

Section

1

Earning a Living

Main Ideas

1. Most Texans in the early statehood period made their livings in agriculture or related fields.
2. Merchants and professionals could be found in towns.

Why It Matters Today

Most cotton in Texas was grown on large farms to be sold as a cash crop. Use current events sources to learn about large-scale farming today.



TEKS: 4C, 8A, 8B,
10B, 13A, 13B, 20A,
21B, 21C, 21H, 22D

myNotebook

Use the annotation tools in your eBook to take notes on how people made their livings in frontier Texas.

Key Terms and People

- cotton belt
- planters
- Richard King
- Aaron Ashworth
- Cristóbal Benavides
- gristmills
- tanneries

The Story Continues

On a typical day, Mathilda Doebbler Wagner was up before dawn. She started a fire in the stove and made coffee. Then Wagner rounded up the calves, milked the cows, and made breakfast for her family. After breakfast came other chores, including making butter and feeding animals. By day's end, Wagner had made two more meals and worked in the fields—all while tending a baby.



Farmers and Planters

During the early statehood period, most Texans, like Wagner, lived in rural areas. According to the 1850 census, only 5 percent of Texans lived in cities. Most of the remaining 95 percent lived and worked on farms or ranches. Agriculture continued to expand as more people moved into the state. The number of farms in Texas more than doubled between 1850 and 1860. Most of these farms were small family operations, but others were plantations covering thousands of acres.

Besides the foods their families needed to live, many Texas farmers grew a cash crop—typically cotton—to sell for profit. Sugarcane, another cash crop, was grown near the coast and along river bottoms. Among food crops, corn remained the most important, although sweet potatoes and wheat were also very popular. Farmers also raised cows for milk and dairy products and hogs for meat. Butter, chickens, and eggs could be sold to earn extra money. As the demand for wool grew, sheep became an important source of income for some farms.

The most valuable crop in Texas, though, was cotton. By the 1850s Texas was an important part of the **cotton belt**, the southern region that grew most of the cotton in the United States. Cotton production in Texas rose dramatically in the 1850s—from fewer than 60,000 bales in 1849 to more than 400,000 bales in 1859. These bales were shipped from Texas ports to northern states or to Europe to be made into cloth. The demand for—and price of—cotton rose as textile factories bought up supplies.

Because cotton was so valuable, a complex economic system developed around its production. The bulk of Texas cotton was grown on plantations in East and Central Texas or along the Gulf Coast. In addition, family farms both large and small grew cotton to be sold in Texas markets. Because these farms were so focused on cotton, they did not produce much food. As a result, they depended on small farms in their areas to provide them with meat and produce.

Growing cotton required many hours of labor. Seeds had to be planted, cotton picked, and fibers separated. Much of this work was done by slaves. About one in every four families in Texas owned slaves. Most of these families owned few slaves—fewer than five—and spent much of their time in the fields alongside them. A few wealthy **planters**, or large-scale farmers, held many slaves. Large planters sometimes owned 100 or more slaves, while most smaller planters owned between 10 and 20.

Planters lived more comfortably than most people. They wore fine clothing and ate fancy dinners. Their homes ranged from fairly simple structures to huge mansions. These homes often had expensive furniture from New Orleans or Europe. Along with their wealth, planters had power and status. Although there were only about 2,000 planters in Texas in 1860, they controlled the state's economy and government.

Reading Check Finding the Main Idea How did Texas farmers adapt to the environment?



VIDEO

Cotton

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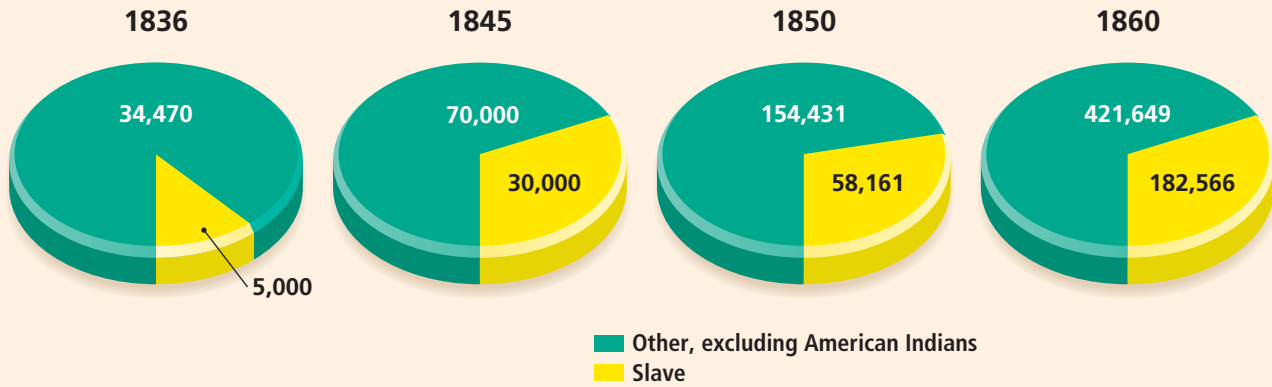
Interpreting Visuals

Frontier farms. Actors at the Barrington Living History Farm in Washington-on-the-Brazos portray life on a farm from the 1840s. **What activities can you see being performed?**



Image Credit: ©Earl Nottingham, TPWD

Texas Population



Source: *The Handbook of Texas*

Interpreting Charts As the population of Texas grew, so did the number of slaves. What percentage of the state's population was made up of slaves in 1860?

★ Ranchers

After cotton, cattle was the state's second-most-valuable export. The value of beef and other products from cattle increased more than 400 percent from 1850 to 1860. Among the products cattle provided were food, hides, and tallow—animal fat used to make soap and candles. Most cattle were sold locally to the highest bidder, but some ranchers in this period began driving herds to markets in Illinois and California. Others drove cattle to the port towns of Aransas Pass, Copano, and Indianola. From there the cattle were shipped to New Orleans.

Two particularly successful ranchers were **Richard King** and Gideon Lewis. In the early 1850s, they bought thousands of acres in the Santa Gertrudis land grant. The ranch they founded—the King Ranch—soon dominated South Texas ranching. **Aaron Ashworth**, a free African American, owned a large ranch in southeastern Texas. In the Laredo area, the Benavides family were also successful ranchers. **Cristóbal Benavides**, for example, ran huge cattle- and sheep-ranching operations. Although most ranches were run by men, a few were owned by women like Sarah “Sally” Scull in South Texas.

Reading Check Drawing Inferences and Conclusions Why was it more profitable for ranchers to sell their cattle in other states?

That's Interesting!

The Mavericks

According to tradition, San Antonio rancher and lawyer Samuel Maverick was often paid for legal services in cattle. Maverick refused to brand his cows, so people would refer to any unbranded animal as “Maverick's.” The word *maverick* eventually came to mean “unbranded cattle.” Today the word also describes someone who acts independently.

★ Trades, Professions, and Industry

As you have read, few Texans lived in towns during this period. Most towns of the time were “mere villages, consisting of long rows of log or board houses,” as one Texan noted. In 1850 the largest town in the state was Galveston. By 1860 San Antonio, with 8,235 people, had passed it in population to become the largest. Other large towns included Houston,

Jefferson, Marshall, Nacogdoches, and New Braunfels. Even though it was the state capital, Austin had fewer than 1,000 residents when Texas became a state.

Even in towns, most people were somehow involved in agriculture. Merchants provided farmers and ranchers in surrounding areas with goods. Blacksmiths, masons, carpenters, and saddle and wagon makers made products that farmers needed. Towns did provide other services as well, including hotels and laundry businesses. They were also home to various professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, ministers, and teachers. Doctors faced many challenges, as one Texan recalled.

TEXAS VOICES

“Injuries, deaths, and murders were to be expected by the frontiersman but, nevertheless, they always came as a shock. . . . Medicine and surgery were crude. It was my lot to help hold some patients for the doctor when he was amputating limbs without anesthetic [pain-killing drug].”

—James Buckner Barry, quoted in *Scalpels and Sabers*,
by Sylvia Van Voast Ferris and Eleanor Sellers Hoppe

Industry was only a small part of the Texas economy. As in the rest of the South, planters in Texas preferred to invest in land and slaves rather than factories. Most of the state’s industries were family-owned and tied to agriculture. The state’s largest industry was flour milling, and most towns had **gristmills**—machines that ground grain into meal or flour. Cotton gins were also common, while **tanneries** were built to prepare animal hides. Lumber-rich East Texas also had a number of sawmills.

In an agricultural society like Texas, cash was scarce. Most people grew or made at home much of what they needed. The demand for most manufactured items was low, and most of the manufactured items Texans purchased came from out of state.

Reading Check Identifying Cause and Effect What was the basis of the Texas economy, and how did that affect Texas industry?

Analyzing Primary Sources
Drawing Inferences and Conclusions Why does Barry say that “medicine and surgery were crude”?



Section 1 Review



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ONLINE QUIZ

1. Define and explain:

- cotton belt
- planters
- gristmills
- tanneries

2. Identify and explain

the significance of the following in Texas history:

- Richard King
- Aaron Ashworth
- Cristóbal Benavides

3. Summarizing

Copy the graphic organizer below. Use it to show how most Texans earned a living.

Farms
Ranches
Towns

4. Finding the Main Idea

- a. Why did cotton planters make large profits?
- b. Where did most Texans live in the 1850s?
- c. How do you think geography shaped how people made their livings?

5. Writing and Critical Thinking

myWriteSmart

Making Generalizations and Predictions

Imagine that you are a Texan in the 1850s. Write a letter to a friend explaining why you think cotton production will increase.

Consider the following:

- who is coming to Texas
- the demand for cotton