

FATHERS' LIVES  
ON THE LINES

PUTTING TOADSUCK  
ON THE MAP

REMINISCING IN  
BLUEBONNETS

# Texas Coop Power

FOR BLUEBONNET EC MEMBERS

JUNE 2024

## A Feat on Foot

One man's quest  
to visit all of our  
state parks  
in one year

**BLUEBONNET  
EC NEWS**

SEE PAGE 16

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# June 2024



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## Trailblazer

How a college professor became the first Texan to visit every state park in a year.

By Anna Mazurek

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One of the breathtaking sights in Palo Duro Canyon State Park.  
Photo by Chase A. Fountain | TPWD

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Dale Blasingame and his trekking sidekick, Lucy.  
Photo by Anna Mazurek



## FINISH THIS SENTENCE

### The Next Book You Should Read Is ...

**TCP** Tell us how you would finish that sentence. Email your short responses to [letters@TexasCoopPower.com](mailto:letters@TexasCoopPower.com) or comment on our Facebook post. Include your co-op and town.

Here are some of the responses to our April prompt: **Wow! The eclipse was ...**

One of those events that reminds us how magnificent our little corner of the universe really is.

SUSAN SINGLETARY  
TRINITY VALLEY EC  
ATHENS

Cool, literally.

LESLIE KRAICH  
TRI-COUNTY EC  
GOODWELL, OKLAHOMA

Way cooler than I expected. I was really looking forward to it, but when it actually happened, I almost cried.

CAROL DUNAGAN  
VIA FACEBOOK

Totally amazing. I love how the sun united people together for this lifetime event.

MOCEDADES ESQUIVEL  
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Visit our website to see more responses.

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Climbing High

**RECOMMENDED READING**  
On National Olive Day, June 1, we hope you'll remember Texas' place in the harvesting of this ancient fruit. Read *Texas Olive Oil: Pressed for Success* from August 2008.

# Growing Influence

**JUNETEENTH**, commemorating June 19, 1865, when African Americans in Texas learned of their emancipation from slavery, continues to spread across the U.S. as a public holiday.

At least 28 states and the District of Columbia recognize Juneteenth as a holiday. Texas was the first to do so, in 1980. President Joe Biden signed the legislation that made Juneteenth a federal holiday in June 2021.

Read an excerpt from *On Juneteenth* by Annette Gordon Reed on our website.

## June 14 World Blood Donor Day

Blood donation centers continue their call for the lifesaving resource—noting that just 3% of the eligible U.S. population donates blood each year. Learn more at [redcrossblood.org](http://redcrossblood.org).



APRIL 2024 Thorny Task

“I have many night-blooming cereus plants in pots. I bring them indoors before it freezes every year. I get new plants from cuttings.”

KATHERINE ALLEN  
PEDERNALES EC  
BURNET



DAVE SHAFER

**Don't Forget Obedience**

I appreciated your article on dog agility [*Top Dogs*, March 2024]. My only issue with the list of dog sports was that no mention of basic obedience or competitive obedience was made.

Obedience is the foundation of all the sports mentioned. If a dog does not have the most basic of obedience commands in its repertoire, all the other things become much harder to teach.

Cindy Hyde  
San Bernard EC  
Columbus

**Around and Around**

I skied at Sea-Arama Marineworld in Galveston in the 1970s [*The Green Carpet*, January 2024]. Occasionally we put on a show at the Shamrock Hilton—in the swimming pool. It required a pretty constant left turn.

Kelley Farmer  
Pedernales EC  
Dripping Springs



TOM HUSSEY

**Planting Ideas**

Native flora and fauna should be of great interest to all of us, so it is heartening to hear of people rescuing and protecting them [*Thorny Task*, April 2024]. And Sheryl Smith-Rodgers' *Seedy Behavior* [April 2024] was both entertaining and inspiring. I once rescued a pint of rain lily seeds just days before the city mowed them down.

Paula Stone  
Central Texas EC  
Fredericksburg

**A Budding Friendship**

The April issue was a “blooming success.” I loved reading about the employees who went to Guatemala [Currents, *Wiring the American Dream*], the urgent need to care for our declining native plants [*Thorny Task*], caring for the less fortunate in Banderita [*Holding Promise*] and seeing the pictures of pollinators [Focus on Texas].

Your magazine puts the focus squarely on what there is to love about Texas: the place; people; and the vital, tenuous and beautiful connections between them.

Michael Davis  
CoServ  
Wylie

**TCP WRITE TO US**  
letters@TexasCoopPower.com

Editor, Texas Co-op Power  
1122 Colorado St., 24th Floor  
Austin, TX 78701

**Please include** your electric co-op and town. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

 Texas Co-op Power

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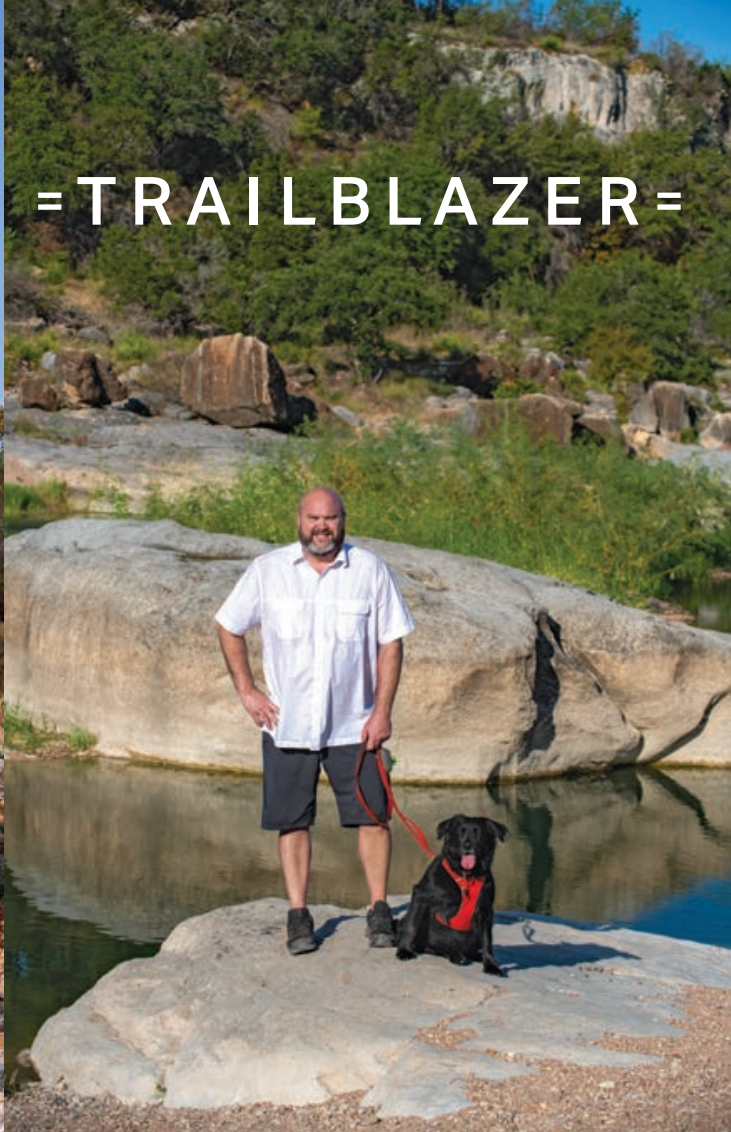
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# = TRAILBLAZER =



BY ANNA MAZUREK

**He was the first to visit every state park in a year, and he can tell you where to start your own adventure**

**WHILE** Dale Blasingame was waiting in the car line to enter Hamilton Pool Preserve in July 2014, a ranger walked over with bad news—the popular Hill Country swimming hole was full. Sensing his disappointment, the ranger suggested an alternative, nearby Pedernales Falls State Park.

“Would you like a day pass or an annual pass?” A simple question at the entrance to Pedernales Falls prompted Blasingame to inquire about the number of state parks. The ranger’s reply—95 at the time—inspired Blasingame to respond immediately with “I’m going to buy the annual pass, and I’m going to do them all in one year.”

LEFT Pedernales Falls State Park, where the idea to visit every state park in one year first struck Dale Blasingame. ABOVE Blasingame and Lucy, his hiking companion.



This spontaneous decision would transform his life and spill over into his career.

With his annual pass in hand, Blasingame, an associate professor of digital media and journalism at Texas State University in San Marcos, started ticking state park properties off his list, beginning with those in Central Texas and followed by ones near Dallas and Houston.

While he had never considered himself outdoorsy, a bad breakup in 2013 led him to spend more time in nature, starting with a trip to Santa Fe, New Mexico, with his brother. That inspired a solo road trip to Montana through Yellowstone National Park and the Rocky Mountains.

Halfway through his state park quest, he met a man hiking with his dog at Buescher State Park in Bastrop County.

“I asked him if he liked hiking with the dog, and he was like, ‘Oh man, you’ll never regret it.’” Blasingame says. “The whole way home, I was just thinking about [how] it would

be really great to have a dog to hike with.”

Coincidentally, the PetSmart near Blasingame’s home was having an adoption event that same day. He brought home a medium-sized black rescue pup he renamed Lucy, who resembles a mix between a black golden retriever and a border collie. Since then, the pair have been inseparable.

Blasingame decided Lucy needed to be the first dog to visit every Texas state park. Since hiking and photography were the main draws for him at the parks, the pair focused on long day hikes, mostly ranging from 11 to 14 miles.

In July 2015, as his annual pass expired, Blasingame visited his 95th state park—becoming the first known

FROM LEFT A family enjoys horseback riding at Palo Duro Canyon State Park. Swampy Caddo Lake State Park captivated Blasingame.





person to hit all of them in one year.

“I do have to be totally honest,” he says. “It actually took me 367 days. I was two days late.” The final park, Cedar Hill State Park, near Dallas, had been closed due to flooding, so he had to wait for it to reopen.

Lucy completed her goal in December 2018 after finishing a West Texas route that included a private visit to Balmorhea State Park, where dogs are normally not allowed. When they reached the last park, Blasingame let Lucy off her leash, and she went nuts. “It was like she knew that was a celebration of something,” he says.

His newfound love of the outdoors led Blasingame to create a park-focused storytelling class at Texas State University in 2017 that has evolved to include visits to state and national parks across the U.S. “It’s one thing to get to know students over the course of the semester and a regular class,” Blasingame says, “but when you’re traveling on the

road with students, you really do make lifelong friends.”

Now Blasingame has a new goal: “I decided to do every national park property, which is different from saying ‘I’m going to do every national park,’” he explains, pointing out that this includes park designations like national historic sites and battlefields.

So far, he’s set foot on 251 of the 429 national park properties.

While Blasingame’s Texas adventures have been filled with awe-inspiring moments, like observing the Milky Way from West Texas, and downright scary ones, like being chased by wild boars at Lake Somerville State Park and Trailway, it’s impossible for him to have only one favorite state park.

Here are some of his top picks by region.

## **=THE PANHANDLE=**

**PALO DURO CANYON STATE PARK** is special to Blasingame because of its landscape and a family connection. Located



near Amarillo, it's home to steep, multicolored mesas and the second-largest canyon in the country, known as the Grand Canyon of Texas. Since his parents lived nearby, he often took them to the park.

"My dad loved to go there and just sit in the car and wait for me and Lucy to finish hiking and being able to share those moments," he says. When Blasingame's parents died in late 2020 and early 2021, friends had a memorial bench built for them overlooking the Lighthouse, the park's iconic rock formation.

Despite roughly 30 visits to nearby Caprock Canyons State Park and Trailway, Blasingame hasn't witnessed large crowds and never tires of the scenic views and hikes through the red rocks.

"It's got the state bison herd, which are always just incredible to watch," he says. The animals have free range over 10,000 of the park's 15,313-acre prairie.

## =EAST TEXAS=

"CADDO LAKE is one of my favorite parks out in East Texas," Blasingame says, reminiscing about the swampy environment where he captured some of his favorite nature photographs of Spanish moss-covered trees on a sunrise boat ride. "The great thing about the environment in Texas is we have every element. We've got beaches. We've got mountains. We've got canyons. We've got lakes."

Dense fog on his first trip to Martin Dies, Jr. State Park, located at the confluence of the Neches and Angelina rivers, was also memorable. "It literally [felt] like I was just sitting on a cloud and looking out over all these trees coming up out of the fog."

ABOVE Gorman Falls at Colorado Bend State Park has made Blasingame a repeat visitor. OPPOSITE He loves the sparkling water of the world's largest spring-fed pool at Balmorhea State Park.



## =CENTRAL TEXAS=

**CLOSER TO HOME**, Blasingame's favorite park is Colorado Bend State Park, along the Colorado River. A 70-foot spring-fed waterfall is a highlight of every visit.

"Gorman Falls is one of the most unique spots in all of Texas—a slice of the rainforest about an hour outside of Austin," he says.

## =WEST TEXAS=

**BLASINGAME'S** first glimpse of the Milky Way from West Texas in 2013 was one of the moments that molded him into an outdoorsman.

The region's parks have remained a favorite, including Balmorhea, home to the world's largest spring-fed swimming pool, and the lesser-known Big Bend Ranch State Park, the largest state park in Texas. Big Bend Ranch is adjacent to Big Bend National Park and has only one paved road, River

Road (FM 170), along the southern boundary. Even if people can't get into the "very rugged" park interior, Blasingame encourages them to just drive River Road.

"You're driving along the Rio Grande the entire time with huge cliffs behind it," he says. "It feels like a roller coaster, too, based on all the dips and turns the road takes. My single favorite part is the big overlook, which seemingly goes on forever."

**THE NUMBER OF STATE PARKS** has fluctuated since Blasingame hit his record of 95 and currently stands at 88 (including state parks, historic sites and natural areas). Several more are scheduled to open in the next 12–15 years.

He hopes to get a sneak peek of the newest park, Palo Pinto Mountains State Park, between Abilene and Fort Worth, when it opens this year or next. "I'm sure we'll be some of the first visitors there," Blasingame says. "New parks don't happen every day in Texas, so this is big." ■



# Following in Dad's Bootsteps

**Three generations of West Texas lineworkers keep the lights on**

**SOMETIMES CHILDHOOD** dreams come true. Other times they veer down an unexpected path.

Three generations of Nixon men in the South Plains ended up on the same path, leaving earlier ambitions in the dust.

Danny Nixon, 66, grew up wanting to be an anesthesiologist. But he fell in love and ran out of money, and he left Texas Tech University after one semester. Soon thereafter he began a career at Lighthouse Electric Cooperative that has lasted nearly 47 years, the first 20-plus spent as a lineworker.

Son Scott, 40, who grew up in Floydada with a dad often away on call, wanted to be a firefighter, but by the time he went off to college, he planned to pursue a career in agriculture. He left Tarleton State University after two years and has been a lineworker at neighboring South Plains Electric Cooperative for 20 years.

Camden, 21, a tall, strapping grandson and son in this family, was sure he'd be a pro baseball player. Did he come close? "Not very," he admits.

Camden remembers how his dad, Scott, missed too many of his childhood games as co-op duties called. "He's not ever at any of my baseball games. What the heck?" Camden says he wondered. "But then my mom talked to me about it, and she was like, he's at work. I was like, well, he's always at work."

Fast-forward to 2024, and Camden is often—if not always—at work, 2½ years into his career as an apprentice lineworker at another neighboring co-op, Lyntegar Electric Cooperative.

Their shared mission of serving co-op members from atop a pole, especially when storms knock out power, is a great source of satisfaction for the patriarch.

"Am I proud? Yes. I'm extremely proud," says Danny, who in 1999 became superintendent at Lighthouse EC and has since been promoted to operations manager.

Camden, the youngster, is proud, too, but he's quick to point out it's not always easy bearing the Nixon name in the West Texas co-op world. He looks first at his dad and then at the man he calls Pops. "A lot of people know him, but *everybody* knows *him*," Camden says. "I say my last name and they're like, oh, OK.

"You don't want to mess up," Camden says. "You don't want to do something wrong. I mean, everybody's going to do something wrong, but you don't want it to be bad enough to where they tell my granddad or tell my dad and we're going to have to talk about this at Christmas."

Of course, they might not be together at Christmas. The crews who keep the power on don't get to schedule when storm recovery and other mishaps call them out on jobs. Thus, the Nixons sometimes find it all but impossible to get together for birthdays and holidays—like Father's Day. It's been that way since Danny started his career, and Scott grew up knowing that.

But he also saw the rewards of the job.

"Dad made a good living and provided us with nice things," Scott says. "I got to do a lot of stuff and go on nice vacations and such that most kids didn't get. It makes it worth the hardships to get to provide my wife and kids with the same things.

"It's also kind of a pride thing. I'm proud to be a lineman. There are not very many people in the world who can do my job."

Danny Nixon—with grandson Camden, left, and son Scott—remembers once telling a member who was stunned to see a crew out in a nasty storm, "Ma'am, when it's the worst, that's when we're at our best."

## "I'm proud to be a lineman. There are not very many people in the world who can do my job."

As parents tend to do, Danny remembers hoping Scott would find his own way in the world.

"Did I put my wishes and dreams on him? No, I did not," Danny says. "I wished for both of these young men anything but becoming a lineman. And I don't mean that in a bad way, but I'd rather him been a doctor or a lawyer or an animal husbandry guy or a vet.

"Both of these guys. You always want better for your kids and certainly your grandkids."

Scott certainly wanted better for the final home football game in Camden's high school career. Senior night is always a big deal—even more so because the Shallowater Mustangs were closing out an undefeated regular season. But an early winter storm socked West Texas that week in October 2020, coating most everything in ice and whipping power lines with wind gusts up to 50 mph.

South Plains EC crews, including Scott, were working on short rest to restore power, and it seemed impossible that he could get away to walk onto Todd Field with his wife and Camden for the traditional senior tribute.

"We worked 16-hour shifts in this ice storm, and I begged my supervisor to [let me] walk out on the field with him—and then I'd get in that truck and go to work," Scott says. With permission granted, Scott, dressed in his fire-retardant work clothes, briefly joined his family in the stadium.

"My bucket truck was sitting in the parking lot—running, ready to roll," he says. "I didn't get to see him play."

By that age, Camden understood—as co-op families do—that Dad had a responsibility to the community. "I was just glad he was able to be there for a little bit," Camden says. "It meant a lot."

The Nixons agree: Working for a co-op is a calling.

"It does set us apart from Acme brand," Danny says.

"We don't go home till the lights are on," Scott says.

"For the members," Camden says.

Yes, Camden walks the path of Scott and Pops. And as has been the case since September 1977, a Nixon is quite likely to rush down that path when a storm strikes the South Plains. ■



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They are called **Freedom Colonies**: at least 65 settlements, built by newly freed Black people, established across the Bluebonnet region more than a century ago. Family histories and dedicated descendants keep their stories alive.

# REDISCOVERING ROOTS

Story by Clayton Stromberger ● Photos by Sarah Beal

**T**ucked away in the Post Oak Savannah about 10 miles northeast of Lockhart, the unincorporated community of St. John Colony is country-quiet much of the year, just like the rest of rural Caldwell County. Passing through on FM 672, you might note a few church buildings, a small museum and a historic cemetery, and then you're winding your way toward Dale or Red Rock.

But visit St. John Colony on the third Saturday in June, and you'll witness a remarkable transformation: Big family groups typically gather under old oak trees as children shout and play. Barbecue smoke wafts across the 10 acres of land between St. John Missionary Baptist Church and the St. John School Museum near the intersection of St. Johns and Carter roads. During the morning's official Juneteenth program, hundreds of voices come together in a joyous rendition of "Lift Every Voice and Sing," the poem-turned-hymn written in 1900 and often sung in Black communities as a prayer of thanks to God and for freedom.

Juneteenth — honoring June 19, 1865, the day the end of slavery in Texas was officially announced by Union forces that landed in Galveston — has been celebrated on this site for more than 150 years. Although celebrated in Texas officially since 1980, Juneteenth was declared a national holiday in 2021.

St. John's founders were 14 Black families who made a trek in 1872 from the Elgin area to Caldwell County to carve a new community out of the undeveloped countryside. The families purchased land and built homes, churches, schools and stores.

St. John flourished through the early 20th century, but then gradually declined in population, like many rural communities. In 1910, about 80% of Texans lived in rural areas; by 1970, that number had dropped to 20%. St. John was part of that change. In 1966, St. John schools became part of the Lockhart school district, and by the 1970s, local stores and cafes had closed.

Still, at least 50 current and former area residents come to St. John Regular Baptist Church, at 110 St. Johns Road in Dale, every Sunday to worship. Today, about 300 people live within the original boundaries of St. John Colony, according to retired Caldwell County Commissioner Joe Roland. Of those, about half are believed to be descendants of the original settlers. Many of them continue to keep the history of St. John Colony alive.

Throughout the Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative service area, freed Black men and women formed many independent communities after the Civil War, and countless people can trace their family histories to those settlements.

Most Freedom Colonies were settled near large cotton plantations in the

**Story continued on Page 20**







**LEFT:** Before Elijah Campbell was a letter carrier for Ledbetter from 1906-1937, he lived in the Lee County settlement of Sweet Home. Learn more, Page 21. *Photo courtesy Vivian Francis for the book 'Images of America, African Americans of Round Top'*



**MIDDLE:** Sunday services at St. John Regular Baptist Church are still well-attended. The church remains the heart of the Freedom Colony of St. John, founded in the 1870s in Caldwell County. Learn more, Page 18.

**BELOW:** The Freedom Colony of Camptown, established in the 1860s near Brenham, included three churches, seen in the foreground of this 1910 photo. *Photo donated to Brenham Heritage Museum by Paula Graves*



## 1

## CALDWELL COUNTY St. John

Descendants of the St. John Freedom Colony in Caldwell County keep the legacy of their ancestors and their community's history alive. Vessie Tutt, 98, was born in St. John and is the granddaughter of Andrew Davis, one of the colony's founders. She lives nearby with her husband, Ezelle, a Vietnam War veteran. "This ground is holy," she said on a recent visit to the St. John School Museum, "because it is ground that people stepped on who were finally free." The renovated schoolhouse, at 112 St. Johns Road near Dale, features exhibits that tell the story of the colony's early days. One historic photo in the museum captures a smiling Lue Rece Hill Tennon, wearing her cap and gown on eighth-grade graduation day. Tennon, now 89, returns to St. John as often as she can: "I grew up here, and it's a part of me."

When the first residents of St. John Colony arrived, "they held church services under a brush arbor and then built St. John Baptist Church in 1873," said St. John native Louis Simms, who lives in Austin but is volunteer curator of the school museum. "Our ancestors left a legacy of faith in God."

St. John Regular Baptist Church, with its ongoing Sunday services, remains the heart of the community, Simms said. St. John had two other churches at one point: Landmark Baptist and Zion Union Baptist, which overlooked the historic St. John cemetery.

— Clayton Stromberger



Above, Vessie Tutt at the St. John School Museum sits next to an undated photo of her parents and younger sister: The Rev. Silas Leonard 'S.L.' Davis, Willie Thompson Davis and Barbara Davis-Dotson. Tutt's parents were second-generation residents of St. John Colony. At left, an undated photo from the museum shows graduates of St. John School.



Above, at Spann's Settlement, the interior of Blessed Virgin Mary Chapel. At right, a hymnal in the chapel.



## 2

## WASHINGTON COUNTY

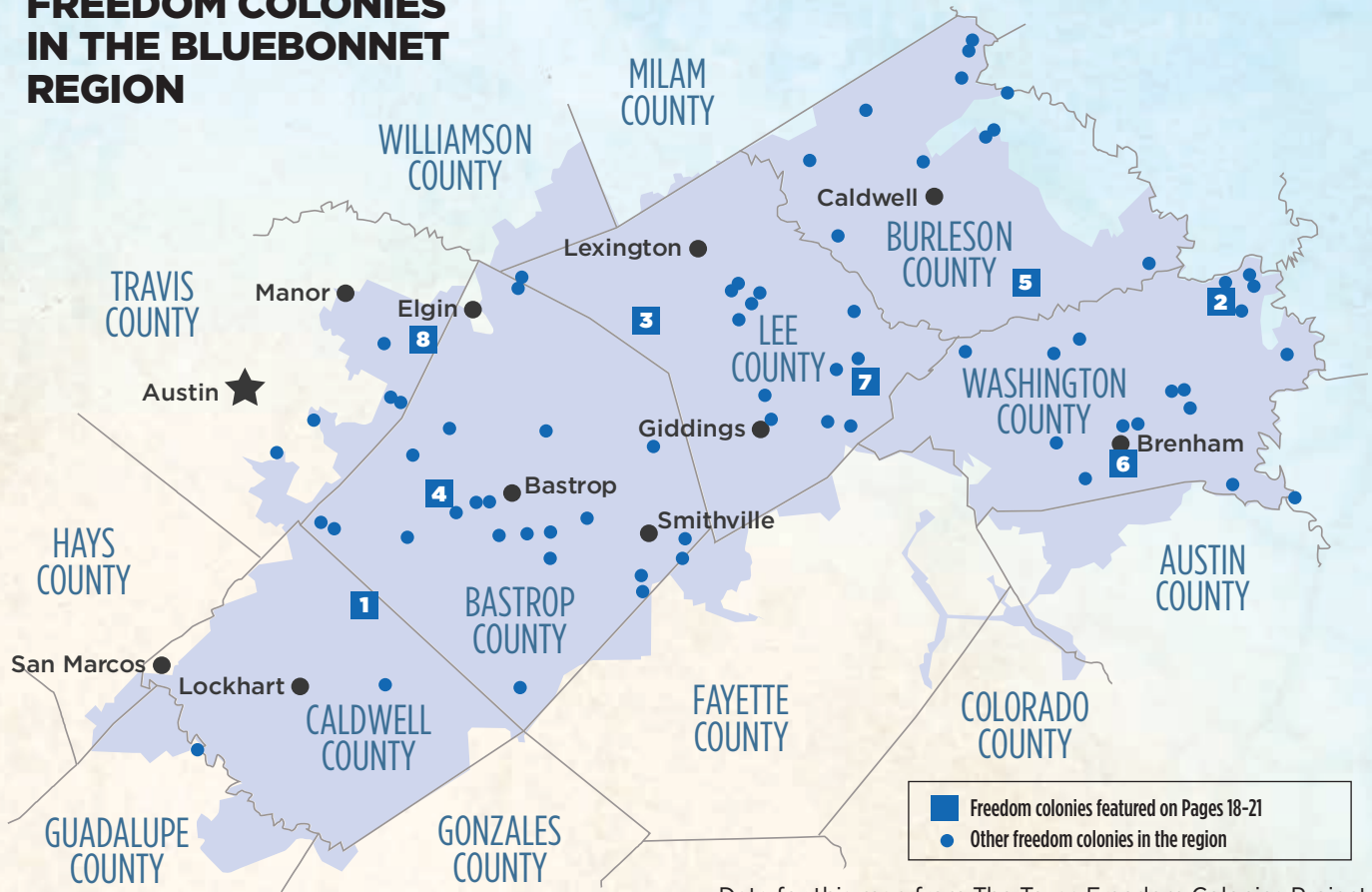
### Spann's Settlement

A unique religious history served as the catalyst for Spann's Settlement, northeast of Brenham and not far from the Washington and Brazos county line. Before the emancipation of slaves in the South, the white family of Malcolm Spann migrated from South Carolina to the area with enslaved people, including many members of the Sweed family, who had converted to Catholicism.

According to the Texas Historical Commission, the Spann and Sweed families worshipped at the same church, a log cabin called the Holy Rosary or Spann's Chapel. In 1888, Black worshippers established their own church, believed to be one of the first Black Catholic congregations in Texas. That church was destroyed by fire in the early 1900s, but in 1995 a new church was built in nearby Washington.

"In 1969, land deeded to descendants of the Sweed family by the Spann family became the site of a new church building, the Blessed Virgin Mary Chapel, and a hall for the African American Catholic community," according to the historical commission. "In 1995, the community constructed the newest church building in Washington, which continues to serve the region's Black Catholics, including descendants of the Sweed family." The church is at 17370 Sweed Road.

# FREEDOM COLONIES IN THE BLUEBONNET REGION



■ Freedom colonies featured on Pages 18-21  
● Other freedom colonies in the region

Data for this map from The Texas Freedom Colonies Project

The Texas Freedom Colonies Project, led by Dr. Andrea Roberts of the University of Virginia, includes an online map ([thetexasfreedomcoloniesproject.com/atlas](http://thetexasfreedomcoloniesproject.com/atlas)) that uses information from researchers and the public to identify the location of Freedom Colonies across Texas and in the Bluebonnet region. This map reproduces some of that data, and numbered locations on this map correspond with related stories on pages 18-21.

**3**

## LEE COUNTY Moab

Early in Texas history, settlers moved onto this land about 10 miles southwest of Lexington in eastern Lee County, and after the Civil War, previously enslaved people moved to the area and established Moab. Like most Freedom Colonies, it was a farming community where Black families could make a living from their own land, growing crops and raising livestock. Some families at that time still depended on picking cotton to earn a living, traveling across Texas and New Mexico to harvest the crop, according to the Texas Historical Commission. Like many Freedom Colonies, Moab peaked in the 1930s, when it had a school, two churches and a post office. Little of the community remains except cemeteries, but for years the Mt. Nebo African Methodist Episcopal Church brought descendants back to Moab to honor their heritage.

**4**

## BASTROP COUNTY

### Cedar Creek and Hopewell

Now a burgeoning, semirural swath between Bastrop and Austin, the Cedar Creek area was home to many Black settlers and more than one Freedom Colony after the Civil War. In 1914, Cedar Creek had 225 residents, four general stores, a gin, a tailor, a doctor, and a cattle dealer, according to the Handbook of Texas. Just to the northeast on State Highway 21, the Hopewell Rosenwald school for Black children opened in 1922. Though it closed in the 1950s, it is among the most intact of 464 Rosenwald schools built in Texas. Construction of those schools — almost 5,000 in rural areas across America between 1917 and 1932 — was funded by Julius Rosenwald, the wealthy part-owner of Sears, Roebuck and Co. In 2015, restoration and renovation of the one-room Hopewell schoolhouse began to gain momentum. That work has continued through community initiatives and donations. The school has been a site for events honoring its past and the area's history as a Freedom Colony.



The Hopewell Rosenwald School in 1922. The building still stands at 690 State Highway 21. Source: Julius Rosenwald Fund Archives 1917-1948, Fisk University

## Story continued from Page 16

state's eastern half. At least 65 of the colony sites that have been identified by the Texas Freedom Colonies Project are in the Bluebonnet region.

Stories about Freedom Colonies — and how they survived against all odds, often in the face of extreme hardships and racial prejudice — have long been part of oral histories passed down through generations of Black families. In their 2005 book “Freedom Colonies: Independent Black Texans in the Time of Jim Crow,” authors Thad Sitton and James Conrad brought attention to this often-overlooked part of the state's history.

Once called freedmen's towns, 557 Freedom Colonies were founded in Texas by newly freed Black people during the decades after the Civil War, according to the project, created in 2014 by Dr. Andrea Roberts, an associate professor of urban planning at Texas A&M University at the time. Today, Roberts is an associate professor at the University of Virginia. The project's website, [thetexasfreedomcoloniesproject.com](http://thetexasfreedomcoloniesproject.com), features detailed research and public input to provide information about hundreds of settlements on an online atlas and interactive map.

After emancipation, an estimated 250,000 formerly enslaved Black people lived in Texas. Some were able to save enough money to buy their own land and avoid an oppressive system of sharecropping that led many workers into deep debt to their employers. Other Black citizens sought land in outlying areas that was neglected or considered unsuitable for farming, such as floodplains and bottomlands.

The dream of land ownership became a powerful driving force toward true freedom. In 1870, only 1.8% of the state's Black farmers owned land. But by the early 20th century that number had reached 31%, the largest share of any state in the country at that time.

That population started to decline in the 1920s, as Black Texans began to leave the state. Over the next 50 years, they joined an exodus of about 6 million Black people who relocated from the American South to states in the North, Midwest and West.

Some Freedom Colony settlements listed on the Texas Freedom Colonies Project map are gone today, but they are still celebrated, in family stories passed down from generation to generation, and through efforts to restore and revive schools and churches. There are settlements in the Bluebonnet area that still survive as small communities.

“These are places where people live today,” said Doris Williams, CEO of the nonprofit Bastrop County African American Cultural Center, where the stories of Freedom Colonies in Bastrop County are being preserved. “They have not disappeared.” (See story about Williams' work to preserve history, Page 21.) ■

5

## BURLESON COUNTY Birch Creek

The Birch Creek Freedom Colony settlement north of Somerville in southern Burleson County was established around 1890, anchored by the Sweet Home Baptist Church. Though the church has been remodeled several times since, “many original aspects are still there, such as the original log that parishioners sat upon,” according to the website of the Heirloom Project, which researched Freedom Colonies in the county. The church served a network of Black communities in the region. The cemetery at the church also holds the graves of those buried at another Freedom Colony that were relocated with the construction of Lake Somerville.

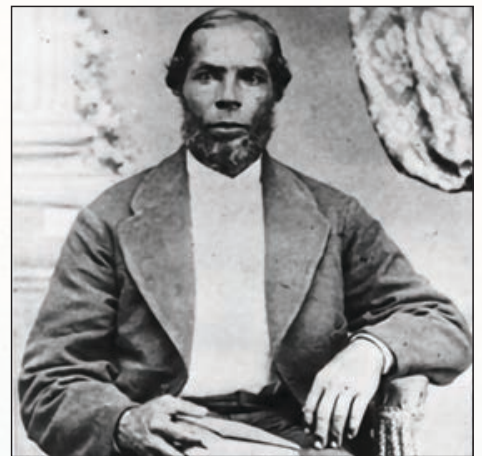


The cemetery at the Sweet Home Baptist Church in Somerville holds the remains of residents of both the Birch Creek Freedom Colony and another nearby settlement.

6

## WASHINGTON COUNTY Camptown and Watrousville

Two of the earliest Freedom Colonies after emancipation sprang up on the edges of Brenham. At the time, in the 1860s, Washington County was one of the state's largest cotton producers, and slightly more than 50% of its population was Black, according to U.S. Census data that was cited in a 1994 case study of the area. Camptown was established east of town and Watrousville to the west, and both grew into thriving, politically active Black communities. Camptown, named for a nearby federal encampment, was the location of the first school building dedicated to “freedman” students in Brenham, according to the Freedom Colonies Project. Wiley Hubert, a prominent Camptown citizen, was key to establishing the school and cemetery there. Watrousville was named after Benjamin Watrous, who was one of five Black delegates to sign the Constitution of Texas in 1869, according to the Handbook of Texas. Several churches and buildings from the settlements remain.



The Mt. Rose Church and Mt. Seriah Campus in Watrousville, at top. Above, an undated photo of Benjamin Watrous, minister and delegate to the Texas Constitutional Convention of 1868-69. From [tshaonline.org](http://tshaonline.org)

# Finding family histories in Bastrop County

**D**oris Williams didn't know about her family's history in the Hills Prairie area of Bastrop County. She was being raised in Lubbock by her grandparents when her grandmother made a request: "Baby, when I die, I want to be buried in Hills Prairie." Williams' first thought, she recalls, was "Where is Hills Prairie?"

The small community, about 10 miles south of Bastrop, got its name from Abram Wylie Hill, who bought more than 2,000 acres of area land where he built a mansion in 1857. He had 36 enslaved people working there, according to historical records.

Hills Prairie is listed as a Black settlement on the Freedom Colonies Project website map and database, [thetexasfreedomcoloniesproject.com](http://thetexasfreedomcoloniesproject.com). A small cemetery on Abram Wylie Hill's nearby property is the resting place for several of the enslaved people who lived there and were given Hill's last name. After they were freed, some Black residents



Doris Williams, left, is director of the Bastrop County African American Cultural Center and Freedom Colonies Museum.

from Hill's property moved to the nearby Hills Prairie community and built homes, while others went to live in the Freedom Colony of St. John in Caldwell County.

Motivated to learn more about her family's history and the city where she was born, Williams and a group of area Freedom Colony descendants founded the Bastrop County African American Cultural Center and Freedom Colonies Museum in 2019. They hope to tell the stories of the post-emancipation settlements that ringed the city of Bastrop and the many others across Bastrop County. The center and museum opened in 2020, and moved into the historic Kerr-Wilson home at

1303 Pine St. in 2022.

The center's board is working with the City of Bastrop to build a new center and museum. "This is a chapter in Bastrop history," said Sylvia Carrillo, Bastrop's city manager. "It's important for us to acknowledge all aspects of our history."

"This is a labor of love for me," Williams said. "It's a chance for me to give back to the community where I was born."

The museum is open Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. except for the second Saturday of each month. School and church tour groups are welcome. Call 512-535-6949 for more information.

## 7

### LEE COUNTY

## Antioch, Sweet Home and Post Oak

These three settlements were clustered about 11 miles east of Giddings, where many freed Black people were able to buy inexpensive land in the decades during and after Reconstruction. Antioch quickly became the largest Black community in Lee County, according to the Texas State Historical Association. "Some of the settlers supplemented their income, which presumably came from farming, by working periodically at neighborhood plantations such as Black's Quarter," the association said. Antioch Baptist Church and its cemetery near FM 141 are still in use today. A book about Texas Freedom Colonies cites an 1890 interview with a couple who said 12 families from Antioch founded nearby Sweet Home. To the southeast on FM 180, the Post Oak settlement was formed in the late 1800s or early 1900s. A school operated there in the 1930s, and there was also a Baptist church and cemetery. The church and cemetery in the Sweet Home settlement area are still in use today.



Antioch Baptist Church and its cemetery are still in use today.

## 8

### TRAVIS COUNTY

## Littig

The unincorporated community of Littig in far eastern Travis County between Manor and Elgin is believed to be one of the oldest Freedom Colonies in Texas. It took root in the early 1880s on land donated by former slave Jackson Morrow, near where the Wilbarger, Willow and Dry creeks converge about two miles south of today's busy U.S. 290. Vestiges of the community, which prospered on good Blackland Prairie farmland, still stand on Littig Road, which is also County Road 76. At its peak, the town boasted schools, a post office (run by the state's first Black postmaster), a general store, two cotton gins and three churches, according to the Texas State Historical Association. Littig's population dropped from about 150 people in 1936 to 35 by the 1940s. It is still home to a small, mostly Black population. About 315 acres of Morrow's original land is owned by a conservation trust and is being developed into a farming cooperative.



The Shiloh Baptist Church on Littig Street near Elgin holds regular worship services.

— Freedom Colony profiles by David Pasztor

# Join us at the Texas Lineman's Rodeo in Seguin

**BLUEBONNET ELECTRIC** Cooperative will send one senior journeyman lineworker team, three journeyman lineworker teams, 10 apprentice lineworkers, nine competition judges, a barbecue team and volunteers to the Texas Lineman's Rodeo at Nolte Island Park near Seguin on July 20.

The event gives lineworkers a chance to compete against their peers from cooperatives and other electric utilities across the state in order to showcase some of the skills they perform on the job. It also helps promote safe work practices, recognizes skilled lineworkers and celebrates their profession. Other competitions include a dexterous pole climb while carrying a raw egg in a bag — and not breaking it — and a pole-top rescue of a mannequin the size and weight of a person. There are other events that test lineworkers' skills at equipment replacement and wiring, as well as a barbecue cook-off.

Come cheer on our teams in person or keep track of their progress via Bluebonnet's Facebook, Instagram and X pages throughout the day. Learn more about the event at [tla.org](http://tla.org).



Troy Moore and Kendal Fiebrich participate in the transformer change-out event at last year's Lineman's Rodeo in Seguin. This year's event will be held on July 20. Sarah Beal photo



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## OFFICE CLOSINGS

Bluebonnet offices will be closed June 19 for Juneteenth. If you have a power outage, you can report it online at [bluebonnet.coop](http://bluebonnet.coop), via our MyBluebonnet mobile app or by calling 800-949-4414. You can pay bills any time online, on our mobile app or by calling 800-842-7708 (select option 2 when prompted).

# that was **THEN**

From its earliest days through the early 2000s, Bluebonnet engineers worked on drafting tables, using scale rulers, protractors and colored pencils to create precise maps showing plans for power line locations. The co-op's electric system was mapped on large pieces of paper held in oversized binders. These essential guides to Bluebonnet's system were in engineers' offices and lineworker crews' trucks.

# this is **NOW**

The occasional paper map can still be found in an engineer's office, but Bluebonnet's system plans today are designed on computers. Laptops, tablets and state-of-the-art software let our experts locate electric lines and assess power capacities. Engineers calculate future power demands and where upgrades will be needed in order to ensure Bluebonnet continues providing safe, reliable power to its members.



**Top:** Warren Le Bouef, a Bluebonnet engineering draftsman, works on a project in the Bluebonnet engineering building in Giddings more than two decades ago.

**Above:** Curtis Fischer and his daughter, Sarah Fischer, both system engineers at Bluebonnet, discuss plans for an upcoming subdivision in the Bluebonnet service area.

In 2024, Bluebonnet celebrates 85 years of providing safe, reliable and affordable electric service to its fast-growing membership. Throughout the year, join us in celebrating this milestone as we honor our past and plan for the future.

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# A Town Called Toadsuck

Long removed from maps, it was home for a governor as colorful as its name

BY W.F. STRONG • ILLUSTRATION BY TRACI DABERKO

TEXAS HAS PERHAPS more than its share of cities and towns with unusual names. There's Cut and Shoot, Dime Box, Bug Tussle.

But perhaps the strangest was Toadsuck. You won't find it on a map today because it eventually became Collinsville, near the Oklahoma border in western Grayson County. For a relatively brief and shining period, though, Toadsuck was a real Texas town.

How did it get that strange name? I learned the story mostly from the Texas State Historical Association's Handbook of Texas, which is a priceless resource.

Toadsuck got its start as the name of a saloon near the eventual eponymous town. Settlers arrived in the area in the late 1850s, and in 1869, a townsite was surveyed near the saloon, about a half-mile southeast of Collinsville today.

"The town of Toadsuck took the name of the saloon," the handbook says. "It may have been named by John Jones, an early settler and mill owner, after the city of Toad Suck, Arkansas" (which, by the way, does still exist).

"According to legend, the name was originally a reference to men consuming liquor until they swelled up like toads.

**TCP** Listen as W.F. Strong narrates this story on our website.



However, the word 'suck' was also commonly used in the region as a term for a whirlpool in a river. Hence, the town name may have simply meant 'toad whirlpool.'"

Bill Cannon, who wrote *Tales from Toadsuck Texas*, tells the story of William "Alfalfa Bill" Henry Davis Murray, who was born in Toadsuck in 1869. Murray would go on to become a colorful governor of Oklahoma in 1930. When he was running for president two years later, he returned to the place of his birth for William Murray Day.

The town of Toadsuck had a statue of Murray ready for dedication, but Alfalfa Bill was so drunk he could barely speak, Cannon wrote. You might say he was "swole up like a toad." The townsfolk were so exasperated and embarrassed that they had a team of horses pull the statue down and break it into pieces. Then they buried it.

Toadsuck faded into history when the Texas and Pacific Railway built its line west of the town in 1880, according to the TSHA. By 1887, most of its businesses and residents had moved to the tracks. The new town was named Collinsville when it was incorporated in the 1890s.

Thus, sadly, Toadsuck was no more. But the beautiful memory of that august name remains. ■

# Simply Salads

Keep cool in the kitchen with these tasty garden mixes

BY VIANNEY RODRIGUEZ, FOOD EDITOR

I always find myself craving a Cobb salad when temperatures begin to rise. It's a hearty dinner with abundant toppings that deliver a variety of flavors in every bite. My Texas Cobb Salad is a fun twist on the classic that is so simple to make.



## Texas Cobb Salad

### SALAD

- 1 head romaine lettuce, coarsely chopped**
- 6 hard-boiled eggs, peeled and halved**
- 8 slices bacon, fully cooked and cut into bite-size pieces**
- 2 avocados, sliced**
- 1 can pinto beans (15 ounces), drained and rinsed**
- 2 ears corn, roasted and sliced off the cob**
- 16 ounces cooked beef fajitas, sliced**

### DRESSING

- ¼ cup olive oil**
- 3 tablespoons red wine vinegar**
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard**
- 1 chipotle pepper in adobo sauce, minced, sauce reserved**
- 2 teaspoons reserved adobo sauce**
- 1 small shallot, thinly sliced**
- 2 teaspoons salt**
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper**

- 1. SALAD** Spread lettuce evenly across a large platter.
- 2.** Arrange eggs in one row across the lettuce. Continue arranging each topping in its own row: bacon, avocado, beans and roasted corn. End by adding fajitas to edge of platter.
- 3. DRESSING** In a small bowl, combine all dressing ingredients and stir to combine. Serve dressing with the salad.

**SERVES 6**

**TCP** Follow Vianney Rodriguez as she cooks in Cocina Gris at [sweetlifebake.com](http://sweetlifebake.com), where she features a recipe for Tomato Cucumber Panela Salad.



## Strawberry Salad

KATHRYN SULLIVAN  
BANDERA EC

Beautiful, simple and elegant, this salad will leave an impression. Whip up Sullivan's salad for your mother-in-law, a first date or for a gathering. Summer sweet berries stun when paired with creamy goat cheese and a balsamic dressing.

### SALAD

- 1 package 50/50 blend baby spinach and spring salad mix (10 ounces)**
- 1 carton strawberries (16 ounces), hulled and sliced**
- 1 pint blueberries**
- 4 ounces goat cheese, crumbled**
- 6 slices bacon, fully cooked and broken into pieces**
- ½ cup chopped pecans**

### DRESSING

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- 3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar**
- ¼ teaspoon Dijon mustard**

- 1. SALAD** In a large bowl, combine all salad ingredients.
- 2. DRESSING** In another bowl, whisk together all dressing ingredients.
- 3.** Pour dressing over salad. With a serving spoon, gently toss to coat.

**SERVES 4-6**

[MORE RECIPES >](#)

\$500 WINNER

## Thai Peanut Summer Salad

REESE JOHNSON  
TRINITY VALLEY EC



This salad from Reese, 14, has me grinning from ear to ear. The recipe, developed by Reese and her mother, packs in flavor, texture and tang. "I love to cook and bake," Reese says. "It all started when I was about 7. I had started making breakfast for myself as well as my family."

**SERVES 10**



### SALAD

- 4 cups chopped napa cabbage**
- 2 cups thinly chopped red cabbage**
- ½ red bell pepper, thinly sliced**
- ½ yellow bell pepper, thinly sliced**
- 1 medium carrot, julienned**
- ½ medium cucumber, cut in half lengthwise and thinly sliced**
- ¼ red onion, thinly sliced**
- ½ cup honey-roasted peanuts**
- ½ cup chopped cilantro**
- 6 radishes, thinly sliced, reserving a few slices for garnish**

### DRESSING

- ½ cup peanut butter**
- Juice of 1 lime**
- 2½ teaspoons sesame oil**
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce**
- 3 tablespoons honey**
- 2 cloves garlic**
- 1 tablespoon fresh peeled and minced ginger**
- ½ cup chopped cilantro**
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- ¼ teaspoon salt**
- 2 teaspoons Sriracha sauce, or more to taste**
- 1 tablespoon seasoned rice vinegar**

- 1. SALAD** In a large bowl, combine all salad ingredients.
- 2. DRESSING** Add all dressing ingredients to a blender. Blend until smooth.
- 3.** Pour half the dressing over the salad. With a serving spoon, mix to coat. Add more dressing as desired and garnish with reserved radish slices.

## TCP \$500 Recipe Contest

**HOLIDAY BITES** DUE JUNE 10

We want the best from Co-op Country kitchens for our November issue. Send us your holiday favorites by June 10 for a chance to win \$500.





## Texas Tabbouleh

CINDY BROWN  
PEDERNALES EC

Chilled salads are the ultimate summer meal. Prep, tuck away in the fridge and you're set for lunch or dinner. Brown's tabbouleh can be served alone or topped with fish or baked chicken. It's yummy the first day and even better the next.

### SALAD

- ½ cup bulgur wheat
- 1½ cups water
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 ears corn, sliced off the cob
- ¾ cup diced carrots
- 1 bunch green onions, diced
- 1 large red bell pepper, stem and seeds removed, diced
- 4 stalks celery, diced
- 1 cucumber, peeled, seeded and diced
- 1 bunch parsley, finely chopped
- 1 can pinto beans (15 ounces), drained and rinsed

### DRESSING

- Juice of 2 lemons or limes
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 cloves garlic, minced

1. SALAD Place bulgur wheat in a heatproof bowl. Bring water to a boil over

medium-high heat. Carefully pour boiling water over bulgur wheat. Let stand for 45 minutes, then drain well.

2. Heat olive oil in a medium skillet over high heat. Sauté corn and carrots until tender, about 4 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat.

3. In a large bowl, combine bulgur wheat, corn, carrots, green onions, bell pepper, celery, cucumber, parsley and beans. Stir to combine.

4. DRESSING In a separate bowl, whisk together all dressing ingredients.

5. Pour dressing over salad, stir to combine.

6. Refrigerate 24 hours. Serve chilled.

SERVES 6

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COURTESY CHET GARNER

## We Brake for Steak

There's no need for menus at the Leona General Store

BY CHET GARNER

**IN MY LINE OF WORK**, it's normal to pass through a small town with ailing buildings and few visible signs of life. It isn't normal for one of those old wooden storefronts to have a line 150 Texans long, stretching clear into the next parking lot. I pulled over to find out what was happening at the Leona General Store, and after someone told me it was steak night, I had no choice but to get in line.

This special event on Friday and Saturday nights draws hordes from hundreds of miles to this vintage storefront on Texas 75 in Leona, less than a mile off Interstate 45, midway between Dallas and Houston. When the doors opened, the small store swallowed the entire line as folks spread across the creaking wooden floor. The walls are covered with knickknacks and farming equipment, just as you'd expect inside a 100-year-old general store.

Part of the magic of "the best little steakhouse in Texas" is its simplicity. There's no written menu since they're known for one entrée: rib-eye steaks. Each one is hand cut and cooked over hot coals. Everyone gets the same sides and salad bar.

The only choice customers make is how big they want their steak. The smallest is 10 ounces, and the largest ever eaten was more than 90 ounces. I decided to let that record stand and ordered a 12-ounce steak, which was at least 16 ounces. They admittedly don't weigh anything in the back, which works to the customer's benefit.

Owners Jerry and Cynthia House made laps through the building, making sure everyone was happy and well-fed. The steak was certainly one of the best I've ever eaten, but it's the small-town hospitality that will keep me and hundreds of my closest friends coming back. ■

ABOVE Chet is about to savor the Leona General Store's trademark steak.

**TCP** Join Chet as he visits "the best little steakhouse in Texas." And see all his Explorations on *The Daytripper* on PBS.



## Know Before You Go

Call ahead or check an event's website for scheduling details, and check our website for many more upcoming events.

## JUNE 08

**Corsicana Endless Summer**, (903) 874-7792, corsicanapalace.com

**East Bernard Czech Kolache-Klobase Festival**, (979) 533-1902, kkfest.com

**Terrell [8-9] North Texas Antique Tractor and Engine Club's Show and Pull**, (214) 497-1611, north-texas-antique-tractor-and-engine-club.net

## 13

**Lockhart [13-15] Chisholm Trail Roundup**, (512) 398-2818, lockhartchamber.com

**Brenham [13-16, 20-23, 27-30] The Star-Spangled Girl**, (979) 830-8358, unitybrenham.org

## 14

**Mount Pleasant Juneteenth Family Celebration**, (903) 575-4000, mpcity.net

**Aransas Pass [14-16] Shrimporee**, (361) 758-2750, aransaspass.org

**Kerrville [14-15, 21-23, 28-30] The Charitable Sisterhood of the Second Trinity Victory Church**, (830) 896-9393, caillouxperformingarts.com

## 19

**Odessa [19-23] Juneteenth Celebration**, (432) 888-9276, odessabcc.org

## 21

**Stonewall [21-22] Peach JAMBoree**, (830) 644-2735, stonewalltexas.com

**Albany [21-22, 28-29] Fort Griffin Fandangle**, (325) 762-3838, fortgriffinfandangle.com

22

**McKinney Night Out at the Heard**, (972) 562-5566, heardmuseum.org

25

**Corsicana [25, 27-30] Of Mice and Men**, (903) 872-5421, thewlac.com

27

**Luling [27-30] Watermelon Thump**, (830) 875-3878, watermelonthump.com

28

**New Braunfels [28-29] Red, White and Tuna**, (830) 627-0808, brauntex.org

**Pottsboro [28-29] Fink Fest**, (903) 786-6000, facebook.com/finktexas

29

**Brenham The Grand Ol' Americana Show**, (979) 337-7240, thebarnhillcenter.com

## JULY

03

**Waxahachie [3-4] Crape Myrtle Festival and Parade**, (469) 309-4040, waxahachiecvb.com

04

**Chappell Hill Independence Day Parade**, (979) 337-9910, chappellhilltx.com

**New Braunfels July 4 Patriotic Parade and Program**, (830) 629-1572, sophienburg.com

**Amarillo [4-6] Will Rogers Range Riders Rodeo**, (806) 584-0733, wrrangeriders.com

**Rockdale [4-15] Sesquicentennial Event**, (512) 446-2511, rockdale150.com

### TCP *Submit Your Event*

We pick events for the magazine directly from TexasCoopPower.com. Submit your September event by July 1, and it just might be featured in this calendar.

*Come celebrate with us!*



# Rockdale's 150th Birthday

## July 4th - July 15th 2024

**Festivities begin with a spectacular July 4th DRONE LIGHT SHOW**

July 5th: Opening of the 1974 Time Capsule  
 July 6th: Community parade  
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# Food and Cooking

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—From *Texas Cookin'* by Guy Clark

CURATED BY GRACE FULTZ



1

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**2 ALLISON HEBERT**  
SAN BERNARD EC  
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Doesn't get any better than biscuits from scratch."

**3 MICHELE BENNETT**  
GVEC  
Fall cookies.

**4 KRISTEN BROWN**  
PEDERNALES EC  
Homemade wheat bread with blueberry jelly.



2



3



4

## Upcoming Contests

DUE JUN 10 Climbing High

DUE JUL 10 Mascots

DUE AUG 10 Young Photographers



Enter online at [TexasCoopPower.com/contests](https://TexasCoopPower.com/contests).

**TCP** See Focus on Texas on our website for many more Food and Cooking photos from readers.



## Renewal in Blue

Bucolic summers in the Piney Woods leave an indelible mark

BY CLAUDIA SULLIVAN  
ILLUSTRATION BY  
JAMES O'BRIEN

**EVERY SUMMER** of my youth, I eagerly packed my bags, left the big city behind and traveled to the Piney Woods to live the life of a farm girl with my grandparents.

Those East Texas summer days were idyllic. Mornings began with the smell of bacon or ham cooking on the stove and skillet-fried toast with homemade apple or plum jelly. Lunch was always accompanied with rice, yellow and thick, made rich with butter and milk. The meal wasn't complete without blackberry cobbler made from berries we picked ourselves, battling thorns and yellow jackets while gathering the tart, wild fruit.

Promptly at 12:30 p.m., Mema settled in to shell peas and watch her "stories" on TV while Pa took his afternoon nap. I spent those sultry afternoons outside

whispering secrets to Boy, the old bird dog, and to Lady Bird, the orphaned calf we raised on a bottle, or rocking in the tractor tire swing hung under the huge pecan tree.

Mema, Pa and I spent nights in the screened-in sleeping porch, cool and bathed in moonlight. Lying in my bed, I heard the whine of diesel trucks on the distant highway and the whirring of the summer breeze through the woven, mesh screen. The night air smelled of rose blossoms and honeysuckle.

It was the scent of summer.

The memories of those summer days have not faded. Mema and Pa are gone now and so is the old farmhouse. Some years ago, on a cold night not long after midnight, the house went up in flames. Some said it was itinerants carelessly discarding a cigarette. Others said it was lightning, though no one recalls a storm that night.

I believe the old house caught ablaze all by itself. The warmth of all those memories heated to spontaneous combustion. The house saved up all those memories until one night there was nothing but glowing embers—except for what lived on in the minds and hearts of those who were sheltered and loved there.

Nothing stands now except two large pecan trees and the old tractor tire swing.

But each spring something wondrous and beautiful happens. In the place where my grandparents' house once stood, a dense blanket of bluebonnets blooms.

Like the color of the sky or the gingham dresses little girls used to wear, the wave of flowers defines the layout of the house. No one recalls ever seeing bluebonnets in that part of town.

Maybe the heat of the fire raised dormant seeds to life. Or perhaps that little patch of earth needed something cheery and pretty to grace its sudden emptiness.

Whatever the reason, I know Mema and Pa would be pleased. ■

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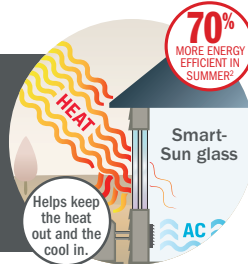
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