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**HENDERSON COUNTY.** Henderson County (F-20) is located in East Texas between the Neches and Trinity Rivers. Athens, the largest city and county seat, is near the geographical center of the county (at 32°10' N, 95°50' W), about sixty miles southeast of Dallas on U.S. Highway 175, at the intersection of State highways 31 and 19. Henderson County is in a transitional region between East and Central Texas. Two major lakes are partly in the county: Cedar Creek Reservoir<sup>qv</sup> on the northwest and Lake Palestine<sup>qv</sup> on the southeast. The county encompasses 949.7 square miles and has different land-resource areas that run almost parallel to the two river boundaries in a northwesterly to a southeasterly direction. The eastern third of the county, along the Neches River, is part of the East Texas Timberlands. This region has wooded, rolling terrain surfaced by deep sandy loams and sands. Loblolly and shortleaf pine, sweet gum, post oak, southern red oak, white oak, and flowering dogwoods grow in this region. In some areas within this system one finds long-leaf pine, black gum, and blackjack oak. Woody undergrowth consists of American beautyberry, greenbriar, and hawthorns. West and parallel to this region is the claypan area, where the soils are shallow sandy loams that overlie dense, clayey subsoils; vegetation here consists of mixed pine and hardwoods, including oak, elm, hackberry, and pecan. Along the Trinity River, the western border of the county, lie the bottomlands of the flood plain, where the vegetation features mixed hardwoods and a dense undergrowth of scrubs and vines typical of the East Texas mixed forests. Throughout these regions are native grasses that include little and big bluestem, Indian grass, switch grass, grama, and Virginia wild rye. A large variety of wildlife and game animals inhabits these areas. The county is hilly and rolling, with an elevation from 256 to 763 feet above sea level. The western part drains into the Trinity River, and the eastern section drains into the Neches River. Mineral resources include oil and gas reserves, sulfur, lignite coal, sand and gravel, and clay used for making bricks and pottery. The climate is considered subtropical. Temperatures range from an average range in July and August of 72° F to 96° and in January of 34° to 56°, for an average annual temperature of 65°. The average annual rainfall is forty inches, and the growing season extends to 260 days. The average date of the last freeze is March 11, and the first freeze is around November 26. Because of its favorable climate, the county's recreation areas are popular retirement centers.

Indians inhabited the area in prehistoric times. Pottery found buried amid fossil remains of extinct horses and camels in the 1920s and 1930s indicated that an aboriginal culture existed along the Trinity River thousands of years ago. One particular artifact, Malakoff Man,<sup>qv</sup> is a sandstone mask weighing ninety-eight pounds. When the first Europeans entered the area in the sixteenth century, they found the Hasinai, a Caddoan group, living along the upper Neches River. The Caddoes had the highest cultural development of any Texas Indians. They were agriculturalists and raised corn, beans, squash, sunflowers, and tobacco. Men and women shared garden work, used dogs for hunting bears, consumed small mammals, fish, and birds, ran trot lines baited with doughbait, and gathered nuts, berries, and wild fruits. The Spanish and French explorers described these people, who called

themselves the Tejas, as friendly (*see* TEXAS, ORIGIN OF NAME).

People of European origin did not settle in the area until after the Texas Revolution<sup>qv</sup> in 1836, though the future Henderson County was part of the Nacogdoches District in Spanish and Mexican Texas.<sup>qv</sup> Although no settlers lived in the area at the time, more than a dozen Mexican land grants were made there. In 1836 the region was inhabited by Indians-Cherokees, Shawnees, Delawares, and Kickapoos-who migrated westward in the winter of 1819-20 ahead of white settlement. The Spanish and Mexican governments welcomed the Indians as a buffer between themselves and the American settlers. The first part of the battle of the Neches,<sup>qv</sup> the decisive defeat of the Indians in East Texas, took place in the future Henderson County in July 1839. Soon afterward, President Mirabeau B. Lamar,<sup>qv</sup> in accord with his harsh Indian policy, forced the remaining Indians to abandon their homes and seek refuge in Oklahoma Territory. The Delawares left their peach orchards near the site of present-day Poynor, but place names such as Caddo Creek and Bowles Creek, as well as rock etchings at Big Rock Shelter,<sup>qv</sup> remain as reminders of the county's Indian heritage.

White settlers moved first into the area along the Trinity River and then into those previously occupied by the Indians. Some of the first settlers were Jane Irvine, who had a Mexican land grant of a league and a labor, and Henry Jeffreys, who owned the league of land where the first community, Buffalo, developed. The town was at a ferry crossing on the Trinity River in the northwestern part of the county, near the site of present-day Seven Points. John H. Reagan<sup>qv</sup> surveyed the town lots and began his law practice there. The first commissioners were William Ware, David Carlisle, Alfred Moore, Thacker Vivion, Sr., and James Hooker. The Texas legislature established Henderson County on April 27, 1846, and named it in honor of James Pinckney Henderson,<sup>qv</sup> first governor of the state of Texas. The county was formed from parts of Nacogdoches and Houston counties. Its court was first held in the home of William Ware, and later, William Love. Henderson County was organized on August 4, 1846, and comprised 3,500 square miles at the time. Buffalo was the county seat until March 1848. Bennett H. Martin presided over the first district court in Buffalo in 1847. Centerville, six miles west of the site of present Eustace, near the center of the county, was to be the permanent county seat. James Harper Starr<sup>qv</sup> donated 100 acres of land in the John P. Brown survey for the town, and on September 11, 1848, Chief Justice B. Graham held court there. But Centerville did not remain the county seat. On April 2, 1849, the archives and county government were returned to Buffalo, for reasons not exactly clear, and Centerville ceased to exist.

In 1848 the legislature formed Van Zandt and Kaufman counties out of Henderson County and reduced it to its present size. The center of the county again moved. J. B. Luker became chief justice, James Boggs sheriff, and E. J. Thompson county clerk. Court was held under a grove of red oak trees where the present courthouse stands. The name of the new county seat, Athens, was suggested by Dulcina A. Holland (later Mrs. Dull Avriett), who hoped the town would be a center of learning. The first courthouse, built in 1850, cost the county fifty dollars. That year the population of Henderson County consisted of 1,155 white persons, eighty-one slaves, and one free black. Farming was the chief source of income; the county's 106 farms had a value of \$64,214, mainly from corn and sweet potatoes. In 1850, the early settlers of Henderson County were from the upper South, but during the following decade westward migration from the lower South greatly increased. Cotton was introduced, though at the beginning production was negligible. By 1855 the courthouse had been sold and the proceeds given to W. B. Stirman to build a

jail, from which only one prisoner ever escaped. The second county courthouse, a two-story, wooden, weather-boarded structure with four brick chimneys, was completed in 1860 and sat in the center of the square until it burned in 1885.

Several Henderson County communities developed not long after county organization. Normandy, established in 1847, was the first Norwegian settlement in Texas. Science Hill, established in 1848, had the first school of higher learning and Masonic lodge in the county. Brownsboro, three miles from Normandy at a ferry crossing on Kickapoo Creek, is the oldest existing town in the county; it was established in 1849 by John (Red) Brown.<sup>qv</sup> In the late 1840s Buffalo had 100 residents and a debating society presided over by John H. Reagan. Fincastle had the first public school and got the first post office in 1852; residents had previously traveled to Palestine for their mail. Stillwater, later renamed for A. H. Chandler, was established in 1859. Citizens read the Palestine *Trinity Advocate* for news; no newspaper was printed in Henderson County until the 1880s. Other communities that no longer exist were New York, Goshen, Wild Cat, Carroll Springs, and Cat Fish.

By 1860 the county more resembled the Deep South. Roads, ferries, and bridges replaced buffalo trails. Cotton had increased in importance. Lumber, leather work, and clay products were manufactured. Levi Cogburn established a pottery company in 1857 to manufacture cups and saucers. Two other manufacturing firms, a lumbermill and a gristmill, helped boost the number of persons employed in manufacturing to thirty-nine, who received \$14,700 in wages and produced \$35,180 worth of goods. As the decade ended, the 1860 census reflected the changing character of the county. The total population was 4,595: 3,478 whites, 1,116 slaves, and one free black. Farms worth \$498,041 produced more than three times more corn and four times more sweet potatoes than reported in the previous census, as well as tobacco, peas, oats, and 2,105 bales of cotton. Almost 3,000 milk cows, 8,000 other cattle, 18,000 hogs, 1,600 sheep, and more than 1,000 horses were listed in the agricultural census of 1860. The county was not on any major trade routes, though in 1859 a stage route extended from Shreveport through Athens to Waco.

Henderson County did not escape the trials of Southern life during the Civil War and Reconstruction<sup>qv</sup> era. In 1859 two sellers of wheat-winning machines were accused of attempting to organize a slave rebellion and were hanged without benefit of trial. A slave revealed the alleged plot and implicated a slave leader, Black Bob, who was tried and hanged. (*See SLAVE INSURRECTIONS and LYNCHING.*) When the secession<sup>qv</sup> vote came, the county voted 400 to 49 to secede. Among residents of the county were 155 slaveholders in 1860. Fincastle had the largest slave population and was the largest and wealthiest community. Robert J. (Howdy) Martin, Jerry Warren, and a Captain Manion each organized a volunteer company. In all about 1,500 Henderson County men served in the war, while the home front provided leather goods, crocks, food, and clothing to the army. One-tenth of the farm products was taxed to cover war expenses, and a county tax helped care for indigent wives, widows, and orphans. During Reconstruction most Henderson County whites resented black suffrage and the rule imposed by Congress. However, the military government rarely impinged on the county. From their Tyler headquarters federal troops investigated an incident in Henderson County in 1867 that involved a fight between J. J. Faulk and Jim McEwin, a black. The county was returned to Democratic party<sup>qv</sup> control in 1870. The 1870 census showed an increase in population from 4,595 in 1860 to 6,786 in 1870. The number of whites increased by 1,654 and that of blacks by 537. Significant immigration from the Deep South occurred during this time. Many slaves were brought into the county from Louisiana and Arkansas and were left there when the

war ended. Many of these African Americans<sup>qv</sup> remained in the county. In 1870, at the nadir of the postwar depression, manufacturing had dropped to less than half its production a decade before; only a cotton gin, a gristmill, and the pottery mill remained. Farm values dropped to almost half of what they had been. Milk cows, however, almost doubled in number during the decade.

In an attempt to recoup their previous financial status, citizens pooled their resources beginning in 1875, donated the right-of-way, and built the bed of the St. Louis Southwestern Railway. In 1880 the first railroad came to the county. The first county newspaper, the *Athens Bulletin*, began in 1873; it later became the *Athens Courier*, then the *Athenian*, and in 1885 the *Athens Review*. Other newspapers in the county have been the *Henderson County Herald*, the *Trinidad Times*, the *Chandler Times*, the *Poynor Tribune*, the *Murchison X-Ray*, the *Murchison Star*, the *Eustace Herald*, the *Malakoff Monitor*, and the *Cedar Creek Pilot*. In the 1880s the Cotton Belt, as the SLSW Railway was called, brought new life, as citizens moved to start new communities and rename old ones. Stillwater became Chandler, in honor of A. H. Chandler, who was instrumental in having the railroad built. Malakoff became the post office for Science Hill, Wild Cat, Willow Springs, and Cross Roads. Murchison, founded in 1877, shipped watermelons out of its depot. Part of Brownsboro moved a short distance, to form new Brownsboro, while Trinidad was founded by the railroad as a water and refueling stop. The census of 1880 reflected growth in every area. Population increased to 9,735 (7,641 whites and 2,094 blacks), and agricultural production increased during the decade. The clay subsoils of the county provided a new manufacturing base when Miller Pottery began to produce flower pots in 1882, Gus Hill began producing building and fire brick in 1885, and Athens Tile and Pottery Company<sup>qv</sup> was formed in 1885. The courthouse burned in 1885, killing the original red oak trees under which the first court met.

The county continued to grow into the 1890s, aided by the completion of the St. Louis and Southwestern Railroad, although manufacturing declined. The Texas and New Orleans was extended from Dallas through Kemp to Athens by 1898. Eustace was established on this line in 1900. Commercial development increased, and in 1890 T. F. Murchison became the first banker because his store had the only vault in the county. The census figures for 1890 showed an increase in population, farm values, and production. The population increased to 12,285. Farm values rose to over a million dollars, and corn, peas, molasses, and peaches competed with the cotton production of 7,949 bales. All phases of agriculture showed a rise as cattle, hogs, sheep, horses, and poultry surpassed all previous levels.

In 1902, J. J. Faulk helped pass the first good-road law, and roads were improved with sand and clay. W. D. Dodd developed the county's lignite deposits for the railroads; migrant Mexican workers first worked the mines. The first automobile in the county appeared in Athens in 1910. The first county school board formed to provide public education for the first time since before the Civil War. Women formed clubs for civic and preservation work, the first public library was established, and the Daughters of the American Revolution and United Daughters of the Confederacy<sup>qv</sup> began to preserve the county's history. In 1913 the present courthouse was built; Boy Scouts planted the trees that grow around it. In 1900 fifty-two manufacturing firms employed 161 people, who earned \$41,494 in wages and made products worth \$154,332. Farms numbered more than 3,000 and were valued at more than \$1.5 million. Between 1900 and 1920 agriculture reached its peak as the economic base of the county. Cattle, hogs, poultry, and cotton production reached their highest levels. The population increased from 19,970 persons in 1900 to 28,327 in

1920. Henderson County contributed 1,119 men and three women to the war effort during World War I.<sup>qv</sup> Twenty-six of the men died, but only four were killed in action; the others died from influenza. The American Legion<sup>qv</sup> post was named for Brady Shelton, the first county man killed in action. The Council of Defense toured county schools to urge children to get their parents to invest in war bonds.

The economy suffered recession in the early 1920s, but several developments rescued it and subsequently helped the county to avoid some of the worst hardships of the Great Depression.<sup>qv</sup> By 1926, Texas Power and Light began to build the power plant at Trinidad to utilize the lignite deposits for power generation. Oil was discovered at Pine Grove in 1934, at the Cayuga field in 1937, at the Flag Lake field in 1940, and afterward at Tri-City; the Opelika gas works of Lone Star Gas Company helped boost the county's economy. The 1920s and 1930s saw a drop in manufacturing, however. As the depression took its toll on manufacturing nationwide, the number of county firms dropped from seventeen in 1920 to twelve by 1940, and the value of products dropped from \$615,608 in 1920 to \$255,000 in 1940. The number of farms decreased very little, but the value of farms dropped from \$18 million to \$8 million. The numbers of farm animals dropped by more than half. The population of the county continued to grow, but at a slower rate. The black population increased from 4,860 in 1920 to 6,115 in 1940. County residents numbered 31,822 in 1940.

The young men of the county responded to the call for volunteers and registered for the draft in World War II,<sup>qv</sup> which claimed the lives of 108 of them. In the 1940s the economy began to diversify. A canning plant built in 1940 canned the fruits and vegetables that began to be a larger part of the agricultural production. Tomatoes, peaches, black-eyed peas, sweet potatoes, and melons eventually replaced cotton. Farm values again rose; crop production declined as a whole, and livestock production doubled, while forest products rose slightly. Farms became mechanized during the labor shortages in the 1940s.

Agriculture and manufacturing progressed subsequently. Hay and livestock production replaced the traditional crops of family farms in the 1950s, when the Henderson County Livestock Association was formed. From the 1950s to the 1970s the number of farms decreased to mid-nineteenth-century levels. Production of cattle, peaches, and pears rose to higher levels than ever before; the last cotton crop reported in the census, that of 1969, amounted to only sixty bales. In the 1970s fifty manufacturing firms hired 1,800 employees and paid wages of more than \$14 million. Workers made products valued at more than \$48 million—processed food, lumber, clay products, furniture, chemical and medical instruments, ladies' intimate apparel, machinery, and electrical equipment.

The county voted Democratic in every presidential election through 1992, with the exceptions of 1972, 1984, and 1988. In the 1980s and 1990s county voters generally favored Republican candidates in state elections, though Democratic senator Ralph Yarborough was born in Henderson County. The population of the county has been primarily Protestant. Methodists predominated in the nineteenth century, and Baptists became the largest denomination in the twentieth century. The county was almost 50 percent urban in 1980. In 1990 Henderson County had a population of 58,543; 89 percent was white, 8 percent black, 4 percent Hispanic, and 3 percent other ethnicities. The county population declined from 31,822 in 1940 to a low of 21,786 in 1960; it was 58,543 in 1990. The county seat, Athens, doubled in size from 1950 to 1970, but afterward maintained a population

of around 10,000. In 1990, Athens had a population of 10,967; Gun Barrel City, 3,526; Malakoff, 2,038; Chandler, 1,630; Trinidad, 1,056; Eustace, 662; and Brownsboro, 545. The growth in population can be partly attributed to thirty-two private and public lakes in the county; near the lakes are twenty incorporated and sixteen unincorporated communities, most of which burgeoned as the lakes were impounded in the 1960s. Gun Barrel City, for instance, the second largest town in the county in 1990, had only sixty residents in 1970.

In 1990 most county residents were employed in manufacturing. Retail trade had doubled since 1956, service jobs had quadrupled, and agricultural jobs had remained stable. Mining, oil, and gas had declined, while transportation and public utilities had grown slightly. Wholesale trade had declined and finance had risen. Recreation and entertainment, hunting, and fishing, bring people to the county along the Texas Forest Trail and the Texas Lakes Trail. The Old Fiddlers Reunion is held in May, and the Black-Eyed Pea Jamboree in July, both in Athens.

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(NOTE: "s.v." stands for sub verbo, "under the word.")

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