

THE HANDBOOK OF TEXAS **Online**

LULING, TEXAS. Luling is an incorporated community at the intersection of U.S. highways 90 and 183 and State Highway 80, fifteen miles south of Lockhart in southern Caldwell County. Early settlement of the area began in the 1840s and was concentrated along Plum Creek. The Plum Creek post office opened in 1848. In 1874 the Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio line laid track from Columbus to a terminus three miles west of Plum Creek. This terminus became the city of Luling, drawing much of its early population from the Plum Creek area and from the Atlanta community. Sources vary on how Luling came by its name: one said that it was named for a Chinese worker; a second, that it was named for a Judge Luling; and a third, that Luling was the maiden name of the wife of the man who built the railroad. The Luling post office opened in 1874, and the community grew rapidly. Within ten years Luling had five churches, several mills, a bank, a school, a weekly newspaper, and 1,800 residents. Its primary shipments were cotton, cottonseed oil, livestock, and pecans. In 1889 a second railroad, the San Antonio and Aransas Pass, built through Luling, connecting it with both Lockhart and Shiner. By 1890 the community had an opera house, two hotels, and a population of 2,000. The number of residents fell to 1,349 by 1900 but increased again to 1,502 by the 1920s.

The discovery of the Luling oilfield by Edgar B. Davis in 1922 prompted rapid growth in the community and attracted various support industries associated with the oil business. By the early 1930s Luling had 5,970 residents and 175 businesses. The San Antonio and Aransas Pass abandoned the section of track between Luling and Gonzales in 1933, and in 1942 the section between Luling and Lockhart, which had been acquired by the Texas and New Orleans, was also abandoned. The number of residents fell to 4,437 in the 1940s and to 4,285 in the early 1950s, but Luling remained a prosperous community. Population estimates fluctuated between 4,400 and 5,100 from the 1960s through the early 1980s, but the number of businesses reported did not fall below 150. The community was hurt by the oil price slump in the mid-1980s, but it had developed other businesses and so was not completely dependent on oil. In spite of the dominance of oil, agriculture had remained an important part of the local economy. By the 1950s local farmers had diversified their crops to include watermelons and tomatoes. Truck farming became such a large industry in the area that Luling residents began holding an annual "Watermelon Thump," a festival that included a seed-spitting contest and prizes for the largest watermelon. The twentieth annual Thump (1973) attracted between 10,000 and 12,000 people, and as many as 40,000 came to one of the gatherings in the 1980s. Luling had 5,039 residents and 170 businesses in 1980. In 1990 the population was 4,661 with an estimated 123 businesses. By 2000 the population was 5,080 with 287 businesses.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Mark Withers Trail Drive Museum, *Historical Caldwell County* (Dallas: Taylor, 1984 Vertical Files, Barker Texas History Center, University of Texas at Austin).

Vivian Elizabeth Smyrl

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