

# WACO & THE HEART OF TEXAS

## LITTLE-KNOWN FACTS

- WACO is the only radio station in the country whose call letters spell out the name of the city.
- There is no truth to the rumor that Dr Pepper soft drink is made with prune juice.
- Darwin the gorilla, a giant statue on Austin Avenue, sports new outfits throughout the year honoring special holidays and events.
- “The Waco Door” sculpture by famous Wacoan Robert Wilson, weighs more than six tons. It provides the perfect gateway to the sculpture walk at Art Center Waco.
- Telephus Telemachus Louis Augustus Albertus Johnson, who died in Waco in 1875, was originally buried in historic First Street Cemetery. His remains were later reinterred in Oakwood Cemetery, which laid to rest the myth that he was buried sitting at a poker table with a bottle of whiskey in one hand and a six-shooter in the other.
- In 1879, Waco became the first town in Texas and the second in the United States (after Omaha, Nebraska) to legalize prostitution. The Reservation, as the vice district was known, extended from Washington Ave. to Jefferson Ave., and from the Brazos River to 2nd St. It was closed in 1917 during World War I, when the U.S. Army made the outlawing of prostitution a condition for locating Camp MacArthur in Waco.
- In 1972, Baylor won the Southwest Conference football championship for the first time in 50 years.
- In 1978 the first mammoth skeleton was discovered near Waco in what is now one of the most important paleontological sites in the world.
- Beaver, bear, and buffalo still roamed the area when, on March 1, 1849, surveyor George B. Erath laid out the new town of Waco Village. Lots facing the square cost \$10, others \$5. Main St. continued to 5th St. Land beyond this area sold for \$2 to \$3 per acre.
- Early Waco settler and merchant, George Barnard, was a natty dresser, ordering his clothing from Lockwood & Dubois in New York City. He paid \$35 each for dress coats, \$7.50 - \$9 for silk vests, and \$15 for cashmere pants. In 1830, he began to wear silk underwear.
- Waco’s first daily newspaper was the *Waco Examiner*, started in 1867.
- Waco was known as the “Athens on the Brazos” during the 1880s because it was fast becoming the hub of education in the Lone Star State. In 1881, Paul Quinn College

moved to Waco from Austin; in 1882, a city tax was levied to fund the Waco Public Schools; and in 1886 Waco University and Baylor University consolidated locations in Waco.

- The invention of Dr Pepper at the Old Corner Drug Store in Waco in 1885 preceded the invention of Coca-Cola by one year.
- William L. Prather of Waco, President of the University of Texas (UT) in 1900, often admonished his students that “the eyes of Texas are upon you.” Inspired by these words, student John Long Sinclair, wrote lyrics to the tune of “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad” that eventually became the school song for UT. The song was first sung on May 16, 1903.
- During the blizzard of 1899, the temperature tumbled to 10 degrees below zero, and people ice-skated on the Brazos River.
- The Pacific Hotel, that once stood at the corner of 4th St. and Franklin Ave., was the first hotel in Waco to install an elevator.
- The Hippodrome Theater, opened in 1914 as a select road show house, spent much of its life as “Hulsey’s Hipp,” operated by E. H. Hulsey to offer major vaudeville attractions and movies.
- In 1874, the editor of the *Waco Examiner* reported that “The stench on Austin Ave. arising from an accumulation of mud and other filth is, under the warm rays of a spring sun, fast becoming a nuisance. The attention of the City Fathers is invited to that odorous locality.” Paving of Waco streets did not begin until 1903, starting with Austin Ave. where the mud was ankle deep from 8th St. to the City Square.
- The Waco Navigators, a professional baseball team, won the Texas League championship in 1914, 1915, and 1916.
- In 1970, one hundred years after its completion, the Waco Suspension Bridge became the first Waco edifice placed on the National Register of Historic Sites.
- The name Waco has been spelled at least 32 different ways, including Wacco, Wachos, Huaco, Hueco, Wacoah, Honechas, Houchas, Quchaco, Quaineo, Quintico, Wacha, Wacoes, Wacoe, Waeko, Wiko, Weko and Weeco.
- The first sermon preached in Waco Village in 1849 was given by a Methodist missionary. Today, Waco is home to over 200 congregations representing 40 denominations and faiths.
- Waco’s first hotel was built in 1849 when Shapley Prince Ross, one of Waco’s founders, built a log hotel on the corner of 1st & Bridge Streets, the site of the present-day Hilton Waco. The hotel burned in 1871.

- McLennan County produced six Civil War Generals and sent over 2,200 troops to fight for the Confederacy out of a population of only about 8,000. Gravesites for some of these generals can be found at the 1st St. Cemetery in Ft. Fisher Park.
- The Chisholm Trail, leading to Wichita, Kansas, and the Shawnee Trail leading to Abilene, both crossed the Brazos River on the Waco Suspension Bridge. By 1871, between 600,000 and 700,000 steers had passed over the bridge, and the cattle drives continued until 1885—the final year the trail was open.
- Jacob de Cordova, one of Waco’s founders, was Jewish. In 1869, a Hebrew Benevolent Society was founded and B’nai B’rith helped construct the first synagogue in 1879.
- Over 2.7 million bricks, made from Brazos River sand, went into the construction of the Waco Suspension Bridge before its completion in 1870.
- Waco was home to the largest inland cotton market in the world in 1890, receiving 60,000 bales annually by wagon and 150,000 bales by rail.
- Over 8 million Texans visited Waco from 1894 to 1930 to attend the month-long Texas Cotton Palace Exposition.
- The Masonic Grand Lodge of Texas, located in Waco, was built in 1904 with \$1.00 from every Mason in the state.
- The 1953 Waco tornado was the most devastating tornado in Texas history in terms of death and injury. The F5 storm took 114 lives and injured over 1,000.
- Waco’s 416-acre Cameron Park has some of the most technical and challenging mountain bike trails in the state.
- The southwest part of Waco is located on the edge of the Balcones Fault, the same geological formation that carved the Texas Hill Country. Across the Brazos, on the northeast side, is rich, black farmland, called the “Blacklands” region in the geology of Texas. From the top of Lover’s Leap in Cameron Park, one can see the vast differences from one side of the Brazos to the other.
- Waco was the same size as Dallas in 1870, and the same size as Austin in 1880.
- Cargill Foods of Waco grows, processes and sells over 8 million turkeys per year.
- Snickers candy bars are made in Waco.
- Waco is the birthplace of more Texas governors than any other city. Governors born here include Richard Coke, Sul Ross, Pat Neff, and Ann Richards

- William Cowper Brann (1855-1898) was the brilliant, vitriolic writer and publisher of the *Iconoclast*, a monthly newsletter with a national circulation. Brann called his publication “a journal of personal protest” and “A literary Gatling Gun.” Brann was killed in a duel with Tom Davis in downtown Waco and is buried in Oakwood Cemetery. A bullet hole mars his tombstone on which his name does not appear. In fact, the only word on the stone is “TRUTH”.
- The city of Hewitt was named in the film *Harold & Kumar Escape from Guantanamo Bay*, including the fictional Hewitt Regional Airport. The scenes that took place in Hewitt were actually filmed in a different location.
- Hewitt Texas was ranked #44 by *CNNMoney Magazine's* 2007 Top 100 places to live
- The city of McGregor lies in two counties, as well as two metropolitan areas. The McLennan County portion of the city is part of the Waco Metropolitan Statistical Area, while the small portion that lies in Coryell County is part of the Killeen–Temple–Fort Hood Metropolitan Statistical Area.
- SpaceX has a rocket engine development and test facility in McGregor, Texas.