



## Preserving the past in Calvert

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Calvert's most striking landmark is the red and white Dairy Queen on the edge of town. At first glance, the rest of the town is so brown and tumbledown, it's easy to drive by, eye-uncaught, past feed stores and billboards on the way to the four-block area residents call downtown. But treasures are hidden, like bargains in the town's stores — they just take a little digging to find.

Calvert was founded in 1868 along what is now Highway 6. Built to take advantage of the new Houston and Central Texas Railroad, the town boomed to

2,500 residents when nearby Sterling relocated to Calvert to take advantage of the convenient transportation.

With settlers from Germany, France, Ireland and China, Calvert quickly became as cosmopolitan as any little town had a right to be. Back then, the town's main claim to fame was that it was home to the world's largest cotton gin, built in the 1870s. The prosperity that the railroad and cotton brought allowed Calvert's citizens to maintain an opera company, a theatre and even a Sanger Harris which thrived side by side with other businesses in Main Street's narrow Victorian store fronts.

"At one time, Calvert was bigger than Dallas even thought

about being," says Anne Lockhart, an employee of the Calvert Chamber of Commerce.

But by the turn of the century, Calvert, like many small East Texas towns, was all boomed out. The greater part of Main Street burned down in 1902 and contributed to the decline. The cotton gin burned four years later and yellow fever broke out. Falling prices and demand for cotton steadily reduced the population to the 1,200 it is today.

But Calvert may be staging a comeback. Lockhart says abundant coal and lignite reserves will bring new industry to the town. The construction of a power plant nearby is also expected to bring new jobs to the area.

"Every time there's some-

Calvert grew up around the railroad (right) and cotton in the 1860s. Once the fourth largest city in Texas with a population of 10,000, Calvert's population now numbers around 1,200. Yellow fever epidemics, the decline of cotton and the movement of the railroad north to Dallas were some of the reasons for the decline. Large homes like the one built by Minnie Walker Burnitt in 1909 (above) stand as testimony to Calvert's heydays.

thing in the news about the power plant," she says, "we get a whole bunch of calls from

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