TWENTIETH-CENTURY ROUND TOP AND WINEDALE continued to flourish economically until the Depression and World War II. The decline of the region’s economy affected the makeup of the area’s labor force and again altered the social landscape of the region. At Winedale, many of these forces were reflected in the activities of the Wagner family, who resided in the old Lewis-Wagner House until the death of Joseph Wagner, Jr., in 1961. By that time the community known historically as Winedale had declined, and the site was about to assume a new role in the cultural history of Texas.

Cotton was the predominant cash crop for Fayette County farmers since the days of the Austin Colony. The Depression of the 1930s, however, knocked the bottom out of the cotton market. Small family farmers turned to subsistence growing and tightened their belts to ride out the hard times. Joseph Wagner, Jr.’s, advice to local farmers to sell mineral rights to their land at $1.00 an acre helped some of them to save their farms. Hardest hit were the tenant farmers and sharecroppers attached to larger lands, whose owners took federal subsidies, evicted their renters, and replaced them with machinery. Though World War II helped to end the Depression, large-scale, mechanized agriculture began to replace the smaller traditional farms. For many Fayette County Germans, Croats, Anglos, and African Americans, however, family land was an extension of the family itself, and traditional small-scale farming continued with stubborn persistence.

The family of Calvin and Lucia Rhone lived in Fayette County for almost a hundred years. The Rhones were farmers and teachers and active in the Baptist church and fraternal societies. Eight of their twelve children were born on a farm near Round Top, and six of them attended Prairie View A & M and became teachers. Daughter Urrisa Rhone Brown taught for many years in the Round Top-Carmine area. The Rhones left Round Top many years ago. As with other African American families, some of the Rhone children moved to Houston. Several of their ancestors are buried in the Mt. Zion Cemetery in Plum in western Fayette County.

Through the first half of the 20th century, the Waggers farmed their land and ran several local businesses, including a cotton gin, feed and grist mills, garage and gas station, blacksmith shop, and a general store and saloon that became a favorite Winedale gathering place. The property around the Lewis-Wagner House was studded with outbuildings (now removed) that reflected the farmstead’s many activities: the cultivation of cotton, corn, sorghum, and peach and pecan orchards; cattle, chicken, and hog raising; and gardening and bee-keeping. Daily life on the farmstead was labor intensive. The Wagner family toiled in the fields alongside several black tenant families who worked for modest wages, food, housing, clothing, and medical care. By the late 1950s, local agriculture and the businesses that served it had waned. The workers moved on, the cotton gin was dismantled and sold, and the Wagner family sold the house and farmstead in 1961.