

ROANOKE

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Roanoke, Denton County, Texas

I. Context

The community of Roanoke is located in North Central Texas in Denton County at the intersection of U. S. Highway 377 and State Highway 114. Roanoke replaced two earlier settlements, Elizabethtown and Green or Garden Valley. The town of Roanoke was the center of community life and a commercial hub for this prosperous ranching region between Fort Worth and Denton, The town served as a major shipping point for the large cattle ranches of southern Denton County.¹ It was platted in 1881 as part of the expansion of the Texas and Pacific Railway through North Central Texas out of the D.O. Hoover Survey. The orientation is northwest to northeast along Oak Street, the main street through the community. Roanoke was not incorporated until November 7, 1933². When incorporated in 1933, it consisted of 53 blocks, 32 of those were on the east side of the railroad and 21 blocks on the west side of the railroad tracks. The east side of the tracks developed into the commercial and residential area of the community. The west side became the industrial part of the community and developed very little over the years. The town of Roanoke encompasses the extant commercial and residential properties that served the community, business owners, area ranchers and farmers. It is also representative of small town commercial and residential growth in North Central Texas. The downtown area is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

II. Overview

Early History of the Roanoke Area

Present day Roanoke is situated in what was part of the Peters Colony land grant. William S. Peters received a land grant from the state of Texas in 1841.³ The company was called the Texian Land and Immigration Company but known as Peters Colony.

¹ Ron Emrich, *National Register of Historic Places Continental Bank Building , Roanoke, Texas* (1986), p.3

² City of Roanoke Resolution No. 28, dated April 2, 1934.

³ Handbook of Texas Online, s.v."http://tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/DD/hcd6.html (accessed November 27, 2006).

Most of the settlers were from the Upper South. Peters sent his agents to Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas and Missouri.⁴ Many of the people who settled in this part of what became Denton County were German and Swedish.⁵

The area was first settled around 1847 by Charles (1807-1864) and Lewis (Louis) Medlin and their families. Charles Medlin, his wife Matilda (Allen), his brother Lewis and their widowed mother had migrated from Missouri with 20 other families.⁶ Charles Medlin brought his 10 sons with him. Their settlement was located northeast of present day Roanoke on Denton Creek and called Medlin Center. The community's name was later changed to Green Valley (or Garden Valley). The town was moved closer to what is now Roanoke due to the continual flooding of Denton Creek.

Although the area was settled in 1847, the town of Roanoke was not established until 1881 when the Texas and Pacific Railroad came through and founded the community to serve as a major shipping point for the cattle ranches in the vicinity. Local historians believe the town was named by one of the railroad surveyors who came from Roanoke, Virginia. The railroads had a profound effect on the establishment of new towns and the economic growth of existing communities and these new towns.

The Railroad and Its Impact

In North Central Texas, before the railroads, there was no other viable transportation system other than over land. Stage coaches and wagons could be unreliable and dangerous. Driving cattle long distances often meant more expense and less profit. This was due to the loss of cattle on the long drives as well as the need to constantly find grazing areas to keep the weight on the cattle. Long distances also meant that more cowboys were needed for longer periods of time for the drives. Again, this meant a lower profit margin for the ranchers. The farming in the county during this early period was subsistent due to a lack of transportation options. The advent of the railroad greatly

⁴ Mary Jo Cowling, *Geography of Denton* (Dallas: Banks Upshaw and Company, 1936), p.1.

⁵ Cowling, p.42.

⁶ Texas Historical Commission Subject Marker for the Medlin Cemetery, Denton County, 1977.

improved the ability of ranchers and farmers to transport their goods to markets, locally, regionally and nationally. It must also be remembered that the railroads often followed the established overland mail and stage routes.

Texas and Pacific Railroad in Texas

The following research is excerpted from the Texas and Pacific Railway article in the *Handbook of Texas Online*. The Texas and Pacific Railway was chartered by the U. S. Congress on March 3, 1871. It was the only railroad in Texas and one of a handful in the country to function under a federal charter. At the end of the Civil War, the plan to construct a southern transcontinental route was renewed. The Texas and Pacific was given the right to construct the railroad from Marshall, Texas to San Diego California. The company was given federal land grants through California, Arizona and New Mexico and a state land grant of twenty sections per mile through Texas. The Texas Legislature recognized the charter in 1871, and authorized the T&P (Texas and Pacific) to purchase the Southern Continental Railway Company and the Southern Pacific Railway Company (not related to the later Southern Pacific Railroad).

Construction on the Texas portion of the line commenced in October of 1872 under the direction of chief engineer Grenville M. Dodge. The construction company was the California and Texas Railway Construction Company. In December of 1873, the line of 125 miles between Longview and Dallas was placed in service. The line from Marshall to Texarkana was opened in late December of 1873 as was the line between Sherman and Brookston. The panic of 1873 caused the construction company to fail. The T&P resumed construction to a limited degree with its own resources. By 1876, the line between Dallas and Fort Worth had been completed, giving the T&P 444 miles of track in Texas. Between 1876 and 1879, the railway tried to find financing for construction of the line to San Diego. In 1879, railroad magnet and “robber baron” Jay Gould organized a syndicate to finance the completion of the line. During the decade of the 1870’s, Gould had acquired several railway lines including the Union Pacific, Missouri Pacific and Kansas Pacific. Grenville Dodge was hired to supervise construction of the line.

Construction of the line resumed at Fort Worth in 1880, extending west 520 miles to Sierra Blanca. The company also resumed construction of the Trans-Continental line from Sherman to Fort Worth. This line, extending ninety miles and passing through Roanoke, was completed in May of 1881. The Texas and Pacific Railway had 1,034 miles of track in Texas by the end of 1881.⁷

Railroad companies practiced what was tantamount to legal blackmail. The railroads would solicit money and land to pass through a community. If the community did not raise the money requested by the railroad or donate right-of-way, then the railroad would lay its track next to a more willing community. Or, they would establish a new community leaving the people and businesses of the existing town no choice but to move to the new town by the railroad or suffer economically.

The Texas and Pacific survey from Fort Worth to Sherman followed the mail and stage routes through Pilot Point, Toll Town (located five miles from present day Roanoke) and Denton. But the route was changed at Pilot Point to come south and west to Denton missing Toll Town into the newly platted (by the railroad) town of Roanoke.⁸ The Texas and Pacific had 33.9 miles of track in Denton County from Roanoke to Pilot Point for which the state paid 718 sections or approximately 459,520 acres. This is equal to about 4/5 the area of the county. The Constitution of 1876 repealed the land subsidies given to railroad companies.⁹

As stated above, communities quickly learned the importance and impact of the railroad. In Denton County, towns not situated on the railroad line would not grow and often would experience decline, vanishing from the landscape. Towns including Elizabethtown, Garden (Green) Valley, Toll Town and Stony disappeared; Bolivar remained a small

⁷ Handbook of Texas Online, s.v. “,” <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu.handbook/online/articles/TT/eqt8.html> (accessed March 20, 2007).

⁸ Maude Grace Smith, *History of Green Valley 1870 to 1900* (Shawnee, Oklahoma: Herald Printing Company, 1944), p.5.

⁹ Cowling, p.80.

town.¹⁰ The residents and businesses of the nearby communities of Elizabethtown and Green Valley understood that access to the railroad and, hence, to local and regional markets would dictate the economic growth of a community. These communities eventually moved to Roanoke. Elizabethtown had a blacksmith, church, saloon and the post office but these all relocated to Roanoke when the T & P missed them by three miles.

Roanoke is located almost equidistance between Fort Worth and Denton. Also, the area had large ranches, with several thousand head of cattle, including the Sam Reynolds Ranch that had 8,000 fenced acres for grazing. Obviously, the ranchers would need to get their cattle to market. Also, the railroad's policy was to establish towns approximately eight miles apart along their track. The combination of these factors, site and an important "client" base i.e. the ranchers, probably lead to the railroad's choice of location for the town. And, with the advent of the railroad, large scale cultivation of crops like wheat and cotton became economically feasible.

An example of how important the railroads were to towns and the inducements a railroad would demand from a community is explained as follows. Even though Roanoke was established by the Texas and Pacific Railroad, the community leaders felt it was important to woo other rail lines and even the Interurban to their community. In 1886, the town chose R.M. Snead, J.W. Medlin and R.T. Foster to negotiate an incentive package with the Gulf and Pacific Railroad officials to induce them to bring their line through Roanoke. The committee was informed by a railroad representative that it would take a cash bonus and several miles of right-of-way for the Gulf and Pacific to pass through Roanoke.¹¹

The negotiations with various railroads and the Interurban continued through into the early 20th century. In 1887, General George F. Alford, president of the Dallas, Archer and Pacific Railroad, was bargaining with communities for the possible route his railroad

¹⁰ E. Dale Odom, *An Illustrated History of Denton County, Texas* (Denton, Texas: Self Published, 1996), p.45.

¹¹ "The Great Railway World". *Dallas Morning News*, October 2, 1886, p.2.

would take: Dallas, Grapevine, Archer or Dallas, Roanoke, and Archer. Decatur, hoping to lure the railroad its direction, filed a bond guaranteeing the right-of-way through Wise County and land for a depot there. It was noted that “Roanoke, a small village, from which no money was expected, had raised \$1,500.”¹² Occasionally, the railroads did cooperate. The Texas and Pacific and the Missouri, Kansas and Texas (MKT) shared track between Roanoke and Denton.¹³ In 1906, there were meetings in Lewisville and Roanoke between community leaders and railroad officials of the proposed Texas, New Mexico and Pacific Railroad. Both Lewisville and Roanoke were termed “enthusiastic” and “would pay a handsome bonus” to entice the railroad through their respective towns.¹⁴ Finally, the impact of the railroads on counties and communities can be seen in the demographics. The Denton County population in 1870, before the railroad was 7,251 and with the advent of the railroad the population more than doubled to 18,143.¹⁵ In Denton County, Aubrey, Argyle and Roanoke were all established by the Texas and Pacific Railroad.¹⁶ As pointed out in the Handbook of Texas article on Denton County, the railroads determined town locations up until the 1970’s.¹⁷

Geography and Agriculture of Roanoke and Southern Denton County

Denton County has three general soil belts running north to south: the eastern belt lies in the Blackland Prairie; one fourth of the county is in the western belt that lies along the Grand Prairie and half of the county in the mid-section is in the Eastern Cross Timbers. Roanoke is located in the southern part of the county in the western Grand Prairie belt with undulating to gently rolling land dissected by several streams.¹⁸ This topography and soil made the area around Roanoke suitable for ranching and general crop cultivation including cotton and wheat. This is important because the agricultural uses in this part of

¹² “Railroad News of the Day”. *Dallas Morning News*, July 1, 1887, p.3

¹³ “About the Railroads”. *Dallas Morning News*, September 17, 1889, p.6

¹⁴ “Conference with Railroad Promoters”. *Dallas Morning News*, March 15, 1906, p.9.

¹⁵ C.A. Bridge, *History of Denton County from Its Beginning to 1960* (Waco, Texas: Texian Press, 1978), p.168.

¹⁶ Ed Bates, *History and Reminiscences of Denton County* (Denton, Texas: McNitzky Printing, 1918), p.278.

¹⁷ Handbook of Texas. Denton County.

¹⁸ University of Texas Bureau of Business Research, *An Economic Survey of Denton County Prepared for Texas and Pacific Railroad* (Austin: University of Texas, June 1949), Section 2.0201-02.

the county contributed to the economic growth of Roanoke. Between the 1850's and the advent of the railroad in the early 1880's, much of the agriculture remained subsistent. However, many large cattle ranches were established in the area including ones by John Chisum, Burk Burnett, and Sam Reynolds¹⁹ Barbed wire fencing was introduced to the area in 1883, soon after the arrival of the railroad.²⁰

Sam Reynolds (1832-1908) came from Missouri to Texas in 1847, and settled near Roanoke. He married Isabel Choate in 1854. Reynolds served in the Confederate Army during the Civil War. He became a successful rancher and was president of the Exchange National Bank.²¹

Another large landowner in the area was John Dolford (Bob) Jones (1850-1936) who amassed 1,000 acres of land around Roanoke. Jones was the son of Leazer Alvis Jones, a white man from Arkansas and his slave, Elizabeth. Leazer Jones purchased land near Roanoke in 1861. After the Civil War, Bob and his brother Jim bought 60 acres from his father who had also been his master. Bob eventually bought out his brother's share in the land. In 1869, Jones married Almeadia Chisum. She was the daughter of local rancher John Chisum and his former slave, Jansey. They had 10 children together. The Jones family was active in Roanoke social and community life. After the black church burned, they were invited to attend services at the First Baptist Church in Roanoke. The Jones property also had a cave on it that was used as a stop on the Underground Railroad to house slaves fleeing to Mexico. Jones took supplies and food to slaves staying in the cave so they could continue their journey.²²

Denton County became know for its wheat cultivation, beginning in the early 1880's and well into the turn of the century.²³ As stated above, large scale cultivation of crops like

¹⁹ "Forest Folk, Prairie Folk: Rural Religious Cultures in North Texas". Jordan, Terry. *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Volume 80, No. 2; October 1976, p.140.

²⁰ Smith, p.6.

²¹ Untitled document on Sam Reynolds, no date from Hise Seagraves papers.

²² "Denton County's Jansey Chisum, Almeadia Chisum Jones, Eugie Jones Thomas and Family." Paper by Yvonne A. Jenkins, 1996. In the files of the Denton County Historical Commission.

²³ Captain B.B. Paddock, *History of Texas: Fort Worth and Texas Northwest Edition*. (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1922), Vol. 2, p738.

wheat became economically feasible with the advent of the railroad and the ability to move these crops to market. Between 1880 and 1900, the acreage cultivated with wheat increased more than 80,000 acres. Denton County ranked either first or second in statewide wheat production behind Collin County.²⁴ The wheat crop increased steadily in the early 1900's. In 1903, the wheat crop increased 10% from the previous year.²⁵

Cotton was also grown in the area around Roanoke.²⁶ In 1880, there were 29,785 acres of cotton being cultivated in the county. Cotton cultivation peaked at 115,078 acres in 1920.²⁷ In 1930, cotton cultivation made up 26% of the crops grown in the county, wheat was 16%, oats 15%, corn 13%, peanuts, sorghum and barley 3%.²⁸ During the Depression years, cotton was still being grown in the area.²⁹ By 1945, cotton was the leading crop in Denton County, followed by cattle. The surge in cotton production may have been in response to the demands of World War II. Dairy farming had also become important to the local economy, with Denton ranking 9th in the state.³⁰ In 1920, there were 4,200 farms in Denton County and in 1925, there 4,255 farms or ranches averaging 120 acres. By the beginning of the Depression in 1930, there were 3,963. This number steadily declined through the Depression years from 3,796 in 1935 to 3,340 in 1940.³¹

Growth and Development of Roanoke

Roanoke served as the business and economic center of the thriving ranching and farming area between Fort Worth and Denton. One of the earliest families in the area was the Medlin family who arrived as part of the Peters Colony in 1847. The Medlin family had a large ranch in the area and also became successful businessmen by investing in local commercial concerns and property in the district. The area attracted several extended

²⁴ Handbook of Texas Online, s.v.”, <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/DD/hcd6.html> (accessed March 5, 2007).

²⁵ “North Texas”. *Dallas Morning News*, April 21, 1903, p.10.

²⁶ “Cotton Report”, *Dallas Morning News*, July 10, 1907, p. 10.

²⁷ Handbook of Texas. Denton County.

²⁸ Cowling, p.45.

²⁹ “Eight Cent Raise in Ginning Prices Called Necessary”. *Dallas Morning News*, July 28, 1932, Section II, p.8.

³⁰ University of Texas Bureau of Business Research, 4.0107.

³¹ University of Texas Bureau of Business Research, 4.0101-03.

families from Sweden who purchased large parcels of land.³² In 1868, Andrew Gustav Petersen and his two brothers, Nels Frederick and Pete, immigrated to the area and ended up owning approximately 2,500 acres in southern Denton County that stretched from present day U.S. Highway 35 to the Santa Fe Railway tracks. They brought steam engines for agricultural use to this area and had the first thrashing machine in the county.³³ Later, many of these families purchased property in Roanoke for residences and businesses. The Petersen family was active in Roanoke community and served on local boards and commissions.

After the community was founded in 1881 by the railroad, it continued to grow. In 1882, there was a general store and the post office was established. The post office was located at the corner of Main and Oak Streets (101 N. Oak Street). The first permanent structure at this site was constructed in 1898. It burned in 1909 and was rebuilt on this site in 1910. The post office remained at this site until the late 1950s. The post office then moved to the corner of Lamar and U.S. Highway 377 in 1962. The first school was also built in 1882. The first general store was constructed by Mr. W.G. Patterson who also built the first residence in town.³⁴ In 1885, a community well was constructed in the middle of on Oak Street. By 1890, the population was 350 and there were four churches, a school, a cotton gin, several groceries, a saloon, doctors, a barber and a shoe maker. The first church established was the Union Church. It served as a meeting place for several early congregations of different denominations. One of the earliest buildings constructed was a saloon. The building, still extant at 114 N. Oak Street, was constructed in 1886 by Lawrence Olson, a stone mason. He arrived in the area from Stockholm in 1870. Olson became a naturalized citizen in 1895. The saloon was owned by the Snead brothers.³⁵ Local lore has Sam Bass as one of its regular visitors.³⁶ The stock pens for cattle were located west of the railroad tracks. Cattle were held here before being shipped to Kansas City. These pens were used by area ranchers before the

³² Jordan, p.143.

³³ Conway Petersen, *Peterson Family History 1810-1997* (Self-published, September 12, 1997), p.24.

³⁴ Philip Manire and Rodney Love, Quad-Town Community News, *History of Roanoke, Texas*. September 14, 1962-November 23, 1962.

³⁵ Petersen, p. 50.

³⁶ "A Page In History-Roanoke Preserves a Piece of the Past". *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, June 13-14, 1962, Northeast Extra, p.8.

Fort Worth Stockyards were built. Even with the construction of the Stockyards, Roanoke still served as a shipping point for cattle and other agricultural products.

The community continued to grow through the turn of the century. By the early 1900s, the town had a weekly newspaper, a bank (the Continental Bank, NR 1986), a grain elevator and the Denton Oil and Gas Company. The Continental State Bank was constructed in 1906 to meet the banking needs of the ranchers, like Sam Reynolds and the Medlin family, in the Roanoke area. The Masonic Lodge, still extant, was constructed in 1908. In 1910, the town was struck with a devastating fire that damaged many of the buildings on the west side of Oak Street. Those buildings were rebuilt soon after.

The community engaged in capital improvements in 1913. The city contracted with W.E. Trotter to install sidewalks on Main, Oak and Commerce streets.³⁷ That same year, 66 lots were purchased for development.³⁸ It was also during this year that local businessmen capitalized and formed the Farmer's Gin Company. They met at the Continental State Bank on Oak Street (NR 1986) to raise \$10,000 for investment in the new gin.³⁹ The gin was chartered in August of 1913 by local businessmen E.C. Neeley, W.P. Davis and J.R. Bourland. At the same time, the Roanoke Creamery was chartered with \$4,500 capital investment by W.P. Davis, J.T. Foster and H.W. Jenkins.⁴⁰ In 1916, Hugh Jenkins built the structure at 200 N. Oak Street for his hardware store (still extant).⁴¹ Mr. Davis and J. M. Medlin, of the local ranching family, were also investors in the Cotton Oil Mill in Lewisville.⁴² Mr. Davis also owned the Davis Dry Goods store on Oak Street. He and two other men, W.D. Miley and E.W. Dickson, invested \$5,000 and chartered the business in 1912.⁴³

³⁷ "Sidewalk Campaign". *Dallas Morning News*, November 22, 1913, p. 4.

³⁸ "Building Houses at Roanoke". *Dallas Morning News*, December 12, 1913, p.10.,

³⁹ "Trades Day at Roanoke". *Dallas Morning News*, April 10, 1913, p. 9.

⁴⁰ "Texas Charters". *Dallas Morning News*, August 6, 1913, p.6.

⁴¹ "Seagraves came to Texas from Lafayette, Tennessee", as told by Hise Seagraves, on October 8, 1963. Author unknown. From the papers of Hise Seagraves Sr. and Jr., loaned by Gary Alexander, Fort Worth, Texas.

⁴² "Texas Charters". *Dallas Morning News*, May 31, 1913, p.7.

⁴³ "Texas Charters". *Dallas Morning News*, October 11, 1912, p.11.

In 1912, a new two story school was constructed on the block bounded by Walnut, Denton and Fannin Streets. (Fannin is now Highway 114). The building first floor was for the grade school and the second was used for the high school. The first class graduated from this building in 1913. The building was used as a high school until 1935. At that time a new high school was constructed and the other building continued to be used for the lower grades. The high school building was used from 1936 until 1949. As with many rural areas, the loss of student population mandated a consolidation of several community schools into a single district. The Northwest Independent School District was created in 1949 consolidating Roanoke, Rhome, Justin and Haslet schools. The 1912 school building was demolished in 1963. The 1935 school building was expanded at this time to accommodate a growing number of grade school students in the district. During construction of the new wing, elementary school classes were held in local churches. After a few years a new elementary school was built in neighboring Trophy Club, and the Roanoke school building was vacated. However, the student population continued to grow and the school building was reopened as an elementary school for the district. In 1992, this building was demolished to make room for a new elementary school. The arch from the 1935-36 school was used in the rock fence that surrounds the school property. The extant rock fence was constructed by the Works Project Administration. This site has been continually used for school building since 1882.⁴⁴

Beginning in the early 1920's, plans were being discussed to build a highway from Dallas north across Denton County. Another highway was also being planned that would extend from Fort Worth through Roanoke to Denton, now U.S. Highway 377.⁴⁵ Highways were to communities what railroads had been in the late 1800's. They were seen as a vital tool for economic development for the communities situated on the highways. Northwest Highway (Highway 114) was laid on what was part of the old Dallas, Pacific,

⁴⁴ Roanoke School Reunion Committee. *Roanoke School Roster 1913-1949*. Special reunion Edition XIX, May 25, 1996.

⁴⁵ "\$143,000 State Highway Fund Will Be Asked". *Dallas Morning News*, December 16, 1921, p. 10.

Southeastern Railroad that had been graded from Letot (Dallas) to Tarrant County but not constructed.⁴⁶

The Dallas Pacific and Southeastern Railroad right-of-way was deeded to the Gulf, Texas and Western and was to pass west through Denton, Wise and Jack counties. The rail line would cross the Texas and Pacific and the MKT at Roanoke. The grade and dump were completed through Roanoke to Rhome when they ran out of money.⁴⁷ The Texas Highway Department purchased this right-of-way and constructed Northwest Highway which was completed in 1932. The highway opened with a great deal of fanfare including Governor Ross Sterling and other dignitaries.⁴⁸ The communities along the highway understood that the highway was the same type of economic engine as the railroad. The leaders of the community had worked to ensure the route would pass through Roanoke. The Roanoke Keller News describes Roanoke, with access to the new highway, as follows “Roanoke has within 30 miles 3 large cities in which to market her products-a population of more than ½ a million people. Where can you beat it?”⁴⁹ In 1939, the city entered into an agreement with the state to receive state and federal funds to construct U.S. Highway 377 along Front Street, running parallel with the railroad.⁵⁰

In 1930, Roanoke, with a population of 400, boasted three grocery stores, a café, a theater, a hardware store, a barbershop, a cream station, and a truck line. Oak Street, the main road through town, was lined with these businesses as well as the homes of community leaders. Some of the homes also housed family businesses. One residence was used as a home and shoe repair shop.

On November 7, 1933 an election was held to incorporate the city and adopt the commission form of government. Jack Medlin and J.H. Seagraves were the election judges. In April of 1934, the city adopted the commission form of government and

⁴⁶ Kate Singleton. Interview with E.I. Weisman, September 13, 2006, notes in the files of Denton County Historical Commission .

⁴⁷ Dallas Morning News. March 25, 1910, p.6.

⁴⁸ Dallas Morning News. *Governor, Visitors from East and West Open Highway*, May 20, 1932, Section 2, p. 1 and 10.

⁴⁹ Roanoke-Keller News, Volume 1, #4, April 4, 1930, p.1.

⁵⁰ City of Roanoke Commission Minutes December 2, 1939.

elected their first mayor and commission members. The election was held at the Continental Bank⁵¹ H. W. Jenkins was elected as mayor. Mr. Jenkins proceeded to apply to the Public Works Administration for a loan to build a new water system in the community.⁵² The first contract with the federal government was dated September 18, 1934, Public Works Administration Docket #7351 for \$21,000.⁵³ The city requested more funds from the PWA from \$21,000 to \$22,000 in September 1935. As Mayor Jenkins stated in his letter, this was to extend service and connections to all the houses being served by Interstate Utility Company, a private company. He did not want the city and a private utility company to be competing in the delivery of water.⁵⁴ The consulting engineer was F. J. Von Zuben from Fort Worth.⁵⁵ The amount was increased and the work was completed by Shinslett and Friday, Fort Worth contractors.⁵⁶ At this time the city also purchased the existing water works system from Interstate Public Utility Company.⁵⁷

A local history states that Roanoke was relatively unscathed by the Depression, “Not a single business house went broke”.⁵⁸ Businesses may not have closed but the farmers and ranchers of the area received checks from the federal government to plow under cotton and wheat and to slaughter animals.⁵⁹

The city commissioners continued to pass ordinances to ensure orderly growth of the community. In 1936, they passed an ordinance making it illegal to allow large animals such as horses, cows and swine to run free in the town.⁶⁰ A traffic ordinance was passed in 1937 that included only parallel parking on Oak Street and a 20 mile per hour speed

⁵¹ City of Roanoke Resolution No. 28 dated April 2, 1934

⁵² City of Roanoke Ordinance 34-103 August 28, 1934.

⁵³ Federal Contract P.W.A. Docket #7351 dated March 18, 1934.

⁵⁴ Letter from City of Roanoke to Julian Montgomery, Acting State Director of PWA dated September 23, 1935.

⁵⁵ Letter from City of Roanoke to WPA dated September 26, 1933.

⁵⁶ City of Roanoke Commission Minutes April 30, 1935.

⁵⁷ City of Roanoke Commission Minutes November 17, 1934.

⁵⁸ Manire and Love, p.2.

⁵⁹ Odom, p.75.

⁶⁰ City of Roanoke Ordinance 36-101, March 31, 1936.

limit it town.⁶¹ By 1940 the population was 485 people with 32 businesses. Most of the businesses were located along Oak Street, the main street of the community. In 1946, the city passed a zoning ordinance dividing the town into six zones.⁶² The town had dial service installed in 1948 for 280 subscribers, both business and residential. Roanoke was the first town in Denton County to get dial service and eliminate the need for local operators.⁶³

In 1950, the city of Roanoke inaugurated its natural gas service. Hugh Jenkins' hardware store already had a meter but the rest of the town had not installed meters. Most of the residents had been using butane up to this time. Lone Star Gas installed 115 meters at 10 dollars each and was expecting to install another 150. Local businessman and city councilman, James M Noah had been instrumental in the push for gas service in the community.⁶⁴ The local population was 511 in 1950. A newspaper article from the time states that the town had no city tax but had its own water system, fire trucks and all utilities including gas. Mayor Fanning stated in the article, "We have 196 water connections; 25,000 gallon water reservoir, 5,000 gallon standpipe, 12 fire plugs, a fire hall, fire truck and city hall." He went on to state that the water system was almost paid for and that a balance of \$7,000 remained. He was optimistic about the future of the community.⁶⁵ By 1960, the population had increased to 585 people.⁶⁶

Local Community Leaders and Associated Structures in Central Roanoke

The population rose steadily over the years. However, the town's proximity to Dallas and Fort Worth has meant a dramatic increase in population in recent years.

Development pressures are beginning to impact the historic original town area. The original town area includes several historic properties, both commercial and residential, that are associated with locally prominent families. The following is a discussion of the

⁶¹ City of Roanoke Ordinance 37-100A, July 27, 1937.

⁶² City of Roanoke Commission Minutes December 10, 1946.

⁶³ "Roanoke Dial Phone Building Ready Soon". *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, June 24, 1948, no page.

⁶⁴ "Roanoke Will Soon Cook with Natural Gas". *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, September 26, 1950, no page.

⁶⁵ "Town of 511 Has No Tax, They Just Pass the Hat. *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, September 27, 1950, no page.

⁶⁶ Handbook of Texas, Roanoke.

buildings and associated information. Most of the buildings date from the early 1900s to the 1950s and are modest, simple structures typical of small rural communities in Texas.

It is important to note, that like many small towns, the community leaders practiced unabashed “boosterism”. This was typical for communities in the early 20th century to try and improve their economic status and viability. As noted previously, local leaders like J.W. Medlin, Hugh Jenkins, J.R. Bourland and others negotiated with the railroads, the interurban and the state highway department in an effort to improve Roanoke’s access to markets and therefore, improve the local economy. Of course, improved transportation and location on major transportation arteries would also be important for the businesses in the community. Again, the buildings associated with the leaders in the community and the other commercial and residential buildings in the district denote the modest economic success of this small rural community.

Hugh W. Jenkins, who came to Roanoke from Tennessee in 1905, is associated with two extant properties in the Central Roanoke Historic District, one his business and one his residence. His hardware store (200 N. Oak Street) was constructed around 1915-16. His house, located at 111 S. Oak, was originally built by William Berry Hood. Hood gave it to his daughter, Hattie, when she married Hugh Jenkins on July 2, 1905. Jenkins served as the manager of the Reynolds-Hanna Lumber Company. In 1915, he bought the hardware part of the Hise and J.H. Seagraves dry goods and hardware business. Jenkins’ first location was the rock building at 114 N. Oak Street. He then purchased the lot at 200 N. Oak and constructed the current building. Over the years, Jenkins participated in a variety of activities to benefit Roanoke. In 1912, Jenkins and several other local businessmen started a “Board of Trade” (precursor to a Chamber of Commerce) for Roanoke. Jenkins was elected the first president of the organization and W.P. Davis, J.M. Medlin and J.R. Norton were also involved.⁶⁷ He also served as a vice-president of the Northwest Highway Association.⁶⁸ Jenkins served as the city’s first mayor after the town was incorporated in 1933. He is credited with developing the well and water system in

⁶⁷ “Board of Trade”. *Dallas Morning News*, October 24, 1912, p.15.

⁶⁸ “Governor Scheduled Speaker”. *Dallas Morning News*, May 8, 1932, Section III, p. 7.

Roanoke.⁶⁹ Jenkins also had another hardware store located in Keller and was an investor in the Roanoke Creamery.⁷⁰

As stated before the Continental State Bank building (312 N. Oak Street) is already listed on the National Register. The bank was often used for meetings and the polling place for local elections including the vote to incorporate the town.⁷¹

The Masonic Lodge, Texas Historical Commission Subject Marker, was constructed in 1908. It is a simple, 2 story wood frame structure located at the corner of Oak and Austin Streets. The building was used not only as a lodge but as a community center. The lodge was started in Elizabethtown but moved to Roanoke, dissolved and reformed. The lodge members met in various locations in Roanoke until they purchased a lot in 1908. The upstairs of the building served as the lodge while the lower floor was used by the community and various other groups. The Woodmen of the World, the Women's Home Demonstration Club, the Boy Scouts, the Chamber of Commerce and many other groups have met in the building.⁷² This building was also used as a polling place for the community.⁷³

The John and Roberta Gillespie house, located at 301 N. Oak Street, was constructed between 1909 and 1910. John Gillespie worked at the Continental State Bank. John Gillespie's widowed mother, Cass, had moved to Texas with her three children in 1878. She later became a housekeeper for her sister, Mrs. Isabell (Sam) Reynolds. The Reynolds family had a large ranch near Roanoke and was involved in several business ventures in the community. After Isabell Reynolds' death, her sister Cass married Sam Reynolds. Sam was the only father that John Gillespie ever knew. After World War I, the house belonged to the Seagraves family. J.H. Seagraves had a hardware and dry goods store on Oak Street (no longer extant).⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Information provided from notes of H.W. Jenkins and Mrs. Alberta Lincecum

⁷⁰ "Keller Fire Does \$25,000 Damage". *Dallas Morning News*, December 14, 1942, Section 1, p.2.

⁷¹ City of Roanoke Resolution No. 28, April 2, 1934.

⁷² Texas Historical Commission. Subject Marker Application for Roanoke Masonic Lodge #668, 1990.

⁷³ City of Roanoke Resolution 44-100 dated February 15, 1944.

⁷⁴ Pamphlet, History of Oak Street Cottage, n.d.

The Seagraves-McDonald House located at 308 N. Oak Street was constructed around 1912-1913. The land was owned by Mrs. H. Reynolds, who received as part of her divorce settlement. She then married W.H. (Hise) Seagraves in 1912 and they built the house. Mr. Seagraves was a successful local merchant and community leader. The McDonald family purchased the house in 1937. H.G. MacDonald came to Roanoke in 1923 to work for the railroad. He served as station master in Roanoke until September 7, 1955.⁷⁵

The two story rock building located at 114 N. Oak Street was constructed in 1886 by Lawrence Olson for the Snead brothers. Apparently, the stone came from one of the local ranches. R.M. Snead owned almost 300 acres in Tarrant County near Henrietta Creek. Snead was on the executive committee of the Denton County Immigration Association.⁷⁶ He was also on the committee, along with J.W. Medlin, to negotiate with the Gulf and Pacific Railroad to have their route pass through Roanoke.⁷⁷ He also served as a delegate from Denton County to the State Democratic Convention.⁷⁸ Locally, he was a property owner, rancher and notary.

Mr. Snead's building was constructed as a saloon. Local legend indicates that it was a brothel. Apparently, the building next door (112 N. Oak) was two stories and housed a bank at this time. Upstairs there was a door between the two buildings. This allowed patrons to come into the bank, go upstairs and pass through to the brothel without detection. The door is still in evidence. In later years, the building was used as a grocery, the site of Hugh Jenkins' hardware store, and café. The structure at 112 N. Oak is now only one story due to a fire. Previously this building housed a variety of uses including blacksmith, garage and grocery.

⁷⁵ Ann Clark, Unpublished research on the Seagraves-MacDonald House, Personal Collection of Ann Clark, 2006.

⁷⁶ "Immigration Matters". *Dallas Morning News*, January 21, 1888, p. 6.

⁷⁷ "Great Railway World", *Dallas Morning News*, October 12, 1886, p. 2.

⁷⁸ "Denton County Democrats". *Dallas Morning News*, April 27, 1902, p.23.

The structure at 110 N. Oak Street housed a grocery and barbershop run by the Newman family. The structure at 106 N. Oak is associated with the Bourland family. J. R. Bourland had come to Texas in 1876 and settled in the Roanoke area.⁷⁹ Guy Bourland was a member of the local Board of Trade, the precursor to the Chamber of Commerce.⁸⁰ J.R. Bourland was an owner of the Farmers' Gin.⁸¹ He was in the lumber business and used this building for his lumber company and general merchandise store. Bourland was also involved with encouraging state officials and the highway department to build highways through Roanoke.⁸² The building was later used by the Noah family for a grocery store.

Community Planning and Architectural Significance

The town still displays extant historic structures from the major period of development—early 20th century until the 1950s. The original town area of Roanoke was platted by the railroad and the layout of the town is a grid pattern that is parallel to the railroad tracks. The original lot sizes varied and were laid out in a peculiar manner. Typically, lots were laid out perpendicular to the main street of the town however the lots on the west side of Oak Street were laid out parallel to the street. These blocks had an alley that divides them mid-block. These lots do not face Oak Street but the side streets of Bowie, Main, Austin, Travis and Denton Streets. On the east side of Oak the lots were laid out in a more traditional manner, perpendicular to the street. The blocks on Oak Street including Denton and Houston Street did not have lots. Not all of these lot patterns remain. Many of the very small lots were combined and sold as one lot. Some of the lots that were parallel to Oak Street were developed so the house faces Oak Street and not the side street. An example of this would be the Gillespie House, 301 N. Oak. It was platted to face Austin Street but the house faces Oak Street.

⁷⁹ “Deaths”. *Dallas Morning News*, June 18, 1919, p.3.

⁸⁰ “Board of Trade Organized”. *Dallas Morning News*, October 24, 1912, p.15.

⁸¹ “Texas Charters”. *Dallas Morning News*, August 8, 1913, p. 6.

⁸² “Tarrant Denton Good Roads Boosters Meet”. *Dallas Morning News*, November 10, 1915, p.11.

There is a collection of early to mid 20th-century commercial and residential structures in the original platted town. The majority of commercial buildings are one story brick structures dating from 1908 to 1957. The earliest extant building is the two story stone hotel constructed in 1886. It is a handsome stone structure with arched windows and white stone keystones. The parapet is corbelled with white stones evenly spaced across the front. The predominant style of the commercial buildings is best described as one part Commercial Style. The Continental Bank Building (NR 1986) though vernacular, is one of the more adorned buildings with its corbelled brick parapet and decorative false chimneys at the four corners. The buildings at 106 N. Oak and 200 N. Oak represent the one part Commercial Style buildings in the district.⁸³ The building at 110 N. Oak is a one story masonry building with a simple parapet cap.

The post office building was constructed around 1910 replacing an earlier building lost in the fire in 1909. In the 1950's another story was added to the building. The former fire station was constructed in the late 1940's – early 1950's and is a one story brick structure. The Tabernacle Baptist Church was constructed in 1957 and is indicative of the 1950's church architecture.

The Masonic Lodge #668 (Subject Marker) was constructed in 1908 and is located at the corner and Oak and Austin Streets. The building is a simple two story frame building. The building has a hipped roof. There are two windows on the second story of the west façade and the entry door is located on the west façade. On the south façade, there is a door. There were two windows with three windows placed symmetrically on the second floor. This pattern is repeated on the north façade. There were two windows upstairs and downstairs on the east façade and a door. The building was originally sited on the property line. In 1981, it moved back from Oak Street approximately sixty feet.⁸⁴

The other buildings along Oak Street are mainly residential in nature and are representative of other residential structures in the community. They represent the

⁸³ Richard Longstreth, *Buildings of Main Street* (Washington, D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1987), p.54.

⁸⁴ Texas Historical Commission Subject Marker for the Roanoke Masonic Lodge #668.

modest growth and development that occurred along Oak Street and the rest of the original town. The houses at 200 and 208 S. Oak are examples of Folk Victorian homes dating from round 1913. They are very similar, displaying the pyramidal roof form center doors with windows on either side. The house at 208 S. Oak has a dormer with three small single pane windows. The McDonald house at 308 N. Oak Street also displays the pyramidal roof form with a center chimney. It also has the dormer with three small windows. The distinguishing feature of the house is the arched porch entrance. The Gillespie house is the most unique of the houses. It has a pyramidal roof form with inset dormers and a wrap around porch. The Jenkins house at 111 S. Oak is also a Folk Victorian house with a gable front and wing. The house at 408 Oak Street is a small board and batten cross gable structure. The following houses, 412, 409 and 505 N Oak are small minimal traditional houses probably constructed in the late 1930's to early 1940's. The structure at 504 N. Oak Street, now a restaurant, was an Army barracks moved from Jacksboro by the Clark family. The other building on this site, a creamery, was moved from the 100 block of N. Oak Street to Denton Street. These buildings were later connected. Other houses including 200 and 205 Walnut Street and 307 Main are from the early 1900s, and display pyramidal roof forms, porches across the front of the houses and wood and/or wood and brick columns.

III. Significance

Roanoke, Denton County is significant as a representative example of the development of a small rural agriculturally-based community in Texas. The town was the center of community life in southern Denton County and developed as a commercial center for this prosperous ranching region between Fort Worth and Denton, serving as a major shipping point for the large cattle ranches in the area.⁸⁵ The town was platted in 1881 as part of the expansion of the Texas and Pacific Railway through North Central Texas but was not incorporated until 1933. Roanoke replaced two earlier settlements, Elizabethtown and Green or Garden Valley. The original town still maintains extant commercial and residential properties that served the community, business owners, area ranchers and

⁸⁵ Emrich, p.3

farmers. It is also representative of small town commercial and residential growth in North Central Texas. The community of Roanoke is located in North Central Texas in Denton County at the intersection of State Highway 377 and State Highway 114.

The families involved with the growth and development of Roanoke contributed to the economic growth of southern Denton County. They were active in ranching, farming and local commerce. Many of them served as community leaders including holding public office. They worked to encourage the growth of the town by lobbying for roads and railroads to be built through the community. The placement of Northwest Highway (State Highway 114) through Roanoke is an excellent example of their work.

The town has a collection of early 20th century small town commercial and residential architecture. One building, the Continental Bank, is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places.⁸⁶ The Masonic Hall has a Texas Historical Commission Subject Marker. The downtown was recently (2007) listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The town is located in a fast growing area of southern Denton County. The town of Roanoke is landlocked by Trophy Club, Northlake and Fort Worth as well as Alliance Airport and is facing development pressure. The city has committed to maintaining the historic core of the community and to document the history of the town. A Texas Historical Subject Marker will further assist these efforts.

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