

BOERNE'S EARLY HISTORY AND TURNING POINTS

Boerne's "Golden Age" in its history was between 1885 and the late 1920s.

Boerne was settled in 1849 by German immigrants who had suffered many hardships on their long trip by sailing ship and inland to find their new home. They came to Texas to colonize in this new land and were hard working in overcoming many obstacles in their way to find a peaceful existence.

The early German settlers were cultured, well educated, and financially able to afford an active social life. They brought their German customs and culture with them and made them a part of their daily lives; their language, music, building skills, furniture making

Water was plentiful, the land was lush and hunting was excellent. They built their homes from available cypress, cedar and limestone and started building a community with schools, a mill, and essential stores for the butcher, baker, blacksmith, craftsmen, apothecary, clothing, farming goods, food, funeral home, livery stables, lumber yards, saloons, etc.

San Antonio was 30 miles South and a 3 day round trip by oxen cart for supplies. Boerne was still a wilderness being tamed and Indians still roamed the hills, attacking the colonists.

Several local hotels were started in the late 1850s and operated as Stagecoach stops, after a seven hour trip from San Antonio. Two of them grew and became a big part of Boerne's history. They still exist today as the Phillip Manor and Ye Kendall Inn

In the 1860s, the Civil War began, disrupting families and growth for Boerne for a decade. Kendall County was formed and Boerne became the county seat.

In the 1870s, the British came in Boerne. Like the Germans, they were cultured and well educated, but they didn't come to colonize as the Germans did. Financial conditions were poor in England, there was a shortage of beef in the North after the Civil War and Englishmen knew they could make money supplying the needed beef by developing Cattle ranches to herd cattle to Kansas City. Cattle runs were short lived lasting until 1885. Some Englishmen stayed, but most left.

This created an interesting time period for Boerne with the clash and melding of different cultures.

The 1880s brought huge changes for Boerne.

In 1883 the telegraph arrived in Boerne and the production of cotton, beef and wool were at all time highs. The building of the two-story Dienger Building set off a commercial building trend in downtown. The Phillip Manor and Kendall Inn were expanded and other hotels and rooming houses were being built or planned.

The Opera House was built and livery stables were operating.

Dr. William Kingsbury, an Englishman, had recruited the English to come to Boerne. Dr. Ferdinand Herff, a German immigrant, promoted Boerne as a health resort, with its clean air and hot springs. They worked closely together to promote Boerne and to bring the San Antonio and Aransas Pass Railroad here, a two and a half hour journey from San Antonio.

On July 17, 1887 the first train arrived in Boerne with 600 tourists and dignitaries on board. It was the beginning of the "Golden Age" of Boerne, with great social activity and economic prosperity.

The Phillip Manor had been a hub of social activity since the 1960s when the German Shooting Club was based at the hotel. Shooting matches on the shooting range behind the hotel were festive and well attended. When the English came they brought Polo and the club was also based at the hotel with many social events. It is said that the first game of polo in the United States was played on a field in Boerne.

When Fiesta was started in San Antonio, the first Royal Court Ball was held at Phillip Manor. Generals from Ft. Sam Houston kept their families at the hotel during WWI and frequently entertained. Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders visited there. Debbie Gracy, who is restoring and renovating the hotel as the Phillip Manor Square, to open in 2010-2011, is planning several rooms to memorialize and display its history.

The other social hub was at the Kendall Inn, overlooking Main Plaza, where many famous dignitaries stayed, and many events were held. The Kendall Inn has continued to expand today, now with a conference room, and continues to be a big part of Boerne's history.

The accommodations for guests at both hotels were luxurious and the food was excellent. Other hotels were the Sunset Hotel and St. James Hotel at the Main Plaza area and the Vogt House and Becker House on Main Street.

During the summers, wealthy San Antonio families came to Boerne, to second homes or hotels and boarding houses, to escape the heat and join in the social life in the resort town. There were plays at the Opera House, card games, much music, singing and dancing, lazy picnics along the Cibolo, horse and buggy rides in the lovely hill country. The Boerne Village Band, started in 1860, continued to flourish and is still very popular as the oldest continuous German Band, outside of Germany, in the world.

Annie Fellowes Johnston, the famous writer of the "Little Colonel" series lived in Boerne during these years. She wrote, "Mary Ware in Texas," a fictionalized story about Boerne, named Bauer in the story, its people and this historical era as seen through her eyes.

Business and construction were booming in the 1890s, and new Victorian style homes were being built.

In 1906, the first Kendall County Fair was held in the Opera House. In 1909 Boerne was incorporated with a population of 885. The railroad also brought hundreds of patients to Boerne. Because of its therapeutic springs, clear air and warm climate, Boerne was a health Mecca for patients recovering from lung diseases. Sanitariums were built and at one time there were more sick people than well people inhabiting the town.

The first automobiles appeared changing the face of businesses from horse and buggy to auto and gasoline.

The U.S entered WW I in 1917. After the War in 1923, tourism cooled and the stock market crashed. The "Golden Era" was over. Most Boerne Hotels closed and some businesses were gone forever. By 1930, most Sanitariums had closed as patient loads decreased.

Between 1940 and 1970, the population almost doubled from 1271 to 2432. By 1980 Boerne had grown to 3229 and was prosperous.

There were other major events that altered downtown businesses.

With the advent of IH 10 in the 1960s, the main business route through downtown was diverted and the railroads ceased operations to Boerne.

Then, in the 1980s, when Wal-Mart and other large chain stores came to Boerne, the old "Mom & Pop" stores that had been the mainstay of Boerne businesses for many years closed their doors,

leaving about 25 empty stores on Main Street. The City of Boerne and the Boerne Chamber of Commerce actively promoted the rebuilding of businesses and as a result the empty stores took on a new life. Boerne became a Mecca for antique stores and art galleries that attract tourists from all over the area, as well as from San Antonio, which was now less than 30 minutes away on IH 10.

In the 1990s the population exceeded 5000 and today is nearing 10,000 with an economic crisis on its doorstep and many new decisions of its future growth to be made.

As the city has grown, city planners have been aware that the influx of new citizens can dilute the very ethnic and cultural basis that is Boerne's heritage. New families are coming here to enjoy the very things that they might change.

The essence of Boerne's downtown charm are the old, historic buildings which have been identified, preserved and adapted for use in our present day society.

The Dienger Building now houses the Boerne Public Library. Within the library is the Historical Research Room where the City Archives Collection is located. It contains all of the detailed historical documents, history and photographs of Boerne, its businesses and organizations, its buildings, cemetery and people from its beginnings. I help to maintain it for the city and am able to find information that will be helpful to you on the HOT committee (Advisory Board) if you need more detailed background on what history is important to emphasize.

A question of museums came up in the last meeting. The Agriculture Heritage Center was identified. There is also another museum located in the Kuhlmann-King Historical House and the Henry J. Graham Bldg. on Historic Hill behind City Hall and City Hall Annex (both historic school buildings). All of these are City owned. Since the Boerne Area Historical Preservation Society's (BAHPS) contract with the City to operate the KK House ended in 1998, the City has not maintained it and it is deteriorating to the point where the safety of conducted tours by the BAHPS is questioned. The problem hinges on the future of these buildings when City Hall moves to the new City Campus, following the Boerne Library's move from the Dienger Building.

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