to qualify. In the four-year time frame, Midland County officials performed the usual governmental functions. Property was put on the tax roll and a school district was created. In 1885, citizens petitioned the legislature to create a new county that included Odessa. House Bill number 113 was passed and Ector County was created on February 26, 1887, which extended from the western portion of Tom Green. It is doubtful that there were actually one hundred and fifty legal adult residents here at that time. Only men were allowed to vote, so women and children were not allowed to sign the petition. As in the case of many west Texas counties, it is believed that train crews, traveling cowboys and drifters were probably recruited to help.

The new county was named in honor of Confederate General Matthew D. Ector, who was also judge of the court of civil appeals and former legislator. Ector County became one of the thirty-six counties named after men that were prominent in the confederacy during the Civil War.

Schools

Ector County Independent School District covers the 906 square miles of Ector County in West Texas. The enrollment is over 26,000 students, coming mostly from the city of Odessa, which has a population of over 95,000. ECISD is the 34th largest school district in the state of Texas, and the 225th largest public school district in the nation.

The core facilities are composed of two 5-A high schools, a Career Center for grades 9-12, twenty-five elementary campuses, (eleven are magnet and all provide full day kindergarten), two early education childhood centers, six junior highs; an Alternative Education Center for grades 7-12, an Academic Acceleration Academy for 9th grade, a Teen Parent Center, AIM High School, a drop-out recovery year-round campus which also offers night classes, and a Family Education Center.

Since its creation in 1921, ECISD has gained regional and state recognition for academic excellence in student achievement. Accomplishments in athletics, academic decathlon, and in the fine arts programs characterize District emphasis on the potential of each student. The Partners in Education program, the Volunteers in Public Schools program, and the Education Foundation serve as strong evidence of community support.

The ECISD student body is rich in cultural diversity: Hispanic - 58.0%; Anglo - 35.3%; African-American - 5.3%; Asian or Pacific Islander - 0.7%; American Indian - 0.7%.

Odessa College was formed in August of 1946 and in 1969 The University of Texas of the Permian Basin was built.

Religion

Early Odessan's worked hard at developing their community, families, and religion. Their roots were planted deep and freedom of religion was practiced from the beginning. There was also the belief that not one religion could preside over any other. Odessans have generally supported the religion of their choice and not the religion of others. There are 31 separate denominations in **Odessa today. (Example: Baptist, Catholic, Methodist)**

Indians in West Texas

Texas has two reservations for Native American Indians. The Alabama and Coushatta Tribes Reservation is located between Woodville and Livingston. The Tigua Reservation is located outside of El Paso. Kickapoos have settled on 125-acre residential site along the Rio Grande near Eagle Pass.

Archaeologists recovered skeletons as well as weapons and pottery that are believed to have belonged to the Paleo-Indians. The Paleo-Indians were nomadic hunters who followed the elephant and the bison, and archaeologists tell us that they roamed around Odessa about 20,000 years ago.

Memorial Gardens

Great herds of wild buffalo once grazed the rich grasses around Odessa. The shaggy animals were the main source of food, clothing, and shelter for the Indians who followed the herd's deep narrow trails.

Along the trails these magnificent animals left buffalo wallows that still exist for hundreds of miles across the plains. The wallows were created years ago when the mammoth animals pawed and rolled in the dirt to rid themselves of ticks and fleas. West Texas winds whipped the loose dirt away, creating basin shaped depressions. Rainwater created water holes that were an even more enticing for them to drink and play. They would cover themselves in mud to cool off and keep flies away. There are two wallows in Odessa today!

The buffalo were killed for their skins and their remains were left all around the countryside. Bones were often stacked high along the railroad track awaiting shipment to the east for fertilizer and souvenirs. Pioneers collected bones to sell, adding to their livelihood during dry years. Buffalo chips were burned for camp and cooking fires. The location of Odessa and the area around was known by its buffalo trails. Army scouts knew the old wallows and used them for making stands in open country against Indians.

Meteor Crater

The Odessa meteor crater was formed in prehistoric times when a great shower collided with the earth. Geologists estimate that the time of the meteor shower was about 25,000 years ago. The Odessa Meteor Crater is believed to be the second largest in the United States. Scientists say that the crater was created by a meteor that was about 100 feet in diameter and weighed about 600 tons traveling at a speed of 36,000 miles per hour. The crater was originally 100 feet deep and 600 feet in diameter, but over time, sand and dirt eventually filled in most of it.

A local rancher originally discovered the crater in 1892. The depression was thought to have been caused by an explosion of gas trapped below the surface. It wasn't until the 1920's that a University of Texas scholar identified it as a meteor crater.

Famous Odessans

Larry King – Resident from 1952-1962; Author, journalist, screen writer,
Larry King Live

Hayden Fry – Resident from 1943-1950; Head football coach at University of Iowa, SMU, and North Texas State University

The Gatlins – (Larry, Rudy, & Steve) Resident from early 1950 early 1970; Country singers

President George H.W. Bush – Resident from 1948-1949; 41st President of the United States

President George W. Bush – Resident from 1948-1949; 43rd President of the United States

Ty Murray – Resident from 1987-1989; World Champion Cowboy

Jack Eric Williams – Native Odessan born in 1944; Composer and Lyricist

Larry Henley – Native of Odessa; Actor, singer, songwriter

Larry Johnson – Resident from 1987-1989; Professional basketball player

Chuck Greenwood – Resident until 1972; Thunderbird pilot

Britt Hager – Resident from 1966-1984; Professional football player

Facts about Texas

State Name: The name Texas originated from Tejas, an Indian word meaning friendly.

Motto: Our state motto is friendship.

Nickname: The Lone Star State

State Bird: Mockingbird

State Tree: Pecan Tree

State Flower: Bluebonnet

State Grass: Sideoats Grama

State Gem: Blue Topaz

State Stone: Petrified Palmwood

State Dish: Chili

State Song: Texas, Our Texas