

Chapter 2 - HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The ability of the City of Benbrook to shape its future is intimately tied to its past. Prior transportation and land subdivision actions profoundly affect the ability to make future land use decisions by establishing the framework within which future development can take place. Prior economic activity tends to direct future economic activity along associated lines. Prior planning activities, whether implemented or not, also continue to influence land use decisions directly or indirectly.

Native Americans and Early Settlers

Prior to the arrival of Anglo settlers, large herds of buffalo and members of the Wichita, Caddo, Comanche and Lipan Apache Indian tribes roamed the Benbrook area. Archeologists estimate that the area has been inhabited at least 11,000 years,¹ though there is considerable debate as to whether or not that amount of time is much greater.² Indian communities looked for the same environmental factors as present communities, with the availability of an adequate water supply being a primary consideration. Undoubtedly, the confluence of the Clear Fork-Trinity River and Mary's Creek provided such a watering place to tribes as they passed through the area on hunting expeditions.

As a community, Benbrook is one of the oldest in Tarrant County. But as an incorporated City, it is one of the youngest. Anglos originally settled the Benbrook area as part of the Peters' Colony, led by William S. Peters, who based his operations out of Louisville, Kentucky. Formed by a series of contracts beginning on August 30th, 1841 with the young Republic of Texas, the colony would eventually encompass some 26 Texas counties.³ In 1842, the Republic granted Peters a contract to attract 250 families per year to the Benbrook (then called Miranda or Marinda) area specifically by offering 320 acres free to family men and 160 acres to single immigrants, plus a free cabin, seed, and musket balls.⁴ Peters and his partners, mostly Englishmen, sought to bring not only Americans but English and French settlers as well.⁵

S. Edward and Nancy Willburn of Missouri reportedly came to the area in 1843 as Family 107 of the Peters' Colony, then settling along Mary's Creek near Benbrook in 1854.⁶ A "Mary's Creek Post Office" was established sometime during the 1850s or 1860s, with Benjamin Richerson serving as Postmaster,⁷ though other accounts cite 1880 as the Post Office's first establishment.⁸ Lemuel Edwards settled along the Clear Fork near present-day Hulen Street in 1848, with land holdings that eventually covered 4,020 acres by 1955.⁹ Settlements in the area were sparse until the 1940s and 50s.

From Early Settlements to a Cohesive Community

A 20-foot by 20-foot single-room school building and Methodist Church was built in 1857 near the Clear Fork Trinity River by Edward Willburn. The structure was made of concrete and had a dirt floor, but apparently collapsed (after years of disuse) due to the poor quality of the concrete in 1865¹⁰. Classes were held during the winter months and had apparently ceased during the Civil War.¹¹ A new school and church known as "Old Rawhide" was built of lumber in 1872 by the Chapman, Edwards, Ward, Majors, and Willburn families. Newspaper accounts indicate that the school had 27 students in 1877 and 48 students in 1879.¹² This building reportedly burned down in 1879. The school was re-established in 1880 near the intersection of the present Mercedes Street and Winscott Road. It was called the Miranda (or Marinda) School (or "Marinda Academy"¹³), named after one of the Willburn children, Mrs. Marinda Snyder, who donated five acres of land to the "Marinda Seminary School Community" for the school.¹⁴ The site reportedly included a cemetery¹⁵ which probably was the beginning of the present Benbrook Cemetery later established in 1885.¹⁶ The building continued to double as the Methodist Church. The community was known by the name of the school during its early years. A post office was established at Benbrook in 1880.¹⁷

In 1884, the Marinda school (and Church) was relocated again to the intersection of Winscott Road and Old Benbrook Road (where the present day Weatherford International building is located.), again on land donated by Mrs. Marinda Snyder.¹⁸ The school was renamed Benbrook School in 1885.¹⁹ The community had supported the school through donations of land and materials as well as tuition fees and subscriptions, but it

was essentially a private institution. The Tarrant County Commissioners Court established the Benbrook Common School District No. 58 and residents voted 26-0 to become the first district in Tarrant County to vote for a local tax to support public education.²⁰

The families that lived north of the (eventual) railroad along Mary's Creek also built a school and church, known as Chapin School,²¹ after early settler I.H. Chapin. The Wallace family settled along Mary's Creek near the intersection of Chapin Road and Chapin School Road.²² The property was later purchased by Arch Rowan, president of Rowan & Nichols Oil Co.

Several family cemeteries were established as early as 1867. The Willburn Cemetery remains at 3720 Streamwood Road in what is now the Ridglea Country Club Estates. The Willburn cemetery contains about 15 graves²³ with burials from 1867 to 1924.²⁴ The Burke Cemetery is located just outside the city limits on Bryant-Irvin Road.²⁵ The Jackson Cemetery is located on the north side of Chapin Road adjacent to Leonard Middle School.²⁶ In 1885, the Benbrook Cemetery was established with James M. Benbrook as one of the original trustees. Graves from the Hunter, Day, January and Mustang cemeteries were moved to the site in 1947 to avoid inundation by Benbrook Lake and the Howard Cemetery was relocated from the Wedgwood area in 1955. James M. Benbrook's grave in the Benbrook Cemetery is designated with an Official Texas Historical Marker.²⁷

A branch of the "Old Chisholm Trail" apparently passed through the area, crossing Mary's Creek at Old Rawhide Crossing in the area of the present Z. Boaz Park, serving as a route to avoid the main trail route through downtown Fort Worth. A branch trail, known the Long Trail or Cleburne Cut-Off, extended from Raw Hide Crossing to Cleburne and shortened the trip by 13 miles.²⁸ The Butterfield Stage Line followed the Old Chisholm Trail and was headquartered in Bowie, Texas²⁹. An old water well used to water the horses was located on the Coder farm. The Fort Worth-El Paso Mail Route Stage Line also ran along Mary's Creek on its way west (1876-1881), and was reportedly robbed several times in the vicinity of Miranda. A gang known as the "Bold Banditti" (including Sam Bass) was responsible for many of these crimes and they often took refuge in "Hell's Half Acre" on what is now the site of the Tarrant County Convention Center in downtown Fort Worth. Bass reportedly robbed the Cleburne-Fort Worth stage at Mary's Creek on November 1877 and the Weatherford-Fort Worth stage on January 26, 1878.³⁰ Fleming (Slim) Doggett robbed the Granbury Stage near Benbrook, and was later slain by Texas Rangers on the H.C. Stephens farm.³¹

James M. Benbrook and Peter Boaz: Benbrook Founding Fathers

James M. Benbrook

James M. Benbrook, the city's namesake, was born in Posey County, Indiana on June 20, 1831. He was the grandson of Ezekial G. Benbrook, born in North Carolina in 1748³² and reportedly served as a Colonel with George Washington in Valley Forge. Ezekial's son James M. Benbrook Sr. and his wife Sarah Shadowen were the parents of James M. Benbrook.³³ The family moved to Hamilton County, Illinois in 1845, with young James later marrying Martha Metcalf in 1852. James fought as a sergeant with the 40th Illinois Volunteer Infantry during the Civil War, which later became part of the Union Army of Tennessee under the leadership of Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman. He attained the rank of sergeant before receiving a medical discharge after being wounded in the hip in 1862.³⁴ Following the War, Benbrook and his family traveled south for his health, first arriving in Johnson County, Texas in 1874 and finally settling in Miranda in November 1876.³⁵

That same year, Benbrook petitioned (on behalf of many in the community) for the Texas & Pacific Railroad to place a station along Mary's Creek near Miranda as the railroad ran west out of Fort Worth.

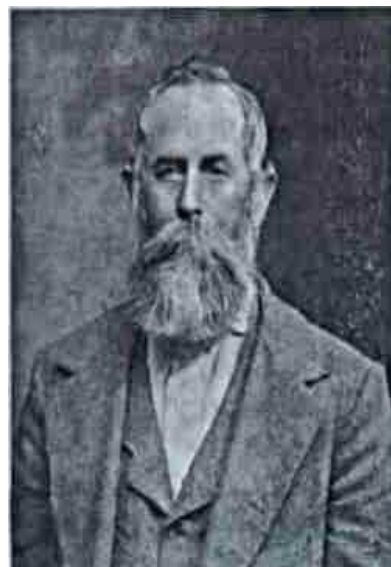


Figure 1. James Benbrook

The line was completed through Benbrook in May 1880³⁶ and the station was named after its chief petitioner as "Benbrook Station." Eventually, people began associating the name of the station with the community. Benbrook would later sell the Texas and Pacific Railroad a half-acre for use as a depot for \$25.00.³⁷

In 1891, the Benbrook family built a large two-story Victorian house near Walnut Creek. James and Martha had six children, three of which died in infancy. Martha died in July 1884 and was buried by the Baptist Church (James was a Methodist). His three surviving children included Albert L. who became a teacher, Monroe who went into the furniture business in Dallas, and Ida who married Dr. E.W. Snyder and moved to Brownwood. James later married Mrs. Louisa Ann Boaz, widow of Peter Boaz, in 1886. Benbrook was active in politics during his life, serving as constable in Illinois and as Justice of the Peace while in Benbrook. He died on February 18, 1907.³⁸

The Boaz Family

The Peter Boaz family arrived in Birdville from Kentucky in 1873 and the family subsequently moved to Benbrook in 1878. Peter had fallen on hard times in Kentucky, and purchased land from Richard E. Sharp on what is now covered by Benbrook Lake. Among Peter and his wife Martha's nine children were Will N. Boaz, Hiram Abiff Boaz, Ex Boaz and Z Boaz. Hiram Boaz reportedly converted to Methodism at one of the Old Rawhide Camp Meetings.³⁹ He then became one of the early leaders of the Methodist Church in Benbrook and subsequently became a Methodist Bishop in 1922, later traveling to Asia to work as a Bishop. He then was president of both Polytechnic College in Fort Worth (later known as Texas Wesleyan) and Southern Methodist University in Dallas.⁴⁰ J.A. Childers, ranch foreman for W.J. Boaz's 3,000-acre ranch, and later constable and county commissioner (1916-1921), built his home on Old Benbrook Road during the 1870s.^{41,42} Z Boaz, a successful businessman, donated 136 acres of land to the City of Fort Worth as a public park in 1928, only because Benbrook did not have a municipal government or park department at that time. Z Boaz died in 1935 and is buried in the Benbrook Cemetery along with his wife, Teck who died in 1970 at the age of 97, and an infant son, Thank, who died in 1898.⁴³

Benbrook Before and After the Turn of the 20th Century

Though becoming less and less of a frontier, the Western half of the United States was still rugged and rough, and the North Texas region was no exception. Nearby Fort Worth's infamous "Hell's Half Acre" sported one of the most famous red light districts in the West. While the rule of law existed somewhat in the Benbrook area, it was at times prone to criminal activity. For example, in 1886, Congressman S.W.T. Lanham (later to be elected as Governor of Texas) was a victim of a robbery near Benbrook while traveling from Weatherford to Fort Worth to give a speech on prohibition.⁴⁴

During the 1890s, two trains a day stopped in Benbrook,⁴⁵ but just like the earlier stage lines, the railroad was an easy target for thieves, particularly at the wooden trestle bridge over Mary's Creek. The train was robbed by five men in June 1887⁴⁶ and again in September 1887.⁴⁷ Both robberies were attributed to the Rueben and James Burrows gang who later bragged about train robberies they pulled in "Bend Brooke(sic)".⁴⁸ A robbery in 1896 in broad daylight, allegedly by Eugene "Captain Dick" Bunch⁴⁹, was one of the last such robberies in Texas.⁵⁰ A total of \$40,000 was reportedly stolen.⁵¹

Transportation Improvements

By the turn of the Century, some of the initial transportation routes were established that continue in use today, as shown on a U.S. Geological Survey map from 1894. The Texas and Pacific Railroad line is now operated by Union Pacific and travels along Mary's and Walnut Creeks. A rail accident at the Mary's Creek trestle reportedly sent 18 cattle cars into the creek in 1902 or 1903.⁵² The main settlement of Benbrook, located within a four-block area around the railroad station, was located near the present junction of Interstate Highway 20 and U.S. Highway 377 along Aledo Road. The settlement was reached from the east along the present Old Benbrook Road and Stove Foundry Road (now known as Vickery). Winscott-Plover Road extended south along its present route to Dutch Branch, now submerged by Benbrook Lake. A road extended east from Winscott-Plover Road near the present Mercedes Street to cross the Clear Fork. Remnants of this county road are still evident on undeveloped land north of Timber Creek.

In 1916, the route of present-day Camp Bowie West was originally part of the Fort Worth-Mineral Wells Highway. It was later designated by the State of Texas in 1918 as part of the Texarkana, Dallas, Fort Worth and El Paso Highway (later built as State Highway 1). One year later, the route was included as part of the Bankhead Highway by the Bankhead Highway Association, a private association that promoted the building of a good road from Atlanta to California across the southern United States.⁵³ The route later became U.S. 80, part of the Federal Aid Highway system. In the 1990s, U.S. 80 was decommissioned and the route was designated as Spur 580. In 2001, it was renamed by Fort Worth as Camp Bowie West.

Further Development

In 1900, the Moore house and farm was established south of Chapin Road near the present Loop 820.⁵⁴ The property is currently being used as a stable. Winscott Road is named for early Fort Worth rancher, developer and hotel owner Winfield Scott (no relation to the famous general of the same name.) Scott was born in Kentucky in 1848 and moved to Tarrant County in 1868. The Winfield Scott Ranch covered over 12,000 acres in Tarrant, Johnson and Parker Counties.⁵⁵ The ranch manager's house was apparently moved when Benbrook Lake was constructed and is now located on Winscott-Plover Road south of Benbrook Lake. Scott built and/or owned several hotels and businesses in Fort Worth. In 1911, he purchased Thistle Hill from Electra Waggoner, the daughter of one of Fort Worth's wealthiest cattlemen, remodeling the home from a Colonial style to a Georgian Revival.⁵⁶

The one room public schoolhouse in Benbrook had had 64 students by 1905.⁵⁷ A new two-room brick school building was constructed in 1912 to replace the previous building at the intersection of Old Benbrook Road and Winscott Road.⁵⁸ The \$3,000 construction cost was financed by 30, \$100 bonds.⁵⁹ In 1918, a second teacher was added. The school building was severely damaged by wind storms in both 1913 and 1923.⁶⁰ This building was replaced again at the same location by a larger four-room structure of flagstone in 1936, plus a larger gymnasium and stage.⁶¹ In fact, a portion of the original gymnasium has been incorporated into the Weatherford International industrial facility. The \$15,000 building was also financed by bonds and was built by V.A. Davis, who resigned from the school board to bid on the project, while landscaping was done by the Works Progress Administration.⁶² Even with the larger building, some students had to be taught in the basement of the Methodist Church next door.⁶³

Benbrook and WWI

Early during World War I, General John J. "Blackjack" Pershing invited the Royal Canadian Flying Corps to establish its training fields in Texas because of its mild weather. After looking at sites in Dallas, Fort Worth, Waco, Austin, Wichita Falls and Midland, three sites were established in 1917 in the Fort Worth vicinity; one each in North Fort Worth, Everman and Benbrook (known as the 'Flying Triangle.')

⁶⁴ The Royal Flying Corps used the fields from October 1917 to April 1918, when they were turned over to the U.S. Army.⁶⁵ Taliafero Field No. 3, later renamed Carruthers Field⁶⁶ (after Cadet W.K. Carruthers who was killed on June 18, 1917⁶⁷) was located south of Mercedes Street in what is now Benbrook Lakeside subdivision. Most of the 34 buildings and hangars⁶⁸ were located in an area generally bounded by Mercedes Street on the north, Winscott Road on the east, Cozby North Street on the south, and Walnut Creek on the west. A railroad spur connected with the Texas & Pacific line across Walnut Creek. When the U.S. entered the war, the field was renamed Benbrook Field and served to train American pilots as well.



Figure 2. Vernon Castle

The most famous Benbrook casualty of WWI was Vernon W. Blyth Castle ("Castle" being a stage name), part of the famous Vernon and Irene Castle dance team who introduced the tango to the U.S. in 1913.⁶⁹ Captain Castle, recipient of the French Croix de Guerre for his combat missions over Germany and Commander of the 84th Canadian Training Squadron, Royal Flying Corps,⁷⁰ was killed on February 15, 1918

while avoiding another airplane that was landing.⁷¹ Mrs. Castle was in Washington at the time. The funeral for Castle was reportedly one the largest held in Fort Worth and drew national attention. Castle's body was taken to New York for burial.⁷² The training field and its buildings were razed in the 1920s⁷³. A memorial for Vernon Castle was erected in 1966 at the crash site near the corner of Vernon Castle Avenue and Cozby West Street,⁷⁴ and included a replica of a Curtis Jenny and photographs of Castle and the airfield⁷⁵ which were later stolen. The monument was restored by Eagle Scout Jerret Martin and rededicated in 1997.⁷⁶ The last remaining building was an ammunition warehouse west of U.S. 377 that was demolished in 2004 to facilitate future commercial development. The foundations of several building can be found behind some of the homes along Cozby North Street. The City contacted the National Archives, the Defense Department and Texas State Library to find original plans for the airfield, but to no avail.⁷⁷ Following the closure of Benbrook Field, the land was purchased by William Monnig and was used as a dairy. The dairy was later purchased by Manning Trammell, and then by Mrs. Grace Cozby.⁷⁸

The Inter-War Years

Benbrook's population was estimated to be 33 people in both 1920 and 1930 and the community had two stores. Other nearby communities in the 1930s included Chapin (25 voters), Wheatland (population of 40 and a school), Plover, and Primrose. One of the earliest buildings remaining in Benbrook is the Eddie Brustrum House at 8204 Old Benbrook Road, which was originally constructed about 1891 as the Methodist parsonage⁷⁹. The Corn House in far southwest Benbrook (11555 Highway 377 South) was built about 1919 by James Corn, a rancher who owned more than 55,000 acres.⁸⁰ John Stevens, for whom Stevens Road is named, was foreman on the Corn Ranch.

Alex Wallace purchased the "old Benbrook Home" property along Old Benbrook Road in 1921. Sometime between 1921 and 1923, Alex and his brothers built two rock houses on the property. The rock house located at 8216 Old Benbrook Road was occupied by N.E. (Nancy) Wallace, their mother. To the east of that house, located at 8212 Old Benbrook Road, the second rock house was constructed for F.E. (Frank) Wallace, Alex Wallace's' brother. All three homes are no longer standing. F.E. (Frank) Wallace and brother, M.N. (Dick) Wallace, were co-owners of Benbrook's general store and post office. The general store/post office is believed to have been in operation from the 1920's until it was sold around 1939. F.E. (Frank) Wallace became postmaster on November 30, 1921. M.N. (Dick) Wallace served as the mail carrier.⁸¹ The American Legion Paul Mansir Post 297 nearby at 8201 Old Benbrook Road was originally constructed in 1933 as the Benbrook Church of Christ. Stoneworker P.A. King of Aledo reportedly supervised construction.⁸² The one-lane Mary's Creek bridge was constructed in 1922 by the County⁸³ using railroad rails for the structural span. In 1993, the bridge was removed by the Texas Department of Transportation to construct a larger, safer bridge.

The Methodist Church built a new building from 1929 to 1931, in Greek Revival style, with funding from members and from rancher Cass Edwards, who felt the Building Committee's original plans were too small.⁸⁴ The building had a sanctuary upstairs and classrooms in the basement and its own electric light plant. Bishop H.A. Boaz officiated at the opening with Rev. Floyd Thrash serving as pastor.⁸⁵ The building was later used by the Benbrook Pentecostal Baptist Church⁸⁶ when the Methodists moved to a new location on Bryant Street in 1957. The Baptists and two other congregations met in a building erected on a one-acre plot donated by Z Boaz.⁸⁷

Many imposing homes were built in the area during the 1930s by such people as Elliot Roosevelt (son of then President Roosevelt), Ellison Harding (president of Fort Worth National Bank), and Ed Sproles (head of Texas Motor Truck Transport Company).⁸⁸ The population had grown to 161 people by 1935.

The Elliott Roosevelt home was in the area of what is now the east side of Lake Benbrook, near St. Francis Village.⁸⁹ The Sproles House was constructed in 1934 and served as the center of a large cattle ranch,



Fig. 3. Benbrook Methodist Church

much of which was submerged by Benbrook Lake in 1947⁹⁰. Most of the house and outbuildings remain near the intersection of Sproles Drive and U.S. 377. The current owner, Mayor Jerry Dittrich and his former wife won the Historic Preservation Council for Tarrant County Pedestal Award in 1996 for their restoration efforts.⁹¹

Roosevelt's Dutch Branch Ranch covered approximately 1,300 acres in the Benbrook area with the ranch house located off of Old Granbury Road (West Cleburne Road) on the east of what is now Benbrook Lake. The ranch was purchased in 1935 by Elliott's wife, Ruth Goggins Roosevelt, and served as Elliot's home while he was president of the Texas State (radio) Network. President Franklin Roosevelt visited his son at the ranch on four occasions from 1936 to 1944.⁹² The Roosevelts sold the ranch in 1944 and Fort Worth oilman Sid W. Richardson later purchased it in 1946. Much of the ranch was condemned by the U.S. Government for construction of Benbrook Lake in 1947. In contrast to the opulent homes built during the 1930s, a "Hooverville" shantytown was reported in the vicinity of Benbrook in 1933 during the Great Depression.

Benbrook and the 1940s

By the 1940s, most of the non-highway road network was maintained by Tarrant County. Old Benbrook Road/Aledo Road was County Road 1024. Winscott-Plover Road was County Road 1042 and Sproles Road was County Road 1048. Mercedes Street was County Road 1046 and Chapin Road was County Road 1040. U.S. 377 and U.S. 80 were constructed, as was R.M. 2871, though it was apparently designated as F.M. 287 at the time. Williams Road was present as well. On the other hand, the Benbrook Railroad Station was apparently closed and was torn down during the 1940s.⁹³ Lee Harvey Oswald apparently began his schooling in Benbrook, but moved shortly thereafter.⁹⁴ The Warren Commission report⁹⁵ indicates that Oswald and his mother moved to Benbrook in 1945, lived on Granbury Road, and attended Benbrook Common School until 1946. They moved back to Benbrook in 1948 and lived on San Saba for approximately one year, before moving to Ewing Avenue in Fort Worth. The house on San Saba is reportedly where the old Benbrook Water and Sewer Authority office was located, which has since been demolished for the relocation of Del Rio Avenue.

By 1940, the Benbrook community had grown to 100 people and three stores. Fort Worth donated land to the federal government that same year for the construction of a bomber plant to be operated by Consolidated Vultee Aircraft Company⁹⁶ (Convair; later renamed General Dynamics then Lockheed Martin). The plant began construction on April 18, 1941 and the first B-24 "Liberator" bomber rolled off the assembly line in April 1942.⁹⁷ The Tarrant Air Drome (later renamed Carswell Air Force Base in 1948) was established at the same time. Benbrook Estates subdivision (which includes Del Rio Avenue, Goliad Street, and San Angelo Avenue to Mercedes Street) was platted in 1946. Lots were typically 70 feet by 170 feet.

In May 1947, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began construction of Benbrook Dam on the Clear Fork, reaching completion in December 1950 and finally impounding water in 1952.⁹⁸ Authorized by the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1945, the dam was designed to prevent flooding such as the major floods of 1922, 1947 and 1949. The May 16, 1949 flood killed 10, injured more than 70, and left over 13,000 people homeless in Fort Worth following 10 inches of rain in 12 hours. Carswell Air Force Base truck and airmen helped rescue distressed citizens from the fallout of the flood.⁹⁹



Figure 4. Benbrook Volunteer Fire Department Assisting Richland Hills Flood Victims, 1957 .

Incorporation

On November 17th, 1947, the residents voted 25 to 0 to incorporate as a Village.¹⁰⁰ The total area included in the new city was 13.3 square miles, including area east of the Clear Fork in what is now the CityView development and areas west of Loop 820 and north of Walnut Creek. The first mayor was Ed Sproles and first aldermen included Mrs. Grace Cozby, J.A. Childers, W.J. Nolte, M.N. Wallace and D.I. Sessums. Earl Cleveland was elected city marshal-tax collector. One of the new Village's first actions (Ordinance Number 2) was to create a Planning and Zoning Commission in August 1948, with the duty to recommend a master plan and zoning ordinance. The first zoning ordinance (Number 20) was adopted in March 1951 and created a single zoning district for "A" One Family lots. Lots were required to be 20,000 square feet and dwellings were required to be 1,000 square feet in size. The Benbrook Volunteer Fire Department, organized in 1949 with H.S. "Doc" Duncan as the first fire chief,¹⁰¹ began with only a small pumper truck. By 1957, the department included a rescue boat capable of helping neighboring communities with flooding evacuations and rescues.¹⁰²

The Village also began addressing the need for water supply. Initially, homes were supplied by individual water wells. In 1949, the Worth Water Company was granted a 25-year franchise to install and operate a water system to serve the Village. The Benbrook Water and Sewer Authority was created in April 1955 by the Texas Legislature and assumed the assets of the Worth Water Company.

Questions of Alcoholic Beverages

In 1940, beer and liquor sales were approved in the Benbrook area by a one-vote margin¹⁰³, alcohol sales were legal when Benbrook incorporated. Once the city incorporated, the City Council passed an Ordinance (No. 4) to prohibit the sale of alcohol through the City, except for the sale of beer along U.S. 377 from the railroad tracks to Mercedes Street. This ordinance was validated by a local option election in November 1949, where citizens voted to prohibit sales of beer and liquor by a vote of 35 to 32.¹⁰⁴ In 1951, by a two-vote margin, the City voted to outlaw taverns. In July 1954, a local option election was held to permit the sale of all alcoholic beverages for off-premise consumption only, but this was defeated by a vote of 95 to 50. In May 1971, Tarrant County held a local option election covering Justice of the Peace District No. 6, which included Benbrook, White Settlement, Westover Hills, Westworth Village and portions of western Fort Worth that approved the sale of mixed drinks by 3,149 to 1,075. White Settlement and Westworth Village immediately held local option elections to prohibit the sale of mixed drinks. In June 1971, Benbrook held an election that prohibited all alcohol sales, except for beer for off-premise consumption, by a vote of 507 to 376.¹⁰⁵

Benbrook and the 1950s

By 1950, the new City had three stores and 617 residents. The Dunlap Addition on Llano Street was platted in 1949. The Benbrook Lakeside Addition was platted in 1950 on the site of the old Benbrook Air Field, with typical lots of 225 feet by 225 feet. This was in the spirit of Frank Lloyd Wright's ideal subdivision where everyone owned an acre of land. However, to stimulate sales the subdivision was replatted within a few years to 75 by 225-foot and 75 by 150-foot lots and homes were sold for about \$8,500. At about the same time in 1950, North Benbrook Addition was platted into lots 50 by 100 foot in size. The lots along Chapin Road were replatted about ten years later into larger lots. A new City Hall and fire station was built on Del Rio Avenue, just off U.S. 377, in 1951. In 1953, the City disannexed about 1.5 square miles in the future Westpark area. The City adopted its first subdivision ordinance (Number 74) in August 1955, which required developers to dedicate and construct adequate street and drainage facilities. The First Baptist Church of Benbrook was organized in August 1954 on McKinley Street.¹⁰⁶ The Benbrook Methodist Church moved to its present location in 1956.¹⁰⁷

The Benbrook School building was abandoned and moved to its present location on Mercedes Street in 1953, on land donated by Mrs. Grace Cozby and Duane Johnson.¹⁰⁸ Construction was funded by school improvement bonds and a Federal grant received because of the large number of Defense plant workers.¹⁰⁹ After 1954, students above the sixth grade attended Fort Worth Schools and Fort Worth ISD began charging \$10 per month tuition.¹¹⁰ Reports show that there were 244 such students in 1957. The 1950s also saw

competition over limited tax funds, with the Volunteer Fire Department wanting a share of funds while the City said that the Village would operate the Fire Department as created under Ordinance 18.¹¹¹ Mayor Wade Malone noted that franchise fees were collected Texas Electric Service Company, Lone Star Gas Company, and Southwestern Bell Telephone Company, but the village was not collecting any revenue from the Worth Water Company.

By 1957, aerial photographs reveal that most of the houses were located on Del Rio, San Saba, Bandera, and San Angelo Streets in Benbrook Estates, though almost an equal number of 45 homes were located on Wade Hampton Street. Other streets then in existence included Cozby North, Childers, Vernon Castle, McKinley, Davidson, Bryant, Usher, Warden and Park Center, but most of these were not paved and there were not more than a total of ten houses on all of these streets combined.

Benbrook had long been charged with operating a "speed trap" on U.S. 377, a charge that apparently never has been substantiated. In 1959, two residents of Brownwood and Fort Worth erected billboards urging motorists to avoid Benbrook's "vicious speed trap" by using U.S. 67 through Cleburne. It was alleged that some 200 Brown County residents had been ticketed in a period of a few months. Interestingly, a reporter from the Brownwood Citizen's Journal investigated the claims and found them baseless.¹¹²

The 1960s to the Year 2000

The census of 1960 indicates that Benbrook has grown to 3,254 people. In 1961, the Texas Education Agency performed a study of the costs of building a Junior/Senior High School to educate Benbrook students.¹¹³ They estimated the construction cost at \$5,000,000 and \$75,000 of local funds to operate, which would require a tax increase of 240%. The Benbrook Common School District No. 58 became part of the Fort Worth Independent School District in 1962.¹¹⁴ The Chapin school district also merged with Fort Worth at this time.¹¹⁵ In 1968, the City disannexed approximately 1.7 square miles, including land in what is now CityView and land west of the future Loop 820. The first City Plan was prepared in 1969 along with the first Capital Improvements Program. The Comprehensive Plan (prepared by Parker-Croston Associates) projected the future population of Benbrook to be 24,700 in 1980 (actual was 13,579) and 52,125 in 1990. The land use plan indicated the vast majority of land as single family residential land, with commercial, industrial, and multi-family limited to very few thoroughfare corridors. The 1969 Capital Improvements Program proposed a total of nearly \$4 million in street and drainage projects and would have rebuilt most of the residential streets then in existence and provided drainage facilities to control most flooding in the City, but the bond election failed.

By 1970, the City had grown to 8,169 people. In 1972, the city staff had grown to 31 employees under the direction of City Administrator H.W. Jett.¹¹⁶ A new City Hall was built in 1976 on the corner of Winscott Road and Mercedes Street. In 1977, the City updated its Comprehensive Plan in a series of three reports, including Land Use Studies, a Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan, and a Housing Element. The 1977 Plan projected the 1980 population to be 14,364 (actual was 13,579) and projected 1990 population to be 26,761. The plan proposed a mix of land uses which does not differ substantially from the currently adopted Plan, with the exception that the area south of Mary's Creek and west of U.S. 377 was proposed for single family residential. The Park Plan proposed a series of nine new neighborhood parks, along with protection of flood plains and existing parks, and construction of a recreation facility/library. A proposed bond issue for the recreation facility failed in 1978, but bonds for a new fire station and streets were approved. A revised bond issue for drainage was approved in 1979. The Housing Element stressed conservation and rehabilitation of older stock housing.

State Law allows cities with a population over 5,000 to elect to have a home rule charter that provides much more flexibility and authority of municipal government. Benbrook's first Home Rule Chapter Commission was appointed in April 1975 to draft a charter, but the proposition failed on the ballot in January 1977. A second Charter Commission was appointed in April 1977, but the measure failed again in August 1978. A third Commission was elected in April 1982, and the Charter finally passed in April 1983.¹¹⁷

In 1980, the City had a total population of 13,579 people. A \$4.1 million bond issue for streets and drainage was defeated in 1980. A possible tornado and hail damaged numerous homes and businesses in May

1981.¹¹⁸ Loop 820 was completed from Hulen Street to U.S. 377 in 1981, while the remainder opened in 1982. In 1981, an election to merge the City with the Benbrook Water & Sewer Authority failed.¹¹⁹ The City experienced a tremendous building boom between 1974 and 1985, with a 90 percent increase in the number of single-family houses built and a 40-fold increase in the number of multifamily dwelling units built. A bond election in 1985 approved funds for a police station, streets and drainage improvements. However, building activity had slowed considerably in the last half of the 1980s. The Benbrook Area Chamber of Commerce was created in 1986.¹²⁰ In January 1989, the voters turned down a bond election for streets, drainage and a library. Voters also defeated use of a 1/2-cent sales tax for a library in May 1992.

By 1990, the City's population had reached 19,564 and the number of businesses had grown to over 400. However, the large majority of workers in Benbrook worked elsewhere. In 1991, the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission recommended the closure of Carswell Air Force Base and subsequent realignment as a Joint Reserve Center under the Navy. The Air Force Base officially closed in December 1993 and the Navy took over in October 1994. In March 1993, Lockheed Corporation purchased the General Dynamics Aircraft Plant. The City's largest retailer, WalMart, closed in May 1992 to relocate to a larger facility in southwest Fort Worth. In 1995, Benbrook voters approved a half cent sales tax increase to finance the activities of the Benbrook Economic Development Corporation, formerly the Industrial Development Authority, to aggressively market the city.¹²¹ In September 1997, voters approved an \$8 million bond issue for streets, drainage, and an indoor community recreation center. Also in 1997, the community constructed the Castle Park Playground using volunteer labor and donated materials.¹²² In 1998, the City entered into a public-private partnership to develop the Whitestone Golf Course in the southwest portion of the City.

Benbrook Enters the 21st Century

By 2000, the City's population reached 20,208 with current (2010) COG estimates of the population at 24,000. The number of firms in Benbrook peaked in 2002 with 632 firms, experiencing an overall decline to 506 firms in 2010.¹²³ This is likely due to a recession in that began in 2002-2003 followed by a much deeper recession beginning in 2008; however, overall employment numbers have increased to 4,933 in 2010 from 4,317 in 2000. The city has reduced its property tax rate eight times in the 10 years preceding 2009.¹²⁴ Much of Benbrook's growth and stable financial position are due to its growing housing values as well as vibrant healthcare, utility, and energy sectors, with the latter due in large part to the rapid increase in natural gas drilling in the Barnett Shale. Growing employment, low taxes, and quality public safety services have led to one of the highest citizen satisfaction ratings in the nation.¹²⁵ The City sold the Senior Citizens Activity Building to the newly-created Benbrook Library District in November 2000, and the Library District subsequently expanded the building. The City created a tax increment finance district in 2002, which has funded highway improvements along I-20, the extension of sanitary sewer to serve the Walnut Creek watershed, and infrastructure within the Benbrook Field development.

In 2007, Benbrook used its Heritage Festival to celebrate its 150th year as a settlement and 60th year as an incorporated City. The City participated in the creation of a Regional Coordinating Committee to support the mission of the Naval Air Station and to prevent incompatible urban encroachment. In October 2008, Chesapeake Energy donated \$500,000 to assist with Benbrook Community Center/YMCA expansion, with the expansion completed in 2010. Wal-Mart finally returned to Benbrook after a 20-year absence, adding 420 new jobs after completing its new prototype Wal-Mart Supercenter in October 2010. Benbrook voters approved the sale of alcohol in restaurants in September 2002 and approved a local option ballot to legalize the sale of wine within city limits in November 2010.¹²⁶

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