

**HISTORY OF REEVES COUNTY**

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**Robert N. Gatewood, B. S.  
(New Braunfels, Texas)**

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# HISTORY OF REEVES COUNTY

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Each county has its own history, different from any other county. The general histories of the State of Texas can not adequately discuss the history of each of the 254 counties, therefore each county history should be recorded before the details of the development of the county are lost.

No history of Reeves County has been published, but parts of the history of the county do exist in manuscript form. In a thesis, "Beef Production in Reeves County," L. E. Gardner includes quite a bit of information concerning the early agricultural history of the county. "The History of Toyah, Texas," by Myrtle Dove, deals with some of the history of that small town. A research paper, "Henry F. Reeves: His Activities and Possessions," by Mrs. Mary Helen Pax, includes information on the history and operation of the Pecos Valley Southern Railroad, and information on the operation of the gravel plant. These papers, all done in the Graduate School at Sul Ross State College, are limited in scope, and give a picture of one

narrow phase of the development of the county.

It has been the purpose of the writer to record here facts showing the development of Reeves County from the earliest explorations to the present time, with the main emphasis upon the agricultural development. The emphasis is thus placed because the economy of the county is primarily dependent upon agriculture.

Reeves County, ninth largest in the state with an area of 2,600 square miles, lies immediately west of the Pecos River in the northern part of the Trans-Pecos region of West Texas. It is bordered by New Mexico on the north, by Culberson County on the west, by Jeff Davis County on the southwest, by Pecos County on the southeast, and by the Pecos River on the northeast. Ward and Loving counties are on the opposite side of the river from Reeves County. The land in the county drains into the Pecos River. The two distinct slopes fall from the fringes of the Davis Mountains which lie in the south and southwest part of the county, and from the highlands of Culberson County to the west. The elevation, which is lowest along the river, ranges from 2,400 feet to 4,600 feet above sea level. Rainfall at the weather station at Balmorhea averages 14.29 inches per year. Rainfall in Pecos is about four inches less. This difference results from Balmorhea's nearness to the mountains, which

receive more rainfall than the semi-desert plains. The soils in the county are clay, sandy, sandy-loam, gypsiferous, chocolate loam, and mountain wash. Farming is done only in the irrigated areas, and the principal crops are cotton, alfalfa, grain, grain sorghums, broom corn, sesame, permanent pasture, fruits, and vegetables. Mineral deposits include oil, natural gas, gravel, sulphur, gypsum, salt, and brick clay. In the ranching parts of the county cattle are predominant, with large numbers of sheep in the farming areas. San Solomon Spring, in the southwest part of the county, flows more than 24, 000, 000 gallons of water daily, supplying an irrigation district of 10, 000 acres.

The native vegetation of the area is typical of the semi-arid sections of the southwest, with clumps of grass, some cactus, and scrubby mesquite and creosote bush.

Reeves County, which was created in 1883 and organized in 1884, was named for George R. Reeves, tax collector and sheriff of Grayson County, member of the state legislature, officer in the Confederate Army, and Speaker of the House in 1881-2.<sup>1</sup>

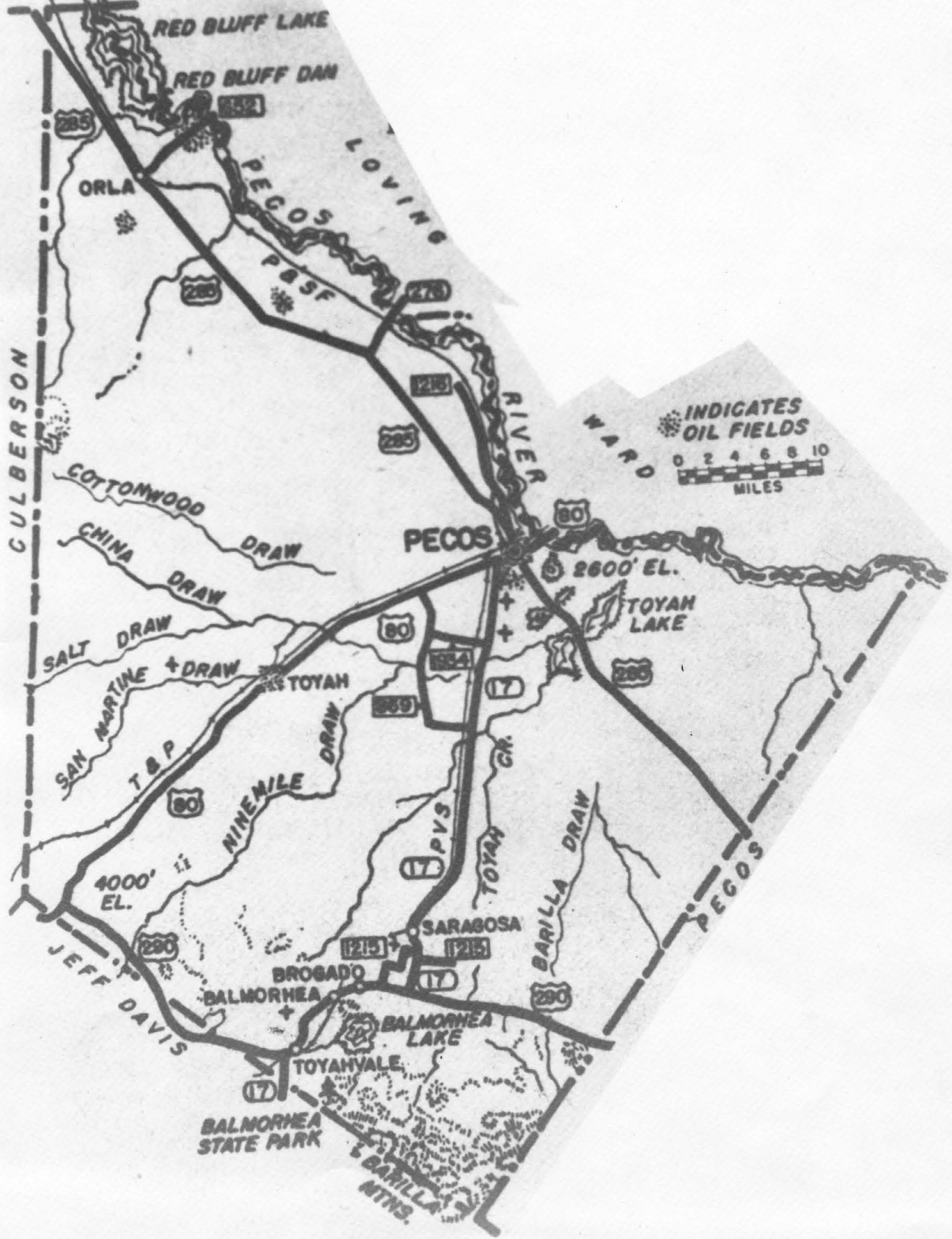
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<sup>1</sup>Walter P. Webb & H. Bailey Carroll (Editors), The Handbook of Texas, Texas State Historical Association, Austin, II, 455, hereinafter referred to as The Handbook.

Bexar County, one of the original counties of the Republic of Texas, included all the land as far west as El Paso. Most of the Trans-Pecos area was formed into Presidio County, which was created in 1850 and organized in 1875. The northeastern part of Presidio County was formed into Pecos County, which was created in 1871 and organized in 1872. The northwestern part of Pecos County was formed into Reeves County in 1883.

# REEVES COUNTY

NEW MEXICO





## CHAPTER II

### EXPLORATION AND EARLY SETTLEMENT

#### A. SPANISH EXPLORATIONS

The economy of Reeves County today is largely dependent upon irrigated farming, and irrigation in the area can be traced back to the Indians who inhabited parts of the county before the coming of the white man. Some of the Indians had an irrigation system on the Pecos River, ". . . the remains of which may be seen today near the Pecos County line in southern Reeves County."<sup>1</sup> This was a small area apparently used to grow corn for food, watered from the river, which in earlier years ran almost bank full the entire year.

The members of the Sosa expedition and the Romero-Miraval expedition possibly saw this irrigation system in use as Espejo observed similar ones on Toyah Creek in the central part of the county.

The ruins of some of these sites have been examined by archeologists who report that they show evidence of a long period of occupation with the practice of agriculture. "Five of these large camps have been

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<sup>1</sup>L. E. Gardner, "Beef Production in Reeves County," thesis, Sul Ross State College, Alpine, August 5, 1955, p. 8.

located along Toyah Creek over about a twelve-mile stretch between the present hamlets of Saragosa and Toyahvale."<sup>2</sup>

Reeves County was, generally speaking, "off the beaten path" of the Spanish explorers since it had neither gold, nor silver, nor large numbers of Indians to be converted. There were, however, three Spanish explorations which covered parts of the county.

The earliest of these Spanish explorations was done by Antonio de Espejo, who, in 1583, explored part of Reeves County on his return from the relief expedition to northern New Mexico. Espejo's route has been traced from the Hammond Translation of the Luxan Journal by J. Charles Kelley and in The Mission Era by Carlos E. Castaneda. These two accounts agree in detail, and especially Kelley seems to be very familiar with the terrain covered. His account,<sup>3</sup> being the more detailed, identifies the locations of the various camps along the Pecos River and along Toyah Creek. The Espejo party stopped on July 31, 1583,

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<sup>2</sup>J. Charles Kelley, "Report of Archeological Field Work in the Madera Valley Area," Sul Ross State Teachers College, West Texas Historical and Scientific Society Publications, Bulletin 48, No. 5, December 1, 1933, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup>J. Charles Kelley, "The Route of Antonio de Espejo Down the Pecos River and Across the Texas Trans-Pecos Region in 1583: Its Relation to West Texas Archeology," Sul Ross State Teachers College, West Texas Historical and Scientific Society Publications, Vol. 18, No. 4, December 1, 1937, pp. 14-15.

where Delaware Creek empties into the Pecos River, just below the New Mexico state line. The weather must have been clear because they sighted the Davis Mountains from this camp, and the distance would be considerably over seventy-five miles. Two days later they camped near the present site of Orla, identified by a large double bend in the river. The next day they made camp near Riverton, and spent August 4th and 5th catching horses that swam across the river. Next they stopped in the vicinity of Patrole, and on August 7 they camped on the northwest side of Toyah Lake. That day they met three Jumanas Indians who told them that the Pecos entered the Rio Grande far below the Conchos from Mexico, and offered to guide them to the Conchos by a shorter route. The next day they camped at a Jumano rancheria, a few miles above Hoban, where they caught very large fish from a pool on Toyah Creek. There was a fishing hole south of Hoban until recent years when extensive use of water for irrigation made Toyah Creek dry except following a rain. On August 10 they camped at San Solomon Spring, and the next night in Big Aguja Canyon in Jeff Davis County.

Gaspar Castano de Sosa, in 1590, followed the Pecos all the way from the Rio Grande into what is now New Mexico, choosing that route because his expedition was unauthorized by the government and he

wanted to avoid meeting anyone.<sup>4</sup> For part of the way he picked the roughest terrain he could have found, that of the lower Pecos River Canyon just above the Rio Grande. Whether or not following the river solved his problem of drinking water would be difficult to say with finality. The waters of the Pecos have been referred to over the years by all terms from good, pure drinking water to absolute poison for man or beast. This could depend upon whether the bulk of the flow at that time originated in the mountains, or in the salt lake overflow from lower New Mexico. The Pecos River was shown on the Spanish maps as the Rio Salado, or Salt River.

The next exploration in the Reeves County area came after a considerable lapse of time. The members of the Romero-Miraval expedition followed the Pecos as far as Horse-head Crossing on their journey from Santa Fe to San Saba in 1763.<sup>5</sup> They crossed at Horse-head, located between the towns of Fort Stockton and Crane, because that was the only place where the Pecos could be crossed.

Throughout three centuries trailmakers tried in vain to find another crossing, but the banks of the Pecos throughout

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<sup>4</sup>Carlos E. Castaneda, Our Catholic Heritage in Texas 1519-1936, Von Boeckmann-Jones Company, Austin, 1936, I, 181.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., IV, 188-9.

West Texas were high and rugged. Only at Horse-head did the banks on both sides of the river lend a gentle slope down to the water.<sup>6</sup>

The Spanish made no impression upon Reeves County--they made no settlements, developed no mines, established no missions. They merely passed through the area going to some other place. These three expeditions, and only these three, are mentioned to exclude any others, who are sometimes erroneously credited with being in this area. There were some other explorers in the Trans-Pecos region, but none of them happened to cross Reeves County.

#### B. EARLY SETTLEMENT

The Mescalero Apaches were still roaming the Trans-Pecos region in the late 1840's or 1850 when some Mexican farmers moved into the southwest part of the county and started irrigating crops with the water of Toyah Creek. These people had frequent contact, and an occasional battle, with the Apaches because the spring feeding Toyah Creek was a favorite camping ground of the Apaches. They called the spring Oho, meaning "clear water."<sup>7</sup> Since that time the spring has

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<sup>6</sup>Ruel McDaniel, "Old Horse-head," Texas Parade, 16:43, April, 1956.

<sup>7</sup>Virginia Thomas, "Abundant Spring Water Brings Prosperity To Balmorhea," Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, Vol. 45, No. 49, July 10, 1931.

been called Head Spring, Balmorhea Spring, Toyahvale Spring, and San Solomon Spring. These Mexican Farmers, as early as 1850, were living in the Village of Indio, and had already established their burial ground nearby.<sup>8</sup> The village was called Indio because the Apaches made frequent raids. When the post office was established in 1895 the name was changed to Brogado in honor of a Catholic priest named Brocardus who had been visiting that community once each month for more than thirty-five years.<sup>9</sup> Brogado is about a mile east of Balmorhea. The irrigation ditches built by the early settlers are still in use. By 1854, the inhabitants of Brogado had erected a cross on the hill nearest the village, "as a symbol of their love and respect for Christ and to invoke his blessing and protection, especially against the Apaches."<sup>10</sup> The cross is still standing today, and is painted regularly and taken down to the church building each year for some special ceremonies of thanksgiving. The crops raised by these early

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<sup>8</sup>Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, "Fifty Years of Progress Edition," no date or number, published between July 31 and August 7, 1936.

<sup>9</sup>Evelyn Somes, "The Cross on Brogado Hill," Sul Ross State Teachers College, West Texas Historical and Scientific Society Publications, No. 2, Jan. 1928, p. 51.

<sup>10</sup>Loc. cit.

farmers were corn, wheat, beans and potatoes.<sup>11</sup> After the establishment of Fort Davis the farmers took part of their produce there for sale. Another Mexican settlement, which was also already established when the first Anglo-Americans entered the area, is the hamlet of Saragosa, about ten miles down Toyah Creek from Brogado. Saragosa grew around the headquarters of the Antonio Matta horse ranch,<sup>12</sup> which, judging from the frequency with which his name figures in the title to different sections of land in the Saragosa area, must have been a large scale operation. Saragosa was "a travelers' stop with a hotel, restaurant, saloon, and post office by 1900."<sup>13</sup>

Anglo-Americans started coming into the Reeves County area shortly after the Civil War. One of the earliest Anglo-American settlers was Daniel Murphy, who started farming at La Mata, near Saragosa, in 1871.<sup>14</sup> Robert Lyle and Sam Miller were others who settled in the Toyah Valley about the same time Murphy started farming

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<sup>11</sup>Virginia Thomas, loc. cit.

<sup>12</sup>The Handbook, II, 572.

<sup>13</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>14</sup>The Handbook, II, 455.

there. The Toyah Valley lies along Toyah Creek, which runs through the center of the county from the south side to where it enters the Pecos River a short distance southeast of the town of Pecos. At one time Murphy and Miller had conflicting claims to the land upon which San Solomon Spring is located.<sup>15</sup> Since there was plenty of water for all, this dispute amounted to very little, and the ditches were laid out. Murphy was a very capable engineer. At one place in the upper valley, near the spring, water from one ditch is divided into ditches running in three different directions. Other Anglo-Americans came into the area about the same time as Murphy, Miller, and Lyle. A few of them were farmers in the Toyah Valley, but most of them were ranchers who ran their cattle on the open range with its abundant grass.

One of the first ranches, also the largest, was the "Hash-knife" of the Aztec Land and Cattle Company, which had its headquarters near Orla<sup>16</sup> and grazed its 34,000 cattle over an area starting from the New Mexico Line, running down the west side of the Pecos River more than one hundred miles, and extending west to El Paso. Following the

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<sup>15</sup>Virginia Thomas, loc. cit.

<sup>16</sup>"Pioneer Hash-Knife Boss Visits Pecos," Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, Vol. 45, No. 49, July 10, 1931.



two year drought of 1888 and 1889, when many of the big cattle companies went broke, small operators came into the area.<sup>17</sup> With the introduction of fences, the nature of the range change entirely.

The fences forced the stock to stay in the pasture, and when too heavily used, or droughts occurred, the grass was permanently injured. Where, according to statements previously made by early settlers, the country looked like a wheat field, waving in the breeze, the conditions changed. In 1904 the grama grasses (mostly black, blue, and side-oats) changed to burro grass in one year.<sup>18</sup>

The ranges have never recovered from this damage, although in some areas they have improved considerably. Over-grazing and drought caused severe damage to the range in many localities, but this area of low rainfall was the most seriously hurt.

Ranching was the predominant occupation, from the standpoint of the amount of land used, but among the early settlers of the county there were a number of farmers in the Toyah Valley between San Solomon Spring and Saragosa.

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<sup>17</sup>District Program for the Upper Pecos Soil Conservation District, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

## CHAPTER III

### LATER SETTLEMENT

When the first railroad in the county, the Texas and Pacific, was built across the northern part of Pecos County in 1881 the area between Tarrant County and El Paso County was almost uninhabited. In the twelve counties traversed by the Texas and Pacific there were only 25,758 people.<sup>1</sup> That was one person for each two square miles of land. The population of Pecos County was even more sparse than the average of the counties crossed by the Texas and Pacific. In 1880 the population of Pecos County totaled 1807,<sup>2</sup> and the area of the county was in excess of 10,000 square miles. With more than five square miles of land for each person in the county, and most of the people living in Ft. Stockton, Brogado, Saragosa, and Toyah, Pecos County was very sparsely settled.

A grade camp for construction was established at Toyah, which

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<sup>1</sup>S. G. Reed, A History of the Texas Railroads, St. Clair Publishing Co., Houston, 1941, p. 365.

<sup>2</sup>Texas Almanac and Industrial Guide, 1956-7, A. H. Belo Corporation, Dallas, p. 135, hereinafter referred to as Texas Almanac.

had been established a year or two earlier as a trading post for the ranchers in the northern part of the county. Chinese laborers were used in the construction of the railroad. A number of them stayed in Toyah to work in the maintenance department when the division terminal was established. For years the Chinese, with their different customs and holiday observances, added a bit of unusual color to the town. Their unusual holiday dress and firecracker popping at the Chinese New Year made an interesting sight in that small cattle town. Gradually the Chinese moved away, or died, and none of them are left in Toyah now.

Toyah thrived during the oil boom of the 1920's and 1930's and still benefits from having some seismograph and drilling crews located there, but the town has enjoyed very little permanent growth. The population has been gradually dropping since 1910.<sup>3</sup> Land agents made their headquarters there for years, but the land around Toyah which is suitable for farming lies in smaller tracts than that near Pecos. Toyah's growth failed to match that of Pecos because Pecos became the county seat, the terminus of two other railroads, and the

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<sup>3</sup>The Handbook, II, 793.

trading center for the large agricultural development within the county.

Pecos, Texas, ". . . was established in 1881 as a stop on the Texas and Pacific Railroad."<sup>4</sup> Originally it was called Pecos Station, but the name was changed to Pecos City, and later shortened to Pecos. The tents which made up the original town were soon replaced by log and board houses and Pecos started to grow after the railroad station and post office were established there. Businesses were established and Pecos City became such a notable cattleman's town that it has been placed on a National Geographic Society Historical Map as the "metropolis of the early-day desert cow-country."

The building of the railroad brought more people into Pecos County, and because of the large size of the county, the northern part was made into Reeves County in 1883. The population of Pecos County in 1880 was 1807. By 1890, Reeves County population totaled 1247.<sup>5</sup>

The election to determine the location of the county seat was held in November 1884, and was bitterly contested by Pecos City and

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 354.

<sup>5</sup>Texas Almanac, p. 135.

Toyah. Pecos City won over Toyah, which was a larger town at the time. "Pecos with a population of about 250 polled 252 votes."<sup>6</sup>

Everyone in town must have voted early and often. The population of 250 is probably a good estimate, because in 1890 Pecos City had 393 people.<sup>7</sup> There were some votes from the ranches, but not many in such a sparsely settled area. It is difficult to understand why Toyah did not contest the election, unless the citizens there felt that having the railroad division was important enough that the county seat did not matter.

Pecos City became the county seat of Reeves County in 1884, and that in itself posed a problem for the residents of the town. The old town of Pecos was located on the bank of the Pecos River, about one and one half miles east of the present location. The people wanted to move to higher ground to escape the frequent floods and to locate on some land to which they could obtain clear title.<sup>8</sup> After winning the county seat election they were afraid that if they moved the courthouse

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<sup>6</sup>"Pecos' First School Teacher Was Tom Beauchamp, Cashier At First National," Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, Vol. 46, No. 49, July 15, 1932.

<sup>7</sup>Texas Almanac, p. 139.

<sup>8</sup>"Pecos' First School Teacher Was Tom Beauchamp, Cashier At First National," loc. cit.

Toyah would demand another election. After considerable thought the problem was solved by incorporating the town and annexing the section of land which is shown as "Original Town" on the records today. Then the town moved to the new land and dissolved the corporation.<sup>9</sup> By this action, the town moved without taking the courthouse outside the city limits. Pecos City, in its new location, was incorporated in 1903.

Pecos, when Reeves County was carved out of Pecos County, ". . . had no banks, one general store, several small grocery stores, one struggling furniture store and five good saloons."<sup>10</sup> This is probably more saloons than any town its size in the west. This abundance of saloons, and an early sheriff who was capable of enforcing law and order, probably led to the invention of the rodeo. Sheriff Morris, who was very proficient with a six-shooter, made a rule that guns were not to be worn in Pecos, and once he arrested and fined all the Hash-knife boys for not following that rule.

Various other towns have claimed the distinction of having produced the first rodeo, but Pecos is recognized as the originator of

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<sup>9</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>10</sup>Loc. cit.

the sport.

the first public cowboy contest wherein prizes were awarded to the winners of bronco riding and steer roping was held on an open flat adjoining the courthouse at Pecos, Texas, on July 4, 1883, but no admission fee was charged the spectators.<sup>11</sup>

In this first rodeo, in which money, saddles, pistols, blankets, and other cowboy treasures made up the pot for the winners, ". . . the Hash-knife cowboys, led by the late veteran Trav Windham, pitted their skill against the W outfit from the mountain country."<sup>12</sup> This contest was held to settle an argument over which ranch had the more skillful hands. Windham later started his own ranch in Loving County, and his widow gave a description of the rodeo to the writer of the history of that county. There were none of the modern rodeo pens and chutes in this impromptu affair. ". . . two men held the steer previous to the beginning of the roping and tying event."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Frederick M. Clancy, "Rodeo," Encyclopaedia Britannica, XIX, 377.

<sup>12</sup>"Annual Pecos Rodeo Recalls That First Contest Held 55 Years Ago," Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, "Fifty Years of Progress Edition," no date or number, published between July 31 and August 7, 1936.

<sup>13</sup>Robert W. Dunn, "The History of Loving County, Texas," West Texas Historical Association Quarterly, Abilene, XXIV, October, 1948, p. 98.

The events more closely resembled the everyday ranching operations than some of the events in the modern rodeo, such as the girls' barrel race and the ribbon roping. The broncs were really wild, and one of the events which would seem to be the same was quite different. In the roping and tying contests, instead of the modern custom of using calves, ". . . the animals were long yearling steers."<sup>14</sup> These animals were the age now used in the team roping event in which one man ropes the head and another ropes the hind feet of the animal. A man tying the feet of such a large animal, without assistance, exposes himself to kicking feet which could seriously injure or kill him. The competition in the first rodeo was rough and rugged, and the Hash-knife cowboys won the prizes and the argument.<sup>15</sup>

The rodeo was an annual event for several years, then was conducted only occasionally until 1926 when it was revived as an annual tourist attraction. It is now recognized as one of the better rodeos of the nation. The headquarters of the Pecos Rodeo and Fair Association is housed in a building which is a replica of the "Jersey Lilly," the saloon-court of Judge Roy Bean, the famous "Law West

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<sup>14</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>15</sup>"Annual Pecos Rodeo Recalls That First Contest Held 55 Years Ago," Loc. cit.



of the Pecos."

When Pecos moved away from the river in 1885 it moved away from floods, and drinking water as well. "That was when the Pecos River ran bankfull and the water was soft and palatable."<sup>16</sup> After the town was moved water was hauled from the river, but that proved unsatisfactory.

In 1886 the first well was drilled into the artesian flow.<sup>17</sup> Other artesian wells were soon drilled and these flowing wells became Pecos' strongest advertising point, known all over Texas. Later a well was drilled west of town into some softer water. The commonly used test of hardness of water was how well it would cook frijole beans.<sup>18</sup> The artesian wells had enough force to make water available on the second floor of buildings, and were used for several years. Work has been going on all the time since the town was moved to solve the problem of an adequate soft water supply for Pecos. In 1930 an unsuccessful attempt was made to pipe mountain spring water to

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<sup>16</sup>"Pecos' Long Fight For Soft Water Is Reviewed," Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, Vol. 51, No. 4, August 30, 1935.

<sup>17</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>18</sup>Loc. cit.

Pecos.<sup>19</sup> The mountain water is the softest water available, but the necessary terms could not be worked out for piping that water to the City. The present city water wells are located southeast of town, where the water is softer than most of the water available.

The wild life of the Pecos area in the early days included more than the celebrating cowboys. Some stories of the early days were told by Ray Camp, an employee of the Fort Worth Star Telegram, on a recent visit to Pecos, which has been his family home since he first came there in 1898 as a young boy. The first animals to be placed in the zoo at San Antonio were three panthers which were trapped southeast of Pecos.<sup>20</sup> Javelinas and snakes were common, and there were a few bears in the area. One of the bears caused quite a commotion when he ambled into the Texas and Pacific Depot one night. Some of the waiting passengers who were warming themselves by the stove left the station by way of windows when the bear entered.<sup>21</sup> Mac Camp, cousin of Ray Camp, came in and killed the bear.

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<sup>19</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>20</sup>"First San Antonio Zoo Animals From Pecos," Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, April 2, 1956.

<sup>21</sup>Loc. cit.

Pecos was once the center of smuggling for a group who brought Chinese across the border, hid them long enough for a few lessons in English, then turned them loose. In 1907 or 1908 when construction was started on a building which is still standing on Second Street an underground room was discovered. Investigation revealed that it had been used to house smuggled Chinese.<sup>22</sup> Apparently the smuggling ring had ceased operation by that time.

In the years preceding the first World War Pecos and Reeves County were "promoted" in such a way and to such an extent that it was actually to the detriment of the county. The local newspapers boosted the area, but their writing stayed pretty well within the bounds of past accomplishments and potential development of the area. Some of the things mentioned by the papers were the figures on the population growth, number of artesian wells, absence of saloons, presence of churches, new depot, sidewalks and shade trees, schools, Carnegie Library, three railroads, foundry, cotton gin, alfalfa mill, railroad ticket sales with Pecos as destination, irrigated farming area, Wells Fargo receipts, banks, cantaloupes,<sup>23</sup> five hotels, water system,

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<sup>22</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>23</sup>Semi-Weekly Pecos Record Times, Editorial, Vol. 26, No. 43, April 19, 1913.

and daily paper.<sup>24</sup> The papers did the sort of boosting that every town should get from its paper.

Some out-of-town concerns tried to promote various things, including dairy farming, a college, a cement factory, and spineless cactus for cattle feed. The dairy farming would have been good for the country. One dairy has been established near Pecos recently. The college, which was to be a branch of Texarkana College, was attempted in 1926. It planned to offer courses in all subjects from business administration to geology and petroleum engineering.<sup>25</sup> The college, which was attempted in a section with too few people to support it, never opened. All that remains today to remind people that once Pecos was going to have a college is the College Addition subdivision of the town. The cement factory failed to materialize, although raw material is present in ample amount. A local group is working to establish a cement factory at present, but it is still unsuccessful. The Texas Cactus Company planned a nursery at Hermosa for spineless cactus, which was supposed to yield as much as \$1,200

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<sup>24</sup>Pecos Daily Times, Editorial, Vol. 1, No. 134, May 24, 1911.

<sup>25</sup>Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, Vol. 44, No. 49, July 16, 1926.

per acre annually. That never worked out. Hermosa, located on the Texas and Pacific Railroad five miles west of Pecos, instead of being the home of a large cactus industry, consists of two cotton gins and a railroad siding.

Pecos had a very active Commercial Club, forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce, which praised the alfalfa, grapes, apples, pears, and sugar beets with almost unlimited superlatives. The following is a sample of the Commercial Club's boosting.

Many people predict that Pecos will have 50,000 people in ten to fifteen years. It is no idle dream, for after three years of actual tests, made largely too by inexperienced farmers, the Pecos Valley around Pecos has proven that it can grow better alfalfa than California or even Utah, that its grapes are unsurpassed on the face of the earth, if we are to believe the experts, who after testing grapes from all sections of the world at the late St. Louis World's Exposition, awarded first prize (gold medal) to Pecos Valley grapes, the finest the world had ever raised; Pecos Valley apples are already successfully competing with the Oregon apple in flavor, size, and shipping qualities; Pecos Valley pears--well, comparisons are odious--but Pecos Valley pears are the climax of Pecos Valley agricultural greatness. As a pear country the Pecos Valley knows no superior and recognizes no equal. The sugar beet has not yet become a commercial plant in the Pecos Valley, but experiments already made bring out the startling fact that Utah must soon bow her heretofore omnipotent head as the Sugar Queen of the Americas--for Pecos Valley sugar beets are to wrest from the Mormon State the honor of giving to the world the best sugar known in Christendom.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Porter A. Whaley, "Pecos, City of Flowing Wells," The Texas Magazine, Vol. 4, No. 4, August 1911, p. 73.

The above was written by Porter A. Whaley, Secretary of the Pecos Commercial Club and Editor of the Pecos Record Times. He later went to San Antonio as manager of the Chamber of Commerce in that city.<sup>27</sup> One wonders what he would have said about the Reeves County cotton crops of 1954 and 1955 which averaged two and one quarter bales for each acre planted. The Commercial Club also predicted population of the Pecos Valley, by 1926, to be 400,000.<sup>28</sup> The entire watershed of the Pecos River probably does not have that many people, and the highest estimates place the 1956 population of Pecos slightly below 15,000. According to the people who have lived in Pecos for many years, the things Whaley wrote about the crops were true. The writing may have hurt the country, however, because sometimes the truth is so fantastic that no one will believe it. ]

The Texas and Pacific Railroad tried to promote immigration to Pecos as well as to other points along the railroad. At one time the Texas and Pacific Immigration Department estimated the land in the shallow water belt near Pecos to total two million acres, not

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<sup>27</sup>Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, Editorial, Vol. 40, No. 1, August 13, 1926.

<sup>28</sup>Porter A. Whaley, op. cit., p. 78.

including areas which could be irrigated from the Pecos River, Toyah Lake, San Solomon Spring, or Phantom Lake.<sup>29</sup> There may be two million acres of tillable land in the Pecos Valley, but at the present time only about 10 per cent of it is being farmed.

Pecos became the terminal of a second railroad in 1891 when the Pecos River Railroad was constructed between Pecos City and Eddy, New Mexico, which is now called Carlsbad. This road was built by J. J. Hagerman and associates, who had built part of the Fort Worth and Denver City Railroad. They owned a large body of irrigable land in the Pecos Valley and needed a rail outlet for the products when the land was developed.<sup>30</sup>

In connection with this road there was an attempt to promote a dam to increase the capacity of Sand Lake, north of Pecos, and it was estimated that the reservoir would have 160,000 acre feet of water available for irrigation each year.<sup>31</sup> This would be enough to irrigate 40,000 acres of crop land. It was figured that the Sand

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>30</sup>S. G. Reed, op. cit., p. 302.

<sup>31</sup>Pecos Times, Vol. 26, No. 75, November 14, 1913.

Lake irrigation district would put 10, 000 people in Pecos within a very few years.<sup>32</sup> The attempt to build a dam to increase the capacity of the lake failed because the water just isn't there in that quantity. The only time in recent years that the lake has had any appreciable amount of water was in 1955 when a fifteen to twenty inch flood in the ranch country, which left drowned deer and cattle in the tops of trees in the draws, ran off and filled the lake. This flood added some water to the Red Bluff Reservoir in the northern part of the county also.

The large agricultural development visualized by the Hagerman group failed to materialize. Sand Lake did not have enough water, and the flow of the Pecos diminished as dams were built in New Mexico. Now there are few years in which enough water is available in Texas to grow a crop. On January 1, 1901, the Pecos River Railroad was purchased by the Santa Fe system.<sup>33</sup>

The Santa Fe Railroad, as it has been called since 1901, did a thriving business during the oil boom of the 1920's and 1930's. A switch was built to handle the oil traffic. This switch, named Irabel after Ira J. Bell, a Pecos promoter, was the scene of a townsite

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<sup>32</sup>Pecos Times, Vol. 28, No. 9, February 26, 1915.

<sup>33</sup>S. G. Reed, loc. cit.



promotion. Reeves County has had several such promotions, including Mont Clair, Riverton, and Red Bluff. During the boom the Santa Fe officials talked of building a double track to handle the anticipated increase in traffic.<sup>34</sup> The double track was never built. The building of the Red Bluff Dam in 1936-7 caused another increase in traffic for the Santa Fe, and sulphur has been shipped from Orla intermittently over the years. The sulphur is mined at the Rustler Springs sulphur deposit on the Reeves-Culberson county line northwest of Toyah. The sulphur never has been developed enough to need the railroad line to the mines that was planned by one group.<sup>35</sup>

After the Santa Fe bought the Pecos River Railroad the line was extended to connect with the Santa Fe mainline at Clovis, New Mexico.

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<sup>34</sup>The Enterprise and Pecos Times, Vol. 39, No. 28, February 27, 1920.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., Vol. 37, No. 16, December 7, 1917.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PECOS VALLEY SOUTHERN RAILROAD

Following the Texas and Pacific and the Pecos River Railroad by several years, the third railroad to be built in Reeves was a short line lying entirely within the county and known as the Pecos Valley Southern Railroad. This railroad, running from Pecos to Toyahvale, is the partial fulfillment of the dream of the builders to run a line from Pecos to Presidio.<sup>1</sup> The idea of a railroad running through the Toyah Valley originated with the people of Saragosa and Balmorhea.<sup>2</sup> The ranchers and farmers of this land along Toyah Creek wanted a rail outlet for their cattle and crops, as well as better travel facilities. In the early part of the twentieth century there were no motor cars or trucks in Reeves County and there were no county roads from Pecos to Saragosa until 1916. Railroads are built now only when careful study shows that the business is available to make operation profitable. When the Pecos Valley Southern was built men still dreamed of new

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<sup>1</sup>Jack Hawkins, "40-Mile West Texas Railroad Refuses To Die," El Paso Times, Sunday, April 19, 1953.

<sup>2</sup>Loc. cit.

empires to be created through access by rail to developing areas. If all proposed railroads had been studied carefully and built on the basis of available business the Pecos Valley Southern would have been only one of the many roads to die in the planning stage.

The Pecos Valley Southern was built when the Toyah Valley was becoming the most highly advertised tract of land in Texas. The agricultural products of the valley included grain, fruits, vegetables, alfalfa, and cotton. The area grows a wide variety of plants, as is illustrated by the list published by the Madera Valley Agricultural Experiment Station near Balmorhea of thirty-one different trees, shrubs, and vines that thrive in the Toyah Valley.<sup>3</sup> The Balmorhea area is sometimes referred to as the Madera Valley because Madera Canyon in the nearby Davis Mountains opens into the Toyah Creek valley near San Solomon Spring. There may also be others, but field crops that are being grown or have been grown successfully in Reeves County include the following: alfalfa, apples, apricots, artichokes, asparagus, bananas, barley, beans, berries, broccoli, broomcorn, cabbage, cane, cantaloupe, corn, cotton, figs, grapes, kaffir, lettuce, milo

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<sup>3</sup>Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, "Fifty Years of Progress Edition," no date or number, published between July 31 and August 7, 1936.

maize, oats, onions, pears, peas, peaches, plums, potatoes, sargo, sesame, sugar beets, tomatoes, watermelons, wheat, yams. It seems, therefore, that the Pecos Chamber of Commerce does very little violence to the truth when it states that "most any plant will thrive in the Pecos area." Some of the land in the Toyah Valley had been in cultivation for many years and the builders of the railroad dreamed of a greatly expanded agricultural empire to be created by providing adequate transportation.

Brogado had been in existence since 1850, Saragosa since before 1870, and Balmorhea was established shortly before the railroad was built. The coming of the railroad and the development of farm land brought a rapid growth in population to these villages and the entire valley.

The State of Texas issued the charter of the Pecos Valley Southern Railway Company on May 28, 1909.<sup>4</sup> The original stockholders were M. L. Swinshart, J. F. McKenzie, J. G. Love, F. W. Johnson, W. D. Cowan, B. R. Stine, W. P. Brady, E. D. Balcom, H. Robbins, and C. W. Griffin.<sup>5</sup> Balcom was one of the

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<sup>4</sup>The Handbook, II, 356.

<sup>5</sup>Jack Hawkins, op. cit.

founders of Balmorhea and the first three letters of the town's name come from his name. When he and his associates, Morrow and Rhea, established the town in 1906 they combined their names to provide the name for the town.<sup>6</sup> Robbins was from Saragosa, Griffin from Toyahvale, and the other stockholders lived in Pecos. The company was chartered with \$45,000 capital stock, and bonds in the amount of \$400,000 were issued. The road cost \$476,661 when completed.<sup>7</sup>

M. L. Swinehart, whose career included two terms as manager of the Pecos Chamber of Commerce, with an interval of 25 years as missionary, engineer, and builder in Korea,<sup>8</sup> was county surveyor when the Pecos Valley Southern was built. He surveyed the original route and landowners along the route donated right of way to the road. The late W. L. Carwile, of Dallas, was in charge of construction. The rails and cross-ties used in building the Pecos Valley Southern were lightweight and had originally been

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<sup>6</sup>The Handbook, I, 104.

<sup>7</sup>Jack Hawkins, op. cit.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

placed on another railroad and replaced after some years service.<sup>9</sup>

Because of necessity the plan was to build the road as cheaply as possible and improve it later from the profits resulting from the anticipated traffic. Civic interest was high during construction, but at times money was short. Even children were interested in the new railroad, and the school children of Pecos once contributed their piggy bank funds as a gift.<sup>10</sup> Construction was finally completed and the first train ran to Balmorhea in December, 1910.<sup>11</sup>

It is strange to note that in the Pecos newspapers published in 1910, when the Pecos Valley Southern was under construction, there is no mention whatever of the railroad except a feature announcing the running of the first train to Balmorhea. The article boosted the area in the typical fashion of the day.

On last Sunday the first passenger train ran through to Balmorhea, and that city and many citizens of the creek country are rejoicing. Now Saragosa, Balmorhea and the whole creek country will boom.

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<sup>9</sup>Mary Helen Pax, "Henry F. Reeves, His Activities and Possessions," Research Paper, Sul Ross State College, January 1953, p. 33.

<sup>10</sup>Jack Hawkins, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup>"Pecos Valley Southern Reaches Balmorhea," Reeves County Record, Vol. 1, No. 3, December 9, 1910.

Toyah Creek is probably one of the most widely advertised sections of country in the United States for its rich soil, ideal climate and adaptability to the growth of alfalfa, fruits, etc. and even the most versatile writers on the subject have hardly overdrawn the situation.

There are many parts of Reeves County just as valuable and when wells are put down and pumping plants put in and a line of development shown in these shall water districts, then Pecos, Toyah, Saragosa, and Balmorhea will have no just cause for knocking each other, for each will be too prosperous and her citizens too busy to envy the rapid advancement of the other. Let us all pull together and build up Reeves County. <sup>12</sup>

W. W. Teague, of Pecos, explained the lack of publicity by saying that the railroad was a pretty controversial subject and the paper probably preferred to stay out of the fight. As it turned out, when the bond issue was floated it really floated. For a large part of the first thirty-five years of operation, the road barely made operating expenses.

For several years the line was fairly prosperous, hauling livestock, alfalfa, and cotton. Passenger trains were run and as much as \$4,000 annually was realized from the sale of tickets. <sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>13</sup>Jack Hawkins, op. cit.

The Toyah Valley was known as the best alfalfa producing area in the United States and alfalfa shipping brought a considerable amount of revenue to the railroad. A note in an early newspaper reported that W. W. Stewart had received an order for 136 cars of alfalfa, or 2,720,000 pounds.<sup>14</sup> Other growers were shipping alfalfa also, but that was the largest shipment mentioned.

The agricultural area served by the Pecos Valley Southern experienced a "boom and bust" that is common in many parts of the West. According to M. L. Todd, retired cantaloupe shipper who farmed near Pecos from 1917 until 1950, several things contributed to the failure of many of the early farmers. There was too much promotion of the "get rich quick" type. Most of the farmers knew nothing about irrigation farming, and it is impossible for a dry-land farmer to learn to farm in an irrigated area overnight. Probably the biggest trouble was that the farmers had too little capital.<sup>15</sup> When a large part of the farms ceased operation, and the remaining trade was encroached upon by trucks and automobiles, the Pecos Valley Southern started having financial troubles.

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<sup>14</sup>Pecos Times, Vol. 28, No. 13, March 26, 1915.

<sup>15</sup>Interview, M. L. Todd, Pecos, Texas, May 9, 1956.



As late as 1922 the revenue was high enough to take care of actual operating expenses, but not enough to pay the interest on the bonds.<sup>16</sup> In 1927 application was made to the State Railroad Commission for permission to abandon the line, but the Texas and Pacific Railroad bought it and operated it until after World War II. The Texas and Pacific took over the Pecos Valley Southern on August 27, 1927. One of the documents connected with the transfer of ownership stated that The Pecos Valley Southern had a total trackage of 45.95 miles made up of 40.33 miles of mainline and 5.62 of sidings, wyes, and spurs.<sup>17</sup> The present day mileage is 39.91 miles of mainline and 4.7 miles of wyes, spurs, and sidings.<sup>18</sup> The Pecos Valley Southern also rents two miles of track from the City of Pecos. This track was built when the air field was constructed and now serves a number of manufacturing and warehouse firms located in that area. The reduction in track mileage came when the Texas and Pacific abandoned the old Pecos Valley Southern depot and switch yards in Pecos and started operating the trains from the Texas and Pacific facilities. The Pecos Valley

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<sup>16</sup>Jack Hawkins, op. cit.

<sup>17</sup>Mary Helen Pax, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

Southern, which carries no passengers, does not have a passenger depot in Pecos. The freight shipments come and go over the Texas and Pacific or the Santa Fe lines.

Under the Texas and Pacific ownership the Pecos Valley Southern became known as a sort of "toonerville trolley." Trains, or whatever equipment was being used, ran infrequently and not on schedule. Freight shipments were pulled by an old switch engine from the Toyah yards, and a converted truck ran each day to carry the United States mail. In 1928 this truck was wrecked at Brogado and the mail was carried by handcar until 1930 when a truck with baggage compartment and passenger seats was placed on the run.<sup>19</sup> This truck was used for several years, and abandoned when the railroad stopped carrying the mail. Small freight and an occasional passenger is carried by a highway transport truck that makes a daily round trip between Balmorhea and Pecos. This truck handles the small freight shipments to Saragosa and Balmorhea since the trains operate on schedule only between Pecos and the gravel plant. The train goes to Toyahvale once a week to get a car of water.

The Texas and Pacific tried to create some agricultural traffic

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

for the road soon after they acquired it. In 1929 they rented a farm near Hoban and started to produce cantaloupes on a large scale. The land in the Hoban area is a rich black soil which grows good cantaloupes, but they are darker than the famous Pecos cantaloupe, have a larger seed cavity, softer flesh, and don't ship as satisfactorily. The Texas and Pacific attempt to grow cantaloupes failed because they started out on the wrong kind of land.<sup>20</sup> The Pecos cantaloupe grows on land west of Pecos which is a pale yellow and contains a plentiful supply of minerals and saccharine which give the melon its distinctive flavor. The Texas and Pacific experiment injured the reputation of the Pecos cantaloupe to some extent. Had they started on the proper land their experiments would have helped the area immensely, but no trade would have developed for the Pecos Valley Southern because it does not run through the cantaloupe land.

The Texas and Pacific was ready to abandon the Pecos Valley Southern in 1946 and made application to the Railroad Commission for permission to do so. This time the railroad was saved by F. M. Reeves and Sons, Inc., of Austin and Pecos, who bought the entire Pecos Valley Southern in October 1946 for \$25,000. The Reeves' are bridge contractors

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<sup>20</sup>"Pioneer Grower Recalls History of Pecos Melon," Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, Vol. 51, No. 4, August 30, 1933.

and have a large gravel plant near Hoban. They wanted the railroad to serve the gravel plant, and started rebuilding it into a first class road.<sup>21</sup> The gravel plant is the F. M. Reeves and Sons Hoban Plant, but is actually located on Collier spur a short distance south of the Hoban siding.

Part of the original structures are still in use, part of the road has been rebuilt, and some new structures have been built since the Reeves family bought the Pecos Valley Southern. The original parts still in use include the track between the gravel plant and Toyahvale, the Pecos section, oil and tool houses, the Saragosa depot, the Balmorhea depot, and the Toyahvale stockpens.<sup>22</sup> The stockpens are equipped to make feeding and watering of the livestock easy. Water is piped to the pens from a spring in the mountains nearby. A large part of the early shipments over the railroad consisted of livestock. New sixty-five pound rails have been laid between Pecos and the gravel plant.<sup>23</sup> The road between the gravel plant and Toyahvale hasn't been

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<sup>21</sup> Jack Hawkins, op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> Mary Helen Pax, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>23</sup> Jack Hawkins, op. cit.

rebuilt because the traffic isn't heavy enough to justify such expenditure of money. The equipment has been improved in the past ten years, and the company now owns two Diesel-electric locomotives, two service cars, one caboose, one water car, four ballast cars, three trucks for the maintenance department, three company automobiles, and the transport truck mentioned earlier. Freight cars are leased from the Texas and Pacific Railroad. A 7,200 square foot terminal warehouse was built in 1950, and there are new loading platforms at Saragosa, Verhalen, and Hoban.<sup>24</sup> Cotton bales make up almost all the freight loaded at these places. Verhalen consists of a cotton gin and a general store and Hoban is made up of two cotton gins and two general stores. The Pecos Valley Southern has a complete radio communications system connecting the office in Pecos, the caboose, the three company owned automobiles, and the gravel plant.<sup>25</sup>

A large part of the industrial establishments of Pecos are located on the Pecos Valley Southern. This is especially true of the ones started since World War II. One reason for this is that on this small, family owned railroad policy is more flexible and decisions more easily reached than on larger lines. The procedure for board meetings and stockholders

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<sup>24</sup>Mary Helen Pax, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>25</sup>Jack Hawkins, op. cit.

meetings is much simpler than on a road like the Texas and Pacific or the Santa Fe. Particularly if a new business will need a siding the Pecos Valley Southern can move faster than a larger road. F. M. Reeves is a man of such rare ability that he can look at a river crossing and in five minutes time make a closer estimate of the cost of a particular type bridge for that location than his engineers are able to make after working with their equipment five weeks, or even five months.<sup>26</sup> It isn't very difficult, therefore, for the Pecos Valley Southern to decide whether it would be profitable to build a siding for a new industry. Also, this policy of the road is not so strictly limited as that on a larger road. Thus they can do whatever is necessary with a minimum of calculation and moving through channels. The businesses in Pecos served by the Pecos Valley Southern include the Western Cottonoil Company gins and oil mill, a grain elevator, three farm chemical companies, Pecos Growers Gas Company warehouse, several gasoline wholesale establishments, Kelton & Wicker transit-mix cement plant, and several warehouses and manufacturing plants in the airbase area.

The railroad, after many years of precarious financial condition, now operates at a profit, and employs over fifty people who enjoy all

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<sup>26</sup>Interview, W. W. Teague, Pecos, Texas, May 9, 1956.

the benefits they would receive from a large railroad such as retirement insurance and hospital insurance.

A large part of the shipments over the Pecos Valley Southern is made up of gravel from the Reeves Hoban plant. During 1955 a total of 6,931 carloads were handled by the Pecos Valley Southern. Of this total 1,751 carloads were agricultural products, 50 carloads of animals, 4,160 carloads of mine products, 41 carloads of products of forests, and 929 carloads of manufactures and miscellaneous products.<sup>27</sup> Practically all the mine products were from the Reeves plant, but twenty-seven carloads of asphalt were shipped into Pecos for use by the Highway department.

The Pecos Valley Southern has compiled an enviable record as far as safety is concerned. In the years when passengers were carried there was never an accident involving a claim of more than a few dollars. The only fatal accident in the road's history occurred in 1949 when the last steam engine exploded and killed the boiler watchman.<sup>28</sup> There have been some accidents which could have been spectacular had things happened just a little differently. One of these involved a runaway boxcar

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<sup>27</sup>Interview, William Hazelwood, Pecos Valley Southern General Manager, Pecos, Texas, May 24, 1956.

<sup>28</sup>Mary Helen Pax, op. cit., p. 41.

which started rolling from near Balmorhea once when the brakes failed to hold. Balmorhea is some 600 feet higher than Pecos and there was nothing to stop the car. The train crew telephoned the Texas and Pacific dispatcher in Pecos and he cleared the track and switched the runaway onto the eastbound track. A locomotive caught and bumped it to make the couplers connect east of Barstow. Fortunately nothing tried to cross the track when the almost silent runaway was near.<sup>29</sup>

The Pecos Valley Southern is now serving a greater variety of enterprises than was dreamed of by the originators of the road, but the management still tries to serve the ranchers and farmers in the best possible manner. Trains operate on regular schedule only between Pecos and the gravel plant but if a rancher wants to ship some cattle the railroad will, without hesitation, get the necessary livestock cars from the Texas and Pacific and run a special train to pick up the livestock.

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 40.



## CHAPTER V

### NEWSPAPERS

The present newspaper, the Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, can trace its ancestry through a series of mergers back to the first permanent newspaper established in Pecos and to the first paper established in Toyah. There have been newspapers published in Toyah and Balmorhea, and there were some papers published in Pecos before the Pecos Valley News was established in 1887, but they were very short-lived.<sup>1</sup> The only one of these earlier papers which is remembered by name is the Pecos City News, published in 1884 by Nicholas Van Horn.<sup>2</sup> In those days the only type of new business which would have been almost certain to be successful was the saloon. Between 1884 and 1886 there were numerous unsuccessful attempts to publish papers in Pecos.<sup>3</sup>

Possibly the first newspaper published in Reeves County was the Toyah Advocate which was succeeded in 1910 by the Toyah Enterprise.

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<sup>1</sup>Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, Editorial, Vol. 40, No. 1, August 13, 1926.

<sup>2</sup>The Handbook, II, 354.

<sup>3</sup>Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, Editorial, Vol. 40, No. 1, August 13, 1926.

The exact date of the publication of the Advocate is unknown and no copies of it are available. The Toyah Enterprise was moved to Pecos in 1915 and became the Pecos Enterprise.

Balmorhea has had two newspapers. These were the Toyah Valley Herald which was being published in 1913 and the Madera Valley News, published from 1925 to 1936. An editorial from the earlier paper was published in the Semi-Weekly Pecos Record Times on April 5, 1913, explaining why the editor of the Balmorhea paper had been slow to boost the newly discovered gold mines near Saragosa and Balmorhea and why he was now a booster.<sup>4</sup> The later paper ceased publication because it was concentrating on news of the Balmorhea-Saragosa area and there were not enough subscribers and advertisers in the area to make the paper a paying proposition.

The Pecos Valley Times, established in 1887 by H. F. Anthum,<sup>5</sup> was the first permanent newspaper in Pecos. It was published until the three Pecos newspapers were merged in 1913. There are no copies of this paper available now. The editors of this paper had trouble finding news sometimes because some of the cowboys who were jailed

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<sup>4</sup>Semi-Weekly Pecos Record Times, Vol. 26, No. 31, April 5, 1913.

<sup>5</sup>Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, Editorial, Vol. 40, No. 1, August 13, 1926.

because of too much celebration threatened to kill the editor if he printed anything about them.<sup>6</sup>

The Pecos Times was established in 1897 under the management of Soames and Link.<sup>7</sup> This paper did well enough that in 1911 it began publishing both the weekly Pecos Times and the Pecos Daily Times. The Times circulation in December, 1910 totaled 1,009 copies mailed through the Pecos Post Office each week.<sup>8</sup> The Pecos Daily Times was started to give the news to Pecos ahead of the other dailies from other towns, and had bonafide subscribers in more than half of the states by the time it was seven months old.<sup>9</sup> The little paper cost 25¢ per month. Copies of this short-lived daily are in the files of the Pecos Enterprise and Gusher. It was a neat little four page paper which lasted longer than anyone thought possible. It was still being published in 1914 and items from it were quoted in the weekly Times. The Times and the Daily Times merged with the other two papers in town in 1912.

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<sup>6</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>7</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>8</sup>Pecos Times, Vol. 14, No. 3, December 8, 1910.

<sup>9</sup>Pecos Daily Times, Vol. 1, No. 146, June 10, 1911.

The Reeves County Record was established in 1910 by Hibdon and Leeman.<sup>10</sup> This paper boosted the Pecos Valley as the "greatest artesian and shallow water belt known."<sup>11</sup> The area had

fertile soil and inexhaustible water which would produce \$75 to \$100 per acre in alfalfa per year, 30 to 40 bushels of corn, 10,000 to 12,000 pounds of asparagus per year per acre to sell at \$1 per pound, \$500 to \$600 per acre on cantaloupes, 60,000 to 80,000 pounds of onions per acre, sugar beets up to 30 pounds each, as fine apples, pears, grapes, figs, and Elberta peaches as anywhere, maize, kaffir, cane, broomcorn, oats, wheat, peas, berries, plums, apricots, and tomatoes as fine as any country.<sup>12</sup>

This paper published numerous such articles, and the old-timers insist that it was only stating the facts with no exaggeration.

The Pecos Valley News, the Pecos Times, and the Reeves County Record consolidated in 1912 under the name of Pecos Record Times. Porter A. Whaley served as editor of the new paper and secretary of the Commercial Club until he went to San Antonio as manager of the Chamber of Commerce in that city.<sup>13</sup> The Pecos Record Times was

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<sup>10</sup>Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, Editorial, Vol. 40, No. 1, August 13, 1926.

<sup>11</sup>"Pecos Valley Agriculture," Reeves County Record, Vol. 1, No. 42, September 15, 1911.

<sup>12</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>13</sup>Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, Editorial, Vol. 40, No. 1, August 13, 1926.

apparently the first Reeves County newspaper to have a certain section set aside for editorials. In 1913 it started carrying the editorials on the first two columns of page four. This practice is still followed in the Enterprise in 1956. After a short time the name of the paper was changed to the Semi-Weekly Pecos Record Times, and papers published on Wednesdays and Saturdays. The Semi-Weekly, four, six, or eight pages, made a regular practice of running pictures of Pecos Valley agriculture on the front page. Some of the pictures showed the Pecos cantaloupe with the small seed cavity it has today, broom corn, kaffir corn, alfalfa, and flowing artesian wells.

The Semi-Weekly lasted only a few months, because in 1913 another name change was made. The name Pecos Times again was used. B. J. Strickland edited this paper, which was regularly an eight page weekly. By the middle of 1915 the Times was regularly using pictures in both news and advertisements. It was a very neat paper in appearance. The paper boosted agriculture and carried pictures of such things as gardens, grain crops, fields and roads, people gathering fruit and baling alfalfa, flowing wells, and the famous cantaloupes. In 1914 the Pecos Times very strongly supported United States Congressman W. R. Smith for re-election because he was chairman of the House Committee on Irrigation and knew irrigation problems. He was re-elected.

It had become apparent by 1915 that Pecos was destined to grow more than Toyah. In that year John Hibdon moved the Toyah Enterprise to Pecos where it became known as the Pecos Enterprise.<sup>14</sup> The Pecos Enterprise and the Pecos Times merged in 1917 under the name of the Enterprise and Pecos Times. Part of the time between 1917 and 1925 it was published as the Pecos Enterprise and Pecos Times, which in 1922 devoted a large amount of space to oil news and advertisements, carried national sports news, had one comic strip and one single scene cartoon. The paper did not neglect agriculture, and agitated for construction of a dam at Red Bluff to provide irrigation water for the Pecos Valley. Once the paper urged a meeting of all farmers, business men, professional men, and others in the Pecos Valley to hear a progress report on the proposed dam. People from the valley between Arno and Beunavista attended.<sup>15</sup>

The Pecos Gusher was established by Barney Hubbs in 1921 as an oil paper.<sup>16</sup> This little paper carried a large amount of oil news, also sports, local items, editorials, jokes, cartoons, and advertisements. The latter occupied about one half the space in the paper. The

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<sup>14</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>15</sup>Enterprise and Pecos Times, Vol. 37, No. 27, February 22, 1918.

<sup>16</sup>Interview, Barney Hubbs, Pecos, Texas, May 9, 1956.

Gusher was published weekly.

The two papers in Pecos, the Enterprise and Pecos Times and the Pecos Gusher, merged in 1925 under the name Pecos Enterprise and Gusher. The paper is ordinarily referred to as the Pecos Enterprise and the Gusher part of the title is printed in very small letters under the first part. Barney Hubbs is owner of the Enterprise and Joe B. Pouns is editor. The Enterprise, which was at first a weekly but since 1949 has been a semi-weekly, regularly wins first prizes in the press association contests between papers. In 1926 the Enterprise predicted great prosperity to follow the completion of the Red Bluff dam. This dam, finally built in 1937 was talked about in Pecos for many years previous to its construction. It is located on the Pecos River about forty-five miles north-west of Pecos. In 1926 the appropriation for the dam had finally passed in Congress. During 1928 the paper tried to promote interest in more paving, soft water, better hotels, and other local improvements. The paper summed up the accomplishments of 1929 as a big year. Among the things done in that year the following were outstanding: survey started on Red Bluff dam; Burford Oil Company refinery completed and put into operation; paving was completed on forty-eight blocks in Pecos; natural gas first introduced as public utility; city airport established; permanent athletic field established for the

high school; Camp & Camp Hospital built; highway construction increased; Texas and Pacific Experiment Farms established; more than fifty new residences constructed; many new buildings and service stations built; houses numbered and free postal delivery started; talking movies started; new telephones without cranks installed; and a new judicial district created.<sup>17</sup> In 1930 a one column editorial was started on the front page. This has continued with few interruptions to the present time. At various times this column has been titled "Peeking at Pecos," "Out Our Way," "Bill's Coffee Break Bulletins," and "Pecos Omnibus." These columns deal with local happenings. All through the 1930's the Enterprise boosted the Davis Mountain area as the ideal vacation spot. A special "Fifty Years of Progress Edition" was published in August of 1936. The sixty-four pages in eight sections contained much historical information on the entire west Texas area. In March of 1955 a special "Pecos Progress Day" edition was published to commemorate the completion of the Pecos Growers Gas Company natural gas pipeline. The bringing of a more economical pump fuel to the farmers was expected to aid the future development of the area.<sup>18</sup> The agricultural and

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<sup>17</sup>Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, Editorial, Vol. 44, No. 21, December 27, 1929.

<sup>18</sup>"Pecos Growers Gas Serves Farm Three Months After Building Began," Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, Vo. 69, No. 42, March 17, 1955.



business progress was portrayed.

The Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, like the earlier newspapers, has as its aim service to Pecos and Reeves County. It is particularly concerned about farm problems because the economy of the county is based on agriculture.

## CHAPTER VI

### MINERAL DEVELOPMENT

The development and production of minerals in Reeves County has never advanced as rapidly as was often predicted. The discovery of gold in 1913 was supposed to cause a gold rush even greater than the 1849 rush to California. The sulphur mines in the northwest part of the county were pictured in 1916 as potentially greater than the deposits in Louisiana. The discovery of oil in 1920 heralded the greatest oil boom the world had ever known. These predictions and more were made but the actual development has been characterized by slow growth rather than boom.

The exception to the slow growth was the gold discovery--it was very spectacular while it lasted. The gold was found during the digging of wells in two locations. The first was on Section 321, Block 13, H&GN, and the other was fifteen miles west of that location. The former is about twenty-five miles south of Pecos and the latter about one mile east of Balmorhea. The gold was reported to assay from \$300 per ton<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>"Gold, " Semi-Weekly Pecos Record Times, Vol. 26, No. 22, February 5, 1913.

to \$2,400 per ton.<sup>2</sup> This would have been very profitable digging. The Saragosa Gold Mining Company was organized and started developing the first strike. Stock was sold and shafts were put down. The operation, which had the entire populace of Reeves County in a high state of excitement, took up front page space in the papers for a time and then just faded out of the picture. According to Ray Camp, the gold strike was not a "skin game."<sup>3</sup> In his judgment the gold was there but not in commercial quantity.

From time to time big things have been predicted for the sulphur deposits lying in the northwest part of Reeves County and the northeast part of Culberson County, but the development has been on a small scale. Professor J. C. Carnera predicted, in 1916, that the Rustler Springs sulphur deposits in Reeves and Culberson counties would become the most extensively and economically worked of any in the world.<sup>4</sup> Tinally and Fisher, who had hired Carnera to make a survey of the sulphur deposits were soon shipping in machinery to start production on a large

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<sup>2</sup>Semi-Weekly Pecos Record Times, Vol. 26, No. 36, March 26, March 26, 1913.

<sup>3</sup>Interview, Ray Camp, Pecos, Texas, March 28, 1956.

<sup>4</sup>Pecos Times, Vol. 29, No. 15, April 7, 1916.

scale. They even planned to build a railroad to connect the mines with either the Texas and Pacific or the Santa Fe.<sup>5</sup> Apparently they accomplished very little from the standpoint of shipping sulphur because in 1934 it was reported that the Colloidal Plant Foods Company had installed a mill at Orla and actually shipped three carloads of sulphur for sale as a soil replenisher.<sup>6</sup> The Enterprise also stated that "in the past millions of dollars have been spent at the sulphur mines but few have been the instances in which any of the substance has actually been shipped out."<sup>7</sup> The Colloidal operation lasted only a short time. At the present time the mines are being worked by Benjamin Weigel of Pecos, in such a quiet way that few of the people of Pecos know anything about his operation. He ships approximately fifty cars a month of sulphur which is used in irrigated farming districts where the land has become salty from watering with salty water. Many crops, including cotton, will not grow satisfactorily on salty land. The sulphur neutralizes the action of the salt.

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<sup>5</sup>Enterprise and Pecos Times, Vol. 37, No. 27, December 7, 1917.

<sup>6</sup>Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, Vol. 49, No. 39, May 4, 1934.

<sup>7</sup>Loc. cit.

As is true in perhaps every oil discovery, the discovery of oil in Reeves County brought glowing prophecies of this developing into the largest oil field ever discovered. Oil drilling has been carried on almost constantly since 1910 when some wells being drilled near Toyah were showing traces at less than one hundred feet.<sup>8</sup> There was some shallow oil in that vicinity which was encountered by men drilling water wells. These windmills pumped a small amount of oil along with the water. The oil stayed on top of the water in the tank and some of the early pump irrigation farmers of the Pecos vicinity made a practice of taking a wagon of empty barrels to these tanks and dipping up oil which they used as fuel in their oil burning engines. It is reported that they ran about as well on that oil as any other.<sup>9</sup> The oil development continued and by 1913 there was an attempt to establish a refinery in Pecos.<sup>10</sup> This refinery failed to materialize. A discovery six miles north of Pecos in 1918 brought to Pecos a number of royalty and stock sales businesses. As was mentioned earlier the Pecos Gusher

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<sup>8</sup>Reeves County Record, Vol. 1, No. 4, December 12, 1910.

<sup>9</sup>Interview, M. L. Todd, Pecos, Texas, May 9, 1956.

<sup>10</sup>Semi-Weekly Pecos Record Times, Vol. 26, No. 44, April 23, 1913.

was established to print the oil news. Part of the wells brought in were gushers and part were pumpers. There was little enough going on in Reeves County between 1910 and the middle 1930's that the steady development seemed like a boom. Between 1910 and 1920 the population of Pecos dropped almost four hundred while the population of the county had a total growth of less than fifty. The twelve wildcats now being drilled in the county<sup>11</sup> represent as much activity as there was any time during the boom.

The Burford Oil Company established a refinery in Pecos in February, 1929 to make both regular and anti-knock gasoline.<sup>12</sup> These gasolines were called Crystal and Silencer and were widely advertised for several years. Crude oil from both Reeves and Winkler counties was used in the plant. During 1929 the refinery processed an average of 5,000 barrels of crude daily.<sup>13</sup> Between February and September 1,200 cars of Silencer gasoline had been shipped to the northern and eastern markets where it commanded premium prices. During 1932 and 1933 the plant was shut down several times. The name of the refinery was changed to West Texas Refining Company in 1933 for ad-

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<sup>11</sup>Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, April 2, 1956.

<sup>12</sup>Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, Vol. 44, No. 7, September 20, 1929.

<sup>13</sup>Loc. cit.

vertising purposes. A fire destroyed much of the machinery in 1934 and the plant never re-opened.

There have been natural gas discoveries in Reeves County occasionally for a number of years. At the present time the Magnolia Company is drilling northwest of Pecos and has brought in five good wells.

The total mineral production per year in Reeves County is worth more than three million dollars. The production of oil totals 326,329 barrels and the total value of oil, natural gas, sand and gravel is \$3,342,619.<sup>14</sup>

The gravel pit near Hoban has been operated on a very small scale for many years. F. M. Reeves and Sons, Inc., of Austin, bought the gravel pit in 1941 to use in connection with their main business of building bridges.<sup>15</sup> They also have a sand and gravel plant at Arno, north of Pecos, but it is not operating at present. The sand and gravel for the Pecos Airbase built during World War II came from the Reeves plant. The gravel deposit upon which the plant is located covers an area thirty miles long and ten miles wide, with a depth of sixty feet. The Reeves family owns only a small part of this deposit, which is estimated

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<sup>14</sup>Texas Almanac and Industrial Guide, 1956-7, A. H. Belo Corporation, Dallas, p. 312.

<sup>15</sup>Mary Helen Pax, "Henry F. Reeves, His Activities and Possessions," Research Paper, Sul Ross State College, January 1953, p. 7.

to contain enough gravel to supply the State of Texas for the next three hundred years.<sup>16</sup> Their operation has been confined to one section of land and only a small part of it has been used. The gravel plant, which employs an average of seventy people, also makes concrete aggregates and asphaltic concrete for buildings and highways. Much of the output of the plant is used on roads in West Texas. Another steady outlet is the concrete ditch and pipe installation businesses which are laying ditches and pipes on farms to handle irrigation water. Henry Reeves showed the value of concrete ditch as a water saver when he installed it on the experimental farms he operated from 1943 to 1951. The plant at Arno, which operated only part of 1955 and is closed now, shipped 7,534.6 tons in 67 cars over the Santa Fe during the part of 1955 in which it was operating. Forty-eight thousand tons were shipped in 1954 when the plant operated the entire year.<sup>17</sup> The plant near Hoban shipped 292,218.4 tons of gravel in 1955, with 498 carloads going by truck and the remainder being shipped on the Pecos Valley Southern Railway. The asphalt hot mix shipped from the plant in 1955 totaled 18,646.56 tons.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>17</sup>Interview, Mrs. Ann M. Cannon, Hoban Gravel Plant, May 24, 1956.

<sup>18</sup>Loc. cit.



The output during 1956 is continuing at the same rate.

The mineral development of Reeves County continues at a slow but steady pace. The sulphur mines are being worked, oil is being pumped, natural gas is flowing, and the gravel plant is operating at or near capacity. Wildcat oil wells are being drilled and the number of seismograph crews working out of Pecos varies from two to seventeen. There are also some seismograph crews operating out of Toyah. In the long run this steady development is better for the community than the sudden boom type development.

## CHAPTER VII

### AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

Agriculture has been practiced in Reeves County for many years. The earliest known inhabitants of the area, as mentioned in a previous chapter, were Indians who farmed small tracts of land adjacent to the Pecos River and Toyah Creek. These Indians, the Jumanas, were no longer living in the area when the first Mexican settlers started farming land lying along Toyah Creek. The Apache Indians were roaming the Trans-Pecos area at that time, but they did very little farming except around their village at San Solomon Spring. The first Mexican and Anglo-American settlers started farming in the same areas previously occupied by the Jumanas. This was done because the available water supply in those days before wells were drilled consisted of that in the Pecos River, Toyah Creek, and some other creeks fed by small springs which have long since ceased flowing.

About 1875 a group of German immigrants settled in the area east of Saragosa and developed farms. They, also, watered their farms from Toyah Creek. Besides the usual crops of vegetables, corn, wheat,

and alfalfa they had rather extensive peach orchards.<sup>1</sup> This was an unfortunate choice for a fruit orchard because there were not enough people in the immediate area to use the peaches produced, and the peaches could not be shipped by wagon very satisfactorily. Although they were successful in raising crops the German settlement faded out in a few years with the settlers going to other areas. The only other people to try as a group to develop agriculture in Reeves County were some Mennonites who settled southeast of Pecos in 1900 or 1901 and dug wells and put land into cultivation. They seemed to prosper and soon had a store, a school, and a post office. As is the custom of their religious group, they stayed in their own settlement, called Hay Flat, and did not mingle with the people of Pecos except when necessary. They used a very crude horse-drawn pump to bring water out of the wells for use on crops. The teacher, or teachers, of their school attended the county teachers' meetings. Although they were raising good crops they left rather suddenly in 1908 or 1909 and settled in Mexico.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>L. E. Gardner, "Beef Production in Reeves County," Thesis, Sul Ross State College, Alpine, August 5, 1955, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

The period of time starting about 1908 and extending to the present is generally considered to be the period of modern irrigated farming in Reeves County. During this period four distinct irrigation districts, or areas, have developed. These areas are the land watered by the Pecos River, the land watered from San Solomon Spring, the land starting a few miles north of Pecos and extending west and south about ten and twenty-five miles respectively, and some land in the eastern part of the county where the Reeves-Pecos county line meets the river. The two latter areas are watered from deep wells and are similar enough that they will be considered together later in this chapter.

The land along the Pecos River was developed early and achieved a great deal of fame because of the size and quality of its agricultural products. The best known products were alfalfa, grapes, apples, pears, sugar beets, and cotton, but a much larger variety was grown. Other crops included watermelons, tomatoes, potatoes, wheat, oats, and barley. At first the flow of the Pecos was dependable both as to volume and softness, but after a few years people in New Mexico started using the water from the river for irrigation and the flow in Texas decreased accordingly. With the decrease in flow a proportionately larger part of the total flow was made up of the overflow from some salt lakes in southern New Mexico and it became difficult to raise crops in Texas with the water of the Pecos.

When the flow of the river first started diminishing interested people started agitating public and congressional opinion about building a dam at Red Bluff to catch water from frequent floods to insure an adequate supply during the irrigation season. As early as 1918 the Enterprise and Pecos Times carried articles favoring construction of the dam and giving reports of the status of the appropriation bill in congress.<sup>3</sup> The dam, which created a reservoir with 310,000 acre-feet capacity, was finally built. The dam is located on the Pecos River forty-five miles northwest of Pecos and was completed in 1936 at a cost of nearly three million dollars. The flood waters have not come as regularly as anticipated. Early in 1937 a flood completely filled the reservoir and the farmers started irrigating crops. The release of water exceeded the intake and the lake was so low in 1940 that no more water could be released. There were floods in New Mexico during 1941 which filled the lake. This water lasted until 1945 and since that date the water supply has been very limited and undependable.<sup>4</sup> The best year since 1945 was 1955 in which 125,000 acre-feet of water were released to the farmers. The

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<sup>3</sup>Enterprise and Pecos Times, Vol. 37, No. 27, February 22, 1918.

<sup>4</sup>"New Mexico Flood Waters Provide Supply to Area Riverside Farms," Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, Vol. 69, No. 42, March 17, 1955.

land in irrigation districts receiving water from the Red Bluff reservoir total almost 140,000 acres with slightly over 16,000 acres of the total lying in Reeves County.<sup>5</sup> The reservoir had only 50,000 acre-feet to release for the 1956 irrigation season. This is enough water for 12,500 acres. Approximately 3,500 acres of the land in Reeves County which is subject to Red Bluff irrigation is actually farmed each year, and much of that receives supplementary water from wells.

The land along the river has not benefitted as much from the construction of the dam at Red Bluff as was anticipated. The water has not been available in what people are prone to refer to as normal amounts. The lack of a dependable water supply caused the farmers to quit growing the fruits for which the valley was so famous and grow crops like cotton and grain sorghums which need to be planted each year. Having no water for one year will not injure the cotton or grain crop the next time water is available, but a shortage will ruin fruit trees and vines. The people are still optimistic, and every report of rain in New Mexico brings the thought that "maybe Red Bluff will catch some water."

The land receiving water from San Solomon Spring has been called both the Toyah Valley and the Madera Valley but is now commonly

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<sup>5</sup>Interview, G. J. Anderson, Manager of Red Bluff Water and Power District, Pecos, Texas, May 23, 1956.

referred to as the Balmorhea Irrigation District. Even the latter term is a misnomer since the official name of the water district is Reeves County Water Improvement District Number One. What may be considered the development of modern irrigation farming in the district started about 1905 when several land syndicates from other areas bought large tracts of land along Toyah Creek and started to develop and promote their holdings. Some of the land was also developed by local people. The first cotton grown in Reeves County was produced in 1910 by H. T. Collier, who was better known in later years as a cattle rancher.<sup>6</sup> This cotton was grown near Saragosa and hauled by wagon to Pecos to be ginned. The first cotton gin in Saragosa was built in 1918 to care for the increasing cotton production of the Toyah Valley.<sup>7</sup> The Reeves County Water Improvement District Number One was organized in February, 1915.<sup>8</sup> This district includes 10,687 acres of irrigated land and is a gravity flow system.<sup>9</sup> In 1915 the land producing

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<sup>6</sup>Gardner, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>7</sup>Enterprise and Pecos Times, Vol. 38, No. 5, September 20, 1918.

<sup>8</sup>Pecos Times, Vol. 28, No. 9, February 26, 1915.

<sup>9</sup>Interview, R. L. Hathaway, Manager Reeves County Water Improvement District Number One, Balmorhea, Texas, May 22, 1956.

crops included 5,109 acres alfalfa; 1,711 acres cotton; 602 acres feed; 47 acres fruit. Besides this the farmers were feeding 13,000 sheep and keeping 200 cattle, and had 2,000 bee hives.<sup>10</sup>

Saragosa and Balmorhea were for many years the thriving business centers of the Toyah Valley. They had a small bank which was known as the Toyah Valley State Bank. This bank, originally located in Saragosa, had almost \$20,000 in assets in 1914.<sup>11</sup> Later it was moved to Balmorhea and in 1934 was absorbed by the Security State Bank of Pecos.<sup>12</sup> Saragosa was originally located on Toyah Creek about one mile south of the present location of the Saragosa post office. The town was not on the route of the Pecos Valley Southern Railroad when it was under construction, therefore part of the town moved north to the railroad. Now Saragosa is "strung out" all the way from the railroad to the old location. Saragosa had by 1940 shrunk to sixty population and four businesses.<sup>13</sup> It is about the same now but in recent years a farm chemical supply company has been added to its businesses.

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<sup>10</sup>"Crops in Toyah Valley," Pecos Times, September 17, 1915.

<sup>11</sup>Pecos Times, Vol. 27, No. 28, July 10, 1914.

<sup>12</sup>Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, Vol. 49, No. 22, January 5, 1934.

<sup>13</sup>The Handbook, II, 572.



The water supply of the irrigation district has been enlarged since the district was organized. San Solomon Spring still flows thirty-eight cubic feet per second,<sup>14</sup> or twenty-four million gallons per day, undiminished by drought or wells in the vicinity. To this seemingly inexhaustible supply has been added the overflow water of Phantom Lake, and the water of Lake Balmorhea. Phantom Lake lies just west of Toyahvale in Jeff Davis County and is the center of some interesting Indian legends. The lake is fed by mountain springs, but has no natural stream outlet, and has never overflowed. This was explained by the Indians as being perfectly natural since the Great Spirit came by on his horse each night and the horse drank enough water from the lake to last him for another journey over the entire world the next day. As evidence of this they pointed out the footprints of the horse. The Indians also told that every afternoon the Great Spirit and his horse rested under the shade of three large trees far to the west. When the early Anglo-American settlers examined the footprints of the horse they found them to be sink-holes which allowed the water to escape from the lake by going underground. They never did completely disbelieve the Indian story, however, because once when following some stray cattle

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<sup>14</sup>Texas Almanac, p. 205.

some of them found, many miles to the west of Phantom Lake in rough country in the Davis Mountains, three large petrified logs, each some fifty feet in length. The sink-holes were dammed off and the water was diverted to Balmorhea Lake when it was completed. Balmorhea Lake is about three miles south of Balmorhea on Toyah Creek. The lake, which covers 533 acres and stores 7,250 acre feet of water, is unusual in that there is a dam at each end of the lake to hold the water in. The water from Balmorhea Lake is used to supplement the spring water in supplying the irrigation district. An agricultural experiment station called the Madera Valley Experiment Station is located near Balmorhea and has worked on various problems of irrigated farming. As a result of this experimentation the farm programs in the Balmorhea district are well balanced. The principal crops are cotton, alfalfa, and grain sorghums, with some wheat, barley, and oats being grown also.

Farming in the present deep well district near Pecos was being carried on as early as 1890 to a limited extent. At that time the water came from artesian wells and shallow hand-dug pit wells.<sup>15</sup> The pit wells were about eight feet square to allow enough room to work on

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<sup>15</sup>Gardner, op. cit., p. 12.

the pump which was placed down in the pit. The pit well pumps were powered by whatever equipment the farmer could locate for the purpose. Some used gasoline burning engines, some kerosene burning, some oil burners, and some even used steam engines fired by burning mesquite roots.<sup>16</sup> Some of the old steam engines were in use as late as 1920 and some of the pit wells as late as 1935. At first the crops raised were mostly gardens and orchards producing just for the local market. The Texas and Pacific Railroad and the Commercial Club soon started boosting the Pecos area very extensively. Many people came to the area to farm. Early crops were the Pecos Challenge Cantaloupe, long staple cotton, pears, grapes, figs, milo maize, sorghum, yams, onions, sugar beets, apples, peaches, kaffir, cane, broomcorn, oats, wheat, peas, berries, plums, apricots, tomatoes, potatoes, asparagus, broccoli, alfalfa, and watermelons.<sup>17</sup> The land was so productive that by 1918 the farms advertised in the newspapers were priced as high as \$100 per acre.

Despite the wide range of productivity of the soil of Reeves County the early fame of the area was built upon the cantaloupe. The

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<sup>16</sup>Interview, M. L. Todd, Pecos, Texas, May 9, 1956.

<sup>17</sup>Semi-Weekly Pecos Record Times, Vol. 26, No. 44, March 23, 1913.

cantaloupe was one of the first things planted on the farms near Pecos, and it did very well. As early as 1915 the Texas and Pacific railroad was urging more careful packing of the cantaloupes for shipment.<sup>18</sup> The Pecos cantaloupe was served in the dining cars of the Texas and Pacific and gained wide fame all over Texas and in the North. When cantaloupes were shipped to areas where the people were familiar with the quality of the Pecos cantaloupe they commanded prices even higher than the famous Rocky Ford cantaloupe from Colorado.<sup>19</sup> Much credit has been given to various people and things connected with the production of the Pecos cantaloupe, properly called the Pecos Challenge Cantaloupe. "It challenges the world to produce its equal."<sup>20</sup>

To begin with, the land which produces the Pecos cantaloupe is unusual. The cantaloupe land begins about a mile west of Pecos and runs west and southwest for approximately fifteen miles, with a total area of less than 30,000 acres. The soil is a pale yellow and contains large amounts of minerals and saccharine, which give the melon its

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<sup>18</sup>Pecos Times, Vol. 28, No. 3, January 15, 1915.

<sup>19</sup>"Pioneer Grower Recalls History of Pecos Melon," Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, Vol. 51, No. 4, August 30, 1933.

<sup>20</sup>Loc. cit.

distinctive flavor.<sup>21</sup> This soil was originally washed down from the Sacramento Mountains in New Mexico. The Pecos cantaloupe started from good seed. The first melons grown at Pecos were a Rocky Ford melon, the Pollock No. 10. Soon another melon was adopted because it sized better for shipping with approximately ninety percent Jumbos and the remainder standards. This melon, the Superperfecto, has a smaller seed cavity than most and ships extremely well because of its firm flesh. If not delayed enroute it can be shipped to any state in the nation by rail and arrive in perfect condition. The early growers who established the reputation of the Pecos cantaloupe were D. T. McKee, M. C. Buchanan, M. L. Todd, and Bill Oden. The others give M. L. Todd credit for doing more for the Pecos cantaloupe than any other man,<sup>22</sup> and he in turn says that the reason he succeeded as a farmer at Pecos was that he started farming with D. T. McKee who helped him to avoid many of the mistakes that a dry-land farmer makes when he starts irrigating.<sup>23</sup> He says that the M. L. Todd Company is still shipping cantaloupes to people he first started shipping to thirty-five

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<sup>21</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>22</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>23</sup>Interview, M. L. Todd, Pecos, Texas, May 9, 1956.

years ago. The Pecos cantaloupe is still served in the Texas and Pacific Railroad dining cars, and is eaten by all public officials from the President of the United States down. Although little of the cantaloupe land is actually planted in cantaloupes there are three shipping sheds in Pecos to handle the sorting, crating, and shipping of the melons.

The irrigated section around Pecos was hard hit by the depression of the 1930's. From 1933 to 1946 there was less than 1,000 acres of land in the well irrigation area around Pecos actually being farmed.<sup>24</sup> In 1945 quite a number of farmers from other areas of the state became interested in the possibilities of irrigated cotton growing in the Pecos area. Many of these men were experienced irrigation farmers. Late in 1945 some of them purchased raw land and drilled wells and prepared the land for planting in the spring. For the first few years of this post war land development there were no acreage controls of cotton, but there was a guaranteed price on it. In those years, therefore, almost one hundred percent of the land planted was in cotton. The figures in Table I, supplied by Louis J. Ivey, who is known nationally as "Mr. Cotton" and has been called to Washington numerous times over the years to serve on high-level agricultural committees, show the growth of deep well irrigated farming near Pecos since 1946.

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<sup>24</sup>Gardner, op. cit., p. 15.

TABLE I  
ACRES IN CULTIVATION IN REEVES COUNTY

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<u>Year</u>	<u>Acres in Cultivation</u>
1946	16,000
1947	46,000
1948	71,000
1949	96,000
1950	106,000
1951	121,000
1952	135,000
1953	150,000
1954	165,000
1955	170,000
1956	175,000

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In 1955 Reeves County produced 2.26 bales of cotton per acre planted, and two bales of Pima cotton per acre. Both of these yields are exceptionally high and there is no other area in the United States that has produced more than one and one quarter bales of Pima per acre.<sup>25</sup> The climatic conditions and length of growing season are especially favorable for Pima. This Pima is of such high quality and tensile strength that it exceeds the Egyptian long staple cotton, which for many years held the position of world leader in high quality cotton, in quality as well as demand on the market. Present indications are that production in 1956 will be even greater per acre than in 1955. With acreage controls allowing the Reeves County farmers only 54,000 acres of cotton in the county for 1956 they are working to produce as much as possible on those acres.

In 1955 part of the cotton in the county was skip planted, either four rows cotton and four rows fallow or two rows cotton and four rows fallow alternating across the field. The 513 acres planted this way produced 2,152 bales of cotton, or approximately 4.2 bales per acre. Approximately seventy-five percent of the cotton in the county is skip

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<sup>25</sup>Interview, Louis J. Ivey, Pecos, Texas, May 23, 1956.



planted in 1956. Skip planting produces more cotton because the stalks get the sun and air better, and get more water since every row is an outside row (when planted 2 cotton 4 skip) and it has been known since the first cotton was grown under irrigation that an outside row produces more. When planting on the skip system a farmer with a one hundred acre cotton allotment is allowed to plant a two hundred acre field four rows in and four rows out.<sup>26</sup>

Farming in Reeves County is big business both from the standpoint of the \$35, 000, 000 per year income from crops in the county and from the standpoint of the total capital investment represented by the farm and by the total production cost of the crop. A section of land with good soil and good wells is worth from \$300 to \$400 per acre or \$190, 000 to \$250, 000 total. All the necessary equipment to farm a section, Caterpillars, plows, trailers, irrigation equipment, rubber tired tractors, and trucks, costs about \$40, 000. A good irrigation well is expensive, costing \$11 per foot to drill and case, \$5, 000 to \$6, 000 to install motor and gearhead, and up to \$6, 000 to install pump and liner. On a section of land three to six wells are necessary, depending upon the volume of water pumped from each. The rule of thumb followed is

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<sup>26</sup>Loc. cit.

that ten gallons of water per minute is needed for each acre watered. Thus, a 1,000 gallon per minute well will water 100 acres, a 2,500 gallon per minute well will water 250 acres. The cost of producing a cotton crop is high. Total cost, including plowing, seed, water, fertilizer, labor, picking, and ginning runs as high as \$200 per acre. With natural gas pumping fuel the cost is \$30 per acre less.

Since the cost of producing cotton using butane, diesel, or electricity was getting too high, and the cost of producing other crops with those fuels was already so high that a farmer could not depend upon making any money on other crops, Billie Sol Estes and W. W. Teague of Pecos, and John Harvey of Tulsa, Oklahoma, formed a corporation called Pecos Growers Gas Company to build a pipeline to bring natural gas to the pump motors. The charter for the company was issued by the State of Texas in January, 1954. The contract for construction of the line was signed January 15, 1955, and the first farmer to be connected for service started burning gas on March 15, 1955. The Pecos Enterprise and Gusher published a special "Pecos Progress Day" edition in which it was stated that "a more economical pump motor fuel has been brought to the Trans-Pecos farmer by Pecos Growers Gas Company, and its influence is expected to aid the area's

future development."<sup>27</sup> Pecos Growers now has over 365 miles of pipe in the ground. There are forty-two miles of 12 inch, twenty-one miles of 8 inch, forty-four miles of 4 inch, sixty-five miles of 3 inch, and over 196 miles of 2 inch. In March and April, 1956 fourteen million cubic feet of gas per day passed through the purchasing meter at the beginning of the company's twelve inch line at the El Paso Natural Gas Company's Santa Rosa cleaning plant. In July and August daily sales should reach 17,000,000 cubic feet per day. Pecos Growers now serves 539 of the 856 irrigation wells in Reeves County, 148 wells in Pecos County, and eight cotton gins. The other thirteen gins in the county have applied for service, as have most of the farmers whose wells are still on another fuel. The cost of ginning cotton is reduced from \$1.79 per bale to \$.26 per bale by using natural gas. Cost of watering a cotton crop is reduced from \$50 per acre to \$20 per acre by using natural gas.<sup>28</sup>

The pumping cost reduction has encouraged many of the farmers to try to grow more crops than just cotton. Paul Davidson grew a mixture to cut for silage consisting of Mexican June Corn, Japanese Cane,

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<sup>27</sup>"Pecos Growers Gas Serves Farm Three Months After Building Began," Pecos Enterprise and Gusher, Vol. 69, No. 42, March 17, 1955.

<sup>28</sup>Interview, J. C. Cotton, Manager Pecos Growers Gas Company, Pecos, Texas, May 23, 1956.

Hegari, and red top cane which produced an average of twenty-two tons ensilage per acre.<sup>29</sup> Milo grown for grain produced from 3,500 to 6,000 pounds per acre, and fifteen tons silage per acre. Corn produced from 65 to 110 bushels per acre, barley from 65 to 85 bushels, and alfalfa seed cut from 600 to 1,200 pounds per acre. In 1956 Reeves County has a total of 3,000 acres of crops such as onions, broccoli, cabbage, lettuce, and asparagus. None of these crops were grown during 1955.

Pecos has a number of businesses which are dependent upon farming. These include the Western Cottonoil Company's oil mill which employs 150 people full time and can process 165 tons of cotton seed per day. Besides the usual farm implement and supply houses there are a number of farm chemical distributors. More fertilizer and insecticides are used here than in areas where total production costs are lower. Just a little more insecticide or fertilizer at the right time will save a crop from destruction by insects or cause it to put on just a little more cotton which increases the farmer's income accordingly.

Irrigation water is expensive, and much is lost by seepage in

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<sup>29</sup>Interview, Louis J. Ivey, Pecos, Texas, May 26, 1956.

open dirt ditches. Many of the farmers are installing concrete ditch liners to carry the water from the well to the field where it is to be used. This saves about one third of the water for use on crops. There are approximately 100 miles of concrete ditch in the county at present.<sup>30</sup>

With improved methods of production, concrete ditch, and low cost fuel the Reeves County farmers will be better able to stand a decline in price than were their predecessors of several years ago.

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<sup>30</sup>Interview, Mrs. Ann M. Cannon, Hoban Gravel Plant, May 24, 1956.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

Reeves County has changed a great deal over the years and the greatest changes have been brought about by the agricultural development. The county has developed schools, churches, lodges, businesses, highways, and other things which emerge when an area changes from the frontier to settled country. Most of these things are dependent to a large degree upon the agriculture and the people it has brought to the county. If the land in the county were still used entirely for ranching it would support more than the one person for each five square miles, such as in 1880, but it would not support the population which is dependent upon the farming. The population of Pecos is approximately 15,000 and the population of the county is approximately 19,000. The agriculture, which has been riding a boom since 1946, is leveling off into a steady growth on a sound basis. Cotton allotments are being reduced and the farmers are experimenting with other crops. Some of the larger canning and freezing companies have leased land in the county and are growing vegetables on an experimental basis. Since the success or failure of vegetable raising is dependent upon having

facilities to handle the crop, this is encouraging many of the local farmers to plant some vegetables. It would be a relatively easy matter to adapt the cantaloupe shipping sheds to ship fresh vegetables, but before the area experiences a large scale development of vegetable farming there will need to be a canning and quick-freezing plant in Pecos. When a company such as Van Camp is convinced of the quality of vegetables produced the processing plant will follow. With the Reeves County area developing as the outstanding producer of Pima cotton in the nation it is reasonable to expect the establishment of a cotton mill to make high grade cloth from this quality fiber. There are some individuals and groups in Pecos who have access to the source of money that can handle such projects.

The reason many of the farmers are experimenting with vegetables is that the land will grow them in high quality and quantity, the climate is ideal, and it is possible to clear as much as \$1,000 per acre growing vegetables.<sup>1</sup> As long as the economy of the United States stays stable the Reeves County area will thrive, and the farmers are now better able to stand a decline in price than the farmers were years ago when the area experienced the rapid decline of agriculture.

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with Louis J. Ivey, Pecos, Texas, May 26, 1956.

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