

Zavalla

A Town Nestled In The Pines



Sponsored by: The Angelina County Historical Commission

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References: Diboll Days: Then and Now, Land of the Little Angel,
The Free Press, The History of Angelina County, This Was
Angelina County, The Towns We Left Behind, The Pine
Bough, Vol. 16 and The Pine Bough, Vol. 15, Paddling the
Wild Neches, and Through the Streets of Zavalla

ZAVALLA: A TOWN NESTLED IN THE PINES



In the piney woods of East Texas, there is a **community** named Zavalla. This is the story of Zavalla from its beginning.

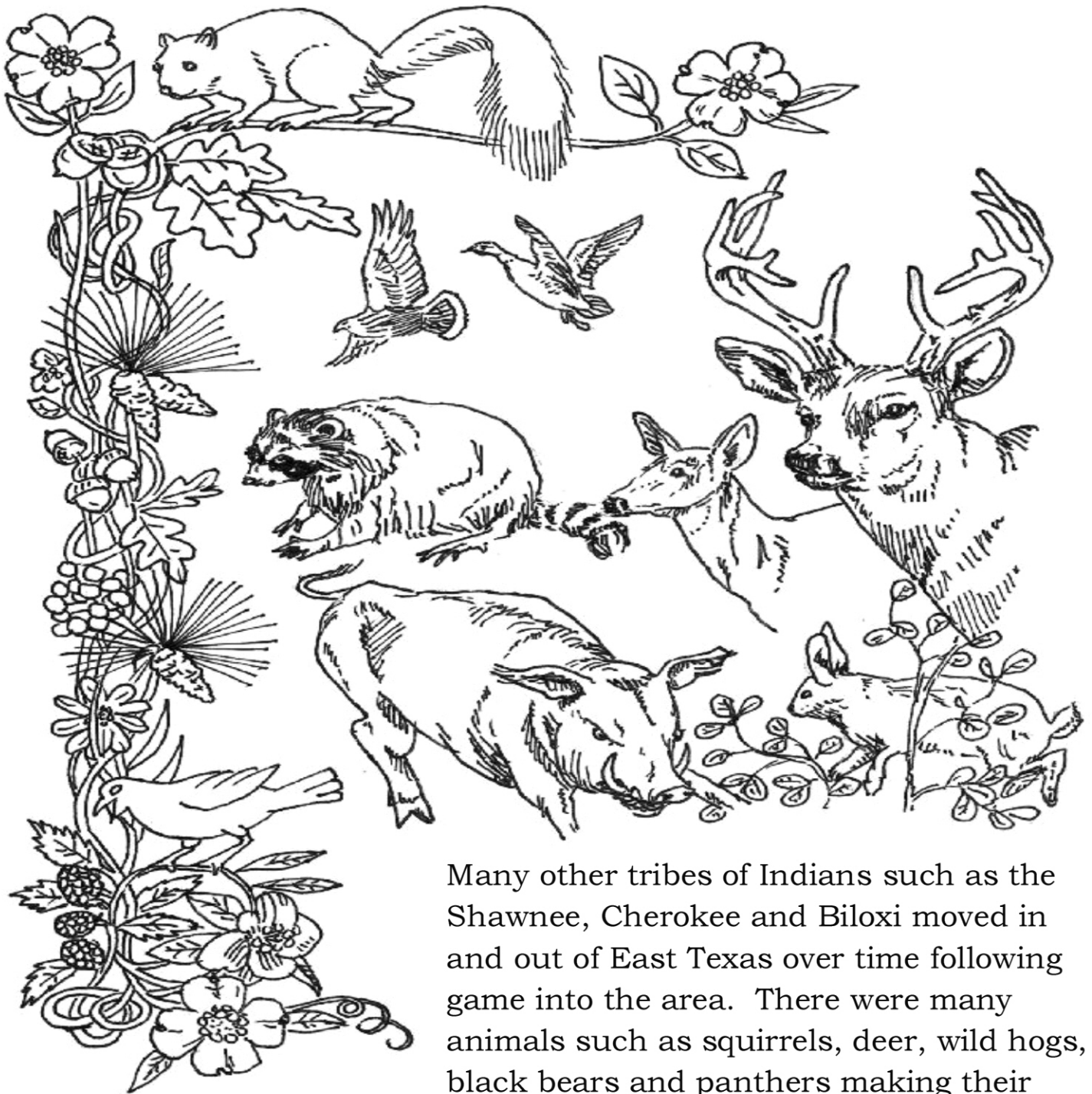


The first people who lived in the area were Caddo Indians. These Indians were probably mound builders. Little is known about these very old or “**archaic** people” except for the things that are found buried in their mounds. **Archeologists** still find and study **artifacts** or things left by these Indians in Nacogdoches, Alto and East Texas.



By the late 1600's several tribes known as the Hasinai Confederation of Caddos lived in the East Texas area. Because the tribes were friendly, they called each other "taysha" which meant "*friends or allies.*" The Spaniards who lived in the area probably used the word "tejas" in the same way.

The Spanish and French were the first **European** people to **explore** Texas. When they came into this area, they met a young Hasinai Indian girl named Angelina. They wrote about her in their diaries. She was described as gentle and likable. Even her name meant "*little angel.*" Of the 254 counties in the state of Texas, only Angelina County has a woman's name.



Many other tribes of Indians such as the Shawnee, Cherokee and Biloxi moved in and out of East Texas over time following game into the area. There were many animals such as squirrels, deer, wild hogs, black bears and panthers making their homes in the forest.

The Alabama and Coushatta tribes especially liked the area of East Texas along the Angelina and Neches Rivers. **Abundant** food was available for hunting or gathering in the woods between the rivers. By 1841, all of the Indian tribes were driven out of the land that is Angelina County, but they left their names on Shawnee and Biloxi Creek.

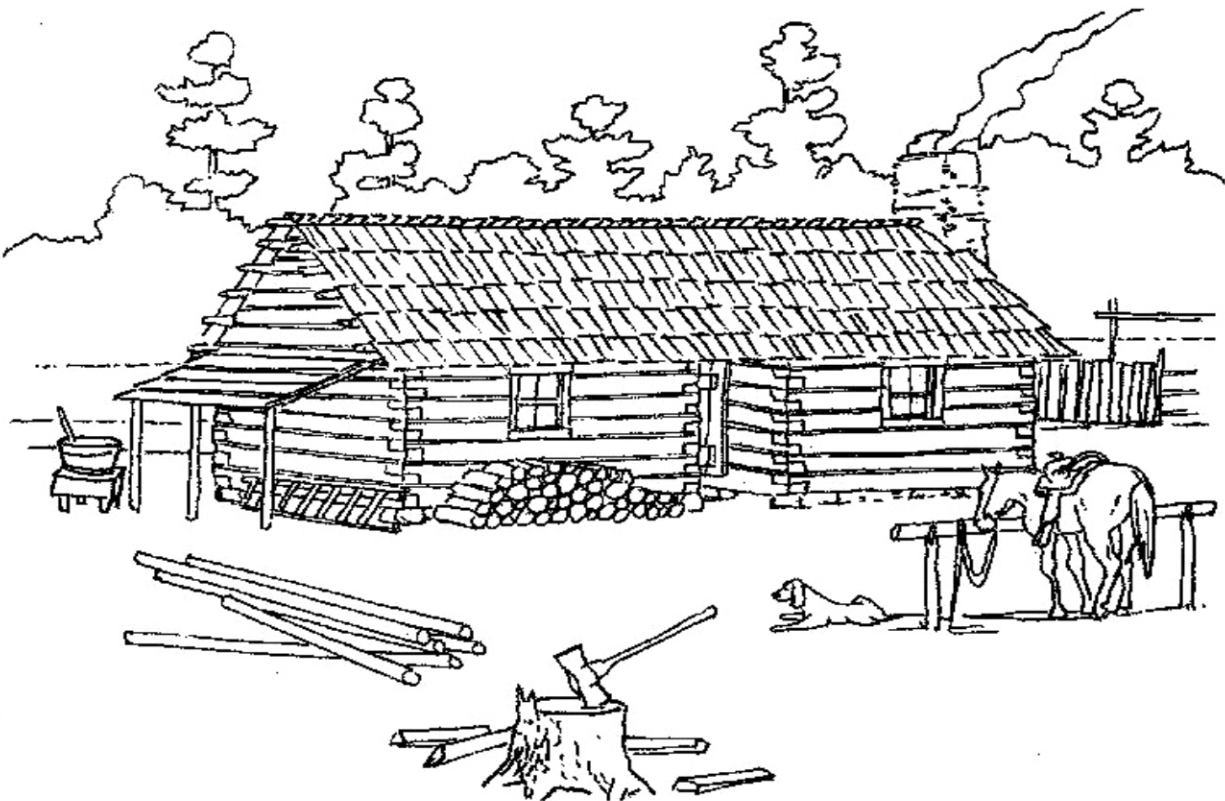


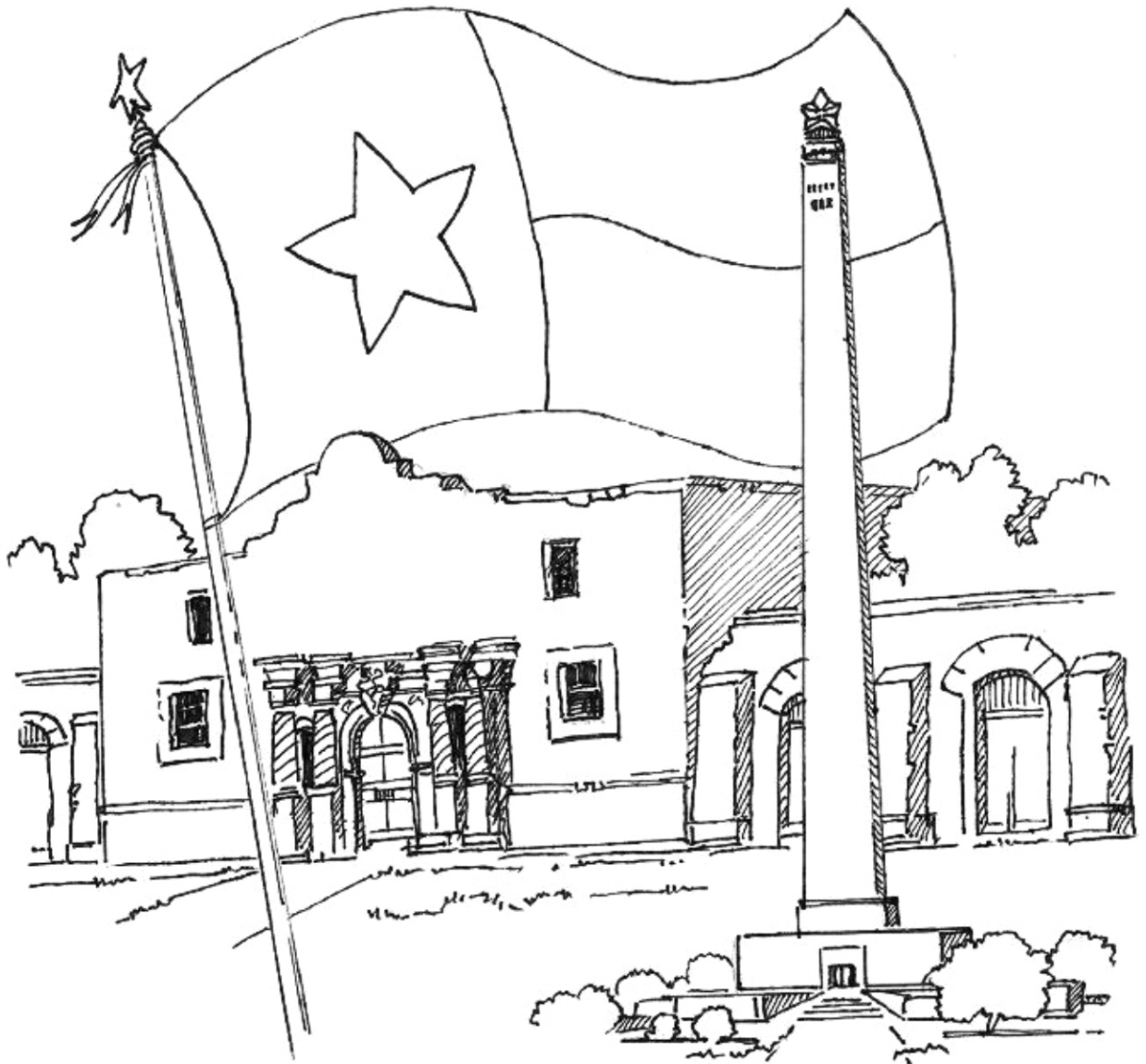
The first land owner in this area was Lorenzo De Zavala. He was an **empresario** who was given a land grant by the Mexican government in 1829. He was a very famous Texan and eventually became the Vice-President of the Republic of Texas. He never lived in the town named for him, but he sold the land to early pioneers to Angelina County.

These people found many trees, so their first homes were log cabins. The many springs around the Zavalla area made it easy to find home sites with plenty of water nearby.

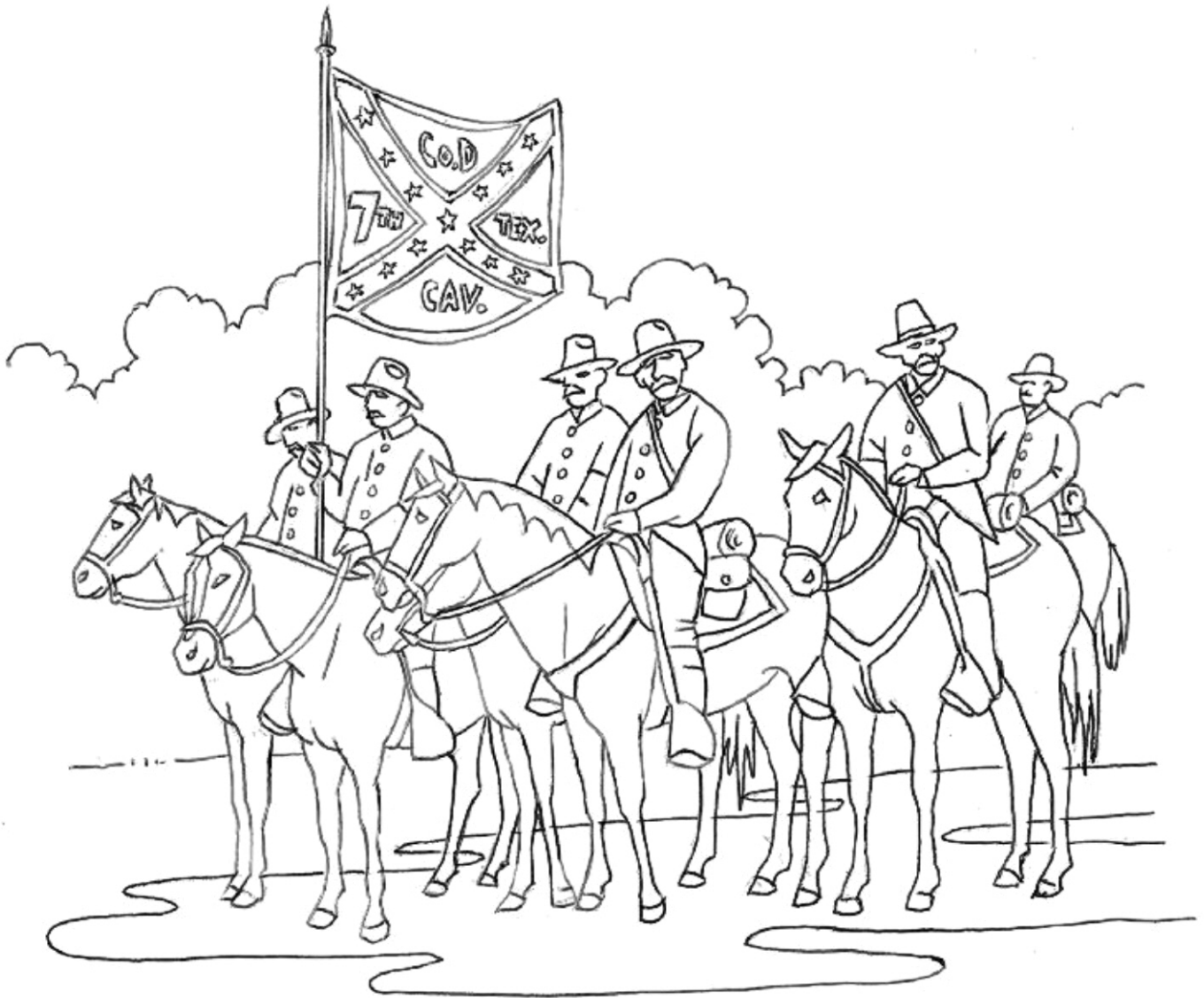
The **pioneers** would pick out very tall trees to use in building their cabins. The spaces between the logs had to be filled with clay or mud. This was called "**chinking**". A single cabin could be built in about eight days. The chimney for the fireplace was made of mud mixed with gray moss known as "**mud cats**". These mud cats were then placed around sticks to form the "**stick and daub**" chimney. If the chimney caught fire, someone would climb up on the roof and push the whole chimney down to save the rest of the house.

For a larger house, two cabins were built close together and connected with a covered porch called a "dog run" or a "dog trot."





People living in Texas, soon wanted freedom from Mexico. In 1836, a war for independence was fought. After several battles, such as the Alamo, the **Texicans** won their independence at the Battle of San Jacinto and became an independent country. Texas is the only state that was ever an independent country. In 1845, Texas became part of the United States.

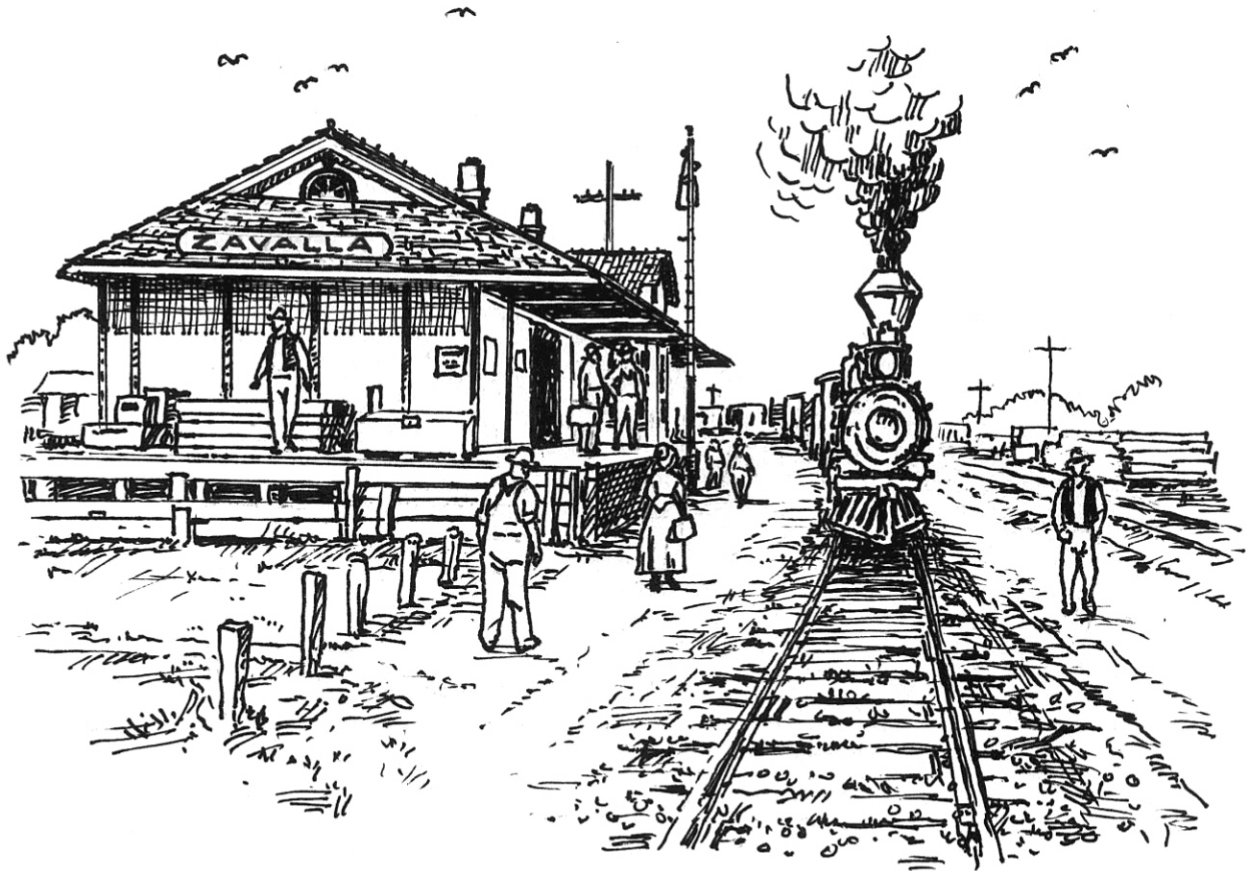


Remember that in 1850 there was no Zavalla yet. The entire population of Angelina County was only 1,165.

In 1861, the United States went to war to settle the question of whether the South would be a separate nation. Angelina County voted to remain with the United States. However, when Texas did **secede** from the Union, the people in Angelina County supported the Confederacy with soldiers, cotton and food. The South lost the war and Texas stayed part of the United States and the slaves in Angelina County were freed.

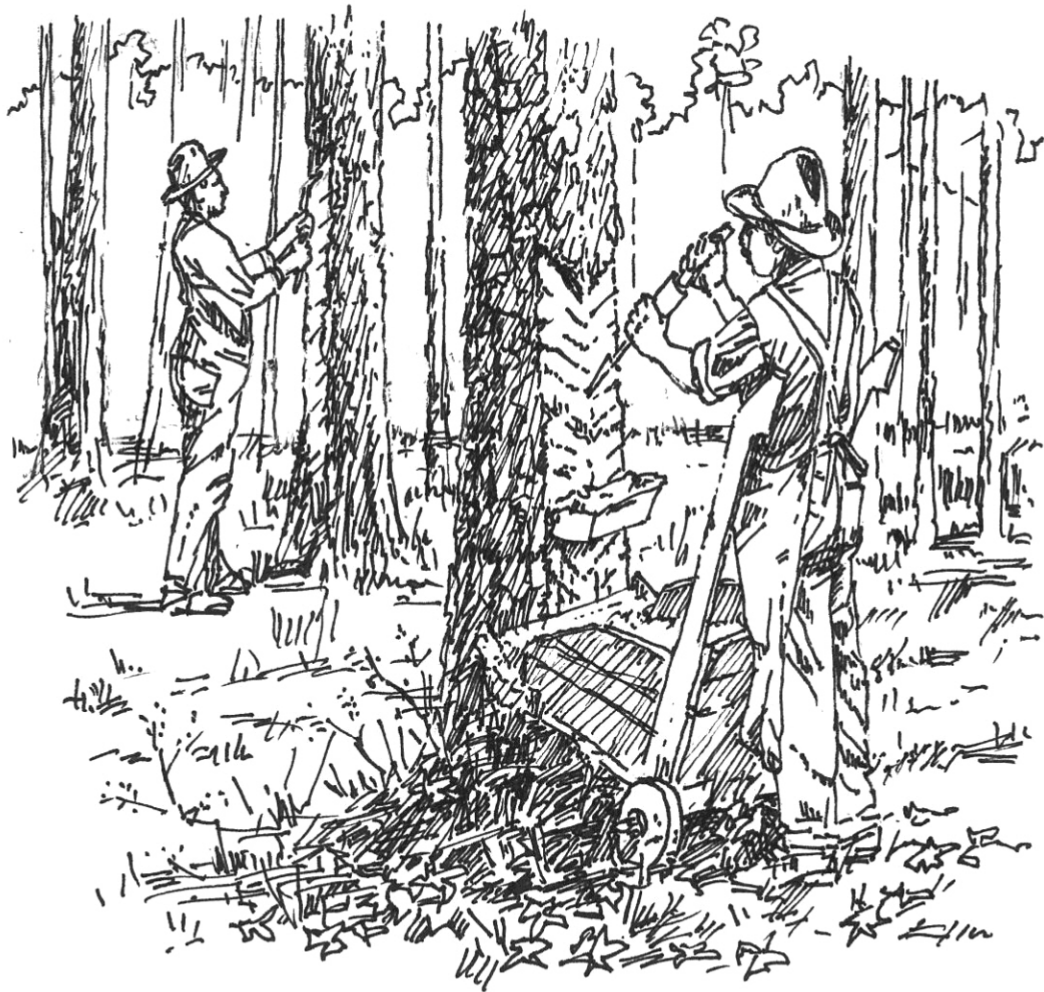


As early as 1866, there was a store in the Zavalla area run by the Carpenter family. The family built newer and larger stores as the population in the area increased. These stores were called **mercantiles** or general stores. You could buy groceries, clothes, shoes, caskets, tools, or anything else you can imagine. The Barge's family store even served as a movie house and a lumber store as time went by.



The town of Zavalla began in 1900 because of a railroad. The Texas and New Orleans railroad was being built from Beaumont to Dallas. Locals called it the “T & NO”. Steam engines needed water to run. Springs near the town provided water for the steam locomotives. That is why the **depot** and water tower were built in this place.

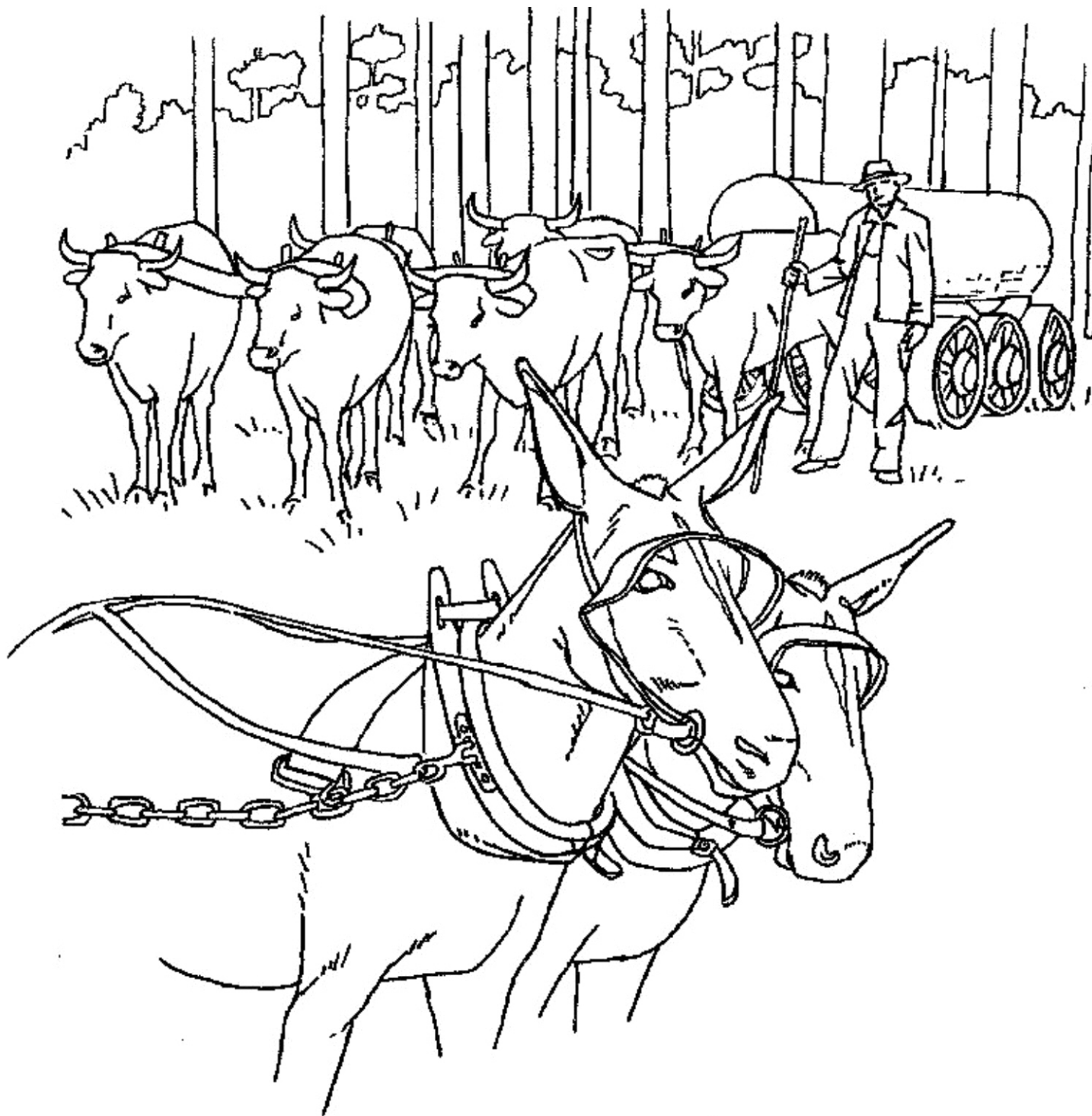
The railroad made Zavalla a good shipping center for lumber and farm **products** going to **market**.



The railroad and depot led more families to the Zavalla area. The forest provided many **resources** to make money. The men made crossties with hand axes for the railroad. They would make **barrel staves** from white oak trees. The men would also collect sap from the pine trees for the production of turpentine. Turpentine was used as a medicine and as a **solvent** like paint thinner. Later cotton was grown in the area.

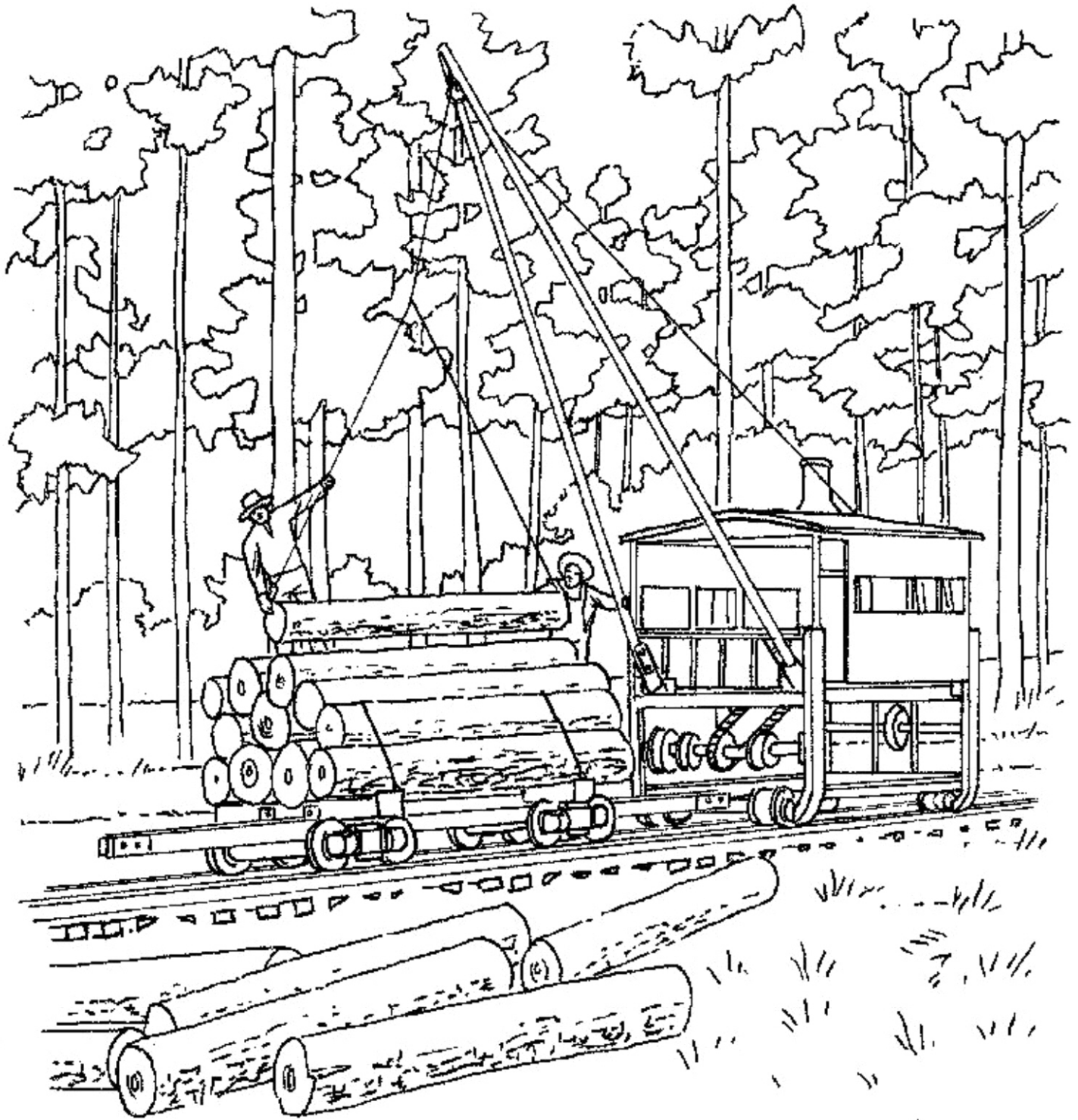


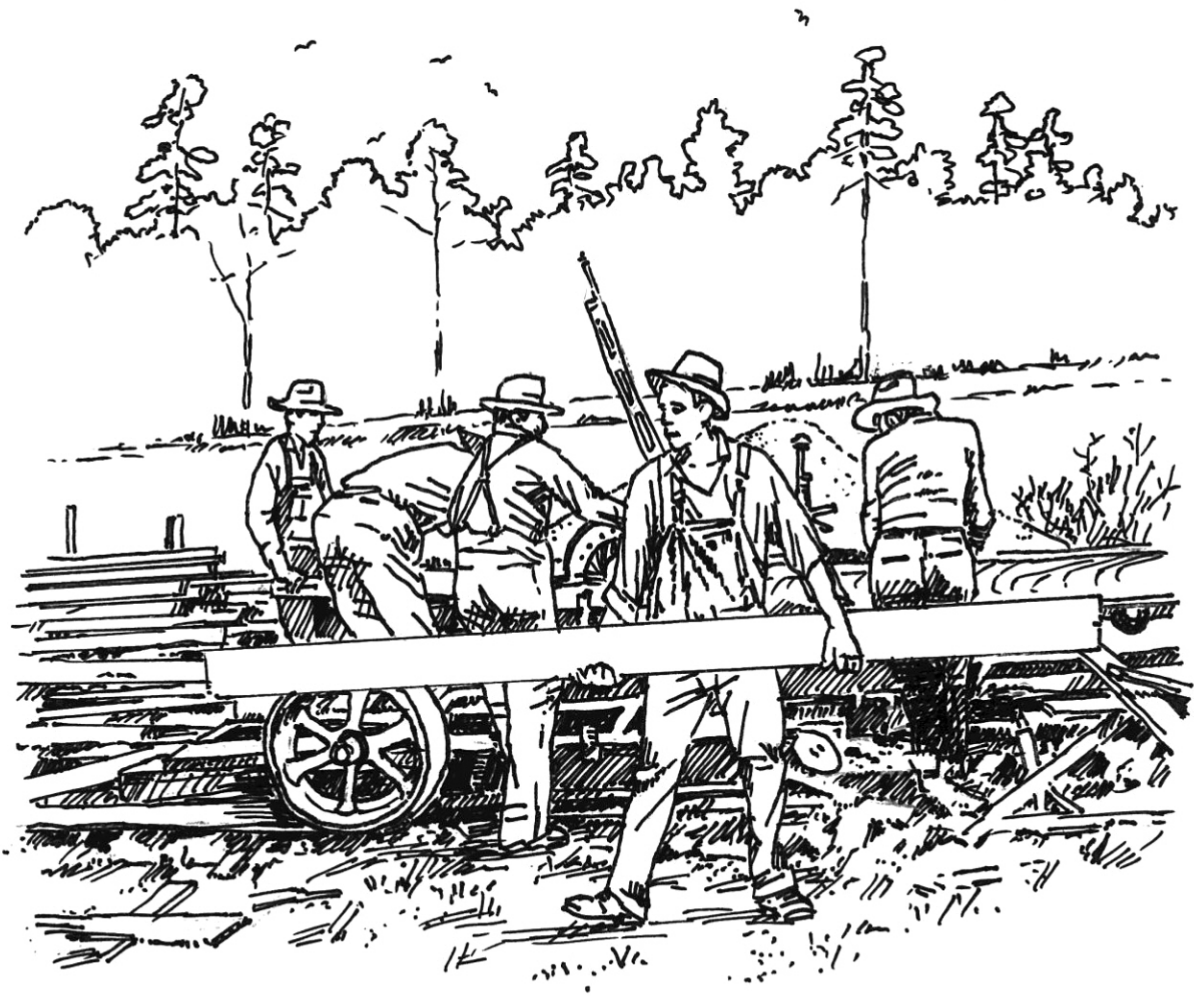
Men also worked as lumberjacks and used **crosscut saws** to cut the large trees in the **virgin** forest. Each crosscut saw required two men to **operate**. A man took a handle at each end of the saw and pulled back and forth until the tree fell. Notice the size of the trees. They were much larger than trees are today.



After the trees were cut down, mules and oxen were used to haul the logs to a train. The oxen had such names as “Rough” and “Rowdy,” while the mules were given names like “Molly” and “Dolly.”

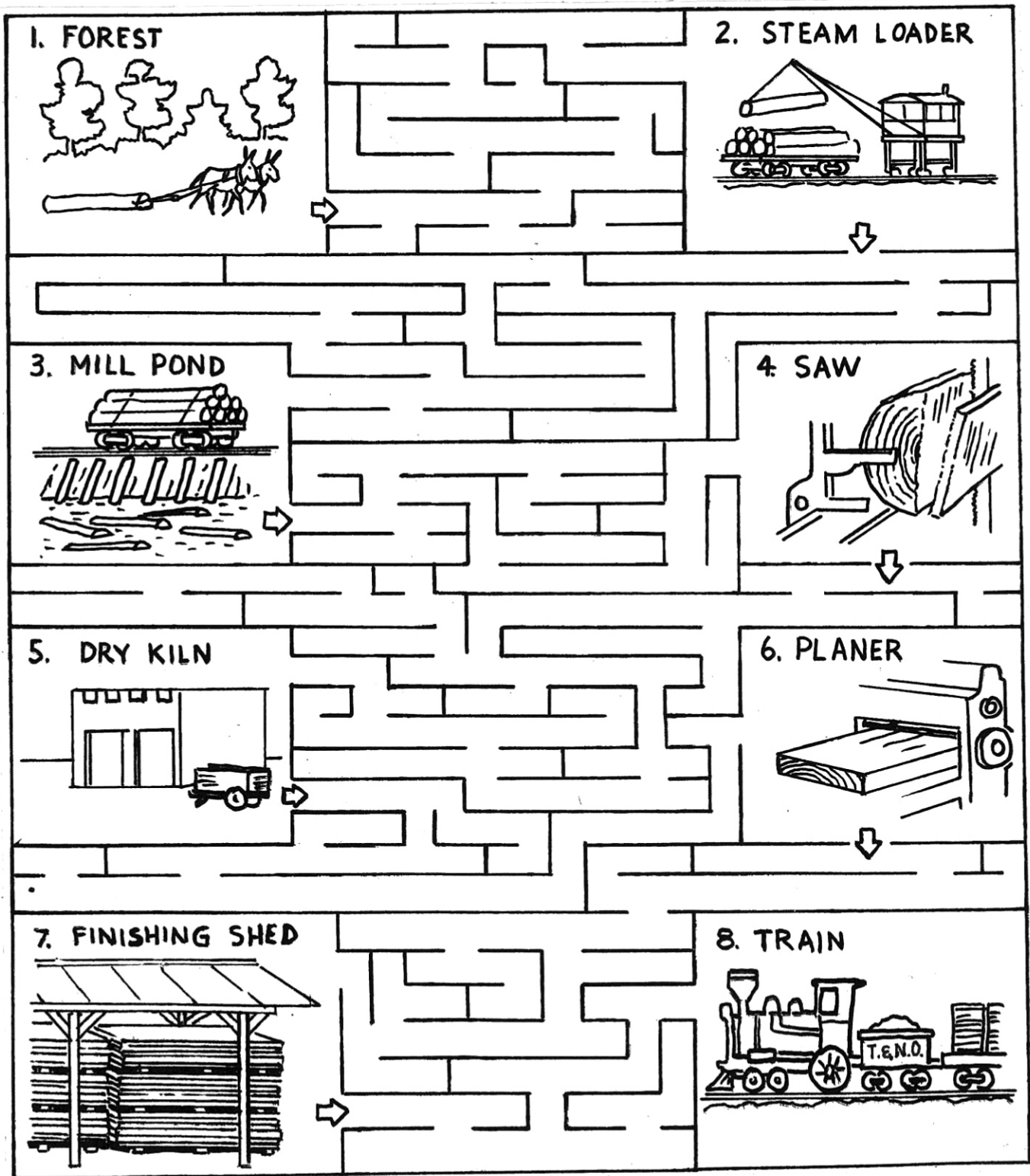
Logs were put onto railroad cars with the swing booms of steam log loaders. These logs were taken to the mills over **tram** roads.



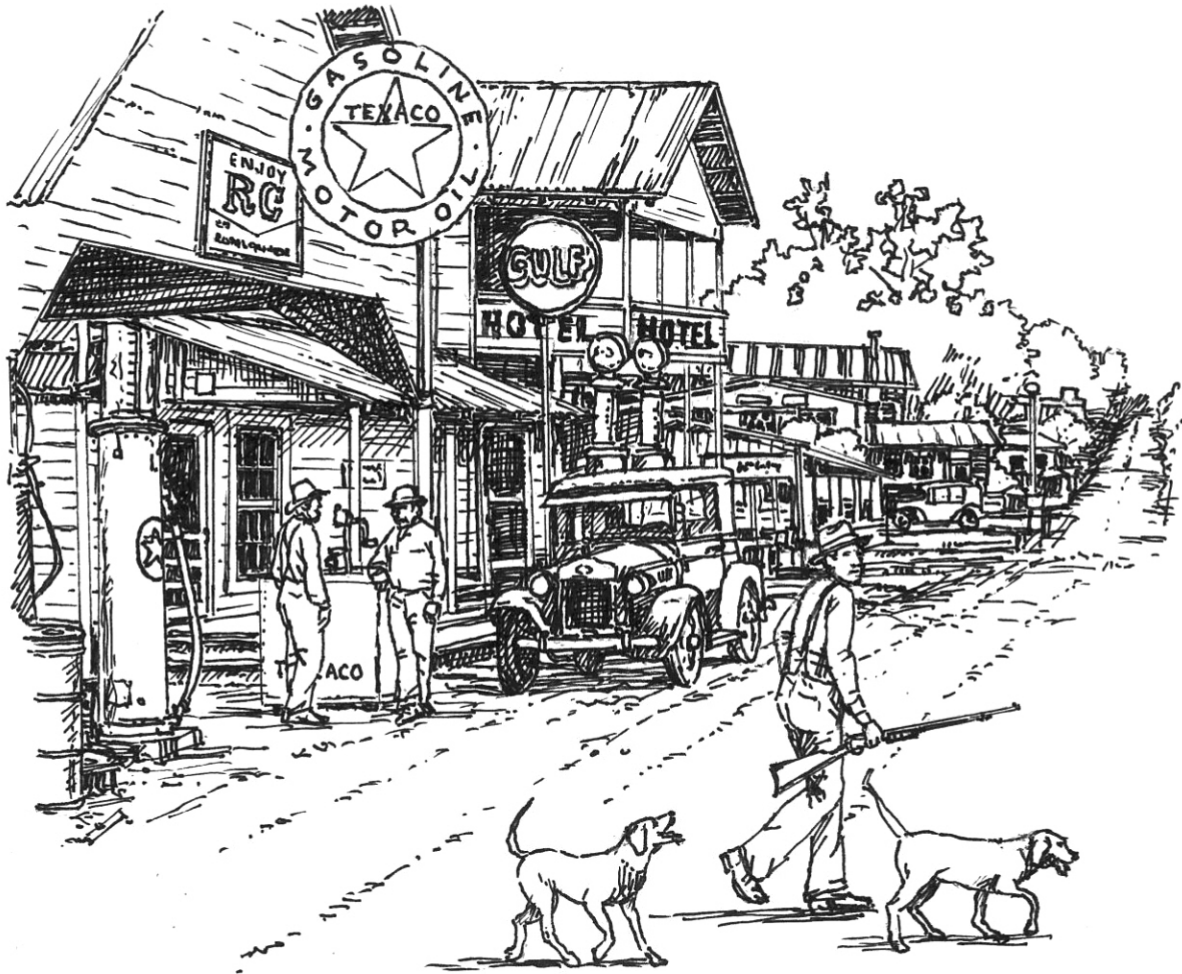


Amos Hodges built the first sawmill in 1901. Around Zavalla you could hear the buzz of the large circle saw, smell the sawdust and see the smoke of the boiler.

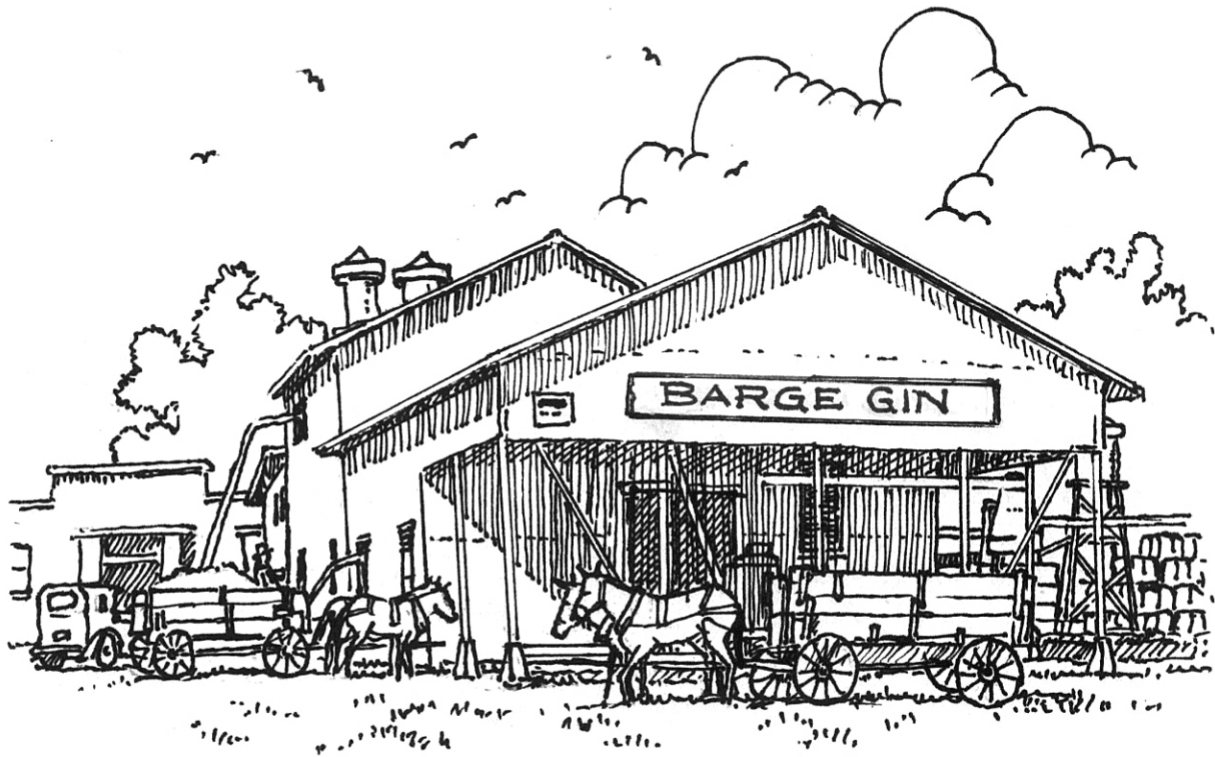
Logs were dumped into the mill pond behind the sawmill. Water kept the logs from drying out and made them easier to saw into lumber. After the lumber was dried, it was **planed** or smoothed and sent to the finishing shed. Finally, a train carried the finished lumber to market.



See how long it takes you to send a log through the sawmill. Guide your log through the steps it takes to become a building product.

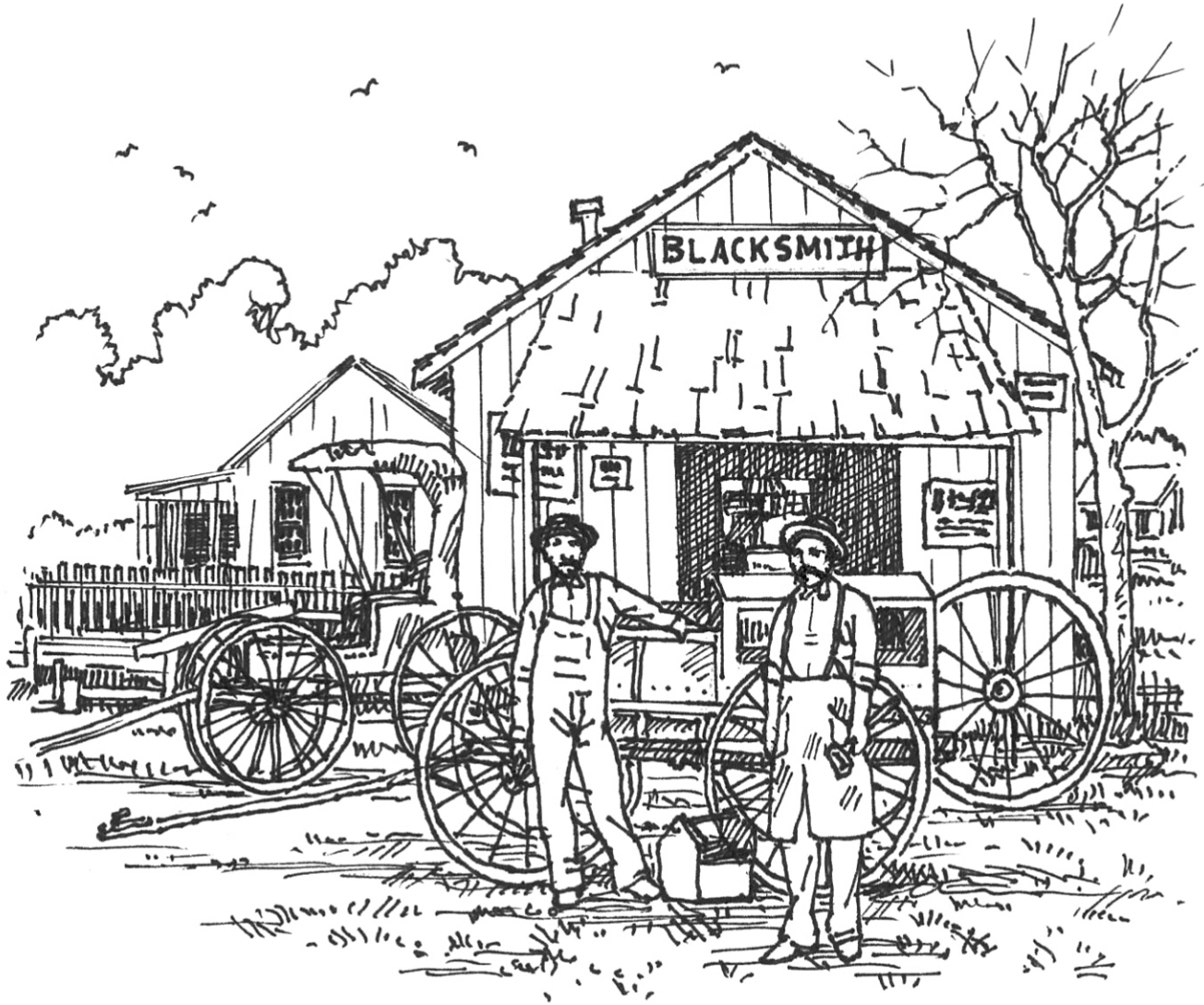


With the train came the opportunity to ship forest products to the rest of the state and nation. The town also depended on the railroad to bring everything to town, including the mail. As late as the 1930's, the train whistle would sound and the postmaster would walk to the depot, collect the mail and take it back to the post office. In the afternoon, he would meet the train again and send the outgoing mail on its way. The two hotels in town provided **passengers** with rooms for the night before they continued their journey.



One time there was a cotton gin in Zavalla. Farmers from the surrounding area brought their cotton by wagons to the gin. There the cotton was ginned to remove the seeds and trash and pressed into bales. During cotton harvesting, Barge's gin worked day and night to produce cotton bales that were shipped by rail to larger markets.





Among the businessmen in town were two **blacksmiths**. They repaired buggies and shod the horses that pulled the buggies. Later blacksmiths worked on early automobiles.

A man's best friend in early Zavalla was his stock dog! These well trained dogs were used in hunting deer and treeing squirrels, raccoons and bears. They also protected the **homestead** from wild animals that would try to eat the chickens, turkeys and eggs. The **smokehouse** was also a target of hungry wild animals. The dogs would announce the arrival of any visitor to the homestead.





In the early days almost all the residents ran cattle and hogs in the **common grounds** surrounding Zavalla. When they wanted to catch or herd their animals, they turned not to their horse and rope, but to dogs. The dogs would herd the cows by nipping at their heels and a hog by grasping its ear. The men could then catch or kill the cow or hog.

The coldest day of the year was hog killing day because there was no refrigeration and the cold kept the meat from spoiling. Hog meat was used to make bacon, hams, hog head cheese, cracklings from the skin, and pickled pig's feet. The meat was packed in salt, smoked, or canned. A family could process a hog in November or December and eat the meat for most of the year.

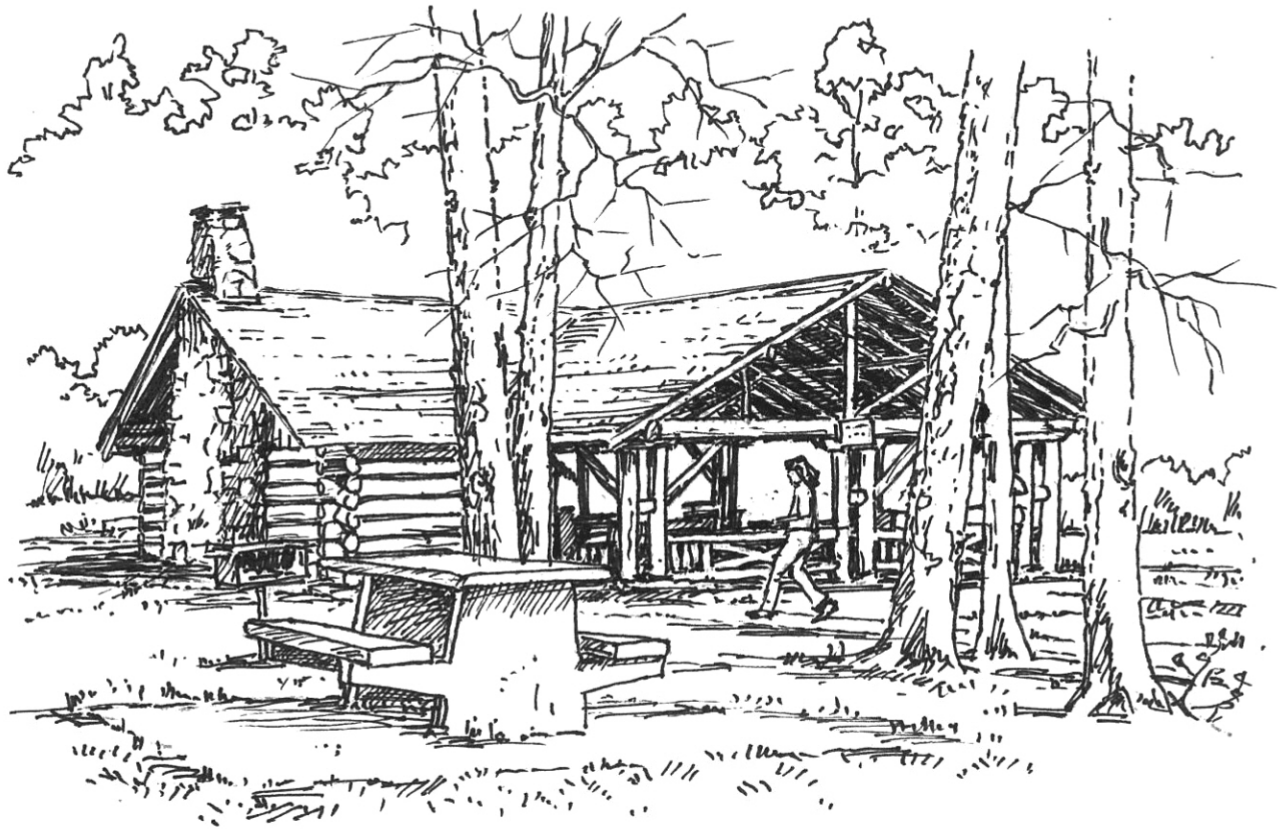


Zavalla's first electricity was furnished by an old **dynamo**. Most of the stores were lighted by a single light bulb hanging on a green electrical cord from the ceiling.

Draw lines connecting the new technology to the old.



In the early history of Zavalla, the first church was a Baptist congregation. Other denominations soon followed. At that time, churches baptized their members in Sandy Creek or the mill pond.

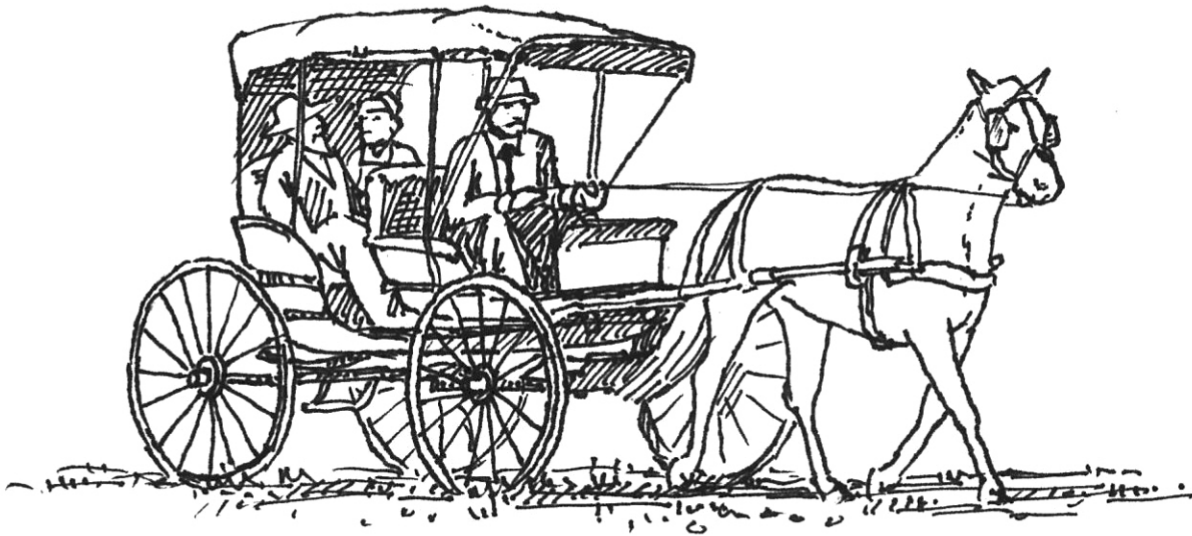


In the 1930's **The Great Depression** gripped America. The entire nation suffered an economic crises and money and jobs were scarce. Zavalla benefited from several government programs that brought jobs to the area and helped to relieve the suffering. The **CCC** planted thousands of trees in the area that became the Angelina National Forest. The recreation buildings at Boykin Springs were also built by the CCC.

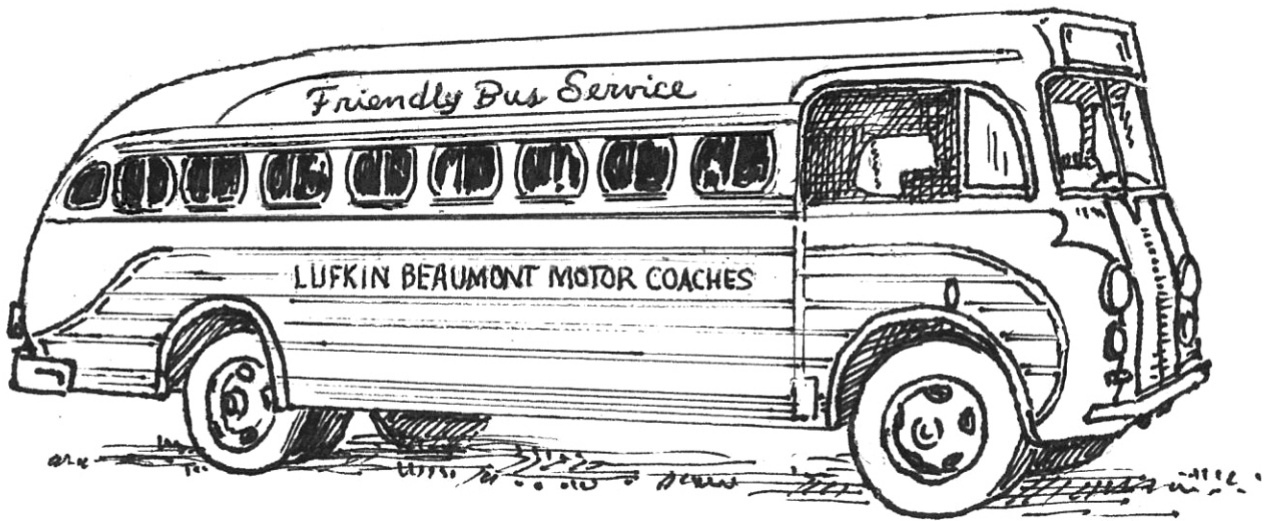
The WPA hired workers for a mattress factory that used the local cotton. Jobs were provided for women in sewing rooms, a canning factory and the school lunchroom.

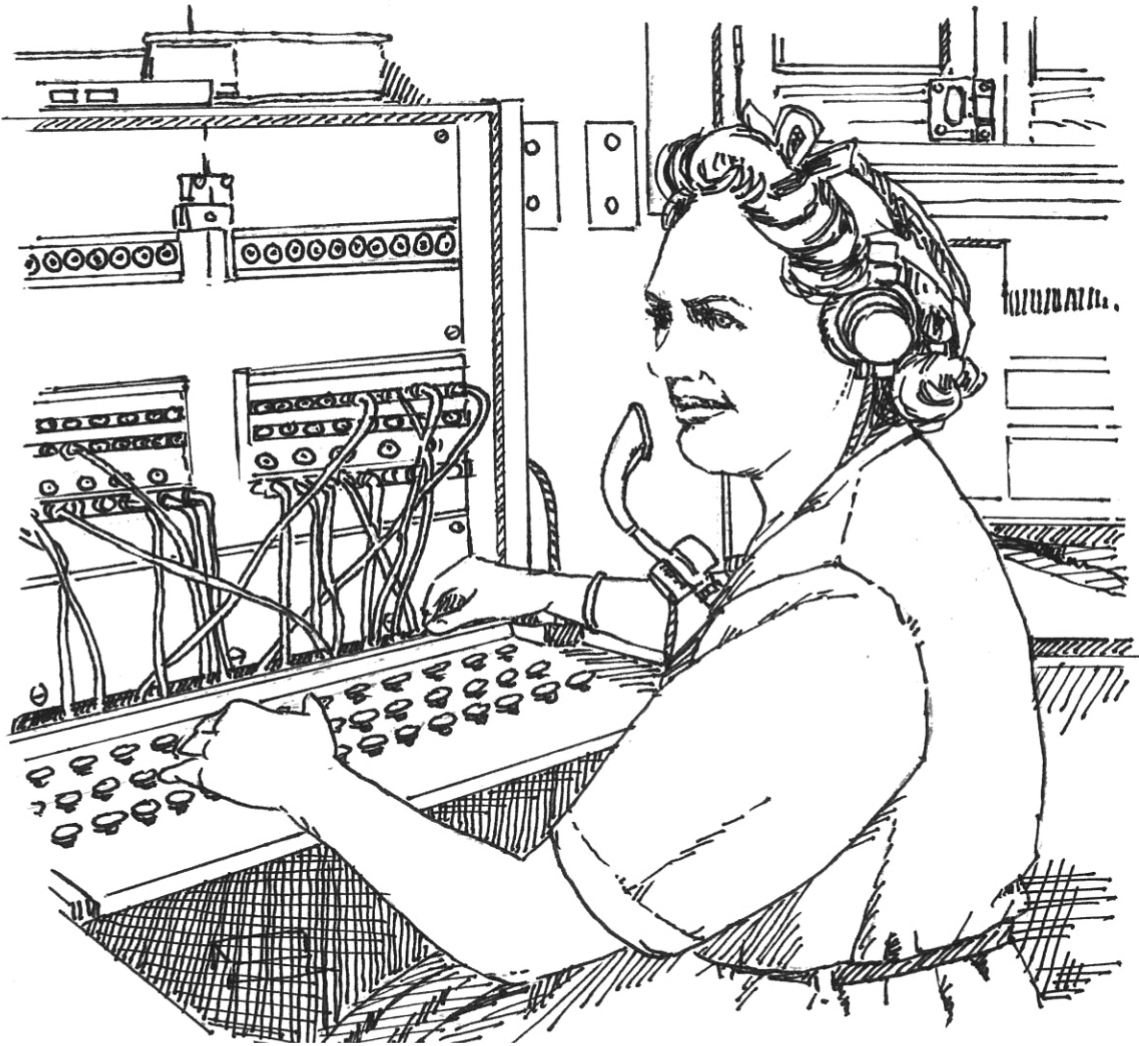


The first school in Zavalla was built of lumber and had two rooms. In the 1920's the community built a two-story brick building and added a new high school in 1925. By the 1930's the town had a four year high school. The **WPA** hired local workers to build a new high school and elementary school using native stone taken from the Boykin area. Outside the school today you can still see the stone fence and the school mascot, the eagle.



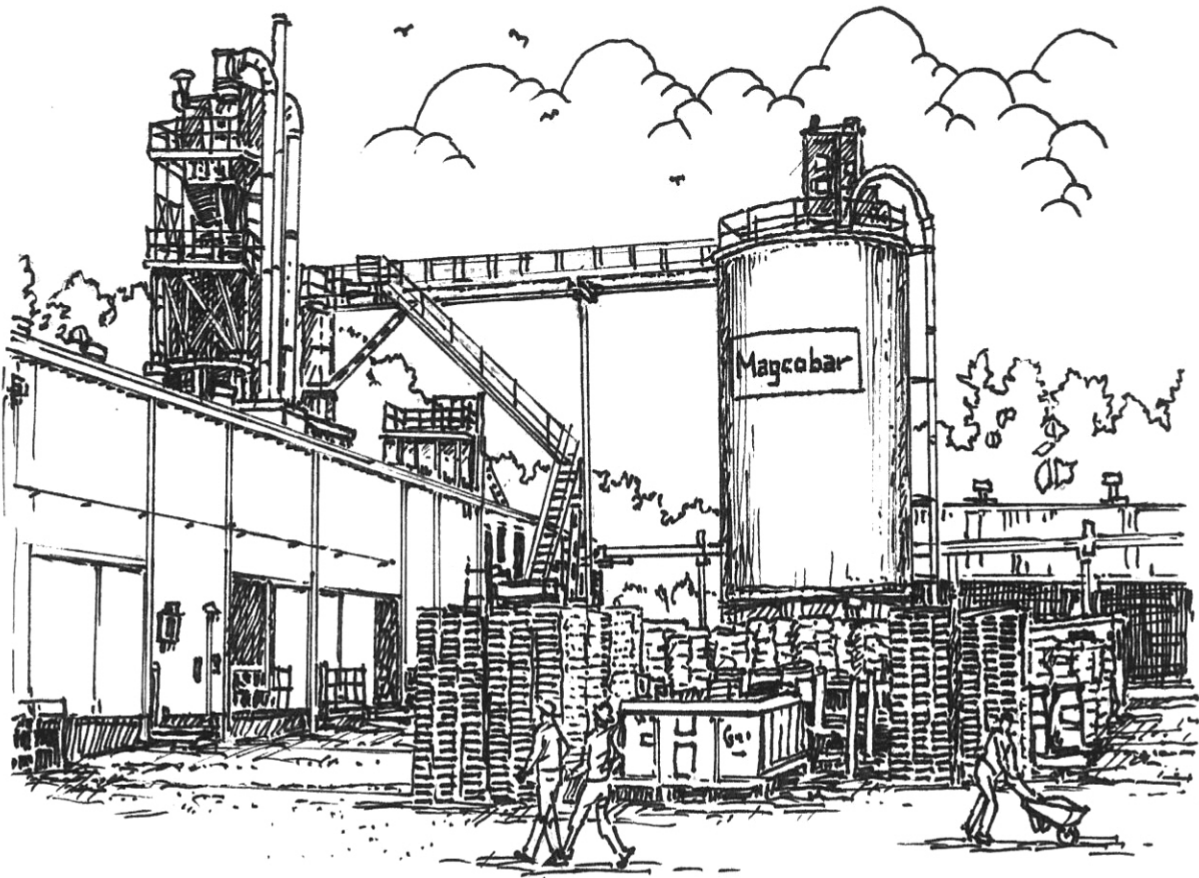
Railroads carried freight and passengers between Zavalla and distant cities. **Transportation** between Zavalla and Lufkin was also provided by C. S. McMullen with a horse and buggy. Later he extended service to Beaumont using buses. Often the buses bogged down in the mud of the East Texas roads. Lufkin Beaumont Motor Coaches also served the area when few people owned cars.



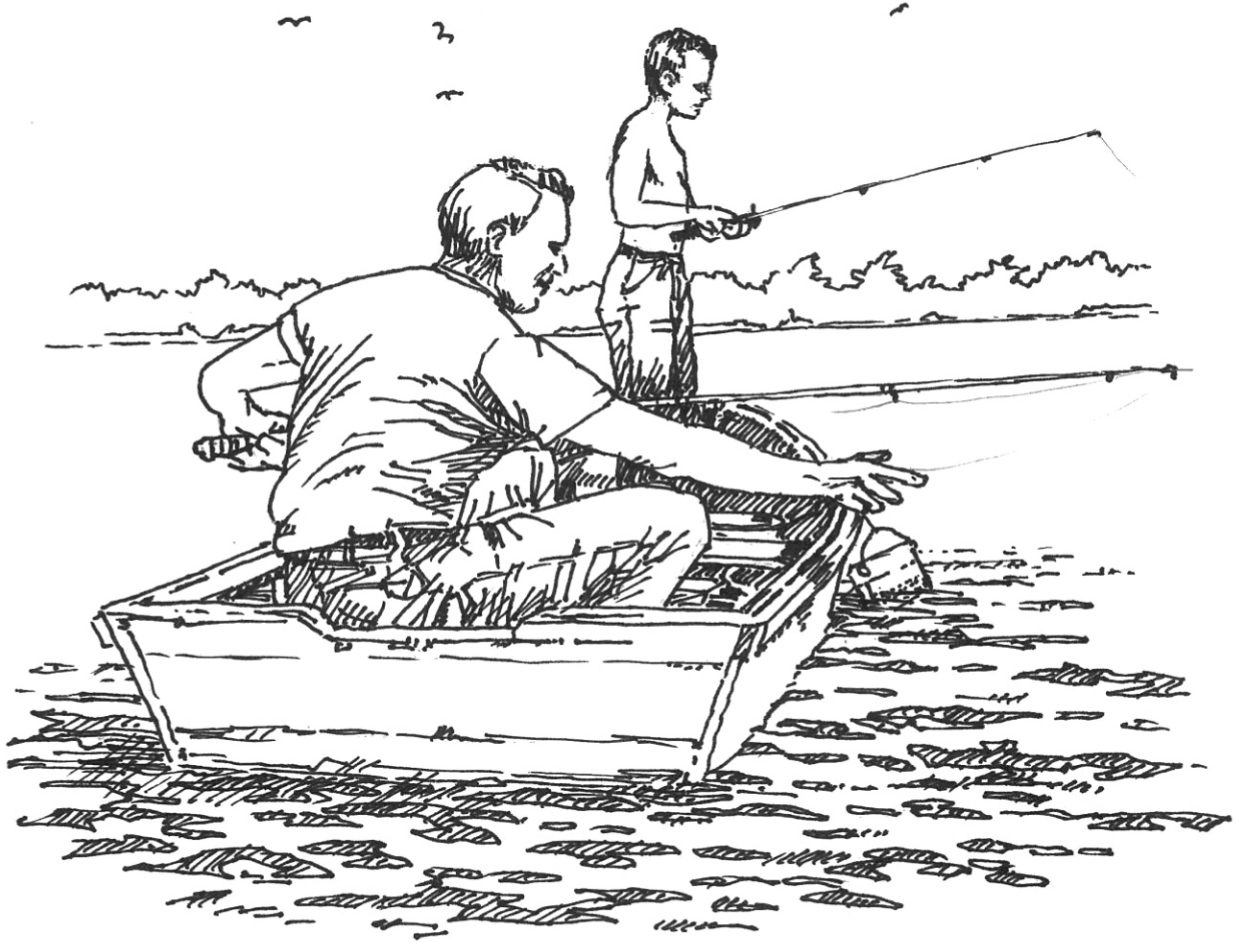


Small towns like Zavalla had a central telephone office where an operator manually connected one phone number to the other. Homes had a crank on the phone which could be turned to gain the operator's attention. The operator then asked "number please" and plugged the caller into the line of the person called. Many people were on party lines where two to ten people shared the same line. The number of rings let the people know which person was being called, but everyone on the line could listen if they wanted.

Local operators were so skilled that they could connect you with only the person's name and not the number. One of the last operators was Mrs. Beulah King.



Bentonite clay is used in making oil well drilling mud. This resource was found in the Zavalla area in the early 1930's. A company called Magcobar mined the clay and shipped it by rail and truck to oil companies. At one time the plant employed one hundred twelve men. Today the plant produces XP-20 **fluid** for use in drilling oil wells.



In 1956 a dam was begun on the Angelina River and was completed ten years later. This dam formed Sam Rayburn Reservoir, the largest lake within the boundaries of Texas. It brought many changes to the communities around Zavalla.

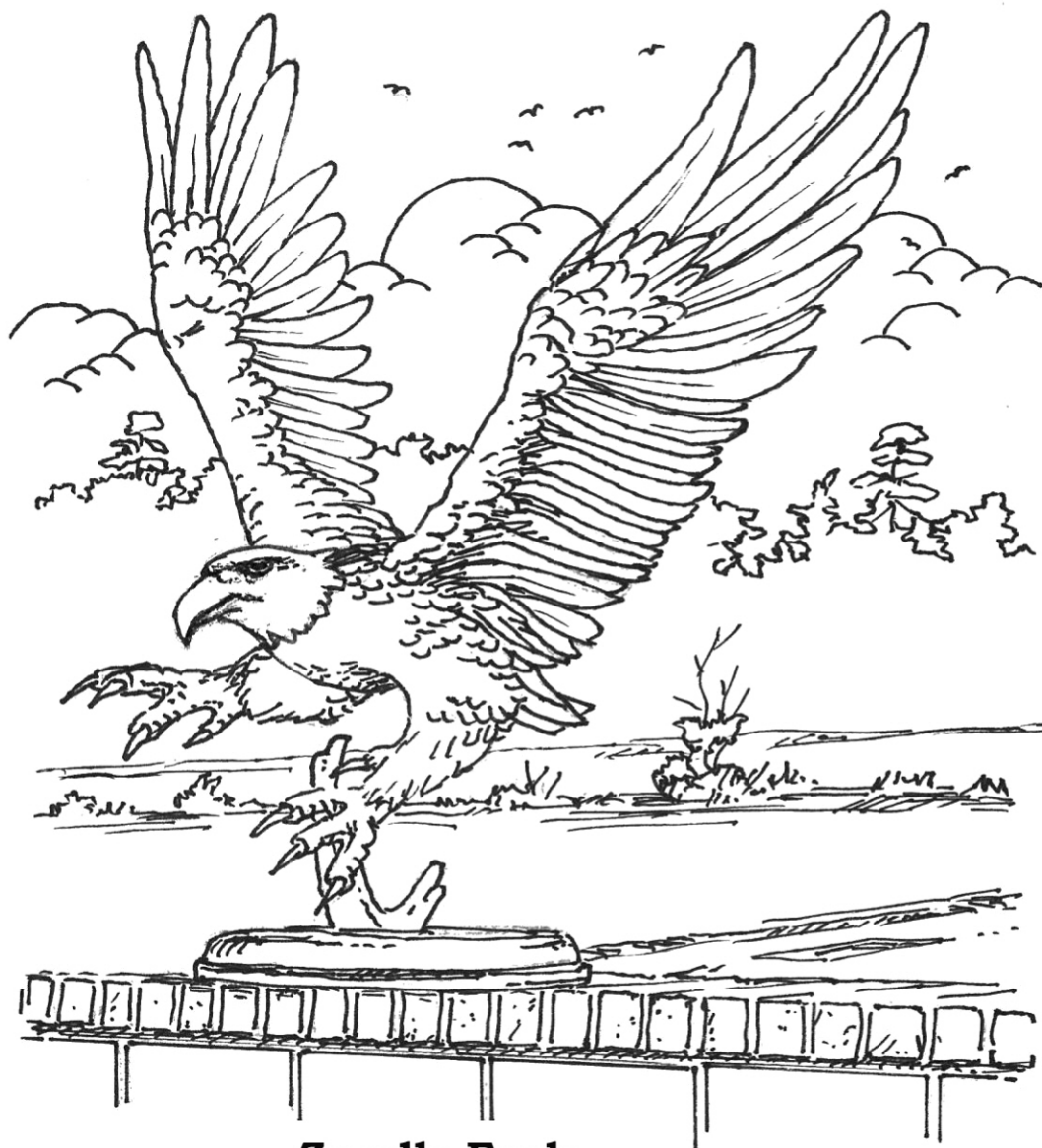
The town of Concord had to be moved because it was eventually covered by the waters of the lake.

The lake brings many visitors to Zavalla. They come to camp on its beautiful shores. Fishing, swimming and boating provide additional activities on the lake. The dam also supplies **hydroelectric** power and stores water for the cities of East Texas.



There are many historical landmarks in the Zavalla area. There was a large sawmill at Aldridge. A hike down the trail from Boykin Springs takes you to these **ruins**.

Ft. Teran, Boykin Springs, and the Blue Hole are hidden in the Angelina National Forest as reminders of those early people who made the forests of East Texas their home.

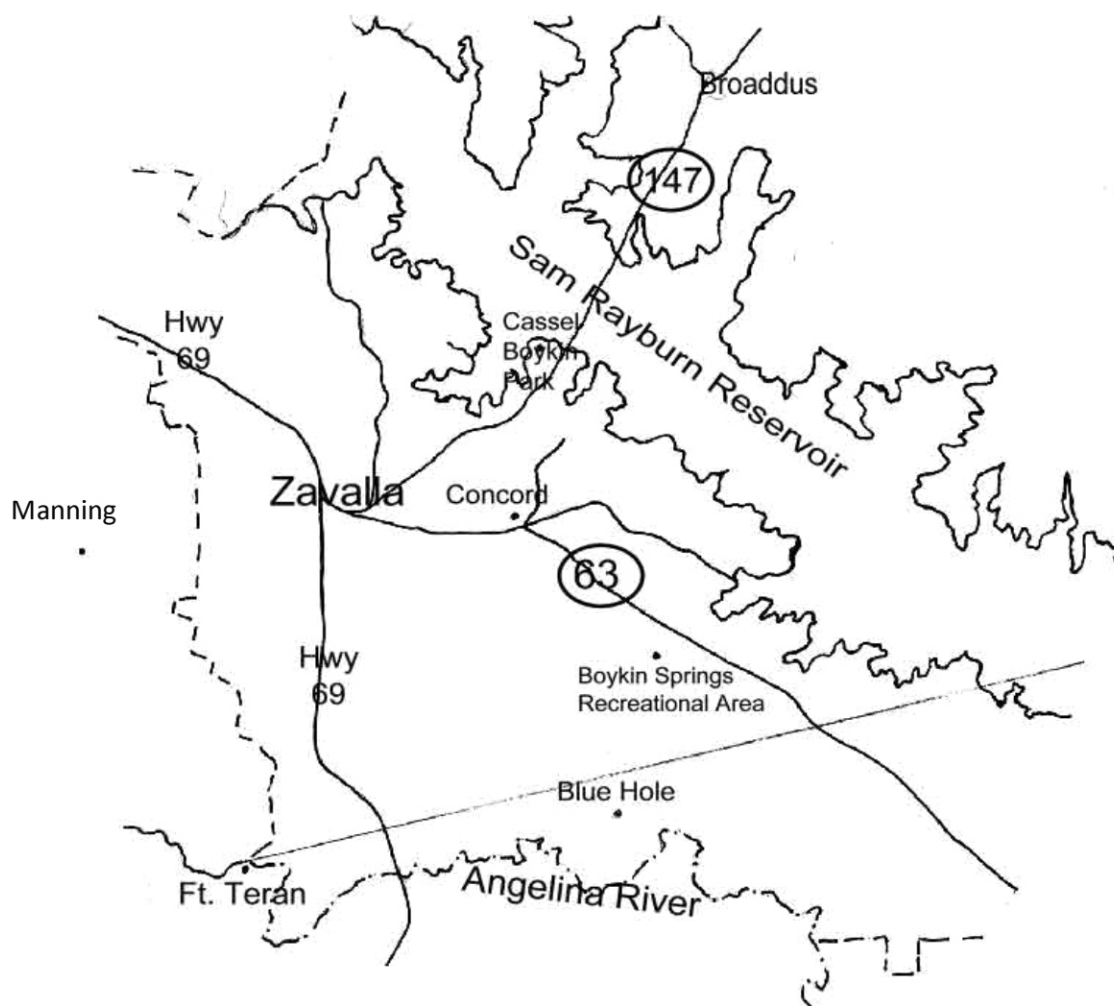


Zavalla Eagle

Sculpted by local artist, Lavon Hopkins.

Although the town of Zavalla has been in existence since 1900, it was not officially a city. As the town's population grew, many civic services were needed. The town's residents voted to **incorporate** and organize a city government in 1975. The statue of the eagle in front of the school stands as a symbol of Zavalla's heritage.

Zavalla Map and Interesting Facts



1. Zavalla is surrounded by the Angelina National Forest. Color the area within the dashed lines green.
2. Locate the Boykin Community. This was a large black settlement close to Zavalla. Today Boykin Springs Recreation area is close by.
3. Circle Cassel Boykin Park. This is a great place to camp and enjoy the great outdoors.
4. Ft. Teran was a Mexican fort built in 1831 to keep out Indian and American settlers on the Neches River. Draw a square around it.
5. Color the Sam Rayburn Reservoir blue. See if you can find out for whom the Reservoir is named.
6. Find the Blue Hole. It was a **quarry** for sandstone. The Galveston jetty in the 1900's may have used some of this stone.

Glossary

abundant – plenty of something or a great quantity.

archeologists - people who find out about the past by digging up things left by people of long ago.

archaic – very old.

artifacts – things that are left by people of long ago.

barrel - a container made of wood used to store liquids.

blacksmith – a person who shapes horseshoes and makes things out of metal.

CCC - Civilian Conservation Corp – a government agency that provided employment during the Great Depression.

chinking – the process of filling the cracks between the logs of a log cabin with clay or mud.

common ground – land that everyone used as their own, but did not own.

community - a place where the people living in the same area try to make a safe place to live and work.

crosscut saw - a saw with a handle at both ends and a blade in the middle and used by two people.

depot - a building in town where the train stops to take on freight or passengers.

dynamo – a machine that generates electricity.

empresario – a Mexican government official.

European – a person from the continent of Europe.

explore – to travel in a new land to find out everything about it.

fluid – a liquid.

Great Depression - a period of time in the 1930's when Americans were without jobs and money. Often people were hungry and had nowhere to live.

homestead – a home and the surrounding land owned by a family.

hydroelectric – electricity made by falling water.

incorporate – officially form into a city.

market – a place where things are sold.

mercantile – a general store that sold lots of different things.

mud cats – a handful of Spanish moss mixed with clay and used to make chimneys a long time ago.

operate – to make work.

passengers – people who ride on trains, cars, buses, and so forth.

pioneers – the first persons or people who go into an area or place to live.

planed – a rough sawn board from a sawmill is made smooth in a place called a planer mill.

product – anything that is made that can be bought or sold.

quarry – an open pit where building stone is mined.

resource – a natural source of material that can be turned into wealth or money.

ruins – the remains of buildings that are falling down with age and neglect

secede – to withdraw from.

smokehouse – a storehouse where meat is kept from spoiling by dense smoke.

solvent – a liquid that can make a some substances disappear or disperse.

staves – a narrow strip of wood used to make barrels.

stick and daub – a long time ago, a type of chimney made of mud and sticks.

Texican – what a person was called who lived in Texas when it was a part of Mexico, a long time ago.

tram – short railroad lines leading to the main railroad going to a lumber mill.

transportation – travel from one place to another.

virgin – a forest that has never been cut before and replanted.

WPA - Work Project Administration, a government agency, that helped people with jobs during the Great Depression.