

THE TEXAS LAKES TRAIL

RIVERS, RESERVOIRS, MAIN STREETS AND A METROPLEX

Seventy years ago, there were no lakes in the Lakes Trail Region. Rivers cascaded through the North Texas prairies, but today's 30 regional lakes were merely a mirage. By the late 1930s, federal dam projects produced the lakes that became popular recreational destinations with the added benefits of flood control and hydroelectric power.

As a result, small towns near the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex began to grow. The charming 19th-century town squares lured people to these rural villages, and the appeal of the area soon became evident.

The Texas Historical Commission's (THC) newest brochure, the *Texas Lakes Trail Region*, showcases the area's reservoirs and rivers along with the history and culture of the surrounding cities and attractions. From the Oklahoma border to Hillsboro, from Vernon to Paris, the 31 counties in the Lakes Trail Region boast an enchanting range of towns and waterways, each with a unique history to share.

For instance, the 1942 creation of Lake Texoma, located on the Red River near Denison, submerged a grand plantation known as Glen Eden. The stately home, built in 1845 with white oak logs, was meticulously dismantled with each board individually marked for eventual reconstruction. The salvaged wood was set aside, but it ultimately fell victim to an unusually cold winter. It was almost too late before someone realized the wood being used for a campfire was the marked oak from Glen Eden.

"I guess they needed that lumber just to keep from freezing to death," said Donna Hunt, a history columnist with the *Sherman-Denison Herald Democrat*.



THC/OT

"Nellie Chambers brought the rest of the wood to nearby Pawpaw Hill and built a small house out of it."

Nearly 90 miles south of Lake Texoma is the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex, the Lakes Trail Region's economic hub. Offering world-class cultural, commercial and educational opportunities, the metroplex provides large-scale attractions ranging from Texas' unique heritage to modern entertainment venues.

"Fort Worth has the stockyards and world-class museums, and Dallas is full of amazing attractions like the State Fair and West End Historic District," explained Margo Richards, Lakes Trail regional coordinator. "You can experience everything from the Wild West to Andy Warhol in an afternoon."

The urban area is complemented by the surrounding rural communities, which offer historic town squares and slower-paced diversions. Aside from water activities like swimming, boating and fishing, the Lakes Trail Region provides a geographic spectrum of recreational opportunities.

"There are canyons in the north and the Hill Country to the south," Richards said. "You could spend weeks visiting all the parks and trails around here. Almost every geographic feature in the state of Texas is represented in this region."

In addition to its natural assets, the region showcases an impressive collection of history-themed attractions. County courthouses, military museums, Chisholm Trail landmarks, Victorian homes, archeological sites and antiques shops are just a few of the many colorful threads in the historic fabric of the Lakes Trail Region.

The following pages offer a sampling of the towns and attractions that make the area one of the most popular destinations for travelers in Texas.

GRANBURY

More than 50 antiques and specialty shops, restaurants and boutiques line Granbury's Victorian town square, surrounding the impressive 1890 Second Empire-style Hood County Courthouse. Visitors can take horse-drawn carriage rides and spend the night at one of 20 local bed and breakfast establishments — many in historic homes.

Most historic among the downtown's several live entertainment venues is the **Granbury Opera House** (116 E. Pearl St.). Established in 1886 as Kerr's Hall (an opera house until it closed in 1911), the venue was restored in the 1970s and annually stages nearly 300 musicals, plays and melodramas. The 1893 **Nutt House Hotel and Restaurant** (121 E. Bridge St.) on the square has been in continuous use as a hotel since 1919 and features a four-star restaurant.

County history takes center stage at the **Hood County Museum** (208 N. Crockett St.). Located in a county jail from the 1880s, the cells and gallows remain largely intact. The sheriff's quarters contain exhibits, including the story of county namesake Confederate Gen. John Bell Hood and his Texas Brigade.

REGION:

With its colorful history, it should come as no surprise that Granbury serves as headquarters for Lakes Trail Regional Coordinator Margo Richards.

“It’s all about historic preservation in this town — it’s a remarkable place,” she said. “The community really gets behind the preservation programs, and I think that’s evident to all the visitors who keep coming back to experience Granbury’s charm.”

CORSICANA

In 1894, a water well driller accidentally tapped into the first major oil discovery west of the Mississippi River, and Corsicana became one of Texas’ first oil boomtowns.

One of the many groups to settle in Corsicana after the boom was the Jewish merchants who constructed an unusual synagogue in 1898. Now a community meeting hall, **Temple Beth El** (208 S. 15th St.) features two onion-dome towers and remains a rare example of Moorish Revival architecture in Texas.

Another boom-time enterprise was the 1896 **Collin Street Bakery** (401 W. Seventh Ave.). It developed a reputation for spectacular fruitcakes, and today the bakery’s wares are shipped worldwide.

Preservationists and Civil War enthusiasts have eagerly anticipated Corsicana’s newest heritage attraction, the **Pearce Civil War Museum** (on the Navarro College campus at 3200 W. Seventh Ave.). Located in the Cook Center, the new 14,000-square-foot facility is one of the country’s few museums interpreting both sides of the Civil War. It features original documents, interpretive panels on each year of the war, and walk-through, sound-and-sight exhibits simulating battlefield action.

PARIS

This former railroad town features several structures with European classic touches. **The Lamar County Courthouse** (119 North Main St.) is a 1917 Classical Revival structure with Romanesque details, built of marble and pink granite from the same quarry as the State Capitol.

A stroll away is Paris’ downtown plaza, built around the 1927 **Culbertson Fountain**. Its waters swirl beneath shady oaks into Italian marble basins built after a 1916 fire destroyed much of downtown. Facing the plaza, the restored 1926 **Plaza Theater** hosts productions of the Paris Community Theater.

Just down the street lies another European touch — the crape myrtle-lined **Bywaters Park** (300 block of South Main St.), home of a 1931 Corinthian peristyle and site of free summer concerts by the Paris Municipal Band, Texas’ longest-running municipal band.

The city’s most notable historic structure is the 1867 **Sam Bell Maxey House State Historic Site** (812 S. Church St.). This finely appointed antebellum mansion blends Greek Revival and Victorian designs. Confederate Gen. Maxey, whose family lived here for more than a century, built the stately home. Guided tours offer glimpses of original family furnishings and memorabilia, plus period plants in a Victorian garden.

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At right: A freeze gripped the Culbertson Fountain in Paris’ downtown plaza in 1932.

On the cover: Lake Texoma and (inset) downtown Grapevine





BONHAM

Bonham is the home of one of America's most powerful 20th century politicians, the late Sam Rayburn. "Mister Sam," as he was known, was the longest-serving speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. Administered by the THC, **The Sam Rayburn House Museum** (1.5 miles west of Bonham on Hwy. 56) tells his life story inside his 1916 wood-frame home. The museum features original furniture, china and other personal belongings, as well as out-buildings and vehicles.

Nearby is the **Sam Rayburn Library and Museum** (800 West Sam Rayburn Dr.), administered by the University of Texas Center for American History. Dedicated in 1957, this elegant Greek Revival structure of white Georgia marble exhibits photographs, original letters, political cartoons, art, furniture and memorabilia from Rayburn's life and times. It houses a duplicate of his U.S. Capitol office and also contains his extensive personal library.

The Fannin County Museum of History (1 Main St.) showcases the county's past from the pioneer era to the 1950s in a restored 1900 Texas and Pacific Railroad depot. Exhibits fill 14 rooms and include military displays highlighted by a restored Fairchild airplane.

DENISON

Denison was developed in 1872 as a stop on the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad (the Katy, or M-K-T) as it pushed through North Texas. The rail-

road left an impact on the town — it was named after Katy vice president George Denison.

In 1890, Dwight D. Eisenhower was born in a two-story white frame house on the railroad line. The house and 10-acre grounds now comprise the **Eisenhower Birthplace State Historic Site** (208 East Day), which interprets his family life in Denison. Another "Ike" site is on nearby Lake Texoma. **The Eisenhower State Park**, a 450-acre outdoor haven, lies near the site that Butterfield Overland Mail stage-coaches used to cross the Red River at Colbert's Ferry.

Since 1944, Lake Texoma has sprawled nearly 89,000 acres across Texas and Oklahoma, forming one of the region's most popular recreational sites. On the Big Mineral arm of the lake, the **Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge** (6465 Refuge Rd.) forms a birdwatcher's paradise — 11,300 acres of wetlands on the migratory flyway of many species of waterfowl.

WICHITA FALLS

This burgeoning town's economy was fueled in 1910 when drillers struck oil. During that time, one of the city's leading promoters, businessman Frank Kell, built a lavish Classical Revival home. The stately red-brick home is open for tours as the **Kell House Museum** (900 Bluff St.). With seven fireplaces and hand-stenciled decorations, the restored home retains many original family furnishings, including a baby

grand player piano. Rotating exhibits interpret Kell family life, as well as city life of various eras.

The pivotal history of railroading unfolds downtown at the **Wichita Falls Railroad Museum** (500 Ninth St.). Located in a working railyard on the former Union Station site, the museum features locomotives, cabooses, and passenger and freight cars. Tour guides, many of them former railroaders, entertain visitors with train tales, especially those of the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railway.

Although the city's original waterfall washed downstream, in 1986 Wichita Falls residents paid homage to their past by building a 54-foot tall waterfall on the Wichita River.

DENTON

Home of the University of North Texas (UNT) and Texas Woman's University (TWU), Denton has been a college town for more than a century. Music devotees nationwide recognize UNT for its advanced music programs, especially in jazz. Architecture enthusiasts know TWU's **Little Chapel in the Woods** (1200 Bell Ave.). Designed in the 1930s by Texas regionalist architect O'Neil Ford, the chapel was named one of the state's top 20 buildings in 1983.

Another historic site is the **Campus Theater** (214 W. Hickory St.). In the 1950s, students flocked to the downtown cinema to watch movies. Recently restored, the historic movie house now hosts live stage productions.



IF YOU GO...

For more information about the communities featured in this article, contact the following resources.

Texas Lakes Trail Region information
www.texaslakestrail.com
 817/573-1114, ext. 154

Bonham
www.cobon.net
 903/583-7555

Corsicana
www.corsicana.org
 877/376-7477

Denison
www.denisontexas.com
 903/465-1551

Denton
www.discoverdenton.com
 888/381-1818

Granbury
www.granbury.org
 800/950-2212

Grapevine
www.grapevinetexasusa.com
 800/457-6338

Paris
www.paristexas.com
 903/784-2501

Wichita Falls
www.wichitafalls.org
 940/761-7401

Presiding over downtown Denton is the domed clock tower of the grand 1897 Denton County Courthouse. Inside, the **Courthouse-on-the-Square Museum** (110 W. Hickory) features county history through early photos and exhibits about prominent early families. The museum also displays Native American pottery, American pressed blue glass, thimbles from around the world and B.W. Crawford's quirky folk art people made entirely from pecans.

An associated downtown heritage site, the **Bayless-Selby House Museum** (317 West Mulberry St.) offers tours and lectures in an 1898 Queen Anne-style home representing life at the turn of the 20th century.

GRAPEVINE

Once called Cross Timbers, by the 1850s Grapevine was named after a creek where wild Mustang grapes proliferated. Wine and heritage tourism are now abundant in this Lakes Trail Region town. Half a dozen Texas wineries offer tasting rooms in Grapevine's historic Main Street District, also the site of fine eateries, art galleries and shopping.

Each September, the city hosts GrapeFest, one of America's largest wine festivals. Appropriately enough, Grapevine is home of the Texas Wine and Grape Growers Association, located in the **Grapevine Heritage Center and Historical Museum** (1 Liberty Park Plaza). This three-acre site features a

blacksmith shop, leather shop, farmers market, heritage garden and the restored 1901 Cotton Belt Railroad Depot.

The depot houses the Grapevine Convention and Visitors Bureau Information Center, and is also home to the historic Grapevine Steam Railroad. This restored 1896 steam excursion train runs 21 miles daily to the Fort Worth Stockyards. Passengers ride in turn-of-the-20th century Victorian coaches and open-air cars.

Up Main Street from the depot is the recently restored 1939 **Palace Theater** (300 S. Main St.). The one-time movie palace is now the Grapevine Opry, a 500-seat venue for country music shows by headliners such as Willie Nelson and Charlie Walker.

The Texas Lakes Trail Region offers a colorful spectrum of exciting attractions, and visitors are invited to explore the rich heritage and diverse geography of the area. To request a free copy of the THC's new regional brochure, *Texas Lakes Trail Region*, call 512/463-6254. ★

This article was written by Andy Rhodes, managing editor of The Medallion.

Opposite page (from left): The Wichita Falls Railroad Museum, Granbury's Hood County Museum, Grapevine's GrapeFest, a parade in Paris' downtown plaza circa 1931

Above (from left): Bonham's Sam Rayburn Library and Museum, Denton's Bayless-Selby House Museum

At right: Texas Lakes Trail Region brochure cover

