

Local

Four claim to be state's oldest

Texas cities argue over their age

By ROBERT R. GREEN
Battalion Reporter

Quick, now, think back to that Texas history course you had in high school. What's the oldest town in Texas?

San Augustine, you say? Right, say the people of San Augustine. Wrong, say their neighbors down Highway 21 in Nacogdoches.

Not at all, say the West Texans in Ysleta. To the contrary, maintain the folks in San Antonio.

In fact, all four cities claim to be the state's oldest settlement. And which one of them is right depends on how "the oldest" is defined, said Dr. J. Milton Nance, professor emeritus of history at Texas A&M University.

To decide which city is oldest, one has to decide what area is included in Texas — the state's borders have changed over the years — and what kind of settlement is eligible, Nance said.

For instance, a mission on the present site of Nacogdoches in East Texas was founded in June 1716. But it is not considered a continuous settlement because it was abandoned during two periods in the 18th century.

Nearby San Augustine grew out of another mission, this one founded a few months after the Nacogdoches mission but shown on official maps with a date of 1717.

The oldest continuous Spanish settlement in

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Spanish Texas as defined by decrees of 1805 was the Villa de Bexar, now San Antonio, Nance said. It was founded May 1, 1718.

Ysleta, in El Paso County, is the oldest town within the present boundary of the state as set by the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, Nance said.

Ysleta grew out of a mission dating from 1682, and was founded by Spaniards who fled from a revolt of Pueblo Indians in northern New Mexico, said Dr. Tom Cutrer, a research associate at the Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio.

The problem with Ysleta, though, is that while the town is now on the Texas side of the Rio Grande, the river changed course in 1829. Originally, Ysleta was on the opposite side of the river, Nance said.

If one wants to go far afield and consider the area claimed by the Republic of Texas from 1836 to 1846, Nance said, the oldest city is Santa Fe,

founded in 1609. Santa Fe is now part of New Mexico.

"If you want an oldest city, San Antonio is my favorite candidate," Cutrer said. However, he also acknowledged that there's probably no way to say definitively which Texas town is oldest.

Nance, who doesn't consider the question especially important, said that "this chamber of commerce rivalry" between the towns explains the arguments over age.

He said the question is only one of many which historians are unable to resolve with scientific accuracy.

"It's not a science," Nance said of history, "because it doesn't use ... a test-tube method. You're dealing with the past, you're trying to find out what people thought and did, and yet you have to rely on the records they left behind."

Errors can creep into accepted history, he said, and this adds to the uncertainty.

"Once something is put down in black and white, pen and ink, or in a newspaper or book," Nance said, "others quote it or accept it without knowing it is wrong, and so it gets repeated and repeated."

Chemicals blamed in lab fire

Fire burst out Saturday at 5 p.m. in a fourth-floor Biological Sciences Building research laboratory.

No one was in the lab at the time. Damage to equipment and the building is roughly in the \$75,000 to \$100,000 range, said Robert Stiteler, Texas A&M University safety and health officer.

Stiteler said there was some minor smoke damage to other labs, but nothing serious.

Douglas Landua, College Station fire chief, said the fire was probably caused by "flammable liquids stored in a non-explosive container."

"When the refrigerator kicked on, it caught a spark and exploded," Landua said.

Although the report on the fire is incomplete, Landua said vapors had probably leaked into the refrigerator and exploded.



Staff photo by Greg Gammon

Sawed-off horn

Junior Accounting major (and Aggie) Ronnie Hilliard sports a broken t.u. "longhorn" cap that seems to match the football team. The Aggies "sawed varsity's horns off" to the tune of a 24-14 win over the Longhorns in Austin Saturday.

KAMU opens house

KAMU-TV will hold a live "Open House" from 8 to 10 tonight in Studio A of the Hiram Moore Communications Center.

The presentation is scheduled to feature the music of Texas A&M University's four choral groups — Singing Cadets, Century Singers,

Women's Chorus and Reveliers — in addition to choirs from local churches and schools.

Other activities will include holiday food ideas presented by Blocker Trant and gift ideas by a selected group of area merchants.

The festivities are part of KAMU's festival week.

Santa posing for pics

Santa Claus and his elves will come to the main hallway in the Memorial Student Center this week to pose for pictures.

The photo sessions are sponsored by the Student Chapter of the American Veterinary Medicine Association and will be today and Thursday from 3 to 5 p.m., Wednesday from 2

to 5 p.m. and Friday from noon to 5 p.m.

The Polaroid pictures of Santa Claus will be put into a Christmas card for \$3 each and can include as many persons as desired, Melissa Hill, chapter member, said.

SCAVMA is sponsoring the event to raise money for an April trip to a convention in Ithaca, New York, Hill said.

Concert on before Taps

Country singer Lacy J. Dalton and the Dalton Gang will appear tonight at 8 as planned, Michael Parkman, MSC Town Hall chairman, said.

"What we are going to do is ask her to end the show by 10:15," Parkman said. This is to avoid a possible con-

flict with Silver Taps, which will begin at 10:30.

Many tickets are still available for the concert at \$6.50, \$5.75 and \$5.00, Parkman said. The show will be in Rudder Auditorium.

Firearms instruction this week

For those who want to learn the proper use of guns, a "Firearms for Defense" course will be conducted Wednesday through Friday at the Bryan Research and Extension Center.

Classes will be from 7 to 10 p.m. and shooting practice will be from 8 a.m. to noon on Saturday. The \$40 fee includes ammunition.

The course will be conducted by the Law Enforcement and Security Training Division of the Texas Engineering Extension Service, a part of the Texas A&M University System.

For more information, contact Bill C. Cooksey at 779-3880, ext. 391.

Symphonic band to play Thursday

The Texas A&M University Symphonic Band will present a concert at 8 p.m. Thursday in Rudder Auditorium with featured guest Arturo Sergi, Metropolitan Opera tenor.

The band will play marches, overtures and Cole Porter tunes. Individual numbers include a flute trio and a baritone solo.

Admission is \$1 for students and \$3 for non-students. Tickets may be purchased at the Rudder Box Office, at the door or from any Bryan-College Station Rotary Club member, whose organization is sponsoring the event.

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