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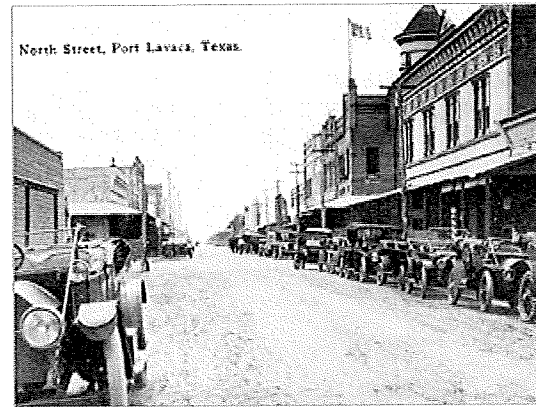
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[Port Lavaca, A City of Survival](#)

Port Lavaca, A City of Survival

It's interesting to note that Port Lavaca would probably never have existed if it weren't for a Comanche raid in 1840. This city was originally known as Lavaca, and the town was founded shortly after the Linnville raid, which was part of one of the largest Comanche raids in the south. Comanche attacks swept through the cities of Victoria, approximately 25 miles northwest, and Linnville, 3½ miles northeast.

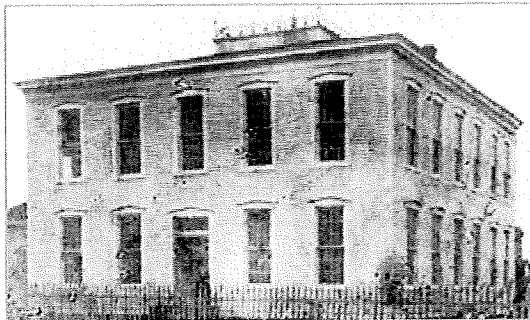
With the burning of Linnville, many of its citizens moved to the site of what is now Port Lavaca. The town, originally named La Vaca (the cow) in 1841, was laid out a year later. Situated on a bluff 15 to 20 feet above the bay, commission men from the east reportedly played a significant role in establishing Lavaca. They envisioned this town as an important shipping point for exporting raw materials and importing manufactured goods. Lavaca fulfilled this expectation, and succeeded Linnville as the busiest port on the adjoining Matagorda and Lavaca bays during the period of the Republic of Texas.



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Main At North Street Looking West

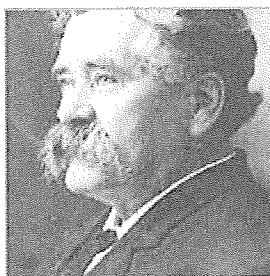
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First Courthouse

county seat. It also received a post office. In 1847 the community became a terminus for ships of the Morgan Line, and in November of the same year a stagecoach route was established between Lavaca and Victoria. In 1849 Lavaca raised its docking fees to help pay for improvements to its wharves. In protest, Charles Morgan abandoned Lavaca and rerouted his ships to the mouth of Powderhorn Bayou, a few miles south of Indianola. Despite the loss of the Morgan Line's trade, Lavaca continued to prosper and to compete for supremacy as the premier port in the Matagorda Bay region.



(<http://texasnowmagcoastalbend.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/0423-PL-Flavius-Gentry-Port-Lavaca-First-Mayor-PS.jpg>)

First Mayor of Port Lavaca, Flavius Gentry

Wagon trains and carts freighted goods between Lavaca and southern and western Texas and northern Mexico. Export items included cattle, hides, tallow and horns, as well as cotton, wool, pecans and mustang grape wine; also exported were copper, lead, silver, and gold. In 1850 Lavaca had a population of 315. The San Antonio and Mexican Gulf Railroad was chartered in 1850, and grading on the railroad began six years later. Within two years, 5 miles of track were put into operation. Though this short stretch of railroad ended at the time in empty prairie, the company did a healthy business. By 1861, twenty-three additional miles were completed into Victoria.

In 1852 Indianola became the county seat, having the advantage over Lavaca of a deep water port at nearby Powderhorn. Soon Lavaca businessmen had invested

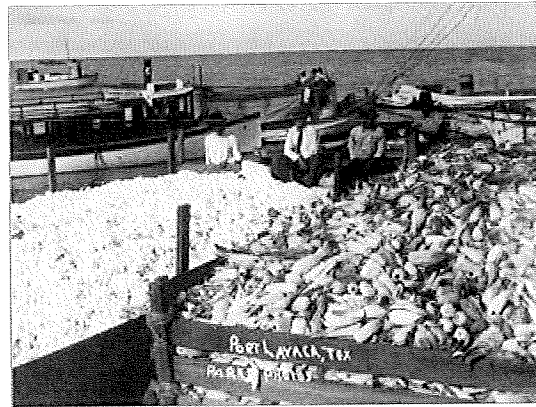
in dredging equipment to dig a channel through sandbars allowing better access to their port.

By 1860 Lavaca had fallen behind Indianola, due to having half the population. But with the Civil War, Lavaca became a hub for military activity. Several garrisons were stationed at different times in the town, which also had a large Confederate arsenal and small arms factory. Federal gunboats bombarded the port on October 31 and November 1, 1862, but the city, defended by two waterfront batteries, did not surrender. The gunboats withdrew. During the war a Lavaca resident, Capt. Edgar Collins Singer, designed an underwater mine, which he tested successfully in February 1863. Singer subsequently manufactured the mines in Mobile, Alabama, for the Confederate government. Lavaca was occupied by Federal troops in December 1863. In April 1864 voters elected to change the county seat back from Indianola to Lavaca. This was reportedly due to county officials in Indianola having sworn allegiance to the Union during the Federal occupation of that city. Federal troops evacuated the Matagorda Bay area in June 1864. In September 1865, after the end of the war, Indianola again became the county seat.

In addition to the disruption of commerce as a result of the Federal blockade, Lavaca also suffered from the destruction the winter of 1862–63 wrought on its wharves. The railroad, having served the Confederacy, was all but destroyed, though was rebuilt in 1866. A major hurricane in 1875 so damaged the railroad near town, the five miles of tracks from Lavaca to Lavaca Junction (later Clark's Station) were taken up. Thus Indianola, which enjoyed better access by water than did Lavaca, now had the only rail connection as well.

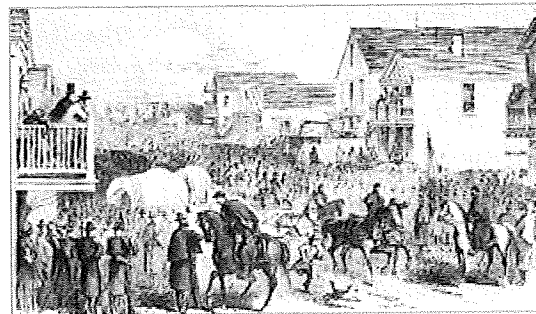
By 1880 the population of Lavaca had fallen to 100, and by 1884 it had declined to 70. The only businesses reported there were a general store and a combination dry-goods and grocery store; at that time the town also had two churches and the district school. The abandonment of Indianola after a hurricane in 1886, however, removed Lavaca's chief rival in the Matagorda and Lavaca Bays region. It was at that point Lavaca began a long period of steady growth. Later in the same year Lavaca once again became the county seat, and in 1887 its railroad connection with the track to Victoria was restored. About this time the community began to be known as Port Lavaca.

In 1890 the town's population reached 365 to 500 and within six years had grown to 800. With the expansion of railroads in the state during the 1880's, Port Lavaca never regained its prestige as a shipping point for cattle. Instead, the shipping of seafood became an important part of the town's economy. Tourism also became important, with the train bringing weekend excursionists to



(<http://texasnowmagcoastalbend.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/0440-PL-Parks-Corn-Cotton-PS.jpg>)

Corn and Cotton



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Civil War Woodcut of Union Troops in Indianola

Port Lavaca's pavilions and oyster roasts, travelling from Houston, San Antonio, Cuero and Victoria. Sportsmen also traveled there for fishing and hunting.

By 1910 the town had two banks, two cotton gins, a broom factory, an oyster knife factory, an ice factory, an electric plant and a local telephone company. The federal government dredged a channel from Pass Cavallo to Port Lavaca, and in 1913 the section of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway below Galveston was completed, giving Port Lavaca an inland water link with that major port.



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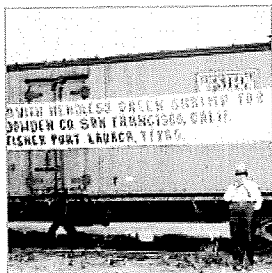
First National Bank On Main Street Before The Roads Were Paved

The Port Lavaca city government functioned until November 1916,



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Post Card Of The Municipal Quick Freezing Plant



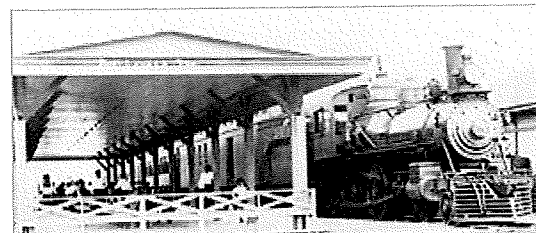
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Railcar Loaded With Shrimp Ready For Shipping

paved highway in the county. Passenger train service was discontinued in 1935. In 1936 the city harbor was dredged and the channel through the sandbars reopened. The establishment since the late 1940's of such industries as Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa), Union Carbide, Du Pont and Formosa, in Point Comfort and other nearby communities, has contributed to Port Lavaca's growth.

when the city went bankrupt. It incorporated again as a general law city 3 years later. In 1920 a seawall, designed to protect Port Lavaca from high water and erosion, was completed. The export of shrimp became a major industry during the 1920's, and in 1928 contributed to Port Lavaca's leading the nation in the amount of seafood shipped. A municipally owned quick-freezing plant opened during the Great Depression. Originally intended for vegetables, it proved ideal for freezing seafood, further enhancing the town's economy. Natural gas was discovered near Port Lavaca in 1934 and oil in 1935. In the latter year, an ample supply of artesian water was also made available.

Surfacing the county roads in the 20's and 30's provided Port Lavaca with easy access, along with the completion of a causeway from Port Lavaca to Point Comfort, on the eastern shore of Lavaca Bay. In 1940, however, State Highway 35 remained the only



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San Antonio & Mexican Gulf Railroad Train Depot



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Oyster Shuckers

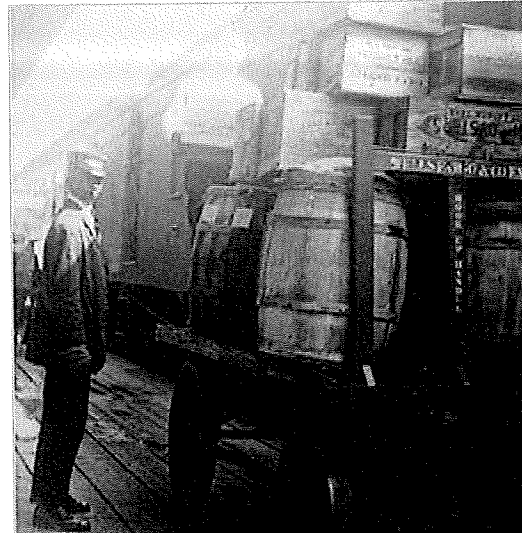
The location of the Aluminum Company of America plant at Point Comfort gave impetus to efforts in the 1950's to acquire a deep-sea channel for Matagorda and Lavaca bays. The Matagorda Ship Channel was completed in 1965 to Point Comfort, with side channels branching off to Port Lavaca. A harbor of refuge was also created at Port Lavaca for the protection of boats during storms. In 1963 the Port of Port Lavaca-Point Comfort was designated a United States Customs port of entry.

In 1961 Hurricane Carla seriously damaged the original causeway, and it was abandoned. A 3,200 foot-long fishing pier (the Port Lavaca State Fishing Pier) was constructed out of part of the old causeway. At the foot of the pier is Lighthouse Park, which includes a manmade sand beach and a nature walk designed to give access to wetlands. Also in the park is Half Moon Reef Lighthouse, originally built on Matagorda Island in 1858. Resembling lighthouses on Chesapeake Bay more than those on the Texas coast, this was one of three remaining lighthouses in Texas in 1991.

Also of interest is Main Street Park, which is located within the shells of two historic buildings. A small cemetery, adjacent to the city harbor, contains the grave of a settler killed in the Linnville Comanche raid. At Old Indianola, a statue of René Robert Cavalier, Sieur de La Salle, commemorates the first effort to establish a European colony in the region.

Celebrations in Port Lavaca include the Fishing Festival held Labor Day weekend, the Taste of Heritage festival in the summer, a county fair in October and the Festival of Lights in December. In 1985 a celebration marked the 300th anniversary of La Salle's landing. In 1990 Port Lavaca observed its sesquicentennial.

by Katherine Elliott
photos From the Calhoun County Museum Collection, Port Lavaca, Texas



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Loading Fish And Oysters At The Train Depot

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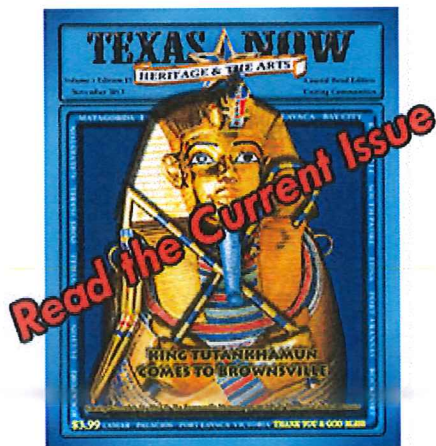
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