

HISTORICAL VISITORS GUIDE

Bastrop County, Texas

INCLUDING
10 AREA MUSEUMS



Enjoy Our Friendly Nature!

ExploreBastropCounty.com



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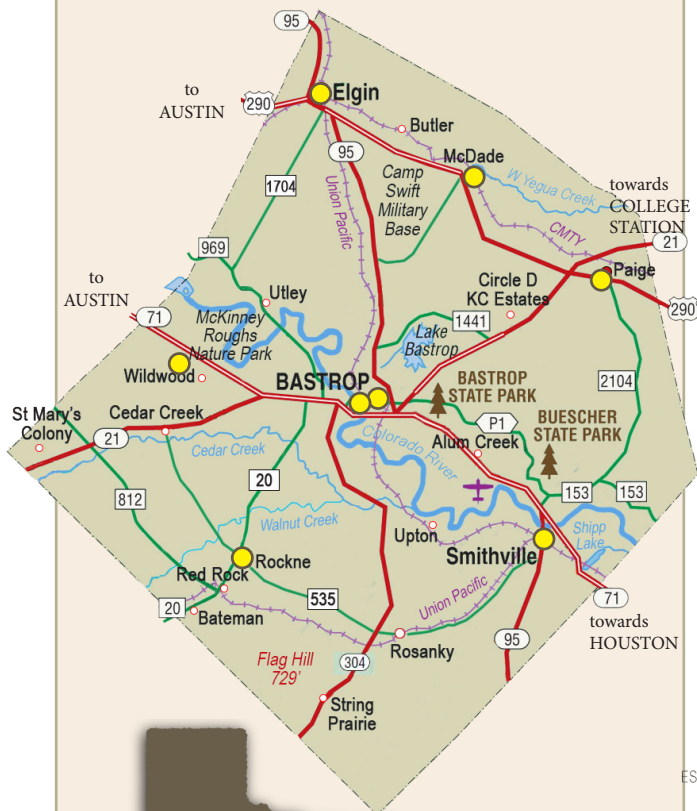
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10 HISTORICAL MUSEUMS

of Bastrop County Texas



Enjoy our friendly nature!

www.ExploreBastropCounty.com

A BRIEF HISTORY *of Bastrop County Texas*

Several museums chronicle and display the history of this area.

With rich and varied vegetation, plentiful wildlife and easy access to water, the area of present Bastrop County attracted nomadic hunters and gatherers for centuries and White pioneers beginning in the early 1830s.

In 1691, the first Whites to visit the area came with a Spanish exploration that failed to locate a direct route connecting Mexico and the United States because of difficulty passing through the thick pine forest. A century later, however, others established the “Old San Antonio Road,” a branch of El Camino Real de los Tejas. It crossed the Colorado River at present Bastrop, traversed the pine forest, and briefly benefitted from soldiers stationed as a small fortification at the river crossing to protect mail carriers and other travelers.

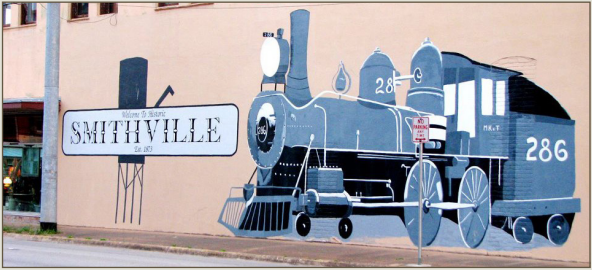
In 1832, to provide support for settlers in the western portion of his colonies, Stephen F. Austin, the “Father of Texas,” founded a town at the river crossing, naming it “Bastrop” after Felipe Enrique Neri Bogel. This Dutch native, known throughout Texas as “the Baron de Bastrop,” had



Baron de Bastrop

proved very instrumental in the success of Austin’s early Texas ventures and well deserved the honor. This made Bastrop the first town, and now the oldest, in current Central Texas, and the only Mexican-founded town in the region.

The legislature of Coahuila and Texas renamed it “Mina” in 1834, but in 1837, after colonists won independence, their congress restored the original name for the town and county. In 1839, the town and pine forest proved essential to developing Austin as the republic’s capital. After annexation to the United States (1845) and until a few years after the Civil War, it was the only town in the county and its county seat, with outlying areas depending on its resources while prospering through farming and lumbering.



A mural highlights the importance of rail to the area.

A new railroad across the northern portion of the county in 1872 built depots that soon grew into the small towns Elgin, McDade, and Paige. In 1887, a new rail line arrived at the small village of Smithville, which soon became a prosperous community, the largest in the county.

After Emancipation and Reconstruction provided a level of justice for former slaves, a “Jim Crow” environment prevailed for eight decades as the county’s population and economy remained relatively stable. Meanwhile, the development of lignite mines between Bastrop and Elgin, beginning in the early 20th century, brought prosperity for mine owners and an initial influx of immigrants from Mexico. Clay deposits in the northern portion of the county led to pottery production in McDade and brick manufacturing in Elgin, each providing jobs and helping enrich the area.

The federal government used the Civilian Conservation Corps to build Bastrop and Buescher state parks in the 1930s, and during World War II the U.S. Army established Camp Swift, between Elgin and Bastrop, as a training facility that now functions as an Army National Guard facility.

Today, the county benefits from its proximity to Austin where many residents work, businesses in the towns of Bastrop, Elgin, and Smithville (each of which has charming historic downtowns), brickyards in Elgin, and a film industry in Smithville. A growing tourism industry is supported by 19th century buildings and homes, the presence of Lost Pines-laden state parks, migratory routes for birds crossing the Western Hemisphere, McKinney Roughs Nature Park, Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort, Lake Bastrop, and the Colorado River.

Bastrop County’s historical richness is honored by its inclusion on both the state’s Texas Independence Trail and Brazos Trail.



ELGIN DEPOT MUSEUM

14 DEPOT SQUARE, ELGIN, TEXAS

512-285-2000 After hours: 512-285-4515

FRI & SAT Noon - 4 p.m.

[Facebook: Elgin Depot Museum](#)

The Elgin Depot Museum, located in the historic 1903 Union Depot, harkens to the frontier days when the Railroad connected markets and “cotton was king.” Imagine Bastrop County with streets filled with oxen, mules, wagons, and horses rather than automobiles, pickup trucks, and motorcycles.

The City of Elgin was founded in 1872 after the Houston and Central Railroad established a depot and named it for Robert Morriss Elgin, the railroad’s land commissioner.

The Elgin Historical Association (EHA) with support of the city and citizens from the surrounding area restored the original depot building and opened the Elgin Depot Museum in 2002. It offers three exhibit rooms, a photo archives, and historical artifacts with permanent and rotating exhibits.

Come explore the history of railroads, films, military, agriculture, and celebrate the rich Swedish, German, Irish, Mexican, Black founders whose multicultural heritage defines Texas today.

Trains still run and if you are lucky a train will blow its whistle as it passes by.



McDADE HISTORICAL MUSEUM

MAIN STREET AND LOOP 223, MCDADE, TEXAS

512-273-2566

Facebook: [McDade Historical Society](#)

The McDade Historical Society was organized in 1962. Their first effort was to purchase and preserve the old rock building at the intersection of Main Street and Loop 223 of Highway 290 in McDade.

A Texas State Historical Marker greatly adds to its appearance.

McDade is named for James W. McDade, a railroad lawyer with the Houston & Texas Central Railroad. Located in the A. Martinez Survey, Bastrop County, McDade received the first train in 1871. Not everyone favored the Iron Horse. A local preacher often met the train and preached the “evils of the train” to gathered crowds.

The name “Tie City” came about because for a time, this was the end of the line and railroad ties were stacked here. Mail came and went by train.

McDade’s early history includes notorious gangs, outlaws, murderers, dances, saloons, vigilantes, robberies and hangings.

The Society also encourages historical research into the early history of the town and works to preserve the findings thereof. In the beginning, the Society put on numerous fund raisers to provide funding for restoration of the building.



PAIGE DEPOT MUSEUM

117 MAIN STREET, US 290, PAIGE, TEXAS
512-253-1111

A museum in the old depot adjoins the community center on the south side of Hwy 290. The museum is open by appointment – or “any time you see cars parked in front of the museum.”

Next door is the memorial to Doris Laake who was the longtime unofficial community historian and the reporter for area newspapers with Paige news.

The town began with the arrival of the Houston and Texas Central Railroad in 1872. The name chosen was to honor the railroad’s civil engineer, Norman Paige. The depot was first located three miles west of the present location, but moved in 1876. Paige was granted a post office in 1874. In 1877, a German immigrant by the name of Fedor Soder arrived and built a cotton gin and store. He bought undeveloped land and broke it into small farms for the more recently arrived German settlers.

In addition to cotton, the town shipped cordwood, produce, cattle and swine. For local consumption and use, Paige manufactured brooms and had both a creamery and a pickle factory. The population declined to 400 by 1914 but the remaining citizens could call one another on the recently installed telephone system.

By 1952 Paige had an estimated population of 220. In the early 1980s Paige established both a community center and a volunteer fire department. The 1990 census reported 275 people and the same for the 2000 count.



MUSEUM & VISITOR CENTER OF THE BASTROP COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

904 MAIN STREET, BASTROP, TEXAS

Museum: 512-303-0057 VC : 512-303-0904

BastropCountyHistoricalSociety.com

In the heart of Downtown Bastrop, visit the remarkable Bastrop County Museum that includes more than a dozen exhibits about a community that was founded before the Texas Revolution and almost became the state Capital.

Stop by the front desk of the Visitor Center where helpful volunteers are armed with handy, easy-to-use brochures and area maps. You can find information about shopping, dining and recreation and see Bastrop's first motorized fire truck!

Museum exhibits include a historical timeline and fascinating histories on El Camino Real de los Tejas, the Colorado River, Lost Pines, the Baron de Bastrop, Settlement, Independence, Runaway Scrape, Cotton, World War II, Camp Swift, Governor Sayers, Coal Mines, and Cowboys, Cows and Cattlemen. Artifacts span from prehistoric times to the 21st century, and documents date back to the 1832 Minutes of the Incorporation of Bastrop.

Also, BCHS offers quarterly speaker meetings, scavenger hunts for kids, walking tours of downtown, docent guided step-on-bus tours of the historic district and docent-led tours of the Museum. Call to schedule a tour.



BASTROP COUNTY AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER & FREEDOM COLONIES MUSEUM

1303 PINE STREET, BASTROP, TEXAS

512-535-6949

CoalitionOfFreedomColonies.org

Admission \$5

The Bastrop County African American Cultural Center focuses on the diverse contributions of peoples of color to the history of the United States. The cultural center teaches others of the rich history of African Americans and their relationship with other cultures.

It is a harbinger of cultural artifacts, history, black art, and futurist ideas that are inclusive of all cultures working together in harmony. The goal is to increase cultural awareness that promote a better understanding of African Americans and other cultures. The cultural center plans to achieve its goal through teaching, training, showcasing, inclusiveness, uniting all cultures through harmonious relationships and coalitions, mutual respect, and appreciation.

Most of the original Founders descend from the 13 original Freedom Colonies in Bastrop, Texas, though there were more, and there are special exhibits set up with maps, and items from the past.



THE DINOSAUR PARK

893 UNION CHAPEL RD, CEDAR CREEK, TX

512-321-6262

www.thedinopark.com

Admission \$10 age 2-12; \$11 Adults

The Dinosaur Park features a unique outdoor museum setting with realistic life-size dinosaur exhibits that show skin and color variations to give a better understanding of how they looked when they were alive. These static statues range in size from the 2-foot long Compsognathus to the 123-foot Diplodocus, the longest dinosaur that ever lived.

As you walk through a tree-lined nature trail the dinosaurs sit back from the trail, situated among plants, trees and rocks, making it easy to imagine real dinosaurs in a natural environment. The Dinosaur Park is an educational and fun place, where everyone can learn about the majestic animals that ruled our earth for over 150 million years.

Other activities include a fossil-dig, playground, picnic area and a wonderful Dinosaur Store stocked with a variety of gifts sure to please any dinosaur fan!



ROCKNE MUSEUM & HILBIG PARK
4065 FM 535, HILBIG PARK, ROCKNE, TEXAS
512-303-3092 or 512-925-1892
Facebook: [Rockne Historical Association](#)

The legend of Small Town Texas still exists at Rockne, located off Highway 20 between Bastrop and Lockhart. Named after the fabled Notre Dame football coach, the town's actual history goes back to early 1846 when German settlers established a small Catholic farming community.

Today the area is inhabited by many of those early immigrants' descendants. The Rockne Museum, built as a testament to life in rural Texas, exhibits items of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries including sacrifices made for the United States' historic war efforts.

Step back in time as you explore two different historic homes filled with artifacts used by the cabins' original owners. Connect with a thriving faith community as you discover a collection of items from the 19th century Catholic Church, including an ornate altar, beautiful stained glass and baptismal font. Other historic structures include a corn-crib, smokehouse and out-house.



TEXAS HALLOWEEN HISTORY MUSEUM

149 SPLIT RAIL LANE, SMITHVILLE, TEXAS

512-658-7996

Hours Change Seasonally

TexasHalloweenMuseum.com

The Texas Halloween Museum comprises three buildings full of interactive Halloween History, excitement and learning, all located within Scream Hollow Wicked Halloween Park, 10 minutes south of Bastrop. The World's only museum dedicated to preserving the History of Halloween, Halloween's influence on culture and Haunted Halloween!

The gift shop and additional exhibits located in the main museum building are ever-changing for a new experience each season.

The museum helps the public understand the history and culture of Halloween with a hint of mystery and magic.

The museum's education programs are geared toward all ages of diverse socio-economic backgrounds, and partners with area schools to engage students in learning about history & culture as well as to the wide variety of careers in acting, preservation, molding and casting, set design and more!

The site also hosts Paranormal Investigations and other events seasonally.

As you explore the museum, you will discover everything there is to about the origins and interesting little-known history of what has evolved to the Halloween holiday of today!



JAMES H. LONG RAILROAD MUSEUM & VISITOR CENTER

106 NE 1ST STREET, SMITHVILLE, TEXAS

512-237-2313

www.smithvilletx.org/art-museums/

The Smithville Area Chamber of Commerce hosts the museum in its Visitor Center, celebrating a rich railroad history in the area. In 1887, a railroad line reached connecting mid-west business to Texas and to Houston and Galveston. In 1894, the Missouri, Kansas and Texas (MKT) established its central shops and terminal in Smithville, making it a major employer, swelling Smithville's population, and solidifying it as the largest town in the county until the 1940's.

In 1911, a boiler explosion killed 9 men and injured 12 others, with pieces of the train found several blocks away. A piece of wreckage is displayed outside.

The white gazebo nearby (formerly the decorative top of the town's City Hall) beckons you to the Railroad Park and its special events area which includes a historic depot moved from nearby West Point, train cars, and playground.



SMITHVILLE HERITAGE SOCIETY MUSEUM

602 MAIN STREET, SMITHVILLE, TEXAS

512-629-2197

Facebook: [Smithville Heritage Society](#)

The lovely 100-year plus old house-museum, built in 1908 in downtown Smithville, is open only by appointment. However, volunteers are usually working in the metal archives building behind the home on Tuesday mornings between 10 a.m. and noon, visitors are welcome in the archives. Call the above phone numbers and leave a message to schedule a tour of the home or to get help with research on early Smithville and its inhabitants.

The first settler in what is now Smithville was Dr. Thomas Jefferson Gazley who established him on site now called Independence Park and eventually opened a medical practice and store. The Smith family soon followed, opening a trading post, and the "Old Smithville Village" grew along the Colorado River.

After the arrival of the M-K-T railroad in 1887, the population grew to the point that until the beginning of World War II, Smithville was the largest town in Bastrop County.

There are exhibits in the house that take you back to the early 1900s when this former home was built. Old newspapers, photographs, documents, maps, Smithville cemetery information, and other donated artifacts are kept in the metal archives in the back building.

MORE THINGS TO DO

in Bastrop County, Texas

BASTROP COUNTY TEXAS FILM TRAIL

<https://explorebastropcounty.com/listings/bastrop-county-texas-film-trail/>

You'll find ten iconic filming locations from seven movies on our trail. Trek your way through romance, fantasy, horror, crime, comedy, action, and adventure while in Bastrop County!

BASTROP DOWNTOWN WALKING TOUR

<https://explorebastropcounty.com/listings/historical-downtown-bastrop-tour/>

Visit more than three dozen historic buildings and sites, many of which were built after a fire devastated the town in 1862, creating a pristine Texas town nestled along the Colorado River.

BASTROP MEDALLION TOUR

<https://explorebastropcounty.com/listings/bastrop-medallion-tour-2/>

See the street medallions on El Camino Real de los Tejas (The King's Highway) where the Old San Antonio Road section comes directly through the heart of present-day Bastrop.

ELGIN DOWNTOWN WALKING TOUR

<https://explorebastropcounty.com/listings/historical-downtown-elgin-tour/>

See 33 locations with brick structures built mainly in the 1920s in the historic business district around Main Street.

SMITHVILLE DOWNTOWN WALKING TOUR

<https://explorebastropcounty.com/listings/historical-downtown-smithville-tour/>

See the various architecture styles in the Historic Business District and read stories of early Smithville.

OTHER INTERESTING PLACES TO EXPLORE



BASTROP COUNTY COURTHOUSE & JAIL

804 PECAN ST, BASTROP

The first courthouse, 1835, was a two-story building owned by early settler S.V.R. Eggleston. The second, built 1839, was a house located between Walnut and Austin Streets. The third, built 1853, was at the site of its current location and burned in 1883. A new brick courthouse was built in 1883 for \$33,000. In 1991 the courthouse was fully restored for full use today. The jail was built in 1892.

THE LOST PINES REGION and the CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS (CCC)

BASTROP AND BUESCHER STATE PARKS

Adapted over thousands of years to local dry climate and soils, Bastrop's Lost Pines are the westernmost stand of Loblolly Pines. The Bastrop County Complex Wildfire of 2011 was the most destructive fire in Texas history, but replanting and regrowth is well underway, restoring the beauty of the forest.

The parks' buildings, bridges and trails are also shining examples of the Civilian Conservation Corps, a program created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to provide jobs for young men during the Great Depression.

THREE HISTORIC DOWNTOWNS

MAIN STREETS IN BASTROP, ELGIN & SMITHVILLE

Historic buildings still make up the bulk of the historic downtowns around Main Streets in all three of our incorporated cities. Walk the sidewalks and think of how times used to be with long dresses,

CONT. ON PAGE 18: INTERESTING PLACES

dusty roadways, horse and buggy, and railroads as distance form of transportation.

As a bonus, each town has historic homes so check out their historic districts!

CAMP SWIFT

1705 TX-95 N, BASTROP

About eight miles south of Elgin on Highway 95 is Camp Swift, named for Major General Eben Swift. It served as a major military training facility for 300,000 troops during World War II. The camp was active from May 1942 until July 1946, and covered nearly 56,000 acres. Today Camp Swift is a training center for the Army National Guard.



Historical Marker at Camp Swift.

FAIRVIEW CEMETERY

1307 TX-95, BASTROP

Fairview Cemetery is located on Highway 95 in Bastrop. You'll find graves of war veterans from the War of 1812 to the Persian Gulf War. A War Babies Guardian Angel statue stands over the area where a number of infants, whose families had no means to bury their children, were interred free during World War II. The gravesite of Texas Governor Joseph Draper Sayers, Lt. Gov. and Congressmna G.W. Jones, numerous legislators and 13 Texas Rangers are buried there.

SMITHVILLE TEXAS VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK & SPLASHPAD

311 NW 2ND ST, SMITHVILLE

With the list of county veterans with the conflict in which they served stands in front of these memorials is impactful and reflects patriotism in our communities. A large angel statue, titled "Going Home," stands over the memorial with a cherub holding a quill as if just finished writing down the names of young veterans from Smithville who lost their lives within a short period of time. A small water park for young children represents hope for the future.



Hopewell Rosenwald School restored in Cedar Creek.

HOPEWELL ROSENWALD SCHOOL

690 STATE HWY 21 W, CEDAR CREEK

Established in 1921 as part of the Rosenwald School Building Program, Hopewell School taught African American children until 1959. The 1.5 acres was deeded from the McDonald estate (former slaves) for a school and a church (Hopewell Primitive Baptist est. 1950) to serve the Hopewell community. Only 40 out of 527 Rosenwald schools in Texas survive, and some have been altered. Hopewell and the church next door remain intact. Four other Rosenwald schools were built in the County in the early 1920s.

ROCK FRONT SALOON

MAIN STREET & LOOP 223, MCDADE

A gunfight happened at the 1870 Rock Front Saloon in 1883 when a deputy sheriff was killed. Vigilantes hanged four suspects and the violence continued with the infamous McDade Christmas lynchings on Christmas Eve 1883, when three additional outlaws were executed. This led to a yet another gunfight in front of a saloon on Christmas Day, leaving three more citizens dead.

POST OFFICE NEW DEAL ARTWORK

21 N AVENUE C, ELGIN

400 MAIN ST, SMITHVILLE

In the 1930's and 40s in the midst of the Great Depression, artists painted murals in public places so that the art was accessible to everyone. Bastrop County boasts two murals out of 60 painted in Texas.

In 1940 using oil paint, Julius Woeltz painted "Texas Farm" in the Elgin Post Office, and Minette Teichmueller painted "The Law - Texas Rangers" in the Smithville Post Office.



HISTORICAL COMMISSIONS, SOCIETIES & RESOURCES

BASTROP COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION
512-940-7897

Facebook: Bastrop County Historical Commission
Historical Markers, Cemeteries, Resources

BASTROP COUNTY CLERK'S OFFICE
512-332-7234

www.co.bastrop.tx.us/page/co.county_clerk

BASTROP COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
512-303-0057

www.bastropcountyhistoricalsociety.com

BASTROP COUNTY GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY
512-321-5441

www.bastropcountyhistoricalsociety.com

BASTROP PUBLIC LIBRARY
512-332-8880

ELGIN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
512-285-2000
elgindepot@gmail.com

ELGIN PUBLIC LIBRARY
512-281-5678

McDADE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
512-273-2566

PAIGE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
paigetexasmuseum@gmail.com

ROCKNE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
<https://sites.rootsweb.com/~txrha/>
Facebook: Rockne Historical Association

SAYERSVILLE HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
512-964-1602

SMITHVILLE HERITAGE SOCIETY
512-629-2197
smithvilleheritage@gmail.com

SMITHVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY
512-237-3282 ext. 6