



1881-1981

Autograph program

Arleta Hallam

1881-1981

**FIRST
CENTURY
ABILENE**

History of Abilene, page 1. ENGLISH TO TEXIAN

1881 - 1881

The Texas and Pacific Railroad began a construction plan in the year of 1879. The Texas and Pacific Railroad began a construction plan in the year of 1879. The Texas and Pacific Railroad began a construction plan in the year of 1879. The Texas and Pacific Railroad began a construction plan in the year of 1879. The Texas and Pacific Railroad began a construction plan in the year of 1879.

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HISTORY OF ABILENE

1881 - 1981

On February 1, 1858, the Seventh Texas Legislature decreed that part of the territory which was formerly in Bexar and Travis Counties was to be formed into a new county to be named Taylor County, for the three Taylor brothers who died in the Alamo. However, even with the creation of the county, there was no settlement in Taylor County, but merely a dot on the Texas map, through which the famous Butterfield Mail Line Route passed in the northwest portion of the county. Indians, the Civil War, and the barren land made the county almost uninhabited until about 1874, when some homes were known to have been built.

The famous Hashknife Ranch, owned by John N. Simpson, was established in 1875, with the main dwelling located just west of the present ACU Hill. At the same time, ranches in the area of Buffalo Gap came into existence. Soon, Buffalo Gap had a good sprinkling of people, making it the first community in young Taylor County.

It is estimated that in 1878, the county had approximately one hundred residents. On July 3, 1878, an election was held, in which eighty-seven votes were cast, organizing a county and establishing the County Commissioner's Court, which held its first meeting on July 23rd in Buffalo Gap. Buffalo Gap became the county seat and settlers began moving into the county. In 1880, booming Buffalo Gap boasted a population of twelve hundred residents, and the concentration of people began spreading out, forming Tuscola and other communities in the county.

The Texas and Pacific Railroad was the prime reason for the opening of West Texas. In the 1880's, the railroad crews were laying up to twelve miles of track per week in the race toward the Far West, and around January 15, 1881, the tracks reached Abilene. The first passenger train passed through Abilene on January 27, 1881, and, on February 28, Major H. W. Stocking, an agent for the railroad, arrived at Abilene with terminal cars and opened an office.

In the fall of 1880, a conference of ranchers and representatives of the Texas and Pacific Railroad took place at the Hashknife Ranch, near North 13th Street in present-day Abilene. The purpose of the conference was to establish and locate a townsite in the area. Originally, the plan had been to run the railroad through Buffalo Gap, but the railroad officials decided to choose the present location route. An agreement was made between the railroad and the founding fathers on December 18, 1880, and the townsite was given a legal description. J. N. Simpson and Clabe Merchant, ranchers, named the town Abilene in hopes that this new town would reach the same importance in the cattle industry as Abilene, Kansas, where they had often driven cattle to the end of the cattle trail.

The auction of town lots was scheduled for March 15, 1881. By this date, Abilene was already populated with over three hundred people, living in a tent city. The auctioneer set up his block at a location which was eventually to become South First and Chestnut Streets, and on that date, 139 lots were sold for \$23,810. The next day, 178 more lots were auctioned at \$27,550, and the rest were sold at private sale.

History of Abilene, page 2

The Texas and Pacific Railroad began a promotion plan in the East to interest people in living in the Southwest. Special immigrant trains were run, on which fares were reduced. The townspeople prepared brochures to attract citizens to move to Abilene. The town continued to grow, and, on January 2, 1883, Abilene was incorporated into a city.

Now that Abilene was larger than Buffalo Gap, it became a political issue to see which city would get the new county courthouse. A bitter contest was underway and all types of tactics were used to promote making Abilene the county seat. Election day, October 30, 1883, brought a great number of voters to the polls, and some reports indicate that more people voted than could have been residents of the county. When the election was over, Abilene was the winner and the new courthouse was built and the county records were moved to Abilene.

The first church in Abilene was organized by the Presbyterians on February 27, 1881, before the first townlot was even sold. They were followed by the Methodists, which established the first Sunday School in the spring of 1881 and later constructed the first church building. The First Baptist Church was organized on December 17, 1881. Because of the lack of church buildings, the denominations rotated their meeting days and used the school building on the corner of Third and Cedar Streets until December, 1882.

Schools were among the earliest institutions in Abilene. Abilenians raised \$600 to build the first school, located at 302 Cedar Street, while Abilene was still a "tent city". Before that, classes were taught in a tent pitched between Hickory and Cedar Streets. By 1884, a second school was needed and \$500 was raised to build the southside school at 541 Chestnut Street. Abilene's first high school was started in 1887, in a warehouse at First and Sycamore Streets, and the first high school building was constructed at First and Peach Streets in 1890.

The first issue of the Abilene Reporter was published on June 17, 1881, by C. E. Gilbert, and it became a daily newspaper in the spring of 1884. The paper was first published in a tent, located at South First and Oak Streets. Because it is still in existence, the Abilene Reporter-News has the honor of being the oldest continuously operated business firm in Abilene.

Farming began in the Abilene area in the spring of 1878, when fifteen or sixteen German families arrived and established the Eagle Colony along Lytle Creek. The colony was short-lived, as the Drought of 1886 brought a severe crisis to the new county. Clara Barton was sent by President Cleveland to make first-hand inspections of the area. Federal aid was requested and help came from as far away as St. Louis. As more efforts were made to make crops grow in West Texas, a dispute developed between the larger ranchers, who wanted to keep the range open, and the smaller ranchers or farmers, called "nesters", who wanted to fence their acreage.

History of Abilene, page 3:

On November 20, 1891, Abilene had its one and only legal execution, when William H. Frizzell, who had been convicted of killing his wife, was hanged publicly at the courthouse before an audience of 1500 to 2000 people. This is reported to have been quite a gala event, with much singing and a long speech by the condemned man.

In 1885, the first waterworks plant was established by Grosscup and Keith. Abilene received its first electric streetlights, seventeen in number, in 1891. They were mounted on forty-foot poles and were lighted from dusk until dawn. Telephone service began in 1895, gas service in 1906, and the streetcar system in 1908. In 1910, the street paving project began.

The city prospered commercially, and, by 1887, Chestnut Street reached as far south as Seventh Street. Commercial construction was in excess of \$100,000 in 1890, when there were three brick plants in operation in Abilene to meet the demand for bricks. A wooden plank sidewalk was first constructed in March, 1888, reaching from the post office to the Texas and Pacific Railroad Station, and more sidewalks were added as needed. Abilene became a wholesale grocery distribution center for the entire area during this period.

On July 4, 1891, between 5000 and 6000 people were present for the cornerstone laying of the first building of Simmons College, located in the North Park Addition of Abilene. The Baptist college opened for students in September of 1892 in a two-story brick building, despite the fact that sixteen colleges had failed in this area before 1890. Ninety students were in attendance the first year and the school continued to grow. In 1925, the name was changed to Simmons University, and, in 1934, to Hardin-Simmons University.

In 1905, plans were formulated for a Church of Christ school in Abilene. The land was offered by W. H. Childers in west Abilene, and the school was begun and chartered under the name of Childers Classical Institute. The school opened on September 11, 1906, with twenty-five students and a faculty of eight. There were financial struggles until 1912, when James Sewell became president, and by the time he resigned in 1924, it had reached senior college ranks. In 1929, the college, then called Abilene Christian College, moved to its present location in northeast Abilene, where it is now known as Abilene Christian University.

The third college in Abilene was proposed in 1921 and opened by the Methodists in the south section of Abilene, in September, 1923, with 191 students enrolled. Dr. J. W. Hunt felt that there was a need for a Methodist College in West Texas. He had headed the Methodist school at Stamford before it burned down and thought Abilene should be the place to rebuild. He talked to his St. Paul congregation and the Chamber of Commerce about raising the \$300,000 necessary, and got a Baptist, K. K. Legett; a Methodist, J. M. Cunningham; and a Presbyterian, Henry Sayles, Jr.; to donate forty acres of their landholdings to form a campus. McMurry College became accredited as a senior college in 1926.

Abilene has been a medical center since its inception. The Alexander Sanitarium and School of Nursing, and the Hollis Sanitarium were organized early in the history of Abilene. In 1901, Abilene was awarded Abilene State Hospital, now known as Abilene State School. The West Texas Baptist Sanitarium began in 1921 and later became Hendrick Medical Center; the West

History of Abilene, page 4:

Texas Rehabilitation Center opened its doors in 1953; and the West Texas Medical Center began in January, 1968.

The Abilene Public Library began in 1899, following campaigns by the Taylor County News, the Nationalist Library Club, the Abilene Literary and Library Association, and the Abilene City Federation of Women's Clubs during the late 1800's. The Abilene Federated Library Association was housed in "Library Hall" on Pine Street and a librarian was hired in 1900. By 1902, library service was being extended to the communities of Dudley, Colony Hill, Merkel, Baird, and Caps, as well as Abilene.

On February 26, 1906, the Abilene Federated Library Association was chartered and application was made to the Andrew Carnegie Foundation for funds to build a library building, which was completed and formally opened on July 7, 1909. An agreement was entered into with the Abilene City Council to provide a "free public library to which the citizens of Abilene and visitors in the city may have free and uninterrupted access", and city funds were appropriated. The Carnegie Public Library was located at the corner of Cedar and Second Streets. On April 19, 1953, the Eugenia Pickard Memorial Branch Library at 342 Cockerell Street was opened. By 1960, the Abilene Public Library had outgrown its Carnegie structure, and on January 18, 1960, the present building, located at 202 Cedar Street, was opened, with a capacity of 200,000 volumes. The Abilene Public Library, under the direction of W. Dee Blackmon, now serves the 32-county Big Country Library System as one of the state's ten major resource centers and houses over 225,000 volumes, as well as periodicals, microfilm, recordings, films, videotapes, art prints, and other library materials.

Abilene became a home rule city and adopted the mayor-commissioner form of government on March 20, 1911, changing to the city manager form of government on August 27, 1946. The new Abilene City Hall opened on February 14, 1966.

Oil, agriculture, and ranching have been important in the development of Abilene since its beginnings. In 1890, a Well Committee was formed by prominent citizens of Abilene to drill an artesian well for water and search for an oil reservoir. After drilling 2,223 feet at a site near the present Abilene High School, the well was abandoned. The immediate Abilene area did not have any great success in discovering oil until the productive Wimberly Field near the Taylor-Jones County Line was located on February 28, 1941. Nevertheless, oil concerns are a large part of Abilene's commercial interests.

During World War II, Abilene became a military center. Camp Barkeley, located southwest of Abilene, was rapidly built, at times housing in excess of 60,000 men. The men of the 45th and 90th Divisions, the 11th and 12th Armored Divisions, the Medical Replacement Training Center, and the Officer Candidate School were trained there. It also served as a prisoner-of-war camp. The Tye Army Air Corps Base was a training command for fighter pilots and added even more to Abilene's participation in the war effort. When these two bases closed down at the end of the war, it was thought that Abilene would surely die as a town.

History of Abilene, page 5:

In the early 1950's, Abilene made its bid for a permanent Air Force Base. Local businessmen raised \$850,000 to purchase a large tract of land west of Abilene in the general vicinity of the old Tye Army Air Corps Base. Congress approved the establishment of Dyess Air Force Base on July 3, 1952. In 1955, all plans were completed and the Air Force began construction of a new air base for the Strategic Air Command to house two wings of B-47 bombers. On January 6, 1956, the first B-47 landed on the new Dyess runway. As Abilene celebrates its centennial, Dyess Air Force Base is twenty-five years old.

Today, Abilene has grown from the three hundred people living in tents in 1881 to 96,316, according to preliminary 1980 census returns. Taylor County now boasts a population of 110,834.

Tuesday, June 25, 1951

The Alexander...
Mrs. Mary...
Lt. Gen. Fisher...

John Alexander
Mrs. Mary
Lt. Gen. Fisher

Thursday, July 12, 1951

Mrs. Olive Stephens...

[Handwritten signature]

Monday, January 15, 1951

Richard D. [Handwritten signature]

Friday, September 14, 1951

Tuesday, February 13, 1951

[Handwritten signature]

Thursday, October 11, 1951

Tuesday, March 27, 1951

[Handwritten signature]

Monday, November 5, 1951

Thursday, April 26, 1951

[Handwritten signature]

Monday, December 17, 1951 at 2:00 p.m.

Monday, May 14, 1951

Children's Program... Christmas 1951

[Handwritten signature]

Abilene Public Library's

CENTENNIAL SERIES

Monthly programs open to the public, with free admission.

7:00 p.m.

Library Auditorium

Monday, January 19, 1981:

Sam Pendergrast... "The Real Abilene Trinity: Bootleggers, Baptists, and Books"

Sam Pendergrast

Tuesday, February 10, 1981:

American Association of University Women... "A Century of Fashion" (style show)

Janet Dixon, A.A.U.W.

Thursday, March 19, 1981:

A.C. Greene... "Abilene: The Village of My Heart"

A.C. Greene

Thursday, April 23, 1981:

Kathryn Duff... "Catclaw Country"

Kathryn Duff

Monday, May 18, 1981:

Jack North... "Pioneers of the Abilene Area"

Jack North

Tuesday, June 23, 1981:

Jim Alexander... "Fort Phantom Hill"

Mike Myers... "Camp Barkeley"

Lt. Pam Fenner... "The Dyess Story"

Jim Alexander
Mike Myers
Lt. Pam Fenner

Thursday, July 16, 1981:

Mrs. Clyde Bingham... "Buffalo Gap: Remember When?"

Monday, August 10, 1981:

Richard Dillard... "Architecture and the Development of Abilene"

Richard Dillard

Tuesday, September 15, 1981:

Juanita Zachry... "Barbed Wire and Ranching in Taylor County"

Tuesday, October 13, 1981:

Paul Lack and Gerald McDaniel... "The Lack and Mack Show: Did The Jazz Age Come to Abilene?"

Paul Lack
Gerald McDaniel

Tuesday, November 3, 1981:

Harry Holt... "Farming and Ranching in West Texas"

Harry Holt

Saturday, December 12, 1981 at 2:00 p.m.

Children's Program... "Christmas 100 Years Ago"

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This brochure has been published with the support of the Abilene Cultural Affairs Council and prepared by the Centennial Committee of the Abilene Public Library.

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