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WHITNEY, TEXAS. **Whitney** is at the intersection of State Highway 22 and Farm roads 933 and 1244, two miles southeast of Lake **Whitney** and twelve miles southwest of Hillsboro in western Hill County. It was established in 1876 when the Houston and Texas Central Railroad built a line through Hill County to Cleburne. On November 25, 1879, the town lots were auctioned from a wagon on the site of the future depot. The land, which was originally part of the Sterling Robertson^{qv} grant, was purchased by the railroad from I. E. Griffith, C. C. Hicks, and Lewis Raborn for fifteen dollars an acre. The sale, which served as entertainment for Hill County residents, netted \$32,000 for the lots that sold for \$100 to \$750 each. The town was named for Charles A. **Whitney**, the brother-in-law of J. P. Morgan, and a principal stock holder in the H&TC. **Whitney** became a boom town with merchants setting

up tents to serve as temporary stores. Merchants from nearby communities, such as Towash, moved their businesses and buildings to **Whitney** because of the growth expected from the railroad. The postmasters of Towash and Hamilton Springs, two nearby communities, moved their post offices to **Whitney**. Several months later John Napier was appointed the first official postmaster, and **Whitney** officially had a post office in 1880. Hill County crops in 1880 were a failure, and the railroad promised that the first train to town would bring a bushel of corn for each person in the area. Many residents had not had bread for months, and the trains carried carloads of corn for months. In 1882 a good crop sent 22,000 bales of cotton from **Whitney**.

In 1880 **Whitney** was incorporated, and the first bank opened. By 1883 the population was estimated at 1,200. School was held in a store and then in the Presbyterian church before enough money was raised through donations to build a schoolhouse in 1884. In 1885 **Whitney** was incorporated as a school district and levied a school tax. That same year a black school was built. By then the town had a newspaper named the **Whitney Messenger**, the Boesche Lumber Company, and four churches, Methodist Episcopal, Cumberland Presbyterian, First Baptist, and Church of Christ. After 1883 the population of

Whitney began a decline. A fire in 1885 destroyed thirty of the community's frame buildings. By the end of the decade most of the frame buildings had been replaced by brick. In 1890 the population was 400, and businesses included two gristmills and cotton gins, grocery stores, millinery shops, saloons, and shoemakers. The railroad shipped cotton, grain, livestock, and wool. Because of the declining population the citizens of **Whitney** decided to promote their town with a picnic in 1891. The community barbecued 3,500 pounds of meat, and special excursion trains ran from as far as Brenham to bring people to **Whitney**. There were political speakers, tournaments, races, and dancing. The picnic was a success. Six thousand people attended, and by 1895 the population was once again over 1,000. The town was incorporated and unincorporated several times and finally incorporated permanently in 1912. The city government was established in 1915. At that time they purchased the water and electric company, founded in 1896, which supplied water with very low pressure and electricity only at night. After the decline of the cotton market in 1915 the population began to decline. By 1930 **Whitney** had 750 residents and thirty businesses. During the Great Depression^{qv} Texas relief funds provided some jobs on roads and opened a cannery by 1934. The Work Projects Administration^{qv} provided funds to build a concrete bridge to replace a wooden

one, a lighted athletic field, and a sewer system in 1935. When the **Whitney** Dam and Reservoir Project was authorized in 1944 a bond election was held to raise taxes to improve city services. The reservoir project began in 1946, and Highway 22, relocated over the dam, was opened in 1951. The power plant was in operation by 1953. In 1950 **Whitney** had a population of 1,379 and fifty businesses.

In 1907 an ice plant, the **Whitney** Ice and Bottling Works, opened in **Whitney**. A second was added in 1928. In 1946 the Blue Chip Ice Company, a thirty-ton ice plant, was built to supply ice for the building of the dam. In the summer ice was put in the cement mix. In the 1960s the operation was expanded, and the plant shipped ice all over central Texas. After the dam was completed the population dropped to 1,050 by 1960. The community went into an economic recession. Although some farms remained, farming was not as important after 15,800 acres of farm land was inundated by the lake. Ranching became more important in the area. In 1951 the Lake **Whitney** Association was organized to promote the lake. The growing number of tourists helped the economy, and eventually it was stabilized by new permanent residents. The last train passed through **Whitney** in 1967, and the town began to change in the 1970s. By 1972 it had a population of 1,500, a

hospital, a city hall, a fire station, a post office, a school, a bank, two nursing homes, and some federal housing. On May 23, 1971, a tornado struck **Whitney**. One man was killed, thirty-seven were injured, and fifty houses and thirty mobile homes were destroyed or damaged. In 1990 the population of **Whitney** was 1,626, and four manufacturers were located in the community, including an ice plant, a machine shop, a publisher, and a horticultural supply manufacturer. Several yearly events are held in **Whitney**, including the Lake **Whitney** Beauty Pageant and the **Whitney** Rodeo in June. Two newspapers are published, the **Whitney Messenger** and the **Whitney Star**.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Hill County Historical Commission, *A History of Hill County, Texas, 1853-1980* (Waco: Texian, 1980).

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