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## LUFKIN: A CENTURY OF LOCOMOTIVES, SAWMILLS, AND INDUSTRY

by *Bob Bowman*

When Lufkin celebrates the 100th anniversary of its founding this year, its nearly 30,000 residents will look back on a lively century punctuated by the whistles of locomotives, the whine of sawmills and the roar of heavy industry.

Founded in 1882 at the beginning of an era which brought the railroad and, subsequently, the first significant timber boom into East Texas, Lufkin's early directions were for the most part shaped by aggressive and pioneering business and industrial interests which parlayed the region's abundant forest resources and a willing work force into a viable industrial-business complex which has been the spring-board for most of the city's other improvements.

Unlike Nacogdoches and San Augustine, whose roots reach beyond the Republic of Texas era, Lufkin's history is contemporary in nature, dating mostly from the late 1800s.

Looking back at the city's history, it is obvious three principal eras were responsible for what Lufkin is today. The first era, which centered on the arrival of the railroad and the progress it precipitated, occurred between 1882 and 1890. The second, marked by the great timber boom which produced hundreds of sawmills in East Texas, took place between 1890 and 1920. Lufkin's third significant era, often called its golden era of expansion, occurred between 1938 and 1945 when industrial expansion produced thousands of new jobs and widespread community growth.

To understand the origins of Lufkin, and the events which shaped its character and being, it is helpful to reach back to 1846 when Angelina County—of which Lufkin today is the county seat—was formed by the Texas Legislature from the southern flange of Nacogdoches County, one of the original counties under the Republic of Texas.

The name, Angelina, was taken from the river which constituted the county's northern and eastern boundaries. The legislative act creating Angelina County also named seven commissioners to lay out the county, form a government, and receive land donations for a courthouse. The seven were W. G. Lang, Henry Massingill, James A. Ewing, Joseph Herrington, A. C. Colwell, John T. Bowman and John McAnnelly.

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For the first 12 years of its existence as an established county, Angelina County remained a rough-hewed, sparsely-settled land without the amenities and civilities which marked life in Nacogdoches, San Augustine and other settlements in East Texas. Most of the county's settlers, who at the most numbered only a few hundred during the 12 years, were occupied with putting down roots, building homes, and trying to wrest a living from the tall-timbered land between the Neches and Angelina rivers.

For the most part, the county's communities were made up of two or three stores clustered beside a river ford or a strategic crossroads in the forest. Farming constituted the county's meager economic base, and the long hours and hard work that crop-producing required made trips to the settlements only occasional. Professional services such as medicine and law were scarce.

Even Marion, the county's first seat of government (1846-54), and Jonesville, the second (1854-58), were scanty settlements, lacking in professional services, established churches and the other niceties of older East Texas towns. It wasn't until the late 1850s, when Homer became the seat of government, that the county began to file off some of its rough edges and acquire the sophistication of "town life."

Marion, even though it acquired the distinction of becoming Angelina County's "first town", never was much more than a few buildings resting on the red-clay banks of the Angelina River. The town (also known as McNeill's Landing and Moses' Bluff) was selected as the first seat when the Texas Legislature created the county.

J. C. Moses of San Augustine donated 51 acres that made up the county seat and in return was given Lot No. 1 of Block No. 3 in the original Marion townsite. The settlement had a general store, drug store, blacksmith shop, a few homes and a river ferry. Riverboats frequently stopped at the settlement, picking up cotton for the trip south to Sabine Pass and unloading flour, sugar, drygoods and other necessities for the settlers.

Like Marion, Jonesville was small and inconsequential in relationship to Nacogdoches and San Augustine. The town was founded by Martin William (Gobbler) Jones, a native Alabaman noted for his ability to imitate a turkey gobbler. Shortly after arriving in Angelina County, Jones won a seat on the County Commissioners Court and in 1854 joined with two other commissioners, Frank Hill and Hardy Parker, to vote for moving the county seat from Marion to Jonesville. The county seat (Jonesville never built a real courthouse) remained there until 1858 when it was relocated at Angelina (later renamed Homer), principally through the efforts of a cultured physician, druggist and sawmill owner, W. W. Manning.

Vowing to create at Homer (named for his Louisiana hometown) a community of substantial culture and progress, Manning built the county's first significant courthouse from planks sawed by his own sawmill. Early historian W. J. Townsend, Jr. described Dr. Manning as "... an intelligent, progressive and useful citizen... who did much to promote its general welfare." He was also the first person to import into Angelina County jersey milk cows and blooded chickens.

Even at its height, Homer never had much more than 500 persons, but between 1858 and 1882, the community's leadership in the county went virtually unchallenged. The majority of the county's lawyers, physicians and other professional people lived there. The county's first established church was built there, and the county's major business firms did business around the courthouse square. Dr. Manning himself founded the county's first mechanical sawmill. Virtually all of the decisions affecting Angelina County were made by a council of Homer citizens.

The introduction of culture to Homer came through its founder, Dr. Manning, who reportedly had the best, if not the only collection of books in the town. Among them were *Homer's Translations*, *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Fox's Book of Martyrs*. Manning also owned the first piano in town and it has been said that he rang a set of chimes twice daily to summon his slaves for a period of worship.

Therefore, it seems ironic that Homer—the very fountainhead of culture and business development for Angelina County—should be remembered best for a rowdy, drunken brawl that supposedly killed the town and founded its 1880s archrival, Lufkin.

According to a story handed down by generations, Lufkin was little more than a few homes strung out on a dirt road in a forest clearing in 1881 when a surveying crew from the Houston East and West Texas Railroad came into Angelina County to plot the route for the railroad's push through East Texas. The crew supposedly began its work by surveying a route which would take the railroad through Homer, the county seat.

The story goes that the surveying crew decided to spend Saturday night in the saloons at Homer. As the night wore on, their patronage became a bit too enthusiastic and Constable W. B. (Buck) Green put the rowdy bunch in jail. The next morning, the men paid their fines and were freed.

Green's actions, however, infuriated the chief of the survey crew, a man some accounts identify as Captain Edwin P. Lufkin. He supposedly ordered the crew to retract its steps and plot a new route for the railroad—one which would bypass Homer and run through what

was known informally as "Denman Springs." The new route conveniently crossed the property of Colonel Lafayette Denman and his son, Dr. A. M. Denman, who reportedly had hosted members of the survey crew a few days earlier.

Whether the story is accurate or not is subject to speculation. Many of Angelina County's oldest residents, including some whose ancestors lived at Homer, insist the story really happened and the changing of the railroad eventually turned the town into a ghost.

Some sources, however, cast doubt on the story. Jim McMullen, writing in the January 27, 1935, issue of *The Lufkin Daily News*, hinted that the surveyors' decision to run the route through Denman Springs was brought about by another reason. "When rumors of a new town on the railroad began to be whispered, both Colonel Denman and P. C. Abney evidenced their willingness to donate land for the townsite. The railroad engineers were staying at the home of P. C. Abney, there being no boarding house in the vicinity, and no doubt they were enjoying numerous social occasions as there were three young ladies, daughters of Mr. Abney's, in the home . . . how much the charming surroundings had to do with the engineers' decision is not known, but soon a townsite was surveyed and business houses began to be built."

At the time, McMullen said, Colonel Denman, Abney and Dick Walker were the only residents of the community. What is now Abney Street was Lufkin's only street and shortly after the town began to grow, the first stores were located on the street. It wasn't until after the railroad's arrival (the depot was located on property donated by Colonel Denman) that Cotton Square and the rest of downtown Lufkin began to develop around the depot.

Dr. Robert S. Maxwell of Stephen F. Austin State University, who in 1963 wrote a history of the Houston East and West Texas Railroad, *Whistle in the Piney Woods*, also doubts the Homer brawl resulted in the town's demise. He said studies of the railroad's incorporation papers in Houston and Angelina County indicate that no right of way was ever obtained at Homer. A map drawn for the railroad's investors prospectus in 1879 shows the line following its present route through Angelina County. Equally significant, Bremond acquired the site for the railroad's crossing over the Angelina River in 1879 at a time when the route had not proceeded beyond Goodrich, south of the county. The site would not have been usable if the road had swung east through Homer. It seems more probably that Bremond never intended to go through Homer.

In rebuttal, believers in the Homer brawl story insist that a large curve in the railroad trackks near Burke, south of Homer, shows where the line was changed to make the turn through Lufkin.

Regardless of what really happened, the story of the Homer brawl is clearly imprinted on the history of Angelina County, and it is an indisputable fact that the railroad gave birth to Lufkin and, simultaneously did as much as the lumbering industries to bring growth and progress to the middle East Texas region.

Paul Bremond began his line at Houston in 1876 with a narrow gauge route considered a new departure in railroad construction. By 1879, some 63 miles of track had been completed and were in operation to Goodrich in Polk County. The railroad's march northward continued at a pace of about 25 miles a year and soon reached Lufkin and Nacogdoches.

While Bremond's railroad created tremendous interest, there were some who joked about its jerky, rail-hopping disposition, and often called it "the Rabbit Railroad." Others complained that the initials H. E. and W. T. stood for "Hell Either Way Taken."

To promote his route, Bremond often ran excursions from Houston to points northward. In 1878, for example, he ran a series of excursion trips from Houston to San Jacinto Springs. Three trains left daily at a cost of 50 cents for adults and 25 cents for children. Bremond provided a concert band for the passengers' entertainment, but prohibited any "spirits."

When Bremond's iron rails arrived in Lufkin in 1882, the railroad company immediately began to advertise the public sale of town lots in Lufkin. Terms of sale called for one-half cash, the balance in 12 months at 3 per cent interest. To permit Houston residents to view the lots and the rest of the fledgling town, Bremond ran an excursion train from Houston on September 11, 1882, with roundtrip tickets offered at half rates.

The lots in Lufkin were laid out on streets named for officials of Bremond's railroad company, including Groesbeck, Dozier, Shepherd and Burke. An advertisement published by the H. E. and W. T. said: "The Town of Lufkin is beautifully situated in the rich rolling prairie of Angelina County, 120 miles from Houston, 20 miles from Nacogdoches and six miles west of Homer, between the Neches and Angelina Rivers. It is one of the best agriculture sections of Texas, and being situated about the centre of Angelina County, will command the trade of this county and surrounding county."

The words were prophetic. Soon after the railroad arrived, many of Homer's business firms, lawyers and doctors began to move to Lufkin to be near the railroad. Some merchants continued to do business at Homer, but opened second stores at Lufkin. Among Lufkin's first stores were S. Abram's general store, Captain Kerr's grocery and saddle shop

and W. H. Bonner's general store, all located on Cotton Square behind the railroad depot, a two-story wooden structure with the living quarters of the agent located upstairs.

Cotton Square eventually became the center of activity for the young town. Farmers parked their wagons there, examined their neighbors' cotton and unloaded their own bales for buyers to see. The square was also the scene for political rallies, celebrations, street dances and horse sales. Occasionally, a gunfight broke out on the square and at least one public hanging (the only one known to have taken place in Lufkin) was conducted there. The square continued to be known as Cotton Square until 1961 when it was renamed to honor Louis Calder, Sr., a New York philanthropist who contributed to hospital and library improvements in the city.

By April 12, 1882, Lufkin had received federal recognition as a town when a post office was established. William A. Abney was the first postmaster, serving until March 21, 1883, when he was succeeded by Joseph Kerr. Communications also began to take shape when, in 1883, a telegraph line was strung from Lufkin to Nacogdoches. The population of the town is at the time not known, but probably did not exceed more than 80 or 90.

In 1884, the *Texas State Gazateer and Business Directory* placed the town's population at 100. The directory also listed 11 merchants and business people: Frank Abney, livestock; W. L. Chesnutt, carpenter, J. D. Clark, livestock; Mrs. Crosier, hotel; J. F. Davis, lawyer; W. L. Denman, justice of the peace; J. A. Denton, hotel; A. H. DuBose, physician; J. D. Moffatt, blacksmith; R. A. Simmons, blacksmith; and W. B. Treadwell, physician. The town probably had a number of other businesses which were not listed by the Directory.

As Lufkin's fortunes of commerce rose, Homer's fell. By 1890, Lufkin had grown to such an extent that Homer's leadership in Angelina County was almost nonexistent. Most of its business leaders had migrated to Lufkin to be nearer the rails and more and more newcomers were buying lots and settling in the community.

Lufkin, unfortunately, was also acquiring a rough and tumble reputation. Conductors on the H. E. and W.T. Railroad often admonished passengers to remain on the train when it stopped at Lufkin and at least one conductor called out the stop with warning, "Next stop, Lufkin, Prepare to meet thy God." Citizens often drifted down to the depot when the trains arrived to pick fights with passengers who dared to comment on the town's rough-looking exterior.

One Lufkinite tells the story of the man who got off the train and asked where he could find a certain man. When the local resident was

pointed out, the visitor walked over to him and immediately gave him a lashing with a bullwhip. Seeming to feel satisfied that justice had been done, he boarded the departing train.

By 1890, Lufkin had grown to the point where its leadership felt the city community should become an incorporated entity. On October 15, 1890, in an election called by County Judge J. T. Maroney of Homer, 51 male citizens voted in favor of incorporation and 26 cast ballots against. In a second election on November 15, J. M. Smith, owner of Smith's Hotel, was elected the town's first mayor, along with aldermen H. D. Weaver, W. A. Abney, Sr., J. Kerr, J. F. Davis and E. J. Mantooth, who also served as city secretary (and later as Lufkin's sixth mayor). W. M. Jones was elected city marshal and, in addition to enforcing laws, he was charged with the responsibility of assessing and collecting taxes. The city was incorporated with a property valuation of about \$250,000.

For the next year, the city's governing body spent most of its time passing ordinances to bring law and order to the rowdy settlement. One ordinance required the city marshal to be at the railroad depot and meet all trains "and keep a close watch for all violations . . ."

The city also made its first efforts at traffic control by ruling that ". . . any person who shall wrecklessly drive in, along or across any highway, street or alley or other public place within the . . . town and shall cause his animal to come in collision with or strike any other person, shall be fined." No one was allowed to drive a "wild or vicious-tempered animal" through the streets.

Even before its incorporation, Lufkin had made an effort to move the county's courthouse, still situated at Homer, to the railroad settlement. But an election in 1885 resulted in a 532-247 vote to retain the courthouse at Homer.

In 1891, with the majority of the county's population concentrated within its boundaries, Lufkin's leadership began to argue once again for bringing the seat of government to the community, reasoning that the county records should be near the railroad where they would be accessible to land agents and others who were doing a brisk business in the county.

Homer, despite its declining population, remained firm. The courthouse had been there 30 years; it would remain there.

But in November, 1891, Homer awoke one morning to find its courthouse in ashes. The town was certain the fire had been deliberate, the result of orders originating in Lufkin and carried out by night riders.

Everything was destroyed in the fire except two fireproof safes containing the county's records and money, but they were so hot that it was three days before they could be safely opened. During the time, Homer residents saw that they were closely guarded to prevent possible theft by Lufkinites.

One leading Homer resident merchant is said to have come running half-clothed to the courthouse fire, shouting: "They've done it. I knew they would. This is the work of Lufkin."

The County Commissioners Court designated temporary offices for the county in the back room of Dr. W. W. Manning's drugstore, but Lufkin wasted no time in capitalizing on Homer's loss. The day after the fire, the Commissioners Court received a petition from W. B. Mantooth and 200 other Lufkin citizens, asking for an election to decide if the courthouse should go to Lufkin or remain in Homer. Twenty Lufkin citizens agreed to furnish land and a new courthouse building.

When the election was held January 2, 1892, Lufkin counted 1,076 votes; Homer had only 436. Homer residents argued vehemently that Lufkin had brought in dozens of railroad workers, traveling salesmen and other out-of-towners all the way from Houston to vote in the election. It was a bitter loss for the community which once exerted so much leadership in the county.

By 1886, with its claim on the county seat finally cemented, Lufkin's population had swelled to more than 1,000. The city had two churches, a college, a public school, one bank, a sawmill, a brickyard, several cotton gins, a weekly newspaper, a tannery and other conveniences. The town also had more than 100 other business and professional people.

A few miles north of downtown Lufkin, in the community of Keltys, the city's industrial fortunes—and the shape of Lufkin for decades to come—were being molded with the development of a small sawmill known as Angelina County Lumber Company.

The company had been started in 1887 by Joseph H. Kurth, a German immigrant, when he acquired a small sawmill from Charles L. Kely. Kurth, who had previously operated a mill in Polk County, was soon joined in the venture by two friends, S. W. Henderson, Sr. and Sam Wiener, both of Corrigan. In 1890, they formally organized the Angelina County Lumber Company, which was to become the forerunner of many of the innovations in lumber manufacturing and forest management in East Texas.

The impact of the three families and their business partners in Lufkin's growth during the next 75 years was enormous. At the height

of their activity, the three families were involved in nearly a dozen Texas sawmills, a paper mill, foundries, hotels, movie theaters, railroads, investment companies, newspapers, radio and television stations, insurance firms, banks, hospitals and other enterprises.

Even though Angelina County Lumber Company ceased operations following its sale to Owens-Illinois, Inc. in 1966, all four of Lufkin's major industries—Lufkin Industries, Inc., Southland Paper Mills, Inc. (now St. Regis), Texas Foundries, Inc., and Angelina Plywood Company (now owned by Louisiana-Pacific)—owe their existence wholly or in part to the early involvement and interest of the business empire spawned by the old Angelina County Lumber Company at Keltys.

While legend and some early written accounts claim that Lufkin was named for Captain Edwin P. Lufkin, an engineer who helped survey the railroad route through Angelina County, there are strong indications that the town was in reality named for Captain Abraham P. Lufkin, a seaman, cotton merchant, Galveston city councilman and friend of Paul Bremond, president of the Houston, East and West Texas Railroad.

In 1880, two years before the railroad steamed into Lufkin, the Texas census showed Captain Abraham P. Lufkin living in Galveston as a wealthy cotton buyer. He and his wife had two sons, both railroad clerks. Born in Maine in 1816, Lufkin had gone to sea as a cabin boy, became captain of his own ship, and later settled at Galveston in 1845.

Lufkin devoted much of his business attention at Galveston to merchandising, lumber, cotton, ice making, and shipping. He was a stockholder in two cotton compress companies, a member of the Galveston city council and warden of the Galveston port.

Lufkin's business ties with Bremond are unclear, but since his sons were railroad clerks, it is likely he had invested in the H. E. and W. T. In 1885, according to *The Houston Post*, Bremond died at Lufkin's Galveston home. *The Post* described Lufkin as a "lifelong friend" of Bremond. Lufkin himself died in Galveston in 1887 and was buried in Episcopal Cemetery there.

While Captain Abraham P. Lufkin's friendship with Bremond can be documented, the same, unfortunately, cannot be said about Captain Edwin P. Lufkin, who supposedly gave his name to Lufkin.

City directories for both Houston and Galveston in the 1880s show no Edwin P. Lufkin. Houston's public library has nothing in its Texas or Houston files that bears the name. The same is true of Galveston's Rosenberg Library and the Texas 1880 census.

The only reference to Edwin P. Lufkin are found in old newspaper clippings at Lufkin and in the *Handbook of Texas*, which lists Edwin P. Lufkin, "a civil engineer," as Lufkin's namesake.

It may be that an early researcher or writer—long since forgotten in the mists of history—simply made a mistake in the name of the man for whom Lufkin was named.

Considering his "lifelong friendship" with Paul Bremond, it is likely that Abraham P. Lufkin is actually Lufkin's namesake. If so, land-locked Lufkin may owe its name to a sea captain.

#### NOTE

Those interested in further reading on the history of Lufkin will find the following of interest:

*Land of the Little Angel, a History of Angelina County, Texas*; Angelina County Historical Commission, 1976; Lufkin Printing Company, Lufkin, Texas.

*History and Description of Angelina County*; R. W. Haltom; published 1888, reprinted 1969, Jenkins Publishing Company/Pemberton Press; Houston, Texas.

*Handbook of Texas, Volumes One and Two*; Texas State Historical Association, 1952; Walter Prescott Webb, Editor; Austin, Texas.

*They Left No Monuments*; Bob Bowman, 1975; Lufkin Printing Company, Lufkin, Texas.

*The Towns We Left Behind*; Bob Bowman, 1972; Free Press Publishing Company, Diboll, Texas.

*Axes, Oxen and Men*; Laurence C. Walker, 1975; Free Press Publishing Company; Diboll, Texas.

*Whistle in the Piney Woods*; Robert S. Maxwell, 1963; Texas Gulf Coast Historical Association; Houston, Texas.

*The History of Angelina County*; Effie Boon, 1937; Thesis for Master's Degree, University of Texas; Lufkin and Austin, Texas.

*The Economic Development of Angelina County*; Archie Birdsong Mathews, 1952; Thesis for Master's Degree, University of Texas; Lufkin and Austin, Texas.

Angelina County Records, County Clerk's Office, 1846 to 1895; Lufkin, Texas.

City of Lufkin, City Secretary's Office, various records, 1892-1895; Lufkin, Texas.

*The Lufkin Daily News*; various articles published between 1907 and 1976, Lufkin, Texas.

*The Angelina County Free Press*, various articles published between 1957 and 1976; Diboll, Texas.