



# East Texas Historical Journal

A Publication of the East Texas Historical Association

Volume 55 Issue 2

Article 6

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2017

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### Recommended Citation

Speir, Thomas (2017) "Historic Survey of Waskom, Harrison County, Texas," *East Texas Historical Journal*: Vol. 55: Iss. 2, Article 6.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj/vol55/iss2/6>

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## Historic Survey of Waskom, Harrison County, Texas

BY THOMAS SPEIR

*Editor's note: The format and style of the following article differs from most pieces in the Journal. It follows the accepted format and practices of such surveys.*

The City of Waskom is located on the Texas and Louisiana state lines, at the intersection of FM 134 and 9, U.S. Highway 80, and Interstate Highway 20. It is eighteen miles southeast of Marshall in southeastern Harrison County.

### Native American Presence

Several Archaic Period (6000 B.C. - 300 B.C.) artifacts have been found in East Texas, including eastern Harrison County. This is evidence of a human culture living in and traveling through the Waskom area, some 3400 years before the construction of the Pyramids of Giza and the Sphinx. (B. M. Staff 1999).

These humans likely became the ancestors of various tribal units of the Caddo Confederacy, including the Yatasi near present-day Shreveport and the Petit Caddo around Caddo Lake. At their peak, ca. A.D. 1100, the Caddo were the most highly developed prehistoric culture known within the present state of Texas. Texas takes its name from the Spanish spelling of a Caddo word "taysha," that means "friend" or "ally". The Spanish explorers pronounced the work "tejas". Early chroniclers encountered at least two dozen named, independent Caddo groups, some speaking separate dialects of a common language, which helped each other as members of a common confederacy.

*Thomas Speir is the chair of the Harrison County Historical Commission*

**“If the Comanches might be likened to the Asiatic Huns, the Caddoes might crudely be called the Romans of Texas.”** (W. W. Newcomb 1961) The Caddo were highly successful farmers with an assured food supply that made possible a dense population and elaborate social institutions, like full time priests and chieftains.

In July 1542 several hundred Spaniards and Portuguese passed through western Harrison County as part of the Hernando De Soto expedition. A century would pass before Europeans returned to the Caddo world. In the intervening period recurring diseases (like smallpox) decimated Caddo populations. Caddo societies grappled with catastrophic changes caused by rapid population loss, incursions of enemies from the north and east, mounted raiders from the west, and with a changing economy.

The relentless push of Anglo-American settlers from the east forced the Caddo to abandon much of their homeland as they grew smaller and smaller in number, with the remnant groups banding together for survival. With the signing of the Louisiana Treaty of Cession in 1835, the Caddo transferred nearly a million acres of their land to the United States.

An 1835 survey map designating various head rights within the then Department of Nacogdoches clearly identified an Indian trail that ended in an area marked only by “Ind. Village.” This area was 9.5 miles northwest of present day Waskom. An archaeological study suggests that this 1835 village is an early Alabama Indian site. Findings at the site included French trade goods. This study documents that tribes from the eastern United States were moving into the eastern Harrison County area in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and trying to establish settlements. (Armstrong 2002)

### **Early European Intrusions**

At one time both Spain and France claimed the area of present Texas and by 1716 Spanish presidios and French trading posts at Natchitoches, Louisiana were separated by only a few miles. In 1736 the commanders at the two outposts agreed on a Red River tributary between the Sabine River and Natchitoches, as the boundary between Louisiana and New Spain. (Handbook of Texas Online, “Boundaries” 2010)

When the United States purchased Louisiana in 1803, the boundary of the purchase was not defined. During its short life, The Republic of Texas, 1836-1845, was plagued with boundary problems with Mexico



and also with the United States. One of the most troublesome spots was the north-south line that ran between the Red and Sabine Rivers in East Texas. In 1838, the Texas Secretary of State complained:

The country through which the line will pass is now rapidly settling by an active and enterprising population, whose condition is rendered unpleasant and embarrassing (sic) by the uncertainty which exists in regard to the true boundary. While such a state of things continues this Government cannot enforce its revenue laws, neither can it make suitable preparations for the defense of that frontier.

Between 1806 and 1846 a 100 mile by 200 mile strip of land between the Red River and the Sabine River became known as the Texas Badlands, or the Redlands, due to the significant amount of blood spilt there. During this forty year period the United States and the Republic of Texas disputed ownership of this strip of land, with neither side exercising jurisdiction. This became an ideal location for persons operating outside the law.

Confusion prevailed. Only a joint survey of the boundary line by the two nations would resolve the many problems, but such was not forthcoming until 1841. Many of those living on the lands surveyed by the United States continued to owe their allegiance to Texas, and one resident, Robert Potter, who lived on Potters Point, became a member of the Texas Congress.

Treaties were tied to the thirty-second parallel, which runs just south of present day Carthage, Texas. North of the thirty-second parallel, the border no longer followed the Sabine. Rather, it followed a line that had yet to be drawn. In addition, this section was still occupied by the Caddo, lands that were becoming more desirable to settlers. In 1835 the Caddo signed the Treaty of Cession, and in 1837 town lots began to be sold in the new community of Shreveport.

Tempers flared occasionally, but only one military encounter developed. In November, 1838, the "Texas Militia" crossed the border into Caddo Parish while pursuing a band of Indians. Briefly "occupying" Shreveport, the Texans almost precipitated a break in relations between the two nations. (Ruffin 1973)

Some settlers in this frontier took advantage of the situation by showing no loyalty to either country. Surveyors at this time recorded just a few dozen cultivated fields, and five Indian villages. As more settlers arrived the need for a firm boundary became more important.

The area that later became Powellton came to be settled due to the fact that it was a midway point between Marshall and the Red River. An east/west road developed between the two sites by which products could be brought into east Texas and raw materials could be taken to the steamboats on the river. (Duncan 2011)

### **The Regulator-Moderator War**

The Regulator-Moderator War was a feud in Harrison and Shelby counties in East Texas from 1839 to 1844. The roots of the conflict lay in the frauds and land swindling that had been rife in the Neutral Ground, the lawless area between the American and Texas borders.

Charles W. Jackson, a former Mississippi riverboat captain and a fugitive from Louisiana justice, shot a man at Shelbyville in 1840. Jackson then organized the Regulators to prevent "cattle rustling." In turn, the Moderators were organized by Edward Merchant to moderate the Regulators. The first major confrontation between the groups came on July 12, 1841.

The feuding groups signed a truce on July 24, 1844, which protected "good and unoffending citizens." The struggle was again renewed in August 1844. About 225 Moderators attacked sixty-two Regulators near Shelbyville. The Regulators were reinforced by prominent citizens from Harrison County, one of whom was killed.

On August 15, 1844, President Houston ordered the militia to go make peace in East Texas. They arrested ten leaders from both sides and brought them to San Augustine. Both Regulators and Moderators eventually joined Capt. L. H. Mabbitt's company to serve in the Mexican War (1846-1848). (Cuthbertson 2010)

### **Powellton**

The town now known as Waskom was established around 1850 and was first known as Powellton. Jonathan S. Powell received a 640-acre land grant northwest of today's Jonesville, a community 3.5 miles northwest of Waskom.



The original document, on file at the Texas General Land Office, reads as follows:

*The Republic of Texas: County of Harrison*

*This is to certify that John S. Powell appeared before us the board of Land Commissioners of Harrison County & proved according to Law that he Emigrated to this Republic in Feb. 1841. That he is a married man and having never received a certificate is entitled to an unconditional grant of six hundred and forty acres of Land. Given under our hands and seals this 6<sup>th</sup> day of May 1844.*

(Abstr. 564; File Number 000187)

*The State of Texas, Harrison District; Survey No. 120 District No. 3; May 26<sup>th</sup>, 1848*

*Survey made for John S. Powel of 640 acres of land situated in Harrison County. About two miles west of the Thirty sixth mile post in the Louisiana State and Texas boundary line. It being the quantity of land to which he is entitled to by virtue of a Certificate No. 250...*

A portion of Waskom included land purchased by Jonathan's brother, Thomas D. Powell from a land grant issued to W.H. Adams. (Waskom, Texas, Eudora Coleman Hodges, Waskom File D29-1674B, Harrison County Archives.) T.D. Powell came from Alabama in 1842. The Texas 1846 census shows Powell residing in Harrison County but under no township. (Bach-Prather, SFA Center for Regional Heritage Research: Harrison County Historical Sites Survey ; Resources by Location 2013)

Thomas D. Powell settled in the N.H. Adams headright, exactly two miles south of his brother, John. The year of his arrival is documented by a statement in his wife's obituary, written by their son-in-law, Rev. Horace Bishop of Tarrant County at whose home Mrs. Powell died. (Hodges 1994)

Powell was the first storekeeper and postmaster in the community. A post office was established under the name of Powellton on May 18, 1850, which officially established the town. It continued to exist under that name through the Civil War until 1872. According to the U.S. Appointments of Postmasters, John M. Waskom was appointed the General Postmaster in 1866 for Powellton (Record of Appointment of Postmasters, 1832-Sept. 30, 1971).

In the early days of settlement in East Texas, it was not uncommon for plantation owners to establish stores on their property. Powell's store was already in operation when, on July 1, 1854, Dr. Perry made purchases there. Dr. Perry was an old family friend from the Leigh area of Harrison County, who also made purchases in Jonesville that day. (Hodges 1994)

Historians often agree that a farmer holding 20 or more slaves could be termed a planter. A Waskom area planter was Zachariah Abney who, with his wife Elizabeth Susannah McClure, operated a plantation of several thousand acres spread along and across the state line into Louisiana. He also operated the Abney General Store.

Records indicate Abney had 22 slaves in 1854 and 55 in 1860. Records show he never hired an overseer and insisted on keeping slaves grouped together in family units. This non-standard method of doing business worked well for everyone. They worked a farm of 600 improved acres and 500 unimproved acres and in 1860 produced 5,000 bushels of corn, 400 bushels of sweet potatoes, 10 bushels of Irish potatoes, and 126 bales of cotton.

In addition they maintained livestock holdings of 10 horses, 12 mules, 60 head of cattle and 100 hogs. To be everywhere at once, Abney relied on Black supervisors who helped manage the farm, fence and building repairs, feeding and clothing of all the families, and medical requirements. Abney needed to be an expert in both farm management and group psychology. (R. G. Campbell 1987)

Once a reasonably large consignment of cotton was baled, it would be shipped by steamboat to New Orleans and later, Shreveport. A commission house there would sell the crop for the best possible price, retaining a 2.5% commission, and keep the plantation's credit on their books. Planters would then send orders for needed supplies for the coming year, such as salt, sugar, molasses, coffee, gunpowder, medicines, and clothing materials. This order would be gathered and shipped to the planter, the cost being deducted from the plantation's credit, along with another 2.5% commission. If expenses outran income during a bad year, credit would be extended at 8% interest.

The use of the telegraph for communication with the rest of the United States and Texas began with the chartering of the Texas and Red



River Telegraph Company on January 5, 1854. The first telegraph office was opened by the company in Marshall, Harrison County, on February 14, 1854. Patrons were offered connections with New Orleans via Shreveport. It is likely that this telegraph line ran through Powellton, and there may have been a station established there. (Wilcox 2010)

On March 18, 1872, Powellton was changed to "Waskom Station," (shortened to Waskom on September 29, 1881) in honor of the Reverend John Millage Waskom who was instrumental in bringing the railroad through the town. By this time, Powell had moved and resettled in Hearne.

John Waskom was a stockholder in an early railroad company of the area, Texas and Pacific (not the same as the later T & P line,) and it was through his influence and management that the railroad line from Marshall was extended through Waskom to the Louisiana line. (Waskom, Texas, Eudora Coleman Hodges, Waskom File D29-1674B, Harrison County Archives.)

By 1884 Waskom had an estimated population of 150 inhabitants, two black Baptist churches, a school, a sawmill, four steam gristmills and two cotton gins. (Lentz 2010) The city was incorporated on August 15, 1894. By 1900 the town had three stores, a one room school, and about a dozen families. Waskom's population fluctuated at approximately two-hundred until 1920 when the population grew to 1,000 after oil was discovered in the area.

## The Railroad

The history of Waskom is tied, in no small way, to the history of the railroad which was introduced to Waskom in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The Texas Western Railroad Company was chartered on February 16, 1852. In 1857 the railroad constructed twenty-three miles of track between Marshall and Swanson's Landing on Caddo Lake.

It should be noted that the railroad did not "arrive" as an extension of previously laid track, as it did in most communities. Rather, the railroad was brought to Harrison County by steamship and an independent track was laid to Marshall.

The Texas Western Railroad Company changed its name to the Southern Pacific on August 16, 1856. The Southern Pacific owned a line



between Longview and Waskom (Powellton) and leased the line of the North Louisiana and Texas Railroad Company from the Texas state line to Shreveport.

During the Civil War part of the line to Caddo Lake was taken up, and the rails were re-laid to Waskom where connection was made with the Vicksburg, Shreveport and Texas Railway Company, thus forming a line between Marshall and Shreveport, Louisiana. (Werner, Handbook of Texas Online, "Texas Western Railroad" 2010)

The American Civil War seriously affected transportation in Texas. The outbreak of fighting halted all railroad building for seven years, and difficulties in maintaining rolling stock caused existing service to be interrupted. As previously noted, several miles of track between Swanson's Landing, on the south side of Caddo Lake, and Jonesville was taken up and re-laid eastward from Marshall to Waskom (Powellton) for military purposes. (Wooster 2015) This was for a very practical purpose.

Most rails were manufactured in Northern states, allowing Union trains to travel at relatively high speeds on well-maintained tracks. In the South, most rail lines were still quite primitive, often using "strap rail". This was basically a metal plate that was layered on top of a wooden "rail". It was inexpensive to make but severely restricted safe traveling speeds. As such, 15-20 mph was likely the top speed on these lines. Re-laying good quality rails made prior to the Civil War allowed for greater speed.

The "strap rails" also had a common habit of wearing loose where it was nailed down to the wooden rail with large spike nails. Wheel action would cause the strap to coil up violently when it came loose, even ripping up thru the bottom of cars. Railroad men referred to these as "snakeheads". Where solid iron rail or pressed U rail (sheets of metal pressed into an inverted U shape with flanges for spiking) was used, speeds could be increased. Iron rails were still weak, however, and the U rail was not very strong either. It is likely that 20-30 mph was top speed, even for Express trains. (VSmith 2005)

Some of these solid iron rails were reportedly carried through Powellton on to Shreveport. There, the Confederate Navy laid down the keel of the Ironclad ship "Missouri" in 1862. Her casement was constructed of well-angled surfaces covered over with railway iron, laid vertically in two interlocking layers to avoid cutting the iron. (Writer 2016)

To consolidate the Confederate chain of command west of the Mississippi River, the Trans-Mississippi Department was created in 1862. The headquarters was established in Shreveport, Louisiana. However, a yellow fever epidemic in Shreveport at that time prompted the Confederate commander to move most, but not all of his operations to nearby Marshall, Texas. This required a fast and reliable means of transportation and communication between the two cities. Waskom, which was still referred to as Powellton during this time period, was located mid-way between these two cities. (Jurney 1996)

During this period a steam locomotive in the Southern U.S. could travel, on good rails, at an average top speed of 15-20 mph. This compares to a stagecoach which could travel 3-5 mph; horse and wagon, 2-4 mph; ox team and wagon, 1-2 mph; or walking at 2-3 mph. When speed was of the essence of necessity, travel by rail was the obvious choice. (DL Dance 2005) It is not hard to picture these steam powered trains traveling daily through Waskom (Powellton), heavily loaded with officers, politicians, supplies and equipment.

Harrison County's African American population during the 1870s far exceeded other counties in the Piney Woods, and many of these persons went to work either on the railroad directly, or in related industries, such as migratory logging camps. Logging camps usually included a "barrel house," a portable structure that served as a recreation center for laborers in the camp, and often included an inexpensive upright piano.

Oral histories and objective evidence strongly suggest that the music now known as Boogie Woogie, with its iconic left-hand bass lines that mimic the sounds of the logging camps and the rail yards, originated in the area of Marshall, Texas in the early 1870s. The earliest players named left-hand bass figures after stops along the T&P line, including, for example, the "Tyler Tap," the "Jefferson," the "Waskom," and the "Marshall." (Canson 2016). This music became a part of daily life in and around the Waskom area.

The sixty-six mile railroad owned by the Southern Pacific between Longview and Waskom and the leased section from the Texas state line to Shreveport was acquired by the Texas and Pacific on March 21, 1872. This was the only predecessor of the company in Texas to have built and operated a railroad. This Southern Pacific was not related to



the later Southern Pacific system, which originated in California. (Werner, Handbook of Texas Online, "Texas and Pacific Railway" 2016)

Nearly thirty miles of track was built from Jefferson to Waskom in 1900 by the Sherman, Shreveport and Southern Railway. Rights for tracks were obtained over the Vicksburg, Shreveport and Pacific Railroad from Waskom to Shreveport. (Werner, Handbook of Texas Online, "Sherman, Shreveport and Southern Railway" 2010)

A branch of a second railroad, the Missouri, Kansas and Texas, was built through the community about 1900. The population had grown to an estimated 207 people in 1904. Oil was discovered near Waskom in 1924, and Waskom's population increased to some 1,000 inhabitants by the mid-1920s.

The Texas and Pacific Railway system had their railroad's shops and general offices for Texas located in Marshall. The county seat benefited from the railroad and from its position as a retail center for the surrounding area. Nevertheless, a majority of the county's workers were employed in agriculture during this time period. (R. B. Campbell 2016)

### **Cotton and Timber**

Harrison County remained overwhelmingly agricultural and rural from 1880 to 1930. Waskom was home to two cotton gins to handle the high volume of cotton brought into the city.

Old plantations were eventually divided up and leased to tenants and sharecroppers. Tenants lived in houses on the landowners' property. For their year of work, after the cotton was ginned, they received two-thirds of the value of the cotton. After the cotton was sold and the accounts settled, the tenant or sharecropper often had little or no hard cash left over. This socially enforced debt peonage, known as the crop-lien system, began after the Civil War and continued in practice statewide until the 1930s. (Karen Gerhardt Britton 2010)

Farmers first saw the ravaging effect of the boll weevil during the 1890s. A high demand for cotton during World War I stimulated production, but a drop in prices after the war led many tenants and sharecroppers to abandon farming altogether and move to the cities for better job opportunities. (Karen Gerhardt Britton 2010)

Factors that caused the decline of cotton production in Texas after the 1920s were the federal government's control program, which cut acreage in half, the increase in foreign production (the state had been exporting approximately 85 percent of the total crop), the introduction of synthetic fibers, the tariff, the lack of a lint-processing industry in Texas, and World War II, which brought a shortage of labor and disrupted commerce. (Karen Gerhardt Britton 2010)

In 1937 each of the town's two cotton gins averaged nearly 3,000 bales each. An entire sharecropper family could produce 4 bales of cotton, utilizing 2-3 acres per bale. These figures also applied to the cotton gins in Leigh, Jonesville, and the two in Elysian Fields, all within a ten mile radius of Waskom. The total land under cultivation in the area was 40,000-50,000 acres.

By 1940 cotton production had dropped to 14,000 bales. In 1941, and in 1945, the two cotton gins in Waskom shut down. By 1949 the remaining four cotton gins in the area were only processing 8,400 bales. In the 1950s that number dropped to 3,600 bales. In 1960 the gin at the T.C. Lindsey store in Jonesville processed 950 bales, and the other three gins processed a total of 1,800 bales, for a grand total of 2,750 bales in 1960.

Productivity had increased by this time. Production of a bale of cotton only required 2 acres, and a family could produce 5 bales in a year's time. Land once used for cotton production was being used for other crops and, more extensively, cattle production. (Allison April, 1961)

Waskom also served as an early logging center, which provided employment opportunities for many area African-Americans. Pine was harvested from the local forests and hauled by mule train or rail to Waskom mills. The mill town of Lorraine was built neighboring Waskom to the east, between Waskom and the state line. It contained a large commissary, hotel, gasoline station, offices and several homes. A "General Highway Map" for Harrison County, dated 1936, and prepared by the Texas State Highway Department clearly shows the "Waterman's Logging Tram" serving Lorraine from Panola County in the south and traveling north, nearly paralleling the state line to Lorraine.

Starting as the Waterman Saw Mill in 1914 with 35 employees, the mill was owned by William Madison Waterman. It was acquired by the



Frost Johnson Company of Shreveport in 1922. The Waterman Lumber mill suffered an estimated \$30,000 in damages following a fire on Friday, June 5, 1925. This was a large amount of money at this period in time, and represents a major investment in the Waskom economy.

That company later changed its name to Frost Industries and operated until 1952.

Olin Mathison Chemical Corporation bought the mill and closed it in 1953, ending one of the first industrial payrolls in Waskom. (Waterman Mill Gave Rise to Company Town of Lorraine 1994)

### **Oil and Gas**

During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the price of cotton, the traditional main source of income for Harrison County, continued to fall. Harrison County remained overwhelmingly agricultural, as cotton continued as the main crop. However, the Great Depression hit the county hard. The value of farm property fell 30 percent between 1930 and 1935, and there were almost 1,500 fewer farms in 1940 than in 1930. For the first time, a majority of workers depended on nonagricultural occupations, and unemployment became a problem. (R. B. Campbell 2016)

Waskom suffered from unique criminal activity in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that was directly related to the oil and gas industry. When the East Texas Oil Field was discovered in 1930, Texas was already the leading oil producing state of this nation. This began with the advent of Spindletop's gusher down in the Gulf Coast Region in 1901.

Chronologically, at about the time of the Waggoner discovery in Wilbarger County in 1909, exploration along the Texas-Louisiana border in the vicinity of Caddo Lake resulted in discovery and development of the area in 1910. Bubbling ponds at the lake indicated the presence of gas which led to exploration of the area.

The East Texas Oil Field was the proving ground on which experimental Texas laws and experimental methods were tried and proved. The Oil and Gas Conservation Act of 1919 prohibited production of crude oil "in such manner and under such conditions as to constitute waste" and the Texas Railroad Commission was charged with doing "all things necessary for the conservation of oil".

The discovery and development of the Waskom Gas Field around 1924 led to the first shipment of oil from that field being delivered in Marshall on August 25, 1926. The discovery of natural gas spurred the development of the Dixie Pipe Line Company, which eventually dedicated \$650,000 for expansion of their gas plant near Waskom in 1927. This was possibly influenced by Waskom's position on the Texas/Louisiana state line. (Dixie Pipe Line Company Will Expend \$650,000 for Plant Near Waskom 1927) The sudden influx of oil and gas wealth into the area created opportunities for criminal activities. On December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1927, Rudd's Store in Waskom was burglarized and \$600 taken. Reported in The Shreveport Times the following Sunday, this type of crime was not common in such a small community. Again, this might have been influenced by its location on the state line.

On August 14, 1931, a meeting of approximately 1,500 citizens, producers and royalty owners was held at Tyler, Texas due to the rapid and uncontrolled development of the East Texas Field. On the following day, a committee appointed by this mass meeting called upon Texas Governor Sterling, insisting that a state of insurrection existed in Gregg, Smith, Rusk and Upshur counties and that riot and destruction of property and probably bloodshed was imminent.

On August 15, the Governor issued a proclamation declaring Martial Law in the counties of Upshur, Gregg, Rusk and Smith. Martial law in these nearby counties continued for six months, enforced by National Guard troops, but was eventually struck down by the courts.

The failure of Sterling's martial law plan left the state at the mercy of the oil thieves. In June, 1932, the Texas Railroad Commission was allowing East Texas 325,000 barrels of oil daily, this figure being taken to represent the limit of production that might be allowed without physical waste. Amounts variously estimated to run from 100,000 to 350,000 barrels daily in excess of this figure were finding their way into the market with devastating effect.

While there were a half dozen modern efficiently constructed refineries in operation in East Texas, the number of topping and skimming plants had increased to nearly fifty. These plants continued to receive all the oil they required at prices far below the posted market price for oil. At the low prices they paid for crude, these refineries could only re-



ceive supplies from operators who would sell them amounts in excess of the allowable set by the Railroad Commission.

Methods of checking these plants were difficult, as most of the oil was run to them in a secretive, underhand manner, through hidden lines and from sources unknown to the Railroad Commission employees. Newspaper articles from the Shreveport Times document these issues. For example, The Times article from February 23, 1935, page 7, discusses patrols establishing headquarters specifically to stop shipments of "hot oil" at Waskom.

Stolen oil was hauled from the wells at night, and the community of Waskom and its environs was an ideal area to cross the border. Tank trucks delivered petroleum to topping plants; the converted oil, in the form of low grade gasoline, was, in turn, distributed by fleets of trucks which virtually commanded the principal highways leaving the oil field for cities and towns within a radius of several hundred miles. Practically none of this product had paid the state gasoline tax; the plants manufacturing it kept no visible records of their crude purchases.

Any attempt to trace the source of the oil going to these plants ended in failure. Employees of the Railroad Commission were repeatedly turned away from the small refining plants in the field with shotguns and threats of violence. Shady practices have doubtless been resorted to in almost every other field in this country, but none of the old tricks compared with the ingenuity of the East Texas oil racketeer. (Silvey 1938)

### **Municipal Expansion in the Twentieth Century**

The newspaper articles concerning Waskom in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century dealt primarily with the usual activities of weddings and funerals, as well as numerous local sporting events. These were only periodically marred by reports of criminal activity or injuries sustained by employees in the petroleum or railroad industries.

At the turn of the century, Waskom acquired its first resident physician, Dr. Z.E. Vaughn, whose home was built in 1901. It should be noted that Waskom, like the rest of the nation, was exposed to the dangers of the Spanish Flu in 1918. It was estimated that between 600-700 cases of the flu were reported in Marshall alone, resulting in 70 deaths. (Knight 1919)

Poverty still plagued the county. During the depths of the depression in 1935, 1,114 heads of families in Harrison County were on government relief. As late as 1940, 850 workers were employed on public emergency works, and another 838 were without jobs. (R. B. Campbell 2016)

The county also retained its black majority through these years. Blacks constituted more than 60 percent of the total population in every census from 1880 to 1930. Harrison County enjoyed transportation facilities that were better than average for East Texas counties, but its nonagricultural economy expanded slowly from 1880 to 1930.

In order to understand the social dynamics of the Southern United States during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, it is necessary to reflect on the common displays of racial inequality. The “Jim Crow” laws following the Civil War required “separate but equal” treatment of African Americans. If a service, such as a water fountain, were made available, a separate water fountain for Blacks would be made available.

The extreme end of this inequality was the legacy of lynchings. These hangings have been defined as violent, public acts of torture designed to traumatize African Americans. Numerous such acts were never reported or recorded. However, throughout all of Harrison County, 15 lynchings were recorded from 1877-1950, ranking the county third in the state. (Equal Justice Initiative 2015)

However, some of the citizens of Waskom had a history of banding together for mutual support. In 1941, just prior to World War II, townspeople formed the Waskom State Guard. This was a group of volunteers intended to protect the town from saboteurs and invaders. (Stringley 1994). There is evidence that nationwide, Blacks and Whites put aside their differences to support the war effort during World War II.

The city of Waskom provided its fair share of intelligent persons who worked to provide for the common good both at the local and state levels. Cread L. Ray, Jr. was born 1931 was elected judge of Harrison County in 1959, was elected to the Texas House of Representatives, and to a seat on the Sixth Court of Appeals. He became an Associate Justice, Texas Supreme Court, 1980-1990. (Tarlton Law Library 2004) Other notable persons claimed by Waskom include Ben Z. Grant and Sam Baxter.



The 1940s and early 1950s saw a change in the economy of the Waskom area as the community was changing from a farming community to an industrial area. Population and income increased, and the community began to feel the need for an area bank.

Merchants had begun the practice of borrowing change from each other until they could drive the twenty miles, during a work day, to get to a bank. This meant the merchants had to carry an extra-large amount of cash during hours of operation, and this led to the additional expense of insuring that extra cash. Night time robberies increased.

Additionally, local citizens could not secure loans locally for financing homes, so Waskom at this time was mostly made up of rental properties. This was compounded by the availability of affordable appliances, furniture, and automobiles. (Allison April, 1961)

To meet this need the First State Bank, Waskom, was opened in 1922. In 1928, business at the bank was good, and a new building was constructed to house the bank. This included resources of one half million dollars, and \$200,000 in loans, primarily on cotton crops and farm land. However, in 1929 the Wall Street Crash heralded the Great Depression. The bank was purchased by the First National Bank in Marshall. The bank left Waskom in 1932.

When the old Waterman Saw Mill was sold, Mr. Waterman formed the Waterman Brick and Tile Works. This business was later sold to Tri-State Brick and Tile Company of Shreveport who sold it in 1954 to the Acme Brick Company of Fort Worth.

Although discovered in 1924, it was not until after World War II that the Waskom gas field reached full development. Three refineries were developed; Arkansas Louisiana Company, the Waskom Natural Gas Company, and the United Gas Company plant at Panola, nine miles south of Waskom. (Allison April, 1961)

Caddo Machine Works began production of fabricated steel products in Waskom after World War II. In 1953 the company was bought by Fabricated Steel Products which operated until 1972. This brought a large payroll and prosperity to Waskom.

In 1972, facing plans to close the plant, the business was purchased by 12 employees. By the mid-1970s Fab Steel employed 600 persons.

Corporate headquarters were moved to Shreveport in 1981, but in 1985 the company fell victim to a nationwide slump in the steel industry. This resulted in 400 employees being laid off, which was a critical blow to the Waskom economy.

## Transportation

Almost all East Texas roads in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were still dirt, and subject to inclement weather problems. Some towns “paved” heavily traveled downtown streets to help support businesses in those areas, and to display to visitors that their town was “progressive”. Roads between towns were addressed by local county governments and, as such, varied widely in their quality.

The Texas Highway Department (now the Texas Department of Transportation) was not created until 1917. The Atlanta District of TxDOT that serves East Texas was not created until 1932. A copy of the oldest map of Harrison County in the TxDOT archives, revised up to 1940, shows the first four paved highways in Harrison County (US 59, US 80, SH 154 and SH 43) as well as some of the county roads of that era. (Sandifer 2009)

The State Highway Department Map showing “Proposed System of State Highways”, dated June, 1917, shows a highway entering Texas in the approximate location of Waskom, and traveling through Marshall and Longview. It is labeled as Number 11, the “Jefferson” Highway, extending from Denison to Marshall. “Jefferson” seems to refer to a title, not a destination, as the highway does not come near the town of Jefferson in Marion County. The map of proposed highways legend indicates that this was to be a “1<sup>st</sup> Class Highway (Concrete, Brick, Bituminous Types).

It should be noted that once Highway 11 leaves Longview, it becomes Highway 15, the “Dallas-Louisiana” Highway, which stretched from Dallas to Longview. This became an integral part of one of the first trans-continental highways in the United States.

A 1936 State Highway map shows this road to be a paved road, now labeled as U.S. Highway 80. It is joined in Waskom by a bituminous surfaced road entering the city from the northwest, coming in from Jonesville. Traffic legends indicate that U.S. Highway 80 had close to



2000 vehicles travelling on it in a 24 hour period. This same map shows the population of Waskom to be 1,117.

Parallel to this Jonesville road is the T&P Railroad line. It is joined by the Louisiana, Arkansas and Texas (L.A. &T.) Railroad line which enters Waskom from the north (Karnack) and then turns to parallel the T&P line until it crosses the state line into Louisiana. Five other "unimproved roads" are shown on this state map entering Waskom from different directions.

Added to all of this was Interstate Highway 20 which passed south of Waskom. The interstate was completed in 1964, which pulled many travelers away from the city, which was effectively bypassed.

### **The Dixie Overland Highway**

In the 1920's the City of Waskom literally became the "Gateway to Texas". One of the first "all-weather", or paved trans-continental highways in the United States came through Waskom as the entry point to Texas from eastern states. It was named the Dixie Overland Highway, or U.S. Highway 80. For the first time, this brought traffic, year around, from all over the United States into Waskom.

The 250 or so named trails, roads and highways crisscrossing the United States in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century carried picturesque names, but they had become a confusing collection of unorganized pathways. At the request of the State highway agencies, the Secretary of Agriculture appointed the Joint Board on Interstate Highways in April 1925. This Board developed standardized signs, including the original U.S. shield, identified the Nation's main interstate roads, and conceived a system for numbering them. (Weingroff 2015)

The Secretary of Agriculture submitted the Joint Board's proposals to the American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO) for consideration. Finally, in November 1926, AASHO adopted the U.S. numbered plan. The first official description of the approved U.S. 80 appeared in the U.S. numbered log that AASHO printed in April 1927.

Beginning in 1927 the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads (BPR) issued press releases describing some of the major U.S. numbered highways. One November 1927 release ("United States Routes Make Cross-Continent Run Easy") stated:

Two . . . United States routes have a special interest for prospective transcontinental travelers living in the large eastern cities; one - Route 40 - because it is the most direct motor route to California, and the other - a combination of Routes 40, 61, 70, 67, and 80 - because it is a year-round road and, for the present at least, is more surfaced throughout than any other transcontinental highway.

Around this time, the BPR issued a separate release on U.S. 80 summarizing the condition of the road:

Route 80 has a total length of 2,671 miles, of which 798, or about 30 percent, are paved with brick, concrete or bituminous macadam, according to figures of the Bureau of Public Roads of the United States Department of Agriculture. More than half the mileage, or 1,472 miles, is surfaced with gravel, sand-clay or topsoil. Climatic conditions in the Southern States are favorable for this lighter construction, which is proving adequate for present traffic. Some of the States have developed very successful methods of treating sand-clay and lime rock roads to eliminate dust which is the one important defect of such surfaces in this region. On the route there are 315 miles of graded and drained earth roads, and 86 miles of unimproved highways.

In the years since then, U.S. 80 has shifted somewhat to place it on improved alignments and city or town bypasses. More important, U.S. 80 has been shortened, and no longer serves as a transcontinental highway. Following a request from Texas and New Mexico, approved on October 12, 1991, Dallas became and remains the western terminus of U.S. 80.

## Education

Prior to April of 1894, the only school in Waskom was conducted in a single room which J.H. Bryson added to his home specifically for that purpose. On April 3, 1894 an election was held for free school purposes. The petition which called for this election was signed by 20 prominent local citizens, including S.E. Waskom, (the son of John M. Waskom), John L. Waskom (grandson of John M.) and T.C. Lindsey of Jonesville.



The election results were 67 voted in favor, and none opposed. A new one-room school was built, with another building added later. This led to the construction of a two story, four room school which burned in 1920. In 1922 it was replaced by a brick building consisting of 12 classroom, 2 restrooms, and an auditorium. The cornerstone for this \$40,000 school was laid on September 19, 1922. This school also burned in the 1950s.

In 1930 the Waskom Independent School District served 277 white pupils and 807 black pupils in segregated facilities. A photograph from 1936 shows a large group of Boy Scouts on the steps of the Waskom Elementary School, which burned in 1957. Boy Scouts also enjoyed swimming at "Camporees" at summer camp held at George's Lake in 1933.

By 1957 several new school construction programs were completed. More recently, on July 28, 1974, an open house was held at the high school to show off the new classrooms, gymnasium and renovated areas. (Staff 1994)

### **Religion, Entertainment and Sports**

From the 1880s to the early 1900s the city of Waskom flourished. Numerous churches were established, and at one time, it was thought there were more churches in Waskom than any other type of structure. (Stringley 1994)

Church gatherings, which had always enjoyed the participation of large groups, continued to be a mainstay of social interactions. Revivals and camps were regularly scheduled. A "big, new hall" in 1922 hosted a visiting orchestra.

Sports became a major part of life in both the Anglo-American and African-American communities in the Waskom area. Competitions between baseball clubs were well publicized in area newspapers, and were well attended. The high school also developed football and basketball teams. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century Alvin Earl Moore from Waskom went on to become a major league baseball player who played for White Sox and the Braves from 1976-1980. (Carle 2000)

Hunting was a competitive sport. The March 25, 1924 edition of the

*Marshall News Messenger* had a front page announcement that Dr. H.H. Vaughn of Waskom, one of the “best known and most prominent fox hunters of Harrison County” would be hosting John M. Brenham, president of the National Fox Hunters Association of the United States.

Waskom had its own movie theater, called the Wakea, and later, the Don Theater. It often showed first runs of movies before the Strand Theater in Shreveport. This theater stayed in business up into the 1960s.

Starting On April 3, 1948, Waskom residents could drive to Shreveport’s Municipal Auditorium, located just west of nearby downtown Shreveport. On that date, a new program named The Louisiana Hayride began a weekly showcase of talented singers, songwriters and performers. This nearby venue gave Harrison County residents an opportunity to observed world-class talent in what became known as The Cradle of the Stars. (Shreveport Municipal Auditorium 2016)

In 1955, Waskom born Grady Gaines capitalized on the Boogie Woogie tradition of the Waskom area when he was offered a job to head up a newly formed band supporting entertainer Little Richard. He became a well-known tenor sax blues player. (Dahl 2016)

## **Architecture**

Commercial construction materials had started with log buildings in the early days. As the economy improved, these were replaced with wood frame buildings on pier and beam foundations. Wealthy individuals could contract for the local manufacturing of brick if they wished as Harrison County is known for having excellent clay outcrops. Besides potteries, there were numerous “handmade” brick making facilities in the area.

As “manufactured” brick became more economical and easier to come by, more structures were built using this method. Early American architects embraced influences of Roman styles. Although this style had been superseded elsewhere by the Greek Revival in the 1830s, Harrison County lagged behind in the latest trends. Early Classical structures near Waskom include Locust Grove (1847) in Jonesville and Mimosa Hall (1844) in Leigh. (Bach-Prather, Harrison County Historic Sites Survey 2013)



As railroads expanded, housing components from factories, such as doors, windows, roofing, and decorative detailing became more widely available, and desirable. This changed the box-like homes into complex and elaborate structures, and business could begin splurging on structural details that were more decorative than functional and utilitarian.

The Neoclassical style (1895-1950) became best-known after the World's Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893 which mandated a classical theme, therefore, the architects designed dramatic colonnaded buildings with facades dominated by classical columns and symmetrically balanced windows.

The Winston Taylor home in Waskom was built in 1941 by Winston Taylor, a cousin of First Lady "Lady Bird" Johnson. The Winston Taylor home is a 1941, two-story, brick, Neoclassical square structure with a flat roof. It consists of a double-gallery porch, supported by four classical columns which cover three of the seven bay facades. It is the only site in Waskom that bears a historical recognition medallion.

Brick and wood are the two most common materials used on the exterior of commercial buildings. Prominent display windows facing the busy highway were intricate to Waskom's downtown buildings. Historic materials tell of the availability of those materials, relative wealth of the original owner, skill of the designer and builder and aesthetic sense of the owner. Brick masons and stone masons of the past possessed skills no longer practiced. Materials are important features in understanding and interpreting historic buildings.

In regard to the buildings that make up historic downtown Waskom, here is a quote from the City of Palestine's Design Guidelines that is fitting in regards to the styles of Waskom's commercial buildings:

*"Even the commercial utilitarian 'style' is a distinct form associated with late 19th and early 20th century commercial design. In such buildings massing, form and facade arrangement are the primary design elements and the building does not display detailing directly associated with any particular style."* (Associates 2002)

## Businesses

Prior to the stock market crash of October 1929, Waskom enjoyed a construction expansion of its downtown area. This was contemporaneous with Federal enforcement of the 18th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, known as prohibition, which occurred from 1919 until its repeal 1933. Archeological studies in eastern Harrison County in the 1990s accidentally encountered remains of illegal stills, which was a large "cottage industry".

This economic boom during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century naturally drew the attention of both honest and dishonest citizens. The February 19, 1915 edition of *The Shreveport Times* reported that the iron safe from the Waskom post office had been hitched to a cart and taken one mile down the railroad track before the perpetrators "blow same at leisure".

Such high-profile events were unusual enough to warrant headlines, such as the March 30, 1929 headline in the *Shreveport Times* which read "Seven Waskom Stores Robbed Late Thursday."

It was during this time that construction began on what is now the Historic Downtown Waskom District. This included grocery stores, variety stores, barber shops, doctor offices and pharmacies, all centered on the post office which was located near the train depot. This downtown area came to serve the entire community, and outlying farms.

W.L. Rudd had been doing business in Waskom for decades. He built a brick store on Waskom Street built in 1928 to replace his wood frame store. Waskom Street (Avenue) was the Dixie Overland Highway, and paralleled the T&P railroad line. The Waskom train depot was within easy walking distance of these buildings, and the Rudd Store was one of the first businesses travelers from the east encountered when they entered Texas. Rudd obviously understood the value of this interstate business as advertisements for his store can be found in the pages of the *Weekly Shreveport Times* ever since the 1880s.

Other businesses in the downtown Waskom area that developed over the years included Chastain's Variety Store, and Dr. Fowler's office. Young patients that behaved could then be taken to the drug store which had a soda fountain that served soft drinks and floats.



The importance of the downtown business to the entire community was evident when a pledge to "rebuild" was issued on Sunday, January 31, 1932 following a devastating fire that destroyed two structures the previous Friday.

In 1933 the town had 1,117 inhabitants and thirty-nine businesses, including a large timber mill and brick plant. By 1941, at the beginning of WW II, Waskom had shrunk nearly by half, with a full-time population of 564. This did not include persons who worked in Waskom, but lived elsewhere. (Lentz 2010)

In 1946 new gas and distillate producers were discovered in the area, and the Waskom economy was also bolstered by the local Frost Lumber Industries. The population increased from 719 in 1952 to 2,182 in 1988.

Twenty-five business leaders banded together on January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1954 to form the Waskom Chamber of Commerce. Their purpose was to consolidate efforts to bring new industry to Waskom. By their second meeting membership had risen to fifty-six members.

Thanks to the work of Housing Committee member Don Long, Jr., a twenty-four home F.H.A. financed subdivision helped to relieve the housing problem in Waskom, which was still predominantly rent homes and few home owners. One hundred and four additional lots were laid out.

The Chamber initiated several efforts to bring new industry to Waskom. Bond issues were passed that allowed for the construction of new schools for blacks and whites. The City built a New City Hall and fire station with modern equipment. The town was surveyed and a city map made. Street lights were installed and street markers placed at street corners in 1954. (Allison April, 1961)

Waskom had not been home to a bank since 1932. Thanks to the efforts of the Chamber of Commerce, the First State Bank, Waskom, Texas received its charter and opened its doors for business on December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1954. They modernized the old original 1920s bank building. Over \$16,000 was spent for a new front to the building, air conditioning, fixtures and supplies.

Acme Brick began a million dollar remodeling program, adding two kilns and reworking five others. By 1957, 116 persons worked there. Fabricating Steel Products, Inc. enlarged in 1955, increasing their employees from 25 to 61. The Arkansas Louisiana Gas Refinery became the Arkansas Louisiana Chemical Company and drilled 50-100 wells annually from 1958-1961. They employed about 75 persons.

The Waskom Natural Gas Refinery was enlarged and remodeled in 1956. New gasoline terminals for the Texaco and Mobil oil companies were secured in 1957, adding 17 new families to the community. Waskom's fame became known statewide when Penny Lee Rudd became "Miss Texas" in 1962. She graduated from Waskom High School in 1960.

There was a Ford and Chevrolet business, mercantile stores, and two railroad depots. As it was located on the extreme eastern boundary of Texas, Waskom was the site of numerous filling stations. Thousands of out-of-state drivers, mostly from Louisiana, regularly came to Waskom to fill their vehicles because the gas tax in Texas was lower. The small community boasted 39 gasoline stations, well into the 1960s. This high rate of gas stations per capita brought Waskom recognition in "Ripley's Believe It or Not".

Between 1930 and 1970, as the county lost population and saw its agricultural economy decline, other developments occurred. First, the automobile had revolutionized transportation. Harrison County had only 7,396 motor vehicles registered in 1930. By 1950 the total stood at 12,571, and in 1970 there were 26,912.

Housing continued to be a major issue. A survey in 1959 revealed that 40 employees of Waskom industries had to live in either Marshall or Shreveport due to lack of housing in Waskom.

The *Shreveport Times* of December 12, 1923 mentioned that the Harrison County Commissioners, meeting in regular session, had discussed building an electric plant in Waskom. The Panola-Harrison Electric Cooperative, begun in 1937, increased its clientele from 332 customers in 1938 to 2,802 in 1950 and 7,416 by 1970. (R. B. Campbell 2016) Southwestern Electric Power Company showed 376 meters in the community in 1954, and 440 meters in 1960.



The timber and petroleum industries that had fueled Waskom's economy in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century began to dry up. The saw mills closed first, and by the late 1960's, the oil industry began to fail. However, at this same time, the construction and completion of Interstate 20 across the southern edge of the city allowed Waskom to become a "bedroom community" for Shreveport residents who worked in Louisiana, but preferred to live in Texas. This helped to stabilize the population of Waskom.

### Conclusions

There is a great deal of Waskom's history, if not a majority, that is undocumented, and efforts should be made to correct that short-coming. In regard to a pre-historic presence in the area, there is very limited information, and none of it applies directly to the city. It is reasonable to say people have been living in the Waskom area for 8000 years, back to the early Archaic Period. However, it is quite possible that there was an even earlier Paleo presence dating back 10,000 years. There is no evidence to support the statement because no one has looked.

Since 90% of all archaeological sites are located on private property in Texas, the private property owners in the Waskom area should be encouraged to report any pre-historic or historic sites on their property. These sites can be recorded without any cost, it would not change how the land is being used, and the existence of a site would be kept confidential. Recording such sites would provide the sites with a level of protection from public works projects, such as pipelines which are common in the area. Once bulldozed, all the information that a site could reveal is permanently erased.

This same strategy to preserve Waskom's past should also be applied to Waskom's historic heritage. The location of old original log buildings should be recorded as archaeological sites in order to protect them like the pre-historic sites. For example, where exactly was Powellton located? Can any trace of the original buildings be found?

Mapping and recording out-buildings from the early settlement period, such as stores, slave quarters, barns, etc. would increase our knowledge of settlement patterns in the early days of the Republic of Texas, and beyond. Old original cemeteries and family burials should be documented and unified efforts made to preserve them.

The same can also be said of old roadbeds and railroad beds. Extensive traffic between Marshall and Shreveport could leave behind seemingly minor artifacts that could, in reality, document previously unknown trade routes and explain unknown cultural interactions. For example, what relationship was there between the African-American slave population and the Native American population? Again, no evidence exists because no one has looked.

Due to the overall lack of specific knowledge and available information about historic and pre-historic Waskom, encouragement of local private property owners to have their sites recorded should be considered a priority. Participation would help protect the sites, would not harm the land or the owners, and would benefit the city, county, state, and the scientific community. The longer one waits, the more unique sites are permanently lost from construction and erosion.

In regard to Waskom's history in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there seems to be sufficient evidence to suggest that Waskom enjoyed two separate "Golden Ages". One was in the 1920s, and the other in the 1950s.

By the mid-1920s Waskom's population had increased to about 1,000 persons. A branch of the Missouri, Kansas and Texas, was built, adding to Waskom's rail traffic. Cotton production did not significantly decline until after the 1920's, so agriculture was still a major contributor to Waskom's economy.

The Waterman Saw Mill was started in 1914 and became one of the first industrial payrolls in Waskom. The discovery and development of the Waskom Gas Field around 1924 led to the first shipment of oil from that field being delivered in Marshall on August 25, 1926.

All of this wealth led to a population growth and substantial development of a downtown area in Waskom that became the "Gateway to Texas" on the Dixie Overland Highway. This included grocery stores, variety stores, barber shops, doctor offices and pharmacies, all centered on the post office which was located near the train depot. The First State Bank, Waskom, was opened in 1922. Also in 1922 the first brick school building consisting of 12 classroom, 2 restrooms, and an auditorium was constructed. A "big, new hall" in 1922 hosted a visiting orchestra.



This "Golden Age" for Waskom is today only represented by a few structures in the downtown area. The prosperity of the community declined along with the nation's following the Wall Street Crash of 1929, and the following Great Depression.

An argument could be made that Waskom enjoyed a second "Golden Age" in the 1950s, following World War II. The unification of 25 business leaders into the Waskom Chamber of Commerce in 1954 can easily be identified as a turning point for the economy of the city.

Thanks to their efforts, the city built a New City Hall and fire station with modern equipment. The town was surveyed and a city map made. Street lights were installed and street markers placed at street corners. A new local bank was opened which allowed for housing loans in a newly created sub-division.

Local businesses and industries were expanded, including Acme Brick and the Waskom Natural Gas Refinery. There was a Ford and Chevrolet business, mercantile stores, and two railroad depots, not to mention the local revenue from 39 gasoline stations and a first-run movie theater.

Many Texas communities would be proud to identify a single "Golden Age" in their history. The City of Waskom has reason to be proud of their past, which deserves to be promoted, protected, and preserved.

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