

The History of Forest Hill, Texas

Forest Hill has existed as a community since around 1860. It started as a farming community, gradually became a village and has grown to a thriving city with a population of over 13,000, covering 4.2 miles in 2010.

There is a mixed population including many ethnic groups along with older citizens who have lived in Forest Hill all their lives and remember when it was a rural village. Younger residents who have moved to the City in the past few years are both professionals and tradesmen on their way upward. Forest Hill was originally known as Brambleton Station. Settlers found the land attractive with its meadows and woods and the area began to grow. In 1870, the entire population of Tarrant County was 5,000 according to the U.S. Census. The population of the City of Fort Worth was only about 500 at that time with Birdville and Mansfield all having a population near that. By 1905 there were two streets in Forest Hill, Old Mansfield Highway and Forest Hill Drive. Mail was delivered to Brambleton, Texas, at the post office that faced the railroad near where the famous Forest Hill Trade Days is located in the 3500 block of Bisbee Street. There was a telephone exchange owned by a private company in Everman and eavesdropping on the conversations on the large party line was great sport in those days.

An electric interurban streetcar ran from Cleburne through Forest Hill and on into Fort Worth hourly during the early 1900s. Forest Hill originally had its own school system that extended to an area near the Masonic Home and School on Wichita Street in Fort Worth. The Polytechnic area was also included in the school district. L.C. Collier was the first principal at the one and only schoolhouse.

In about 1912, the inhabitants of the community saw the need for some type of water supply. Some private citizens drilled what was called a "crooked hole well" and started operating a private water system, which was used until the early 1940s. In about 1944, the Trentman Company began developing the Twin Oaks Addition and about the same time, Johnson Campbell Company started developing the Forest Oaks Addition. These developments caused the owners of the private water system to realize the need for a more adequate water supply so they sold the system to the Texas Water Company.

In early 1946, 23 people petitioned County Judge Clarence Kraft to call an election to see if the citizens of Forest Hill Village wanted to incorporate. The election was called and on March 16, 1946, by a vote of 75 for and 26 against, Forest Hill was incorporated. The population of Forest Hill was about 300 at that time. George Wright was elected the first Mayor and served during 1946. The first meetings were held in his home. The first City Council meeting was held on May 7, 1946. Action taken by the aldermen during this period included having streetlights installed at 11 locations. A candidates' picnic was held on June 22,

1946, at which local Democratic candidates spoke and soft drinks and sandwiches were sold to help raise money for petty expenses of the village. Franchise ordinances are the first on file for the City. The first signs were put up marking the town in 1946. Mayor Wright died in office in 1946 and \$20.00 was spent on flowers for the funeral. The expenditures for the entire city for that year were only \$98.16. Other disbursements included \$34.00 for signs, \$26.04 for streetlights, \$15.00 for election expenses and \$3.12 for maps. The City had a balance of almost \$625.00 in the bank at the end of the year.

S.E. Bostwick was elected Mayor on January 11, 1947. In February, the first Planning and Zoning Commission was appointed which included L.T. Burford, Ted Williamson and S.A. Phillips. A franchise to Forest Hill Water Service granted the minimum rate of \$2.00 for 3,000 gallons of water in early 1947. Early City Council meetings were held in the homes of the members of the Council and their wives frequently served refreshments, usually iced tea and cookies. Some early ordinances dealt with licensing of liquor, beer and wine sales, regulating speed of automobiles, and an occupation tax that was passed for patrons of the movie house which existed on Mansfield Highway. There were also numerous "nightspots" on Mansfield Highway including the notorious Jack's Place which went up in flames in the 1950's, many believing it to be arson ordered by organized crime members.

In April, 1947, Roy F. Mahaney was elected Mayor. The Aldermen were Richard E. Glover, A.J. McQuerry, Ted Williamson, Herbert Craig and Art E. Ewing. Clyde Dodson was appointed Tax Collector with a five percent commission for taxes collected. A drawing was held to determine which Aldermen would serve one year or two years so that half the Council could be elected every two years. Southwestern Bell Telephone was given a 20-year franchise for service in the area. The Fire Department at the U.S. Public Health Service Hospital (now the Federal Prison) served the City at this time and there was much discussion about formation of a volunteer fire department.

On April 8, 1949, an ordinance was adopted to accept the provisions of Title 28 of the revised Civil Statutes of Texas of 1925 relative to towns, cities and villages. This provided for a village to petition to become a city when the population reached 500. The name was changed from Forest Hill Village to the City of Forest Hill. By 1954, 33 ordinances were on file. The Volunteer Fire Department, the Police Department, and Corporation Court had been created. The population continued to increase and the need for expansion of the water system was great. In 1955, the Council engaged the services of engineers and plans were formulated for a program to improve these facilities. A bond election was held and the city was authorized by the people to sell bonds and purchase the water system from Texas Water Company, to install its own sewer system, build a sewage disposal plant and to install transmission mains and lines so that

all septic tanks could be phased out. Carrie Craig, daughter of deceased Mayor Wright, served as the clerk for the water department. She took the money collected for water bills home at night and hid it in her refrigerator to keep it safe. By 1959, the population had reached 2,100 and with the potential growth now evident, the City Council realized that additional income had to be found for the maintenance and upkeep of the City, so they increased the tax rate. In 1959, petitions were circulated and a controversial wet-dry election was held and the citizens voted for Forest Hill to be dry. It was a heated election, setting the tone for future elections in the City. Several nightspots on the Mansfield Highway were vacated and other businesses took their places. With the aid of the State Department of Health, Education and Welfare, a Comprehensive Plan was proposed for the City of Forest Hill in 1960 so that the city might grow and prosper in a well-planned, orderly manner. This plan was updated by the adoption of a new comprehensive plan in 1973 with other updates occurring periodically. By 1963, Loop 820 (I-20) was completed and Forest Wood, Highland Forest, Sherwood Forest, Rosebud and Trailwood Additions were well underway followed shortly by Forest Edge and Carriage Hill Additions.

Volunteers completed the Fire Station on Wanda Lane in 1965 and a big celebration was held including a fish fry. The population had grown to about 5,000. Heritage Addition began development in 1966 and the area south of Carriage Hill known as Woodbridge was annexed. A bond election was held in 1966, enabling the City to buy a second fire truck and purchase the former construction and insurance office for Collier and Stephenson, (developers of the Heritage Addition) for City Hall. A 500,000-gallon overhead water storage tank at Forest Hill Drive and Lon Stephenson Road was constructed and many needed storm drains were installed plus improvements to the water and sewer system were made. Another bond election was held in 1974 enabling the City to provide its portion of the funds for the reconstruction and widening of Wichita Street, updating the water system and building the Community Center at 6800 Forest Hill Drive. Plans were also approved at that time for the South Creek Linear Park.

In the early 1970s, many other changes began to take place in Forest Hill. With the availability of nice housing at a reasonable cost, upwardly mobile African-Americans and Caucasians moved into the community making a quiet transition. In 1974, an application for a historical marker for the Forest Hill Cemetery was submitted to the State Historical Society which was approved, making the cemetery the only recognized site in the City. In 1976, the Forest Hill Home Rule Charter was approved giving the City the power to annex adjoining land and to better govern itself. This was one of the first chances for African-Americans to become involved within the community including Donald Walker and Robert Davis, who served on that Commission which was chaired by Donald Day. Walker was elected to the City Council in 1977 marking the start of the new era in which Forest Hill would become a trendsetter in the state for electing individuals

without regard to race, color or creed. Walker served as Mayor Pro Tempore during the three terms J. Maurice Oakes was Mayor. In 1985, Walker defeated Oakes in the Mayoral race making him the first African-American Mayor in Tarrant County and thrusting Forest Hill into the limelight with news media reporting frequently on the activities of the Council. Walker served until 1995 when he did not seek re-election.

In 1984, a bond election was called but only one proposal, a request for a fire truck, passed. The Council called another election as soon as possible after that and a proposal asking for \$1.5 million for street improvements passed. A request for funds to reconstruct Forest Hill Drive and to build a municipal complex was again defeated. In 1985, the City Council voted unanimously to issue certificates of obligation for reconstruction of Forest Hill Drive. Council Members stated that the widening of the "rough road" was necessary to promote development. Development of the Forest Hill Drive area blossomed and a shopping center adjoining the major grocery store was completed and another major shopping center was soon on the drawing board. Economic development continued with the addition of major businesses along Southeast Loop 820 after the developer and the City worked with state officials to construct an access road during the reconstruction of Interstate 20 (Loop 820) which was widened to eight lanes. A bond election in 1989 set aside funds to remodel a 9,000 square foot building at the corner of Forest Hill Drive and Horton Road to be used as a police facility. The Police Department had been housed at the old city office building at 3415 Horton Road since the city offices were moved to 6800 Forest Hill Drive in 1968. Public Works took over the old Police Department location after their building was remodeled.

The first Public Library was opened in the late 1980s and was housed at the Forest Hill Mall. Due to the work of volunteers and the donation of books from across the county, the Library was quickly accredited and remained active until it was closed in mid-1995 during a budget crunch. In 1994, a 4B Sales Tax was approved by voters to supply funds for much needed street improvements to enhance economic development. In 1995, a major layoff of city employees was necessary due to budget shortfalls and a deficit in city funds. However, voters approved a proposition in 2000 providing a ¼-cent sales tax for funding and forming the Forest Hill Library District. Trustees were elected to that Board which brought a state-of-the-art library facility to the 6900 block of Forest Hill Drive. A proposal for a ¼-cent tax for a Crime Prevention and Control District was defeated in that same 2000 election but after a better educational process with the public, the "crime tax" was approved in another election in 2001. That tax remained in effect until it was defeated upon renewal and soon after that, a ¼-cent sales tax was enacted to be used for streets. An urban renewal process continues in Forest Hill with dilapidated dwellings being torn down and replaced with beautiful new homes, including the RoseCrest Estates subdivision.

In 2010, City Hall moved into the east half of the Chase Bank Building at California Parkway and Wichita providing greater visibility and room to expand. The City has since purchased the entire building and leases the space to the bank. Another building on Horton Road was purchased for Public Works. The old City Hall has been remodeled and is now utilized as the Police & Fire Substation. The old Public Works Building house all city historical documents and memorabilia.

The population continues to evolve with a large number of Hispanics making the rural city their home, further broadening the community. Economic development continues thrives in the community; new home construction is up and the crime rate is down. Major employers include:

- Conatser Construction
- United Rentals
- Horton Tree Service/NES
- Starbucks
- Global Signs
- J. Wales Enterprises
- TAS Environmental
- Chase Bank
- QT
- Luby's Cafeteria

Forest Hill has a distinct suburban atmosphere and has been called the "City of Brotherly Love" and the "City with a Heart." Other nicknames have included "Church Hill" due to the number of churches and "The City with a Future." "Gateway to the East and West" was considered for a short while, but, the current branding, "*Community Driven*," was developed due to the continued involvement of citizens.

As residents, businesses and city government work together to build positive relationships, economic and residential growth will flourish now and into the next century. And as we continue making and executing those plans, we will strive to focus on innovation and integrity and make improvements that will increase the City of Forest Hill's opportunities for growth and drive economic stability.

Our Vision Statement

In our on-going commitment to the citizens and businesses in the City of Forest Hill, we will endeavor each day to be fiscally responsible, knowing that we are held accountable for our actions, to move the city in a forward progression of economic development, to provide the best customer service to those who live, work and play within our city limits, and to be fair and honest in all that we do. With passion, integrity and professionalism, from within City Hall to our elected officials, we will be the leader of the Community Driven spirit that will guide the success of Forest Hill into the future.