

DATES SIGNIFICANT TO BRENHAM

March 17, 1836	Washington County created
December 14, 1837	Washington County formally organized
February 4, 1844	Brenham becomes new county seat
May 22, 1846	Brenham Post Office opens
February 2, 1856	Charter granted for Washington County Railroad
May 29, 1858	Affirmative vote for incorporation of Brenham
June 19, 1858	First city officials selected for incorporated city
October 1, 1860	First trains on Washington County Railroad from Brenham to Hempstead
December 17, 1860	County vote in Brenham overwhelmingly in favor of secession from the Union
July, 1865	Company B, 17th U.S. Infantry begins military occupation of Brenham
September 7-8, 1866	Pillaging and burning of Brenham
May 28, 1867	Brenham Voluntary Fire Department formed
May 21, 1870	Military rule in Brenham ends
December 4, 1870	Germania Verein (German Social Club) formed
January 18, 1874	First Democratic candidates elected by local residents since end of Civil War
April 26, 1875	Resolution passed by City Council to initiate Free Public Schools
May 23, 1877	First recorded air flight (gas balloon "City of Paris") over Brenham
August 11, 1877	First Post-Civil War Militia organized (Brenham Greys)
September 4, 1877	Poll Tax Levy ordinance approved

p.3.

April 24, 1880	Santa Fe Railroad handles first freight from Brenham to Galveston
March 28, 1883	First session at Mission Institute (Blinn College)
1884	City Water system approved
1901	Electric lights installed in Brenham
August 15, 1905	Oldest state bank in Texas (Washington County State Bank) organized
September 7, 1920	Commission form of government adopted in Brenham
June 8, 1937	Blinn College becomes the first Junior College in a county-wide district in Texas
August 14, 1947	Brenham Municipal Airport dedicated

N.B. Other important dates need to be added to this list as research is continued.

III. HISTORICAL SKETCH OF WASHINGTON COUNTY, TEXAS

Washington County, Texas lies in the southeastern part of the state about 90 miles east of Austin and 120 miles from the Gulf of Mexico. The Brazos River forms a natural eastern boundary as do Cedar Creek and Yegua Creek on the north. It is bounded on the north by Lee, Burleson, and Brazos Counties; on the south by Austin and Fayette Counties; and on the west by Fayette and Lee Counties. The area encompassed in the present Washington County is 611 sq. miles containing 392, 320 acres of excellent agricultural land. With an elevation ranging from 200-350 feet above sea level, Washington County enjoys a mild and agreeable climate. The average yearly temperature is just under 70 degrees while the rainfall averages about 40 inches per year. In addition to its agricultural productivity, Washington County has mineral resources consisting of oil, gas, and some lignite, brick, clay, salt, and sulphur.

The geographical boundaries of Washington County have changed considerably since it was first organized in 1837. At one time it was one of the largest counties in the state. Due to the creation of other near-by counties, however, its land mass was gradually reduced over a period of years. The following sketch indicates the approximate original area embraced by Washington County in 1837.

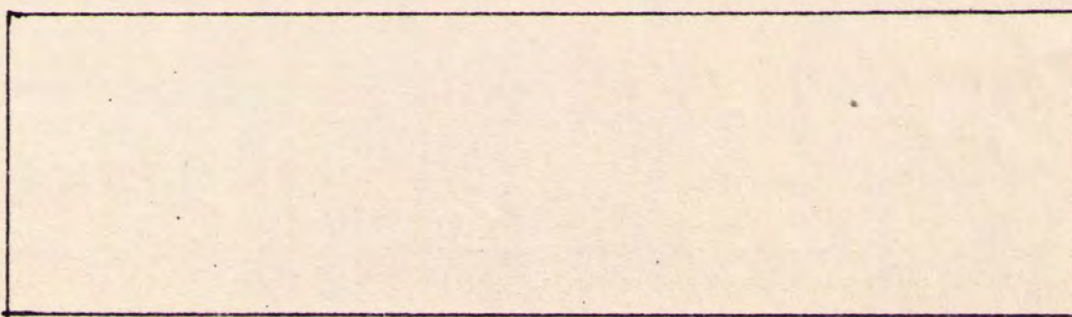


Figure #1.

In 1840 the Texas Legislature transferred all the territory west of the Brazos River and north of Yegua Creek to Milam County. Today, Lee, Burleson, and Milam Counties comprise this territory. In 1841 the formation of Navasota County (now Brazos) made the Brazos River the eastern boundary of Washington County. Subsequent additions of Walker County (1846), Madison County (1853), and Lee County (1874) resulted in the reduction of Washington County to its present size.

Although the recorded history of the area once embraced by Washington County dates back to the beginning of the sixteenth-century when adventurous Spanish explorers and military men spied out the land, the territory as a whole was primarily controlled by Indian tribes up to the early decades of the nineteenth century. Indeed, it was not until the arrival of Stephen F. Austin in 1821 that the land destined to become Washington County began to take on the features of an Anglo-Saxon culture.

Through the persistent efforts of Moses Austin, Spanish officials in 1820 granted permission for three-hundred Anglo-Saxon settlers to establish a colony in the province of Texas. The elder Austin's death in 1821 left the burden of developing the colony to his son, Stephen. With a party of men Austin explored the area lying between the Colorado and Brazos Rivers and chose a section of land along the west bank of the Brazos as an ideal location for his first colonial adventure. Included in this territory was the ground which later became Washington County.

The plan of organization for the colony stipulated that each family-head was to receive 640 acres, his wife 320 acres, and each child 100 acres. Moreover, each slave holder was entitled to 80 acres for every slave in

p.6.

his possession. By December, 1821, the actual introduction of the original "Three Hundred" had begun. Included in this group were such names as Kuykendall, Cole, Gates, Gray, and Robinson. However, it was not until the heavy German migration which began in the late 1840's that any substantial permanent towns were established.

The early organization of Washington County by the Mexican Government did not begin until 1824 following the successful completion of Mexico's battle to end Spanish hegemony. At that time the Mexican Congress passed a "Constituent Act" uniting Coahuila and Texas since neither one was really populous enough to form a single state. In addition the decree provided that when Texas had grown sufficiently he could be admitted into the Mexican Union as a separate state. However, because Saltillo, the new state capital, was inconveniently located for the majority of Texans, the Mexican government passed a colonization law in 1825 creating a political department of Texas with a political chief located at San Antonio de Bexar. In 1831 the Department of Texas was sub-divided into the Departments of Bexar and Nacodoches. Due to increasing population a third division was made in 1834 by forming the district of Brazos with a capital at San Felipe de Austin. Not long after this citizens living along the Brazos north of San Felipe petitioned the political chief at San Felipe to approve the creation and organization of the "Municipality of Washington". The petition was approved in 1835. Under the Constitution of the Republic of Texas, adopted March 17, 1836, the Municipality of Washington was re-designated Washington County. As indicated above, its boundaries were established by an Act of Congress in 1837. (See diagram p. 4)

Due to shifting population in the pre-Civil War period there were several "ghosts towns" in Washington County. Some of these towns have disappeared completely while others are marked by the sites of a few weather-battered ruins. Jacksonville, named after Terrel Jackson, a wealthy settler in that area, was situated about three or four miles north of Chap-pell Hill. Utilizing the commercial advantages of the Brazos River, local residents built fine homes and erected places of business. However, no trace of the town can be found today.

Mount Vernon, the second county seat (1841-1844), located about six miles northwest of Brenham, had a courthouse, jail, and other public build-ings. It is not clear exactly how large the town actually was, but ref-erences to churches, schools, and homes in addition to the public buildings suggest that it was of substantial size.

Before the Civil War Mustang was an important trading center about three miles east of Brenham. This was the home of "Mustang Gray", the fam-ous Texas Ranger, from whom the town received its name. Mustang was also the temporary residence of W. B. Travis, famous defender of the Alamo, who practiced law in the Alcalde's Court in the 1830's.

About nine miles northwest of Brenham was Old Gay Hill once noted for its natural beauty and colonial refinement. In 1850 Rev. James W. Miller established Live Oak Female Seminary which flourished for several years until civil strife forced its doors to close.

On the west side of the Brazos, about fifteen miles south of Washington stood the town of Rock Island. During the early Republic years Rock Island reportedly had a wealthy and cultured citizenry. It was also the home of

Rock Island Academy, an institution which for years maintained a state-wide reputation for academic excellence.

Tigertown (or Tiger Point) was located on one of the rolling hills of Washington County about six miles west of Brenham. Many important plantation owners had magnificent homes there. Today, however, nothing but rich farmland covers the site of this once active and bustling frontier town.

Union Hill was a border town on Yegua Creek about two miles northwest of the present town of Burton. After the Houston and Texas Central Railroad was extended west from Brenham to Burton and Austin in the 1870's, the town went into an economic depression from which it never recovered. Of educational note was the Union Hill High School which was chartered on February 1, 1858.

Although these "ghost towns" are only names with a few scattered traditions, several early towns did survive and continue to function as municipalities today. The five most important civic centers of Washington County are: Brenham, Chappell Hill, Independence, Washington-on-the-Brazos, and Burton. The towns of Greenvine and William Penn are only of secondary significance.

Washington-on-the-Brazos has a unique place in the early history of the Texas Republic. In a blacksmith shop of that tiny village of one hundred inhabitants the Revolutionary Convention met on March 1, 1836 to draft a Declaration of Independence from the sovereignty of Mexico. Because of its location at the junction of the Brazos and Navasota Rivers, Washington-on-the-Brazos became the center of an extensive river traffic. The town became the first county seat of Washington County and served as the capital

of the Republic when Sam Houston moved his government from Austin in 1842 fearing a Mexican invasion. President Anson Jones was inaugurated in Washington and carried on the functions of government there until the annexation convention was called to meet at Austin, July 4, 1845.

In spite of all these early indications of commercial importance and political significance, Washington-on-the-Brazos did not become a large and prosperous city. In 1848 local residents refused to grant the Houston and Texas Central Railroad Company permission to build through their town. Cut off from the benefits of the "Iron Horse" which had many advantages over the slower and less certain riverboat transportation, Washington began to dwindle in population and commerce. Today its major attractions are its historical shrines and Washington Park, one of the leading parks in Texas.

Known in the pre-Republic days as "Coles' Settlement", Independence became one of the leading communities of East Texas being especially remembered as the first home of Baylor University. Because of its importance as a center of learning and culture, Independence early acquired the descriptive nickname, the "Athens of Texas". Under the auspices of the Baptist Church, Baylor University was chartered on August 1, 1845 with both male and female schools. Formal instruction began the following year with one teacher and a few students. The university expanded its activities up to the Civil War. Like all other institutions of learning, however, it suffered greatly from the confusion and depression of civil strife. In 1866 the male and female schools were placed under separate boards and under the able leadership of Dr. William Carey Crane, the university re-

covered and established itself as one of the leading educational institutions in the state. In 1866, when the male branch of the university moved to Waco and the Female College to Belton, Independence lost most of its raison d'etre. Only the crumbling ruins of once proud buildings remain as a monument to the "Athens of Texas".

As early as 1849 Chappell Hill, named after the settler Robert Chappell, was regarded to be an important trading point in East Texas. Just as the Baptists put Independence on the map with their educational institutions, so the Methodists brought prominence to Chappell Hill with their academic ventures. Chappell Hill College opened in 1852 as a private academy and came under the jurisdiction of the Methodist Church in 1854. In 1856 it became strictly a Female College. The school continued to function at Chappell Hill until 1912 when economic factors forced the cessation of classes. In addition to Chappell Hill College the Methodist Church founded Soule University in 1856. In 1875 Soule merged with Southwestern University at Georgetown, Texas. Today the old Soule campus is a productive cotton field which gives no indication of the venerable university once located on that spot. In modern times Chappell Hill has survived as a small town with considerable rural trade.

The town of Burton came into local prominence when the Houston and Texas Central Railroad moved westward from Brenham after the Civil War. It played no important part in the early history of the county, however, either politically or educationally.

POPULATION STATISTICS OF WASHINGTON COUNTY

1850-1960

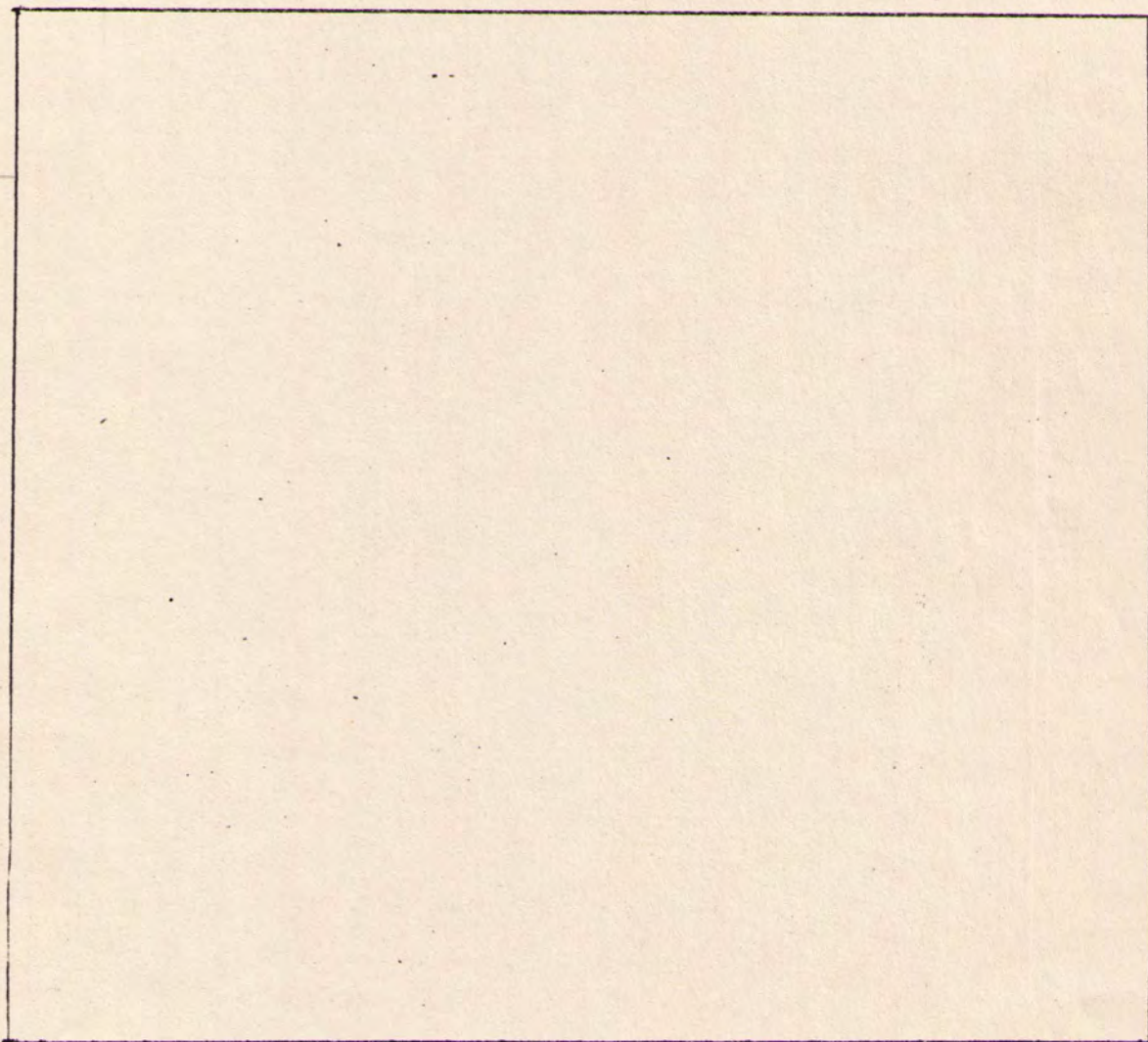


Figure #2

IV. A Short History of Brenham, Texas

In the history of Brenham the number "three" has a special significance. By a slim majority of three votes the residents of Hickory Grove community in 1843 adopted a new name, Brenham, in honor of Dr. Richard Fox Brenham, who had practiced medicine some years earlier in the near-by vicinity. Brenham had achieved fame as the martyr-hero of the ill-fated Mier Expedition of 1842-43. Heavily outnumbered by Mexican troops the small band of 300 Americans were defeated and imprisoned at the hacienda de Salado near Saltillo, Mexico. The desperate prisoners decided to make a break for freedom with Brenham offering himself as the lead man who would almost certainly meet with death. In the charge for freedom Brenham killed two guards and severely wounded a third before he lost his life. It was in tribute to his courage and self-sacrifice that the inhabitants of Hickory Grove re-named their community in his memory.

The number "three" was also important a year later when residents of Washington County decided to select a permanent county seat by popular vote. Mount Vernon (the present county seat), Independence, Turkey Creek, and Brenham hotly contested for the honor. No single community, however, could muster the required majority vote. Turkey Creek and Mount Vernon then withdrew from the race leaving the choice between Brenham and Independence. J. D. Giddings, a local lawyer, toured the county making speeches on behalf of Brenham extolling its virtues as the logical place for a centralization of county government. On February 4, 1844 voters selected Brenham by the slender majority of three votes as the permanent county seat. Utilizing 100 acres of land donated by Jessie Farral and James Hurt, Congress

designated commissioners to survey the townsite and sell lots so that the nucleus of a town could be quickly established. In the spring of 1844 Asa M. Lewis built the first home in Brenham and other quickly followed. Secure in its position of political importance, Brenham had future prospects which no other county town could ever hope to achieve.

Between 1844 and the beginning of the Civil War Brenham grew rapidly. Residents from other county towns, sensing that Brenham was a key commercial and political center, sold their homes and moved into the local area. Another wave of immigration brought industrious settlers from North and South Carolina, Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee. A heavy concentration of German and Polish immigrants also settled in and around Brenham between 1856 and 1883. Most of these newcomers became thrifty, industrious, and eventually prosperous citizens. The editor of the Brenham Daily Banner expressed his approval of Brenham's role as a "melting pot" of cultures and customs in 1873. "We are glad to see such a tide of immigration pouring into our county--Germans, English, and Americans from Alabama and Georgia--We rejoice to see them coming thus from all quarters. We like a mixed population; it is just what constitutes the American character as a cosmopolitan nation." (Brenham Daily Banner, January 25, 1873)

With the increase of population came also a building boom and commercial expansion. Ten years after becoming the county seat Brenham could boast of at least twelve thriving business establishments and a population of more than 250. When the Washington County Railroad extended from Hempstead to Brenham in 1860, however, the pace accelerated. Merchants invested capital and constructed many substantial places of business. When the first

census of Brenham was taken in 1860 there were 600 whites and 300 black inhabitants. With the beginning of hostilities between North and South in 1861, Brenham suffered the same economic and political stagnation shared by so many other southern municipalities. It was not until military rule ended in Brenham in 1870 that any significant strides toward economic recovery and stability were actually taken.

During the so-called "Reconstruction" period following the Civil War, Federal troops were stationed on Brenham's eastern border. "Camptown", as older citizens call the eastern part of the city today, is a reminder of the days of army occupation. Relations between military officials and local were tense and strained. They reached a breaking point in 1866 when a group of soldiers reportedly set fire to the town and prevented townspeople from extinguishing the blaze before it got out of control. An ensuing struggle between the local newspaper editor and the camp commander only added to the bitterness and resentment engendered on both sides. An uneasy truce was maintained until the soldiers of the 17th Infantry marched out of town on May 21, 1870 to take up new quarters at Waco. Four years later the populace finally managed to elect Democratic candidates for the first time since the close of the Civil War. This brought the "Reconstruction" era formally to a close.

The end of military rule was the signal for the beginning of economic as well as political rejuvenation. As early as 1867 construction of new buildings had begun, but it was not until the 1870's that this had become a marked trend. As the local newspaper observed in 1871, "Bricks and mortar are steadily taking the shape of elegant business houses in Brenham,

and the erection of fine dwellings is becoming a passion with our citizens." (Brenham Daily Banner, February 28, 1871) Between June 1878 and June 1879 102 new homes were constructed inside the city limits. Moreover, the population had increased from a meager 250 in 1854 to a respectable 4, 200 in 1880. The business section of town contained many brick structures some of which were two and three stories high. In all there were more than one hundred and fifty business establishments most of which were in a prosperous condition.

An interesting sidelight to the Brenham "industrial complex" of the 1870's was a silk industry started in 1878 by C. F. Herbst. After several years of intensive experimentation, Herbst ordered 1,000 mulberry trees from Japan. Sample tests of his transplanted trees indicated that the silk had good color and a remarkably strong fiber. Difficulties in processing the product, however, forced Herbst to abandon his never project. Because of this abortive industry, a suburb located in the southwest section of Brenham has been traditionally referred to as "Silkville".

More than any other single factor, however, it was the arrival of the railroad that brought economic strength and stability to Brenham. In 1871 the Houston and Texas Central Railroad completed its line as far west as Austin thus linking Brenham with that important city. In order to facilitate the transportation of livestock, the Santa Fe built a road from Galveston to Chicago. Near the end of 1879 the Bellville to Brenham section opened giving Brenham an important link with a major interstate railroad. In 1880 the Santa Fe started hauling freight from Brenham to Galveston which enabled Brenham farmers to send their goods directly to large markets for quick and profitable sales.

Life in Brenham in the post-Civil War period was characterized by a strong sense of community spirit and a stubborn streak of individualistic pride. Both qualities can be historically documented quite easily. The community spirit is well illustrated in Brenham's early acceptance of Public Free Schools as absolutely essential to the future well-being of the country. When the 14th Legislature passed a bill on March 25, 1875, providing that public schools be financed by direct taxation, Brenham was the first Texas town to accept the plan and put it into operation. In 1878 a two-story brick building was erected by funds obtained from popular subscription. At that time the school system had 298 white pupils with 7 teachers, and 153 black students with 4 teachers. In 1880 there were approximately 700 pupils enrolled in the free schools approximately two-thirds of this number being white students.

Another example of community pride and cooperation was the annual Volkfest or Maifest, a spring celebration which was begun by the German citizens of Brenham in 1874. These peoples festivals stem back to ancient Teutonic religious ceremonies commemorating the passing of winter and the beginning of spring. In modern times, however, they have lost much of their religious significance and have become strictly social affairs. The pageantry of crowning king and queen, the beautiful floats, and convivial eating, drinking, and singing that constitute the Maifest, are constant reminders of the friendly community spirit that has existed in Brenham for nearly one hundred years.

Yet even in its "good old days" Brenham had to face problems not entirely unlike those confronting small communities today. The local paper during this period was filled with accounts of muggings, shootings, and

rapes. Frequent attempts to close "Hells Half-Acres", the Brenham "red light District" invariably met with failure. The ladies of the street would dutifully pay their fines, promise to leave town, and return to their usual haunts. Even among good-hearted citizens it was not always easy to maintain a measure of law and order. Several contemporary examples will illustrate this.

A grand scrimmage took place near the post office on Tuesday evening between the city officers and a young man who was crazy from the effects of whisky. The drunken man whipped the whole crowd, including the county jailer. Whisky when not pure is a terrible enemy to mankind. (Brenham Daily Banner, February 19, 1875)

Pistol serenades have become a nightly occurrence and it seems to peaceable citizens who do not enjoy this kind of music, that the city marshall and night police should make an extra effort to catch the musicians.

(Brenham Daily Banner, October 31, 1880)

Even juvenile delinquency was not unheard of in those days.

Nearly every small boy in town is provided with a box of tobacco, paper, and lucifer matches, and the ease and speed with which they smoke cigarettes is astonishing.

All physicans condemn the practice. (Brenham Daily Banner, June 12, 1880)

Old-timers were even plagued with the modern problem of traffic congestion in the down-town area.

The manner in which Main Street is obstructed by vehicles of all kinds in front of and near the livery stable between Douglas and West Streets, is a nuisance and should be abated. The yard and not the street is the place for wagons.

(Brenham Daily Banner, February 3, 1880)

Even the problem of pure food and drugs had to be faced. Not always did residents have the paucky good-humor of the local newspaper editor.

Our city butchers are now furnishing better beef than they did a little while back, which is very consoling to the customers, but rather hard on the dentists.

(Brenham Daily Banner, March 26, 1875)

As might be expected from all the foregoing, Brenham was not lacking in places where "liquid refreshment" could be readily purchased. In 1880 the Brenham Daily Banner reported that there were 27 establishments in town where liquor could be purchased by the drink. Although most establishments were respectable (or attempted to be), it was not always possible to control the customers. The visitor to Brenham could quench his thirst at the Casion, Walkers' Bar, Gerber's Bar, The Bar and Billiard, the O.K. Saloon, or Jake Neuss "Hole-in-the-Wall" on Ant Street (now Baylor Street). According to his advertisement, Jake had been "catering to the wants of a discriminating public for the past nine years and knows how to run a saloon." (Brenham Daily Banner, May 10, 1879).

For those who did not frequent saloons there were other types of entertainment. In addition to the local lodges and fellowship groups there were the weekly performances at the fashionable Opera House. Constructed in 1878 on Alamo and Park Streets, the Opera House cost \$25,000 and was considered to be one of the finest structures in the county. The coming of the railroad meant that performers of national reputation could put on one or two night stands. The Brenham Daily Banner announced a typical schedule for the early months of 1880.

Feb. 14	Weathersby Froliques
Feb. 26	The Wallace Sisters
Mar. 3	Rice's Evangelina
Mar. 4	The Great Wilhelm
Mar. 19	Nip and Tuck

Locals also enjoyed periodic visits of various travelling circuses with their dare-devil performers and terrifying animals. The appearance of "Buffalo-Bill" Cody in 1880 was long remembered by both young and old.

Development of Brenham's history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.