

Downtown Eagle Lake - 1976



This is a composite view of downtown Eagle Lake taken on a peaceful Sunday afternoon from the corner of Main

Street and McCarty Avenue facing northeast toward the Municipal Building on the downtown city square.

Eagle Lake's Progress In 1907 Noted By Editor

[Editor's note: The following report by the late Bruce W. McCarty, editor and owner of the Eagle Lake Headlight is a description of Eagle Lake in a special illustrated edition in October of 1907. Mr. McCarty titled the story, "A progressive little city of 2500 inhabitants located in the rice, cane and cotton belts of Texas."]

Eagle Lake is a prosperous little city of approximately 2,500 inhabitants, situated in the heart of the rice, cane and cotton belts of Southwestern Texas, located in Colorado county, sixty-five miles west of Houston. The town is built on a level prairie about five miles from the Colorado river. Eagle Lake has a splendid free school, the finest of its kind in the state, having nine months in the year, four splendid church buildings, three strong banks, two live local newspapers, a volunteer fire company, electric light plant, ice manufacturing plant, bottling works, two lumber yards, a good in shop, two wholesale houses, a first-class bakery, numerous good retail stores, and as good an opera house and hotels as can be found in any town of its size in the State. Throughout the entire business portion of the town are uniform concrete sidewalks. This, together with the handsome brick business houses gives the town a city-like appearance. Located in the center of the business portion of the town is an attractive and well kept park, in which is erected a picturesque little band stand, from which our excellent cornet band (composed of strictly Eagle Lake citizens) furnishes free open air concerts every Thursday night during the summer months. The town has never had a boom, but has always enjoyed a steady growth. Among its citizens are a

number of Northern and Western families, who have been practicing their investments in the neighborhood. Near the town is a body of water after which the town is named. Eagle Lake covers about 2,500 acres, and is filled with fish of all kinds and descriptions, perch and trout being the most numerous. During the winter months this lake is covered with wild ducks in countless numbers, and fishermen and hunters from all parts of this and from other States are constantly visiting the lake for the fine sport to be had there. Our people are exceedingly progressive, and for the last few diversifications have been practiced with such great success that our little city has become the Mecca of all prospective land buyers, who can always find in our variety of soils just the quality that will suit their individual purposes. The raising of cotton, which alone for many years, sustained the business interests of this section, proves the soil second to none for the fleecy staple; the large yearly corn yield, the heavy yields of all manner of garden stuff, twice each year, and the heavy and high test sugar cane yields, all tend to prove the assertion that our lands cannot be excelled. The rice lands also produce large yields of high grade rice, with water for irrigation within the reach of all. The use of fertilizers is totally unknown; some of the soil having been in constant cultivation for more than seventy-five years, and still produces as abundantly as new land.

Irrigation Facilities
For rice growing the lake furnishes a large portion of the water used by the two large canals near town, supplemented at times by the

waters of the Colorado river. These plants are thoroughly equipped with high grade pumping machinery, and are raising fine crops yearly. The smaller farmer or land owner, however, is, in this section, totally independent of the canal owners for his water supply. By putting down shallow wells, thirty to sixty feet deep, sufficient water is found to successfully irrigate from one hundred to one hundred and sixty acres. As this has been demonstrated for several years, during dry seasons as well as wet years, it has passed the experimental stage, and rice has become one of our established crops. So much so, that two rice mills were constructed to prepare for market the produce of the rice fields; and these mills are not cheap structures, but are well built brick buildings, equipped with the latest milling machinery and cost over fifty thousand dollars each. They are the Eagle Lake Rice Milling Company's plant, located on the Cane Belt and San Antonio & Aransas Pass tracks, and the plant of the Lakeside Rice Mill Company, located on the Cane Belt. These two mills are well managed, enjoy the confidence of the rice men in this

section, and handle large quantities of rice annually. **Sugar Refinery**
The Lakeside Sugar Refining Company has been in operation one of the finest sugar mills in the South; the plant costing half a million dollars, with a capacity of 1,000 tons of cane daily. This mill is located on the Cane Belt Railroad about three-quarters of a mile south of town. There is sufficient acreage of cane land in this immediate section to support several mills of this size, with their profit accounts well on the right side of the ledger. Two good cotton gins prepare the cotton of the farmers for shipment to the spinners. Important in the attraction of many of the "above mentioned enterprises has been Eagle Lake's splendid railroad facilities, equipped with the progressive management of the several roads, all of whom have exerted at all times their best efforts to advance the interests of this section, and their assistance has been a great factor in the results attained. The main line of the great Sunset system on its way to the Golden Gate; the San Antonio & Aransas Pass, and the Cane Belt Railroad, now a holding of the great Santa Fe system, all recognize Eagle Lake as an important station on their lines.

Commercial Club
Locally, two organizations are working harmoniously for the interests of the farmers and the town: the Commercial Club of Eagle Lake is a thoroughly alive organization of the business men of the city for the purpose of building up the new enterprises of the section, ready to foster any reliable undertaking that would be to the benefit of the town or its vicinity, and the Eagle Lake Farmers' Institute, organized in 1903, for the purpose of encouraging the cultivation of garden truck in sufficient quantities for shipment, in place of the local table purposes, as heretofore. It has proved in adjoining counties very profitable to raise and ship early vegetables for Northern markets, placing them on the tables of the well-to-do in the colder climates before they are planted in that section. They will reach their destination as early as those shipped from Southern Florida, and several weeks ahead of the California products. There are many other profitable crops.

Good Financing
The enterprise and ability of our citizens is reflected in the management of the affairs of the city itself, in being conducted along progressive lines in every respect. The city of Eagle Lake has redeemed all of its bonds before maturity at a premium; it owes no man a dollar, and has money to its credit in the local banks, of which there are three—one National, one State and one private. Eagle Lake offers every inducement possible to factories and industries looking

newspaper on August 1st, 1961 under a lease-contract with Mr. Taylor. He passed away in April of 1966 and she sold the paper to the Franks. The late Fred G. Franks became associated with the Headlight in September of 1967 when the paper was under the ownership of Messrs. Norman and Taylor. The younger owner, Fred R. Franks, son of Fred G. Franks, became associated with the newspaper in September of 1965 following his return from service with the U.S. Navy.



AS THE CURTAIN GOES UP ON THE THIRD CENTURY OF AMERICA'S PROUD HISTORY OF FREEDOM - LET US RECAPITULATE THE SPIRIT OF A GREAT AND COURAGEOUS HANDFUL OF PEOPLE WHO BROUGHT ABOUT THE EVENTS FOR WHICH WE HOLD THIS JOYFUL CELEBRATION.

MAY THE LIGHT OF FREEDOM SHINE FORTH ON THIS NATION FOREVER.



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EAGLE LAKE

Valuable Historical Papers Preserved In County Archives

Papers of James Montgomery and allied families dating from 1828 to 1898, including Spanish Land Grant documents signed by William Barrett Travis (of Alamo fame) and C. C. Dyer (one of the old 300 colonists), are among these papers and documents in which many early people are mentioned. These were given to the Colorado County Archives by Mrs. Jewell Vineyard Brewer of Eagle Lake. The original papers will be kept in acid free boxes for their preservation. They will be used for historic document display only. Xerox copies will be available for historic research.

The Colorado County Archives is on the second floor in the county courthouse and kept open two days a week and at other times by request. It is under the supervision of the Colorado County Historical Survey Committee. The purpose of the County



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For... Lakeside Sugar Refinery



This is the former Lakeside Sugar Refinery which was located on property just south of Eagle Lake on property now owned by the Waddells and Brummers.

Foundation and one building of the refinery facilities still remain on the Waddell property on Lakeside Drive.

Eagle Lake Was Once A Prominent Sugar Producer

(Reprinted in part from a July, 1975 issue of the Headlight, written by Kathryn McCarty of Eagle Lake.)

In a paper written by Stephen F. Austin in 1831 to encourage settlers to come to Texas he said that there were 70,000 square miles adapted to the growth of sugar cane. Even then, there were sugar mills in Brazoria County which soon became known along with Matagorda and Colorado Counties as the "Sugar Bowl".

In 1834, William Stafford erected the colony's first permanent sugar mill in Fort Bend County.

It was to Eli Mercer that Texas is indebted for the origin of sugar cane. In the 1830's Mercer began planting sugar. His plantation was in what is now Wharton County, but that county was not organized until July 3, 1846 after it was created from Colorado, Matagorda and Jackson counties. When Colorado County was organized in 1837, the plantation was in this county. In 1833 Mercer, with the help of two sons and one Negro, cultivated not only enough sugar for his own family but he supplied the whole population of Egypt with cane. He made a sugar mill of his own design and sold the sugar to his neighbors for a good price.

Cane Planted On Matthews Bayou In 1851

We know that sugar cane was planted on Caney (now Matthews Bayou) in 1851. In January of that year, C. W. Tait wrote from Columbus that "A good many planters on Caney have lost a large portion of their cane by the severity of the cold."

In some instances farmers cultivated two or three acres. Machinery for crushing cane and making sugar and molasses was usually owned by some enterprising Yankee who loaded the equipment on a wagon and traveled from place to place where it was unloaded and set up in a short time to be worked by horsepower. During these early days the price of sugar varied. In 1836 A. M. Closser wrote his father that sugar was 20¢ a pound and no money to be had. From 1851 on the price varied from five to six cents a pound. In 1863, it was worth fifty cents a pound.

Town Of Lakeside

Established
About 1874, Captain William Dunovant and his sister, Adelia, natives of Chester, South Carolina, came to Texas and made their home in Eagle Lake.

Reestablished outside Eagle Lake a town called Lakeside, designed exclusively for the promotion of his business enterprises. In a few years a sugar refinery, a rice mill,

and the general offices of the Cane Belt Railroad were located there.

Lakeside Sugar Refinery received its \$200,000 charter between January 1, 1901 and August 31, 1902. It was located in the P. Reel's Survey on what is known as Lakeside Drive in Eagle Lake, on property now owned by the William Waddell heirs. To furnish water, a permanent right to the water from the lake for industrial purposes was sold to the sugar mill. This right runs with the title to the land.

The sugar refinery was a one-half million dollar plant and was constructed entirely of steel and iron. It was strictly fireproof in every respect. It was equipped with the best machinery, had a capacity of 1,000 tons of cane per day, and employed about 100 men. It had an annual output of 5,000,000 pounds of sugar. It was noted as one of the most modern mills of Texas.

"Whangdoodle"

RR Hauls Cane

In order to reach the large farms of William Dunovant and the others, the Cane Belt Railroad Company was formed and on March 10, 1898, W. T. Eldridge secured a charter for the railroad. (You will note that this was prior to the charter of the Lakeside Sugar Refinery. In the 1890's Ed H. Cunningham installed machinery necessary to produce refined sugar in Sugar Land. This company is known today as the Imperial Sugar Company.) Associated with Eldridge were William Dunovant, E. F. Newsum, Perry Clark, Thomas Boulden, John Thatcher and others of Eagle Lake. It was to operate from

the mill ground 70,000 tons of cane. The "Whangdoodle" brought a few less than five thousand cars of cane to the Lakeside Sugar Refinery. In addition it handled five hundred and seventy-five cars of cane for Mr. Eldridge, which were shipped to St. Louis.

Refinery Goes Into Receivership In 1912

After the most successful season in its history misfortunes set in for the sugar refinery. The tropical storm of July 31, 1909 inflicted heavy damage to the Lakeside Sugar Refinery. Much of the corrugated iron was stripped from the building and scattered, but the machinery was not damaged. The loss was several thousand dollars. Bonus Plantation, owned by the Lakeside Refinery Company suffered a heavier loss. Fifty-four cabins, seven corn cribs, three windmills, three new implement sheds and one school house were almost entirely destroyed. The convict camp was a mass of wreckage.

Flourishes In 1908

The cane crop of 1908-1909 season was especially good. There were sixty-four cars of cane on the tracks at the refinery when it began operation the last day of October. Labor was scarce and H. W. Rytner, General Manager of the Lakeside Sugar Refinery offered to pay parties who furnished their own labor and teams, by the ton or car and to arrange to feed the mules and pay cash each week. During the growing season

An article in a special "booster" edition of the "Headlight" of May 14, 1910 stated that the refinery was owned by St. Louis citizens.

In April 1912, the Lakeside Sugar Refinery went into receivership. Hon. George

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Capt. Dunovant Introduced Metal Money

Cotton was selling at 7 1/2 cents a pound and cottonseed brought \$1 per ton. In 1893, Silver money being scarce that year, Capt. William Dunovant introduced metal money of his own on his large plantation and it bought goods in his stores or was redeemable in United States currency at the end of the month. Capt. Dunovant paid his hands every night.

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They Helped Make America Great



During our Bicentennial year, let us remember the many men and women who helped to make this nation great. These famous faces carved in stone on Mount Rushmore are only four of the millions of Americans who built this country into a nation as solid as her great mountains.

WE SALUTE AMERICA
Congratulations to the progress shown by the citizens of this area!
Thanks for your help and support!!
EAGLE LAKE COMMUNITY HOSPITAL
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WELCOME TO AMERICA

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CITY OF EAGLE LAKE MUNICIPAL BUILDING

City of Eagle Lake

CITY OFFICIALS and EMPLOYEES