The Winedale Story

The Land and Early Inhabitants

Winedale is situated in a landscape of alternating regions of Post Oak Savannah and Blackland Prairie vegetation. Bounded on the west by the Edwards Plateau and the Cross Timbers and Prairies regions and on the east by the Gulf Prairies and Marshes region, Winedale is located between the Brazos and Colorado Rivers and traversed by spring-fed Cummins Creek. This is an area of fertile soil, mild climate, and abundant wildlife, timber, and water. The region’s early Tonkawa inhabitants represented a transitional culture that featured elements of other native cultures around them. The area became a crossroads of trade among peoples of the Mississippi Valley, the Gulf of Mexico, and western Texas and Mexico.

Today the land around Winedale features a combination of woods and prairies. Oaks, hickory, and juniper with an understorey of yaupon characterize the woods. The prairies may be remnants of original native tall-grass prairies, imported grasses, or mixtures of the two. Wildlife abounds, including white-tailed deer, raccoon, opossum, coyote, squirrel, gray fox, beaver, wild fowl, and songbirds. Natural resources include sand, gravel, clay, lignite, and oil and gas.

Among the native plants of the region is the American Centuary (Sabatia angularis), which flowers at Winedale in the spring. Naturalist Gideon Linneceum brought his knowledge of Choctaw herbal healing from Mississippi to Long Point, just a few miles from Winedale, in 1848. He collected hundreds of plants in central Texas and wrote extensive commentaries on their medicinal qualities. The American Centuary is a bitter herb, about which Linneceum wrote:

“Every part of this beautiful little plant is a sure and strong biter, devoid of unctuosity... It is one among the rest of our tonics, promoting digestion. It may be profitably employed in any form of fever. In yellow fever it has been very useful in the hands of the skilful. It is used in tincture, or in infusion, taken 3 or 4 times a day on an empty stomach in such doses as the stomach will bear.”

Archaeological investigations along nearby Cummins Creek have turned up many artifacts. Projectile points, pottery, and food and plant remains reveal significant details of early Tonkawa culture. The evidence suggests that early groups inhabiting the area were marginal to ascendant Comanche and Caddoan cultural complexes. The Tonkaws were positioned on the southern periphery of the bison range, as well as on major east-west and north-south trade routes. This population was open to many and varied cultural influences, including both nomadic hunting and sedentary agriculture. The result was a culture displaying a conglomerate of lifestyles.

The Tonkawa population of central Texas suffered a steady decline over the centuries, accelerated after European contact by disease, Comanche pressure, and environmental hardships. Following his expedition to Texas in 1828, French naturalist Jean Louis Berlandier published a book on the Indians of Texas that included watercolors based on firsthand observations.

The Tonkawas befriended the Spanish and Mexicans, and later the Anglo settlers of Texas, as allies against their common Comanche foes. Nonetheless, their days in Texas were fast drawing to a close. In the mid-1800s the Tonkawas were removed to reservations farther north. Only from this later period of their decline do we have photographs that show the true face of the Tonkawa people who once roamed the Post Oak Savannah around Winedale.