

Spring 1956

# The SHAMROCK

Notes  
Focus on the Frontier by J. Evetts Haley—Page 2

A broken plate but still a fine range study of an XIT wad-  
die shoeing an unwilling mount on the Montana Range.  
(Photograph by L. A. Huffman)

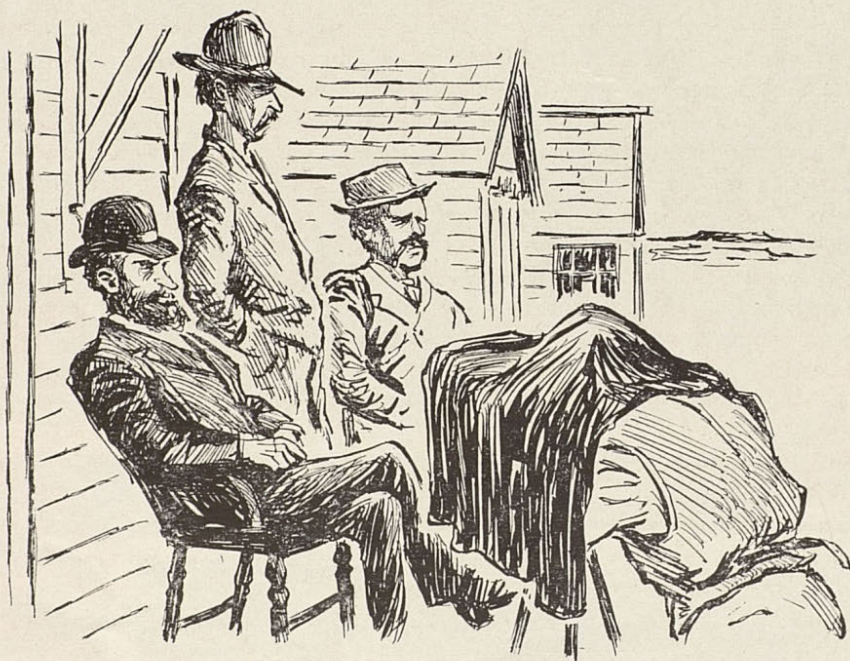


Historic "Photorama"—Great Plains





An early longhorn herd caught by Ragsdale as it watered on the Conchos near San Angelo, a prominent way station adjacent to the great Goodnight-Loving Trail.





Focus on the Frontier . . .

third in a series

*In these pages are excerpts from the  
remains of a photographic history of . . .*

# Texas great plains Country

While L. A. Huffman was still dreaming of going to Montana—to the upper frontier of grass, game, Indians and cattle—another eager young man with wet-glass plates and a bulky camera, M. C. Ragsdale, was at work recording the colorful and changing life at the other extremity of the Great Plains in Texas.

These two young men, a thousand miles apart, were fellow adventurers in a land and a life that were much the same. Contemporaries with camera, they were wrapped up in the passing scene and the opportunities for recording it. They were in love with the tempestuous times and deserve to be remembered together.

But while Huffman's great work was preserved to attest his fine rank as a photographic historian, Ragsdale was deprived of his proper place through the perverse carelessness inherent in human nature. Except for scattered fragments, such as those reproduced here from second copies, his great collection is lost.

Unlike most pioneers, those with photographic plates found their future renown resting on a fragile and uncertain fate. Fighting men on the frontiers left the tangible evidence of their bravery in stable and peaceful countrysides. Imaginative and industrious riders of the trail and range left challenging traditions and productive estates as gauges of their caliber. And engineers and builders generally left significant and sometimes monumental structures as solid evidence of their pioneering ability. But the proof of great accomplishment with a camera is as ephemeral as the smell of greasewood after a shower when proofs and plates are gone.

Fate or accident, as men variously term some decisive force or event which shapes their ends, rather than early, over-whelming interest, turned M. C. Ragsdale into a photographer. Economic compulsion—a heavy term for human want and often the forceful ally of western adventure—first set him to drawing subjects into





focus. His interest was later to be whetted by distance and denial.

All of which is preliminary to saying that McArthur Cullen Ragsdale was born in South Carolina, April 22, 1849, and, as the oldest of eight children, was early forced into helping to make a living for the family. Determined to get an education, he hit upon the notion of the pursuit of photography to pay his way through school, but never managed to get a camera until he was twenty-one years of age.

Then, wherever he sought a location, he disappointingly found that every town big enough to support a photographer apparently already had one, and thus formal education continued to elude his lens.

At last he amassed close to a thousand dollars, deposited it in a bank, and entered college. In three months the bank failed. Thereupon, young Ragsdale packed his plates and headed west.

He reached the frontier of Texas in 1868 and stopped at the warm-hearted and hot-blooded little town of Belton. From there, with buckboard and team, he became an itinerant photographer swinging in a great circuit through the villages northwestward to Brownwood and beyond, southward to Fort McKavett, Mason, and Fredericksburg, and eventually back to the shaded environs of Belton. Moving leisurely, as uncertain trade and stable interests in subject matter dictated at times, he was two years upon the road.

The land and the time of which he soon became a part were animated with life and vivid with color . . . with the dynamics of action and



of change. Belton dozed in dangerous moods for all who chose to frolic or to fight—and all at times were apparently willing. It was an important landmark on the Texas Trail then pouring its millions of long-horned cattle from the lush ranges of southern Texas into the hungry maw of the expanding East and North. In the valleys of the Bosque, San Saba, Colorado and the Conchos to the west, grizzled Texans with guns eternally upon their hips and in their hands, were building log cabins and spreading their hardy herds across the verdant hills. Beyond them was the teeming buffalo range, with its millions of massive animals gradually giving way before the incessant boom of the hide-



(Right) Other Mexicans, in simple, weathered 'dobe houses sought the shady side in summer and squatted in the sun for warmth in cool weather.

(Below) Looking down Concho Avenue in San Angelo in the middle 1880's toward the Nimitz Hotel, the Ah Sing and Ah Lee Laundry and the Gray Mule, White Elephant and other famous saloons.





(Extreme Left) By New Years Day of 1895, Ragsdale's home town was putting on social airs, with young blades traveling in state with a driver in livery, their footman mounted on a diminutive donkey—even footmen scorned to walk—and the old Legal Tender Saloon conveniently at hand.

(Left) Sporting gentlemen of the 1880's in old San Angelo accomodated the photographer in one of the more pretentious gambling halls. (Right) Out on the edge of San Angelo in the early days, Mexican camps, with sacks hung up for shelter, jerked meat hanging on the lines, and owners comfortably cooking over open fires; such camps escaped the contamination of crowds as well as the lives of tax collectors.



hunters' guns.

On the outer edge were the army campaigners in an ineffective line of frontier forts designed to repel the native warriors of the Plains. Beyond these, nursing their terrible wrath at this desecration of their ancestral homes, were the proud, mounted remnants of the Kiowa and Comanche tribes, striking these rash Texans with scattered, elusive, awful and vindictive force almost as often as the moon grew full. The mighty challenge of risk and danger permeated the air.

Into this land of reckless men and fantastic adventure trotted the team of McArthur C. Ragsdale, while he sat upon the buckboard seat

armed with a rifle and a camera. His first camera soon wore out, but he scraped together enough money to buy the best lens he could find, and drew this picturesque panorama of life into focus upon his plates.

In 1875, while the first of the great campaigns against the Plains Indians was being conducted out of Fort Concho, he reached that noted outpost perched in the forks of the rivers. The return of General William R. Shafter's great command was expected, and in anticipation of the exhuberant release of spirit and funds incident to its arrival, the floating, sporting elements of the frontier were concentrating on the post by stage and saddle, and every other con-





venient means. Across the Main Conchos, a few lariat lengths to the north, the business-minded men and women in the dugouts and hovels of the village called Saint Angela, with a touch of grim frontier humor, cinched up their plans for the return of the soldiers, the celebration of the ritual, and the usual baptism by immersion in booze and blood.

Understandably a little apprehensive, Ragsdale and a brother who now accompanied him, therefore asked permission of the commanding officer to pitch their tent upon the military reservation. But Colonel B. H. Grierson, then in charge, was incredulous of their story of being photographers, and, sure that they must be traveling sports out to fleece the returning soldiers, refused. So they camped across the river near Veck's, the post sutler's store and opened for business while everyone expectantly awaited the arrival of Shafter's command, long absent on the Staked Plains.

Within a few weeks the suspicious commandant, finally convinced that they were photographers—for few things are more persuasive of reality than pictures held in hand—invited Ragsdale to set up shop on the military reservation. In the few weeks that had intervened, however, six men had been prematurely ushered into Heaven—according to the generous public trust—by gun battles in Saint Angela.

Though he was an ardent hunter and a good

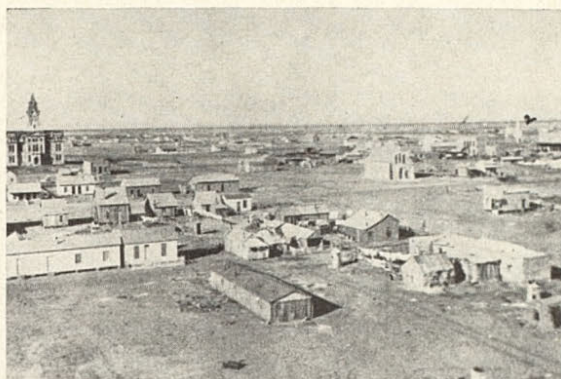
(Right) Two of the most reliable modes of Western migration. What a story is suggested here, men with swarming children poking their heads from under the wagon sheets, long-suffering mothers who capped the day's jolting ride by cooking over smoky fires, and men with long whips pushing their bull teams, or mares in harness with sedate little colts following by their sides. The rawhide-bottomed dining suite was lashed behind.



M. G. Ragsdale.

Photographer

Views Around San Angelo, Texas.



(Top) Parades have a peculiar fascination for growing communities. It was no different in the late 1800's. Here the float of the pioneer farm, topped off with a big tassel of milo maize, pointed to a changing day, while a distant float advertising ice and lager beer suggested a human trait that seems eternal. (Bottom) Sprawling San Angelo and its new courthouse about 1885, when it was the judicial center for 12 organized West Texas counties that extended to the Pecos.

A busy scene on Concho Avenue in San Angelo in 1883, with substantial construction in progress, and characteristic vehicles parked helter-skelter along the street in keeping with the casual ways of the time.



M. G. Ragsdale.

Photographer

Views Around San Angelo





hand with a rifle, Ragsdale's "shooting" was of a decidedly different kind. In time he moved back across the river and set up his "studio" in a picket house along the main trail which became Chadbourne Street, on the site of the present Ragsdale building, in modern San Angelo. There he brought his bride, and there he lived and labored to catch and "fix" the passing scene on fragile plates of glass. And there too came the individualistic circuit rider, Fighting Parson Potter, to preach the first Protestant sermon to

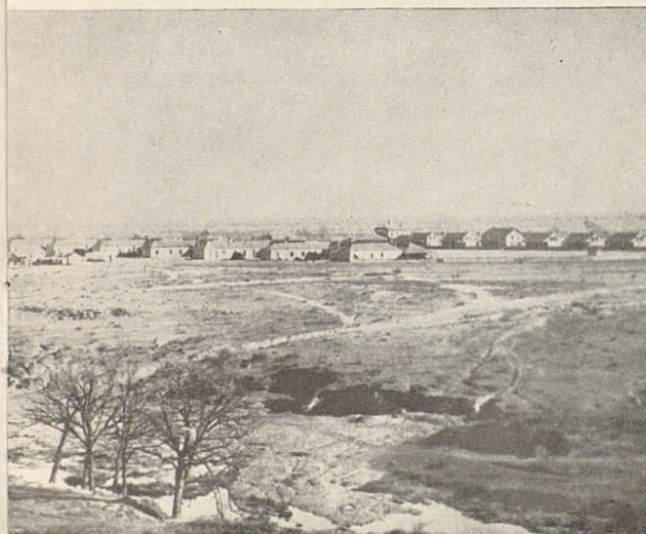
sinner sitting in respectful silence upon benches of boards, and bring them to conversion with the moral compulsion of Christianity reinforced with the persuasive power of his handy Colt.

The years passed and so did the old life. In 1915, forty-seven years after he reached and began to record the frontier life of Texas, Ragsdale sold his studio. Sometime thereafter its buyer, obsessed with that mania for destructive house-cleaning that is the curse of history, took his great collections of plates and dumped them on the city trash heap.

Ragsdale's disappointment was unappeasable. Around San Angelo a story is still told which should be true, even if it be a legend, that Ragsdale ran the unimaginative buyer out of town. Justifiable homicide with far less provocation was a well-established precedent in the life that he had recorded.

While that intensely interesting region never ceased to intrigue him, Ragsdale never forgave this thoughtless tragedy. He died September 14, 1944, and is buried on the land that slopes gently toward the Concho. But the perverse fate that hangs so precariously over the immortality of photographers has left but a suggestion of his rightful place which simple equity and superb ability should have assured him in the pages of history.

Fort Concho as it looked from the San Angelo side of the Concho River in the middle 1880's. Compared with the later years there was a striking lack of timber.



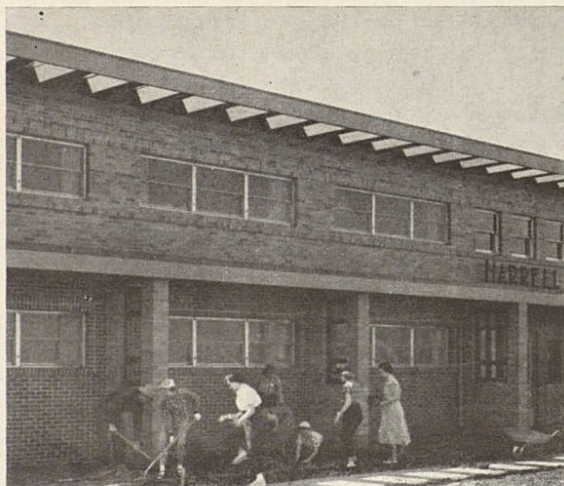




The Oil and Gas Building (Right foreground) is headquarters for many oil operators.

## North Texas . . . Queen City

Members of a local garden club assist with the beautification program of an elementary school. Wichita Falls is a classic example of one of the many outstanding school systems in the North Texas area.



● While most major North Texas and Panhandle cities rocked along with populations of 10 to 15,000 in 1920, Wichita Falls was bursting its seams with 40,000 people and city traffic was cited as a major civic problem.

The cattle industry was responsible for a steady migration to the area and ranching activity remains an important key to the area's economy today.

Ranching, well established by 1920, had started with Herefords brought into the area in the late 1800's . . . the first Herefords to arrive in Texas. The cattle crossing coupled with the arrival of the railroad prompted the earliest settlement along the Wichita River.

However, the tide of migrants that poured in with the oil discovery was more responsible for the sudden soar in population. The average citizen of the early 1920's predicted 100,000 people by 1930 and the more enthusiastic were



determined that Wichita Fall's population would reach 200,000.

Oil in the area first became apparent when a water well was drilled on a farm nine miles from Henrietta, Texas, in the summer of 1901. It was one of those hot, mucky summers in Clay County. Weeks had passed with no moisture and the stock tanks were dry.

J. W. "Uncle Jim" Lochridge decided to do something about it on his 480-acre tract. He started drilling for water with a home-made rig and in six days he hit sand. The seventh morning he went out to his well and found little water, but a considerable amount of black "smelly" liquid . . . oil. That was the beginning of the first North Texas oil field, and the third oil field in Texas.

But this beginning was not the development that inspired the people to predict such growth for Wichita Falls. In fact, the field was small and natural gas soon became a more significant factor. Wichita Falls was the first city in Texas and the first west of the Mississippi to have natural gas piped in for domestic and industrial fuel.

Developments that sprouted a few years later set the people in a frame of mind alerting them to "tremendous growth" . . . in 1909 and

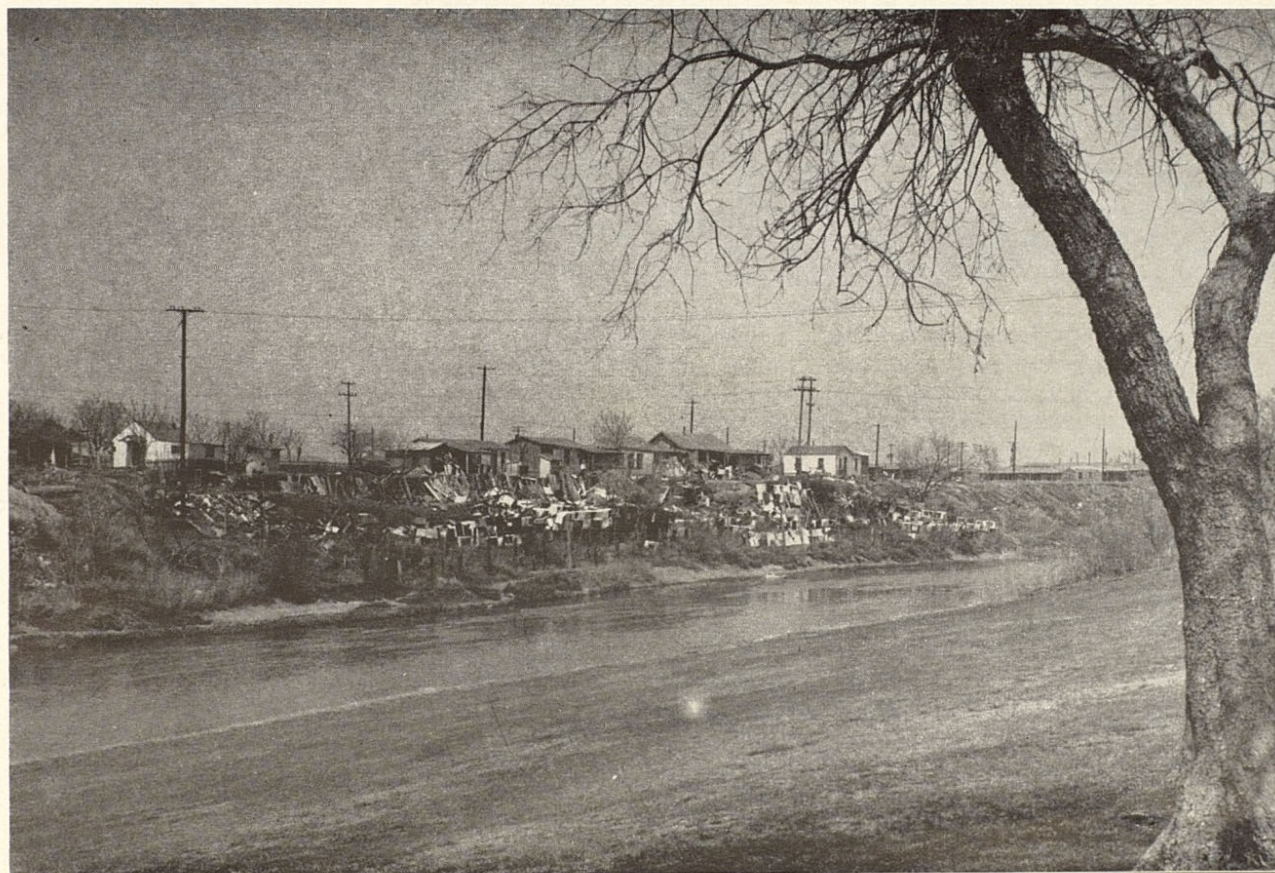


The first Herefords to arrive in Texas were brought into nearby Henrietta area. The cattle business provides a vital force to the economy. District Beef Shows, (Above) are held annually in the Wichita Falls area.

again in 1911 more impressive oil discoveries increased the tempo of enthusiasm. Then in 1918 the frenzy of excitement reached a peak with the Burkburnett discovery. Derricks sprang up all over the community.

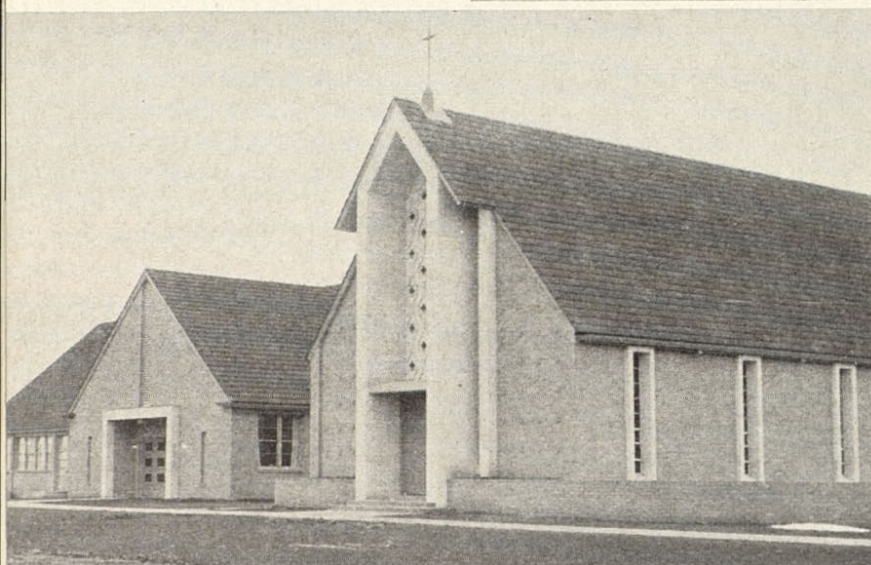
The Burkburnett Field started because of a

Contrasting sides of Wichita River reflect progress of city beautification project.





Throngs of people line a busy street to view a parade during the West Texas Chamber of Commerce meeting. The year was 1927—Wichita Falls was a thriving city of nearly 50,000 enthusiastic people.



A classic example of the continuing growth and building in progress is cited by new churches, new shopping centers, homes and business places. The University Methodist Church (Left) is located near Midwestern University.

Woman's determination. Her husband S. L. Fowler wanted to sell their property but Mrs. Fowler would not sign the deed because she was determined that there was oil under their property. There was. The first well drilled, after local people put up a \$15,000 gamble on her hunch, came in as a 2,000 barrel a day producer.

Though Burkburnett is 12 miles away, Wichita Falls was prepared to capitalize on the boom. Courageous civic leaders had cooperated during the past ten years to prepare for the sudden growth . . . uncertain as it was.

Years before the peak of the oil boom, paved

streets, a sewer system, good schools, banks and a modern theater were built. To a casual observer it might have appeared that the people were "going overboard" . . . strictly "carried away".

But there was good basis for their optimism even from a business standpoint. The oil wells were shallow, usually from 1,600 to 1,900 feet deep and required comparatively little capital to drill. A man who could raise as little as \$25,000 was usually "in business", because that was about the average cost of drilling a well. The area was tagged the "Poor Man's Oil Field" be-





*the  
heart  
of North Texas'  
recreational area*

Wichita Falls is a centrally-located recreational area for thousands of people who are annually attracted to Lakes Wichita, Kemp, Kickapoo and Diversion for fishing, water skiing and boating.

Three swimming pools accommodate the public during the summer in addition to the four nearby lakes featuring other activities. Other Texas Lakes, Possum Kingdom, Bridgeport and Eagle Mountain, and Texhoma, Murray and Lawtonka in Oklahoma lie within a two-hour drive of Wichita Falls.



cause of the low investment opportunity. Almost all the money stayed at home since the drilling was done by small independent oil operators who located in Wichita Falls.

Before long the city acquired the distinctive title, "Capitol of Independent Oil Companies."

During all these years, railroading played a significant role in the area development, and the activity increased with the oil boom.

Irrigation got an early start in Wichita Falls as a result of spirited minded citizen's concern over the severe water problem. Lakes were built and water was piped in. The water prob-

lem was solved for years to come.

Wichita Falls continued growing and building . . . a modern residential section, more paving, office buildings and stores went up during the early 1920's and by 1925 the population topped 50,000. Civic leaders still had their plans geared for the 100,000 mark by 1930.

But in the late 1920's it appeared that these faithful citizens were in for a "letdown". A recession of business and finally the depression of the early 1930's slowed activity to a virtual standstill, as compared to the hum-drum of the booming era a few years before.



In the first place, the oil industry was bound to weaken in the area because it was and still is primarily a "stripper operation" . . . 11,000 of the 25,000 wells in the area produce 10 barrels of oil per day or less.

A deadening slump in oil prices during the depression years took its toll of marginal producers.

Though many major companies blossomed from a meager beginning in the area, (a fair booth sign in Dallas in 1920 read, "40% of major oil company headquarters are located in Wichita Falls, Texas") they moved out when much larger producing areas were discovered in East Texas, the Texas Panhandle, Oklahoma and other areas.

For example, the Lone Star Gas Company was founded at Burkburnett with the first big strike there. Now its headquarters are in Dallas. Magnolia originated in the area and Gulf Oil Company's original operations started there. The original organizers of the Shamrock Petroleum Company (now The Shamrock Oil and Gas Corporation) were from Wichita Falls.

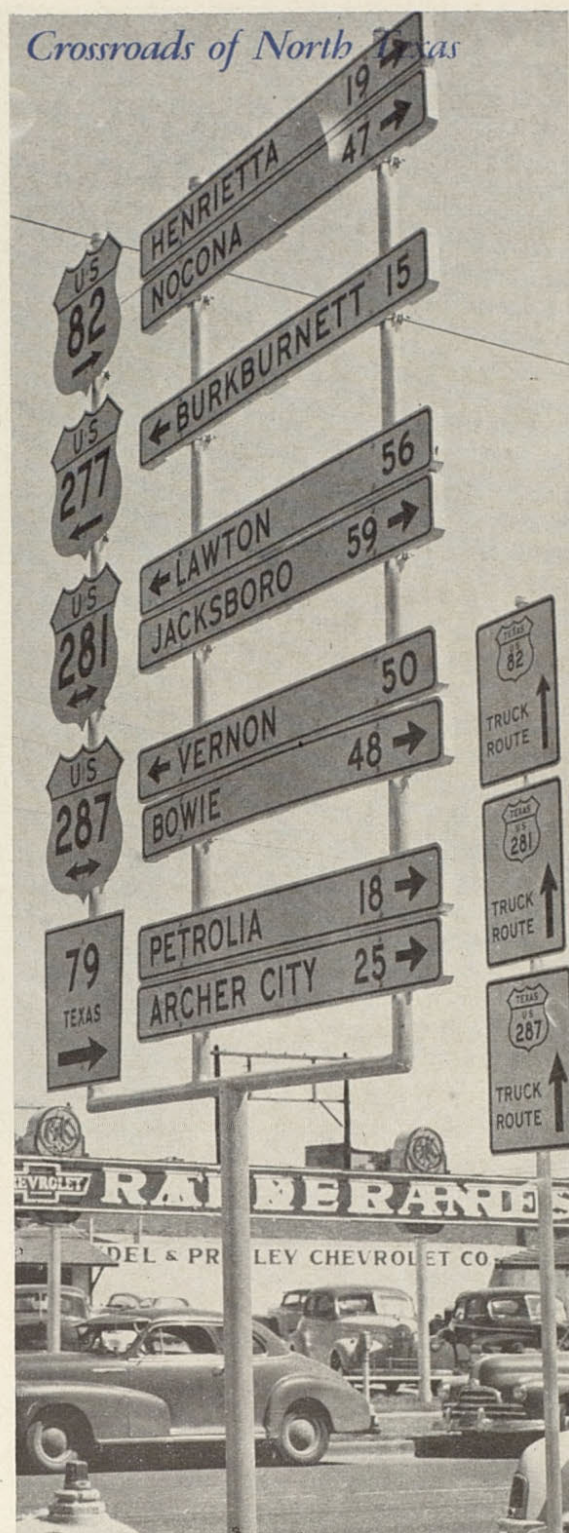
Dwindling oil in some sections and the depression brought on a 10-year period of comparatively static activity. Wichita Falls never reached the 100,000 population mark but generally lost people it had gained since 1920.

However, in 1937, still another era of oil activity was ushered in with the first "deep well"—additional wells were drilled to 6,000 feet.

More oil operators moved in and the city began to hop again—except on a more solid footing which prevails today. By 1941, Sheppard Air Force Field was established, and except for a brief period after World War II when it was closed, the field with its tremendous investment in people and equipment has played a major role in the life and economy of the city ever since. Today the population of Sheppard Field alone exceeds 20,000 military and civilian personnel.

Wichita Falls is near the 110,000 mark in population. The growth serves to illustrate that in addition to Sheppard Field other factors have come into play distinguishing the modern era as compared to the early boom. Permanent factors that differ, at least, in important respects.

For example, the large number of independent oil operators with offices in Wichita Falls are established firms who depend primarily on the type of oil activity peculiar to this area . . .







Farming and Ranching — the key to a continued growing and prosperous Wichita County. Cooperation among farmers and ranchers and the various agricultural agencies including the Texas A. and M. Experiment Station has resulted in increased production and overall improvement in farming and ranching techniques.

stripper-well operations and shallow drilling. Speculation remains an insignificant factor as compared to the activity during the early period of the oil development.

No other county in the United States except Harris County, (Houston) has as many oil service companies. One of the larger equipment firms in Wichita Falls built the first rotary rig used for drilling.

The area is an outstanding research center for secondary recovery methods. Probably as much scientific data on secondary recovery has been compiled in the Wichita Falls Oil and Gas Building in cooperation with the North Texas Oil and Gas Association as anywhere in the country. This has been one of the most progressive and significant developments for the area in years.

More and more oil is coming from wells that were formerly abandoned or where produc-

tion had severely dwindled, and new deeper wells are coming in as a result of continuing research.

Oil is "King" in Wichita Falls. But Agriculture provides the greatest source of income in Wichita County as a whole.

A broad expanse of prosperous farmers and ranchers comprising an exceptionally large trading area encompassing many surrounding counties places Wichita Falls in an enviable central location as a trading center. The trading area includes some counties in Southwestern Oklahoma.

Some of the most progressive and prosperous farmers and ranchers in the country raise prize-winning cattle, wheat and cotton. An experiment station conducted in cooperation with Texas A. and M. College has been a big boost in educating the farmers and ranchers in production methods. Another organization called the District Agricultural Workers Council has been



an overwhelming success in the area. It is an organization that might well serve as a tip to other areas throughout the United States—maybe even a tip for Secretary of Agriculture, Benson.

The council is an organization represented by more than 20 agricultural agencies to study agricultural problems in a particular area. It was formed in 1949 and is the first of its kind in the United States. Hundreds of regional councils have been organized after observing its success. The groups study and assist agricultural programs and often eliminate duplications in work schedules which are planned by the agencies represented.

The farmers know where to go for particular information and every agency cooperates with the farmers and ranchers and with each other—which was not entirely true before. Farmers and ranchers from a host of counties testify to the value of the program.

Another outstanding organization promoting farm improvement and soil conservation is the Bridwell Soil Builders organization. Each year a number of awards are made in cash to farmers displaying greatest improvements in various categories. Bridwell Awards for 1955 totaled \$5,880.

The Chamber of Commerce keeps abreast of city activities and stays on top of planning activities and progress of the area. Some typical examples of recent progress are continually cited such as: a dozen major building projects underway, including an ultra-modern automatic parking garage, the city's first . . . a \$3 million dollar expressway for the city which is a part of a proposed \$25 million turnpike highway plan for the county. . .

More than \$6 million to be spent on an Air Force Hospital . . . \$11 million to be poured into engine test cells at the base and more than \$4 million expected to be authorized for a municipal airport.

Another 100 low-rent housing units are now in the planning stages. The project to put the "falls" back in Wichita Falls, a city beautification project, is daily becoming a reality. Each side of two miles of the river has been cleaned, a part of it sodded and beautified. Expansion of school facilities and many other municipal projects such as a new multi-million dollar water reservoir to meet "expanded needs of the



Nine neighborhood parks with playground equipment and excellent facilities for picnicking, tennis, baseball and golf are inviting spots for all age groups. Golf tournaments at the Wichita Falls Country Club and Weeks Park attract golfers from the North Texas area.

future" are in the more-than-talking stages. A host of other civic and industrial expansion projects are in the mill.

The Chamber of Commerce and Wichita Falls citizens could go on for many pages citing accomplishments that have been made just during the past year.

Among them would no doubt be modern new shopping centers in several suburban areas. Another might be the big new home and auto supply warehouse and home offices of a Southwest chain store organization. The building is the largest home and auto supply warehouse in America—two blocks long.

These examples of recent expansion in Wichita Falls point up the fact that it is little wonder why the city had the "highest per-family income among residents of metropolitan areas in Texas during 1954 and 1955."

Examples of expansion and progress also illustrate the competitive spirit of the people, since the city's founding in 1882. 1957 will mark the city's 75th Anniversary. For years it has appeared a sort of game to see who could build the biggest house. One is under construction right now at a cost that is estimated to run into six figures. Wichita Falls has demonstrated that an old slogan . . . "The City That Faith Built" . . . might be appropriately revived.



# SPRING CLEAN-UP TIME

Each year millions of motorists are misled by the word "permanent" when used with anti-freeze. Permanent anti-freeze, the manufacturers point out, means "satisfactory use for one season", or "winter-long", not year after year as some motorists are led to believe.

"Permanent type" anti-freeze used for more than one season can cause corrosion to form in the cooling system as the rust inhibitors in the old solution becomes depleted. Rust, a product of corrosion, is likely to clog up the radiator and narrow passages of the engine block, causing the engine to overheat with costly damage to pistons and other engine parts.

Motorists may prevent these costly damages by following the recommended procedures of their local Shamrock Dealer. As soon as the danger of freezing temperatures have passed have your Shamrock Dealer perform the following:

1. Drain out and discard the winterworn anti-freeze solution from the radiator and engine block.
2. Clean and flush the cooling system, using a chemical cleaner, if necessary.
3. Check all parts of the cooling system for leaks or wear; replace or repair parts where necessary.
4. Refill radiator with fresh water and add a rust inhibitor.

## THE SHAMROCK Now A Quarterly Publication

Effective with this issue, *The Shamrock* magazine will be published on a quarterly basis rather than every two months.

You are especially requested to fill out the enclosed post card and return it promptly to The Advertising Department and promptly notify us of any future change of address in order that we may keep our mailing list up to date.



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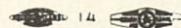
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waddie shoeing an unwilling mount on  
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