

## **HISTORY OF HUNTSVILLE, TEXAS**

Huntsville and several other East Texas communities were founded very early in the history of Texas. The Mexican Government granted Mr. Pleasant Gray a league of land in 1834. The City was founded on a part of his seven mile square tract. The first building was probably his Trading Post, where he did business with the Bedias Indians, settlers who bought land from him, and travelers moving Westward.

Texas became a Republic after the Battle of San Jacinto. Nacogdoches, San Augustine, Huntsville and other East Texas towns became safe places to settle and take roots. Nearby, steamboat traffic on the Trinity River was available, and by the mid 1840's there was talk of Huntsville as the new State Capitol City. The Great Northern Railroad by-passed Huntsville in 1871, several miles to the East, but later built a Huntsville Tap.

Huntsville's very own Citizen General, President, Governor, Senator Sam Houston had much to do with many good things that happened in the 1840-1870 era, but other able and influential people also did much. These included the Gray, Gibbs, Smithers, Thomason, Smithe, Yoakum and Ball families, to name a few; all were both generous and faithful in promoting the welfare of the town and its people.

Several major events in the early years had a profound effect on the community, people of the time, and the future of the community. Early, the people developed opportunities for learning. By 1843 there was a co-ed Academy; by 1852 the Austin College was open. There is no doubt the very earliest settlers gave high priority to education. Later, in 1879, Austin College became Sam Houston State University.

The Texas Department of Corrections was established in Huntsville by the new State of Texas, soon after its Statehood in 1845. Employment opportunities there, unique to most early towns, gave Huntsville a unique stability that is still a major industry for the area.

An outbreak of Yellow Fever swept over the community in 1857, causing the death of more than ten percent of the people of Huntsville. This terrible thing and the Civil War years stifled development and growth for ten or more years.

Land and fruits of the land, i.e. cotton, cattle, timber etc. were dominant area industries of the first hundred years. WWII and the flagging Agrarian Era overlapped in years of transition for the community. New and stabilizing growth promoted land sales and development, commercial, institutional, residential, and road building. Enrollments at the University increased, payrolls grew steadily, and many other good things happened causing Huntsville to grow and prosper.

The community projects its historic and cultural significance in dynamic ways, as it matures in a field of Opportunity, to grow, to become something more than it is if not bigger. It hovers at the edge of the largest population center in Texas, the fourth largest in the United States. As such, and for a variety of other reasons, Huntsville's future as a contender for industry and all things any city wishes for.

Huntsville's significant history dims in the brilliance of its future. The best, definitely, is yet to come.