

THE EARLY YEARS

FROM INDIAN WILDERNESS TO SPRAWLING CITY



BY MARGE PARRISH

It began, as James Michener would point out, millennia past. This felicitous spot of land which would someday be Irving, Texas. During those millennia, nature endowed this particular piece of land with an abundance of good things to sustain human life.

And that's how it all began.

Between the forks of the Trinity River lie some 67.7 square miles of land capable of sustaining a superabundance of activities. Most notable is the ability of the very fertile land to provide sustenance for human beings. Springs, creeks, above average rainfall, timber and vegetation flourish. The earth itself is blessed with minerals which enrich all that lives upon it. From early years wildlife of all kinds lived here, bird, animal, fish, insect.

The first humans, perhaps, to come to the land between the forks in recent times were Indians, probably of the Delaware, Comanche, Caddo tribes, moving along the river bottoms in search of food. They left with no visible signs of permanent habitation in what is now Irving proper, but in surrounding areas relics have been found — Indian marker trees, arrowheads, pottery shards. Along Delaware Creek was a trail used by the earliest people going south from what is now Arkansas.

Since the land was good, it followed that modern man would come as soon as the migration from the eastern states began infiltrating the western reaches of the continent.

It was the white man and the black man who came looking for a better life than they had known. They arrived in the mid-1880s and began the process of turning a wilderness into habitable cities.

The true story of Irving is that of the men and women who settled here, sometimes at great cost to themselves and their families, bringing civilization, land cultivation and culture with them.

Irving is the story not just of Irving as it is today, but of various small communities which sprung up in the land between the forks of the Trinity. Generally, these communities came into being when one skilled man arrived with his family, settled and went to work — whether farming, blacksmithing or operating a general store or trading post.

In the mid-1880s, the Texas Emigration and Land Company came into being. This group of investors encouraged people to

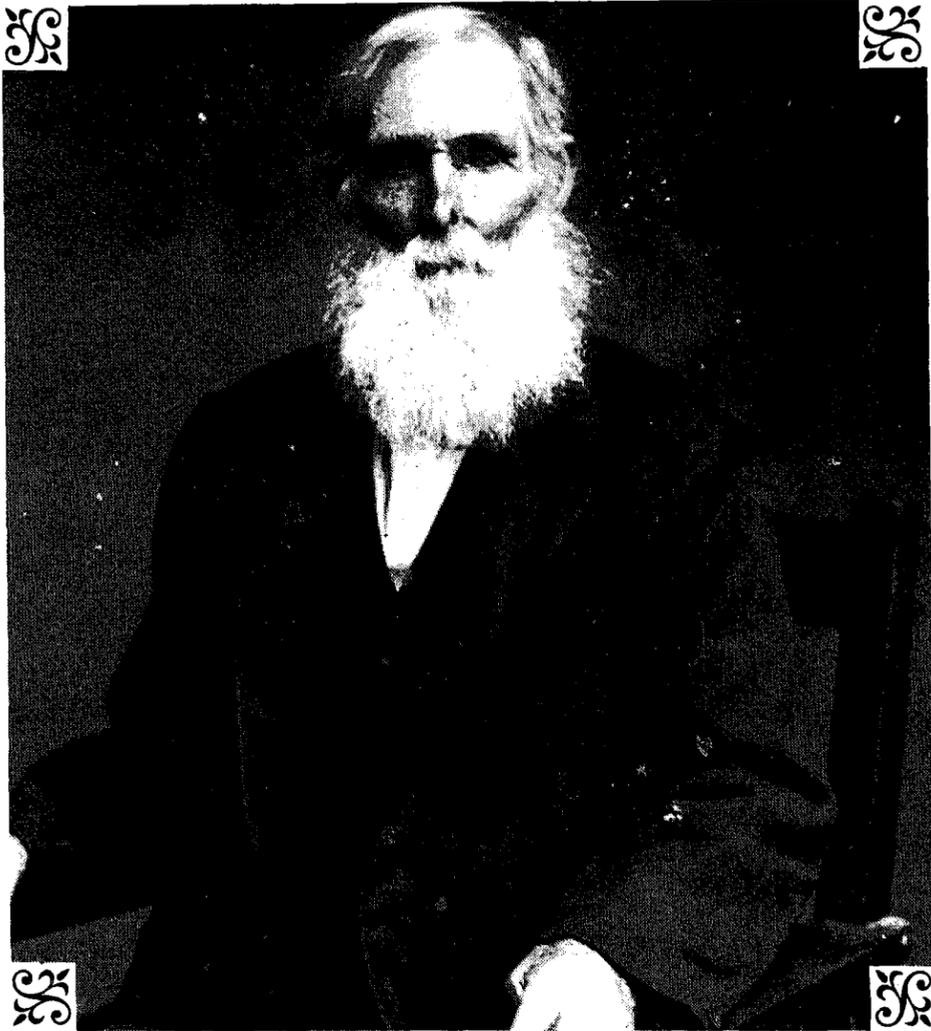


Photo Courtesy Of Lenora Story Muense

Jonathan Story was one of Irving's earliest pioneers.

settle in the Republic of Texas in return for free acreage, with each family receiving 640 acres. Within the 225 square miles designated as the choicest land of the Peters Colony lay the entire area of present-day Irving. Thus began the settlement of an area destined to become the center of a great metropolis.

LaReunion was settled by artists and craftsmen from France and Switzerland. Eagle Ford, now part of Dallas, began life as a "cowtown." "Ike" Story opened a general store in Gorbet/Kit, which became a gathering spot for the neighborhood. When the post office was opened, the settlement became known officially as Kit. Kiah Lucas of Union Bower started the first school between the Forks. Sowers, the largest community between the Elm and West forks of the Trinity, began life as a family farm. Buck and Breck was the earliest post office in the area.

Bear Creek in southwest Irving was settled in the 1850s by men and women who had been slaves. They acquired land, farmed, share-cropped and helped neighboring farmers. The farmers of Estelle grew oats, wheat, corn and cultivated fruit orchards.

The tree-studded landscape provided the impetus for several occupations — agriculture, wood-cutting, dairying and all kinds of associated crafts. Naturally, the land had to be cleared for agriculture and the frugal settlers wasted nothing. Farms grew in size and diversity. By 1900, the area was rich with prosperous families who had brought with them culture and a variety of interests and occupations. Schools and churches had been established, well-trained physicians used their skills. Community parties created a sense of neighborhood.

Thus, the stage was set for the founding

of a city. The Chicago, Rock Island & Gulf Railway had built a line to Fort Worth in 1894. Other lines were already leading into Dallas. In 1902, the Rock Island was ready to connect Fort Worth and Dallas. Among the crew was a 27-year-old surveyor from Iowa named J.O. Schulze and his rod man, Otis Brown, from Ohio.

Schulze also was a dreamer. One of his dreams was to be the founder of a town. Surveying the beautiful terrain between the two cities, Schulze knew he had found the place for his own. At the time, he and Brown were living in a tent on the farm owned by H.W. Britain, one of the pioneer families. As he considered the territory, Schulze saw excellent farm land, abundant surface water, trees and industrious people. In October, 1902, Schulze, with Brown as a partner, bought 80.21 acres of Henry Britain's farm to become the original townsite of Irving.

The original map for the to-be city of Irving, drawn on a 6' x 13' tablecloth, is owned by one of Otis Brown's nephews, Charles Brown, and is presently being preserved by the city to be hung in Irving's City Hall.

On December 19, 1903, an auction was held to sell the lots. Advertisements in area papers, a special train from Dallas and a barbecue picnic induced about 150 people to attend the festivities of the day. The map was hung on the side of the depot — the line had been set in place — and the bidding began. Captain J.A. Hosack of Cleburne acted as auctioneer. By the end of the day, about 20 lots had been sold at an average cost of \$50 per lot.

Schulze opened a lumberyard and within eight months Main Street was a thriving center of commerce. He and Brown donated land to three churches — St. Luke's Catholic Church, the Delaware St. Church of Christ and the First Baptist Church. The Church of Christ and the Catholic churches had built sanctuaries within a year.

Tragically, for one of the founders, the dream ended. Agnes Schulze, J.O.'s wife, contracted malaria during her first pregnancy. Although the family returned to Iowa hoping for a better climate, the child died. Schulze sold his lumber business to his younger brother, Charles Percy, and thereafter only occasionally returned to the city he had dreamed of creating.

Many of the first settlers of the area — Britains, Livelys, Schulzes, Browns, Casters, Lucases, Harringtons — still have descendants living in Irving.

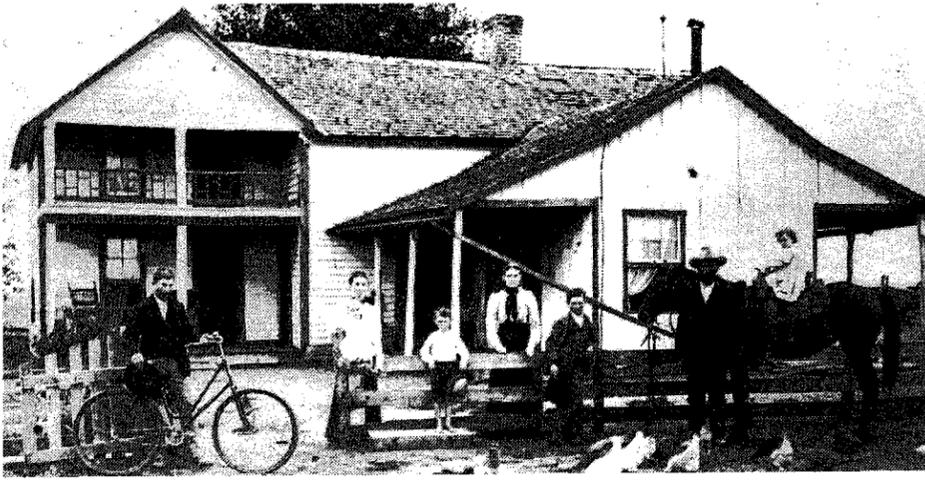


Photo Courtesy Of Mary Louise Wadsworth

The Good family in front of their home near Esters Road.

Truck farming was the principal means for earning a living. Although the acreage of an individual farm might enclose many acres, these were not large fields of one crop — wheat, grain or cotton. Rather, the farmers grew produce for dining tables throughout the area, trucking it into Dallas early in the morning.

Local residents purchased their tomatoes, sweet potatoes, green beans, black-eyed peas, crowder peas, leaf lettuce, radishes, green onions, spinach and greens (mustard and turnip) directly from the farms of the Althoffs, the LePors and others. In the river bottom land around what is now Belt Line Road and Hunter Ferrell Road, Red Indian peaches and plums were grown.

The next step for Irving in its ascent came in the mid-1930s when it began its climb as a "bedroom community." Two Dallas developers, R.E. Lee and Jim Shepherd, purchased land from Tom Clark west of the Trinity River on the north side of Old Irving Blvd. and Shady Grove Road. There they built two bedroom, one-bath houses with an attached garage. Their attention-getting gimmick was to put a Ford automobile in the garage, and the house and car were sold as a unit for about \$3,500. This was the first commercial residential development in Irving and was successful.

In 1945 C.E. Caldwell advertised the first subdivision between Sixth and Eighth Streets. Lots were sold with deed restrictions which for that time were strict. The land was not yet in the city limits and there was no telephone service. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the city limits expanded west of Delaware Creek. This was probably the first section of town located principally south of the Rock Island Railroad.

Then the "boom" started. The 1950 census showed 2,615 people living in Irving. By 1955 there were 24,800 and the 1960 census reported 45,985. By 1970 there were 97,457 residents. Today, Irving has a population of between 150,000 and 160,000 and is still growing as major companies relocate to the Las Colinas business parks. The Irving Chamber of Commerce and the Irving Convention and Visitors Bureau effectively promote the advantages of Irving as a quality location for business and residence.

In 1954 an event occurred which "tore the town apart." Carr P. Collins of Dallas, sensing the explosion in housing needs

created by veterans returning from World War II, applied to the Irving Planning and Zoning Commission for permission to build the Mayflower Addition and the Plymouth Park Shopping Center. The addition met with approval. The shopping center didn't. The outcry of dissent was so great that the Planning and Zoning meetings had to be moved from the Community House where they were usually held to the gymnasium of the high school. The issue was an economic one. Bringing in large chain stores would divert business from Main Street and the central Irving business district.

In spite of the furor, the permit was granted and the center was built. It was instantly successful. Tom Thumb, Volk's Bros., M. E. Moses, E. M. Kahn, and J. C. Penney became part of the development at the intersection of Story Road and Irving Blvd. It truly was the beginning of the end for Old Irving business.

The Mayflower Addition, however, was successfully launched as the first centrally air-conditioned tract development in the United States.

Through the mid-60s, Irving retained its status as a residential community. But times were changing and rural isolationism could not hold its own. Dallas and Fort Worth were building toward Irving's boundaries. People were becoming more sophisticated and business growth was becoming more important.

Clint Murchison, owner of the Dallas Cowboys football team, began looking for an improved stadium for the team's ball field. If the Dallas City Council would upgrade the Cotton Bowl Stadium, he would keep Dallas as the team's home base. But in the event this improvement was not forthcoming, he began acquiring property in Irving at the intersection of Highway 183 and Loop 12 as a location for a new stadium. Meetings took place between Murchison and Irving City Councilman Robert Power.

The concept of a stadium was leaked to the press, and on January 27, 1967, Power held a press conference giving details about the preliminary discussions. The stadium would be city-owned, but would be built at no cost to the city which was not able to handle the financing. This would be done through City of Irving Revenue Bonds issued in the form of seat-option bonds.

Orders for \$400,000 were secured within three days. In January, 1968, commitments

totaled \$3.5 million. Ultimately the city sold \$31 million in bonds. Building began in April, 1969 and was completed in 1971. Irving had gained the attention of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex.

At the same time as negotiations for Texas Stadium were going forward, the two major cities were working toward the establishment of an international airport. Midway between the two cities were 18,000 acres of high level prairie land, used primarily for the cultivation of cotton and maize. The two cities purchased the land, city limits of Dallas and Fort Worth met in the center of the tract, and on January 11, 1969, ground breaking took place.

Four years later the Dallas Fort Worth Airport was opened as the nation's largest airport, with a capacity equal to the three New York fields combined. Currently it is the second busiest airport in the world. Only O'Hare in Chicago exceeds it in the number of passengers moving through its gates.

There remained one final step for Irving to emerge as a world-class city — the creation of Las Colinas, the crown jewel of the Metroplex and the dream of a master dreamer and planner, Ben H. Carpenter. Building from a residential base of prestigious homes in the University Hills subdivision and the Las Colinas Country Club, Las Colinas has become the premier residential and office location in Texas. From the first, Carpenter insisted on the highest standards of design and material.

"We are not building to meet an existing market. We are creating a new market establishing new standards," he said.

Las Colinas is a spacious, cohesive entity of parks, lakes, walkways, green space, flowers and outstanding architecture. International corporations and homes, schools and churches, North Lake College and the University of Dallas share land space. Every facet of development is attended by competent planners concerned with maintaining the highest standards of modern urban life.

The centerpiece of Las Colinas is Williams Square, a multi-storied, three unit office complex, surrounding a monumental pink granite plaza through which runs a 400-foot-long watercourse with nine running life-sized bronze mustangs created by the internationally known wildlife sculptor Robert Glen.

The "Mustangs of Las Colinas" compose one of the greatest cityscapes in the United States, and as an emblem are prominently featured in Irving's promotional literature. Tourists through the square in all seasons. The ambiance created here is one of space, peace and serenity and embodies all that Carpenter envisioned for Las Colinas.

Little is left now of the primeval landscape. Planes have replaced feet as the means of transportation. Men have replaced wildlife as occupants of the land. What is now is a sense of vibrancy, expectation, life and progress toward that destination which the spirit of man has been seeking since the beginning of time.

Marge Parrish is a 20-year resident of Irving and a charter member and past president of the Irving Heritage Society.