



# Rice, Texas

established 1912

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## [History of Rice, Texas](#)



**Main Hotel in [Rice, Texas](#)  
Donated by [Roger Bartlett](#)**

From [The Handbook of Texas Online](#).

Located on Interstate 45 and U.S. Highway 287, ten miles north of [Corsicana](#) in Navarro County Texas. Rice was settled in the late 1860s. By 1872, when the Houston and Texas Central Railway was built through the area, a dozen families lived within a four mile radius. One of the railroad owners, William Marsh Rice, donated land for a church and cemetery. The first business structure was a two-story wooden building with a general store operated by L. B. Haynie on the lower floor and a hotel operated by Ed Taber and his wife on the upper. The Rice post office opened in 1872. By 1890 the town had a steam gristmill and cotton gin, three general stores, two grocery stores, a blacksmith shop, two wheelwrights, a druggist, and an estimated population of seventy-five. The first newspaper, the Rice Enterprise, was founded in 1898 and operated for only for a few months; it was followed in 1901 by the [Rice Rustler](#), edited by Clarence Urbin. The first school at Rice began operating around 1875; by 1906 the town had two large public schools, one with 127 white students and one with

125 black students. Rice had a population of 268 in 1900, but in May 1901 a fire destroyed almost a third of the business district. In 1912 the Texas Electric Railway completed the Dallas - Corsicana line through Rice; the town was incorporated that year and adopted the aldermanic form of city government. Rice continued to prosper during the 1920s, reaching peak population of 900 in 1929. During the 1930s its population began to decline, due in part to the effects of the Great Depression and the flight of local residents to the cities. By 1945 the number of residents had dropped to 489, and the town had only eight registered businesses. By the mid-1960s the population had reached a low of 250. Rice recovered, however, and by 1990 had grown to a population of 564 with seven reported businesses. Many of the residents worked in nearby Corsicana. By this time the community had expanded into nearby Ellis County.

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Inside the Fortson Store, [Rice, Texas](#)  
Photo donated by Ann & Bob Marcy

### **A History of Rice**

Researched by Mrs. M. S. Miles and Mrs. S. A. Moore

Originally published in "[The Navarro County Scroll](#)", 1967, pp 36-53

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*Extracted by Roger Bartlett*

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Many items from the History of Navarro County  
By Annie Carpenter (Mrs. W. F.) Love

An Account of Rice, by Mrs. Maud Lackey Elliott

A Story of Rice, by Mrs. J. A. Lackey as told to Grafton Goodwyn

Other items from memories of early settlers.

[p. 37] There were only farmers and ranchers living around Rice until the Houston and Texas Central Railroad reached here in 1871-1872. Then Mr. Lewis B. Haynie and Rev. Jerry Ward came and established a store and post office on the corner where Loop and Walker had a store later. Soon Mr. Benjamin C. Clopton came and had the first Drug Store in Rice. He was the father of [Mrs.] J. M. Bartlett.

Among the farmers nearby in 1860 were Burwell Edmunson [Edmundson], Lucian Lockhart, Isaac B. Sessions, Egbert Sessions, Jesse M. Bartlett Sr., James and Thomas Bartlett, Wm. A. Langham, Nathan M. Fitzgerald, and Major Rose. The Log house which Mr. Langham built is still used. The Major Rose house is still standing and the framework is of cedar logs.

A great number of people settled here between 1872 and the 90's. This is a partial list of family names:

William D. Haynie Rufus Cardwell P. C. Bradley W. W. McPherson John Gibson John Bradley William A. Neal J. M. Bartlett Joe Bradley C. C. Neal Tom Bartlett R. P. Dukeminier S. N. Gregory S. J. Norvell A. C. Hervey J. M. Allen John Fortson Howard Wear  
A. D. Cardwell Joe Fortson J. R. Collins John Cardwell Emmerts Hays Geo. Humble Will Cardwell H. F. Barrington Nathan M. Fitzgerald Mrs. M. E. Moore J. S. Scott

The ones who stayed here and established businesses of different kinds were:

J. M. Bartlett.....Hardware, gins, land  
John and Joe Fortson.....Large tracts of land  
The Haynies.....Land and other property  
The Bradleys.....Large farms and other businesses  
Jake Queen.....Store for many years

The father of Mrs. S. M. Miles was Jim Allen, a farmer north of Rice. The children of Jesse M. and Ella

Guy Allen were daughters; Mrs. W. W. Stringer; Mrs. A. W. Christian, Mrs. M. S. Miles; Mrs. T. A. Cullen; Sons: Timothy Y. Allen; Arthur O. Allen, Chas A. Allen.

A trainload of settlers from New York and New Jersey came to Rice in 1877 to find a warmer climate for their homes. The next morning the ground was covered with snow, which was too much for part of them who then left. But fortunately some stayed and settled on land beginning at the cemetery and extending north to Walker's Creek. The following is a letter from one of those who stayed and was sent to the Rice Rustler.

[p. 38] Otisville, N.Y. March 7, 1912.

Mr. J. W. South, Editor "Rice Rustler"  
Rice, Texas.

My dear Sir:

Please accept my thanks for a recent copy of your "Rustler" and the news about your live little town which interested me greatly. I regret to learn from the columns of the "Rustler" that Egbert G. Sessions is infirm and -- is over 70 years of age -- Three church notices I find in your columns, which shows that the people of Rice and vicinity are ardent supporters of the Church. 'Tis well.

In the southeast corner of that last resting place for the departed to the Great Beyond, is interred the remains of a young friend of mine, Mr. Frank Ketchum, a bright young farmer who came out with the N. Y. - N. J. Colony, of which I was Secretary, in 1878, and who owned a small farm that cornered at the cemetery where he now sleeps. He has two brothers here and I shall advise them of \* \* the cemetery where their Frank was about the first interment.

I suppose that the first cotton-mill in (this part) [of] Texas was established at Telico on the Trinity about ten miles northeast of your town in the early days. I had this from reliable sources when I lived in Rice, thirty-five years ago, more or less.

[p. 39] I remember the most exciting campaign I ever participated in was when Hon. R. Q. Mills stumped the state against prohibition on the grounds that it is an "infestation on personal liberty" \* \* \* \*

The writer had some exciting hunting, fishing and berry expeditions when he lived out on his farm on



the Colony lands northeast of town. It is about nine miles (from) Porter's Bluff, I think, where we occasionally resorted during the few leisure weeks we had after the crops were "laid-by" in the summer, to draw up our wood supply from the post oak ridge, west of the big spring where we always camped for dinner, made coffee and got a drink of good pure water. We would start in at the big bluff where there was a ferry across the Trinity, and fish up stream and we surely caught some big fish in that muddy stream - buffalo, cat fish, perch, suckers and etc. Some of them weighed from 10 to 40 pounds.

On one occasion a large alligator was caught and we all liked to have went into fits in our efforts to capture the monster, which was done after a hard and long fight. It must have weighed over a hundred pounds. In hunting we did not have to go very far. I have shot many prairie chickens from the porch of my dwelling from the far corner of my garden. There were lots of these birds in that locality at that time and they were very fine eating, too.

[p. 40] Then there was an abundance of cotton-tail and jack rabbits on the prairie everywhere. Wild geese and ducks would alight in one stock tank and we had plenty of these wild fowls, also. Then there were numbers of plover and other birds that we brought down with our guns, while over on Walker Creek, you could have fun shooting wolves and coyotes.

Upon one occasion after a rainy forenoon, myself and a carpenter friend, Moses C. Dunn, started on an excursion to cut a bee tree back of Cornelius Neal's plantation over near Walker Creek (Neal's Valley). We loaded our wagon with buckets, cans, and a large wash-tub and other paraphernalia necessary to insure a successful job, which included a sharp ax, a butcher knife, large spoon, a good supply of sulphur, rags, matches, and etc. On arriving at the tree it was raining as if the clouds above had broke loose. Moses promptly cut a large hole at the bottom of the tree's trunk, we jammed in a bundle of rags saturated with sulphur, set it on fire with a match, plugged the hole full of clay and waited events in the pouring rain. In short time the bees were all killed or stupefied and Moses commenced to down the tree with his ax, when the job was nearly completed, the wind caused the tree to lurch and over it went splitting the trunk up about 20 feet and in the downfall scattering honey, comb and dead bees, (as well as a few live ones), in every direction. We were somewhat astonished at the result, and as my partner in the raid was [p. 41] afraid of them, it was left to me to assume the duties of "Master of Ceremonies". Therefore the writer pitched in and we soon had gathered up in our receptacles nearly a barrel of as fine honey as I ever tasted and it lasted our families and some of the neighbors many months. The worst stinging I ever got was when I found some of the honey made from horsemint, and it was found to be as hot as a dose of cayenne pepper or a Mexican tamale. \* \* \* \* \* The first time I ever saw an opossum we cornered the pig-looking animal in front of the house - he played up dead. Having never seen one of these little "varmints" before and not knowing what it was, he was carefully picked up by his pig-like tail and 'twas thought

our capture was a wild pig. Don't laugh, dear reader, the joke was on us that time.

I think I was the first one to plant an orchard of fruit trees on the black waxy soil of Ellis County - for our lands were located just north of the Navarro County line. It consisted of 100 apple and peach trees, some quince, currants, gooseberries, strawberries, white mulberries, grapes, plums, figs. All bought over at Larissa in East Texas. I also planted rhubarb, horse radish, asparagus, and Bois 'd Arc or Osage orange for a hedge on a division line with the next 100 acres. (Many others did this and these hedges still stand all over this part of Texas.) [p. 42] The apple tree trunks, I wrapped with rags up to the limbs and there were doing nicely when I sold the place a few years later. Peaches did well. I planted Umbrella China seed and sat under their shade 5 years after planting. I secured the first well of water on the colony tract by having a well bored by Sam Bull, a well boring contractor from St. Louis, Mo. Only had to go 40 feet deep when an abundant supply of clear water was obtained but it was so impregnated with minerals that it was unfit for household use or for cooking, but it was a healthful drink for man or beast. And stock always appeared to like it and it was nice and cool. I then built a cistern and we used the water therefrom for cooking and drinking purposes as I could not stomach tank water unless strained and boiled in my tea or coffee. \* \* \* \* I abandoned the farm and went to Hubbard City and became owner of the News and again embarked in journalism and real estate - became a regular promoter - not a boomer, but an industrial missionary in that favored region of Hill County known as Cold Corner, where Capt. W. H. Wagley was the leading potentate surveyor, planter and philosopher. It was my destiny to remain in that city eight of the busiest and most eventful years of my life.

\* \* \* \* \* Yours truly,  
Stephen H. Sayer  
Otisville, N. Y.

[p. 43] The first newspaper was "The Rice Enterprise" but it only lasted a few months. The next one was "The Rice Rustler" in 1901. The editor was Clarence Urban. Urban sold to J. Warner South and Sam Millerman. They ran it for several years and then sold to Chester A. Nowlin. Nowlin owned it for many years but later merged with the Ennis paper. He was editor of the Ennis paper until his death.

Rice was incorporated December 2, 1912. The first officers were:

J. W. South, Mayor

Aldermen were: D. M. Loop

A. W. Christian

P. F. Halbert

Rice has never had a saloon. It was made official in 1876 that no saloon could ever be in Rice.

The Rice Post Office was established October 2, 1872 with Lewis B. Haynie as Postmaster. One account says that Joseph C. Bartlett was the first Postmaster. He was the father of Jesse M. Bartlett and was also the County Tax Collector in 1846. Other Postmasters were Wm. H. Todd, James W. Norriss, J. B. Slade, R. M. Langham, Mrs. Verna [p. 44] K. Harper, T. Y. Allen, Abe Coulter, Mrs. Claudia Starnes, Mrs. Myrtle Carter, and the present Postmistress is Miss Verna Gregory, whose father was an early day resident of Rice, Mr. S. N. Gregory.

The first to have a drug store in Rice was Benjamin C. Clopton. He was the father of Mrs. J. M. Bartlett. The building was across from the Haynie-Ward store. Other druggists were Dr. Will M. Harper, Robert L. Harper, James M. Collins, Grover Bruner, Richard Norwood, G. B. Simpson, Chas. A. Allen, Hugh Hodge, John Hitt and Mr. Hayes of Ennis.

The first school in Rice was taught by Rev. Jerry Ward, a Presbyterian Minister, in October 1875 on the first Monday. The public school was opened in November 1875 with Rev. Jerry Ward and wife teaching. The first school had pupils from seven to twenty years of age. The first building was a wooden house used for the school and for church also. A two-story schoolhouse was next and cost \$3,000.00. The building now in use is brick, built in 1912. A corner [p. 45] marker has this inscription:

#### Trustees

J. B. Fortson, President.

W. T. Wilson, Vice-president.

T. W. Neal, Secretary.

#### Building Committee.

G. W. Pollan (Sr) J. T. Fortson

A. C. Hervey (Sr) J. M. Bartlett (Sr)

A. W. Christian W. W. Stringer

Rice has had many capable and dedicated teachers through the years. Rev. Jerry Ward was the first and the present Principal is Mr. Elga R. Kelly. Among other teachers was Mr. Ray Waller who became the first President of Navarro Junior College. An early day teacher was Miss Myra Winkler, the daughter of Captain C. M. Winkler.

The Methodist Church was organized by Rev. Wm. Vaughn in 1874. The first building was a school and church. Among the charter members were: I. B. Sessions, Egbert Sessions, J. M. Mitcham and several other Mitchams. The first building was erected in 1883. The present brick church was finished in 1909. The members raised the money for it and W. D. Haynie [p. 46] and wife, Viola Sessions Haynie, furnished the major portion. Mrs. Wm. D. Haynie built the pastor's home later. Among the prominent

members at the time the present church was built were: Mrs. Martha Wear, W. W. Swafford family, V. T. Swafford family, W. B. Swafford, Sam South and family, T. D. Queen and wife, Joe B. Fortson family, John Fortson and wife, R. F. Bartlett family, W. R. Smith family, W. H. Holland family, Dr. Hugh Sloan family, B. H. Clark and wife, A. C. Hervey family, and many others.

A corner marker has this inscription

**Methodist Church organized 1874**

**W. D. Haynie Memorial Church**

**Erected 1908 A. D.**

The First Baptist Church of Rice was organized February 21, 1875 by Rev. (J. T.?) Puryear as Moderator, and E. P. Beddo as Church Clerk. Rev. Matt Beasley was first Pastor and served for more than ten years. John A. Clopton [was the] first Deacon to be ordained by the church. Among the early members were: Wm. H. Todd and wife, E. P. Beddo and wife, John C. Gallemore and wife, John Deaton, John L. Miles, R. A. Bowden and wife, Mrs. Burwell Edmundson, Wm. Edmundson, [p. 47] Wm. A. Neal and wife, Joe Edmundson, James and Thomas Bartlett and their wives.

The present Church building was erected in 1894. Wm. H. Todd and wife Mary, were the parents of Jackson Todd, Egbert Todd, and Josie Todd Bowden. All were members of the Rice Baptist Church. Josie Todd married Reddick A. Bowden. She lived to be 102 years of age and had over one hundred descendants at her death. Most of these have been members of this church and some are still here. Two daughters, Mrs. M. E. (Sallie) Cummins, Mrs. J. D. Burdine (Addie) and a son, John R. Bowden.

The First State Bank of Rice was organized in 1902. A. C. Hervey was Cashier and remained until his health failed. S. B. South entered the Bank in May 1917. After serving in the U.S. Army until the close of World War I, he returned to work at the bank and has been Cashier many years.

There were two instances of other banks being here but they only lasted a short time.

In the early days, most men managed to do their own barber work at home. Among the barbers who served Rice were: Everett Emmert, R. T. Irwin and Lonny Williams.

[p. 48] Haynie and Ward had the first cotton gin. It burned in 1875. J. M. Bartlett and Herbert Mitchell had a gin below Rice. J. M.

Bartlett and John B. Haynie had a gin where the Fortson gin is now. Later there was one owned by several men and located where the Rice Twentieth Century Club house is now. It burned too. Granville Rutherford, Ed and Norman Holmes and H. C. Noel had gins too. Fortson's own the only gin here now.

The transportation was by horse and wagon at first. In common with the rest of the world they



graduated to buggies and the surrey with "the fringe on top". Later came the automobiles. The first "Horseless Carriage" was brought to town by Montgomery Ward. They brought an exhibit of their wares in a railroad car. The chauffeur asked for passengers to try a ride and Dr. J. A. McGee and wife, and Bess, were chosen. Also Lena Moore. It had wheels like a buggy and the steering gear was like early streetcars had, which had a handle that moved around to steer.

The H. & T. C. Railroad came through in 1872. The Interurban line of the Texas Electric Railway was completed to town in 1912. The roadbed for it was laid by Irishmen using wheelbarrows, according to Mrs. Lewis B. Haynie.

[p. 49] The Bowen Bus Company was next and is now The Continental Trailways. There are many people who have never ridden a train because they have always had cars.

Various Incidents that happened around Rice.

Once a man passing through had smallpox. The men had him make a fire on the prairie north of town and he was guarded all night and sent to Corsicana next morning. Smallpox was a very dreaded disease and they were not taking chances.

There were no fences between the cemetery and town, being open prairie.

The Wm. A. Langham family had the first sewing machine in the county. W. A. Langham built a log cabin which still stands.

Bob Banner of Bob Banner Associates, of T.V. fame, is the great-grandson of John B. Haynie.

During the First World War the government sent the Liberty Bell across the country. It came through Rice on a flatcar, with the crack plainly showing. A large crowd viewed the emblem of Liberty. It was late arriving that night because people along the road would get on the tracks to make the train slow down for them to see better.

[p. 50] The Rice war record compares favorably with the rest of Texas. Many Confederate Veterans settled here but Rice was not a town until 1872. Volunteers for the Spanish-American War were John Allen Queen, Will Queen, Henry Dukeminier, Wm. D. Bartlett and A. Q. Thornton.

Many were in the First World War and two lost their lives: Robert Wasson and Wm. Bolt.

World War II saw so many from Rice that it is not practical to name all of them. Among the dead were: Estes O'Neal, James Spurgeon and a Latin American, and S.Sgt. Scott Bowden.

Many were in Korea and many are being sent to Viet Nam. Rice men were Captains, Lieutenants, Sergeants as well as Privates. Some were Ace Pilots.

A shameful thing happened here once when a negro boy was hanged by a mob, from a telegraph pole near [the] R.R. tracks.

An amusing occasion was when a man got his dental plate lodged in his throat. He came to a doctor who had him lean on the stair rail while the doctor pounded him on the back until he coughed up the plate.

[p. 51] Two centenarians have lived here. Mr. Burwell Edmundson lived to be 100 years of age. Mr. Edmundson served during the Civil War under Benjamin F. Sterling, who was the father of Governor Ross Sterling. The Edmundson family were neighbors of Sam Houston at Huntsville.

Mrs. Josie Todd Bowden (Mrs. R. A. Bowden) lived to be 102 years of age. Her family has a record of longevity. She was the daughter of Wm. H. Todd, a pioneer of Rice.

According to John O. Thomason, a son-in-law of Wm. A. Neal, there were no fences or trees between Chatfield and Waxahachie when he was mail carrier between these places. The prairie was covered with Texas prairie grass, sometimes called bunch grass. There were millions of so-called "hog wallows" that were really Buffalo wallows. The buffaloes left depressions on the ground that would fill with water after rains.

[p. 52] (Later additions to Rice Merchants)

Thomas D. Queen and wife, Lula Fortson Queen had a Drygoods store. Will F. Hodge had a Paint and Wallpaper business. He also carried a line of Caskets.

At present: W. Clarence Mahaley, Groceries; Fortson Brothers, Groceries, Hardware and paint; Mrs. A. J. Doster, Antiques; Stuckeys; Dot's Cafe; An agency of The Tuloma Fertilizer Company. J. T. Allen is the Rural Mail Carrier for Rice and Chatfield. Fortson's Gin. Floyd Brewer's Mobil Service Station.

Blacksmiths: This list is not in Chronological order. Albert LeMay; T. H. Wear; -- Madewell; A. W. Hodge and son; Jake Travis; J. S. Parker; -- Mageors; -- Russell; Tom Moore; Willie Franks; -- Cole; Chapman Clark.

In 1893 or 1894 at Mount Hope, Alabama, Mr. G. R. Thornton had Mr. T. H. Wear to shoe his mules for a

trip to Texas. Mr. T. H. Wear came to Rice Texas on a train. When Mr. Thornton arrived at Rice, he had Mr. Wear to remove the horseshoes. They did not have their animals shod for farm work but did for traveling.

[p. 53] Names of Confederate Veterans buried in [Rice Cemetery](#) which were left out in the original roll.

J. S. Scott. Born July 21, 1842. Died Nov. 3, 1922. No record but known to be a Veteran.

George F. Humble. Born Mar. 28, 1834. Died Jan. 11, 1912. Joined Nineteenth Brigade of Texas Militia. Discharged April 1862.

One name left out from the Chatfield Cemetery.

Captain John Marion Harper. Born June 15, 1840. Died March 21, 1930. Joined in Alabama. Company G, 12th Alabama Regiment, 12th Cavalry of Alabama. He enlisted at the beginning of the War and served during the entire time of the War. He was a Lieutenant under Col. -- Reese. Also on Gen. Wheeler's Staff for a time. Later was made Captain. A Georgia Native.

### Town Facts:

- Location is 32°14'37"N 96°29'54"W; elevation is 463 feet
- [Rice](#), Texas, United States Postal Service Zip Code is 75155

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### See Also:

- [Rice Cemetery](#)
- [A History of Rice](#) "The Navarro County Scroll", 1967, pp 36-53

- [Historical Facts About Rice & Chatfield](#) "The Navarro County Scroll", 1967, pp28-35
- [Township of Rice](#) "The Navarro County Scroll", 1986
- [History of Rice](#) "The Rice Rustler", Thursday, Feb 13, 1930
- Link to: [Texas Escapes - Rice, TX](#)
- Link to: [William Marsh Rice Biography \(Great Houstonians\)](#)
- Link to: [William Marsh Rice Biography \(Handbook of Texas\)](#)
- Link to: [City of Dawson; DFW Info](#)
- Link to: [Racing House Website](#)

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