

The real history of Palestine and Anderson County is written on gravestones in the silent cities of the dead surrounding the city. Men and women of great distinction — some proud, some humble — walked these streets and sylvan paths. They left their marks in institutions, buildings and lifestyles which have survived a hundred years and more.

About 1836, a settlement known as Fort Houston was established on a site about two miles southwest of the present city of Palestine. In response to a petition presented by settlers around Fort Houston, then in Houston County, the Legislature of the State of Texas passed an Act on March 24, 1846, creating a new county. A suggestion was made that the new county be called Burnet in honor of David G. Burnet, to whom the Mexican government made a grant of land for colonization in this section of Texas prior to the independence of the state. The county was named Anderson, however, after Kenneth Lewis Anderson. A native of North Carolina, Anderson came to Texas from Tennessee in 1837, became a prominent member of Congress and the last Vice-President under the Republic of Texas.

Settlers who had petitioned the State for the new county appointed a committee, composed of Dan Lumpkin, Captain W. T. Sadler, and John Parker to layout the site of the new county seat and give it a name. The Parkers had come from Palestine, Crawford County, Illinois and upon the suggestion of John Parker, the new county seat was given the name Palestine. One record shows that the actual locating of the town site was made by a commission composed of John Parker, M. Main, and J. E. Box. Johnston Skelton, surveyor, drafted a map laying off the town site around the present courthouse plaza.

The first court record for the new county reads as follows: “The State of Texas, Anderson County, County Court, called session, July term, A. D. 1846. Present, The Honorable D. H. Edens, Chief Justice; and William Wright, James W. Gardner, Allen Killough, gentlemen commissioners; John Grigsby, clerk; Peyton Parker, Sheriff; William M. Gibson, assistant tax collector; Alexander E. McClure, district clerk; J. Raney, coroner.”



In September, 1849, a weekly newspaper was started by J. A. Clark, father of Addison and Randolph Clark, founders of Add-Ran College, now Texas Christian University at Fort Worth, Texas. Colonel J. A. Ewing, later editor of the Palestine Advocate, was foreman. Due to emphasis placed on commerce and navigation of the Trinity River, the newly established paper was called The Trinity Advocate.

When the smoldering ember of sectional hatred burst into conflagration of civil war, Palestine and Anderson County, with practical unanimity joined in defense of state's rights and sent the ablest of her men into the conflict. Companies volunteered for service in all sections requiring military operations. In Judge John H. Reagan, Palestine furnished a member of the cabinet of the Confederate government. He served throughout the war with distinguished ability as Postmaster-General of the Confederacy.

Perhaps the most notable event following the war was the completion in the 1870's of the International & Great Northern Railroad into Palestine. The Houston & Great Northern Railroad, chartered in 1866, completed its main line into Palestine in 1872. The International Railroad Company, organized in 1870, completed its line from Hearne to Longview in December, 1872. On September 22, 1873 the two lines were consolidated under the name of the International & Great Northern Railway. Excerpts taken from The Advocate for the year 1875 give some idea of conditions of the time and the progress being made in Palestine: “Ours has been a one-horse town long enough,” says the editor, “and now it is about time to become a four-in-hand team. In less than eighteen months from date, the population will have doubled, and instead of having a population of 2500, as at present, we will have 5,000 or 6,000.” Under the leadership of Judge John H. Reagan, the people of the city and county joined in voting a bond issue of \$150,000 which was given as a bonus to the railroad company as a part of the consideration for the locating in Palestine permanently the shops and general offices of the consolidated railroad companies.

Another excerpt from The Advocate in 1875 describes the conditions: “Located as we are on the southwest corner of the public square and Avenue A, which leads to the depot and what may probably be called ‘West Palestine’, we go west and take our way down Avenue A toward the depot of the International & Great Northern Railroad Company. The avenue leading from then public square, where businessmen do congregate, to the depot, is in fine condition. Wagons of all sorts and sizes, loaded or unloaded, and pedestrians have ingress and egress there at all times and hours. This avenue is an institution. It cements and links the two hills and all other hills together, so far as relates to Palestine and its present and prospective prosperity. The mill men on the Neches — and they control more than fifteen mills — say they sell more lumber to Palestine people than to any town on the road.”



## *A Step Back In Time*

### DOWNTOWN WALKING TOUR GUIDE





1

### CARNEGIE LIBRARY BUILDING 502 N. QUEEN

The library project began in 1853 as an effort by Judge John Graham Gooch to see a circulating library established in Palestine, at first lending his own books. With a contribution of \$15,000 from Andrew Carnegie, the original library was replaced by this structure, which served as the library until August, 1986. The building became a Registered Texas Historical Landmark in 1970. The building is one of thirteen remaining Carnegie Library buildings in the State of Texas.

2

### REDLANDS BUILDING 400 N. QUEEN

During the mid-1910's, the Young Men's Business League recognized the need for a hotel that would attract visitors and businesses to downtown Palestine, as well as confirm the city's growing status as an important regional center of commerce and transportation. The formal opening on March 18, 1915 was considered "the event of the year". Private investors acquired the structure in 1976, and have gradually converted The Redlands into a mixed-use facility of shops, a restaurant, office space and apartments.

3

### DILLEY BUILDING 501 W. MAIN

This two-story structure, distinguished by cast iron entry sills and Corinthian columns, was constructed in 1882 for George Edward Dilley, a prominent citizen of Palestine. The building has housed a variety of businesses, but it is speculated that the earliest occupant was a shoe and boot store. The Palestine Post Office was located here from 1890-1894. In 1993, a restoration project began and the Palestine Area Chamber of Commerce now has offices here. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

4

### ROBINSON STATE BANK BUILDING 213 W. MAIN

This brick building was originally built to house Bonner and Robinson Bankers, the first full-time bank in Palestine. The name is in the tile at the threshold of the building. The bank officially opened on April 1, 1881. Its three-bay facade displays elaborate and finely crafted brickwork and a large round archway, marking the primary entrance. It also features a stepped three-apart parapet with corbelling. The building is among the best preserved buildings in the downtown area and maintains its historic character.

5

### HINZIE BUILDING 111 W. SPRING

One of the earliest of Palestine's boom-town structures, it was built by real estate dealer Martin Hinzie in 1878. It is considered the oldest commercial building in downtown Palestine which maintains most of its original facade. Although alterations have destroyed much of the historic character on the ground floor, the second story appears to be virtually unchanged. Architectural embellishments and the elaborately detailed parapet present an outstanding example of the Victorian Italianate style.

7

### GREGG-LINK BUILDING 101 W. SPRING

A stately three-story building with a basement, the Gregg-Link building was built by Alexander Whit Gregg, a U. S. Representative from Palestine. Although in poor condition, efforts are underway to restore the property to its original historic appearance. The building displays outstanding craftsmanship and remains a prominent historic architectural landmark in Palestine's central business district. Stylistic detailing is suggestive of the Romanesque Revival style, a popular choice in the late 19th century.

9

### LINK/BRATTON DRUG BUILDING 101 W. OAK

Built around 1901, the Link/Bratton building was once home to East Texas' leading drugstore, Bratton Drugs. The drugstore featured an elaborate ice cream parlor and mercantile. Bratton Drug also manufactured Jenkin's Headache Cure, Cinchona Hair Tonic and Borated Lily Cream. The second story housed offices for Dr. Fred Felder, architect O. L. Hazelwood and other professional tenants. The thigh-high curbs outside were originally used when dismounting from buggies and horses.

10

### GARDNER BUILDING-TWIN BUILDING 107 W. OAK

In 1908, two conjoined buildings were erected in downtown Palestine. The left side was built by Judge P. W. Brown and became Palestine Gas Company. The right side, built by Judge B. H. Gardner, became a silent movie theater call the Gem Picture Palace. The Gem ceased to be a movie theater in the 1930's and the structure became the offices for Texas Power & Light until the 1970's. After three years of intense restoration, the current owners opened an antiques store, which continue to operate.

11

### DENBY BUILDING 201 W. CRAWFORD

Prominent Palestine architect Theodore S. Maffitt designed the Denby Building in about 1935. It is classified as a Two-Part Commercial Block, the most common type of commercial property in downtown Palestine, and is one of the city's best examples. The building's longest association was with the Denby Furniture Store which remained through the 1950's. The Denby Building reflects a popular trend in commercial architecture of the 1930's that emphasized simplicity in design and appearance.

12

### TEXAS THEATER 213 W. CRAWFORD

The Texas Theater opened in 1917 as "The Best Theater" and is believed to have been constructed for the purpose of Vaudeville performances before becoming a movie theater in 1923. The current structure, built after a devastating fire, is a prime example of Spanish Colonial architecture and was designed as an atmospheric movie palace when it opened in 1930. It was the most expensive theater built in Texas at the time. In its earliest days, it had an organ which played background music for silent movies.

