

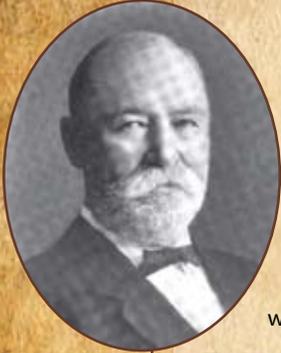
Westchase : A Community History



The Westchase District Celebrates 15 Years of Building Higher Value



Early Settlers; Early Communities



Jacamiah Seaman Daugherty

Nomadic Natives Left Little Behind

Early settlers in the area did not face the threat of Indians since most Indian tribes had moved on from this area before Anglo-American settlements arrived here. Prior to the early 18th century, the Akokisa and Bidais Indians inhabited south Texas.

Early Innovators

Jacamiah Seaman Daugherty was one of the early landowners in Alief. After the 1900 hurricane destroyed much of Alief, Daugherty convinced those who stayed behind to grow rice, instead of cotton. He promoted the Cane Belt Canal, which was completed in 1934 and ran from the Brazos River, eight miles north of Richmond through Alief and south to Alvin. The canal provided irrigation for the rice farms in Alief. Daugherty was the first chairman of the Harris County Drainage Ditch #1.

Mitchell Louis Westheimer was a German immigrant who came to be one of the most successful businessmen and entrepreneurs in early day Houston. He was a hay merchant and owned a flour mill and the Houston Livery Stable.

Shortly after arriving in Houston, he purchased a 640-acre tract of land at auction. Some stories say he paid as little as \$2.50 an acre for the land, which extended from Buffalo Speedway west to Fondren and from present day Westheimer Road south to Bellaire.



John and Alief Magee

Alief, originally known as Dairy, was first platted in 1895. Soon after, the town's leaders applied for a post office and changed the community's name to Alief in honor of its first postmistress, **Alief Ozelda Magee**.



The Town of Alief Became the Area's Hub

Significant flood damage occurred in 1899. The 1900 hurricane that destroyed Galveston left Alief in ruins as well. Very few structures were left standing, crops were destroyed and the town's early settlers (all but six families) abandoned Alief, moving mostly to Houston.

In 1901, a small group of German immigrants came to the area. They proved to be hardy individuals who were instrumental in the resurgence of Alief as a community. By 1904, many of the previous residents who fled in 1900 returned. The area thrived following construction of the Cane Belt Canal, whose purpose was to provide irrigation for the rice farmers in the Alief area. That, coupled with the construction of the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railway (SAP), brought new prosperity to the area.

The 1900 hurricane that destroyed Galveston left Alief in ruins as well.

In 1909, Alief area residents formed the Harris County Drainage Ditch #1 (28 years prior to the formation of the Harris County Flood Control District) to mitigate flooding in the area.

OFFICE OF ATTORNEY GENERAL OF STATE OF TEXAS

This is to certify, that the COUNTY of HARRIS

From DRAINAGE DISTRICT NO. 1 IMPROVEMENTS

ORDER issued by the COMMISSIONERS' COURT

on the 14th day of April, 1909, for the purpose of drainage improvements,

made Feb. 1st, 1909, amounting to the sum of \$1,000.00

with aggregating the same to Sixty Thousand (\$60,000)

by order of office of State Treasurer, Austin, Texas (Hannover Nat'l. Bank, N.Y.;

office County Treasurer, Houston, Texas,

DISTRICT, as follows: Bonds Nos. 1 to 12 in 10 years; Nos. 13 to 24 in 15 years; Nos. 25 to 36 in 20 years; Nos. 37 to 48 in 25 years; Nos. 49 to 60 in 30 years;

from above with interest at the rate of five per cent per annum, payable semi-annually, Feb. 2 and Aug. 1st,

and there hereby authorized said bonds to mature with the same and the Commission and have on the expiration of said bonds, and I that upon the expiration of said bonds, and on the expiration of the terms of the following bonds:

1. That DRAINAGE DISTRICT NO. 1

of the ORDER above referred to legally ESTABLISHED.

2. The bonds referred to DISTRICT

amounting to the sum of \$60,000.

3. The rate of said DISTRICT

and the purpose for which said bonds were issued was to be used in the sum of \$60,000.

the total indebtedness of said DISTRICT

SIXTY THOUSAND (\$60,000.) DOLLARS.

4. That ORDER

and any moneys paid

5. A sum UPON ALL

DISTRICT

and to provide for their redemption or maturity, and to be sufficient for the purpose aforesaid.

6. That said moneys be paid to the order of the ORDER

and the same be used in the manner and for the purposes aforesaid.

7.

It is my judgment and I so find that said bonds were issued in conformity with the Constitution and laws of the State of Texas and that they are valid and binding obligations upon said DRAINAGE DISTRICT NO. 1

of Harris County, Texas.

In Testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and the seal of my office at Austin, Texas

this 14th day of May, 1909.

M. L. Westheimer
Attorney General of Texas

Alief residents established the Harris County Drainage Ditch #1

The only major roads in the area were Westheimer, Rogers, Cooper, Dairy Ashford and Alief Houston Road.

Other Communities Offered Alternatives to Living in Houston

Jeanetta was located just east of present day Westchase. There were two churches and one school in Jeanetta in 1936, plus the railway depot for the SAP. As Houston grew, the town was absorbed and was no longer designated on county maps.

Piney Point, later Piney Point Village, had a railway stop for the Texas Western Narrow Gauge Railway. After the railway closed, residents traveled to Jeanetta to use the SAP train depot to travel to Houston for business or pleasure.

The settlers of Piney Point were almost exclusively German immigrant farmers. In fact, 40 percent of Houston's population in 1850 was German.

Transportation

Early Roads Were Almost Non-existent

What few roads existed were described as so muddy and plagued by potholes that travelers said it would take a whole day just to travel six to eight miles.

One exception was Westheimer Road, which was created when Mitchell Westheimer donated a portion of his land to Harris County as right-of-way, providing an important thoroughfare for farmers in the Alief area to transport their cotton, rice and other farm goods to Houston and beyond. Today, Westheimer Road is the longest major thoroughfare in Texas.

Railways Let Farmers Deliver Their Crops to Houston

The Texas Western Narrow Gauge Railway (later known as Texas Western Railway) was chartered in 1877 to run from downtown Houston west to Pattison, through the Westheimer plantation and present day Westchase. It enjoyed early success — at one time spanning 52 miles to Sealy with two locomotives, 15 freight cars and one passenger car. Since it only had one passenger car, passengers would often ride on flat cars to get to their destinations. The narrow gauge railway was ultimately overtaken by traditional railways and was abandoned in 1899.

The SAP ran from downtown Houston through the southern part of present day Westchase and Alief, to Fulshear and points west. The Alief depot was located across from the cotton mill at what is now Alief Amity Park.

As late as 1934, the only major roads designated on Harris County maps of the area were Westheimer, Rogers, Cooper, Dairy Ashford and Alief Houston Road (which is present day Richmond Road).

20th Century Transition

A 1949 Harris County Population Density Map showed the area west of the Jeanetta Railway Depot and south of Westheimer Road with a population of only 200. The area did not develop until new roads were built in the mid 20th century.

Most of the land in the Westchase area was given out to early settlers as land grants from either the Spanish or Mexican governments. These grants were for one league of land



The San Antonio & Aransas Pass Railway's Alief Depot



Rice farms supplanted cotton to take advantage of the area's wet climate



The San Antonio & Aransas Pass Railway let farmers transport their crops to Houston



This land has provided a living for generations

MSS0200-0487

MSS0100-943

MSS0100-0120



The Moors Mansion still stands as part of the Lakeside Country Club

(4,428.4 acres). Some of the original land grant holders in the Westchase area are merely footnotes in history. But tracing those land grants through the years to their modern day owners offers an interesting insight into land development through the 20th century.

Clifford Mooers purchased 100 heavily wooded acres of the original Christiana Williams land grant in 1934. He named his land Pine Lake Farm and built a mansion at a cost of \$164,000 (an enormous amount of money at the time). He also bred horses on the property. Later he sold the mansion and land to prominent Houston furrier Ralph Rupley. The original Mooers mansion makes up the central section of the Lakeside Country Club clubhouse today.

William Keck founded Superior Oil in 1921. After his death, his son Howard took over the oil company and moved its operations to Houston. The Superior Oil Company owned the Superior Oil Ranch (part of the original Eugene Pillot and William Hardin land grants), directly west of Andrau Airport. There they raised Santa Gertrudis cattle. Many Alief high school students worked as cowboys during their summer breaks.

“Buy land on Westheimer,” Smith told anyone who asked.

Andy Andrau and Bob Smith Had a Huge Impact on West Houston

E.W.K “Andy” Andrau was born to Dutch parents in Sumatra, Indonesia. His family immigrated to California in the early 1940s. He later joined Shell Oil Company as a geologist and moved to Houston following World War II. Andrau bought five tracts of land from the Bellows, Wade, Lewis and Woodruff land grants, much of which was used for rice farming and raising Angus cattle. However, he set aside a substantial portion of land, which became Andrau Airpark, in 1946. Andrau, nicknamed the “Flying Dutchman,” flew his private plane to visit many remote oil well locations. He was killed in a plane crash in 1951 in Louisiana.

Robert E “Bob” Smith began to buy land in west Houston in the mid-1950s. Back then, Houston was oriented north and south around Main Street. But Smith was only interested in one area of town. “Buy land on Westheimer,” he told anyone who asked. Smith earned considerable wealth and fame as an oilman. He was also well-known as one of the original partners in the Houston Colt .45s baseball team and the first President of Houston’s Petroleum Club. When he started investing in land, he did so in a big way. His holdings included the original Henry Lewis, Isaac Wade, Henry Woodruff, George Bellows, and Joel Wheaton land grants.

In 1955, the Andrau family sold most of their property, except the airport land, to Smith. By 1964, Smith owned 11,000 acres of land – more than any other landowner in Harris County. His ranch included the area of Westchase, and it continued all the way east past present day Beltway 8 and south to Bissonnet. While he used his land for ranching purposes and raised his best show cattle at his Brays Bayou Ranch, he envisioned a city in this area.

Smith and his family attended Houston’s First Methodist Church downtown and he was the first Chairman of the Board of the Quillian Center – the church’s recreational ministry. Under his leadership, the church broke ground for the original Quillian Center, located at Kirkwood and Bellaire.

At the time of his death in 1973, Smith’s fortune from oil, real estate and ranching was greater than \$500 million. His widow, **Vivian Leatherberry Smith**, sold 760 acres of the family’s land holdings to Westchase Corporation, which began developing modern day Westchase. First Methodist Church’s current site at Westpark and the West Sam Houston Tollway sits on land once owned by its former member, Bob Smith.

RG D05 F.4983



Bob and Vivian Smith



Andy Andrau (standing in front of plane) used his airport to make drilling locations more accessible

Modern Days

The development of today's Westchase District began in the early 1970s when the Westchase Corporation bought 760 acres of land from the Smith family and began mapping out parcels of land for development. Building setbacks and landscape requirements ensured that the development would be high quality. The first land sale was to Western Geophysical, which built its campus on 27 acres at Richmond and Briarpark. Other commercial developments followed in the '70s including apartment communities and the Carillon shopping center. Development really took off in the '80s, led by construction of the Ensearch building (now Millennium Tower) on Richmond. In 1980 alone, twelve office buildings, three shopping centers, ten apartment communities, nine office/warehouse projects and the Adam's Mark Hotel (now Westchase Marriott) were all completed.

In 1985, construction began on the West Belt Toll Road (renamed Sam Houston Tollway in 1988.) But the bottom soon dropped out of the real estate market and, as properties fell into foreclosure, the Westchase Business Council was formed. This membership-driven organization was created to help maintain property values and quality in the area at a time when the economy was faltering.



Ensearch Building under construction



The West Belt Toll Road is constructed in the shadow of several prominent Westchase office buildings

By 1988, the area was recovering nicely. The City of Houston purchased land for a library and a fire station. The Sam Houston Tollway opened in 1988 and Randalls purchased land for its corporate offices. That same year, the Andrau family sold its last 700 acres of land (still used for an airpark) to Camden Trust. Camden kept 200 acres and the remaining land was developed by Sunrise Colony Co. into Royal Oaks Country Club.

In 1995, Westchase area landowners successfully petitioned the Texas Legislature to create the Westchase District. The organization's founding board of directors met for the first time on August 29, 1995.

In the 15 years since the creation of Westchase District, more than \$2 billion in commercial development has occurred with the accompanying job growth. Westchase District is proud of its 15 year history and excited about the area's continued potential for growth.





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