

# Marker research guide for Communities

The Texas Historical Commission (THC) created this guide to help county historical commissions and marker sponsors develop a strong application for a community as a topic for a historical marker. It is a guide in researching and preparing the narrative history.

**NARRATIVE HISTORY:** This is the key element to any marker application and the vehicle through which historical context and significance are demonstrated and proven. The narrative history is essentially a research paper that includes four key components — *context, overview, significance and documentation*. A sample is included.

- **CONTEXT:** The historical context represents a broader set of facts or circumstances that explains why the community should be considered historic. What were the elements that directly led to its development? How does the community's history relate to the earlier history of nearby communities, its county or its region? What is its relevance to the broader history? What other events took place (locally, regionally or nationally) that may have had a bearing on how or why the community's development was important? History does not take place in a vacuum; it is dynamic and interconnected, and the context explores these elements.
- **OVERVIEW:** This is the main body of the narrative history, and it represents the key facts in the story. The overview should be told, as closely as possible, in chronological order with clearly documented connections between earlier and more recent aspects of the historical context. While a complete overview is required, the central focus should be on the *historical period of significance* (see *Significance* section), i.e., the formative years of the community and important changes or developments in its history.
- **HISTORICAL/CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE:** A topic is considered to have historical significance if it had influences, effect or impact on the course of history or cultural development; age alone does not determine significance. Topics do not need to be of statewide or national significance; many historical markers deal with local history and a local level of significance. They may also have cultural significance. To determine significance, ask such questions as: How did the community play a role in history? How has it made a difference in the context of local or state history? Who were the individuals involved in the community's history?
- **DOCUMENTATION:** This is, in effect, the evidence necessary to develop the history of significance of a topic. It is the foundation of historical interpretation and accurate research. For the purposes of the Official Texas Historical Marker Program, documentation associated with applications should be broad-based and demonstrate a survey of all available resources, both primary and secondary (see *Types of Sources* section below). Documentation serves as a detailed guide so future researchers can follow the research trail for their own purposes. As used in marker applications, it is most commonly manifested through endnotes, photographs or maps (see *Preparing the Reference Notes* section below).

## TYPES OF SOURCES FOR COMMUNITY RESEARCH

The THC will consider the objectivity and reliability of information sources used in compiling a narrative history. Whenever possible, consult **primary source** material. Primary sources —

those that are contemporary with the topic — include newspaper accounts, diaries, meeting minutes, deed records, census records and legal documents. Such sources, as well as the recollections of disinterested, unbiased and authoritative persons, are preferred over secondary sources.

When using **secondary sources**, check them thoroughly since they are often not as reliable as primary sources. Secondary sources, such as history books, are not contemporary with the topic's history. Oral histories collected from authoritative sources are valuable research tools if properly documented (see example at the end of this document). Any claims of uniqueness (earliest, oldest, first, largest, etc.) must be accompanied by factual documentation from an authoritative, unbiased source.

## **SUGGESTED SOURCES FOR COMPILING COMMUNITY HISTORIES**

### **Government Records**

- Municipal (building permits, minutes of official meetings, ordinances, tax records)
- County (contracts, abstracts of title, court records, deeds, probate records, tax records, mechanics liens)
- State (land records, homestead records, mineral rights records, transportation records)
- Federal (census)

### **Institutional Records**

- Cemetery (family relationships, birth and death dates)
- Church (biographical information on birth, death, marriage; congregational records)
- School (biographical information, building information, social history)
- Fraternal (membership information, dates, building information)

### **Family Papers**

- Deeds (ownership, property value, associated improvements)
- Letters and diaries (biographical information, building information, social and economic history)
- Genealogical information (family relationships)
- Estate records (dates, building information, transfers of land not recorded by deeds)

### **Maps and Plats**

- Sanborn maps (plans, dates of construction, materials, settlement patterns)
- Bird's Eye View maps (building information, settlement patterns, natural features)
- Property and subdivision plats (building hierarchies, dates, settlement patterns)

### **Photographs and Printed Images**

- Family photographs (biographical information, building evolution, landscape changes)
- Postcards (biographical information, building evolution, landscape changes)

### **Newspapers and Journals**

- Advertisements (owner information, dates, building information, neighborhood development)
- Society pages (biographical information on civic leaders, institutional history)
- Obituaries (biographical information)
- Articles (significant local events, economic history, social history, building information)

### **Oral Histories**

- Minority history, social history, business history, building evolution and uses

### **Published Histories**

- County (information on buildings, people, institutions, events)
- Community (information on buildings, people, institutions, events)
- Business (commercial trends, economic base of community)

- Fraternal (building information, social history)
- *The Handbook of Texas*, Texas State Historical Association, online or print

### Online Sources

- Texas Reference Sources (<http://www.txla.org/trsonline.html>)
- Baylor Institute for Oral History ([http://www.baylor.edu/Oral\\_History/](http://www.baylor.edu/Oral_History/))
- Texas General Land Office (<http://www.glo.texas.gov/>)
- Texas State Library and Archives Commission (<https://www.tsl.texas.gov/>)
- Portal to Texas History (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/>)
- The Handbook of Texas Online (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/>)

### PREPARING THE REFERENCE NOTES

For the specific purposes of the Official Texas Historical Marker Program, the **required** means of resource documentation to be used in preparing the historical narrative are reference notes. Generally speaking, facts that cannot be assumed to be common knowledge should be documented with a reference note. They can be either footnotes (placed at the foot of the page on which the fact is mentioned), endnotes (listed sequentially at the end of the history) or parenthetical notes (placed in parentheses immediately following the fact within the narrative history). The notes must be complete so the reader finds the referenced source quickly and easily.

Regardless of which type of reference note is used, the first use of a source should include a full first citation (all relevant resource details) with abbreviated information thereafter in subsequent citations (see examples below). NOTE: With the use of full citation footnotes, a bibliography is no longer a required element of marker applications.

### Examples of First Full Citations (Footnotes or Endnotes):

- <sup>1</sup> Terry G. Jordan, *Texas Graveyards: A Cultural Legacy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), p. 79.
- <sup>2</sup> Orange County Deed Records, Book 4, p. 139; August 2, 1981.
- <sup>3</sup> 1900 United States Census, Fort Bend County, Texas (Roll 1553) Enumeration District 16, p. 16.
- <sup>4</sup> Bessie Jones. Interview with Scotty Jergenson, June 21, 1991. Tape recording and transcript available at the Darrouzett Public Library.
- <sup>5</sup> Letter from Maria Gutierrez to Henry Guerra, May 23, 1922. Private collection of Henry Guerra, Dallas. Copy on file at the Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco.
- <sup>6</sup> “San Jacinto Monument Reconditioned.” *Temple Daily Telegram*, Vol. 76, No. 256; July 31, 1983, p. 5-C.

### Examples of Subsequent Citations:

- <sup>9</sup> Jordan, p. 83.
- <sup>10</sup> Orange County Deed Records, p. 140.
- <sup>11</sup> 1900 United States Census, p. 23.
- <sup>12</sup> Jones, 1991.
- <sup>13</sup> Gutierrez letter.
- <sup>14</sup> *Temple Daily Telegram*, 1972, p. 5-C.

**Note:** For sources used in preparing the text but not specifically cited, list them separately under the heading ADDITIONAL SOURCES. For further assistance on reference note styles, see the following guides, or contact your local library.

*Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

*MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations*. 5th ed. New York: Modern Language Association, 1999.

Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*. Revised by John Grossman and Alice Bennett. 6th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

## COMMUNITY RESEARCH CHECKLIST

Narrative histories submitted to the THC in support of marker applications for **communities** should include, but not necessarily be limited to, the following information. (**Note:** Communities may be considered eligible for subject markers if they have existed for at least 50 years and are considered historically significant.)

- Current and former names, with background information on the origins of the names
- Current location; include specific locations within county, as well as relation to significant natural features (rivers, creeks, mountains, etc.) and other communities
- Former locations and reasons for relocations (railroads, natural disasters, etc.)
- Establishment of the post office
- Incorporation information (if applicable)
- Significant people associated with the community; provide brief biographical information with dates of association, as well as birth and death. Significant persons include:
  - Pioneer settlers
  - Founders
  - Political leaders
  - Business/civic leaders
- Economic base, including commercial, agricultural or industrial development
- Cultural institutions or ethnic associations
- Religious institutions
- Causes of growth or decline
- Important events
- Significant structures/architecture/design or plat of community

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**Note:** This sample history, comprised of fictional information, represents in format, scope of content, documentation and length the type of narrative history required for a historical marker application. It is presented as a general guide for developing a narrative of a historic community, whether a dispersed settlement, a ghost town or an existing municipality.

## **GABLE'S GAP COMMUNITY**

### **I. CONTEXT**

Gable's Gap Community, a dispersed agricultural settlement, is located along Wilson Creek three miles northwest of Jergenson. It centers on the present intersection of FM 437 and US Highway 289. In prehistoric times, nomadic Native American tribes traversed the area during seasonal buffalo hunts. In historic times, the area developed as part of the Milam District, but as the frontier line moved west in Texas, sufficient settlement occurred in this area to influence creation of a new county. In 1876, the Texas Legislature approved formation of Post Oak County, with the new railroad town of Jergenson as the county seat. At the time, there were already settlers in the vicinity of what became Gable's Gap.<sup>1</sup>

### **II. OVERVIEW**

In 1868, brothers William J. Gable (1828—1877) and Franklin K. Gable (1831—1902) came to this area from Richland, Michigan.<sup>2</sup> The 1860 census listed their occupations as ranchers.<sup>3</sup> The Gable brothers came to the Milam District to start their cattle operation, attracted by the area's open range and accessible water sources, as well as the cheap land prices. The land they selected was in a natural gap in the steep ridge north of the Wilson Creek headwaters. Because the gap provided access through the ridge to railroad shipping points back east and to frontier settlements farther west, it became an important route of both commerce and migration. Some who traveled the route settled in the vicinity of the Gable brothers' ranches to begin farming, and the settlement that developed became known as Gable's Gap. A post office by that name opened in 1874.

The Gable's Gap Ranching Operation grew steadily over the years and eventually included satellite operations in Wyoming, Utah, New Mexico and Venezuela. In terms of cattle production, it is now one of the top 50 operations in the state and also the second largest capital operation.<sup>4</sup>

Those who settled in the early community represented diverse cultures. There were

Anglos, Czech Moravians and African Americans. Some worked for the Gable Brothers Ranching Operation, while others established small farms that produced cotton, corn and wheat. The success of the agricultural enterprises, coupled with that of the surrounding area, attracted officials of the International and Great Northern Railroad who were planning the route of a new line to serve as a connector between existing lines further east. The purpose of the route was to take advantage of the region's resources, including, in addition to the agriculture, vast stands of timber in the upland areas. Although the gap in the ridgeline afforded important access for the railroad, Wilson's Creek, with its seasonal flooding, proved to be a major factor in the decision to route the line farther east. The route still took advantage of the gap, but it bypassed the community, resulting in the development of Jergenson. As the county seat grew, Gable's Gap and similar communities in the county remained stable or even declined.<sup>5</sup>

Given the relatively close proximity of Gable's Gap to the developing commercial center of Jergenson, many residents chose to stay rather than relocate. By the early 1900s, the community boasted two mercantile stores, a blacksmith shop, a doctor's office, a post office and a cotton gin. There were also three churches: St. William Methodist Church, founded 1873; the First Baptist Church, established 1872; and St. Cyril's Catholic Church, a Moravian parish that also began in 1873.<sup>6</sup>

Anglo American children attended Frog Pond School, located one mile west of the community center. It began with the 1873 school year and continued in operation, offering instruction for grades one through six, until it merged with the Jergenson Independent School District in May 1933. Two teachers taught in the Frog Pond Schoolhouse, a two-room frame building, and they lived either with local families or in the small teacherage, constructed south of the schoolhouse in 1889. In the era of segregation, African American students attended a separate school called Prater's Point, located one mile farther west of Frog Pond. Prater's Point School remained in existence ten years, from 1903 to 1913, merging with Blackshear School in Jergenson. St. Cyril's Catholic Church additionally provided limited instructional classes for children of its member families, but the church school was in operation only three years. The exact years of the school's operation could not be determined from existing records, but church records indicate the last class completed its studies in 1912.<sup>7</sup>

Gable's Gap declined in population as cotton prices dropped in the 1920s and 1930s. With the advent of improved roads, most notably US 289, which connected the area to larger markets, and with the end of World War II, when new business opportunities became available in Jergenson and other nearby towns, Gable's Gap stores closed, as did the school. The Methodist and Baptist churches merged with congregations in Jergenson, but St. Cyril's remains active, although small in membership.<sup>8</sup>

Today, there is little evidence of what was once the thriving community of Gable's Gap. In addition to St. Cyril's, there is the community cemetery, with graves dating to the early 1880s, and the ruins of the Frog Pond School. A number of homes dating to the period of the 1920s remain. The last of the commercial structures, the Allison Feed Store, burned in 1963, and the site gave way to construction of FM 437 two years later. Former residents of Gable's Gap and their families gather at the early townsite in October of each year to attend homecoming events, to clean the local cemetery, to record oral histories with longtime residents, and to reminisce, reconnect and reflect. Money raised at the October gatherings are used for cemetery

maintenance, for the transcription and binding of oral histories, and for college scholarships for graduates of Jergenson High School. Gable's Gap Elementary School, established by the Jergenson Independent School district in 1999 and located a half mile west of FM 483, is named for the historic community.<sup>9</sup>

### III. SIGNIFICANCE

The history of Gable's Gap is significant because it provides a background for the historical development of Post Oak County. Predating Jergenson, the county's seat of government and largest town, Gable's Gap began as a focal point for the development of early agricultural enterprises, most notably cattle ranches and cotton farms. It remained a viable early community for decades, but when bypassed by construction of the central rail line through the county it eventually gave way to progress.

Rural communities such as Gable's Gap were once common in Central Texas, existing for a specific and often limited purpose. When that purpose changed, many, including Gable's Gap, were unable to compete with nearby towns. Among those settlements in Post Oak County, though, Gable's Gap is unique for several reasons. First, it was the site of the initial Gable Brothers Ranching Operation, now a state leader in cattle production and the second-largest business in the county in terms of gross revenue. Second, as the site of St. Cyril's Catholic Church, it represents the county's early cultural diversity. Third, because of its location at the natural gap in the Wilson Creek Ridge, it influenced early commerce along the general route that is today US 289. Although bypassed by the rail line due to the uncertainties of Wilson Creek, Gable's Gap provided a stable early focal point for settlement. From that base grew other communities, businesses and institutions still in existence today. And finally, the name Gable's Gap remains in use for a local elementary school. There is also a permanent exhibit on the community in the Post Oak County Museum. The state marker will provide the Post Oak County Historical Commission an opportunity to further interpret the community and to provide heritage travelers with background on the early settlement and development of Post Oak County. While similar communities exist in the county, Gable's Gap provides the most significant example of how such agricultural settlements spurred early growth in the area and served as focal points for commercial development.

### IV. DOCUMENTATION

<sup>1</sup> Smith, Jim, ed. "Gable's Gap," *The Texana Handbook*. Austin: Smith Texana Publishers, 1999. Vol. 5, pp. 356-357.

<sup>2</sup> 1860 United State Census, Post Oak County, Texas (Roll 1553), Enumeration District 16, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Prater, Elihu. *Beyond the Rim: A History of Early Post Oak County*. Jergenson: Post Oak County Historical Commission, 1978. Pg. 323.

<sup>4</sup> "Ranching Records," Texas Ranch Association website ([www.xxxxxxxxxxxxxx](http://www.xxxxxxxxxxxxxx)). Accessed January 3, 2006; current business data files, Post Oak County Chamber of Commerce, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Prater, pp. 323-324; Smith, Jim, ed. "Wilson's Creek," *The Texana Handbook*. Vol. 6, p. 546.

<sup>6</sup> Women's Aid Society of St. Cyril's Catholic Church. *St. Cyril's on the Prairie: The First Century* (Jergenson: Smith Texana Publishers, 1976), p. 57.

<sup>7</sup> Women's Aid Society, p. 58; Records of the Post Oak County School Superintendent, 1910-1955. Office of the County Clerk, Post Oak County Courthouse, Jergenson; Nott, Nelda. Interview with Marcie Smith, December 7, 1988. Tape and transcript available at the Post Oak County Museum, Jergenson. Mrs. Nott has been a member of St. Cyril's Catholic Church since 1932.

<sup>8</sup> Prater, p. 323; Smith, "Gable's Gap," p. 356.

<sup>9</sup> "Gable's Gap: Jergenson's Predecessor on the Plains," *The Jergenson Vindicator*, November 9, 1948. Section A, p. 1.