THE HISTORY OF CAMERON COUNTY, TEXAS

THESIS

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For the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

By

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CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND AND EARLY EXPLORATION

First Colonization Attempts

The unfortunate expedition of Francisco Hernandez de Cordova, undertaken from Cuba in 1517, aroused the curiosity of two men resulting in a jealous rivalry and a greedy race for personal as well as national glory. Reports of the above mentioned expedition, sent from Cuba to explore unknown lands of the north or to hunt Indian slaves, were to lead ultimately not only to the conquest of Mexico but to the first exploration of the entire coast of Texas.

The two men who took such vital interest in exploring the region, of which Cameron County is a part, were Diego Valasquez, governor of Cuba, and Francisco Garay, governor of Jamaica.

Upon Cordova's return from his ill-fated expedition with a report of the riches worn by the natives of the new lands, Valasquez immediately, in 1518, dispatched his nephew, Juan Grijalva, to ascertain the authenticity of the story concerning the wealth of the newly discovered land. Grijalva reached the coast between the mouth of the Rio Grande and Yucatan and despite the fact that he did not directly see the South Texas coast, his glowing account more than verifying Cordova's
reports reached other ears and resulted in further expeditions.

Upon the return of Grijalva in October, 1518, it seems that the adventurous pilot, Anton de Alaminos, who sailed with Ponce de Leon in 1513 to the coast of Florida and later accompanied both Cordova and Grijalva in their explorations, made his way to Jamaica. Francisco Garay, a former companion of Columbus on his second voyage, listened with undisguised interest to the tales of great wealth and the impressive civilization of the natives of the lands visited by Alaminos in recent years. Disappointed, perhaps, by not having been allowed to join the expedition of Cortes which set sail on November 18, 1518, Alaminos must have pointed out to Garay that there was still time to occupy the new land or a portion of it before Cortes arrived there. If Garay would fit out an expedition he could establish a claim to share in the great wealth of the new country.¹

The fact that Alaminos knew the coast line of Florida as far as Pensacola Bay and had followed the coast from Yucatan to Vera Cruz with Cordova and Grijalva caused him to suggest to Garay the necessity of sending an expedition to explore the coast line from Pensacola Bay to Vera Cruz with the possibility of not only gaining claim to a part of the great wealth in the new country but of there being in all likelihood in this unexplored area a strait or passageway to the riches of the East or India.

An expedition was fitted out by Garay, placed under the command of Alonso Alvarez de Pineda, with instructions to reach the area near Vera Cruz before Cortes who had been sent

¹Carlos E. Castaneda, Our Catholic Heritage in Texas, I, pp. 6-7.
out by Valasquez and to explore that part of the coast from Pensacola Bay to Vera Cruz. Whatever were the instructions of Garay, Pineda's expedition was the first to explore and map the entire coast of the present state of Texas. As exact as the records can be traced Pineda began his expedition in the early summer of 1519. On his arrival at Vera Cruz and finding Cortes already in possession and failing to gain any concession pertaining to Garay's claims to the Panuco (Tampico) Vera Cruz area, Pineda set his course northward. After leaving Vera Cruz Pineda stopped at a very large river and stayed there forty days repairing his boats. Here they not only traded with the friendly natives but explored the river for a distance of six leagues or approximately eighteen miles. "The numerous Indian villages are incontrovertible evidence that the river visited on the return trip was no other than the Rio Grande, first named Rio de las Palmas." 

After listening to the glowing reports of the wealth of the country made by Pineda, Garay hurriedly equipped another expedition and placed it under the command of Diego de Camargo with instructions to establish a settlement near the mouth of the Rio de las Palmas (Rio Grande). Mistreatment of the Indians by Camargo's men caused them to be driven from their proposed settlement and thus ended Garay's second attempt at gaining a foothold in this area. Hearing no news from Camargo and

\[2\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 14}.\]
supposing that he had established a settlement, Garay dispatched a third expedition to reinforce him. This group probably sailed to the Rio Grande and finding no one there except hostile savages continued on to Vera Cruz and joined Cortes.

Garay prepared a long and detailed report concerning his activities in exploring and settling the country discovered at his expense and dispatched the same with samples of gold and a map of Pineda's exploration of the coast from Pensacola Bay to Vera Cruz and requested a grant or patent from the king to settle said land. The king granted the request and that portion of the land that might fall within the jurisdiction of Garay was to be known as Amichel.3

With authority from the crown to settle and govern this new country of Amichel, Garay prepared a large expedition under his direct command to found a settlement at the Rio de las Palmas and with this as a base undertake to drive Cortes from the Panuco.

On Saint James day, July 25, the expedition reached the mouth of the Rio de las Palmas which was about thirty or forty leagues north of the Panuco River; here the ships finally came together. It was decided to send Gonzalo de Ocampo to explore the river and select a convenient site for the settlement. While the fleet waited at its mouth Ocampo ascended the stream for a distance of about fifteen leagues. This must have brought him up the Rio Grande to the neighborhood of the present day Brownsville. Although Ocampo's report was unfavorable, it was Garay who was anxious to leave Rio de las Palmas and proceed to Panuco (Tampico).4

Following his departure from the mouth of the Rio de las Palmas and with this as a base undertake to drive Cortes from the

3Ibid., p. 19.

4Ibid., p. 23.
Palmas Garay proceeded to Panuco where he was captured by Cortes following the desertion of his followers. Garay's death, a short time later, ended his ambitious struggle to plant a settlement in the area embracing Cameron County.

Thus, it appears that Francisco Garay, Governor of Jamaica and former companion of Columbus, was strangely and closely related to the first actual contacts made by white men with the region around the mouth of the Rio Grande. Garay's agent, Alonso Alvarez de Pineda, was the first white man to see, to map, to tread upon, and to explore the region now known as Cameron County, Texas. That was in 1519. Another agent of Garay, Diego de Camargo, was the first to attempt a settlement in the area. The attempt failed, but Garay himself was made Governor of a huge territory called Amichel, which included all of the South Texas coast country. Garay visited the Cameron County region in person, undoubtedly with the idea in mind of establishing a permanent settlement there, and another of his agents, Gonzalo de Ocampo, was the first white man to explore extensively in the neighborhood of present day Brownsville.

In 1525 the Lower Rio Grande sector -- in fact, all of the territory formerly designated as Amichel -- was united with Panuco as one state. Castanada says,

A new province was created to include Panuco and Rio de las Palmas. This new jurisdiction was to be known as La Provincia del Rio de Panuco e
Victoria Garayana and included, in fact, the entire area formerly granted to Garay under the designation of Amichel.\textsuperscript{5}

This new province was soon thereafterwards given the name of Tamaulipas. The northern border of Tamaulipas was the Nueces River. When the Mexican Federal Government was organized in 1821, the Province of Texas was added to Coahuila to form the state of Coahuila-Texas, but the region between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande was not included in the new state. It was a portion of the State of Tamaulipas and remained as such until after the Texas Revolution.

**Early Explorations and Land Grants**

The region including Cameron County, although explored at an early date, was one of the last sections of the southwest to be systematically settled by the Spanish. More than two centuries elapsed after the capture of the Aztec Empire by Cortez before the first permanent settlement was made in this area with the founding of the colony of Nuevo Santander in 1747. In the meantime several exploring expeditions were carried out into this region.

The first of these exploring parties was promulgated in 1526 when a small party of Spaniards with Father Andrea Olmos as chaplain left Tampico to explore the Gulf Coast. Besides Garay and his followers they were the first representatives of

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\textsuperscript{5}Ibid., p. 32.
any civilized race to reach the Lower Rio Grande Valley or
Cameron County. "Their explorations were of a minor nature
and not much was learned from their records."6 During a se-
vere storm in 1553 a Spanish fleet was wrecked upon Padre
Island. Survivors of this catastrophe reached the mainland
on the north side of the Rio Grande and wandered for many days
on what is now Texas soil in the area between Port Isabel and
Brownsville.

These survivors after suffering untold hardships and privations were set upon and massacred by a band of hostile Indians, supposedly the fierce Karankawas. A Catholic priest and two companions eventually made their way to Spanish settlements in Mexico.7

The first overland expedition to enter the Lower Rio
Grande region was under the command of Alonso de Leon, Sr.,
who explored the southern reaches of the Rio Grande in 1653.
According to de Leon's report there were many Indians on both
the north and south banks of the river.

When La Salle was reported to have made a settlement in
Texas the Spanish officials at Mexico City, fearing that the
French government was intending to seize Texas, sent Alonso de
Leon in 1686 to either drive La Salle out of this area or cap-
ture him and destroy the French settlement. "De Leon passed
through the Lower Rio Grande region, as he followed the

6San Antonio Express, March 5, 1933, p. 17.
7Castenada, op. cit., III, 143.
meanderings of the Coast line, searching for this reported French settlement."^8

Over a period of approximately two hundred years the area including Cameron County served merely as a brush-lined trail or road, over which the small number of Spanish exploring parties who crossed the Rio Grande travelled, for passage to East Texas or the San Antonio section which were the focal points of early Spanish colonization efforts in Texas.

Following these desultory visits to the southern tip of the Rio Grande delta the Spanish remained south of the Rio Grande until the latter part of the sixteenth century or the early part of the seventeenth century. "Several excursions were made into the Rio Grande country within the above mentioned period for the purpose of capturing Indians to be used as slaves in the mines of Mexico or to be sold as slaves on the Cuban slave market."^9

The first bona fide plans for a settlement in the Rio Grande country were proposed by three important men of the frontier region of Northern Mexico.

Antonio Ladron de Guevara, a citizen of Nuevo Leon; Narciso Marquis de Montecuesta, Alcalde Mayor of the Villa de Valles; and Antonio Fernandez de Jourequi were the three men who sent petitions to the King of Spain, and on July 10, 1739, a royal decree was issued authorizing the formation of a junta by the Viceroy in Mexico to decide on the

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qualifications of the candidates.

Finally, after seven years of deliberation, the junta summoned Jose de Escandon to appear before the body and, on the basis of his great work in reducing the Sierra Gorda country, appointed him, in 1747, lieutenant to the Viceroy and governor of the new province. Escandon derived his only knowledge of the country from scattered expeditions which had previously crossed the region.

Since this area was almost entirely unknown, the first step was to explore the land and its resources and determine the most suitable locations for settlements. Four expeditions were dispatched at the same time from different points to converge upon the Lower Rio Grande and compare notes. Following the reports made by these expeditions, Escandon spent two years in preparation for the location of his colonies. The new district was to be organized and known as the Province of Santander.

The settlements were to be located with a view to dominating the Gulf Coast and the Indian tribes in the interior. None of the first proposed colonies were to be located actually within the bounds of Cameron County but all the desirable land of this area was to be parcelled out in land grants and scattered ranch houses began to dot this area during the period from 1750 to 1780.10

Escandon's aim was to apply military tactics to his plan of colonization. This plan, as outlined, was to penetrate the area from seven different points at the same time with each expedition converging upon the mouth of the Rio Grande.

This plan as outlined had many advantages as Escandon pointed out. It would make it possible to explore and map the entire area from all directions at one time; it would take less time than if one party had to march and countermarch over the entire area. It

would bring forcefully to the attention of all the Indians living in the different sections of this tierra incognita the realization that the Spanish knew the routes to be followed and that they could penetrate into the lands at will and, lastly, "it will cause great wonder" to the natives to see Spanish soldiers entering from all directions before the news of their presence can be transmitted by smoke signals.

This preliminary exploration remains unsurpassed in the history of American colonization.

In three months a virgin area of twelve thousand square miles, inhabited by barbarous Indians who had resisted all efforts of the Spaniards to subdue them, covered with countless swamps, lagoons and brush-covered hills and numerous streams had been thoroughly and completely explored, surveyed and mapped. The chief purpose of Escandon's plan was to pick suitable location for his proposed settlements and to become better acquainted with the natives who lived there.

Escandon's plans to establish colonists in the South Texas province of Santander was the instigation of many land grants being made by the King of Spain to Spanish families who desired to establish new homes or new fortunes in the new land.

Some of the more notable of these grants were:
Santa Isabel grant including the Port Isabel area,
the Buena Vista grant including the Bayview area,
the San Martin grant made to the Trevino family,
the Espiritu Santo grant made to the de la Garza and Cavasos families, the La Feria grant and the San Pedro de la Carricitos.

11 Castaneda, op. cit., III, pp. 141-142.
12 Brownsville Herald, Jan. 1, 1950, p. 4A.
The above mentioned grants were dotted with scattered ranch homes but no efforts were put forth toward establishing an urban center or town for nearly a century.

"Captain Hawkins, the famous English freebooter of Queen Elizabeth's reign, is believed to have anchored near the mouth of the Rio Grande where he prepared his ships for an attack on the port of Tampico, Mexico."  

Early Indians in Cameron County

Early explorers discovered no single strong tribe of Indians along the South Texas coast. However, they did find large numbers of Indians grouped more like families; that is, the tribes, if they should be called such, were small.

These numerous groups of Indians were not stationary. They roamed up and down the Rio Grande, sometimes on the north bank and at other times they would be found on the southern or Mexican side of the river. These various groups of savages eked out an existence by hunting, fishing and oftentimes by plundering their neighbors.

Some of the names identified as belonging to these roving families of natives were:

"The Cotonam; the last of this tribe was at La Noria Rancheria, in Hidalgo County, in 1886,"

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13San Antonio Express, March 5, 1933, p. 6.

14F. W. Hodge, American Indians, I, 352.
The Pampaques; a small tribe located just south of the Nueces River,

The Pacaruja; a tribe living between the Nueces and the Rio Grande Rivers,

The Pastaucaya; a small tribe residing on the north bank of the Lower Rio Grande after 1703,

"The Pakawa; a tribe that lived on both sides of the Rio Grande. The only survivors of this tribe in 1886 were two women who were found on the banks of the river near Reynosa at a place called La Valsa."15

The Pacuachim; a tribe that resided near what is now known as Rio Hondo, Texas,

The Pampapas; a small tribe of only a few families, last heard of on the south side of the Rio Grande above the present city of Brownsville,

The Comecrudos; called the shoeless people because they wore sandals instead of moccasins. The last chief elected by this tribe was Marcelino, who died in 1856. The location of this tribe has been given as near Brownsville.

The Payaya; some of whom were baptized in 1706 on the Rio Grande,

"The Tejones, a tribe living at Reynosa, Mexico, on the Rio Grande at the time of its foundation in the middle of the

15 Ibid., II, 192.
eighteenth century, the remnant of which still lived in 1907 at Las Prietas, Mexico. ¹⁶

These, and a few others whose names cannot be recalled, make up practically the Indian inhabitants. The above mentioned tribes, although they lived as separate units or families, often banded together to beat back the threat of early Spanish invaders and were instrumental in keeping the Lower Valley free of settlers for many years after the remainder of the state had been colonized.

A tribe, different from all the other Indians, was found in the vicinity of the present city of Brownsville by early missionaries. These Indians, if they could be rightly called Indians, were very dark complexioned, had curly black hair, thick lips and showed a distinct likeness to negroes rather than Indians. Upon inquiry by the missionaries it was discovered that the ancestors of these peoples were put ashore during the early part of the seventeenth century and those who survived had intermarried with neighboring Indians. Whether they had been brought from Africa or Jamaica by Spanish masters was never ascertained. The above mentioned tribe had developed a fairly modern system of agriculture on the north bank of the Rio Grande.

The Karankawas, one of the fiercest of the Texas Indian tribes, made frequent raids or hunting trips into that section

¹⁶Ibid., p. 724.
of South Texas which includes Cameron County and were undoubtedly the tall, fierce tribe of natives spoken of by early Spanish explorers.

As the American colonists moved into Texas other Indian tribes were pushed southward and these displaced tribes likewise exerted pressure on the Karankawas, who had formerly called the country around Galveston and Matagorda Bay their home, forcing them to move farther south into the Nueces-Rio Grande country.

This freedom-loving tribe, who depended almost entirely on fishing and hunting for their existence, spent the last years of their Texas sojourn in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Caught between two advancing foes, the Spaniards from the south and the Americans from the north, the remnants of the former strong band of Karankawas were practically destroyed.

A few survivors were claimed to have been seen going south into Mexico.

"Perhaps the oldest inhabitant of Texas soil, he was the first to be driven from it by the merciless settler. The remnant of their tribe was last contacted as having crossed the Rio Grande into Mexico."17

To give some idea of the treatment accorded the Indians of this area the following reference is quoted:

Captain Dimmit, a friend of the Karankawas had been giving them beef but he joined the Texas Revolution and when the Indians came looking for beef and found no one at home they helped themselves.

When a band of Mexican soldiers came upon them and asked their business, they replied, "Oh! We are friends of Captain Dimmit." Upon hearing this the Mexicans charged them, killing several and putting the others to flight. Later they met a band of Americans and shouted, "Viva Mexico!" whereupon the Americans fell upon them and almost annihilated them. The remnant, a mere handful of old men, women and children, were last seen "begging their way into Mexico and oblivion."18

Spanish Occupation

The Lower Rio Grande area of which Cameron is a part seemed to have been almost entirely forgotten by the Spanish as they sought to find wealth in the Southern extremes of North America. The dry brush-covered country just north of the Rio Grande held no inducements for settlers. There were no hills or mountains that might lead explorers to look for gold or other precious metals. The rainfall was not sufficient to cause people to settle there for farming purposes and insects seemed to cooperate with the fiercest of all Texas Indians, the Karankawas, to make this country as unwelcome to settlers as possible. Consequently, Cameron County and adjoining areas became more nearly a roadway, used by the Spaniards as an overland route to more northerly and better productive areas of Texas.

18 Noah Smithwick, The Evolution of a State, p. 22.
Except for a few straggling adventurers and burros as well as large two-wheeled caravans that crossed the Rio Grande conveying salt from La Sal Del Rey, "a large salt lake discovered in 1687," to all of Northern Mexico, there was no effort made to settle the north banks of the Rio Grande before the latter half of the eighteenth century. Jose Eandon brought a few settlers into the Brownsville sector from 1750 to 1780.

"The first permanent settler in the Port Isabel region was Don Jose de la Garza in 1775. He brought other settlers shortly afterwards." Port Isabel (1788), Santa Maria (1780) and Brownsville were the only settled communities in Cameron County before the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ending the war between Mexico and the United States for possession of South Texas which gave undisputed possession of this area to the United States.


CHAPTER II

EARLY HISTORY OF CAMERON COUNTY

Creation and Naming of Cameron County

Cameron County, the most southerly situated area of Texas or "the southermost point of the mainland of the United States," was created on February 12, 1848, out of the Nueces region, lying between the Nueces and Rio Grande rivers, which had been a "bone of contention" between Mexico and Texas since 1836.

Legislative Act Creating Cameron County

Sec. 1. Be it enacted by the Legislature of the State of Texas, that all the territory embraced within the following limits, to wit:

Commencing at the mouth of Olmor Creek on the coast, being the southern point of the county of Nueces, and running thence along the coast of the Gulf to the mouth of the Rio Grande thence up the Rio Grande to a point where the upper line of the municipality strikes the same, thence in a northeasterly direction until it strikes the southwestern boundary of Nueces County at right angles, thence southeasterly along the same to the place of beginning, shall constitute the County of Cameron.

Sec. 2. Be it further enacted, That the town of Santa Rita shall be the county seat of the County of Cameron. Approved Feb. 12, 1848. 2

The first area designated as Cameron County was large,

1San Antonio Express, Dec. 3, 1930, p. 11.

BOUNDARY LINES AND HISTORIC PLACES

Legend:
1. Palo Alto Battleground
2. Resaca de Palma Battleground
3. Palmetto Hill Battleground

--- Area Lost in 1852
----- Area Lost in 1912
-------- Area Lost in 1921
occupying a space of 3361 square miles as compared to its present area of one-fourth the original plot.

In 1771, the greater part of what is now Cameron County was granted to Salvador de la Garza by the King of Spain and, upon his death in 1790, was left to his daughter, Javiera. Her ranch, Santa Rita, became a thickly settled locality and thrived until 1826.

About 1830, the Rio Grande changed its course and left a "banco" which was granted to John Stryker in 1834 under the name of "Banco de Santa Rita." When the American army occupied Matamoros, many American residents moved to the Stryker place. It became the first permanent English speaking settlement in Cameron County.

The above named settlement became the first county seat of Cameron County which was later moved from Santa Rita to Brownsville. Israel Bigelow sat as the first Chief Justice which was the title of the head of the first Commissioners' Court.

The first commissioners were:
Thomas B. King, Precinct No. 1,
S. B. Duffield, Precinct No. 2,
A. A. Salinas, Precinct No. 3, and
Edward A. Weyman, Precinct No. 4.

Other officers in this newly-formed county were:
Thomas J. Stansbury, County Clerk,
Darius Bacon, District Clerk,
Madison W. Stephens, Sheriff,
Juan J. Balli, Justice of Peace, and
Casper Glavecke, Constable.

The first concern of the new county was transportation and the first action of the new court was to award franchises and licenses to operate ferries.

"In 1852 the area of Cameron County was reduced by the formation of Hidalgo County entirely from within her former

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3 Brownsville Herald, May 10, 1936, p. 16.
4 Ibid., p. 12.
boundaries."\(^5\)

There were no further changes in the borders of this southernmost county until 1912 when "more than half of the county's original area was detached to form Willacy County."\(^6\) Nor was this to be the last reduction in the size of this once huge county as about 200 square miles were taken from the upper end and given to form Kennedy County in 1921.

"The present area of Cameron County is 883 square miles and the present population is between 90 and 100 thousand people."\(^7\)

Ewen Cameron, for whom the county was named, was born in the Highlands of Scotland in 1811 and came to Texas in 1837.

He organized a company and commanded it with conspicuous bravery at the battle of Mier. With the entire command he was taken prisoner and while on their way to prison the Texans, led by Cameron, rushed upon their guards and made their escape but, after a series of horrible sufferings among the mountains of Mexico, they gave themselves up to the Mexican soldiers.

At the Hacienda Salado seventeen of the men were shot. Cameron, after drawing a white bean at this lottery of death, was ordered shot by Santa Anna later on. When he was taken out he bared his breast to his executioners and his body was pierced by many bullets. His execution occurred April 25, 1843, and his name is perpetuated in that of Cameron County.\(^8\)


\(^6\)Ibid., p. 613.

\(^7\)Texas Almanac, 1948, p. 448.

\(^8\)Z. T. Fulmore, The History and Geography of Texas as Told in County Names, p. 171.
The Texas Revolution - Grant and Johnson

After Houston had been made commander of the Texas patriot army he had sent signed orders to Colonel James Bowie in January, 1836, to raise a volunteer regiment and proceed against Matamoros. The orders were delayed in reaching Colonel Bowie and, in the meantime, Dr. Grant was given the commission to lead the proposed expedition against Matamoros. This order was given by the Council in opposition to the wishes of either Governor Smith or Houston.

To Grant, Johnson and Fannin was given control of the army and resources of the province of Texas. Houston, feeling that he had been shoved to the background, did not retire from the field without an appeal to the intelligence and patriotism of the volunteers, most of them recently arrived from the United States. He addressed them at Refugio, their assembling point for the Matamoros attack. The volunteer army continued to assemble at Refugio and while waiting for supplies and equipment, Grant and Johnson made foraging expeditions south of Refugio to capture horses for their venture. Johnson and half of the company captured a number of horses and returned to San Patricio where they were surprised and killed or captured with the exception of Johnson and four followers. Grant captured a sizeable group of horses, a large number being taken from their herders on the bank of the Rio Grande after pursuing them for several miles.
We pursued them to the Rio Grande where we overtook them and, as they were attempting to cross pell-mell, some of them drowned. Having taken a considerable number of horses, we returned on our way back to San Patricio visiting the different ranchos, getting all the horses we could.

Grant's men were set upon by Mexican dragoons, the advance guard of General Urrea's, before they regained San Patricio, surrounded and killed with one exception. (The narrator of the incidents was a Colonel Brown who was later released by the Mexicans and spent the remainder of his life at Valesco.)

Thus ended the plan that might have turned the area including Cameron County into a battleground of the Texas Revolution or, should it have been successful, formed a new state including Southern Texas and Northern Mexico.

"On the 10th Colonel Johnson issued a like proclamation, calling his the Federal volunteer army, marching for the country west of the Rio Grande under the flag of 1824."

Border Troubles

There arose in 1839, in Northern Mexico, a new movement of the Federalist party of that country. It culminated in the formation of the Republic of the Rio Grande, decidedly favorable to Texas. Representatives of this new republic made overtures to President Lamar for an alliance with Texas against

10 Ibid., p. 541.
Mexico. President Lamar declined to commit Texas to their movement. Volunteers from north of the Rio Grande to the number of about three hundred flocked to their standard and organized with Colonel Reuben Ross as their commander. This body later united with a force of Mexicans under Colonel Zapata and won a fierce, hard-fought victory over a superior Centralist force under Colonel Pabon. Following this battle most of the Texans returned home.

In the summer of 1840 about three hundred allies of General Cavaler congregated on the Rio Grande. Colonel Wm. S. Fisher and Captains S. W. Jordan and Juan N. Seguin commanded these volunteers under Cavaler as chief. Jordan and 112 Americans with a few Mexican allies were sent as an advance guard into the interior. They were led by a circuitous route into a pre-arranged ambush near Saltillo, Mexico. An enemy force of a thousand troops with artillery confronted them. As soon as lines of battle were formed the Mexican allies under Molano deserted to the enemy shouting vivas to Mexico and death to the Texans.

The whole villainous scheme was understood in Saltillo whose population had gone forth and occupied the surrounding hills to witness the anticipated sport, the destruction of 112 Tejano Americans. But sad was their disappointment and when night closed on the scene, they were unanimously of the opinion that they had been fighting not men but devils.

Jordan promptly seized an invulnerable position behind a stone wall only approachable from one side. The Mexicans charged and charged again till, when night came, four hundred of their number lay dead on the field. During the night
Jordan ascended and crossed a mountain ordinarily deemed impassable and thence retreated with one hundred and seven men through mountains and valleys a distance of three hundred miles to the Rio Grande and crossed that stream. The enemy followed the whole distance but the last of the one hundred and seven safely crossed the river. Jordan had but five men killed and seven wounded, all of the latter being saved.\textsuperscript{11}

Old Landmarks

Mention of the old landmarks of the early history of this area serves to enrich the historical data of the county.

A curious lake of snow-white crystals ranging in depth from two to four feet and said to be over ninety percent pure is a lake of salt, La Sal del Rey, situated in Cameron County in a flat surrounded by higher lands, forty miles north of the Rio Grande. This lake is about one-half mile wide and two and one-half miles long, is said to have been discovered by the Spaniards about 1687 and has a salt cellar for the entire Southwest for centuries. In the years long gone burro caravans, and later, lumbering two-wheeled ox-cart caravans, carried this salt to all of Northern Mexico, while innumerable animals had worn deep trails like chalk lines to this, their favorite salt lick.

This lake has never been exploited, however, and none of the railroad lines actually constructed have gone near this natural wonder.\textsuperscript{12}

A monument of approximately a century is the lighthouse at Port Isabel. "This famous structure, built in 1852, has been a beacon light for ships in distress when the angry waters of the Gulf were seeking to add them to their many victims who had already gone to 'Davy Jones' Locker".\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., II, 174.

\textsuperscript{12}Allhands, op. cit., p. 108.

\textsuperscript{13}Dallas News, Feb. 10, 1940, p. 12.
The first earthen works, some of which may still be seen marking the site which was to become known as Ft. Brown, were thrown up the last few days of March and the early part of April, 1846. This fort, which was soon to be christened with the blood of the man for whom it was named, Major Jacob Brown, has since been made into a modern arsenal capable of accommodating, very comfortably, seven thousand troops with all equipment.  

"The government reservation, on which the fort is located consisting of 258 acres was purchased from Juan Cortina's mother for the price of $266,000. It is located on the opposite side of the river and about one mile from Matamoros, Mexico."  

There are three small areas in the vicinity of Brownsville marked by tablets and hallowed by the blood of the men who died in three bloody battles. Two of these tablets are memorials to the American soldiers who gave their lives in the first two encounters of the Mexican war between the American forces under General Taylor and the Mexican forces under Ampudia.  

"About six o'clock that very evening of May 9, 1846, President Polk received official reports of the battles that had taken place between American and Mexican troops at Palo Alto, a prairie between the present town of Brownsville and the mouth of the Rio Grande, and at Resaca de la Palma, also  

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14Brownsville Herald, May 10, 1936, p. 10.  
on the Texan side of the river and four miles north of Matamoros."16

At Palmetto Ranch near Brownsville the third marker commemorates the last battle of the Civil War. "Here, on May 13, 1865, Colonel Ford defeated 800 Federals and learned from the prisoners that General Lee had surrendered on April 9, more than a month before."17

The most noted land mark, a living one, is Pedro Guerro of Port Isabel who claims the ripe age of 128 years stating that he was a member of the firing squad that executed Maximilian, deposed Austrian Emperor of Mexico, and who later earned fifty cents per day for gathering five hundred oysters for the first makeshift hotel in Port Isabel.18

Negro Colony

Early Spanish settlers relate the high degree of agricultural achievement reached by a colony of Negroes formerly located near the present city of Brownsville. The following article was written by a member of the Cameron County Historical Society following a visit to the vicinity formerly occupied by the above mentioned colony.

The Nego colony, once located near the present city of Brownsville, is known to have existed many years before the hardy Texans

17Ibid., p. 235.
18Personal interview with Pedro Guerro at Port Isabel, Sept. 12, 1949.
declared their independence from Mexico. Early settlers said that the Negro colony was at one time of considerable size. Since Texas was at that time under the Mexican flag it is believed that this colony of Negroes was sent north by the Mexican government. Mexico had made it a custom to send its undesirable persons to Texas. This leads us to believe that the Negroes came as exiles. The colony remained at the original location and prospered. The exact location of the former colony is near the city of Brownsville on the Old Military Highway.

The Negroes lived in shacks on the banks of the Rio Grande and, judging by the appearance of the area formerly occupied by them, were good farmers. Why they left nobody knows. The theory thus far advanced is that a great flood came and caught the unlucky exiles by surprise. Many were drowned and the ones who managed to escape left the Brownsville area. Firearms and other relics of a fairly advanced state of civilization are often found by the present tenants of the surrounding country. The cemetery has totally disappeared and its former location is known to only a few persons.\textsuperscript{19}

The Mexican families living in the area have reported, on more than one occasion that weird noises can be heard in the vicinity at night.

Climate and Soil

The mellowing effect of the Gulf breeze, both in winter and in summer, has a tendency to make the climate of the county resemble that of a tropical nature. Seldom indeed is the frost heavy enough during the winter months to injure the citrus fruit or vegetables and, on an average of 28 years, there has been no frost of any description throughout seven of these

\textsuperscript{19}\textit{The Brownsville Herald}, May 10, 1936, p. 5.
years or one year of each four is frost free.

Fruit, vegetables and good fishing, combined with warm sunshine throughout the winter, make Cameron County a tourist's paradise.

Summer temperatures, while high, are ameliorated somewhat by the sea breeze and winters are predominantly snowless and frost free.

Rain, the majority of which falls in the summer, is insufficient for farming purposes and irrigation is the answer to a farmer's prayer.20

The soils of the Tip-o-Tex sector are extremely fertile and need only water and cultivation to produce abundant crops.

Since the southern section of this South Texas plain has less rain, its soils suffer less from erosion and leaching of plant foods. Hence, most of the soils in this area contain much lime, phosphate, potash, magnesium and other mineral plant foods that would have been dissolved by water had the climate been a rainy one.21

The Texas part of this lower flood plain and delta of the Rio Grande, although called the "Valley" by its inhabitants, is an alluvial fan rather than a valley for it consists of rich silt which the river has deposited at its mouth making the section higher than the surrounding coastal lowlands.

The broad, level, low-lying plain of which Cameron County is composed is characteristic of either coastal or deltaic deposits. The altitude varies from sea level to seventy-five feet above sea level throughout the county.

There are shifting sands on the lower part of Padre Island, which is considered a part of the county and in the interior of


the mainland a short distance from the Gulf but, with these exceptions, the county is a low coastal plain.

"The Rio Grande itself is by far the most important drainage unit of the entire area and the only one with a perennial flow."\(^2\) The river furnishes a shifting international boundary line. Yet, it is the most important single item in the entire region as all the water for the many irrigation projects of the Valley is pumped from this stream. Various cut-off meanders and ox-bow lakes, locally known as "resacas," occupy lands of the lower delta.

In addition to the natural drainage, man has constructed many artificial ditches to drain off surplus irrigation waters.

"The waters of the Rio Grande are always silt-laden and the 'Magic Valley' delta has been made in the same manner as the famous delta of the Nile which it rivals in fertility."\(^2\)

**Epidemics**

Cameron County, as are newly-settled areas, has had its baptism in epidemics of different degrees. Yellow fever took its toll of human lives and caused an untold amount of suffering in a severe epidemic that swept Brownsville in 1882. The dread disease, long since banished by medical science, left many saddened homes and even empty homes before it was completely stamped out.

\(^2\)Texas Geographic Magazine, May 31, 1939, pp. 3-5.

\(^2\)A. E. Mann, Texas as it is Today, pp. 63-64.
During the summer of 1903 the scourge broke out in Monterrey and advanced toward the Texas border. "Brownsville citizens had not forgotten their sad experience with the fever ravages of 1882 and their anxiety caused them to quarantine against the entire Mexican border in less than thirty days." 24

Other scares came in 1905 and 1906 when yellow fever was prevalent in Corpus Christi but the early lesson learned by Brownsville caused it to be instantly alerted and the dread disease was kept from that sector.

Another dread disease that took its toll of lives in the area between the Nueces and the Rio Grande rivers was cholera. This disease first made its appearance in Victoria in 1833 and spread to other sections leaving desolation and sorrow in its wake by carrying off a number of prominent and valuable citizens. Cholera appeared again in 1848 claiming the lives of many people, both soldiers and civilians.

Practically all the deaths were attributed to the drinking of the brackish waters of the rivers and bayous. Those who drank cistern water did not contact the disease. When cistern water was made available to all the inhabitants the disease disappeared as if by magic. 25

The above mentioned epidemics have taught the inhabitants of the coastal area of South Texas to be ever on the alert for inroads of any disease.


25 Brown, op. cit., II, 49.
Gulf Storms

One of the destructive forces that have been destructive to the inhabitants of the Lower Rio Grande area has been the feared Gulf storm which sweeps into the sector with a lashing, driving fury that leaves death and desolation in its wake. The residents of the lower part of Cameron County were initiated into the danger of these storms in 1867 when Clarksville, a small town located near the present Boca Chica resort, was lashed for twenty-four hours leaving few homes or dwellings standing. Port Isabel and Brazos de Santiago were also recipients of much damage from this storm. Before the country had fully recovered from this catastrophe or seven years later in 1874 another storm, more severe than its predecessor, struck the Texas coast with blinding fury.

For three days and nights the waves beat on the defenseless town of Clarksville. Winds from all directions lashed the poorly constructed houses to pieces. Homes, household goods and stock were swept into the raging sea; other areas suffered heavy damage wherever there were buildings to be destroyed. The city or town of Clarksville was so completely destroyed by this storm that it was abandoned, never to be rebuilt.26

The same thing could be said of Bagdad, located on the opposite side of the river from Clarksville in Mexican territory. There is no trace left of this village which was a thriving port during the Civil War.

In 1933 the entire area embracing Cameron County was

26 The Brownsville Herald, May 10, 1936, p. 5.
rocked and buffeted by one of the most severe storms of his-
tory. Heavy rain accompanied by 120 mile-per-hour winds
blasted the coast for thirty or more hours. Homes were de-
stroyed in great numbers, crops were literally destroyed,
household goods were either ruined completely or heavily dam-
aged, citrus orchards were laid low, canning sheds and other
business establishments were totally demolished. Communication
lines were down, transportation was at a standstill and Cameron
County was cut off from the outside world for three or more
days. The Lower Valley lay a mass of water-soaked wreckage, a
sight to cause the bravest soul to turn his back on the country
and never return, but the pioneer spirit, never to say quit,
prevailed and the inhabitants began immediately to clean up
and rebuild. Today or even five years following the storm no
trace of the occasion was left to mar the beauty of the land of
sea breezes and winter flowers.

Wild Cattle

Escandon and his lieutenants, when planning and carrying
out their plans for the settlement of the South Texas coast
country, reported the presence of wild cattle, asses and horses
near the Rio Grande River. The cattle, no doubt, were the fore-
runners of the Texas Longhorns, later to become noted for their
stamina and endurance. As to the origination of these long-
horn cattle many suggestions can be rendered, but, in all
probability they were the result of a mixing or crossing of
the native cattle with those brought from Spain by the early explorers who came to Mexico with Cortez.

A matter of great interest in the Southwest was the abandonment of stock ranches between the Nueces and the Rio Grande by their Mexican owners and herdsmen caused by the inroads of wild Indians in 1834, 1835, and 1836 and the retreat of the Mexican army in June, 1836. The soldiers of Texas were suffering for meat and in this emergency General Rusk adopted the plan of sending detachments of mounted men into the abandoned country to drive in cattle for the needs of the army. This plan was successful and no further scarcity was experienced.27

In the Valley area as in other sections the longhorns, which have become a scarce commodity, have been replaced by sleek short-horn beef cattle.

Several thousand dollars were appropriated by the United States Government for the purchase and maintenance of a nucleus herd of the pure Spanish Longhorn. They were hard to find but, finally, after travelling more than five thousand miles and inspecting more than fifty thousand head of cattle, thirty head of the pure-bred Spanish strain were found and rounded up at San Benito. These cattle were shipped to the Ft. Worth stockyards where they were dipped, tubercular tested, branded "U.S."; then shipped to the Wichita National Forest and Game Preserve at Cache, Oklahoma.28

27 Brown, op. cit., II, 138-139.
CHAPTER III

FIRST PERIOD OF EXPANSION

Bandit Trouble

Mexican and American outlaws or bandits have for many years found asylum along the Rio Grande border where they might escape to either side, according to necessity. Their living has depended chiefly on foraging and marauding. As there were few Americans in this sector before the Mexican War, records of bandit troubles, as relating to American History, were few before the 1870's. Raids by bandits and retaliation by citizens, Rangers and soldiers marked the area from 1870 to 1918.

During the month of November, 1874, Billy McMahon, a very popular inoffensive school teacher who taught in a small rural school north of Brownsville was waylaid by desperados led by one Agriyo (the Needle). These men tortured McMahon by cutting off his fingers, toes, wrists and ears. They finally severed his legs from his body and left him lifeless.1

The retaliatory measures taken by the Rangers and other law enforcement bodies were equally as harsh if not so barbaric.

On June 12, 1875, Captain McNelly of the Rangers and his company of twenty-two men, guided by H. S. Rock, Lino Saldona, Casimiro Tamayo and Tinoteo Solis of Brownsville, overtook a band of sixteen cow thieves running 300 head of cattle. The fighting took place fourteen miles from Brownsville. Fifteen cow thieves were killed and their bodies brought to town and displayed on the market square as a grim warning to the bandit element. One Ranger, Berry Smith, was killed by the cow thieves.²

The outstanding bandit of the Rio Grande, without regard to time, was undoubtedly the red-headed Cortina who, saying that he had been cheated out of portions of his mother's property by his American neighbors, took the law into his own hands and created quite a disturbance in and around Brownsville.

Before daylight on the morning of the 28th of September, 1859, Cortina entered the city of Brownsville with a body of mounted men, variously estimated at from forty to eighty, leaving two small parties of foot soldiers outside, one near the cemetery and the other near the suburbs to the east. The citizens were awakened by firing and cries of "Viva Cheno Cortina!" "Muran los Gringos!" (Death to the Americans) and "Viva Mexico!". The city was already in his possession with sentinels at the corners of the principal streets and armed men riding about. He avowed his determination to kill the Americans but told Mexicans and foreigners that they should not be molested.

Thus was a city of from 2,000 to 3,000 inhabitants occupied by a band of armed banditti, a thing unheard of in these United States. He made his head quarters in the deserted garrison of Fort Brown and sent mounted men

²Ibid., p. 109.
through the streets hunting up their enemies. He
broke open the jail, liberated the prisoners,
knocked off their irons and had them join him.
He killed the jailer, Johnson; a constable
named George Morris; Young Neale as he lay in
his bed, and searched for the wounded City marshal,
Glaevecke, and others.
Cortina, following these depredations, re-
tired to the Mexican side of the river keeping
an organized force under his control and later
establishing himself on the American side of
the river, above Brownsville on what is now
known as the Military Road.
Cortina was now a great man. He had de-
feated the Gringos and his position was impreg-
nable.  
Cortina was later driven out of the United States Terri-


tory by the combined efforts of Major Heintzelman of the United
States Army, Captain Ford of the Texas Rangers and Captain
Thompson of the Brownsville Tigers (a civilian troop).
"Thus marked the exit of the 'Red Robber of the Rio Grande',
the most striking, the most insolent and the most elusive Mexi-
can bandit, not even excepting Pancho Villa, that ever wet his
horse in the muddy waters of the Rio Grande."  
Following the Cortina incident the bandit trouble dwindled
to a minor issue until the early part of the twentieth century.
Although not linked with the border outlaws, the negro uprising
of 1906, resulting in a short reign of terror and a few deaths,
was a black spot on the young city of Brownsville.
"Captain Bill McDonald of the Texas Rangers with the aid

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3San Antonio Express, March 5, 1933, p. 8.
of Ranger McCauley defied the United States Army and held a
court of inquiry in the barracks at Ft. Brown to help clarify
the uprising of the Negro battalions in said fort."

The last flurry of border banditry occurred just before
and during our participation in World War I or from 1915
through 1918. A few of the items listed below were in the
newspaper from time to time:

May 1915. A band of heavily armed Mexicans
was seen near Sebastian.
July 17, 1915. Bernard Boley, a young American
was killed near Sebastian by bandits.
July 28, 1915. A prisoner was taken from
Deputy Sheriffs Frank Carr and Daniel Hinojosa
near San Benito. The prisoner was hanged and
shot.
July 31, 1915. Bandits raided Los Indios
ranch and killed Joe Benavides.
August 2, 1915. Ten soldiers from Troop A,
Twelfth Cavalry, accompanied by deputy sheriffs
and a civilian posse, had a skirmish with a large
force of bandits. Pvt. G. W. McGuire of the Twelfth
Cavalry was killed, Deputy Sheriff Monahan and Joe
Longoria, a civilian, were wounded.6

News items of the above mentioned variety were weekly, if
not daily, occurrences until the close of World War I when
they gradually ceased to be of any importance.

A few of the law enforcement officers who have
ably assisted in quelling the bandit trouble along
the Rio Grande border are:
Captain "Rip" Ford - - - - - Texas Ranger
Captain "Bill" McDonald - - - " "
Captain McNelly - - - - - " "
Captain Armstrong - - - - - " "

5 A. B. Faine, Captain Bill McDonald, Texas Ranger, p.
331.
6 Pierce, op. cit., pp. 89-90.
Towns

Before the coming of the railroad to the Valley in 1904, there were only three towns in Cameron County, two of which were villages. Port Isabel, Santa Maria and Brownsville were the foundation of the present family of cities, towns, and villages of the county.

The oldest of these is Port Isabel (Point Isabel) which was established in 1823. This seaport town depends on the waters of the Gulf for its sustenance. Spaniards had discovered this spot as early as 1530 and two different Spanish villages had reposed here before the nineteenth century.

Tourists and fishermen vie with each other in this ideal location for recreation. The old lighthouse stands as a mile post of early days of the struggling fishing village. Here are an abundance of tourist camps or courts and a town almost surrounded by boats of all description from fourteen-foot canoes to the large oil tankers, banana and pineapple boats. Here may be seen the millionaire from the North and the poorest fisherman rubbing elbows.

"This town was first called 'El Fronton de Santa Isabel',

Legend:
--- Proposed Causeway from Port Isabel to Padre Island
from the old Santa Isabel land grant, but was later shortened to Point and then Fort Isabel."

Fort Isabel was incorporated in 1928, one hundred and five years after it was founded. It has several thriving business houses and the present population is 2,900.

Brownsville was established in March, 1846, and has undoubtedly become the best known of the Valley towns, aside from its distinction of being the southermost town on the mainland of the United States.

The early American settlers, home seekers, from every state in the Union, the native Spanish inhabitants, the Army personnel at Fort Brown and a sprinkle of French influence have made this city one for interesting study. The streets are narrow and the buildings are a mixture of style and comfort, modern and ancient.

Brownsville is linked to Matamoros by two international bridges. It has three airports, one world airline and two major domestic airlines. It has many industrial plants such as, canning, clothing, tanning, brick, tile, quick freeze and dehydrating plants. Add to these the new giant hydrocol plants and a new canal, deep water port and a turning basin for a complete survey of the industrial picture.

Brownsville, with a population of 40,000, has had four names, Santa Rita, Shannondale, Taylor (for three days) and

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8 Miriam Chatelle, *For We Love Our Valley Home*, p. 23.
Brownsville. "C. Stillman builded the first house in the city in 1847 and is called the founder of the city."\(^9\)

Santa Maria, although it had been a Spanish settlement since 1780, founded its present municipal status in 1872 and now has a population of 300. It is located on the "Old Military Highway" and has only a small number of business establishments such as grocery, dry goods and hardware firms. "The oldest church in this area was builded in Santa Maria in 1788."\(^10\)

"Harlingen, once called 'Six Shooter Junction', sprang up almost over night on the first railroad that reached the Valley from upstate."\(^11\) The first house in this new town was constructed in 1905. The name, Harlingen, chosen by Lon C. Hill, Sr., and Uriah Lott, the man to whom this section was indebted for the railroads, from Van Harlingen in Holland which name also was that of Lott's grandmother.

Harlingen is a retail and wholesale center having as its principal industries, meat packing, bottling plants, cotton compress, cotton seed oil mill, machine shops, milk and ice cream plants and many lesser, smaller factories. Next to Brownsville in size, its population is 25,000.

San Benito, another of Cameron County's family of towns, was founded in 1904 on the new rail line which had just been

\(^9\)Pierce, op. cit., p. 19.  
\(^10\)Ibid.  
\(^11\)Ibid., p. 21.
completed giving the Valley its first rail outlet to the North. It has had about as many name changes as a divorcee.

Other than the cognomen of "Resaca City" which is a lasting "alias", the city was first called "Diaz". Later this name gave way to "Bessie", honoring the daughter of the late B. F. Yoakum who at that time was president of the Frisco Railroad.

Not too long afterwards it became San Benito, meaning St. Benedict, for Benjamin Hicks, a beloved pioneer of that period. The Spanish word, Benito, is translated Benjamin in the English language; hence, San Benito.

This town has not developed in size so rapidly as have some of its neighbors but more than atones for same by its beauty both in buildings and natural surroundings.\(^\text{12}\)

San Benito has a population of approximately 15,000 and, aside from its many other business enterprises, its inhabitants are justly proud of the New La Palma Plant erected by Central Power and Light Company and the recently completed Dolly Vinsant Memorial Hospital, dedicated to the memory of Dolly Vinsant, the daughter of Dr. and Mrs. W. J. Vinsant, who, as a nurse, paid the supreme sacrifice during World War II.

La Feria, meaning "little fair", was founded in 1908 by a Mr. Schoenburg. With a population of 3,000, an ideal location in the citrus belt and many thriving business establishments, this town is rapidly taking its place with its larger sister towns of the county family. "A large, stately ebony, the largest I have ever seen and one that has waved through

\(^{12}\text{Chatelle, op. cit., p. 31.}\)
many seasons before the coming of its present inhabitants, adorns the center of the city."\(^{13}\)

Combes, about five miles north of Harlingen, named for Dr. Joe Combes, the first physician for the then New Valley Railroad, was founded in 1906.

Los Fresnos, first called "Moseville" for Lon C. Hill, Jr., "Mose" being his nickname, was founded in 1915 by Lon C. Hill, Sr., and his son, Lon C., Jr., and has a population of 1,000. "Los Fresnos, meaning "ash", has several thriving business houses, a large trade area of rich farm lands which produce abundant quantities of vegetables and citrus fruits and is a natural gateway to the many tourists who "flock" to Port Isabel each year."\(^{14}\)

Rio Hondo, a thriving city of 2,000 souls, is located on the Arroyo Colorado in the northeastern section of the county and is a fast growing city containing a business section of which any small town should be proud.

Sebastian, Bayview, Stuart Place, Russelltown, El Jardin, Olmito, Santa Rosa and Laureles, smaller sisters of the already mentioned cities, complete the family or network of towns in the southernmost county of Texas.

Padre Island

No corner of Texas contains more of historical interest

\(^{13}\)Ibid., p. 35.

\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 37.
than that which includes Padre Island, the southern portion of which is a part of Cameron County and very closely connected with said county in the history of the area.

Many have been the Spanish ships that have met their doom on the coast of this island and treasures lost with the destruction are occasionally discovered by tourists or fishermen in their search for pleasure or profit.

Padre Island was granted to Padre Balli in 1800 and was re-granted to him and his son Juan by the Mexican Government in 1829, but was not developed and has not been developed to a very great extent to the present time. ¹⁵

The danger of coastal storms combined with the shifting sands did not make for a profitable investment for the early owners; consequently, the ownership changed hands several times. "Padre Island has changed hands more than twenty times in the last one hundred years." ¹⁶

Some of the better known owners were: Patrick F. Dunn, a big hearted Irishman, former member of the Texas Legislature who purchased the south half of the island in 1879; Sam Robertson, a man who spent much time and great sums of money not only in Padre Island but in developing the entire lower valley. Robertson built roads and a thirty-one cottage camp site on the island but saw his labor and expenditures turned into a jumbled mass of wreckage by the storm of 1933.


¹⁶Austin American, June 25, 1943, p. 6.
"Dunn and Robertson unloaded their "white elephant" at a good profit, selling the southern portion of the island, including all the improvements thereon, to Jones Bros. of Kansas City." 17

The plan to make a park of the south end of the island has been revived during the years following World War II. The following excerpts appeared in issues of the valley newspapers:

A 26-year old dream today leaped another step toward becoming a reality.

Five men, Nueces County Judge George Prowse, Kenedy County Judge Lee Lytton, Kleberg County Judge Tom Brookshire, Willacy County Judge Charlie Johnson and Cameron County Judge Oscar C. Dancy, were appointed yesterday to lead the way toward construction of a paved road down the center of Padre Island. The group, tentatively known as the Padre Island Road Executive Committee, immediately went to work and contacted a New York engineering firm, Parsons, Brinckerhoff, Hall and MacDonald, to do the preliminary planning and surveys for the road project.

The proposed highway, which would extend 131 miles instead of 90 miles as previously announced, would connect the nearly finished Corpus Christi-Padre Island causeway and the planned Fort Isabel-Padre Island causeway. Plans are now being drawn for construction of the causeway at Port Isabel. 18

Cameron County's dream of a huge recreation center on Padre Island moved a step closer Monday. County Commissioners set March 25 for the $850,000 bond election voted in January. The bonds will provide funds for the development of site 1 (one) on the southern end of Padre Island.

As the election was called, commissioners

17Dallas News, Jan. 26, 1943, p. 27.
pointed out that approval of the $850,000 in bonds for the first site would assure the sale of $2,000,000 in revenue bonds for the building of a causeway from Port Isabel to the southern end of Padre Island.\textsuperscript{19}

The above mentioned bonds have been approved and plans are under way to speed the construction of the causeway, roads and Site No. 1 and the following prophecy about to be fulfilled. "From a land infested with creeping crabs Padre Island will probably some day become a fine beach resort."\textsuperscript{20}

Even though the past efforts and money spent on Padre Island have failed to produce any conceivable measure of success, this item appeared in one of the Valley newspaper editorials: "The plan long dreamed of by the white man, of putting Padre Island with its scenic grandeur and its gentle sloping beach, composed of shell and pure white sand, to a better use than the grazing of cattle and a graveyard for Old Man Neptune, is about to be realized."\textsuperscript{21}

Cameron County During the Civil War

Brownsville and vicinity probably made more exciting history during the period from 1860 to 1865, the Civil War dates, than through any period of one hundred years before or possibly since that time.

Following the secession of Texas from the Union, E. B.

\textsuperscript{19}Harlingen Valley Morning Star, Feb. 28, 1950, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{20}Dorothy Childs Hogner, \textit{South to Padre}, p. 119.
Nichols, Commissioner for Texas and Colonel John S. Ford were sent to Fort Brown with a request that all United States troops who did not care to enlist in the Confederate Army must evacuate the area at once. This order was soon complied with and all the troops embarked from the nearby port of Brazos Santiago. Several thousands of dollars worth of ammunition and supplies were destroyed by the evacuating troops.

With the outbreak of war on the Rio Grande the majority of the Americans enlisted in the Confederate Army; there were many, however, who claimed to be Unionists but not sympathetic with the war and these moved to the Mexican side of the Rio Grande. Only a few volunteers from the border section actually saw service in the Union Army.

The border "neutrals" were greatly augmented by a large group from the interior of Texas who styled themselves by the same name and moved into towns on the Mexican side of the river. Here they established themselves in business of one kind or another and many reaped great fortunes in the handling of contraband goods.

Prior to the outbreak of the war hundreds of Europeans had settled in Brownsville and, since most of these were of the merchant class, their gains were on a gigantic scale. They were not under the same suspicious surveillance as were Americans who were not outwardly sympathetic with the South.

Northern sympathizers were particularly unwelcome in Brownsville as was attested to by Miss Melinda Rankin, a New Englander, then serving as a Presbyterian Missionary teacher, in charge of the Rio Grande Female Seminary. She received an order from the pastor of the Presbyterian Church to leave the city and when she inquired the reason he replied in a written statement. "You are not in sympathy with the Southern Confederacy and no teachers but such as are can be permitted to occupy that institution; You are in communication with a country called the United States."
Miss Rankin had to take refuge in Matamoros which was very sympathetic to the Southern cause. Maximilian was on the Mexican throne, the border towns of Mexico being filled with French, Austrian and Belgian soldiers.

Point Isabel and Clarksville, a small village near the present site of Boca Chica, were in control of the Northern forces while Ft. Brown and vicinity were held by the Confederates; money was everywhere and Brownsville became a boom town. Prices of everything, including wages, skyrocketed. Texas cotton, which was plentiful, was in big demand on world markets. "Texas ports were blockaded by the United States Navy from July 1861 until the end of the war and Mexico was the only outlet for this valuable crop." Cotton, wool and hides were exported in great quantities. The abundant yield of cotton offered the greatest possible chance for ready cash and wagons, and ox-carts wended their way through trails, some of which had never been travelled before, bringing this precious staple to Brownsville where it was exchanged for gold and silver money or the absolute essentials for the continuance of the war.

General H. P. Bee had assumed command of the Confederate Army of the Rio Grande in January, 1863. In November of the same year

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the Federal fleet under command of Major Nathaniel P. Banks anchored at Brazos Santiago with an army of 6,000 men. When General Bee realized that the Yankee army so greatly exceeded his own in numbers, he began the burning of all government buildings, at the same time evacuating the fort and town.

Much cotton stored in the Confederate warehouses was burned and hundreds of packs thrown into the river.

General Bee's troops moved into the interior.24

While Brownsville was in the hands of the Federals, these contraband goods had to be taken up the river and crossed above the Federal lines.

During the early part of 1864 the Federal hold on the Rio Grande was weakened by the defeat of their leader on the Red River. Colonel John S. (Rip) Ford retook Brownsville and Ft. Brown which brought about a resumption of cotton shipping from Brownsville across the river to Matamoros and thence overland to Bagdad where it was loaded on boats for world markets.

Admiral Raphael Semmes and many other Confederate officers, with a price on their heads, were smuggled back through these above mentioned cities into the Confederacy.

On a hill between Brownsville and Boca Chica the last battle of the war was fought and the last gun was fired on Texas soil in an engagement between Texan troops under Colonel John S. Ford and a large Federal force under General Barrett.

This battle occurred on May 13, 1865, at Palmetto Hill near Martin's Ranch about twelve miles from Brownsville. Ford's men were victorious and learned from prisoners that Lee had surrendered more than a month before this encounter.25

24Scott, op. cit., p. 105.

25D. G. Wooten, History of Texas, p. 368.
Brownsville was soon thereafter occupied by Federal troops under General Philip H. Sheridan and the boom days of the war were at an end.

Early Transportation and Roads

The mode of transportation used by the early Spaniards in the area along the Rio Grande was burro pack trains on the lands and canoes or small boats on the river. Of course, there were many who preferred riding horseback through the cactus and the chaparral.

Following the advent of the Anglo settlers in the latter part of the eighteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century, the principal method of handling overland traffic or freight was the ox-cart method. These cumbersome, huge, two-wheeled carts were drawn either by oxen or burros. The rate of speed was slow and the amount of freight the carts would carry was small.

As transportation problems increased other methods of transporting goods in larger quantities were considered.

The handling of the overland traffic in Cameron County before the days of highways was done by ponderous two-wheeled carts. River traffic, due to a shifting, meandering channel, had been abandoned. The large volume of freight depending on ox-cart transportation overtaxed the capacity of the slow trekking ox-carts. A means of quicker transportation of goods moving from Point Isabel to Brownsville became a necessity.26

The above mentioned need was the forerunner of a plan that resulted in the construction of a 21-mile narrow gauge railroad from Brownsville. As most of the valley freight came by way of the Gulf and Point Isabel, the Northbound traffic was principally passenger service with only light baggage.

The nearest point of approach of a railroad to the Valley before 1903 was Alice and the means of carrying passengers between Alice and Brownsville was by stagecoach, and the passengers who rode this swaying, bucking conveyance had an experience that was never to be forgotten.

With a speed ranging from five to eight miles per hour, the little jaunt from Alice to Brownsville required two days and a night of hard continuous travel. The night end of the trip was something of a horror with the passengers sitting up and snatching their forty winks as they could. The one-way fare for adults was fifteen dollars.

The run from Corpus Christi to Brownsville required from fifty-six to eighty-four hours continuous travel. There were no towns along either route, only brush and cactus, with little or no water to drink. Hour after hour on a bumpy trail of holes and ruts or fifty miles of deep sand broken only by an occasional change of mules or one pause where unwashed tired passengers could unlimber their aching limbs and get a refreshing meal, the wayside place of Captain James Smith.27

The roads over which these stagecoaches and ox-carts were compelled to transport their freight or passengers were either deep-rutted, rough roads or cactus and brush-lined trails with alternate sections of deep sand or very rough surfaces.

27 Ibid., p. 142.
Who cared about the Valley? That it was only a brush-covered half desert region where no decent person would care to live among the ants and other insects appeared to be the thoughts of the persons who might be the means of financing a railroad into the Valley.

Threat of Secession

The question of land titles loomed as a severe storm on the horizon of the South Texas area in the early part of the last half of the nineteenth century. The early land grants made by the King of Spain to certain of his subjects were causing various decisions and judgments in direct opposition to the titles of many of the new settlers in the area between the Nueces and Rio Grande rivers. A storm of protest was raised against the state authorities and petitions were signed asking the Federal Government for permission to form a separate state.

Three quarters of a century in a new and rapidly developing country is long enough for important incidents in history to be entirely forgotten. Therefore, few, if any, will recall the threat of the people of this lower country to secede from Texas and set up an independent government, "The Rio Grande Territory," shaking off the Texas part of itself, very much as a young frog sheds its tadpole scenery.

Restless over the land title situation which some felt their state was seeking to annul and feeling that their only recourse, in order to quiet their titles, was to go to the Federal Government for a territorial organization, preparatory to the formation of a new state. A number of Brownsville citizens sent out a spirited call setting forth their grievances.
A mass meeting was held in R. N. S. Stanbury's school house in Brownsville on February 2nd to take steps for the territorial organization of the country lying between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande. 28

A meeting close on the heels of the above mentioned get-together, presided over by some of the more far-sighted citizens, with some quieting assurances from the State Capitol had the effect of pouring oil on troubled waters and causing the dissatisfied parties to give their state another chance.

The title grievances were settled so thoroughly to the satisfaction of everyone concerned that the candidate for governor of Texas received ninety-six per cent of all votes cast in the Valley sector.

CHAPTER IV

AGRICULTURAL AND INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT

Rice and Sugar

The story of rice and its relation to Cameron County is not of much importance, for the land which at first seemed to be perfectly suited to rice growing later proved to be allergic to the floodings which the rice must have.

The rice industry was never developed on a large scale. Small acreages were planted over a period of twenty years but by 1905 the production of rice in this area had practically disappeared.

The following paragraph by Allhands gives an account of the largest rice venture and the reason for its failure:

William Ratcliffe, former Louisiana agent of the McCormick Harvester Company, interested some of the officials of his company in the future promise of a great rice domain in Cameron County.

They acquired more than three thousand acres of land at $2.50 per acre, together with right-of-ways for their proposed canals. Whereupon they planned and built the Brownsville irrigation project, erecting a pumping plant on the river of sufficient capacity to irrigate some 15,000 acres.

A company was incorporated with a capitalization of $250,000 on June 11, 1901. In that year the crop was a ten-strike, rated at 43,000 sacks and the growing of rice seemed assured. By the third year the production of rice practically played out. It was not a rice country as the flooding of the crops brought out alkalis and salts that ruined the land.
There was also, at that time, an over-production of rice in the nation which brought on a depression of prices. The growing of rice was gradually abandoned and is now only a memory.¹

Much money was invested and a heavy loss was sustained in proving that the valley lands were not suitable for rice.

Many experiments were made in frontier settlements and this area was no exception. A crop that inveigled more people into its productive web than any previous agricultural venture and one that created much more interest and activity by far than rice was sugar cane. This commodity was first introduced into the Valley about 1860. "George Brulay from Louisiana, a wealthy farmer of French-Canadian extraction, planted and harvested the first successful crop of sugar cane in Cameron County in 1864."²

Brulay settled on his home site near the river west of Brownsville and, after working out a crude system of irrigation, proceeded to create a veritable "Garden of Eden" in this brushy wilderness.

Brownsville was quite proud of Plantation del Rio Grande, better known as George Brulay's place, located less than nine miles west of the town. Brulay was said to have been the only man who ever engaged in farming in the strictly Brownsville Country before the coming of Lott's railroad. He built himself a large two-story house and was the first to plant cotton in that section. He likewise grew the first crop of sugar cane ever grown in not only Brownsville area but in the entire South Texas area.

Brulay had 389 acres that had been in constant cultivation since 1870. He had a roller sugar mill and had been producing sugar in abundance for twenty-seven years when visited by Uriah Lott, the railroad sponsor, in 1903.\(^3\)

Sugar cane continued to be an important crop in this Valley area for fifty years or more. Hundreds of acres were planted in sugar cane and because of the mild climate five to seven cuttings could be made from the same stubble. The cane grew to an enormous size, often having as many as thirty-two joints to one stalk, and produced from thirty to forty tons per acre.

The following appeared in the *Texas Almanac* of 1914.

The Rio Grande Valley produces from thirty-five to forty tons of sugar cane per acre and gets from four to six crops from the same stubble. Louisiana produces twenty tons per acre and gets only two crops from the same stubble.\(^4\)

Five large sugar mills were in operation in Cameron County at one time, probably the largest being that built by Sam Robertson and Company at a cost of $350,000. The sugar turned out by these mills was shipped, in unrefined stage, not only to Texas but to other states in the Union and declared to be of high quality.

Sugar cane was grown in the Valley area until the late 1930's and it was pushed aside by winter vegetables and cotton, assisted by falling prices and some element in the soil that

\(^3\) J. L. Allhands, *Uriah Lott*, p. 100.

\(^4\) *Texas Almanac*, 1914, p. 143.
caused a problem in the crystallization of the cooked cane juice.

Winter Vegetables

When rice and sugar cane had failed to measure up to the standards set for them by the growers of the Valley sector, they began to investigate and experiment to find something that could be produced during the winter months and from a scratch beginning in 1900 the vegetable industry has outstripped any section of the United States with an area of the same size.

Although a few vegetables were grown before the coming of the railroads in 1904, transportation was the stumbling block. By 1926 articles like the following were appearing in the newspapers of the Southwest:

Within twenty-five years there has grown at the southern tip of Texas an area generally called the "Lower Valley," the like of which may be found nowhere else in the United States. Semi-tropical temperatures, alluvial soil of extraordinary richness, abundant water from the Rio Grande which rises in the snows of the Colorado Mountains more than 2,000 miles away, all three combine to make the Lower Valley Country a garden of beauty and a source of agricultural wealth.

From this region comes hundreds of cars of early vegetables sold on the markets of the North's most popular cities at a fancy price.5

The growing of winter vegetables has continued to increase year by year and pour thousands of dollars into the pockets of

5San Antonio Express, June 21, 1927, p. 20.
the growers of that area.

Since they have all modern means of transportation and refrigeration methods to preserve the cargoes, the farmers have realized a handsome profit as they are able, because of a mild climate, to place their vegetables on Northern markets from thirty to sixty days earlier than other areas and can demand a higher price.

In 1930 4,000 cars of vegetables were shipped out of the Valley and this amount had increased in 1948 to more than 8,000 cars. To give an idea of the quantity and kinds of vegetables that are produced in the Cameron County area, the following is taken from the Texas Almanac.

Vegetables shipped from Cameron County in 1948 are as follows:

- Cabbage - - - - - - - - 5,544 cars
- Tomatoes - - - - - - - - 1,377 "
- Irish Potatoes - - - - - 1,102 "
- Peppers - - - - - - - - 156 "
- Lettuce - - - - - - - - 391 "
- Carrots - - - - - - - - 127 "
- Cucumbers - - - - - - - - 40 "
- Beets - - - - - - - - 137 "
- Beans - - - - - - - - 4 "
- Peas - - - - - - - - 39 "

These figures do not include the large quantities of vegetables that are canned at the numerous canning factories in the county or smaller shipments of:

- Broccoli
- Squash
- Rutabagas
- Corn (Roasting ears)
- Spinach
- Cauliflower
- Onions
- Garlic
- Radishes
- and Others
Most of the canned vegetables include tomatoes, 2,500,000 cases, beets, cucumbers, and kraut.

The vegetable growers have to be continually on the alert for insects that would destroy their crops and combat these pests by poisoning.

Cantaloupes are raised rather extensively in the Valley area and shipped to northern markets for the early high prices.6

"The first Irish Potatoes were grown in the Rio Grande Valley in 1847 in what is now the city limits of Brownsville."7

Citrus Production

Although the first citrus trees grown in the entire Rio Grande Valley area were seven orange trees transported from Spain and planted near the present city of Edinburg on the Laguna Seca Ranch, the man given credit for being the father of the citrus industry in Cameron County was a Frenchman, Celestine Jagou by name, who had settled in Brownsville soon after the close of the war between Mexico and the United States. The following paragraph tells of his contribution to the history of the Valley:

A real show place in its day was the Esperanza Farm, five miles below Brownsville, owned and operated by Celestine Jagou. Jagou came to Brownsville from Southern France in 1850. He cleared the land of its tangled brush and put in crops of corn, Mexican beans, and cotton.


7 Personal interview with Mrs. Harbert Davenport, Brownsville, May 12, 1950.
He experimented with sea-island cotton, which he sold for 30 cents per pound, and tried his hand at tobacco raising but perhaps his greatest contribution was the planting of citrus in 1891. He had an orchard planted with lemon stock of Italian origin, limes from Mexico and budded oranges from Orlando, Florida. All these were killed by the freeze of 1899.8

The growing of citrus fruit in the Valley was very much of an experiment before 1915 as the growers did not want to plunge into some project, in a big way, without being certain of its feasibility. They feared the results of frosty weather would eliminate the success of the citrus fruit venture. "Before the first World War there was little citrus culture in Texas because it was believed that winter would be too hard on the fruit; however, the citrus industry developed rapidly in the early 1920's."9

The predominating tree in the Valley citrus field was the grapefruit tree which grew in acreage and popularity through the 1920's and was of one variety, the White Marsh. However, in 1929, new blood moved into the grapefruit field as a result of the discovery by a Mr. Collins in a Florida fruit grove.

One day in 1913 a man named Collins walked into a grapefruit grove in Florida to pick some fruit for a special order. In the course of his work Collins stopped to slice open a fruit he had just plucked. To his astonishment he found that the meat of the grapefruit, instead of being the customary light yellow, was a delicate

9Saturday Evening Post, June 3, 1950, p. 100.
pink color. In flavor, this biological sport was blander and sweeter than the Marsh seedless grapefruit which the parent tree customarily bore. Marking the spot well Collins hurried back to report his discovery.

What Collins found that day has since become, through permutations of fate and horticulture, a multi-million dollar industry and a geographical trade mark in a sun-baked Texas Valley one thousand miles from that Florida orchard.10

In 1925, Thompson, the Florida nurseryman, was offering for sale the first pink sport trees, produced from the discovery of Collins. The first 160 of these new trees on the market were bought by Hart, Baker, Heminger and Doctor Webb, all Valley growers. Four years following this purchase both Heminger and Doctor Webb found another sport from the pink variety. This new sport was a red variety and was patented by Heminger and Webb in what was said to be the first fruit patent issued by the United States Patent Office. This was the beginning of the Ruby Red or Red Blush grapefruit for which the Valley has become so famous. "The first of these Red Blush grapefruit shipped to Chicago were put through a laboratory test before the prospective buyers would believe that their color was natural."11

From 3,000 boxes shipped in 1918, the citrus fruit production of the Valley has grown by leaps and bounds until, in 1948, the shippings were listed from Cameron County as follows:

10Ibid., p. 32.
11Ibid., p. 102.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fruit</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grapefruit</td>
<td>7,760 cars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oranges</td>
<td>3,162 &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lemons</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangerines</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limes</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed citrus</td>
<td>1,017 boxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grapefruit juice</td>
<td>4,944,258 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grapefruit sections</td>
<td>189,421 &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange juice</td>
<td>296,067 &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grapefruit and orange juice blend</td>
<td>228,890 &quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are twelve plants in Cameron County that can citrus juices and grapefruit sections.\(^\text{12}\)

Texas citrus fruit are shipped to every state in the Union and there is considerable foreign export. Citrus peel, pulp, and seed are being converted into stock feed. There are at present 2,326,192 citrus trees in Cameron County that produce a handsome income for the growers.

Research and experimentation are constantly changing the industry and helping stabilize operations. A fruit and vegetable laboratory is located near the center of the Valley which is continually conducting research for more and varied uses of the citrus fruits. The citrus trees must be sprayed from one to three times each year as a protection from insects and other vermin that would either injure or destroy the crops of fruit. Although the area is filled with all kinds of modern machinery the method of gathering is by hand and the "wet back" laborers are used. They can be hired in large numbers which take care of the growers' rush when the fruit is ready. They are usually transported to and from the orchards in large

trucks and they work for a much cheaper wage than the American farm laborers, who are really scarce in this southern section.

Cotton

The first cotton to be planted in Cameron County was on the George Brulay farm near Brownsville on a small acreage near the Rio Grande River where some form of irrigation could be used if the need occurred. The forerunner of a great cotton sector was this wee block of land cleared of brush and planted in 1864.

Practically all of the cotton produced in the county was cultivated by "dry farming" with the prayer that enough rain would fall at the proper time to produce at least a fair yield of cotton. This was a hit or miss gamble and the odds were heavily in favor of the latter as the average rainfall of the Valley is approximately twenty-six inches, the major portion of which falls in the summer months when the cotton is ready to gather. The Valley's irrigation system was not a working unit before 1900 and in some areas even later. The rainfall can be judged by the irregular trend in the number of bales ginned in the county. The land had to be cleared, many canals and drainage ditches built and kept in good working condition and the construction of the entire irrigation system was slow and costly; hence, the late date of Cameron County taking its place in the limelight as a heavy
cotton producing area. "Before 1900 the cotton fields in Cameron County were small in size as well as in number. The cotton industry in this area consisted of a few small fields and a production of scarcely more than 100 bales per season."\(^{13}\)

The completion of the first railroad into the Valley, which event was celebrated in 1904, solved the much needed transportation problem for the Valley area. The farmers, seeking money crops to take the place of the discarded rice and sugar ventures that had proved unsuited to the delta section of South Texas, began to depend more and more on "king cotton." Cheap Mexican labor was imported to clear the land of its wilderness of mesquite and cactus. Improved systems of irrigation were installed furnishing more water for the increasing number of acres being added to the farming areas, and the production of cotton began to mount and continued on an upward trend leading to the all time record production of 1949. White Gold, as it was called by the growers, had truly been the means of staving off a depression in the agricultural sector of the Magic Valley. The following item, appearing in the Christian Science Monitor following the harvesting of the 1949 cotton crop, gives an idea of the value placed on cotton in the Rio Grande Valley as a standby in time of an emergency:

\(^{13}\)Eugene C. Barker, *Texas History*, p. 627.
The farmers of Cameron County, seeking to supplant their small incomes from the citrus groves caused by the freeze of 1949, increased their cotton acreage resulting in an all time high in cotton production for that area. Orchards and vegetable crops had been heavily damaged by the coldest weather recorded at the Brownsville Weather Bureau in 37 years. These extra acres were planted in cotton and by the end of August, two weeks before the deadline for plowing under the cotton stubble, the harvest of cotton lint and seed had brought the growers of that county the tidy sum of $43,446,000.

Valley cotton is shipped to many foreign fields including Canada, Spain, Greece, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Japan, China, the Philippines and others. 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>NO. OF BALES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>8,285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>13,281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>3,713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>5,487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>2,486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>4,872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>2,708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>8,790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>8,876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>5,835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>13,655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>9,473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>17,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>26,089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>31,711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>45,034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>49,945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>16,823</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Irrigation

Far sighted men who came to the Valley in its initial stages of development gazed upon the rich soils of the area, the water supply of the Rio Grande, and the mild climate with an idea that a situation parallel to the delta of the Nile was not mere theory in the then brush-covered deltaic plain. Because of the scant rainfall the future of the sector would depend largely on a stabilized system of irrigation. The first irrigation projects, other than that of the early Mexicans who

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>NO. OF BALES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>36,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>37,018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>24,165</td>
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<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>14,304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>12,196</td>
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<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>18,544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>21,777</td>
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<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>11,096</td>
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<td>1936</td>
<td>20,284</td>
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<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>43,718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>35,751</td>
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<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>31,126</td>
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<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>28,013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>11,656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>29,362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>32,275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>42,142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>49,511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946</td>
<td>37,734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>111,188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>111,919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>214,536</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

transported water for small areas by hand, were those used on the farms of George Brulay and Celestine Jagou. Crude pumps and hand-dug ditches capable of supplying water to a few acres were used by these two gentlemen between 1850 and 1900. Another pioneer in the field of irrigation was John Closner, a transplanted Swede from the Wisconsin dairy country. "In 1892 John Closner put in the first pumping plant on the upper river. The pumping equipment was shipped into Point Isabel on the Morgan Lines steamships and hauled in wagons from there to Closner's plantation." Closner's pumping plant consisted of a twenty-five horse power centrifugal pump and portable steam engine that would suck 4800 gallons of the yellow silt laden water of the Rio Grande up an eighteen foot lift and thus enable him to irrigate something over 200 acres. John Castaing achieved somewhat the same results on a much smaller scale, water being supplied to his growing crops by means of an odd looking water wheel powered by a donkey and which, as it splashingly revolved, filled and spilled a series of five-gallon cans.

Prior to the construction of the Gulf Coast Railroad in 1904, only a small tract here and there was watered, producing principally corn, frijoles, sugar cane and some rice with a few acres of cotton dotting the landscape.

One of the earliest ditches dug for irrigation purposes was that of the Santa Maria Canal Company. It was about seven miles in length and watered some

\[ J. L. Allhands, Uriah Lott, pp. 103-104. \]
three thousand acres in and around the town. This canal was started in 1897 by E. Forto and the Longoria Brothers.16

Other pioneers in the field of irrigation were Sam Robertson and Lon C. Hill, Sr. Robertson's irrigation project centered around San Benito.

Having scraped a little profit together on other contracts Sam Robertson, in December, 1906, was able to put his Mexicans and mules to clearing brush out of the old resacas and start work building the enormous headgates on the River. His plan called for the use of the old river bed as his main canal and he would take water from the Rio Grande by gravity flow. However, by the following March his scanty capital had given out. Then he went out and looked up the Heywoods. They had made a pile of money in the Spindletop and later Jennings oil fields and it was their dollars that enabled Sam to expand and complete his irrigation project, the San Benito Land and Water Company, and to found the city of his dream, San Benito, known in an early day as Sam Robertson's Town.17

Lon C. Hill, Sr., began the ground work on his irrigation scheme about one year later than Robertson and centered his activities around Harlingen.

On May 2, 1907, Mr. Hill started to water some of the thirsty lands in the vicinity of his new town of Harlingen and the following September he founded the Harlingen Land and Water Company with the following incorporators: Lon C. Hill, Sr., John D. Hill, Miss Paul Hill, Dr. S. H. Bell, and P. E. Blaylock.18

The first large company to become interested in Valley irrigation was the American, Rio Grande Land and Irrigation  

17J. L. Allhands, Uriah Lott, p. 147.  
18Ibid., p. 158.
Company, founded in 1903. To this company belongs a great part of the credit for having given the United States one of the most prosperous and fertile regions that is to be found anywhere. Although there is a sizeable amount of acreage in Cameron County not under irrigation, great strides have been made in bringing the greater portion of it under the flow of the waters of the Rio Grande and the county is set up under a well balanced irrigation program whereby the area is divided into seventeen water improvement districts, each under skilled and efficient management.

The Valley Laborer

From south of the Rio Grande came the labor supply that was needed to clear the land, dig the ditches, cultivate, water and harvest the ever increasing yields of vegetables, citrus fruit and cotton. The "wetback", subject of conferences and government regulations, has been the answer to the needs for cheap labor in the Valley. In many instances these workers have had experiences that left them amazed at the ruthlessness of Christian, civilized America. Some unscrupulous growers and their foremen brought these laborers to the Valley with glowing promises of good wages and a good place to stay, something they had not experienced in their native land and after working them through the harvest season turned them off with little pay and the threat of deportation to keep them from reporting the wrong.
The life of the "wetback" worker has been one of danger and hardship on many occasions. Some have drowned in their attempts to swim the river to the American side. Many have been killed by immigration officers or other border officers for various reasons and a large number have been murdered by their own countrymen when they had saved a few American dollars and were returning to Mexico. Items in the daily newspapers such as the following were weekly, if not daily, occurrences: "Three unidentified bodies were recovered from the Rio Grande near Brownsville late yesterday afternoon. The bodies all of Latin-American descent, were discovered by fishermen as they were seining for bait prior to making a fishing excursion to Port Isabel."\textsuperscript{19} News reports of this nature are not a rarity even in 1950.

The majority of the growers saw that their laborers were well fed and provided with medical care although the wages have not been on a level with those in other sections of the state. The wage scale has been upped in most sections of the Valley. Seventy-five cents per day which resembled a fortune to the ragged, half-starved peons was the general wage for many years. A raise to twenty cents per hour became the average wage about 1930 or shortly thereafter. The latest wage adjustment scale 40 cents per hour, which was made in 1949, was set as a minimum scale for common labor and 75 cents per

\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Brownsville Herald}, September 8, 1949, p. 1.
hour for truck and tractor drivers. The low wage scale has been a means of keeping the Anglo laborer from competing with the Latin laborer in the Valley agricultural drama. The growers contend that the high taxes and water rates compel them to use cheap labor in order to realize a profit.

Tax rate per $100 of assessed valuation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tax Description</th>
<th>Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State ad valorem</td>
<td>$ .42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County tax</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School tax</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigation Dist. tax</td>
<td>.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Flat rates (water tax) $3.00 per acre
Charge for each watering $1.50 per acre.

The cost of poisoning and cheap prices for products received in competition with those produced in Mexico with much cheaper labor will compel them to abandon farming and seek other means of earning a livelihood in the coastal region.

**Rio Grande**

The river christened **Rio de las Palmas (Palms River)** by the Spanish explorer, Captain Alfonso Alvarez de Pineda, who, in 1519, while coasting along the Gulf side of present Texas, ventured into the river's mouth, was lined with tufted, tall palmettos. The Spanish advancing from Mexico in the south titled it **El Rio Bravo del Norte**, "The Brave, Valiant, Wild River of the North", in tribute to its gorges, freshets, and sudden furies. **Rio Bravo** has long been also **El Rio Grande del Norte**, "The Large, Lordly River of the North", the great river

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come upon by Captain-General Coronado on his eastward march into the interior of New Mexico in 1540. The mere trickle, or source of the Rio Grande, is 12,500 feet above sea level at bleak Stony Pass of the Continental Divide, eight miles from the old mining town of Silverton in the rugged San Juan Mountains of Southwestern Colorado. From the take off, gathering strength with melting snows, bursts of rain and creek inflows, it courses down through gorges, valleys and bottoms through Colorado, New Mexico, and along the Texas border for 1,888 miles to the Gulf of Mexico. In length it ranks third among the rivers native to the United States.

On the long road from its source to the Gulf of Mexico the Rio Grande furnishes not only life giving substance in the form of water for the parched soil along its path but, with each flow through the irrigation channels over crops of different variety, there is deposited on the fields a thin layer of silt which has a tendency to enrich the soil similar to the manner that Egypt or the Nile Valley is watered and fertilized by the Nile River. The fertility or, at least, the productivity of the Rio Grande Valley depends largely upon the river by the same name. Should the waters of the Rio Grande be suddenly taken from the fields of Cameron County and other sections within its irrigable radius, that semi-arid region would become a grazing domain, lacking sufficient rainfall for profitable farming.
CHAPTER V

SECOND PERIOD OF EXPANSION

Railroads

Following the Civil War when other sections of Texas and the United States were building railroads in all directions Brownsville and the Lower Rio Grande Valley appear not to have existed as far as a line to that area was concerned. Railway companies did not wish to risk the long miles of road bed construction through an unsettled, unproven, desert-like area with no assurance of freight in amounts large enough even to pay expenses not to mention thoughts of profit. The first promise of a railroad that would solve Brownsville's transportation needs was a company incorporated by a Count Telfener, D. E. Hungerford and other financiers from Texas, New York and France. This proposed route with a beginning at Richmond, Texas, was to extend southward until it eventually reached Brownsville. Telfener's railroad of 1882, although it quickened the pulse of the citizenry of the Lower Valley region, never materialized.

The next railroad venture was the Roper organization with plans to build a line, 2,150 miles in length, extending through Brownsville into Mexico. In 1890 several miles of grade were thrown up for the proposed road. The proposed
Roper line, after making a grand beginning, met the fate of its predecessor and ceased to function.

The next company to try to breach the distance from Victoria south to Brownsville with steel rails was the Pan-American Railway. The project was backed by some prominent people and was supposed to be amply financed.

Again the railroad seemed near realization and by August, 1892, ten miles of track to the crossing of the Guadalupe River had been laid west from Victoria and equipment was being delivered. Ere long the project was sorely in need of funds, the lack of which finally caused suspension of construction work and culminated in a sheriff's sale of the property in January, 1894, to J. M. Bronson for the nominal sum of $11,000. Its fifty-six pound rails were torn up and eventually went to John H. Kirby for use on his Gulf, Beaumont and Kansas City Line.1

Following the above mentioned efforts to build railroads into Brownsville there were visits, meetings, promises and everything except the road itself materializing between the Nueces and Rio Grande rivers. The muddle finally clarified to the extent that it appeared to be a race between the Southern Pacific with its southern terminal at Alice and the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railway Company that was seeking to build a road from Sinton south to the Rio Grande. Without demanding a bonus it first appeared that the Southern Pacific would lead the way into the Valley but people began to doubt their idle promises and gave bonuses to the New St.

1J. L. Allhands, Gringo Builders, p. 78.
Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railway Company which built the first actual railroad into Brownsville.

The above named company was chartered January 12, 1903, with the following incorporators:

Uriah Lott
R. J. Kleberg
John B. Armstrong
R. Driscoll
James B. Wells
George F. Evans
John G. Kenedy
and

Robert Driscoll, Jr.
E. H. Caldwell
J. J. Welder
F. Yturria
Thomas Carson
Caesar Kleberg
Arthur E. Spohn
R. King.²

On July 1, 1903, the Johnson Brothers entered into a contract with the new railway company for the construction of its line. Their final estimates called for 141.75 miles at $12,500 per mile. Almost exactly one year from the time construction was started the first passenger train rolled into Brownsville in charge of Geo. W. Heuster, Conductor, with H. H. Kendall at the throttle and Billy Jordan, fireman. Following is a list of the first passengers to arrive in Brownsville on the new road:

Uriah Lott
Charles Chase. . . . . . . . Supt. of Motive Power
W. P. Pollard. . . . . . . . Chief Dispatcher
F. P. Read . . . . . . . . . Supt., Johnson Bros. Construction Co.
G. A. Taft . . . . . . . . . Supt., Wells Fargo Express Co.
J. W. Hutchinson . . . . Travelling Passenger Agent, Frisco R. R.
Ed E. Everett . . . . . . . . Agent, San Antonio Daily Express
Mrs. J. S. Graham. . . . . Wife of Local Agent

²J. L. Allhands, Uriah Lott, p. 82.
Harry Brown .................................................. Chief of Police
Russell Cooke .............................................. Porter
Willis Callaghan ........................................... Porter
Mrs. H. E. Kliman .......................................... Eagle Pass
J. H. Ransom ............................................... Eagle Pass
J. W. Herreford ............................................. Ft. Worth
W. R. Savage .............................................. Ft. Worth
C. W. Childers ............................................. Ft. Worth
C. C. Figio ................................................ Lampasas
C. E. Campbell ............................................ Brownwood
R. M. Whenney ............................................. Edna
N. N. McDonald ........................................... Austin
H. M. Crockett ............................................. Houston
J. E. Eaton ................................................ Normana
J. J. Beck .................................................. La Porte
L. K. Norris ................................................ Harlingen
Capt. Sam Smith .......................................... Marlin
N. S. Murphy ............................................... Beaumont
J. D. Hickey ............................................... Corpus Christi
Mrs. Patrick Moran ....................................... Beaumont
J. L. Faison ................................................ San Antonio
G. A. Stoerner ............................................ Llano
W. J. Toland ................................................ Ft. Brown
Dr. Fred T. Kyle, USA ...................................... Ft. Brown
C. A. Jacobs ............................................... Frank Vasquez
Antonio Cisneros ......................................... Charles Hirsch
C. W. McDonald ........................................... Y. Trevino, Jr.
Frank Lopez ............................................... W. F. Cuttingham
H. Besteiro ................................................ P. B. Basco
A. E. Renick ............................................... V. A. Scoville
C. F. Fox .................................................. Mrs. J. A. Tillman
Mike Cavasos and family ................................ J. W. Farley
J. M. Pettus ............................................... Mrs. M. M. Abney
Dr. R. H. H. Wright ....................................... Ashburne, Pa.
Mrs. J. Cavanaugh ......................................... N. E. Braunfels
A. H. Fisher ............................................... Laredo
George Robertson ......................................... Goliad
Dr. R. R. Lemaster ....................................... Brownsville
J. B. Marshall ............................................. Matamscos, Mexico
W. P. Steen ................................................ St. Elmo, Illinois
A. E. Johnston ............................................ Waco
E. B. Martin ............................................... Orange
W. C. Buckner .............................................. Kerrville
G. D. Anderson ........................................... Wortham
R. Andrews ................................................ Chicago, Illinois

"On the morning of July 4, 1904, Brownsville said goodbye to its overland stage coach when Conductor Ed Burke gave the high sign; there was a hiss of steam, the clang of a bell and the first passenger train from Brownsville, bound for Corpus Christi, was on its way. The St. Louis, Brownsville, and Mexico Railway, once called the Gulf Coast Line, was later purchased by the Missouri-Pacific Lines and the entire system replaced by modern equipment.

With the completion of the Southern-Pacific from Alice to Brownsville in the late 1920's Cameron County had ample railroad service to care for the vast amount of shipping and passenger service shuttling in and out of the Valley. The present modern railroad system of the Valley is quite a contrast to the twenty-mile strip of narrow gauge track, the Valley's only railroad from 1872 to 1904, extending from Brownsville to Port Isabel.

Roads

The greatest improvement in arteries of transportation for the section of South Texas called the "Magic Valley" has been the development of the highways or roads of that area. Before the entry of the United States into World War I, there were only two short stretches of all-weather road in Cameron County, one being the old Military Highway from Brownsville.

\[4\] J. L. Allhands, Uriah Lott, p. 143.
up the river to Edinburg, which was used in the movement of troops up and down the Rio Grande in the early pioneer life of Texas. The second stretch of all-weather road extended from Brownsville through San Benito and Harlingen to the Hidalgo County line. Other than the above mentioned roads the nearest claim to highways in the county were dirt roads that were maintained in most instances by split-log drags. These roads were strictly dry weather roads and sad was the plight of motorists who were caught on these roads in a rainstorm. Even as late as 1930 tourists who had driven to Port Isabel would ship their automobiles to Brownsville by rail rather than try the dirt roads after a rain.

The first hard-surfaced highway to reach Brownsville from upstate came through Alice-Falfurrias-Edinburg and down the Valley paralleling the river. This highway, a combination of Numbers 83 and 281, is one of the busiest or most travelled avenues of transportation in the entire state.

Other short branches of road were improved but it was not until after 1934 that road building got the needed impetus or stimulant really to start road improvement in a big way. The Lower Valley country had long seen the need of a highway or system of highways from Robstown into Brownsville without going all the extra miles necessary to circumvent the enormous land holdings of the kind and Kenedy interest which would not allow a highway to be constructed across their property. For many years all entreaties for a highway through
the above named lands were met with refusal after refusal. The reasons given by the King and Kenedy interests for not wanting a highway through their vast ranches were as follows: "We have railroads through our property for transportation purposes and should a highway be granted through the same property our fences would be torn down, gates left open and our cattle continually causing an unending amount of trouble and extra work." A right-of-way was finally obtained through these estates in the middle 1930's and construction of the long-desired highway was begun. This highway, designated as Highway Number 77, connects Brownsville with northern portions of the state by a road through Harlingen, Raymondville, Kingsville, and a more direct course than that of Highway 83 by way of Edinburg and Falfurrias.

Many miles of hard-surfaced roads have been constructed in the last decade and many more miles are under construction. Tourists can drive to Port Isabel and not have the fear of being compelled to ship their cars out by rail as there are more than two hundred thirty miles of hard surfaced roads in the county, not enumerating the large number of improved gravel roads. Farm-to-market roads are being constructed throughout the county and the area will be accessible to its every hook and corner regardless of the weather or the vehicle in which the traveler is being transported. Could the reader have

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5Brownsville Herald, March 7, 1925, p. 4.
glimpsed the deep-rutted roads of forty to fifty years ago travelled by large two-wheeled ox carts, and if he could have compared them with the present system of fine roads another "Rip Van Winkle" story could be possible.

Improvements of Air and Water Transportation Facilities

Two-wheeled ox cart transportation that carried cargoes from Brownsville to Port Isabel and from Port Isabel to Brownsville for many years was Brownsville's only outlet to the Gulf. The twenty-five mile trip was rough at all times, slow at all times, dangerous on most occasions and muddy to the point of being practically impassable when it rained. Year after year this method of transportation for imports and exports served the people of the Valley. There had been a time when the river was passable from the Gulf to Brownsville but no one cared to risk the expense of dredging the channel as the amount of money needed to finish the task would be enormous.

Finally, in 1872, the ox cart method of moving the goods from Port Isabel to Brownsville was replaced by a narrow-gauge railway, known as the Rio Grande Railway, connecting the two cities. The equipment of this road, including rails, locomotive, and cars, was light and cheap; yet, what an advancement had been made in transportation between the two cities! This narrow-gauge railroad served the Valley until the early stages of 1940 when the government, with some aid from South Texas, dug or dredged a canal from the Gulf to Brownsville that
would accommodate the banana and pineapple boats that plied between Mexico and Texas but would likewise accommodate the large oil tankers which carry oil and gasoline from Texas to the Eastern seaboard of the United States and any large craft that cared to cruise up the Rio Grande. A large turning basin was completed in connection with the canal, giving Brownsville the possibility of becoming one of the important seaports on the Gulf, capable of handling not only the water transportation of South Texas but also much of the exports and imports of Northern Mexico. This item appeared in the Brownsville Herald:

> With the opening of the Port of Brownsville, a new milestone has been passed in the transportation problems of the Valley. Fruit and vegetables with the proper refrigeration now available can, with cotton, be shipped not only to other parts of America but to other world markets at a much cheaper rate than that formerly paid.  

Harlingen citizens are very highly elated over a prospective water route from that city to the Gulf.

The project already under construction will give Harlingen an outlet to the Gulf by way of Rio Hondo. The Arroyo Colorado is to be dredged and widened into a channel or canal that will permit vessels other than large passenger liners to dock at the city's back door and will aid the congested transportation facilities that accrue during the fruit, vegetable and cotton shipping seasons.

Highways of the air are fast becoming important factors in the everyday life of the "Magic Valley." Brownsville is

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6 Brownsville Herald, March 4, 1945, p. 16.

the "jumping off spot" for the Pan American Air Lines as their planes leave the United States for Mexico, Central and South America. The large Pan American airport, with its many hangars and shops, employs a large number of mechanics and other laborers. Such an airport would be an asset to any city or county. Large transport planes winging their way either north or south are nothing spectacular to the natives as they come and go daily.

Two well-equipped municipal airports and the above-named international airport make of Brownsville a center of air traffic in the Valley.

Harlingen is proud of the fine airport bequeathed to that city by the United States Air Force shortly after the close of World War II. The field is equipped with modern hangars, runways, and all the facilities that are needed in the construction of a high class airport. A large landing field and hangar, formerly used by the United States Air Force at Bayview, is not being used at present except by private planes, but it could quickly be converted into an efficient air base. Flying seems to be a well established hobby of the citizens of Cameron County as many private planes are owned by farmers and business men of the area.

Farm Mechanization

The oxen pulling a single plow in the fields of the early settlers of Cameron County would appear out of place, if driven in the same fields with the modern tractors and many other
up-to-date farm machines now used in the irrigated areas of South Texas. These oxen, a few of which were being used as late as the beginning of the twentieth century, eventually were replaced by mules, and the walking plows and planter were pushed to the background by more modern or riding plows.

Casting a look over the fertile fields of the Valley one sees all the farm work being done by mechanical devices, even to a portion of the cotton chopping and cotton picking. Tractors with which a farmer can cultivate many times the number of acres that could be cultivated with oxen or even mules, planters that plant four rows at one time and harvesting equipment that is on a par with that found any where in the nation, all can be seen at work in the fields. Crops and orchards are dusted for disease and fungus control, either by tractors that can cover many acres in one day or more likely from the air which is often buzzing with duster planes which fly low over the fields and citrus groves placing the poison on each tree and vine. These same duster planes are sometimes brought into use to prevent or check the spread of disease by dusting entire cities or communities. Modern gins, located at positions within easy driving range of the growers, have lessened to a great degree the long period of waiting to have their cotton ginned which was so prevalent a few short years ago.

The farms of the Rio Grande region have become so completely mechanized that practically all farm work is being done by machinery with
few exceptions, the most noticeable of which being the harvesting of citrus fruit. This one occupation is carried on exclusively by cheap "wet back" labor as the fruit cannot be taken from the trees successfully by machines without injury to not only the fruit but also to the trees.8

Industrial Development

Industrial development has not failed to keep pace with the rapid growth and advancement of the Lower Rio Grande area. From the first small ice plant in Brownsville that was capable of turning out, at maximum capacity, two tons per day, there have been constructed in the larger towns of the county modern ice plants with a capacity of many tons of ice each day. Freezing and dehydrating plants have eliminated much of the waste formerly noticeable in the fruit and vegetable realm. Many giant canning and processing plants utilize the surplus fruits and vegetables. Factories of all kinds, equipped with modern machinery, have sprung up on every hand. Machine shops, compresses, brick plants, creameries, oil refineries and many other thriving industries furnish employment to hundreds of workers. "Construction of two large hydrocool plants near Port Brownsville has attracted many new residents to the Valley, not only from other sections of Texas but from the entire nation which, in turn, has caused a flurry of building and buying of new homes."9

8Brownsville Herald, June 18, 1949, p. 17.

A proposed causeway which will connect Port Isabel with Padre Island, the southern end of which is to be a second "Miami Beach", will be a colossal enterprise and will attract increasing numbers of job seekers to add to the mounting residential construction already at an all time high. "As the tourist or prospective resident drives down the Valley he sees a new industrial center, the fruit growers' exchange, the new Spanish style houses, finely kept groves, the cotton gins, bulging banks, packing plants, stores of all kinds, pumping plants and irrigation ditches, all from a very small beginning in 1904."10

Tourists

The tourist trade is a source of income that had its small beginning in the period from 1915 to 1920 and has developed into a thing of major financial importance in the Lower Rio Grande. The tourist trade is considered of such great value to the area that clubs, programs and contests are being sponsored as a means of attracting more and more people to visit or become residents of the "Magic Valley." Attracted by its vivid tropical beauty, people from all parts of the United States visit the Lower Rio Grande Valley each year. Here is a land for winter vacationists unexcelled anywhere in the United States. Many who come as visitors remain as residents. Visitors are

10 Dorothy Childs Hogner, South to Padre, pp. 153-154.
welcomed to the Valley by a score of lively towns connected by fast bus service, and tourist clubs are maintained in all Valley towns of any appreciable size. These signs welcome the visitors as they scan the tourist literature.

There are many interesting things to see in the Valley including Cactus farms, Snake King's farm, where many varieties of snakes and some animals may be observed. This farm is noted for the extraction and crystallization of rattle-snake venom which is sold and shipped to almost every country on the globe. In the Valley may be seen the first battlefield of the Mexican War, the last battlefield of the Civil War, ancient chapels, game preserves, miles of canals and resacas, strange trees, tropical and semi-tropical shrubs, flowers of many kinds and colors that bloom almost every month of the year, orange, grapefruit and tangerine orchards in blossom through February and March and heavy with fruit of a beautiful golden color from November until April. Of equal interest is a trip across the Rio Grande into colorful and romantic Old Mexico. The tourist, when he is in Mexico, will find pleasure in visiting some of the earlier buildings constructed by the Spaniards, the Mexican cemeteries where vaults are rented by the month but remove the body and cremate it if the rent is not promptly paid. A bull fight may be observed. Here the tourist not only witnesses the gory, butchering tactics used in bringing the bull to a blinding state of anger before he is dispatched to the tune of cheers or jeers from the crowd but sees the gaudy dress of the Mexican audience in its brightest colors for the occasion.11

The first tourists or prospective buyers to visit the Valley about 1920 did so under circumstances quite different from those with which they now come into contact. Sightseers or home seekers journeying into the Rio Grande Valley when

the tourist phase was in its infancy were confronted with a system of roads that tried the patience of all motorists, whether they possessed a Cadillac or a Model-T Ford. Hard-surfaced roads were found only in sections of the state bordering on the large cities and in between said areas were found roads of all description: dirt roads almost impassable for days following a rain, roads partially gravelled and so rough that cars travelling over them could make only slow progress and detour signs here and there along the route that added many extra miles to the journey. Tourist camps, where the weary traveller could spend a comfortable night, were few and unreasonably high in price. Clean, sanitary lunch rooms were almost as scarce.

Upon reaching the Valley the traveller, whether he be home seeker or sightseer, was confronted with that avaricious army of boomer real estate agents who hounded every step of each stranger who appeared in their area with glowing stories of bumper crops and fabulous prices made and received by certain farmers of the surrounding country. The present-day tourist is not subjected to the above mentioned uncomfortable series of circumstances. Hard-surfaced roads span the area; the entire state being blanketed with a network of all-weather roads makes driving into or out of the Valley a pleasure. Roadside parks with cool shady resting places for summer travellers dot the roadside. Modern tourist courts with all modern conveniences for comfort are found in every part of
the Valley and in other areas through which the highways pass leading into the Valley.

The tourist, or "snow digger" as he was formerly referred to by natives along the Rio Grande, receives a royal welcome as soon as news of his arrival reaches the ear of some member of the Chamber of Commerce. Welcoming committees are on the job to see that the new arrival receives all the courtesies and comforts that are within their powers to bestow. Membership in tourist clubs are at their convenience and sight-seeing tours are offered at a reasonable rate. Contests are now sponsored each year by the tourist departments of the Valley Chamber of Commerce offering a first prize of $1,000 to the family that is picked as the most likely representative of the average tourist family of the year. The following item appeared in several of the Valley newspapers:

Tourist, do not get excited or angered if you are stopped and interviewed along the highways of the Valley during the next few days. You are not in danger of robbery or deportation but committees are only seeking the always welcome tourist family who will be judged the winner in our annual contest to choose a family that will represent the average tourist family of the year. You might be the winner of that first prize of $1,000. 12

Money spent by tourists in the Valley has become a source of income to be reckoned with; hence, the attitude of the Valley inhabitants is not only to make the visits of the tourists pleasant but to induce more tourists to come each succeeding

year. Much money is spent each year in advertising the sights and comforts of the Valley to possible future tourists. That "a satisfied customer is the best advertisement" has been the slogan adopted by the Valley Chamber of Commerce.
CHAPTER VI

CULTURAL PROGRESS

Churches

Father Telmon built the first Catholic Church in Brownsville in 1848. It was a small frame building which served both as a church and as a home for the clergy. The church was blessed and was named Immaculate Conception. "The first bell of this frame building was given by a sea captain to Father Verdet; both the captain and the father perished at sea in 1856 in the steamer Nautilus."¹

In 1854 the foundation for the present church was laid. The present Catholic church was planned by Father Keralum, a young assistant priest from France, who was, before joining the congregation, a famous architect. After the new brick church was completed, the corner stone was laid by Father Verdet in 1855. "In a cavity provided for the corner stone was placed a box containing the American flag, church periodicals, American and Mexican coins of the period and the name of the parish priest."²

All the towns and cities of the county have one or more

¹Brownsville Herald, May 10, 1936, p. 5.
²Ibid., p. 6.
beautiful churches built by the labors and moneys of their Catholic congregation. Perhaps the greatest work done in the religious field by the Catholic missionaries was the achievements of the Oblate Fathers founded in France in 1816 by Charles Joseph Eugene de Mazeyrod. This item appeared in the press:

Men hungry for gold hurried West a hundred years ago. They were known as the "Forty-Niners." But they were not the only Forty-Niners and the treasure they found was good only for money. In that same year a small group of Oblate Fathers landed at Point Isabel, crossed a battlefield so new the grass had not all grown back and reached the "lawless" Brownsville to search for the treasure of men's souls.  

The resolute priests did in Texas what the Texans did. They took to the saddle. In clerical garb they rode with all the skill and probably with more zeal than the border cowboys. In time they came to be known as the "Cavalry of Christ" as they rode for miles across the brushland, spreading the gospel at lonely ranches and among the poorest of the poor. The present-day Catholic denomination owes much of its mentioned success in the Valley to the strenuous work of the above-mentioned Oblate Fathers or "Cavalry of Christ."

The first church of any denomination to be constructed in the Lower Valley was located at Santa Maria on the old Military Highway a few miles west of Brownsville. "Holy Mary,

3San Antonio Express, November 20, 1949, p. 18.
the first Catholic church in the County of Cameron, was built at Santa Maria in 1780.\textsuperscript{4}

**Presbyterian**

Reverend Daniel Baker, the founder of the college by that name, was the first Protestant minister to deliver a sermon in Brownsville or the Lower Valley area. One year later, in 1850, the Reverend Hiram Chamberlain, a Protestant missionary, came to Brownsville and established the first Protestant church on the Mexican border. The Reverend Chamberlain, a Presbyterian minister of the sturdy pioneer type, built the first Presbyterian church in Brownsville in 1850 and started with a membership of six. Chamberlain dedicated his life to home mission work and while he remained pastor of the church at Brownsville his work up and down the Valley as a Sunday School organizer was far reaching. "Instead of only one church at Brownsville the Presbyterians, spurred on by the example of Hiram Chamberlain, have organized churches in the twelve leading towns of the Rio Grande Valley."\textsuperscript{5}

Through Brownsville passed the first missionary of Evangelical faith into Mexico. Miss Melinda Rankin came to Brownsville in 1852 soon after the founding of the first Protestant church there by Reverend Chamberlain. She first

\textsuperscript{4}J. L. Allhands, \textit{Gringo Builders}, p. 163.

\textsuperscript{5}\textit{San Antonio Express}, October 4, 1925, p. 8.
established a school for Mexican girls in Brownsville in 1854. The stories of soldiers returning from Mexico aroused her interest in the Mexican people. Operating from her school in Brownsville she crossed the Rio Grande as the first Protestant missionary in Mexico and continued her work until she had organized fourteen mission stations for the Presbyterian Church.

The one hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the first Presbyterian church in the Valley will be celebrated on October 4, 1950, in the many beautiful churches of that denomination up and down the Rio Grande. The Reverend Chamberlain was active in many lines, being one of the outstanding figures in the organization of Masonry in the state and was a prominent figure in reconstruction work after the war. He was the first Worshipful Master of the Valley Masonic Lodge and was district deputy grand master of the State lodge at the time of his death.

Methodist

The centennial of Methodism was observed in Brownsville on May 7, 1949, which date marked the 100th year since the first house was erected for a Methodist church in Brownsville.

The Reverend N. A. Cravens was appointed to shepherd the small flock in 1849. At the time of his appointment Reverend Cravens resided in Alabama. Upon receiving his transfer to Texas Reverend Cravens started on a long trek that was to last seventy-seven days before he was to reach his destination.6

6Christian Advocate, June 1, 1950, p. 709c.
The first Methodist church dedicated on May 12, 1849, was a small frame house which was used as a church until 1892. Today Brownsville has an adequate building erected in 1922 with the education unit completed in 1948. All the towns and cities in Cameron County are fortunate in having some of the nicest buildings in Southwest Texas as places of worship. Methodism has shown a steady increase in both church and Sunday School membership from the time of Reverend Craven’s arrival in Brownsville to the present day.

Other Churches

The First Episcopal church in the Valley was established in 1854 and has continued to prosper as have churches of like denominations in San Benito and Brownsville.

The Baptist and Church of Christ denominations are probably the two fastest growing churches in the entire valley. They have beautiful churches pastored by able ministers in every community in Cameron County. The first Baptist church to be erected in Cameron County was built in Brownsville. Since that date its growth has been phenomenal. The date of the first Church of Christ edifice was not obtained but its growth has almost paralleled that of the Baptists.

Christian Church, Assembly of God, and several other denominations offer the inhabitants of the coastal plain a variety of places for Christian worship.
Schools

Although school of some form was taught in the Valley area, either sectarian or private, in homes or in other buildings, the first public school in Brownsville or the entire Valley area was erected in 1888 and located at Washington Park. The list of names of the teachers who taught the first year follows:

J. F. Cummings, Principal
Miss Mary C. Butler
Mrs. T. H. Clearwater
Miss Minnie Duffy
Miss Katie Kingsbury
Miss Kate Daugherty
Miss Mina Egly
Miss Lily Willman
Miss Nelly Kimbell
Miss Annie Scanlan
Miss Clare Fernandez
Miss Sarah Kenedy
Miss Maggie Kenedy

St. Joseph's Academy, a school for Latin-American boys, was established in Brownsville in 1867, and the first school for Latin-American girls was the one established in 1854 by Miss Melinda Rankin.

Before the coming of the railroad in 1904 the public schools in Cameron County might be counted on the fingers of a person's hand but soon thereafter the country side, in every direction, became dotted with little one-room school houses, each of which did its best to solve the educational problems in the community in which it was located. On each Friday

7Brownsville Herald, January 1, 1950, p. 11A.
evening there were programs given to aid the pupils in combat-
ting stage fright or make them feel at ease when standing be-
fore an audience.

The only school of any size in the county prior to 1910
was Brownsville. Following in the wake of the rapid growth
of the Valley has been a correspondingly rapid increase in the
school scholastics of the area. Practically all the small
schools have disappeared or have been consolidated into larger
centralized locations with the former districts occupied by
the one-teacher schools being serviced by an efficient system
of school busses.

More than fifty percent of Cameron County's school popu-
lation are Latin-American pupils. The Anglo-American pupils
and the Latin-American pupils form a mixed society which fur-
nishes a fine example of broad-minded, Christian civilization
as these two races, as different in culture and religion as
the East is from the West, mix with each other on a very co-
operative and friendly basis.

Census reports of 1910 gave the school popu-
lation of Cameron County as less than 7,000 pupils
and 165 teachers. The schools were rated low as
compared to the standards of other areas even in
Texas. There was a strong feeling of racial dis-
tinction in many parts of the area. School houses
were not very comfortable and the transportation
facilities were even worse.8

Muddy roads, danger from wild animals and bandits who

8Brownsville Herald, April 18, 1949, p. 8.
were continuously on the prowl kept many children from attending school. This picture of a county with only one poorly equipped high school is in sharp contrast with the school system of 1948. According to the total count of 1948 there were nine efficiently operated high schools in the county, not to mention several grade schools whose districts transferred their high school pupils to some neighboring high school.

There is one junior college in the county, Southmost College, at Brownsville. In less than a two-hours' drive away there is another junior college located at Edinburg and a senior college at Kingsville.

The school census of Cameron County for 1948 gave a school population of more than thirty thousand pupils who were taken care of by a corps of 750 teachers. There is and has been for the last few years a continuous building program of more room, more desks and a larger school plant in general to serve adequately the increasing attendance from year to year. The Gilmer-Aiken program set up in the state will work to a disadvantage with the Valley schools because of the seasonal workers who come and go with the amount of work to be had nearby causing the teachers, who have been selected on an off-season average daily attendance check, to be overloaded to the point of suffocation when the seasonal work has brought extra families streaming into the districts. "Attendance among the Latin-American pupils which has been very sporadic in the past has become one of the bright spots of the schools of the area due
in part to the increasing number of efficient, understanding teachers who are finding their way to the Valley Schools.\(^9\)

**Civic Organizations**

Perhaps no area in Texas or even the United States has had a greater need for civic and cultural uplifting than that of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Brownsville was a city untouched by new fangled notions. You turned no faucet for water. You threw no switch for light. Its lighting system consisted of kerosene lamps and candles. Cisterns and tanks supplied most of the water for private residences while the poorer classes depended upon the water carts for their supply. The water peddled on the water carts sold for a "picayune" per barrel. Water hauling was a daily routing and it was delivered either in heavy barrels with a pin in each end and rolled on the ground or a barrel mounted on a two-wheeled cart and drawn by a burro. Most people would think twice before drinking the water. Sanitary conditions were bad. There was an unlovely mud puddle on Levee Street in front of the present site of the Traveler's Hotel. This puddle was used by roaming swine whose ears and tails had been cropped by dogs. As a city hog wallow it had an unsavory stench and often drew vultures to sit on nearby buildings or in the street.\(^{10}\)

The above mentioned conditions existing in the city of Brownsville, which contained the major portion of all the inhabitants in 1904, presented a plight that had the effect on a civic minded person as the waving of a red cloth would

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\(^{10}\)J. L. Allhands, Uriah Lott, pp. 99-100.
upon an angry bull. As the population increased these civic and cultural needs increased. Awakening to the fact that these important factors of well-being and happiness of any community, especially an area where two distinct racial groups were mixing and mingling continuously, were being neglected, a wave of civic pride appeared to infiltrate the sector and clubs. Men's organizations, women's organizations and mixed groups began to appear as the new towns developed.

The Valley's civic and cultural development has kept pace with its commercial development. Many beautiful parks have been laid out, furnishing not only recreational opportunities for the boys and girls but for their fathers and mothers as well. A county-wide beautification plan has been worked out, several thousand bougainvilleas and other beautiful shrubs have been planted on boulevards, public places and even in residential sections of the cities. Public libraries have been established in Brownsville, Harlingen and San Benito that are easily accessible to the entire county and which contain thousands of volumes of excellent reading material to be had for a nominal rental fee of one quarter of a dollar for three month's reading privileges.11

The Valley today boasts of more civic clubs than any other area in the Southwest. The work done by such clubs cannot be measured in dollars and cents. Children's eyes are tested and fitted with glasses, correcting great handicaps which have been a great stumbling block to the children's advancement in the educational field. Health programs have been sponsored by various groups often preventing epidemics

that had taken heavy tolls in human life previous to 1900.

Following is a partial list of the civic organizations, the first of which had their beginning in the period between 1910 and 1920:

Chamber of Commerce, Sr.
Chamber of Commerce, Jr.
Lions Club
Kiwanis Club
Optimists Club
Study Club
Junior Service League
Twenty-Thirty Club
Rotary Club
Valley Historical Society
Rio Grande Civic Music Association
Business and Professional Women
American Legion
Boy Scouts
Girl Scouts
Garden Club
Flower Lovers Club
Daughters of the Nile
Contemporary Study Club
Child Study Club
Community Chest
City Federation of Women's Clubs
Opti-Mrs. Club
Veterans of Foreign Wars
V. F. W. Auxiliary
Welcome Wagon
Home Demonstration Club
Charro Club

and many other organizations including men and women's organizations in the various churches of the Valley that have accomplished much toward furnishing a feeling of Christian neighborliness and national unity in the Rio Grande region.

12 Ibid.
Newspapers

The *American Flag*, the first Valley newspaper, was not published in the United States. James Bernard, editor of the above mentioned newspaper, a semi-weekly sheet, published the paper in Matamoros, Mexico. Bernard began the publication of his paper in 1846 and to save the cost of setting up a printing press rented, for a small remuneration, a rather delapidated press across the river. The *American Flag*, published twice each week, was small, only eight by ten inches and usually had from four to eight pages. Local news covered the major portion of its pages. A few copies of that early newsheet may be found in the Library of Congress and in college museums such as Yale or Harvard.

The *Old Sentinel*, published in Brownsville, had its beginning in 1850 and served the area bordering the Rio Grande for forty years. Another early Valley newspaper, the *Cosmopolitan*, had a fair following before the beginning of the twentieth century. News items carried by this paper were impartial, half the space being used for news around Brownsville and the other half with news of Matamoros.

In 1859 another paper appeared on the streets of Brownsville. The title *Ranchero*, which had enough Spanish zest to attract much interest from the Spanish element in the area, gave its owners a good profit for a few years but the interest was only temporary and the publication discontinued its circulation in 1876.
"The Daily Herald, or Brownsville Herald as it is called today, had its beginning in 1892.\textsuperscript{13} Railroad news, good and bad, which was the subject that interested more people in the Valley sector, blazoned on the front page of each issue and not only brought in a sufficient income to keep the Herald going but created an ever-increasing demand and a growing circulation. The present Brownsville Herald has the distinction of having the largest circulation and the largest number of pages contained in each issue of all Valley newspapers.

The Daily Sentinel began publication in 1910 but, due to the strong competition offered by the Herald, was never a success and soon closed its doors.

Probably the greatest competitor of the Brownsville Herald in the newspaper field is the Harlingen Valley Morning Star, which claims a circulation of 12,000 or more. "Farm News and Citri-culture, a farm paper that attempts to solve some of the many questions connected with vegetable and citrus fruit industries, is edited in Harlingen and has a rapidly increasing circulation not only in Cameron County but throughout the entire Valley."\textsuperscript{14}

San Benito, Rio Hondo, La Feria and Port Isabel each boasts of a newspaper which is read profusely in the areas

\textsuperscript{13}F. C. Pierce, A Short History of the Rio Grande Valley, p. 142.

\textsuperscript{14}Personal Letter from Harlingen Chamber of Commerce, June 12, 1950.
immediately surrounding the town in which the paper is located.

Histories of newspapers before 1916 in Cameron County were merely histories of Brownsville papers as Brownsville boasted the only newspapers in the county before that date.

The San Antonio Express has a large number of readers in the Valley and is the only out-of-Valley paper with a good following in that area. The reason for the goodly number of readers who swear by the Express is the excellent Valley news section which gives a thorough coverage on all happenings in the Lower Valley sector.

Health Program

Perhaps no other area of its size in the United States keeps a closer watch on the well being or health of its inhabitants than does Cameron County. Not forgetting the epidemics of cholera and yellow fever that caused such agony and loss of life on several occasions during the early history of the area, the health authorities with full cooperation not only from doctors and nurses but from business as a whole go all out in their efforts to stamp out or prevent any semblance of communicable disease that may appear in the county. So thorough are the methods used in preventing disease from gaining a foothold in the Valley that the conditions following the severe Gulf storms, which tend to cause epidemics of fever, were so quickly and effectively met and conquered that very few if any cases of illness followed the catastrophe.
Each year a county-wide vaccination program is carried out, especially for smallpox and typhoid. Doctors and nurses throughout the entire county offer their services free for that occasion. "Wetbacks" are brought to the vaccination centers in truck loads to receive their immunizations which are given them at no cost. Special attention is given to see that all the Mexican laborers are vaccinated for people remember that only a few years ago the "wet backs" lived under trees, in sheds or in any place they could hide. They dared not travel on the highways or go into a town or public place for they knew that they would be snatched up by the immigration officers and sent back to Mexico. When they were sick they dared not call a doctor. The "wet back" laborers remember those times when they lived like hunted animals and have a tendency to hide out from the health authorities fearing anyone who might be an officer.\(^{15}\)

With such a large transient group of Mexican laborers continuously crossing and recrossing the Rio Grande from Texas to Mexico and from Mexico to Texas the health conditions of the Valley are to be commended.

The history of Cameron County from 1519, when Pineda unquestionably traversed the area near the present city of Port Isabel, to 1950 gives this sector a unique position among the 254 counties of Texas when a study is made of the historical background of the state.

This lower Rio Grande area was a factor in all the wars involving the people of Texas.

The war for Independence brought armies marching and countermarching through the valley section.

The Mexican-American struggle resulted in the battles of

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\(^{15}\)Personal interview with Julia Laakso, Nurse, Los Fresnos, Texas, October 14, 1949.
Palo Alto and Resaca de las Palmas, the first battles of the war, fought on successive days near Brownsville and the establishment of Fort Brown, one of the few remaining forts of Texas history.

During the Civil War the South Texas region was a series of almost continuous battles or skirmishes between the Union and Confederate forces.

Here the French, Austrian, and Belgian soldiers of Maximilian freely mingled with Mexican and American soldiers throughout the period from 1861 to 1865.

Much southern cotton was funnelled through Cameron County to the nations of the world, escaping the Union blockade.

Many daring exploits have been performed by the noted Texans as rangers in the preservation of law and order on the lower Rio Grande.

In the Rio Grande county two distinct and separate races have met and blended forming a society that cannot be found in any other region of Texas. They have lived together and worked together to create an area unequaled for beauty and productivity in the entire forty-eight states.
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