

Legends of the Lampasas



Lampasas River Retreat

Your story
starts here



River of Riches

Winding deep through the Heart of Texas, the Lampasas is a stream from which tales flow of cowboys, outlaws, treasure and more

A good story always begins close to home. Yours begins with your closest community, Ding Dong, an unincorporated area in Central Texas.

Often making national lists of unusual place names, Ding Dong was founded along the Lampasas River in southwestern Bell County. It was named after the owners of the country store that started it all. The store was built in the 1930s by Julius Bell and his nephew, Bert Bell. As the story goes, they hired the artist C.C. Hoover to make a sign for their fledgling business. The finished

sign had two bells on it with Julius in one and Bert in the other. Hoover also lettered the words Ding Dong on the sign. As the community grew around the store, it took on the name 'Ding Dong'.

The store remains in business off the east side of State Highway 195 and is the landmark to prepare to turn into your Lampasas River Retreat.

The Lampasas River, for which your new home is named, is 73 miles south of Waco, 150 miles south of Dallas. Austin is 108 miles south and San Antonio is 160 miles away. By the way, San Antonio is Central Texas' southern city. Waco is the northern point.

The river begins near the city of Hamilton and flows southeast for 75 miles through Lampasas, Burnet and Bell Counties to a man-made reservoir called Stillhouse Hollow Lake. It converges in East Bell County with the Leon River to form the Little River



just east of Belton. Wildlife is plentiful, with the most prevalent being deer, armadillos, raccoons, squirrels, skunks, rabbits, feral hogs, songbirds and birds of prey – and yes – even cougars. The river also is the furthest most natural outpost for a few of the nation's alligator population. They are spotted mostly sunning themselves near the mouth of Stillhouse Hollow Lake.

Fishing is popular in the river and the lake. The most often species caught in the river are Largemouth bass,

channel catfish and white bass.

Most believe the river's name was borrowed from the Mexican town of Lampazos. Spaniards were introduced to that stream in 1721, when the Aguayo expedition crossed it at its confluence with other streams to form the Little River.

Tonkawas, Apaches, and Comanches were drawn to the mineral springs in the Lampasas area long before the first white settlers arrived. Flowing springs, rivers, and streams filled with fish, and a countryside teeming with game such as white-tail deer, turkeys, pronghorn antelope and even bison made the area popular spot for Indians to hunt, fish and camp.

Early European settlers also were attracted to the area. After the bison were exterminated by hide hunters, settlers found the area ideally suited for the grazing of cattle, sheep and goats. The mineral springs continued to draw visitors, but instead of Indians, it was newcomers looking for cures for ailments in the



cool sulphur water.

On the property's east side is the famed Chisholm Trail. Texas ranchers using the Chisholm Trail had their cowboys start cattle drives from either the Rio Grande area or San Antonio. They joined the Chisholm Trail at the Red River, at the border between Texas and Oklahoma Territory. They continued north to the rail head of the Kansas Pacific Railway in Abilene. In Kansas, the cattle would be sold and shipped eastward. The trail is named for Jesse Chisholm, a multiracial trader from Tennessee of half Cherokee descent. Together with scout Black Beaver, he developed the trail to transport his goods from one trading post to another. The two men were the first to drive cattle north along this route.

To the south of the secluded 43 acres, and located on the northeastern edge of the Texas Hill Country, is Georgetown. The Williamson County seat was the country's No. 7 fastest growing city as of May 2019. Georgetown is a mere 30 miles north of trendy tech-town Austin. But here is a surprising fact. Despite its conservative roots, Georgetown, not Austin, was the first Texas city to operate entirely on renewable energy. Georgetown also is home to the oldest university in Texas. Southwestern University began in 1875 through the combina-

**Georgetown,
not Austin,
was the first Texas
city to operate entirely
on renewable energy.**



Whitetail bucks, cougars, raccoons and more call the Lampasas River home

tion of four campuses, the oldest of which started in 1840, hence the historical claim. The private, four-year undergraduate liberal arts college is about one-half mile from Georgetown's historic square.

Southwestern quickly found a rival to its north.

Belton, Bell County's seat of government, is home to the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, which has Miriam "Ma" Ferguson, Texas' first female governor, among its notable alumni. UMHB comprises eight colleges: The McLane College of Business, College of Christian Studies, College of Education, College of Humanities and Sciences, Scott and White College of Nursing, College of Visual and Performing Arts and the Graduate School. Its history dates to the time before Texas became a U.S. state. Its original charter was granted by the Republic of Texas (before

Not to be outdone, a few Scottish settlers decided to have their own 'cultural and educational' stop, this time to service cowboys working the Chisholm Trail.

statehood) in 1845 as the female department of Baylor University in Waco. Classes began in May 1846, in a small wooden building on a hillside at Independence in Washington County. The first class had 24 male and female students. While it was a coeducational institution, the classes were separated by gender.

Baylor College's coeducation lasted until 1851, when it was divided into a Female Department and a Male Department. Each began occupying separate buildings about a mile apart at the campus in Independence.

The location was short lived. The changing demographics of Texas and relocation of the local railroad made it tough for college students to get transportation to Independence.

Both colleges were relocated in 1886 to their permanent homes in Central Texas. The women's division moved to Belton, where operations continued as Baylor Female College.

The men's division moved to Waco and merged with coeducational Waco University. It continues

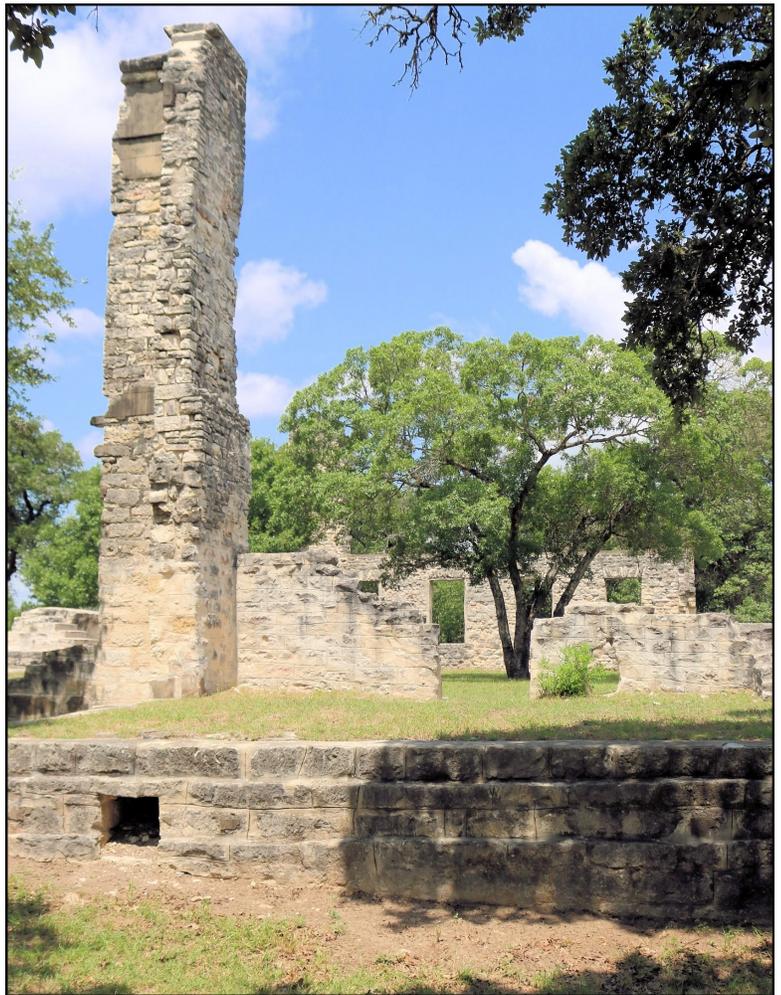
today as Baylor University and is one of the Big 12 football conference campuses. Not to be outdone, a few Scottish settlers decided to have their own "cultural and educational" stop, this time to service cowboys working the Chisholm Trail.

In 1866, Salado became part of the busy Chisholm Trail as thousands of cattle were driven up Main Street on the way to Kansas. The cattle would pass through the area for almost two decades, bringing with them some of history's infamous characters.

Salado's college had a short lifespan due to three fires. Established Feb. 6, 1860, the college operated for 41 years before being destroyed by fire in 1901. It was

rebuilt, only to burn to the ground once more in 1902. Villagers again rebuilt the campus only to watch a blaze destroy it a third time in 1924. That fire dealt the final death blow. This time, the citizens could not afford to rebuild.

The ruins remain to this day off Salado's South Main Street for tourists to browse.



ABOVE: Salado's college ruins remain just south of the village at College Hill off Main Street. **LEFT:** A memorial marker, set in local limestone, tells the history of the doomed college site.

Its legend, one of many for such a small village, is captured in the outdoor musical drama, "Salado Legends," performed annually at the Tablerock Amphitheater. Locally written by Salado playwright Jackie Mills, Legends is one of only two musical period pieces admitted to the Library of Congress.

Salado itself incorporated in 1867 to build a bridge across Salado Creek. That did not happen. Ruts carved into the creek's stone bed can still be seen at the shallow crossing from countless drives and wagons.

Long before the creek crossing was founded, the area had been home to the Tonkawa. The first European visitor to Salado, which means "salty", actually was Spanish explorer and Spanish Texas Governor Juan Antonio Bustillo y Ceballos in 1732. The village would not see European settlement, however, until the arrival in 1839 of Archibald Willingham, one of Stephen F.



Generals, outlaws and top Texas leaders are said to have hung their hats at the Stagecoach Inn. But the big question remains, is the ghost of Sam Houston really haunting this old stagecoach stop?

Austin's original Texas colonists.

Today's Salado visitors can walk in the footsteps of larger-than-life figures like Sam Houston, Robert E Lee, George Armstrong Custer and outlaws Sam Bass and Jesse James, all of whom are said to have hung their hats at the Stagecoach Inn. Built in 1861 by the town's first settlers, the refurbished motel has retained the original building out front and is now the longest continuously operating motel in the country.

By the way, if rumored treasure stashes elude you on the Lampasas River, try your hand at uncovering the gold believed to have been buried on the grounds of the inn by James and Bass. Once the sun goes down, watch carefully. The ghost of Sam Houston is reported to still be seen

delivering his anti-secession speech to the locals. Referenced in the Legends musical, the village drunk apparently was not happy with the speech and attempted an assassination – or was that in Belton? That city also has laid claim to the incident.

Legends, based only in part on fact. And one of the biggest legends for Bell is that of buried treasure.

Speaking of treasure. Did you know that Texas has more buried treasure than any other state?

Here is what Harry E. Christmas, editor of *Real West Magazine* had to say in *Phillip R. Rand, Volume VII, No. 34* that was published in March 1964.

"Records show 229 sites within its borders with a combined estimated \$340 million. And much of this treasure lies under the rugged oaks and rocky landscape of the Texas Hill Country. And those are just the 'big' stories!

"Still out there in raw treasure is gold you can pan or detect,

silver, semi-precious stones, meteorites, lost jewelry in parks/lakes/ rivers, caches from the Spanish, Mexican, French, various settlers, the battlefields, military camps, stagecoach routes, cattle trails, the coast. Pick a direction and there's something worth looking for—we have a little of everything!"

More importantly, there was a finding of lost gold at the Lampasas River.

According to Christmas, the late 1870's were difficult financial times for Texas families. Stories have circulated that there may have been a fortune in gold at the Turnbo Family's homeplace. Had they been able to find it, they would have become wealthy.

As Christmas tells it:

"Just halfway between Waco and Austin, is the town of Belton. Nearby flow the Leon and Lampasas Rivers, through the Turnbo neighborhood, as it was called in the 1860's near Youngsport. In that vicinity, in the late 1870's, there had been traditions of buried gold there and these stories drew great attention to the region. But always from outsiders, rarely did those folks living nearby pay any attention to the tales of buried treasure, regarding them as foolish stories without basis or fact.

"One day, three Mexican mariners came to the region. When questioned, they pleasantly passed off most of the questions put to them. They revealed only one thing: They were searching for buried gold, a large, stone jar of the treasure and three metal chests of gold.

Prying loose the lid, he peered within. It was filled to the brim with gold coins of many sizes and descriptions, some dating back to 1671.

"The residents watched the searchers. For 10 days the mariners paced off distances, checked their compass and hacked holes in the ground. Then they left, as suddenly and as secretly as they came. But they found no gold, the settlers saw to that as they peered through the brush at them day

after day, night after night, watching them at their campfires.

"A decade passed, then another. The residents who had watched them tried to forget about the gold. One day, a young man, A.C. Urvin decided to visit his father at Bertram. In traveling from the Turnbo's where he was employed at the time, young Urvin cut across the McBride settlement, crossing the Lampasas River. After crossing the river, he sat down upon a 'rock' to wring out his socks which were wet from the river crossing.

"The place upon which he had sat down appeared strange to him, round on top, as though man-made. He examined it. It was the top portion of an old stone jar. Prying loose the lid, he peered within. It was filled to the brim with gold coins of many sizes and descriptions, some dating back to 1671. Urvin became sly, afraid for his great wealth, and he took a pocketful of the

gold coins and covered the jar with earth and brush.

"That evening, while at his father's house, a neighbor named John Harte of near Florence who was visiting in the neighborhood discovered Urvin counting and inspecting the coins. Urvin told Harte that he had won the gold playing poker. But Harte disbelieved him, and he told a Mr. Stanley of his disbelief. Soon, many in the county area knew that young Urvin had a pocketful of gold coins, and the talk grew.

"Young Urvin and a brother, who was at his father's home at that time, returned to the Jar, leading a saddle horse with two morrals, or nose bags, thrown over the back of the saddle. These they filled halfway with the remaining gold coins then covered the Jar again with earth and brush. When they returned to Bertram, they told a Eugene Gahn and a man named McDonald of their find. These men spread the story.

"At Belton, the story did not go far until it reached the ears of Moses Whitsitt. He went immediately to the *Belton Journal*, telling the editor that young Urvin was wanted for theft. He told that a merchant named Atkinson of Florence, who had been a rare coin collector, was robbed of his collection. He further made the claim that young Urvin's alias was Maxwell."

A second reference to the bounty was recorded in the

Georgetown Sun on Thursday, Aug. 13, 1885. The paper printed a letter from Holland, a small settlement east of Salado. It was in response to an article, which had appeared earlier in *The Sun*, on Thursday, July 28, 1885, which described the discovery of the gold coins by Urvin.

Dear Sirs;

I found \$11,300.00 in old Spanish coin and have it now In U. S. currency. As to my name It Is A. C. Urvin. I have both father and mother and two brothers to prove my connections...

I am now living in the neighborhood of Holland with G. T. Smith. I am no thief or robber. I will be In Belton this week and see you. I can prove as good a character, from my childhood down to this time, as any man in Texas.

Yours truly,

A. C. Urvin

"But what about the seamen's chests and the gold cargemento de navio? Did Urvin return and make the greater discovery, one of which he was most certainly unaware when he found the original stone Jar and its treasure? Or, did the stories of the metal chests of gold start after Urvin's Initial discovery of Spanish Sold coins?"

Christmas doesn't know how it ended. He said he stumbled on the story while researching other fields. Still, the tale may be



Stillhouse Hollow Lake's 58 miles of shoreline are entirely within Bell County. Construction ran June 11, 1962 through July 1968.

added to aid those who do search for buried treasure. Who knows, there may be indeed two mariners' chests containing the cargo of gold the Mexican mariners sought in the long ago.

The Lampasas flows into the man-made Stillhouse Hollow Lake, which was built between 1962 and 1968. The newspapers referenced in the treasure tale, the *Belton Journal* and *Georgetown Sun*, remain in business to this day.

The damming of the Lampasas at Stillhouse Hollow Lake did not stem the flow of stories.

Though not everybody is in agreement over how Stillhouse Hollow got its name, the most popular explanation is that the hollow (or "holler" as it was commonly pronounced) was named for the illegal whiskey stills situated there.

Moonshining in Texas and elsewhere reached its peak during prohibition, which ran from 1919 to 1933. Any stills that existed at Stillhouse Hollow are long gone, buried under the waters of the reservoir by the same name. They probably were gone long before the lake was created. The repeal of Prohibition took away most of the profit motive for moonshine and World War II sent a lot of its customers overseas.

The late *Dallas Morning News* columnist Frank X. Tolbert once described Stillhouse Hollow, just before it was inundated by the waters of Stillhouse Hollow Lake, as an "ancient bootlegging community." He suggested the new lake be named "Bootlegger's Lake."

As the story goes, Madie Smith, a long-time columnist for the *Temple Daily Telegram*, fired back in one of her columns that not only did Stillhouse House Hollow not have any stills, it was-

n't even a community.

"It's a beautiful hollow fringed with cedar trees and in a few years its beauty and stillness will be reflected in the blue waters of the lake that back up to it," she wrote. Still, Smith did not deny that illicit whiskey operations existed in Bell County.

Of note, moonshine is making a dramatic comeback these days, not as a beverage but as an alternative fuel. Today, it's called ethanol. Trust us on this - don't try to drink it.

But if you are in the mood for a little sunset beverage and dining, head over to Florence's luxury winery getaway. Starting out as polo grounds, the Vineyard at Florence is located southeast of your new home on Farm to Market 487 between Florence and Jarrell. The vineyard's architecture drew its inspiration from Italy's Tuscany region. The main building's timber frame was built in 1850 in New York State. It was moved to Florence where it was restored with spaces added.

Nestled on 680 acres, the resort offers a boutique tasting, dining and overnight experience. Amenities include luxury villa accommodations, a winery, café, day spa, central wine tasting room and space for private events.

The vineyard itself is about 60 acres. Planted in 2007, it now produces Blanc du Bois, Lenoir, Norton and Cabernet Sauvignon. Winery and upscale dining experiences continue in Salado at the Historic Barton House and Alexanders at the Inn on the Creek. Further afield in Temple is the acclaimed Cheeve's Brothers Steakhouse and Pignettis. South in Georgetown, abundant opportunities include the Wildfire Restaurant, George's on the Town, Blue Corn Harvest Bar & Grill and El Monumento.



AT LEFT: Inner Space Cavern is a karst cave located in Georgetown. The cavern was formed by water passing through Edwards limestone. The cavern is estimated to be around 20-25 million years old but was only open to the surface since the late Pleistocene period 14,000-45,000 years ago. **SOURCE:** Wikipedia



Your secluded custom luxury home is nestled on the banks of the Lampasas River in south Bell County. Offering 6,221 square feet, the home features interior stone walls, vaulted wood ceilings with floor-to-ceiling windows that maximize the stunning views and flood the home with natural light. Attention to detail and quality, and well-appointed amenities are apparent throughout.

The chef-grade, open-concept kitchen offers a tall work island, a two-door commercial refrigerator, commercial-grade six-burner gas range, built-in oven and warming drawer, two farm sinks, ice maker and stunning Quartz counters.

Upstairs, enjoy your favorite movies and shows in a fully-equipped home theater with wet bar and private facilities. The home affords the choice of two primary bedrooms, one upstairs and one down, plus a third bedroom downstairs. Other amenities include two laundry rooms, again one upstairs and one down for your convenience.

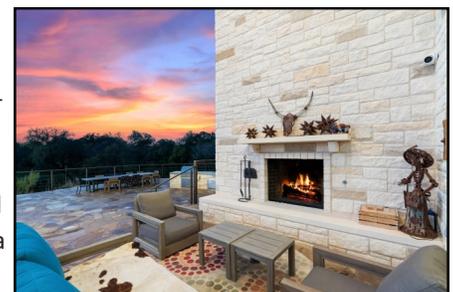
The upstairs landing is perfectly located for views - and a computer, if you do need to do a little "homework." After a walk around the property's meticulously maintained and shaded trails, enjoy a steam shower in the en suite of the second primary bedroom, or relax and enjoy the sun setting over the Lampasas in the inground spa and swimming pool. A second, fully-equipped outdoor kitchen, fire pit and pavilion ensure apres-swim enjoyment.



Riverside entertainment continues with covered outdoor seating and fireplace and a grand stone patio high above the river bank with outdoor grilling. A porte-cochere welcomes you and your guests at the double wrought iron and glass front door. Two glass, side-entry garage doors are perfect for showing off your car collection.

The property is fully fenced along the interior boundaries and features 43 acres of river

front, shaded trails, a pool house with outdoor kitchen and a separate guest barndominium featuring two bathrooms, kitchen and supersized foam-insulated area, currently used as a gymnasium.







Barndominium caretaker or guest quarters. Features include a studio living area with full kitchen and full bathroom. Foam-insulated RV garage has a second bathroom and is being used as a leisure hangout and super-sized gymnasium. A covered parking and extended park pad for the property's implements, plus a fenced dog run complete the ensemble. The 43.406 acre property is fenced on all interior boundaries and cross fenced with pipe and reinforced wire fencing.

