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# Travel Log

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE TEXAS TRAVEL INDUSTRY

## POWER SURGE

The **population of Texas** swelled this past decade to match the hugeness of the state. According to the **U.S. Census Bureau**, high birthrates and an influx of new residents, both foreign and domestic, powered Texas' population past 20 million. *The Dallas Morning News* reports the state added more than 3 million residents in the 1990s, an expansion greater than the whole number of Texans in 1900. **Steve Murdock**, director of the **Texas State Data Center** at Texas A&M University, said the fact that other Americans consider Texas an attractive destination is a sign of the state's healthy economy. "When you get domestic migrants, you generally get people who have higher levels of education and who get better-paying jobs," he said. The figures are the last official state population estimates to be released by the Census Bureau before the 2000 census.

## COMING UP

A group of **Alice** citizens have formed **Tejano ROOTS** (Remembering Our Own Tejano Stars), in a unified effort to establish a **Tejano Hall of Fame and Museum**. The private nonprofit organization is working to honor musicians, singers, composers and others who have contributed to the Tejano culture. The museum will preserve the historic artifacts and documents of the Tejano music industry. For info, call the chamber of commerce at 361/664-3454.

Back in November, a busload of city officials and enthusiastic

citizens from **Carthage** made the 160-mile trek to the Fine Arts Foundry in Dallas to witness the making of a 1,000-pound cast for the **bronze statue** of favorite son **Tex Ritter**. Last month, a 2,000-pound likeness of White Flash, Ritter's horse, was formed. **Tommie Ritter Smith**, director of the **Tex Ritter Museum**, said unveiling of the bronze beauties is slated for August 19, during the annual induction of honorees into the **Texas Country Music Hall of Fame**. The larger-than-life statues will grace the entrance of the soon-to-be constructed \$1 million museum. The new building will stand on a four-acre lot adjacent to the Panola County Chamber of Commerce, which now houses the museum and hall of fame. For details, call 903/693-6634.

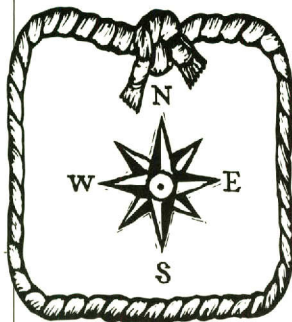
A recent study funded by the **New Braunfels Chamber of Commerce** revealed the Hill Country river city is primed and

ready to welcome convention-goers. PKF Consulting of Houston recommended construction of a 60,000-square-foot **convention center** that could attract more than 100,000 visitors and generate \$14.2 million in direct expenditures each year.

On May 11, 1953, a tornado ripped through the heart of **Waco**, killing 114 people, and destroying 185 buildings and 150 homes. This past December, city leaders broke ground on **Heritage Square**, a new inner-city park marking the final stage of a long-standing revitalization effort. The park, being constructed in front of City Hall, will include two motion-sensor fountains and a large statue of children representing Waco's next generations. In the 1970s, strategies were developed that authorized tax plans to generate money. **Downtown Waco Inc.** was later contracted to organize the revitalization process. The organization con-

vinced federal and state government offices and businesses to return to the central city. Now retail stores and apartment buildings are gradually moving in. With completion of Heritage Square will come downtown concerts, special events and hopes for a vibrant and promising future.

One man's passion for stargazing has given the **University of Texas McDonald Observatory** near **Fort Davis** a needed boost to complete the Texas Astronomy Education Center. **William Nowlin** once aspired to be an astronomer, but made a fortune cofounding National Instruments Corp. of Austin instead. Now he and his wife Bettye have pledged \$5 million to the university, earmarking \$2 million for "one of the world's best small science museums." Through interactive programs, officials hope to encourage children to pursue careers in science and technology. Call 915/426-3640.



**AMARILLO BY MORNING** Get ready for Western hospitality, when Amarillo hosts the 45th Annual Texas Travel Counselors Conference, April 16-20.

Each spring, travel counselors and other folks from TxDOT, AAA, city C&VBs and Texas Parks and Wildlife gather for hospitality training, study tours, special guest speakers and the popular

**Texas Travel Industry Association (TTIA) Travel Fair.** This year counselors will get a real feel of the history and heritage of the Panhandle as they experience the magic of Palo Duro Canyon, tour top-rated museums and attractions, and chow down at the Big Texan Steak Ranch. For details, call TxDOT's Travel Services office at 512/486-5800. For info on the TTIA Travel Fair, call 512/476-4472.

TRAVEL TALES OVERHEARD

The Dallas Morning News reports an abandoned old structure has become one couple's dream. When **Richard and Lillian Creasy** visited **Pecos** in 1998, they noticed a deserted orange-brick building. It was the **State Theatre**, shut down in 1989 when a movie-theater chain closed its single-screen theaters. Since then, residents have driven 77 miles into Odessa to see a show. Mr. Creasy, who for 30 years worked as a carpenter and electrician for theatrical productions, said he always wanted to own a theater. So he and his wife bought the State, moved to Pecos, and are pouring much of their money and all of their sweat into restoring the theater to its 1950s appearance. The couple will add a new sound system, screen, curtain and ceiling, and will expand the stage for plays and recitals. When the theater reopens on June 30, the 46th anniversary of the original opening, the Creasys hope others will follow suit by opening businesses nearby. With a little imagination, they say, Pecos can prosper again.

PLACES

The Big Bend town of **Lajitas** was sold at auction on February 24 by Houston millionaire real estate investor **Walter Mischer**. Now

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**LAREDO TIC** A gentleman from Houston proudly boasted he was a descendant of Texas hero Sam Houston. When counselor Gabby Ramirez asked how they were related, the visitor said he was a cousin of a cousin of a cousin of a cousin of a cousin . . . Wow! The rest of us Texans are

probably related to Old Sam, too.

**TEXARKANA TIC** She was a gorgeous, middle-aged woman, who emulated intelligence, grace and vitality. So it's a wonder one of the counselors recognized her as the freckle-faced, snaggle-toothed hillbilly who used to

scream at her husband from behind the safety of an ironing board on the popular country variety show, "Hee Haw." Roni Stoneman has now been dubbed "The First Lady of Banjo," and she generously shared with counselors and other TxDOT employees copies of her new CD.

**Stephen R. Smith**, Austin developer, rancher and a founder of Excel Communications Inc., is sole proprietor of the 2,650 acres that contain the town, plus another 21,350 acres between Lajitas and Terlingua. Since Mr. Mischer erected a mock frontier village there in the late 1970s, Lajitas has been a popular getaway for tourists and river rafters. The unincorporated town of 50 residents includes more than 90 hotel and motel rooms, condominiums, restaurants, shops, a nine-hole golf course, an 80-space RV park, and a trading post.

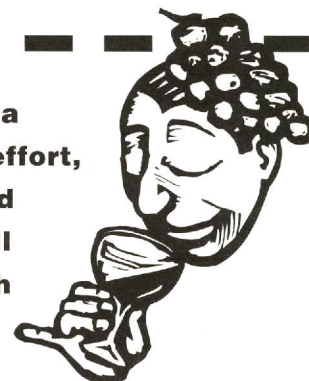
details, contact **Sandy Parker**, the society's president and director of the Levelland Area Chamber of Commerce; 806/894-3157.

The **Arroyo Queen**, docked at the **Port of Harlingen**, has closed for business. The vessel plied the Arroyo Colorado, giving nature-lovers a glimpse of the Valley's many bird species and other wildlife.

Some 20 years ago, **Annie Ward** fired up the barbecue to cook lunch for her husband D.C. He

was painting the **New Zion Missionary Baptist Church** in **Huntsville**. So each day Mrs. Ward smoked meat under some trees down the street. People kept stopping and buying, she says, so she continued selling for a few years. At least until the city told her she had to sell from inside a building with running water. So the church built a small frame building next to New Zion around 14 years ago. Now a staff of six serve Texas-style barbecue four days a week. Travel writer **Kathryn Straach** of *The*

**ONE OF THE BUNCH** In a cooperative marketing effort, 16 wineries have teamed up to form the Texas Hill Country Wine Trail. With some help from the Texas Department of Agriculture, the wineries have put together a Web site and published a brochure. Last month the group sponsored the Wine Lovers Trail, the first in a series of five annual trail events. The new marketing effort is working to make winery visits an integral part of Hill Country tourism and to encourage more consumers to sample Lone Star fare. To learn more, key in [www.texaswinetrail.com](http://www.texaswinetrail.com).



*Dallas Morning News* claims it's "some of the best barbecue to be found." Each week the staff serves up to 48 cases of ribs, 20 cases of brisket, two cases of chicken and 10 cases of sausage, plus plates full of home-cooked potato salad, beans and desserts. The only advertising has been "word of mouth." Open Wednesday through Saturday, 11 a.m. until 7 p.m., at 2601 Montgomery Road. For information, call 409/295-7394.

**HISTORY**

In 1852, Fort Chadbourne was established near the present-day city of **Bronte** in northeastern Coke County. The fort was abandoned in 1873 due to the lack of a reliable water supply. In 1876, the stronghold became ranch headquarters for the OD Ranch, when Thomas Lawson Odom purchased the land, as well as other acreage in several surrounding counties. Now Odom's great-great-great-grandson is returning the history and legacy of the fort to the public. **Garland Richards** and his wife **Lana** will donate Fort Chadbourne to the newly formed **Fort Chadbourne Foundation**, dedicated to protecting the old fort and sharing its history. For the first time since 1876 the historic site welcomes visitors. Interpretive signs, brochures and the eerie remains of six structures reveal the fort's significance in American history. The structures are currently being stabilized, with plans to restore three of the buildings to their 1850s appearance. Research continues on the fort's history. If grants are awarded and funds raised according to plan, construction of a 10,000-square-foot museum and visitor center could begin as early as next year. The museum will house the more than 18,000 artifacts now stored and catalogued in vaults and boxes. Other exhibits will depict local

history and the area's ranching heritage. Open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and by appointment. Look for the sign 11 miles north of Bronte, on U.S. 277, between San Angelo and Abilene. Call 915/473-5311 for details.

Since the last known settlement of the **Caddo Indians** was

**TEXAS TRIVIA**

**What part did Peggy McCormick play in Texas' fight for independence?**

Peggy McCormick and her husband Arthur left Ireland in 1822. They arrived in Texas around 1823, and took up a league of land near the present city of Houston. When her husband drowned, the widow was left to raise two young sons and operate the ranch. It was on the McCormick property on April 21, 1836, where the Battle of San Jacinto determined Texas independence. The landing of the land was, of course, quite by accident. The family had been forced to flee across the San Jacinto River with the approach of Santa Anna's troops. When the McCormicks returned, they found their land strewn with the bodies of Mexican soldiers. General Sam Houston, in the meantime, was busy exploiting his victory. Aides surrounded him, scribbling dispatches for couriers, reporting casualties and herding prisoners. In the midst of activity came a rider. In her Irish brogue Peggy McCormick demanded, "Sam Houston, when the blazes are you going to get your dead Mexicans off my league?" "Madam," Houston replied, "do you not know that your land will be famed in history?" "To the devil with your glorious history!" she shouted, dashing from the scene. The Irishwoman arrived just in time to temper the impetuous idealism of the men.

**TEXAS TRIVIA**



**GOOD SPORTS** Origins of the Southwest of Arlington, the Smithsonian-affiliated museum, will bring its first exhibit of Smithsonian artifacts with the opening of *Sports of the Nation* on

**March 24.** Items related to some of the nation's most legendary 20th-Century sports figures will be on view at the Legends of the Game Baseball Museum at The Ballpark in Arlington. The year-long exhibition will showcase National Portrait Gallery artworks and National Museum of American History artifacts from 13 different sports. For more info, call 817/273-5600.

**EVENTS**

discovered in the **East Texas woods** two years ago, some archaeologists, historians and educators have labeled the find as important to the state's history as the Alamo. *The Dallas Morning News* reports several groups, including descendants of the rediscovered community, are waiting for \$100,000 to kick off a serious dig. A test dig confirmed the findings a year ago. Now a request for funds from the Texas Legislature must wait until the next regular session in 2001. A thorough excavation would help archaeologists resurrect lost information about the tribe's culture and traditions. The area was found on a 100-acre tree farm owned by **International Paper Co.** Though access to the private area is restricted, and the location is being kept secret, a spokesman said the company is committed to the project, recognizing the importance of the site. Artifacts found are expected to be placed in historical collections or returned to the Caddo tribe.

Dozens of teams and thousands of noncompeting avian tourists from the U.S., Canada and Europe will flock to the Texas Gulf Coast for the annual spectacle of spring migration and the **Great Texas Birding Classic**, slated for April 7-16. Birding has become a huge industry, generating more than \$155 million in Texas retail sales per year and more than \$5 billion nationwide. Still, bird numbers and the habitat that sustains them are steadily declining. The contest aims to make these facts known while raising money to conserve and protect the environment for our flying friends. Since the event began in 1997, winning teams have directed \$150,000 in prize money toward buying, protecting or improving bird habitat along the 624-mile coastline. Advance registration runs through March 24. Call toll-free at 888-TX-BIRDS. Or key in [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/gtbc](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/gtbc).

TRAVEL CENTER	Month Visitors	Percent Variation*	Visitors Year-to-date	Percent Variation*
<b>Amarillo</b>	8,802	+3.86	17,019	+5.27
<b>Anthony</b>	10,227	+1.22	20,235	- 0.01
<b>Denison</b>	19,509	+23.56	37,902	+18.91
<b>Gainesville</b>	23,841	-9.64	47,202	-6.54
<b>Langtry</b>	9,003	+9.65	15,621	+2.66
<b>Laredo</b>	7,587	+0.24	14,268	- 12.01
<b>Orange</b>	33,912	-16.38	68,529	-14.71
<b>Texarkana</b>	22,881	-7.20	46,827	-5.04
<b>Valley</b>	38,238	-39.95	71,724	-39.25
<b>Waskom</b>	28,110	+4.33	52,761	+3.53
<b>Wichita Falls</b>	15,441	+1.18	28,353	+0.97
<b>Capitol Complex</b>	6,906	-23.95	11,775	-29.66
<b>CENTER TOTALS</b>	224,457	-12.56	432,216	-12.46

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<b>Mail Services</b>	96,989	129,631
<b>Literature Distributed at Trade Shows</b>	0	0
<b>Automated Attendant Road Condition Calls</b>	4,562	72,328

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\*Compared to last year

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