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## HISTORY

Fort Bend County holds a prominent place in Texas history. Karankawa Indians once roamed the plains and inhabited the river bottoms. In the early 1820's, the Anglo-American colonization of Texas under grants from the Spanish government was initiated. The arrival of Stephan F. Austin's original colony of 300 families at the bend of the Brazos River was delayed until 1822 by the death of Moses Austin and the independence of Mexico. Ninety miles inland from the coast the settlers built a two-room cabin that was known both as Fort Settlement and Fort Bend. Fifty-three of the land grants to the early settlers were in Fort Bend. They found the area suitable for crops and livestock.

In 1837, the Congress of the Republic of Texas incorporated Richmond and eighteen other towns. Later in the same year, the County of Fort Bend was created from portions of Austin, Harris and Brazoria County. Notable citizens of the county included Jane Long, Mirabeau B. Lamar, and Samuel May Williams. During the Texas Revolution, many of the residents fled from Santa Anna's troops in what became known as the Runaway Scrape. They returned to find their homes plundered and their livestock scattered or dead.

Richmond became a prosperous trade center for the surrounding agricultural region. Cotton and sugar and other products were sent down the Brazos River to the Port of Galveston. The early sugar cane plantations and farms supplied the Imperial Sugar industrial complex and its company town evolved into the current City of Sugar Land. When the railroad from Galveston through Richmond was built in the 1850's, the county became a ready provider of agricultural products and raw materials to coastal markets and beyond. Cotton became and continues to be a staple of the agricultural economy.

Much of the early prosperity based on the plantation system ended with the Civil War. At that time Fort Bend had a large black population, mostly slaves. Fort Bend planters and property owners generally supported the Confederacy and many joined Terry's Texas Rangers, led by Benjamin F. Terry of Sugar Land. No battles reached the area, but the war's duration and the economic, social and political hardships that followed put great stress on the community.

The years after the Civil War were a time of uneasy compromise between the political parties and officeholders. This resulted in a brief, but violent confrontation known as the Jaybird - Woodpecker War. During Reconstruction, several black men were elected to County offices, including Mr. Walter Burton, Sheriff and Tax Collector, Mr. Shade Croome, Justice of the Peace, Precinct 2, and Mr. Tom Taylor, Commissioner. Mr. Burton was later a state senator. The era of reconstruction lasted until 1888, when the Jaybird Party took control. They were powerful in Fort Bend County until the 1950's.

Additional railroads further opened the county to new settlers, many from central Europe. Small productive family farms formed the central focus of the economic and social life from the 1880's through World War II. Ranching and cotton production then began to replace the small farms. Missouri City, Stafford, and Rosenberg developed along the rail lines

Discovery of oil and gas at Blueridge in the early 1920's, followed by discoveries at Orchard and Thompsons, then later at Katy, signaled the beginning of Fort Bend's petroleum industry. Production continues today in several areas of the county.

Beginning in the early 1970's with Houston's expansion, Fort Bend saw new growth in the form of increased residential development. Greatwood, New Territory and Cinco Ranch followed the

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master-planned communities of Quail Valley, First Colony and Pecan Grove. More recently Sienna Plantation, River Park East and West, Canyon Gate, Bridlewood and Texana have joined the ranks.

Fort Bend has a long and richly varied history and an exceedingly bright future as it continues to build on the foundations established by the original settlers of Texas.

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