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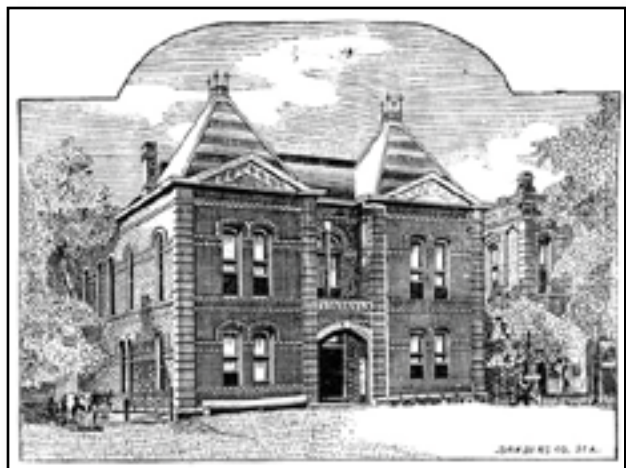
Nacogdoches

© by Dr. Jere L. Jackson
Department of History
Foreman Chairman, Nacogdoches County Historical Commission

Nacogdoches is the "Oldest Town in Texas." Yet, what really distinguishes a town is not age. It is the importance of the people who lived there, the history that was made there, and the continuation of vitality there. Nacogdoches is a distinguished town. In the words of Karle Wilson Baker, local poetess and the First Lady of Texas Letters:

"Nacogdoches has a soul, a spirit, an atmosphere. She is no raw product of today or yesterday. There are ghosts on her streets ...Gentle Franciscan fathers and curious, credulous redmen; lordly Mexican alcaldes and courtly French adventurers.... stubborn, spirited, courageous American Empressarios; ...men like Rusk, ...Crockett, ...Houston ...Travis."

Of the things most travelers associate with Texas -- oil, cattle, wheeler-dealers, independent nation status --they all started in Nacogdoches. No one can write a history of Texas without Nacogdoches. Today, Nacogdoches is truly one of the best kept tourist secrets in the state.



PRE-HISTORIC NACOGDOCHES

Paleolithic settlement of Nacogdoches began about 10,000 B. C. with early ceramic evidence starting about 2,000 B.C. The area of the downtown, between the LaNana and the Banita Creeks, became a Caddoan site somewhere around 700 B.C. Around 1250 to 1450 A.D., a distinct development associated with Caddoan architectural traditions produced



a large nuclear village with attendant structural mounds and mortuary mounds supported by maize agriculture and far flung trade in exotic goods. A civic ceremonial center developed in the plaza area now known as Washington Square in a triangle between three large mounds. This was

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the Indian center the Spanish discovered. The Nacogdoches Indians were friendly and their word for friend was "tejas." Legend has it that the Indian town was founded when a Caddo chief on the Sabine River sent one of his twin sons three days to the west and the other three days to the east. The settlements they established were Nacogdoches and Natchitoches, Spanish and French spellings of the same Indian tribe.

COLONIAL NACOGDOCHES

While Cabeza de Vaca explored the interior of Texas in 1528, maps do not show the Spanish in Nacogdoches before 1542 when DeSoto arrived. The first descriptions of the town date from the Frenchman LaSalle's stay in 1685. DeLeon, in 1690, made the first attempt at colonization and education, but Nacogdoches was little more than a pawn in the French and Spanish imperial rivalries at this time. When the French explorer St. Denis mapped out El Camino Real across the state from the Rio Grande to Nacogdoches in 1713 and 1716, the Spanish decided to establish permanent settlements in the area with a series of missions. Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe de los Nacogdoches was one of these, as was Mission Conception later relocated when San Antonio was established. In 1779, Don Antonio Gil Y'Barbo built the Old Stone House, laid out the modern streets, and wrote the first law code. Nacogdoches remained an important Spanish and Mexican colonial outpost, the capital of East Texas, until the Texas Revolution. A total of 26 Texas counties have been carved out of the Nacogdoches province, from Sabine to Dallas.



REPUBLICAN NACOGDOCHES

THE BATTLE OF NACOGDOCHES. Nacogdoches was the cradle of Texas liberty. In 1832, the citizens of Nacogdoches fired one of the opening guns of the Texas Revolution. The citizens, both Mexican and Anglos, attacked the Mexican garrison under the command of Col. Jose Piedras. The latter held the fortified town center. The garrison was able to defend themselves until Adolphus Sterne showed the newly arrived Redlanders from San Augustine how to out-flank the Mexicans by circling the natural fortress by going through the Washington Square area. The Battle cleared East Texas of Mexican troops and made the independence movement much less dangerous.

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