THE PORTRAIT OF A BOOM TOWN:
BURKBURNETT

THESIS

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CHAPTER I

THE EARLY HISTORY

The earliest history of Wichita County is somewhat obscure but very intriguing. The earliest known human occupants of the Burkburnett region were Indians. The first white explorers in the Southwest learned that the Caddo group occupied eastern Texas, northern Louisiana, and parts of Arkansas and Oklahoma, and that west of them lived a kindred Indian group known as the Wichita Indians. The Wichita Confederacy thus occupied the region of North Central Texas around Wichita Falls for at least three centuries before they were moved to reservations in Texas and later on, in 1859, into Oklahoma (Indian Territory).

The Comanche and Kiowa Indians were placed in the Wichita Mountains and the surrounding country in Southwest Indian Territory immediately across Red River north of the Wichita Falls-Vernon part of Texas. Thus, after about 1859,\(^1\) Indian troubles around Burkburnett were connected not with Wichita Indians but with Comanches and Kiowas on raiding expeditions into Texas.

The name "Wichita" was later applied to geographical locations: mountains, rivers, falls, county, and city near the center of the

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territory where lived the once powerful Wichita Indians.

It is seemingly impossible to say definitely that any white explorer camped in later Wichita County before the eighteenth century. We know from Bolton's Coronado that Coronado passed on one side of it while De Soto's men under Moscoso passed on the other. Moscoso tried to lead De Soto's men to Mexico City. He moved west, headed for Panuco, about the time Coronado was near Culiacan. Morcoso reached the Trinity River. Here an Indian girl belonging to Juan de Zaldivar, one of Coronado's soldiers, came into possession of the Moscoso party. She had fled eastward from Barrancas and said she had fled from other Spaniards nine days distant and she named the captains. 2

Then, too, in 1542, when Fray Juan decided to go on east from Lyons, Kansas, he was killed by enemies of the Wichita Indians. Do Campo, Lucas, and Sebastian, who were with him, fled on Do Campo's horse. Their flight from Herington, Kansas, to Eagle Pass on the Rio Grande brought them near Wichita County, if not through it. 3

Sometime during the eighteenth century, French traders had established a trading post with the Wichita Indians between the Big and Little Wichita rivers. A French writer tells of his trip up the Red River in the eighteenth century. From Indians he learned of a Seven

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2 Herbert E. Bolton, Coronado, p. 256.

3 Ibid., p. 340.
Days' Battle in the vicinity of Wichita County where Wichitas, Kiowas, and Comanches defeated the Apaches and drove them into New Mexico. 4

In 1849, the immediate vicinity of the Burkburnett area was visited by Captain R. B. Marcy, who left this report:

. . . about thirty miles north of our camp there is a sharp mound visible from the hills about here and Beaver tells me that directly at the foot of this mound runs the Big Wichita, one of the principal tributaries of Red River and that thirty miles in a northwest course from that mound, Red River forks; one branch coming in from the west, is called Ke-che-a-qua-ho-no or "Prairie-Dog Town river" from the circumstance of there being a round mound upon the stream which has a prairie dog town on the top of it. 5

Wichita County is in the high plains. Geographically, these are between the thirty-second and fortieth degrees of latitude and between the ninety-eighth and 105th meridians of longitude. Topographically, they are bound on the east by woodlands, on the west by the foothills of the Rockies, on the south by the Colorado River in Texas, and on the north by the Republican River of Kansas and Nebraska. Politically, they include the western part of Oklahoma, Kansas, Northwest Texas, eastern New Mexico, and Colorado. They include the "dust bowl," too, and get a bit draughty. 6

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The history of the plains was made by the arrow, the branding iron, the plow, the oil derrick, and the adding machine. It has always been a young man's country, whether cowboy, nester, townsman, or oilman.

The town of Burkburnett lived through each of these stages.

In 1836, Texas became a republic and between then and 1840, the Congress of Texas passed acts granting each county four leagues of land. The money received from the sale of these lands was placed in a permanent fund of the county. Cherokee, Denton, Palo Pinto, and Tarrant Counties had some or all of their school lands in Wichita County.

Certificates for the school land were handled as so much real estate, whether surveyed or not, and were traded around as such. Practically all the surveys of Wichita County have the elongated shape. This feature was a vital point in deciding some points of the great Red River boundary dispute between Texas and Oklahoma.

On February 1, 1858, the Texas Legislature ordered the County of Wichita surveyed with its county seat to be called Wichita. In Burke's Texas Almanac for 1882, the editor wrote:

Up Red River west of Clay lies the county of Wichita recently organized with Martin (?) for the county seat.

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7 Ibid., p. 10.

This county and the recently organized county of Archer are said to be very rich in mineral wealth. 9

On June 7, 1882, Wichita County was organized. One hundred and fifty names were required on a petition to the court of Clay and Montague Counties, of which Wichita was a part. 10 Burke Burnett wanted his ranch headquarters as the judiciary center. His ranch lost by only one vote. 11

In 1867 the country here was a vast unbroken cattle range. Settlements were few and far apart. Roving bands of Indians were scattered over the county and a few settlers, who had braved the wilds and lived in dreary isolation waiting for more settlers to come to help cultivate the rich soil. Wichita County had little or no agriculture. Occasional raids of Comanche and Kiowa Indians swooped down from Oklahoma and Indian Territory to the white settlements, from which they stole horses and cattle, killed men, and stole women and children and held them for ransom. 12

The first settler in Wichita County was a man named Mable Gilbert. Mable Gilbert's action belied his effeminate name. Regardless

9Burke's Texas Almanac for 1882, p. 83.
10Katherine C. Douthit, Romance and Dim Trails, pp. 11-13.
of how many adventurous explorers came this way, Mable Gilbert was the first to leave a permanent record on the map, and today Gilbert Creek, which winds an intricate route just south of Burkburnett, is named for this pioneer. Gilbert is believed to have been a steamboat captain, and legend has it that he came from Mississippi on a barge. He settled on Red River where Gilbert Creek runs into Red River. Near the creek were cool ever-flowing springs, later named McFarland Springs. Good grass and trees for logs were there. The land had been patented to Gilbert in 1856 and 1857. It was probably obtained for "script" with which Texas rewarded her soldiers who sold it all over the United States. 13

Gilbert brought slaves and his family and lived here a year or two before the Civil War. He prepared for the adventure in the West by laying in a stock of trinkets for trade with the Indians. Gilbert's party started up Red River at flood stage in a barge which they abandoned near where Gilbert Creek empties into Red River near present-day Burkburnett.

Gilbert traded with the Indians on both sides of the river. Buffalo hides and pelts were traded for trinkets. The land was broken and truck gardens planted.

In late 1861 or January, 1862, the men left the settlement to arrange transportation of pelts to the Mississippi. When they returned,
they found their dugouts caved in and the buildings burned. The guards, women, and children had either been killed or carried off. All had disappeared. When Gilbert and his party went after the Indians, he was seriously wounded. He died and was the first white man buried in Wichita County. The title to the land remained in his name and claims were filed later by heirs whose relation to him has never been defined. Their names, according to the deeds, are Morris Maric and Maria Gilbert. Later, the land was sold to the McFarland brothers, and Gilbert Springs became McFarland Springs. Gilbert Creek retains his name to the present day, however.  

In the sixties, wild cattle could be found all over the land where Burk Burnett is now located. Up to the late seventies the grass in this section was shoulder high on the rolling lands and head high to a man on horseback in the valleys. Prairie fires were terrible things, the flames sometimes forty and fifty feet high.

H. C. Akers and D. P. McCracken of Burk Burnett were the first who visited this immediate section prior to 1870. McCracken came because he had heard about the wild cattle. He brought fourteen heavily armed men with him who could fight Indians. They settled on Gilbert Creek three miles from the present town, but not permanently.  

14Wichita Falls Record News, June 17, 1937, p. 11.  
In the spring of 1879 E. Rexford and M. Dodson, with their families, found no one living on Gilbert Creek and settled there. In the fall of that same year, S. P. Hawkins and J. G. Hardin brought their families to the same Gilbert Creek settlement. The McFarland family, Bob and Jo, moved in the same year. They placed their dugouts in a circle for protection against the Indians. 16

In 1881 a terrible drouth nearly depopulated West Texas. The settlers in the Burkburnett section apparently made no crops at all, and people worked at anything they could get to do for money with which to buy food.

Prior to 1881, the cattle men had not begun to move their herds into the Panhandle proper from other parts of Texas. During that year, however, not a day passed, for months at a time, when there was not a herd of cattle in sight, in this section, being driven to the upper plains for grass. So great was this movement that by another year this sight was a common one—that of driving cattle back from the plains country which then had been taken up for pasture and was crowded. There is still a depression angling from the southeast to the northwest through the Knauth pasture that was apparently a part of the Chisholm trail leading to Doan's Crossing on Red River, north of Vernon, Texas. 17

16 Wichita Falls Record News, June 17, 1937, p. 11.
In 1879, Fort Worth was the nearest railroad point. It took fourteen days to get there from Gilbert, as the little settlement was then called. When the railroad had reached Gainesville in 1882, trade naturally went there. Some hauled lumber from there to build houses. It cost three dollars per one hundred board feet. 18

In 1882, the Fort Worth and Denver Railroad built into Wichita Falls, and that town immediately attained considerable prominence. The mail, instead of being brought from Henrietta, came from Wichita Falls to Gilbert. J. G. Hardin was the first postmaster, and S. P. Hawkins was the first mail carrier, making two trips each way a week at two and a half dollars per round trip.

The cowboys from Burke Burnett's ranch poked fun at the Gilbert community because its members farmed. They called the farmers "nesters" and the settlement, Nesterville. This name became better known than Gilbert.

At this time the land around Nesterville was all free range, but as settlers and cattle men came in, land was fenced with the new-fangled Glidden barbed wire which then cost twelve and one-half cents a pound. There were nine gates to open going from Nesterville to Wichita Falls, a distance of fourteen miles. 19

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The farms of the nesters came right up to and made the east boundary of Burke Burnett's 6666 Ranch. Nesterville developed where the Burkburnett cemetery is now. Early settlers raised corn for which there was a ready market for feeding horses and ponies. Freighters came from as far away as Mobeetie with long trains of ox-drawn wagons which they loaded with corn.

The first wheat planted in this locality was sowed by S. P. Hawkins, who says that the first two plantings did not produce a crop. The third made eighteen bushels to the acre and the fourth, thirty-five bushels per acre. In those days none of the settlers fenced their farms. What cattle there were, were so wild that if approached by a person who yelled they were off in a stampede. Of course, later it became necessary to fence against the herds which were driven into this country.

By 1876 the buffalo herds of the Southwest had been virtually exterminated, but it was no uncommon thing to see the bleached bones of these huge beasts that, before the 1870's, ranged the prairies by the thousands of thousands. In the late 1850's, Mable Gilbert found them so numerous that he excavated a ditch something like two thousand feet long, ten feet wide, and several feet deep around his home-place to keep the buffaloes from overrunning and destroying his crops. The outlines of the old ditch were distinctly visible a few years ago. 20

20 Ibid.
The first school teacher in the Gilbert community was Miss Carrie Gregg. The second was Miss McNinch. The school house was a dugout on the Hawkins place. The patrons of the school could get a teacher only by including her board with her salary. The first blackboard for the school was bought in Gainesville by S. P. Hawkins, who paid five dollars for it. He also brought the heating stove from there.

Nesterville was a prosperous farming community and might eventually have become the leading town between Wichita Falls and Red River if Burke Burnett had not decided to move his 6666 Ranch farther west into King, Cottle, and Knox Counties, and if Frank Kell and J. A. Kemp of Wichita Falls had not decided to build a railroad through Burnett's ranch to the "Big Pasture" (1905). 21

Kemp and Kell bought 17,000 acres from Burke Burnett at eighteen dollars an acre and charged against it one dollar an acre donation to the railroad, afterwards selling off the land to settlers at from thirty-five dollars to sixty-five dollars an acre and making money.

The first 340-acre farm was sold to Knauth in 1906. The railroad was not built to Red River and the engineer of the work train just backed the immigrant car off on the ground until it was unloaded. 22

The first depot was a wooden shack near where the one is today, but when the first train came by, it was a whistle stop only. A corporation

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22 Mrs. F. R. Knauth, personal interview, May 6, 1952.
was organized to hold a town-lot sale in 1907. Before it ended, one thousand people had been persuaded to buy town lots costing from thirty-five dollars to $450 each.

Burke Burnett bought two lots on what is now Main Street and announced from the tail end of a farm wagon that his intention was to erect thereon a two-story brick hotel that would be a credit to the town bearing his name. Did he ever do it? No, but June 6, 1907, is the official birthday of Burkburnett, Texas.23

In the first issue of the *Wichita Daily Times*, the editor commented:

"In a year or two, Burkburnett station nine miles east of Iowa Park will be as large, if not larger, than Iowa Park."

The editor of the *Iowa Park Register* came back with, "Where will Wichita Falls be when that date comes?" and the editor of the *Wichita Falls Daily Times* playfully answered, "... By the time Burkburnett grows as large as Iowa Park, Iowa Park will be as large as Wichita Falls and Wichita Falls will be as large as Chicago."

This playful persiflage may become true yet. Wichita Falls is fast approaching the status of a city; Burkburnett is much larger than Iowa Park, which, like poor Jim Jay, seems to have got "stuck in yesterday."24

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24 *Wichita Falls Daily Times*, May 14, 1907, p. 6.
Nevertheless, Gilbert City-Nesterville-Burkburnett was stimulated by the railroad into Oklahoma. It had an outlet for its enormous corn crops, raised much more extensively prior to 1910 than it has been since. The building of the new railroad inspired a string of cotton gins, too. G. W. Wigham of Wichita Falls formed a company to put up gins in Holliday, Jolly, Mabledean, and Burkburnett. The county commissioners ordered a local option election in the Gilbert district, too, and on December the first, 1907, the first saloon was voted in. With a "dry" territory on the north, the little town became a mecca for southern Oklahomans. 25

The first newspaper published in Burkburnett was called the 6666 Star. Its editor and owner was F. J. Graves, who optimistically predicted that Burkburnett, queen city of the Red River Valley, was destined to be a city of one thousand people in a very short time if she kept building at her present rate: a grocery store building and the new school house were almost finished. "... we are glad to state the directors are determined to start this school off right by securing a competent teacher." 26

Burkburnett at this time had a grocery store, a saloon, the school and church (combined), a lumber and wagon yard, two or three small eating places, and a general store. It also had a new livery

25 Ibid., p. 3.
barn with fine vehicles and good horses. This was owned by some brothers named Fowler. The First National Bank of Burkburnett was founded in 1907 by Mr. Hardin and the little community seemed to gain stability.

For four years, crops were good. Farmers planted mostly corn and cotton, which brought nine cents or less a pound. Comparatively little wheat was grown. Oklahoma had by this time secured statehood and was raising bumper crops on her new soil. Corn in the shuck was piled seven feet deep for two blocks up and down Burkburnett's Main Street between Avenue C and the railroad, with four shellers working night and day for weeks, getting it ready for market.²⁷

Much of that corn had been brought over from Oklahoma in wagons, through the bed of Red River. Corn cobs would be thrown in the quicksand to keep the wagons from bogging down and crossing could be attempted only in dry weather. A ferry had been built by C. W. Wigham, but a rise in the river wrecked it. One day in the fall of 1909, as he stood on the south bank of what was called Van Cleave's Crossing, watching a long line of men and beasts as they struggled in hub-deep sand, sweltering, straining, pulling their loads across that shifting trail, he decided a bridge must be built.

Although the town of Burkburnett had a population of only six hundred, Wigham organized a company which included S. L. Fowler,

W. T. Willis, J. A. Staley, John G. Hardin, W. W. Graham, and John Vancleave. Here are the subscription terms: a $100 subscription gave free passage over the bridge for one year, fifty dollars for six months, and twenty-five dollars for three months.

The contract was let to the Austin Bridge Company and the bridge was started in August, 1910. It was a hazardous enterprise because fickle Red River changed its course ever so often. The piling was untreated on account of time and money. The bridge was completed in six months.28

When it was completed, there was a big celebration. More than five thousand people came: many on horseback, some in wagons drawn by horses, mules, and even oxen. Indians, farmers, and business men held a three-day picnic and barbecue at the bridge on the Texas side. Speaking by Judge Scurry was held on the lot of the Central Christian Church. After that, dinner was spread on the grounds, followed by a ball game in the hot sun. The festivities were crowned by music by the Burkburnett band. A picture was made of the new bridge—the first bridge across Red River west of Dallas. On it, spaced evenly across, were eight cars—the entire number owned in Burkburnett.29

After eight years, the bridge had to be repaired at a cost of $40,000. Five floods and one fire had caused the damage. It served

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28 Ibid.

29 Burkburnett Star, June 13, 1946, p. 3.
from 1911 until 1927 and must have been a sound investment because its owners fought a free bridge with tooth and nail.

A severe drought came in 1911. The First National Bank offered ten dollars for one meal of roasting ears and found no takers. J. C. Muller, who came to the Burk Burnett country in 1910, and still lives there in the Clara community, painted a clear picture of this year. He and his family moved from Missouri and bought a farm with a dugout on it built in 1907 when the general land sale was held. Muller had never seen a bale of cotton, but the first year produced three to four bales to the acre and thirty-three and one-half bushels of corn per acre. The next year, 1911, was bad, though. Hot winds wilted the corn at tassel. The whole farm produced only one bale of cotton. Consequently, that winter, two cows provided the livelihood for the family. Corn bread, syrup, and milk was the "bill of fare." It was as bad as the 1936-1937 droughts, and the government did not help. 30

Better times were close, but they approached so gradually that they were imperceptible until they crashed into the later crescendo of 1918. The year 1912 brought the Schmoker Well to Burk Burnett country. The story of the well had its real beginning in a conversation of two men—officials of the Corsicana Oil Company—while eating at a hotel in Dallas in 1911. The discovery of oil in Electra started the

conversation, and a survey near Burkburnett on both sides of Red River prompted one of the men to suggest the possibility of finding oil near Burkburnett.

Schmoker, a native of Switzerland, was sixty years old. He had bought a farm out of the Burke Burnett ranch three miles west and south of Burkburnett. The Corsicana Petroleum Company leased Schmoker's farm in the fall of 1911. On Christmas Day, four men staked off a well, one day before the lease ran out. The drilling began January 14, 1912.

Lots of hard luck was encountered. In June, the bit was lost. It took twenty pounds of dynamite to blow it loose. The well then developed salt water.

Through all this, the people went about their business as usual, without any conception of how this well would change the whole history of the community. It blew in at dawn on July 1, with only the watchman, J. R. Sullivan, present. Less than an hour later, the whole population of Burkburnett was milling around the well.

The oil sand was found at 1,838 feet. They drilled into the sand twelve feet and found oil at 1,850 feet. With a start of forty-five barrels, the well foretold the millions of barrels of flowing gold that would be taken from the earth here. 31

31Wichita Falls Record News, June 17, 1937, p. 10.
J. R. Sullivan still lives on his farm one and one-half miles west of Burk Burnett. He smiled reminiscently as he recounted this experience:

There was a bad electrical storm the night before the well came in—so bad I was afraid the well would be struck and set afire. Just before dawn, July 1, I heard a rumbling in the well and as I started to investigate, I was sprayed with a mist of mud and oil. A few moments later, just at sunrise, the well blew in and sprayed oil over the pasture. It was a beautiful sight and I wished that somebody had been there to share it. 32

The well was soon forgotten by the public and is almost ignored in the histories written by casual visitors, since it seems so trivial when compared to "The Fowler," "Golden Cycle," and "Burk-Waggoner." Yet, today, the Schmoker Number One still pumps its single barrel of oil a day in 1952, while larger wells have been abandoned.

The Corsicana Oil Company immediately made locations for offsets and there was a rush for leases. There was a theory that a field would be found in a direct line between the Electra and Petrolia fields. Strange to relate, no one thought of drilling close to the town itself, and the territory northwest of Burk Burnett was largely ignored. 33

Early geological reports had said that oil would be found in a succession of pools and this was proved by drilling operations. Burk Burnett pools were almost connected with only an occasional dry hole


33 Wichita Falls Daily Times, June 19, 1932, p. 10.
denoting a break in the continuity of the chain of pools containing oil in this area. \(^{34}\)

The business section, at this time, consisted of three blocks: two drug stores, two barbershops, one hardware store, two banks, a general store. Upstairs offices were rented to insurance men, two doctors, and two lawyers. Main Street was unpaved and while there were some concrete sidewalks, most of them were board. The main hotel was on a side street. It had a porch where drummers sat and were served family-style meals for two bits. Life was simple. The only rich man in town was J. G. Hardin, who had founded the First National Bank and owned 1,400 acres of land. \(^{35}\)

In 1913, G. W. Wigham built the first light plant. This was the year, too, that the Burkburnett town council decided to incorporate under the City-Village Act. This proposal passed unanimously on March 3. Ben Schwegler was elected Mayor and C. A. Purcell, A. Lohoefener, C. A. Walling, W. W. Graham, and G. W. Wigham were councilmen. Soon, Walter Cline was elected Mayor and served until 1917.

The voters in Burkburnett, in 1914, voted bonds worth $8,000 to install a water works. The water works, when completed, had a water capacity of 55,000 gallons. It serviced the business district


\(^{35}\) Boyce House, *Oil Boom*, p. 45.
and part of the residential section. Three other happenings in 1914 were that the Hunt-Rigsby Elevator and Gin handled more wheat in wagon lots in July than did any other elevator in Texas; H. Beach bought and shipped 100,000 bushels of corn; the first school graduation was held.

In December of 1917, the *Burkburnett Star* put out a "booster edition." On the front page there was a picture showing Leonard Ramming's threshing and harvesting outfit: the chuck wagon, header boxes, separator, thresher engine, tractor, and crew.

An article under the picture says that Burkburnett territory produced more than 400,000 bushels of wheat in 1917. It graded number two and was commonly overweight.

There were two elevators in Burkburnett in 1917: Hunt and Rigsby's and the Wichita Mill and Elevator Company. No uncommon sight was the elevator-glutted cars loaded to capacity on sidings, and long lines of loaded wagons waiting to be emptied.

A great deal of corn was still raised and cotton was developing into a major crop. One hundred twenty cars of watermelons, averaging nine hundred melons to a car, were sold in 1916.

The business section had grown. Burkburnett now had two cotton gins, two grain elevators, three lumber yards, one machine shop, one  

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36 *Burkburnett Star*, December 14, 1917, p. 3.  
37 Ibid., pp. 2-5.
oil well supply house, two garages, a local and long-distance telephone exchange, two hardware stores, two furniture stores, three drug stores, and two moving picture houses.

The number of churches had grown to three. The school house had two stories, was brick, and had twelve rooms. Bonds worth $18,000 had been voted to build a high school building. Burl Bryant was superintendent of the Burkburnett schools in 1917.

Section Two of this "booster edition" shows another picture of Leonard Ramming's farm, but this time oil wells are emphasized. The Burkburnett oil field covered about sixty square miles. The production was shallow and the royalty income was $135,000 monthly to land owners.

Little fellows could get into the oil game because some wells were put down in thirty-six hours and produced from seven to fifteen barrels a day. One thousand oil-field workers, making from three to nine dollars a day, lived in Burkburnett.

The Burk Oil Refinery had been finished and was to make a test run the week of December 14. It had a capacity of 3,000 barrels of crude oil a day, from which was to be refined gasoline, naphtha, kerosene, and distillates: gas oil, road oil, and fuel oil. The posted price of Burkburnett oil was, at that time, two dollars per barrel. The refinery was considered the most important industry in Burkburnett.
Two other items from this "booster edition" of the newspaper should be mentioned. First, Wichita County voted $750,000 for improving the roads from Red River bridge through Burkburnett to Wichita Falls—a sixteen-mile strip. The second item is that two-year-old cattle brought fifty-seven dollars and fifty cents a head in 1917.38

World War One was affecting Burkburnett, too, like every other town in the United States, but the newspapers mentioned in on the second page, especially after the Fowler Well came in. As Boyce House said in Oil Boom: "Anything mentioned except oil would create as much consternation as a rebel yell at a spiritualist seance."39

The Burkburnett Star, December 14, 1917, says that sixty boys from Burkburnett joined the army in two weeks. Call Field was just fourteen miles from Burkburnett, but thumbing a ride had not then developed into the fine art that it is today.

Airplanes were still novelties, and when two circled the city and one landed in a field near the school, business came to a standstill! The teachers dismissed their pupils and allowed them to give the winged monsters the once-over.40

38 Burkburnett Star, December 14, 1917, Sections I-II, pp. 1-5.

39 Boyce House, Oil Boom, p. 53.

Burkburnett citizens were buying government bonds, too. Addresses were given by Judge Carrigan and R. E. Shepherd, county campaign manager. W. Daniels was the chairman in Burkburnett, and their quota was $500,000.

Thus Burkburnett rocked along. Mothers grieved for boys in the army; bumper wheat and cotton crops were harvested. Twenty shallow wells, including three dusters, had been completed; and local citizens hoped for more and better things. Little did they realize on July 28, 1918, that the first era of their community had ended and that next day, July 29, the Fowler Well would blow in.
CHAPTER II

THE BOOM PERIOD

It is generally conceded that the Burkburnett Boom was ushered in by the Fowler Wildcat Number One, on Sunday, July 29, 1918.

The story most often told and which gained widest credence about the well is that Mrs. S. L. Fowler dreamed that oil was beneath their stock ranch. She told the story so often that her husband was persuaded to drill.

Fowler began to try to organize a company. This turned into a discouraging business. One dry hole had already been drilled on the Fowler farm, and Burkburnett men were skeptical. Finally, however, the Fowler Farm Oil Company emerged. Fowler contributed his farm and $500; W. D. Cline, a driller, put in his cable-tool rig and his services for $1,000 in stock. J. A. Staley paid in $500; A. B. Lipscomb contributed $250; J. W. Ferguson, $250; W. Daniels, $200; and W. W. Graham, $200. The company held a lease on three hundred acres surrounding the well, and the stockholders agreed to drill until oil was found, provided the depth did not exceed 1,700 feet.¹

¹Carl Coke Rister, Oil! Titan of the Southwest, p. 115.
A slight change in the location of the well was accidentally made. Oil, like gold, is where you find it; and this change in location proved significant. When the pipe was being hauled in, the heavily loaded wagons bogged down in the sand fifty yards before reaching the location, and Fowler told the teamsters to unload where they were. Fowler dug the slush pit and hauled the fuel oil himself.  

At last they were ready to begin drilling. Work progressed with the usual halts and occasional shutdowns. At night the powerful chug-chug of the engine could be heard for a great distance, and the steam, colored by the rig's lights, formed an ethereal nimbus around the crown block that belied the powerful throb of the engine.

In the day time, farmers would gather around Fowler's pig pen, just south of the rig, and spit, whittle, and swap stories, bucolic and lewd, squatting cowboy fashion; and always they teased Fowler, and in time the well became known as Fowler's Folly.

More money was needed. Dubious stockholders dropped out, but still the drilling went on. At 1,600 feet, the well was judged dry. They decided to drill at least one hundred feet deeper. During all this time, not one scout, the "eye" of oil companies, was sufficiently interested to visit the lease.

Early on July 29, 1918, with the well 1,734 feet deep and while the Fowlers still slept, Red McDowell ran into the yard, yelling: "The

2 Boyce House, Oil Boom, p. 41.
well came in during the night; she's filled the 800-barrel tank and the 400-barrel, too, and now is running down the cotton rows!"  

The owners kept quiet, but began to try to buy all of the surrounding acreage. That is what caused people to know that the well was in and must be good.  

Good? This territory proved to be the most prolific in the production of light-grade oil in the entire South. The pay sand was relatively shallow and production was from two hundred to four thousand barrels per day. The price of petroleum was $2.25 a barrel and because of the war, it soon soared to $3.50—a price never reached since.  

The Burkburnett townsite boom broke and the rush was on. The Fowler shares of one hundred dollars were held at $14,000 and $15,000 each.  

Although the hole was more than a third of a mile in depth and filled with mud, gas, and oil, it blew out. Cline said that a thorough test of the Fowler well could not be made until the Texas Company's four-inch pipeline to the well was completed. This line could handle five or six thousand barrels daily, and as oil was worth two and a quarter a barrel, the Fowler well was worth at least $16,000 daily.  

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3Ibid.  
4Wichita Oil Reporter, July 26, 1919, pp. 2-3.  
5Jonnie Morgan, History of Wichita Falls, p. 97.  
6Wichita Falls Daily Times, August 1, 1918, p. 1.
The pipeline was connected but proved to be incapable of carrying the oil! Iron tanks were rushed to the location, but a lot of precious oil flowed into the slush pit and down a ravine. The well filled a hundred-barrel tank in forty minutes! Now, capital between $18,000 and $100,000 was subscribed in a day. ⁷

The busiest man in the area was Cline. He had sought oil on the Texas and Louisiana gulf and along the Rio Grande. His wife and two children made up his family. He was using at this time a topless "flivver" with a cracked windshield, and with fenders drooped like the ears of an Arkansas hound. His wife would pour hot water on the motor while Cline cranked. ⁸ After the gusher, the "tin lizzie" gave way to a $4,500 car.

When Cline was showing the Fowler Number One to J. G. Hardin, a Burkburnett banker, he said: "I'll give you $100,000 for a lease on your land." He borrowed the money for a half interest and started the company that sold out, later, for $3,500,000. The "Fowler's Folly" had paid $15,000 for each $100 invested.

After the second well was drilled by the Fowler Farm Oil Company, the owners sold it to the Magnolia Petroleum Company. "We sold our lease with its two wells," said Cline to Rister, "for $1,800,000

⁷Wichita Oil Reporter, July 26, 1919, pp. 2-3.
⁸C. A. Warner, Texas Oil and Gas Since 1543, p. 58; Boyce House, Oil Boom, p. 48.
cash, which E. R. Brown, the President, paid in three checks—one for $800,000 and two for $500,000 each. 

When the news of the Fowler got around, a growth felt all over Wichita County got started. There was a mad rush to secure Burkburnett town lots and to organize companies. Bit wells were being brought in every day. In three weeks after the Fowler came in, fifty-six rigs were running. The Staley, Langford, and Chenault was completed August 24, 1917, one mile from the Fowler. It was another big well.

Now, people thronged to the dusty, heat-baked place, and soon a solid line of derricks was erected for two miles along residential streets of Burkburnett and wells went down as fast as machines could drill them. The derricks, scattered thickly over the little town, pointed upward like so many pins in a cushion.

By January, the Burkburnett oil field seemed to cover an area of more than 450 square miles, the area being steadily increased by new wells. Not only had the entire townsite been covered, but drilling had spread into the country in every direction. To the west and northwest, there were derricks on the Hardin, Herndon, Chenault, Gist, and

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10 C. A. Warner, *Texas Oil and Gas Since 1543*, p. 58.

other farms. To the east, the near-by acreage and the Van Cleave farm were the scenes of much activity and already the derricks reached almost to Red River. There were scores of derricks outside the city limits, reaching toward the south, too. So few dry holes had been drilled that the boundaries of the townsite pool had not yet been defined. 12

Burkburnett now resembled a hive of bees at swarming time. Gusher after gusher increased frenzied deals, drilling, lease, and royalty operations. On the north side of town, toward the Fowler well, lots sold for $1,000 each. One person who, before the boom, had offered to sell his property for $1,500, now got $3,600, for part of his holdings, with royalty provisions included.

Rister paints this graphic picture:

Throng of people walk the streets of Burkburnett all day and until late at night. Main Street is thronged with visitors. Oil companies were being formed on sidewalks or in streets. Hotels, rooming houses, private homes were running over. 'Blind tigers,' bars, stock promoters were everywhere. 13

People paid ten dollars a night to sleep in cellars or on porches. There were so many people milling around, even in the residential parts of town, that shades had to be drawn for privacy. Strange faces, gazing through windows, startled families. 14

12 Ibid., Section II, p. 3.  
13 Carl Coke Rister, Oil! Titan of the Southwest, p. 117.  
14 Mary McGinnis, personal interview, April 16, 1952.
Burkburnett was bursting at the seams. The population had outgrown the town several hundred per cent. By January, it was between five thousand and eight thousand people.

Every line of business in town was badly crowded and overworked. Two banks, with capital of $50,000 each, had combined deposits reaching $3,216,505.36. They employed a force of men and women equal to a city bank and even with this force and their added equipment, the customers often had to stand in line for a long time.

The local post office was swamped. The force of three men was increased to ten or eleven, but they were unable to handle the business. Great rows of post-office boxes were soon installed but they were soon assigned and no more were available. The lobby was enlarged, yet the crowds that flocked to the post office after every mail had to stand in line for nearly an hour before reaching the window.

Office room was at a premium, and exorbitant prices were eagerly paid for the most ordinary office room and equipment. Quite a number of small brick shacks were built and occupied by oil companies for offices. All business, especially hotels and restaurants, experienced capacity business.15

Lack of house room was natural. As many as four families lived in the same house, and many thousands lived in tents or cheap, hastily thrown-together wooden shacks. Little box-car houses sprang up all

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15 Burkburnett Star, January 3, 1919, Section II, p. 3.
over town, the oil field's own architectural design. The outside was stripped and visitors at the front door could see straight through to the back porch. Surprisingly enough, some held beautiful furniture. They were just temporary dwellings.

The railroad freight business alone ran into more than $25,000 a day and the government tax ran into more than $4,000 per month. There were frequently sixty to one hundred cars waiting on the siding to be unloaded. Most of the loads were derrick timbers, oil-well casing, drilling machinery, and other supplies used in the colossal development of the oil industry in and near Burkburnett. 16

The Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad built a siding and switched thirteen box-cars on to it for their extra help. There were nineteen clerks, and yet they could not keep up with the volume of business. 17

Trains ran twice every morning, noon, and night. (They were still running on that schedule in 1919.) A stranger in Wichita Falls, seeing the loaded train at 7:30 a.m., asked if there were an excursion on to Burkburnett. He was told that that was an ordinary train and that another just like it would follow at eight o'clock and two more would come in late in the evening with thousands of workers. 18

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16Ibid.
17J. S. Gore, personal interview, April 10, 1952.
18C. A. Warner, Texas Oil and Gas Since 1543, p. 237.
An operator in a rush for a heavy piece of equipment, ordered it sent from Pennsylvania by express. A flat car bearing the bull-wheel was placed between the engine and coaches of a passenger train. Cities all along the route from Pennsylvania to Texas were mystified to see a passenger train with a flat car speeding along. The express charge amounted to more than the original cost of the equipment. 19

The railroad did not do all of the hauling, however. A conservative estimate placed the number of horses and mules used in heavy hauling at not less than three hundred. One can imagine what heavily loaded drays did to Burk Burnett's unpaved streets. The fall rains settled the dust and created shallow loblollies. The heavy traffic widened and deepened these until the streets were almost impassable. Every boom town claims that a horse drowned on its muddy streets, but Burk Burnett can prove her story. According to H. P. Cornett, now living in Wichita Falls, a mule actually bogged down and drowned in a hole in front of the town's First National Bank in 1919. 20

C. B. Blair was a teaming contractor during the boom. He had a mule to slip and fall and get tangled up in the traces. It almost drowned before they could get it free. Mud and water were almost waist deep and some mudholes would bury a wagon. It took eight days

19 Boyce House, Oil Boom, p. 51.

to move a Star drilling machine down Main Street from Avenue D across the railroad tracks. They used thirty-two teams, the lead pair more than a block from the stuck rig. \(^{21}\)

Wichita Falls was still a country town with board sidewalks and the trip from Wichita Falls to Burk Burnett took four hours. The ordinary dirt road was full of holes, getting worse all the time. On May 23, 1919, the *Wichita Falls Daily Times* contained this letter to the editor:

> There has never been an effort to drag even one road to Burk Burnett, though thousands are forced to bounce from Wichita Falls to Burk Burnett every day. . . . It may be that the county commissioners have an interest in some of the teams stationed at the various mud holes along the wayside charging five dollars for five minutes work. Some farmers near bad holes charge an admission to go over their land and use a gun as an extra inducement for collecting the fee. Can you imagine it? It is rather wild and wooly but it is being done in Wichita County.

> Respectfully,

> Mrs. Grace M. Higgins \(^{22}\)

People were too busy trying to get rich to worry about roads. They went right on jolting over rough roads and being pulled out of mudholes. Burk Burnett became a mecca for oil men from all sections of the country. The streets were filled with crowds of leasers, promoters, and investors. Company after company was organized, and most of the stock was sold right on the streets of Burk Burnett, and it

\(^{21}\) *Wichita Falls Daily Times*, May 23, 1919, Part I, p. 4.

was nothing unusual for a company with $30,000 in stock to be launched and the stock fully subscribed within half a day.

Map salesmen, lawyers, stenographers, and others reaped a rich harvest. Many hundreds of lease instruments, deeds, agreements, and contracts had to be drawn up. Burkburnett's one attorney was deluged with work and his office thronged with clients. A judge from Wichita Falls took desk room in a Burkburnett real-estate office with a court stenographer. Bank clearings ran into hundreds of thousands daily.

Oil companies were called "The Blue Goose," "Burk-cinch" (production on three sides), "Golden Horse Shoe." Circulars and advertisements of promotion companies brought in millions. Two slogans were "As good as a royal flush" and "No grief, no drilling, just profit."23

One promoter erected a derrick on another man's lease to get a picture for his promotion advertising. He had a well drilling, even if it were on another man's property. At a depth of five hundred feet, he abandoned it. He had taken pictures. He had what he wanted.

Innumerable offices were set up in Dallas and Fort Worth as well as in Wichita Falls. People all over the United States were "fleeced."

The assistant district attorney in New York said that citizens there

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23 *Wichita Falls Daily Times*, August 9, 1918, p. 2.
lost $500,000,000 in Burkburnett and Ranger in one year through unwise investments. 24

The little overgrown town was full of fire hazards. Conditions were so bad that fire insurance policies were revoked. One family awakened one morning to find their back yard covered with crude oil. Realizing how easily this could turn into a lake of fire, they packed and left. The house, on account of scarcity of dwellings, was immediately rented by some braver people.

The City Council ordered the removal of all storage tanks from the city limits. After a while, an agreement was reached between the city authorities, the fire insurance companies, the operators, and lot owners to allow two one-hundred-barrel underground tanks to be put in at Burkburnett for each well. These tanks were to be covered and have gas traps. From these it would be necessary to pipe the oil to storage tanks located outside the city limits. 25

A special fire marshal and sanitary officer was employed. He was to be notified at the completion of each well and was to see that all fires in the vicinity were put out.

Even Uncle Sam became annoyed at the conditions in Burkburnett. The government ordered all wells stopped until a plan to lessen the

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24 Boyce House, Oil Boom, p. 57.

drilling and conserve labor, fuel, and materials could be worked out. Two committees—nine men from Wichita Falls and nine men from Burkburnett—tried to find a solution. A meeting was held at the Baptist Church in Burkburnett. R. D. Donelley, inspector of the Oil and Gas Conservation Service, and a Mr. Dwyer of the War Department were there.


Three separate meetings were held, and at last Judge Huff read the report: first, they pledged their co-operation with the government; second, on blocks where rigs had not actually been built, only one well would be allowed near the center of the block; and third, if two wells in a block were started, the one in the sand would be completed. 26

This report was received with anger. The motion was rejected and heated debate followed. One citizen of Burkburnett declared that any man who had room to put up a derrick had a right to drill and that property could be taken only by due process of law through federal courts. Much applause followed that remark!

Mr. McKenzie answered that the food and fuels administrations were daily seizing property with no due process of law whatsoever.

26 *Wichita Falls Daily Times*, September 1, 1918, p. 3.
Walter Cline urged careful thought. As a practical oil man, he believed one well on each block would get every drop of oil.

A new resolution was offered: Let the wells already started be finished. In the future, no new company could be formed for development if it held lease on less than a city block. It was further resolved to ask a representative of the government not to do anything until a full statement of actual conditions was presented to him.  

On September 6, an agreement was reached. There were to be drilled two wells to a block. Leases and companies were pooled where land was less than six lots. Only three blocks in the entire townsite were going to have more than two wells. When interested parties signed this agreement, the townsite blocks were released for drilling.  

Eeds was made director in carrying out the suggestions of the representatives of the fuel administration. From then on, wells had to have their casings cemented to preserve the field and to prevent its disruption by an accumulation of salt water.

This was not the only part of the oil field the government was interested in, however. At the mass meeting on September 2, 1918, W. C. Pope of the United States Internal Revenue Department explained the government requirement in placing revenue stamps on documents used in oil development. Sales agreements should have a two-cent stamp

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27 Ibid.

28 *Wichita Falls Daily Times*, September 6, 1918, p. 6.
placed on the original agreement or receipt issued to the purchaser.

On the stub of each stock certificate for $500 there should be placed a five-cent stamp. On a transfer of certificates, a two-cent stamp for every one hundred dollars valuation should be placed. All parties who sold stock had to pay thirty dollars for a permit. The penalty could be one year in the penitentiary or a fine up to $1,000.  

In October, the Spanish influenza hit the badly crowded boom town.

By October 9, more than half the rigs were shut down. Schools were closed. Nothing but bottled drinks was sold at soft-drink stands.

Many died, especially those living in tents and shacks, but the town remained crowded. Famous men rubbed elbows with the infamous. Henry L. Doherty, head of the Cities Service Oil Company, and two hundred other capitalists visited the Burkburnett oil field. Rex Beach bought twenty-five-cent cigars over the counter at Adams Drug Store while he collected material for *Flowing Gold*. Boyce House interviewed stranger and nester alike, gathering data for *Oil Boom*. Among the returned service men was a fresh-faced sailor boy who later became governor of Texas—James V. Allred. Dressing tools on a cable tool rig, out in the field, was a handsome Dutchman who later on became famous as Clark Gable in motion pictures.

29 *Wichita Falls Daily Times*, September 2, 1918, p. 3.


31 Mrs. J. G. Adams, personal interview, April 9, 1952.
Eventually, production dropped and business slowed a little but not for long. A big gusher three and one-half miles northwest of Burk Burnett began spouting three thousand barrels a day—the Burk-Waggoner. Bob Waggoner, whose well started the new excitement, received $220,000 for a lease on twenty-two and one-half acres. He was a nephew of Tom Waggoner, owner of 600,000 acres on whose land the first oil in North Texas had been found in 1902, and for whose daughter Electra, Texas, is named. 32

Bob Waggoner did not see fit to sell his land. He leased it for one dollar a month per front foot. His rentals were almost $15,000 a month. This pool was brought in by Clois Green, a Vernon, Texas, bank clerk who leased land from Bob Waggoner and organized the Burk Burnett-Waggoner Oil Company. 33

During the fall, the peak production for the combined Burk Burnett area pool including the old area and extension was 100,000 barrels daily! 34

Around the Burk-Waggoner well sprang up another mushroom boom-town, called Newtown. It had its own gambling houses, dance halls, and speakeasies. However, it had a tragic end. In 1922, a


33 Jonnie Morgan, History of Wichita Falls, p. 100.

34 C. A. Warner, Texas Oil and Gas Since 1543, p. 237.
storage tank was struck by lightning during a heavy rain. The released oil followed the rivulets of rain like liquid fire. It flowed in and around trees, caught derricks on fire, and enveloped tents and shacks. The exact number of dead was never known. Newtown is now known as Thrift, Texas, but it never grew back except for a post office, school house, and church.

The Texas Chief extended the Waggoner pool one mile north. It paid 350 per cent in dividends and filled a 500-barrel tank in forty-five minutes.

The derricks marched on for seven and one-half miles until they reached the bank of Red River, where yet another boom town sprang up, called Bridgetown. At one time it boasted 10,000 people. Its main street of one mile had a house of prostitution at one end and a mission church at the other. In between were offices of doctors and lawyers, dance halls, and picture shows. 35

The rapid growth of Bridgetown was responsible for the apprehension of a bank robber. He had escaped and was cornered in Bridgetown. He was accustomed to jumping through windows when cornered by the law. That morning he had inspected his room and noticed that it had a window. That night, with the rangers on his heels, he ran for his window and jumped at it, only to hit something and bounce back into

the room and into the arms of the officers. A shack had been built next door while he was out. 36

Red River territory in the river bed near Bridgetown was the basis of one of the longest and most costly legal suits ever tried. At that time it was the richest oil field in the world.

Texas and Oklahoma contended for the right to designate ownership of land. The Burk-Divide Oil Company filed suit for $525,000 damages over the Red River boundary dispute involving Texas and Oklahoma: a Delaware Corporation versus Frank Brown of Mission Hills, Kansas. It claimed holdings in the Judsonian placer mining claim in Tillman County. Brown was a stockholder in a Texas oil company which confiscated the Burk-Divide holdings after the company had been driven off by Texas rangers. 37

The original survey of this disputed territory was made in 1858. The monument at the 100th meridian is four thousand feet west of the proper location. (The old brass marker is still there.) More than 30,000 acres of land worth $1,000,000 were involved. Part of the suit was to determine the exact location of the line separating Texas and Oklahoma along Red River. It was necessary, then, to determine where the south bank of the river was; whether it was the limit of the river at the time of low water or the much more remote elevations that

36 Burkburnett Star, June 23, 1946, p. 3.
limit the stream in floodtime. Many interesting features developed during the pendency of this suit. Possession of parts of the river bed was being taken by intimidation and force; the courts of both sides were assuming jurisdiction by injunctive proceedings. Armed conflict between rival claimants for the oil and gas was imminent; the militia of Texas had been called to support the order of her courts and efforts were being made to summon the militia of Oklahoma for a like purpose.

Oklahoma claimed that Red River was a navigable stream and that she had a title to the river bed from shore to shore. Texas claimed title half way from the south shore. The United States denied both claims and asserted ownership of the southern half and because of her relationship to many Indian owners, an interest in the northern half. 38

The Supreme Court appointed a receiver with authority to control and direct all necessary oil and gas operations on the disputed land for a distance of forty-three miles up and down Red River. The court held that the Red River was not a navigable stream and therefore the title to land under the river was not in the state but that the Indian or white entrymen or their grantees as riparian owners were vested with the title to the middle of the river.

But another complication arose: since the survey of the river in 1874, and running of meander lines or survey limits of the stream,

38 Grant Foreman, History of Oklahoma, p. 333.
floods had carried away portions of the bank and thus changed the relation of the river to several surveyed tracts. Some that were washed away became part of the river bed, and others, non-riparian before, became riparian and therefore vested a title in its owner to land formerly belonging to another. Oklahoma as owner of certain school lands abutting the river on the north, was held to be an owner of part of the river bed. 39

The Supreme Court decided that the medial line was the Indian boundary and that the land between the middle of the stream and the south bank belonged to the United States; that the south bank is the water-washed and relatively permanent elevation or acclivity commonly called a cut bank along the south side of the river that separates the bed from the adjacent upland and preserves the course of the river. 40

When this case was being argued before the Supreme Court, A. H. Carrigan of Wichita Falls, Texas, was the attorney for some persons who laid claim to the land between Red River and the bluff. He said to the Supreme Court:

It doesn't take a scientist to tell where a river bed is. Any boy back in Arkansas when I was growing up could answer that question. The bank was where a boy could stand with a fishing pole and throw the line into the water.

39 Ibid., p. 334.
40 Ibid.
The Judge was so struck with this homely logic that he gave Carrigan an autographed picture.  

Jesse B. Root, the trial attorney for the Burk-Divide Oil Company in its suit against the State of Texas had several copies of the brief of the case made and gave one to the Crane family who still live in what remains of Bridgetown.

In it, he said that without any notice to the defendants, the Court appointed a receiver for property involved in the suit. He argued that the state of Texas had long before granted the beds of all streams thirty feet or more in width to the public. The north boundary of Texas was fixed by the Treaty of 1819. The south bank of Red River was decided in the Greer County, Oklahoma, case which said that the south bank of Red River was the northern boundary of Texas. 

Root continued:

There appears to have been a studied effort upon the part of persons that wrote affidavits to leave the impression that the Burk-Divide guards were outlaws and bandits and that the Texas Rangers were merely religious missionaries sent to that wild region to open and conduct Bible classes. It is known by 20,000 persons in Tillman County in Oklahoma and in Wichita County in Texas that the Texas Rangers successfully carried out a coup d'état on the morning of January the sixth by suddenly rushing into the bed of Red River armed with rifles and revolvers and overpowering the Burk-Divide guards, seized the property. The Rangers

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41 Boyce House, Oil Boom, p. 71.

42 Jesse B. Root, Legal Brief, p. 48.
were in boots and big hats. There were twenty Rangers; five went to each well. \(^{43}\)

Another version of the eviction of the thirty-five Oklahoma guards from the Texas side of Red River was told by Frank Watkins, a retired peace officer, now of Wichita Falls. He said that he was awakened about midnight and told to get up and lead the Rangers from Burkburnett to the disputed land near Bridgetown. He and the Rangers camped under the Bridgetown bluff about five o'clock in the morning. When they went down to serve eviction notices on the Burk-Divide guards, only one objected, and his objection was verbal. There was not a shot fired. \(^{44}\)

In 1918, the Burkburnett school had 673 pupils. In 1919, the school had increased to 945. Then, in 1920, when tax money should have begun to pour in, the school had to close! This was not the result of anything except negligence on the part of the citizens.

The golden bubble of abundance burst; the people in their effort to become millionaires, had ignored a citizen's unpleasant duty: they had not paid their taxes. The *Burkburnett Star* came out with page after page of lists of delinquent tax-payers.

At an evening meeting held in the Baptist Church on April 9, 1920, nearly $10,000 was raised by the local men who bought warrants ranging

\(^{43}\)Ibid., p. 50.

\(^{44}\)Wichita Falls Daily Times, July 31, 1949, p. 3.
in value from $25 to $1,000. This was purely town patriotism because, while it was hoped that the warrants would be redeemed by the payment of delinquent taxes for 1919, it was not absolutely assured. 45

W. D. Cline gave the security of $5,000. This left only $1,250 to be secured by six Burkburnett men who raised it by personal subscription. Raising the money was really the climax of the day. Annie Webb Blanton, the state superintendent of schools from Austin, had spoken three times in behalf of the school. The school board had made appeals, too, and the scholastic-age children paraded the streets with the slogan, "Save Our School." The 1,700 children went back to classes, but the people realized that enough attention had not been paid to civic affairs. 46

The price of crude oil went down. Production fell off. People who had become wealthy in oil moved to larger places, mostly Wichita Falls. Hangers-on drifted on the next boom-town. Big oil companies bought up all the leases and developed them as they wished. Conditions looked bad. Would Burkburnett become a ghost town?

45 Burkburnett Star, April 9, 1920, p. 1.

A narrator could not tell the story of Burkburnett and leave out the Willises, the Dodsons, the Hawkins and many others; but the history of the Gilbert-Nesterville-Burkburnett area is so closely and vitally interwoven with the life stories of two of its citizens that an account of their lives is also the story of the community. These citizens are John G. Hardin and Burke Burnett.

There is no especial accomplishment in being the first citizen of a community or in having lived there longer than any other person, but to combine that life in a community with more than fifty years of service and leadership is one of the earth's rarest phenomena. That is what the Hardins have done in Burkburnett.

In August, 1879, there came to the Burkburnett country a young man who was to play a tremendous part in its history. John Garham Hardin was born in Tippah County, Mississippi, August 27, 1854. He was the son of George Washington Hardin and Eliza Jane Hardin, and the eldest of several children. His parents were Tennesseans, and they moved back to Tennessee while he was still a child. He was still a very small boy when his father went away to fight for the Confederacy.
Before the way was over, however, he was old enough to do a heavy share of the work on the farm and to help maintain the home. ¹

Under such circumstances, anything like formal schooling was difficult. The boy attended a subscription school when farm work permitted, but this was not very often. As a young man he worked on the farm helping his father.

In 1875, he and his father bought round-trip tickets to Texas over the then-new railroad, planning to visit relatives. They intended to remain only a few weeks, but fate ordained it otherwise. At Texarkana somebody jostled the older Hardin when he was getting off the train. A moment later he discovered that his pocketbook, containing his return ticket and part of his money, was missing. The loss of the money was bad, the loss of the ticket was worse; but railroad fares were extremely high in those days.

The result was that John G. Hardin decided to linger in Texas and to let his father have his return ticket. He located in Johnson County, where he farmed for several years. It was while there that he married Cornelia Adams.

He and his brother-in-law, S. P. Hawkins, decided in 1879 that they would seek new locations. They had heard glowing accounts of the region northwest of Fort Worth and decided to look it over for

¹Wichita Falls Daily Times, June 19, 1932, p. 5.
themselves. The two families set out, traveling by wagon. They visited parts of Denton, Montague, and Wise Counties, finding nothing that particularly appealed to them. Finally, they reached Buffalo Springs, in Clay County, and expressed a decision to turn back.

But here fate intervened again. As they were packing up their effects one morning, preparatory to going back, a wayfarer on horseback arrived at the Springs and, of course, stopped to get acquainted. They told him of their quest.

"Go on up into the Red River valley around Gilbert Creek," the stranger told them. "If what you find there does not look good to you, you will not find anything anywhere that does."

This was west and north of the then unincorporated Wichita County in Red River country. So they changed their plans again and journeyed on northwestward. After a day and a half, they came to the Wichita River and stopped to eat lunch before fording it. The Hawkins children, playing around the river bank, came running back with the news that the water was turning red. That meant that a rise was coming.

The two families hurriedly got their effects together so as to ford the stream before the high water came. They had a wagon with a "spike" team; that is, with two animals next to the vehicle, and a single animal in front of them. Young Hardin rode one of the wheel horses. The rising water frightened the lead horse and he came near wrecking the outfit by turning downstream. With some difficulty, the
crossing was effected. All waited, then, to see the water rise and in an hour or so the stream was almost bank-full.

The journey continued, passing close to where the Charlie community is now located and then on westward to the old Gilbert home, then occupied by the Thompsons. Hardin's eyes still lighted up, fifty-three years afterward, when he recalled how fair the country looked to him. The summer had been unusually wet and the grass was waist high in the river and creek bottoms. On the ridges, the grass was less profuse, but wild flowers abounded in great variety. The members of the party looked about them and then looked at each other. They were all of one mind. "This is the place! This is the place!"

A man named George W. Darby was living on a 125-acre tract just south of where Burkburnett now is. His home was a dugout located at or very near the site of the present playground where the highway turns north into the city. Darby was a homesteader having moved onto the land barely seven months before. His young son had died since he settled there and the bereavement made him want to leave. John G. Hardin bought his claim for one dollar an acre. He borrowed ten dollars from his brother-in-law, S. P. Hawkins, to bind the sale, agreeing to pay the remainder in December when he planned to return with his household effects. Hawkins paid two and a

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2Wichita Falls Daily Times, June 19, 1932, p. 5.
half dollars an acre for a large tract east of that bought by Hardin, buying it from E. Lewis.

The two families returned in December. Hardin lacked forty dollars having enough money to close the deal for his land, and again his brother-in-law helped him. The country was new, but there were a few families already located in that region. Besides the Thompsons there were the Dodsons, the McFarlands, and the Roddys. The previous year S. B. Burnett had acquired large holdings in Wichita County and was moving his cattle there from Denton County. Wichita Falls did not exist at that time. Hardin thinks there may have been one or two families there. It was shortly before J. H. Barwise came.

Hardin with his wife, Susan Gordelia, and their baby daughter, Dovey Eugenie, lived in the repaired dugout. It was twelve by fourteen feet. Its roof was made of timbers and logs covered with sod; the chimney was nothing but a hole. There was no door so they used a wagon sheet, and thereby hangs a tale:

The first winter there came a big snow. The wagon sheet entrance was covered with six inches of snow. Our cow was wandering around from the north side of the dugout to get out of the wind. She came stumbling down the steps into the dugout with us. She had fallen through the wagon sheet.

The following year the country seemed to emphasize the promise it had given the newcomers. Rain was plentiful and the corn was high and well-freighted. They gathered fifty bushels per acre, storing it in
an open crib which they built of logs and covering it with hay to protect it from the weather. The early fall was dry and the tall grass that grew so thick was a menace; if it ever caught fire, it would destroy the little homestead. Accordingly, Hardin set about to burn off some strips close to the shed and dugout. He finished his task and thought that he had put out all the fire. Back in the dugout he and Mrs. Hardin heard a roaring sound. They rushed up to the shed. The crib and the corn were enveloped in flames. Helpless and heartsick, they stood and watched the fruit of their harvest turn to ashes.

Probably they would have given up and left the country, but that was not so easy. They had little money, and grim as the prospect was if they stayed, it was no less grim if they moved. That 125 acres represented the sum total of their possessions.

They had to stay and make the best of things. There was no feed for their stock, but the animals could make out by foraging for themselves. Later in the year Hardin's father visited him and gave him five dollars wherewith to buy some feed. Additional families moved in. Among those that came and stayed was the Rexford family; others came and did not stay. Some moved back to East Texas or other states. Slowly but steadily, however, the country was settling up. Wichita Falls had come into being and was hailing the arrival of the railroad.
The country was still wild. From any vantage point, one could see thousands of antelopes on the prairies. Deer, turkey, and small game were plentiful. The years 1881 and 1882 were years of drouth, and crops were very scanty. This game that the country afforded was the chief source of food. Good years alternated with bad. When Hardin did not make a good corn crop, he had difficulty; but when he had a good harvest, he saved it and sold it to his less fortunate neighbors in bad years: he got two and a half for most of it. ³

Hardin thought that the winters were colder and the wind blew more strongly when he first came here. One day, Mrs. Hardin brought the feather bed out of the dugout and placed it on the pile of stovewood for airing. She forgot about it when a wind-storm developed; the wind picked it up and started across the prairie with it. There were no fences to obstruct its path, so on it blew. A neighbor named Phillips saw it and overtook it on his horse. It had blown to Cottonwood Creek, several miles away.

The buffalo, all except one old veteran, had left the country when Hardin arrived, but the bones of those that the "tongue and robe hunters" had slain were thick upon the prairie. When the drought of the early eighties killed the corn and other crops, these buffalo bones brought fifteen dollars a ton and were the only source of revenue.

³Ibid.
There was a market for them and a load of buffalo bones was the first east-bound shipment of freight from Wichita Falls after the railroad was built. The bones were hauled to Wichita Falls and stacked in enormous ricks close to the railroad tracks.

Sorrow came to Hardin in 1884, when his young wife died. Her grave was among the first in the little cemetery. The rigors of pioneer life were too rough for the Hardin babies, too. They soon followed their mother. Hardin, now alone, continued to farm, occasionally adding to his holdings. The influx of newcomers prompted him to open a little store in front of his home. Among other things such as blankets and corn meal and bacon and cartridges, his stock included some medicated bitters with a high alcoholic content. One day some Indians on the way home from Wichita Falls, camped on Gilbert Creek. Two of them came to the store and wanted some bitters. Hardin refused to sell them, knowing the danger of drunken Indians. The angry braves seized him and dragged him from the store, threatening to kill him if he did not sell them what they wanted. He persisted in his refusal, and finally they thought better of it and left him alone. The Indians really gave very little trouble. They were always riding to Wichita Falls after it was established, to get fire-water, and Gilbert, or Nesterville, was right on their route. Whenever they got hungry, they killed somebody's beef and ate, but the days of raids and killings were over.
The government issued good blankets to the Indians and they would bring them to Hardin's store to trade for whatever they wanted. These blankets were good and thick and very popular with the cowboys.

The settlers managed to get a school started, and a Baptist church also was organized. The first school was in a dugout but later a small frame building was erected near the cemetery. Classes were held several months each year, with about thirty pupils.

Among the applicants for the job of teacher was Mary Funk, whose parents lived on a farm south of Iowa Park. She had had some schooling in Virginia, and the trustees decided to employ her at thirty dollars a month. In 1887, she gave up school-teaching to become the wife of John G. Hardin.

For amusements, the community held fish fries on the river, went plum hunting, and shot deer and turkey. The creek bottoms over on the Oklahoma side were favorite hunting grounds for wild turkey. Usually, after Sunday church services, everybody would go to the home of someone for a community dinner. Such occasions were the height of social life. This was when the Burnett and Waggoner cowboys, like all cowboys, began to call the little settlement "Nesterville" because it had a dozen or more settled farmers. The name persisted for several years, although it was never official.

Hardin was now a prosperous wheat farmer. His 127 acres had increased to 4,000 acres; he owned a store, had a blacksmith shop,
and was postmaster. His wheat was so good that farmers came from miles around to buy it for seed. If the farmer had no money, Hardin would take a mortgage on his crop. Ever so often, he would climb into his buggy and take an inspection tour.  

One time he bought a 3,000-acre tract of land only to have the title contested. During the contest, Hardin had to borrow some money, paying ten per cent interest on the loan. That gave him an idea and from then on, when he got a little surplus on hand, he would lend it out with land as security.  

J. G. Hardin and his wife had no children of their own, but they reared three. One of these is O. L. Clark, who still resides on his ranch near Burkburnett. Clark says that when he was a boy, he thought trips in the wagon to Wichita Falls were wonderful. Hardin usually gave him fifty cents or two bits to spend. When they got back home, Hardin would ask O. L. what he had to show for his money. As there was usually nothing, Hardin would talk to him and try to give him advice on money. He said there were some people who just could not keep money; it burned their pockets. He said to always save a little of any money you get and put it to work. To a person who asked to what he attributed his success, he answered:

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5Wichita Falls Post, December 17, 1937, p. 2.
Early in life I discovered that there is a difference between spending money and investing it. Most people spend money in a way which does not yield proper returns, either in money or in comfort and happiness. Little, if wisely invested, can provide the real comfort of life. All spent above this brings anxieties and worries rather than happiness. All not needed should be invested to make more money.  

Hardin continued to add to his holdings and began to have some money to lend. Among his land purchases was 1,083 acres of the Dubose Survey, for which he paid three dollars per acre. Some of the county's most valuable oil tracts were later developed on this land. He had acquired about $800,000 before oil was discovered on his land.

When it was proposed to build the Wichita Falls and Northwestern, in 1907, residents of the community subscribed to a bonus for the builders. Hardin, who gave $1,000, was the largest single contributor. In 1907, he helped organize the First National Bank. He was its president for twenty-five years. He never lost more than $1,000 on bad loans. When the Fowler Gusher came in, Hardin owned land all around it. For leases on this property, he got as much as $1,000 an acre. He was now a millionaire, but his style of living did not change; simplicity was still the keynote of his life. As Burkburnett changed from the boom-town to a more stable type of community, Hardin and his wife assisted it in three ways: civic, educational, and religious.

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*Volume of Appreciation of Mr. and Mrs. J. G. Hardin, p. 2.*
First, they gave $35,000 for the erection of a municipal light plant. The name Hardin Municipal Light Plant extended across the building. Next, they endowed the Burkburnett Independent School District with a $142,000 fund. This was to be used exclusively to pay off the school indebtedness. Hardin helped build the athletic plant, too. It became the first lighted Class B plant in Texas. As Mrs. Hardin preceded Hardin in death, he gave his house and the surrounding acres to be used for a park. Three churches—the Baptist, the Methodist, and the Church of Christ—of Burkburnett were enabled to retire their building debts through the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Hardin. They assumed the obligations for the three denominations, amounting to approximately $65,950.

Very few people execute their own wills. However, at the age of seventy Hardin decided that a man who had had the business acumen to acquire several millions of dollars should be wise enough to administer his own estate, and he set about to do this very thing. In a period of five years he and his wife gave away approximately four million dollars. They gave $1,250,000 to Buckner Orphans' Home, Dallas, Texas; $850,000 was given to Baylor University at Waco; $250,000 to Simmons University in Abilene; $125,000 to Baylor College for Women, Belton; $160,000 to Abilene Christian College, Abilene; and a $900,000 trust fund was set up for several institutions and causes.

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7 Burkburnett Star, June 17, 1937, p. 5.
In recognition of Hardin's generosity, Simmons University changed its name to "Hardin-Simmons." Abilene Christian College dedicated its administration building in memory of Hardin's first wife. Baylor College for Women changed to "Mary Hardin-Baylor."

When asked why he gave his money to so many schools, Hardin said that when a boy he did not get to attend school much. And what schooling he did get was in a log schoolhouse in West Tennessee, where he went to school three months and worked nine. He had a desire to help others receive that which he was not privileged to have—an education. He and his wife helped a number of young women to go to school. Hardin was partial to girls and his wife was partial to boys.

The Hardin Foundation for Wichita County provides for Hardin Junior College. This has been incorporated into Midwestern University. It has grown rapidly and began to offer graduate work for the first time in 1952.

Mary Catherine Hardin died August 26, 1935, and Hardin in 1937. One of his last public appearances was when he wielded a silver spade in turning soil for the construction of a building for Hardin Junior College.

Hardin died at the age of eighty-three years. Representatives of all the endowed institutions attended his funeral. He was placed by his wife's side in the cemetery of their home town, Burkburnett. As Governor
James V. Allred said in remarks made at the memorial service for this great philanthropist: "Hardin built his own monument." 8

Another man who made a notable contribution to the history of the region was the man for whom the town was named. Burke Burnett belonged to a family who found pioneer life appealing and moved west as each frontier opened up. Jerry Burnett left Virginia before the Mexican War and settled in Missouri. There in Bates County, in January, 1849—the first day of the year—Burke was born. He spent his boyhood on the range. He had few scholastic advantages, but he learned thoroughly all the lessons of frontier life. After his father's home had been wrecked during 1857-1858, the family decided to move and the early days of 1859 found them jolting southward across Indian Territory in a wagon. They settled on Denton Creek in North Texas.

In 1866, Jerry Burnett gave his son fifty dollars per month to drive 1,700 head of cattle to Abilene, Kansas. Over the Chisholm Trail the herd was driven northward, Burke returning to Texas with a good profit in his pocket. For this his father gave him an interest in the stock being held on Denton Creek. The herd grew rapidly for the next few years, and he was in a good position to take a profit from cattle when the trail opened to Kansas. 9

8Wichita Falls Post, December 17, 1937, p. 1.
9C. L. Douglas, Cattle Kings of Texas, p. 351.
He drove 1,100 steers to Wichita, Kansas, in 1873. He arrived at the rail terminal at an unfortunate time, during the market jam of that year, and he could not sell at even fair prices. After a few weeks, seeing that expenses were eating the heads off two or three steers a day, he dropped back to winter on the Osage Reservation in the Territory. In the fall, with a year's weight on his stock, he sold in Wichita and profited $10,000. From Kansas City he brought back side saddles, gold rings, and silk coats to his sisters and mother.

That winter Burke Burnett bought 1,300 head of steers on the Nueces and Rio Grande Rivers and drove them north to fatten on the Little Wichita. He was among the first in Texas to buy and feed steers in Texas for market.

Later, Burnett described the look of his new range:

I recollect as distinctly as if it were yesterday when I drove my first herd of cattle into that territory. My journey ended in the vicinity of the present location of Wichita Falls, and it would be hard to imagine a lonelier or more desolate place. At one time the buffaloes were so numerous and threatened so much injury to cattle that I actually had a Mexican employed to follow me around with a large seamless sack filled with cartridges in order to do away with the buffaloes more speedily. On one occasion we killed 300 buffaloes before driving them from the herd.

Owing to the defeat of the Quanah Parker Comanches that year by General R. S. Mackenzie in Tule Canyon, the country was becoming much safer and Burnett began buying many steers and fattening them for market. It was a new method for that part of the country, and it worked
successfully; but the great drought of 1881 forced Burnett up to Red River. In the meantime Burnett bought land which could be obtained then at prices as low as twenty-five cents an acre. His holdings extended irregularly from the Wichita River to the Red, comprising about 43,000 acres. They were stocked with about 6,000 head of cattle and 1,000 head of horses. The cattle were just range stock of no particular breed, but when Burnett got things going, he started breeding up his cattle and got several head of Durham bulls.

A great deal of this land was purchased for as little as twenty-five cents an acre. He established headquarters near the place that became Wichita Falls and hauled the lumber for his house from Fort Worth—125 miles away. Burke Burnett's brand has always been the Four Sixes—6666. The story of how it originated may not be true, but it makes a good legend, anyway. Back in the early days, a young cowboy by the name of Burke Burnett, who was just getting his start in the cattle business, rode into the village of Fort Worth one morning bent on indulging his skill in the favorite game of range-poker. At one of the many gaming tables, then wide open to the public, he invested in a sombrero full of chips. At first he lost heavily; then the game became variable. About midnight, his luck had changed and by daylight he had a barrel full of money.

One of his opponents was desperate. "Burke," he said, "I'm broke, but I'll play my ranch and cattle against your pile."
"You've made a bet," was the reply.

On the ensuing deal, Burke Burnett drew two sixes. He discarded three other cards, keeping the pair. Then he drew two more sixes. The four sixes won the ranch. Immediately, the story goes on, Burke rebranded the cattle he had won with his lucky number—6666! In time, he increased his holdings until he had three hundred thousand acres in the Indian Territory stocked with Four Sixes' cattle besides an enormous ranch in North Texas. An oil field came in on his land and a boom city, Burkburnett, sprang up. When his widow died only a few years ago, she left several million dollars to Texas Christian University—probably the best poker hand that a Christian institution ever drew! 10

The middle eighties brought great expansion to the 6666 ranch.

With his neighbor, D. Waggoner and Son, he went into Kiowa and Comanche reservations to lease 300,000 acres of grazing land. His father-in-law, M. B. Loyd, was interested in this adventure.

This piece of land was called the Big Pasture. In 1900, the government had set aside 480,000 acres of pastureland in four huge pastures for the common use of the Indians. The number-one pasture was the Big Pasture west of Lawton. It contained 414,300 acres. 11

Three tracts of 100,000 acres and one big tract of 400,000 acres were reserved for the Kiowas and Comanches for grazing. It ran from

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11 Jonnie Morgan, History of Wichita Falls, p. 81.
the western section of Oklahoma to the Washita River, and on for ten miles south of Lawton. 12

Burke took a leading part in the land-leasing program. He was a friend to Quanah Parker and acted as liaison agent between cattle men and Indians who named him "Massa-suta Burnett," meaning "Big Boss" or "He says so."

He would meet with the Waggoners, Suggs, and Herrings to discuss problems. Then Burnett would meet the Comanche chief and close the deals. Leases were made from the head men through the tribal agencies and payments were made direct to the Indians.

Tom Slack of Fort Worth accompanied Burnett on one of the annual pay-offs and he describes it thus:

I was working for Mr. Loyd in the California and Texas Bank at Fort Worth in the late 'eighties and I recall that when Burnett and I left Fort Worth we carried two satchels filled with currency. . . . his share of the lease money. We traveled to Wichita Falls on the Fort Worth and Denver and met other cattlemen at the 6666 Headquarters, near the present location of Burk Burnett. Next morning all the cattlemen belted on their six-shooters, took up their Winchesters and satchels of currency, boarded hacks and crossed the Red River to be met on the Territory bank by an escort of cavalry from Fort Sill. Then we were escorted to the Indian agency at Anadarko.

The Comanches and Kiowas were waiting and for three days we passed ten-dollar bills through the windows at the agency—ten dollars a head on presentation of the ration tickets the government issued to Indians in those days. Some of the Comanches opposed the leasing and were too proud to take the money and we came to the end of the payment with a

12 Ibid., p. 84.
good surplus on hand. The cattlemen turned this money over to the government to be credited to the tribes.

Jonnie Morgan in *History of Wichita Falls* says that Burnett, T. Waggoner, and Cal Suggs had to have gold and silver instead of currency and each of the Indians—two thousand of them—had to have a separate bag.

The handling of the Indians required a certain amount of tact and diplomacy and sometimes Tom Waggoner and Burke Burnett would bring their friend Quanah Parker into Fort Worth for a cattlemen’s convention or to see the sights of the city—and one of these trips almost cost the Comanche chief the loss of his prestige in the tribe.

Another chief, Yellow Bear, accompanied him on this ill-fated junket, and when the two retired for the first night at the old Delaware Hotel, Yellow Bear, unaccustomed to the innovations of civilization, blew out the gas jet instead of turning the stop-cock. In the morning Yellow Bear was found dead, but physicians succeeded in bringing Quanah, who had staggered to a window, back from the borders of the Happy Hunting Grounds.

Yellow Bear was a great man in the tribe, and when his body was returned to the reservation, Quanah, who accompanied it, was treated with a distinct coolness. The head man gave him to understand that his version of Yellow Bear’s death just would not go down. They could not be asked to believe that a man could blow out a fire and then lie
down and die. The loss of Quanah's prestige looked serious until some Fort Worth cattlemen carried to the reservation two big bottles of ammonia. These, they placed under the noses of certain headmen to prove that "bad air" could be a very real and terrible thing.  

Burnett, Waggoner, Suggs, Addington, and Stinson joined forces to lease land north of Red River on which to run their cattle. For about thirty days, they negotiated with the Comanches and the Kiowas before a satisfactory deal involving about 200,000 acres was concluded. It was slow work because the Indians wanted every thing understood, and they could feast on the white men's beef as long as the negotiations were in progress.

One provision in the lease contract, T. W. Roberts recalled, allowed the Texans to build fences for corrals, feed-lots, and the like. It delayed consummation of the contract for many days because the Indians could not understand it.

"White man's words mean too many things," one of the Indian chieftains complained. "When an Indian say 'fence' he mean one thing; when white man say 'fence' he mean thirty things."

The lease was to run for six years at six cents an acre. There was a provision that each of the white men hire six Indians as hands. One of them was to receive thirty-five dollars each month and the rest were to get twenty-five. Roberts recalled that the Indians thus

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hired were not worth such wages, which were rather above labor costs, but they got their way just the same. 14

One day about one hundred horses belonging to the Burnett ranch got out of a corral and wandered over into the Indian country. Roberts and others went over the river after them. The Indians had picked up most of them and readily returned them. They were so nice about it that Burnett thought that he should reciprocate. Accordingly, he invited ten or twelve of them to accompany him to Fort Worth as his guests. Chief Santataka and some other Comanches accepted and made the trip and were shown some cowtown hospitality in a big way.

While they were in Fort Worth, some Indians crossed Red River and ran off some of Burnett's cattle. Some of them were recovered; some were slaughtered and eaten by the raiders. Burnett, naturally, was not pleased over the incident and when he and Santataka returned, he complained to the chief about it.

Santataka, with the pleasure of the trip vivid in his mind, made what he thought was a very fair proposition. For every cow missing, he would undertake to see that one Indian would be killed—ten dead cows, ten dead Indians. He was determined to show the white man that he understood the amenities.

Burnett insisted that no homicide was necessary, but the chief insisted until it was discovered that the cattle thieves were his own

14Wichita Falls Daily Times, June 19, 1932, p. 5.
men—fellow Comanches and fellow tribesmen. When the interpreter told Santataka about this, the chief pondered this fact at some length. It offered quite a problem: he had told the white man he would kill an Indian for each missing cow, and now it developed that his own folks, so to speak, were guilty. Finally he spoke: "Now we are friends, aren't we? If a man can't eat his friend's cattle, whose cattle can he eat?"

The Burnett brand is 6666, placed on the right side of the cattle. Before the coming of the railroad to Wichita Falls, the Burnett cattle were sold on the ranch to drovers and were driven to Kansas markets. When the railroad came, they were sold direct to market.

By 1895, the 6666 Ranch embraced 35,000 acres of land, 25,000 head of Durham and Hereford cattle, and 2,000 head of horses and mules. Fifteen hundred head of cattle, averaging 1,300 pounds in weight, were sent to market at times. The first ranch house built by Burke Burnett on his 6666 Ranch was located a short distance northeast of Burkburnett to the right of the bridge as one approaches the Texas side. The house was a romantic adventure: it was the first frame one within a radius of many miles and it had the first non-native chinaberry trees planted around it. The farm on which this home was located provided food and cattle feed and maintained a small dairy for milk.  

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Burnett built a ranch house and a wild-horse stockade northwest of the present town of Burkburnett on Wildhorse Creek. From this center he directed the activities of his enormous ranch.

In 1904, Burnett and Waggoner had an invitation to go hunting with Theodore Roosevelt. Colonel Lyon, who owned Lyon Park, located between Sherman and Denison, Texas, was both a National Guard Commander and a National Republican Committeeman. He had watched John A. Abernathy catch wolves with his bare hands there, on exhibition, and told Roosevelt about seeing a Texas cowboy do this unusual stunt. The President expressed the wish to see the trick performed and plans were made for the President to hunt in Texas and Louisiana. Abernathy selected the Big Pasture as the most desirable place. The nearest train depot was Frederick, Oklahoma. 16

En route to Frederick, Roosevelt addressed the people of Wichita Falls. He reached Frederick at two o'clock in the afternoon and bands were playing and people who had come from miles around were cheering. Roosevelt made a speech, and among those seated on the grandstand with the President were Colonel Cecil A. Lyon, Captain S. B. Burnett, Tom Waggoner, Lieut. B. L. Fortesque, U. S. A., a Rough Rider, Dr. Alexander Lambert of New York, Sloan Simpson, a Rough Rider, and Quanah Parker, chief of the Comanche Indians, with three of his wives and one baby.

Abernathy had selected Deep Red Creek, eighteen miles east of Frederick, for the campsite. Soldiers from Fort Sill were on duty, patrolling the borders of the Big Pasture. Everything was ready when camp was reached. Pullman-car waiters and cooks furnished the meals, which were served on a long table in the dining tent, one of fifteen. The next day the party hunted south toward Red River. Soon two gray wolves were sighted. After a mile-and-half-chase, Abernathy leaped from his horse and caught the wolf by the under jaw and held the animal up for the President to see. The President asked all the boys to stand back and Dr. Lambert took a picture of just the President and Abernathy. 17

But all did not go peacefully among the cattlemen themselves on the Kiowa-Comanche wide ranges. Burnett and Cal Suggs, the dark-haired giant from the San Angelo country, were continually at loggerheads over fence lines and lease boundaries. Although they often met in general lease discussions, each in time came to regard the other as "Personal Enemy Number One."

On one occasion, after a particularly bitter quarrel, they met in a hotel and both men drew at the same instant. Tom Waggoner, so the story goes, stepped between them and averted what might have been a tragedy. 18

17 Ibid., p. 107.

18 C. L. Douglas, Cattle Kings of Texas, p. 355.
Another incident showing the enmity between the two cattle outfits occurred in the First National Bank of Decatur, where a back-room meeting was held on lease matters. At one side of the table sat Dan Waggoner; across was Tom Yarbrough, late president of the First National Bank in Fort Worth.

A few minutes after these two gentlemen had seated themselves, the other conferees arrived—Burnett and Suggs (Ike, not Cal). They took seats across from each other, but not before each had shifted his six-shooter around to the front. Throughout the meeting they exchanged no word, each addressing his remarks to Dan Waggoner.

This was an important meeting for, at the turn of the century, Washington had sent orders for the cattlemen to vacate their leases in the Kiowa-Comanche country in preparation for the government's plan to open the area to homesteaders. If forced to move at once, the cattlemen would lose large sums of money. A special appeal was made through Senator Joe Bailey, and Burnett, Waggoner, and some of the others were granted a two-year stay. At the end of that time the various outfits moved back across the Texas line. Both the 6666 and the DDD resumed operations on home ranges, but Burnett felt cramped. He decided to move farther west where there was more room.

For this reason, when Kell and Kemp of Wichita Falls wanted to build a railroad over Red River into the Big Pasture, Burnett sold them his ranch. Kemp and Kell paid eighteen dollars an acre for it and cut
it up into 160-acre tracts to be sold to farmers. The Red River Land Company was formed to handle these transactions. 19

When the time came for marketing the farm lands, J. G. Donaghey, then of Kansas City, who was handling the property for the townsite company, suggested to Kemp and Kell that they reserve the mineral rights. At that time there was no oil in Northwest Texas except that at Petrolia, and no one except perhaps Donaghey dreamed that rich pools of oil underlay the Red River valley farms. Kemp and Kell did not take the suggestion seriously.

Burnett told Kell he wanted a town named for him because it would be on his former ranch. Kell promised, and when the site was selected, an application was made for the town to be called "Burk." This was rejected because there was already a "Burke." "Burke Burnett" was suggested, then, as the name of the proposed settlement, but officials in Washington cited a rule against double names and said that "Burke Burnett" was too long, anyhow. They suggested that the town be called "Gilbert."

It so happened that C. W. Merchant, rancher and banker of Abilene, Texas, happened to be in Washington, D. C., and called on President Roosevelt, who had long been a friend of Burke Burnett. Merchant told of the difficulty in selecting a name for the settlement,

19Wichita Falls Daily Times, June 19, 1932, p. 5.
and Roosevelt, with characteristic energy, called in his secretary and dictated a letter to the Post Office Department requesting that they approve the name of "Burke Burnett." The department did so, but obtained the President's consent to running the words together to make one word—"Burkburnett."  

The community was very small, with just one store, when the railroad came. It was laid off into town lots, and the town-lot sale was a memorable occasion. Several thousand people gathered to hear the high-hatted stentorian auctioneer brought from St. Louis for the occasion.

There were interruptions. Occasionally a rattlesnake would crawl out of a hole close to where the crowd was, and the auctioneer would have to pause until it was killed and the attending commotion subsided. Also, there was a barrel of whiskey and some of the part-takers created a little disturbance.

The first lot, in what was to be the business district, was bought by Burke Burnett himself for $1,000. That price was not accepted by the crowd as a criterion of values: $500 was the limit for everybody except Colonel Burnett.

The Big Pasture was opened formally and the land sold December 6, 1906. The price of the land averaged twelve dollars, the highest

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price paid for government land. Congress provided for the establish-
ment of townsites to be named Randlett, after the Secretary of the In-
terior, and Quanah and Ahpeatone after Indians. This area now makes
up Tillman, Cotton, Comanche, Stephens, and Jefferson Counties,
including the south end of Caddo County and the west end of Grady. 

Burnett and his first wife had three children. When they were
divorced, he married Mary Gouts Barradale of Weatherford, Texas.
The latter portion of Burke Burnett's life was spent in Fort Worth,
where he built a mansion and an office building, but he made frequent
trips between the city and headquarters of the 6666.

One time Burnett had his old friend Dan Waggoner over to dinner.
When Burnett invited him, he promised something that Waggoner had
never eaten before. Waggoner came, the meal was put on the table,
and as they finished eating, Waggoner said, "That was a fair meal, but
I did not eat anything that I had never eaten before."

Burke laughed and said, "Oh, yes, you did! That was one of
your own beeves." This was considered a prime joke, for ranchmen of
the times would, in the words of one of them, "as leave eat one of my
own children as one of my own beeves." 

Before Burke Burnett died, he saw his ranch become one of the
greatest in Texas. Under the estate, it remains, even now, one of the

\[21\] Ibid., pp. 294-296.

\[22\] Curtis Bishop, "This Day in Texas," Austin American, June 1,
1951, p. 4.
larger kingdoms. Its present headquarters are at Guthrie in King County, but the 400,000-acre domain extends into three other counties—Hutchinson, Wichita, and Carson—and the brand of the 6666 is still on Hereford hides which go to market.

Tom Burnett, a son by Burnett's first marriage, lived between Iowa Park and Electra until he died in 1939. People riding by, on their way between Wichita Falls and Electra, always notice the big barn on the right side of the highway with four enormous sixes on the roof.

Burke Burnett died in Fort Worth in June of 1922, and among his various bequests he left the city a downtown park as a memorial to Burke, Jr., a son of his second marriage. Mrs. Burnett gave great sums of money to Texas Christian University.

The little boy who had taken a herd of cattle up the Chisholm Trail at seventeen years of age had realized many dreams and become one of the wealthiest men in Texas, but when the end of the trail came for him, he said to one of his friends, Mose Littleton, "I am worth a million dollars, yet I can't hire anyone for a slick quarter to die for me."²³

CHAPTER IV

THE AFTER-BOOM ERA, 1922-1937

The after-boom era is the most interesting and revealing period in the history of a city. Suddenly, in 1922, when the schools were forced to close, the people of Burkburnett realized that the greatest advantages had not been achieved during the boom period. From that moment, a more progressive and co-operative program of civic improvement followed. Schools were rebuilt, paving programs finished, a city hall erected, and an adequate water system installed. By these changes the city was transformed from a mess of mud and social conflict into a town proud of its achievement.

There was still much drilling going on, but it had resolved into orderly and methodical work by big companies like Magnolia, Texas, and Gulf. Many of the derricks had been removed and pumps were in their places. Strangers were startled by the constant coughing and puffing of pumps that drew oil from the earth. Like leeches they sucked the precious fluid from holes with pumping rods like tentacles, holding the farm land in their grip.¹

¹Wichita Falls Daily Times.
Strangers saw, from the train, a hundred or more of these pumps performing their silent task with no evident power. There was the pump, its lever moving up and down, controlled by long rods from pump to pump, probably moved by a gasoline engine one-half mile away. There were three or four hundred of these pumps, and more were installed as wells were finished.²

The chaotic experiences of the boom days were not all futile. Out of that crazy-quilt pattern emerged a new type of citizens creating a community that would be solid and real. From the stress of that period of great wealth and great suffering had developed a determination to build for the future.

This did not mean that Burkburnett had lost the romance of yesterday: the citizens had not settled into complacency, nor had they sighed with relief that the pressure of the boom days had been lifted. On the other hand, the new Burkburnett was one that was aggressively marching toward definite goals. This new spirit was, in its way, like that of the pioneers. When the boom was over, the community had the same headache that any other community had after prosperity, but when the wealth-seeking horde disappeared, the homemaker stayed—men and women really interested in permanency.

By July, 1919, Burkburnett was getting down to civic improvement: brick buildings were replacing the shacks. The water works was being

² Oil Weekly, July 26, 1919, pp. 2-3.
enlarged, the Chamber of Commerce was organized, and about 75,000 acres of wheat had been planted.  

It had taken from July, 1918, to February to make any visible progress on the road from Wichita Falls to Burk Burnett. On February 12, Potts and Prentice, road contractors, started laying concrete on the Burk Burnett road just north of Wichita Falls city limits. All grading had been completed and sub-grading was being done just ahead of laying concrete.  

The daily average of the week's oil production for February 1 was 130,230 barrels for Wichita County and 34,070 barrels for Burk Burnett. The blue-noses had been busy, too: H. D. Howard was fined $580 for violating the Sunday law concerning the showing of motion pictures on Sundays. The picture of Clara Smith Hamon was showing during the week of February 3 against the wishes of the women of the town. J. A. D. Smith, who brought in several big wells, filed a bankrupt petition listing assets at $787,777 and liabilities at $1,690,989.  

There had been a severe epidemic of smallpox among the squatters on the oil-field leases, in 1922. M. M. Walker, county health officer at the time, found one woman who threatened to shoot him with a shotgun if he tried to move her and her children. Nine victims were moved to the county pest-house. One man at Bradley's Corners who had

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the terrible disease was standing in front of a dance hall. The proprietor asked him to move on, and when he refused, the owner pulled a pistol and shot him. Another smallpox victim was found on his way to Newtown with a tintype camera, soliciting business. He was hastily corralled and taken to the pest-house.

By 1924, the oil fields were producing more than 20,000 barrels daily. Seven crude-oil refineries and fourteen casinghead gasoline plants were in operation in the field with combined incomes of $7,500,000. The output of the refineries at that time approximated 7,500 barrels daily; the output of the casinghead was more than 100,000 gallons daily. 6

A committee appointed by the business council of the Burkburnett Chamber of Commerce met with officials of the Southwestern Telephone Company at Wichita Falls and insisted on the installation of the "self-starter" telephone system for Burkburnett. 7

Superintendent W. B. Hogg was re-elected for the term of 1926-1927.

The old wooden tollbridge which once had been such a great convenience had served its purpose well, but by 1927 this section had expanded to such proportions that, as early as 1922, when the pavement was built on the river road, people wanted a free bridge. Texas,

6 Burkburnett Star, October 23, 1925.
7 Burkburnett Star, June 17, 1932, p. 1.
however, objected to building such a structure on soil belonging to the State of Oklahoma.

In 1924, a special law was passed enabling the Highway Commission of Oklahoma, the Highway Commission of Texas, Cotton County, and Wichita County to get together on the proposition. The Wichita Falls Chamber of Commerce enlisted the Senator's help by a trip to Washington and got the co-operation of Oklahoma officials. It was agreed that the Federal Government was to pay one-fourth, Oklahoma one-fourth, Texas one-fourth, and Wichita County (Precincts One and Two), the other one-fourth. 8

As soon as Wichita County asked for bids, the owners of the tollbridge brought suit against the Texas Highway Department. By means of an injunction, a restraining order was issued enjoining the state from paying the allotment of $163,000 on the project. The court quoted Section Ten of Article Four of the Texas Constitution.

The time was used for readvertisement of bids in Wichita County newspapers and Cotton County newspapers. The county's right to control bridge tolls was denied because Judge P. A. Martin said that Wichita County was not empowered to control tollbridges across Red River. As only eighteen feet of the bridge were in Texas, the bridge was an instrument of interstate commerce and was therefore under the

control of Congress. An appeal was taken from the decision of the district court.

An agreement was finally reached whereby the owners of the tollbridge were to receive $20,000 for relinquishing all claims against the bridge builders. This was to be paid at the completion of the new bridge.

Finally, the bridge was finished. It was 3,680 feet long and nineteen feet wide, with the height of the railing twenty-four inches above the base. Concrete pilings, reinforced with steel, sustained the bridge. These pilings were square, tapering at the bottom. These were driven eight feet into the shale below the sand. The floor of the bridge was twenty feet above the normal water mark, and from seven to nine feet above the highest water level on record. Wings serving as breakwaters were built upstream to keep the flood waters in channels.

Just as there had been a celebration when the tollbridge was finished, there was one, now, that the free bridge was completed. Distinguished guests were several members of the State Highway Commissions of Oklahoma and Texas, and Governor H. S. Johnston of Oklahoma. 9

The parade started at 9:30 a.m. The United States flag was followed by the flags of Texas and Oklahoma. The boys' Interstate

9Ibid.
Band furnished music. There were decorated floats and very old and very new cars.

B. D. Sartain of Wichita Falls recounted the history of the bridge. Inspection started at twelve o'clock. A rodeo began at two o'clock in the afternoon. At 2:45, Burkburnett played Waurika in a football contest. All of this celebration was climaxed by a fireworks display at nine! The new bridge was firmly launched!

The following statistics concerning the bridge may be of interest:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Bridge</th>
<th>Cost of Bridge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost of bridge proper</td>
<td>$327,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of approach on Texas side</td>
<td>5,940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of approach on Oklahoma side</td>
<td>3,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$336,440</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Length of bridge (steel and concrete)........... 3,680 feet
Length of Oklahoma approach (fill)............. 1,200 feet
Length of Texas approach....................... 600 feet
Number of concrete spans....................... 90
Width of bridge (inside)....................... 19 feet
Width of bridge (outside)...................... 21 feet
Length of spans .................. 40 feet
Height of railing above base .......... 24 feet

With the completion of this bridge, Burkburnett's trade radius was extended for many miles; southern Oklahoma immediately began coming over into Texas for trading purposes.

A volunteer fire department was organized in October, 1927. A. H. Wade was the first president. The commission and city manager plan of government was put into effect in May, 1923. The city manager for 1923 was R. L. Brumley; for 1925-1926, J. J. Engelman; for 1926-1929, W. A. Roberts; and for 1929-1932, R. P. Reagan.

The Oscar Frye Post # 264 of the American Legion was organized October 20, 1925, by seventeen ex-service men who met in the city hall. By 1932, there were 170 members.

The Methodist Church was dedicated in 1925. Mother Majors, who lived in the village of Burkburnett when it was organized, told how the first $150 was raised for the church building. The few members served a big dinner. For some reason the flies were very bad. After every one had eaten heartily, H. A. Boaz, who later became a Methodist bishop, took charge of the meeting. He told the people that

Ibid.
every time they raised their hand to swat a fly, they had to donate five dollars. Several forgot and, of course, laughingly donated a five spot. When the meeting finished, they had $150.

In 1927, there were three cotton gins in Burk Burnett and by October, 3,480 bales of cotton had been ginned. Growers were getting twenty and one-half cents per pound that year.

A Chevrolet sedan, in 1927, cost $807.56. At the M-system Grocery ten pounds of sugar could be purchased for sixty-nine cents; potatoes were two cents a pound; onions were three cents a pound; a chuck roast cost sixteen cents a pound; round or T-bone steaks cost twenty-five cents per pound; twelve pounds of flour cost fifty-six cents.

Adams' Rexall Drug Store had just received some popular platters recorded by some blackface comedians called "The Two Black Crows" who later became well-known as Amos 'n' Andy. The schools had 1,600 pupils enrolled and four modern buildings. The population of the town was 5,000. There were five churches with strong congregations. The postal receipts for the year 1927 were $22,000. There were fifty-five blocks of pavement and at least one hundred business firms. The old Main Street of 1910 with its windmill in the middle and telephone poles on each side would not have recognized itself. The street had been paved, the telephone poles removed to the alleys, and derricks stood one block from Main on Fourth Street. Drilling
operations were active: several wells were drilling in the Red River bed near Bridgetown.

A well had been spudded in at two hundred feet on a cable-tool test on the Lillie Morgan land in Block 818. This Lillie Morgan moved to the Burkburnett country when it was first settled. Her husband died and she went right on with farming and cattle raising. W. A. Roberts said that he used to buy corn from her. The only way they had to measure it was to fill three barrels full of corn and then divide the weight by three. Mrs. Morgan helped load the corn as if it were an everyday occurrence. Her well came in a gusher and her son is a very wealthy citizen of Burkburnett today. 11

In 1933, the depression hit Burkburnett, too. The city went into receivership. In the municipality's voluntary petition of bankruptcy, City Manager Ross Reagan was appointed receiver by Judge Irvin J. Vogel after a hearing in the 78th District Court.

The petition set out that the bond principal, interest, and outstanding warrants of the city aggregated about $330,000. Each year $11,000 was required for operating expenses and an additional $30,000 to meet the bonded debt. The city's total property valuation for taxes allowed by law was less than $1,000,000, and the maximum tax allowed by law—$1.50 on the one-hundred-dollar valuation—

would bring in less than $15,000 annually even if it were collected one hundred per cent.

The Texas law provides that where a municipality goes into receivership, the receiver must pay the city's running expenses, and then apply any surplus toward the bonded debt. In an editorial by the editor of the local newspaper, Fred Brookman said: "The Star takes off its hat to the city officials for having chitlings enough to look the facts straight in the face and meet the issue in a business-like way."\(^\text{12}\)

Having hit bottom, so to speak, Burkburnett now began its slow pull toward stability and a more limited prosperity.

In 1937, the Burkburnett Chamber of Commerce was very busy. The original organization of the Chamber of Commerce had been a business and professional league organized early in the history of the town. This league served the same purpose that the later organization has served. It was not until July 11, 1930, that the group received its official charter from the State of Texas as the Chamber of Commerce. The application was prepared at the county courthouse the ninth of July, and the Secretary of State granted the petition for charter two days later. The activities included every phase of community work for the promotion of the civic and social welfare of Burkburnett and the area. The program for 1937 had for its major project the state highway from Burkburnett to Vernon via Harrold. The Chamber of

\(^{12}\) Burkburnett Star, October 6, 1933, p. 2.
Commerce had been instrumental in securing the designation of the route as State Highway Number 240 during 1936, and hoped to bring the process of hard-surfacing to completion in the near future.  

Because 1937 was the thirtieth birthday of Burkburnett, a big homecoming was held. It was a homecoming in a real sense for thousands. People who met here for a few years during the boom or in earlier days greeted their friends. Together they celebrated the founding of the city and the years of community building. The old-timers were guests at many special events and in their honor the opening event, a chuck-wagon dinner, was held.

Of course, there was a big parade including a group of soldiers from Fort Sill and Quanah Parker's son and his Indians. The firemen staged a game of water polo; all visitors over fifty years old were asked to take part in a tug of war, Oklahoma against Texas.

An advertisement in the *Wichita Falls Record News* stated that all Northwest Texas owed a debt of gratitude to Burkburnett for, since the blowing in of the first oil well drilled in that territory at dawn on July 1, 1912, the Burkburnett field had contributed more than one hundred million barrels of oil to the wealth of this section!

By now, people knew that Burkburnett would not only live but develop into a solid, if not very large, community. A very normal

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13 *Wichita Falls Record News*, June 17, 1937, pp. 9-10.
maturity had followed her hectic, often violent, adolescence. Her progress, from 1937 onward, was steady and evenly developed in all directions.
If a person approaches Burkburnett from the Oklahoma side, he will come to a rise about three fourths of a mile from the Oklahoma-Texas bridge. From this elevation in the spring and fall he will see the prettiest view that Burkburnett affords.

Red River, here, is mostly dry except for two narrow currents. Salt cedar and cottonwoods grow far out in the stream and on up the bluffs on the western side.

The town seems to lie in a valley and as one enters it, looks like the hundreds of other little western towns in Texas. Good pavement leads right up to Main Street, and the marker with the town's name and population says: "Burkburnett, Population 4,516."

The streets of Burkburnett run parallel with its only railroad, the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas, and have a big curve in them for that reason. Streets running in an easterly-westerly direction are named with Arabic numerals; streets running in a northerly-southerly direction are named after letters of the alphabet.

About seven years ago Roselawn addition was opened. It is now entirely built up and, in the last two years, two more additions have
been started: the Thompson addition and Meadow Lane. These, too, are rapidly being filled up.

The vacant lots along all the streets are disappearing, too. The main reason for this is that many officers from Sheppard Field in Wichita Falls build homes in Burkburnett. They prefer small towns; they obtain "G. I." loans and build houses costing from $7,000 to $8,000. If they are transferred, they simply sell the house and build another wherever they are transferred.

Sheppard Field Air Force Base is in Wichita Falls, fourteen miles away, but for the last twelve years it has affected the development of Burkburnett greatly. At least ten per cent of the people work at the base as civilian employees. At five in the afternoon there is a steady stream of traffic from the field to Burkburnett. This is good, because the payroll of civilian employees from Sheppard Field who live in Burkburnett is $60,000 a month.¹

The soldiers living in Burkburnett help business, too, because they buy practically all of their groceries there, and some clothes and gasoline. They have had one unfortunate effect, however. That is to raise the price of rent property.

Ever since the Second World War, almost every one in Burkburnett has had or built rent property. Because there is a steady demand, rents have always been very high. These high rents caused

¹J. V. Brookshear, President of First National Bank, Burkburnett, personal interview, May 29, 1952.
the Office of Rent Stabilization to investigate the rents during the spring of 1952. This office issued a certification of rent schedules to the landlords. This did not freeze rent schedules, however, because there were too many loopholes for the landlords. 2

Personnel in the army from sergeants up, are allowed so much extra for rent. The property owners soon found out how much this was and demanded it. This practice has made conditions very hard on privates and white-collar workers.

There are not very many wealthy men in Burkburnett now, because most of them who made fortunes in oil have moved to Wichita Falls. There is no "Silk Stocking Row." There are several nice homes but no mansions. There are some attractive yards but, except in the older parts of town, there are no large trees.

The city owns its own electric plant and water works. John G. Hardin gave the light plant to the town in 1933. Some citizens say that money is lost because the upkeep of the light plant is too much for a small town; but sentimentalists voted to keep it. Now Burkburnett has the Texas Electric Company besides its own plant.

Below is reproduced the city manager's monthly report for April, 1952:

2 Burkburnett Star, February 7, 1952, p. 3.
Income:

- Electric Fund: $6,361.11
- Water Works Fund: 4,872.88
- Sewer-Sanitary Fund: 1,112.75
- General Fund: 2,303.00

Total Income: $14,694.74

Expenditures:

- Electric Fund: $6,037.04
- Water Works Fund: 4,827.00
- Sewer-Sanitary Fund: 698.49
- General Fund: 1,738.99

Total Expenditures: $13,301.52

Operating Fund, Cash Balances as of Close of Business, April 30, 1952:

- Electric Fund: $7,829.18
- Water Works Fund: 4,703.03
- Sewer-Sanitary Fund: 4,774.83
- General Fund: 2,087.94
- Social Security Fund: 1,698.00
- Petty cash: 77.60

Total Cash on Hand: $21,170.58


Both the Water and Light Funds transferred, each to General Fund: $1,000.00

Leon Carver, City Manager

The two largest denominations in Burkburnett are the Baptist and the Methodist. Besides these are the Christian, the Church of Christ, the Assembly of God, the Nazarine, and the Calvary Baptist.
The Baptist Church was really the first one organized because in 1880 it met in the dugout of S. P. Hawkins. In 1886, the records were destroyed when Hawkins' home burned. In 1890, it was reorganized and met in the Gilbert school house. After three years, this church was moved to the place which is now the Burkburnett cemetery. The members worshipped here from 1890 until the fall of 1908, when the church was moved to Burkburnett. The large brick building used now was dedicated in 1925.

The Methodist Church had its beginning in a frame structure on Sixth Street, which was used for a school, church, lodge, and community center. It was a union church and Sunday school to which members of all denominations came to worship. The large brick church in which the Methodists now worship was dedicated in 1925.

As early as 1908, members of the Church of Christ were organized in Burkburnett. They built their first church edifice in 1910. The brick church in which they worship now was dedicated April 28, 1929. It was valued at $20,000. John G. Hardin contributed $4,000 to its construction. Hardin contributed to the Methodist and Baptist churches, too. True to Hardin's principle of letting "money make money," these organizations were to pay eight per cent on the sum until Hardin's death, when the debt was automatically canceled. He lived to be eighty-three.

The present-day school system in Burkburnett presents a sharp contrast to the little single-teacher school in 1907. A shed housed the five pupils at the beginning of the 1907 term. Before the end, however, the number of pupils had increased to seventy-five. The teacher was J. P. Hill, who came to buy land in the town-lot sale and secured the teaching job.

In August, 1908, a four-room structure was built where the present grade school building is, and four teachers were employed. This building was used until the first brick structure was completed.

On April 10, 1910, a committee of citizens met in the high-school part of the building and argued about the construction of a new brick school building. Among those present were P. A. Wigham and John G. Hardin, names to conjure with in Burkburnett history. When the discussion reached the highest temper, Hardin offered to carry half of the expense of the building on the condition that the remainder, $16,000, be raised by private subscription. This proposal was made to prevent the levying of a bond tax.\(^5\)

The vote defeated this proposal, however, and the bond election was called. Hardin was appointed construction foreman for the building. The cost seemed enormous to the small village, but the school continued to grow until 1914, when a graduating class of five members

was honored. The teachers at this time were Ella Powers, Davis, and Hill, and two others not remembered.

The next period of importance was in 1917, when Burl Bryant, later a member of the State Board, was superintendent. The citizens voted $18,100 for a new building, but Bryant entered World War One before the year was over and E. J. Woods succeeded him as superintendent. 6

In August, 1918, the Fowler boom had accumulated such impetus that the schools experienced an enrollment that filled them to overflowing. The situation would have been worse, but many of the influx were adults who had left their families elsewhere.

At that time a narrow strip of land from the school campus was leased for $14,000, and the money used to complete the new building and pay the high-priced labor.

After the building was completed, the school received its first affiliation. Seven and one-half units were granted by the State Department of Education.

When J. P. Buck, of the State Department of Education, visited the school that year, he said: "The buildings are inadequate. Two more teachers must be employed." This threat to withdraw affiliation produced results. Improvements were made, and five additional units were granted. 7

6 Ibid. 7 Ibid.
The next year, the students had increased in numbers and the State Department again threatened the forfeiture of units unless more improvement was made. The statement to the newspaper that year was as follows:

Burkburnett's school life has been beset by woes and handicaps. In the first place, the oil boom of this and preceding years has sent her scholastic population far and away over capacity. Last summer a handsome high school building was completed, but it is now not nearly large enough for the overflow from boom times. For this reason a frame house has been constructed by the side of the high school building. Funds in the richest oil field in the world are lacking. The citizens while gaining wealth every day are $82,000 behind in taxes! Naturally there are bad effects evident. Nobody knows how or even whether to continue. 7a

That was a realistic picture of boom days. Wealth, on one side, in great amounts, and the school still without money to operate. When the state superintendent called the next week, $15,000 was raised to keep the school open.

At that time the school buildings had classes in shifts. Only seven hundred pupils could be accommodated, and there were approximately one thousand pupils. A plan was worked out whereby 500 studied and the other 500 played outside the building, rain or shine.

On December 2, 1921, the state superintendent made this report:

The attendance record problem was solved by adopting the Gary plan. All the pupils were divided into twenty-nine classes in the grade school and thirteen were taught while sixteen played outside. 7b

7a Burkburnett Star, June 17, 1937, p. 8.  
7b Ibid.
In 1922, the situation became intolerable and a $150,000 bond issue was voted for the construction of the present high-school building. In addition, the bond issue provided for the erection of a four-room brick building on the Hardin farm west of the city proper. These buildings were in use the following spring for the graduation exercises, and the city now had the best school system in its history.

In the grade school, the Gary plan was now abandoned and the pupils went back to a normal regime.

The difficult days were not over yet, however. Both the price and production of oil had dropped and financial difficulties reappeared.

John G. Hardin again came to the rescue. Bonds were purchased by his estate and held in trust. This refunding made possible the continuation of school and led to a more efficient financial administration. The $146,000 lifted a huge burden from the struggling school.

The building completed in 1923 is still used now, in 1952, for the high school. It was a handsome building and has been well kept. The downstairs has only five recitation rooms; the rest of the space is taken up by the old gymnasium, the auditorium, the boiler room, the offices, and the shop. The upstairs includes twelve recitation rooms and the library. The laboratory, home economics department, and a dark room for motion-picture projection is included in these rooms.

The enrollment in high school for the spring semester of 1952 was 245, with an average daily attendance of 216. The superintendent,
Ralph Davis, and the principal, D. F. Douglas, have headed the schools of Burkburnett for several years.

In 1938, Hardin Grade School was completed at a cost of $94,738. It is a beautiful yellow brick structure with a tile roof. It includes sixteen recitation rooms besides the cafeteria, auditorium, library, and boiler room. It is already overflowing and needs several more primary rooms. I. C. Evans is principal of the elementary school and holds a Master of Arts degree from North Texas State College in Denton.

Last year, 1952, the new junior high school building was completed at a cost of $275,000. It is well built and very modern in every respect. It includes ten classrooms, besides the principal's office and one of the best equipped gymnasiums in North Texas. A. H. Richardson, with a Bachelor of Arts degree from Midwestern University, is principal of the junior high school.

The Burkburnett Independent School District includes the Clara community, incorporated March 23, 1946; the Fairview community, incorporated on the same date; the Cashion community, incorporated June 11, 1948; and the Everett community, incorporated April 7, 1945, besides the town of Burkburnett. The district is 129.77 square miles in size and is valued at $4,500,000. It employs forty-three teachers, including one colored instructor. There are, in 1952, 1,159 students
enrolled in the school system with an average daily attendance of 978.49 pupils.  

The campus of the Burkburnett High School has beautiful trees leading from Avenue D to the front entrance. It is the only high school campus in Texas, perhaps, to have a tombstone on it. Four years ago the custodian died and the senior class, wishing to pay tribute to him, discussed a fitting memorial. Finally they decided to purchase a bird-bath with a dedicatory bronze tablet on it and place it in a rose garden in the southwest corner of the grounds. The committee, failing to find a bird-bath in Wichita Falls, compromised on a tombstone. The next day, much to the superintendent's embarrassment, the engraved tombstone was set up. Because administrative persons are liaison officers, too, the tombstone is still there, but eventually it will be moved to a more fitting location, the cemetery.

Main Street is four blocks long with one cross street of businesses, Avenue C. There are two dry-goods stores, four drug stores, five grocery stores, three hardware and furniture stores, two auto supply firms, two dress shops, one bakery, two motion picture theaters. Besides these there are Boyd's Mercantile and several cafes and cleaning shops. There are 115 businesses in all.

Most of Burkburnett's business comes from southern Oklahoma. Its trade radius is about forty miles. Oklahomans bring their cotton

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8Ralph Davis, superintendent of schools, Burkburnett, personal interview, May 28, 1952.
to the two gins in Burkburnett and their wheat to the two elevators in the town.

The Burkburnett country raises three major crops: wheat; grains such as sorghum, oats, and barley; and cotton. These crops produce two harvest seasons and bring money in twice a year.

Last year, a farmer tried out a new variety of wheat called Kansas Queen. The soil was poor, but the wheat heads were so full of grains that it all was saved for seed and is being planted on good soil. On the poor land it averaged twenty bushels to the acre; on sandy soil it is expected to make fifty or sixty bushels to the acre. 9

Jim Anderson, in 1952, brought in the first load of Texas wheat to Burkburnett. He was close behind the first load received from Oklahoma, brought in Wednesday, May 28, by Raymond Henry. Both first loads received twenty-five-dollar rewards from the Burkburnett Chamber of Commerce. Most farmers report yields averaging fourteen to twenty bushels per acre, but Charlie McClure, east of Burkburnett, has cut several acres which averaged forty-two bushels to the acre. 10

Wichita County is known for its ability to grow high-quality wheat. Wichita Falls has a Wheatime Celebration every spring. Even

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Life Magazine had a two-page picture of wheat fields between Electra and Burkburnett, with this caption:

Under a threatening sky, eight Massey-Harris combines thresh through a 15,000 acre wheat field, hurrying to get crop in before storm breaks.¹¹

Oil, which put Burkburnett on the map, gets little advertising there now. Everything is owned by big oil companies. The Gulf Oil Company has a pump station and camp. It picks up oil from all the Burkburnett field and pumps it through its lines to its many refineries elsewhere. The Magnolia Petroleum Company has holdings and storage tanks everywhere. The Magnolia pump station pumps gasoline to the company's refineries, where it is converted into casinghead gas, butane, and propane.

The Skelly gasoline plant maintains a vacuum on various wells, in the townsite and in the Northwest Extension, producing gas. This is transmitted to a casinghead gas plant where it goes through a compression process in which liquid petroleum is recovered. The La Salle Company has a refinery southwest of Burkburnett. It handles crude oil which it refines and markets. The Bell Pipeline Company is a carrier of crude oil. It pumps it to Grandfield, Oklahoma, where it is refined.¹²


The production of the Burkburnett pool ending May 18, 1952, was averaging 6,244 barrels a day.\textsuperscript{13}

The whole Burkburnett field is to be rejuvenated. All of the operations under the supervision of the Magnolia Petroleum Company are to be water-pressured in order to increase production of oil and to bring out all of the oil available.

The production of some of the wells after thirty-four years is low. The plan is to inject water into the wells. It will go to the lowest depth and into crevices at the side and float all of the lost oil to the surface. It is a major project covering 2,500 acres, and the anticipated returns are expected to total more than the amount of oil produced by the field in the past thirty years.\textsuperscript{14}

The payroll from oil in Burkburnett now (1952) is $50,000 a month.

The highway between Wichita Falls and Burkburnett is a far cry from that muddy dirt road that citizens wrote the editor about in 1918. Since last summer, giant earth-moving equipment has rumbled along and near United States Highway 281, widening and straightening the highway. The $364,000 project has provided a twenty-four-foot, two-lane highway which cuts through fields, into hills, and along the eastern

\textsuperscript{13}Wichita Falls Daily Times, May 18, 1952, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{14}J. V. Brookshear, personal interview, May 29, 1952.
edge of Burkburnett to Red River. It eliminates "dead man's curve" near the old Cashion school. It is perfectly banked and so smooth that drivers are tempted to speed. This project was sponsored jointly by the Transportation Committee of the Wichita Falls Chamber of Commerce, under the chairmanship of C. P. McGaha, and by the Burkburnett Chamber of Commerce.  

Another completed project of which Burkburnett citizens are justly proud is the Youth Center sponsored by civic groups of the community. It was opened on Sunday, May 25, 1952. The Jaycees initiated this project, but the money—about $18,000—came from individual donations and clubs. The building is sixty by forty-three feet, constructed out of concrete blocks finished in buff stucco. The interior of the building houses the various youth activities in one large room with a kitchen at the rear and several closets, a cloakroom, and rest rooms.

Two boards of directors will govern the policies of the Youth Center, an adult board and a student board. Student directors make their own rules with the approval of the adult board.  

The clubs of Burkburnett are very active. There are two garden clubs, three study clubs, a federated missionary society. There are, in addition, the usual fraternal organizations: Odd-fellows,

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Masonic orders, and Elks. All of the service clubs are represented: Rotary, Lions, Chamber of Commerce, and the Jaycees.

Another source of income for Burkburnett is its sales barn. An auction is held each Saturday, beginning at one o'clock. The new manager, Ace Reid, is a cattleman from Electra, Texas. Under the new setup, cattle may be bought at the barn any week day. The yearly income from the Burkburnett Livestock Sales Barn is about two million dollars.¹⁷

This interest in cattle is the most deep-seated concern in the people who live in the Burkburnett country. The people who made money in oil moved away, mostly to Wichita Falls. (Wichitans say that faith built their city; Burkburnett citizens vow that their oil did it!) Those who work for the big oil companies are left.

The farmers who harvest such bountiful crops also raise a few head of livestock. Then there are a few like Buster Morgan, "weaned on a bucking broncho," who admit their first loves are horses and cattle. For this reason, when June comes around every year, people are seen exercising their horses and refurbishing their cowboy costumes. Inharmonious toots and discords are emitted from the bandhall; bicycles and tricycles rush around trailing colored crepe paper. Concession stands pop up. The Chamber of Commerce has heated

meetings: rodeo time is here, again! The rodeo has, up until this year, been held in the high-school football stadium; but it came of age this year. Land was purchased southwest of the city and regular rodeo grounds developed. The money for this project was obtained from private donations. Buster Morgan gave $1,000 and has supervised the building of the rodeo grounds.

The stands are metal and seat six thousand fans. The total cost is approximately $40,000, raised by donations. The arena may also be used for softball—even football, as it is equipped with brilliant floodlights. The rodeo grounds, when finished, will rank tenth in the whole state of Texas. 18

And this leads us to the most famous organization in Burkburnett, the Boom Town Mounted Square Dancers. It was organized and planned by Charles A. (Buster) Morgan and Dow Estes, well-known square-dance caller who worked out the numbers.

The Mounted Square Dancers were organized in the early part of 1946 to help furnish entertainment at the first genuine annual Boom Town Celebration. They made their first public appearance at the football stadium in June of that year, where a four-day rodeo was under way, and performed before a capacity crowd at each of the shows. The novel idea of square dancers on horseback caught on rapidly.

18Charles A. Morgan, rancher and oilman, personal interview, May 12, 1952.
Everyone who saw the perfect teamwork between rider and horse, the gay-colored cowboy regalia, and the almost unbelievable execution of square dancers on horseback, wanted to witness the event again. Soon the group received invitations to appear at other rodeo performances in North Texas and Oklahoma.

In its beginning, finding suitable horses and riders was quite a task. Only expert riders could go through the maneuvers, and horses must be fast and respond instantly to the rein in making the fast turns and quick starts required. Quarter-horses are used exclusively.

At first, no attempt was made to match the horses in pairs as to color and size, but as the public demand for the dancers grew, horses were matched as to color, size, and temperament, as nearly as possible. That brought on more work and longer practice sessions. Each new horse had to be carefully trained.

Some of them simply would not perform satisfactorily. They had to be discarded and a search started for another horse of a particular color and size. After a few weeks' practice, the best horses learn the dance numbers and will go through the complete routine with little or no reining from the rider.

The riders in the group ride as a hobby. They love their work, and one hundred per cent attendance at the work-outs is the rule rather than the exception. Members of the team range from ranchers and farmers to housewives and high-school and college girls. Everyone
is an expert and enjoys each performance just as much as the audience enjoys watching them. Practically all of them knew how to square dance before they joined the group, but naturally they had to be trained just as the horses did. This group has appeared at some of the most widely known shows in the nation, which include the Fort Worth Fat Stock Show, the Louisiana State University Livestock Exposition at Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and rodeos at Memphis, Tennessee; Little Rock, Arkansas; Natchez, Mississippi; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Tucson and Phoenix, Arizona; Burwell, Nebraska; Sydney, Iowa; and San Francisco, California.

The dancers have seven or eight numbers. Variety is likewise attained by a change of uniforms. Regalia, ranging from white to brilliant reds and loud purples, is indeed colorful. Each couple dresses identically, with no two couples using the same colors. Saddle rolls and chaps for each couple match. Bridles and breast harnesses are all alike: white leather with black letters, B-T, for Boom Town.

Each performance is a complete square dance on horseback, just like dancers on a floor. The most thrilling part of the dance, from the spectators' point of view, is the execution of the Grand Figure Eight, used at the conclusion of each performance. It is also the most dangerous for the riders and horses. With the horses running at full speed
and missing each other by mere inches, the smallest error in judgment and timing could be fatal. 19

Burkburnett, 1952: boom town, farming community, ranching country! Like Walt Whitman's line, "I hear America singing; the varied carols I hear," one who knows the region may hear the Burkburnett country singing; notes from the threshers, the round-ups, the oil pumps fit into the universal harmony. Burkburnett is a pocket-sized edition of America.

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