Texas Genealogy Research

Indigenous Peoples and European Explorers, 1500's to 1700's

Different groups of people with a variety of languages, customs, and beliefs lived in present-day Texas for thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans.

- *The Coahuiltecans:* These people lived along the Gulf Coast. Prickly pear cactus, buffalo, and game were staples in their diet. Information about them is sparse. Historians believe that by the 18th century, the Coahuiltecans had largely lost their group identity through death, migration, and displacement.
- *The Karankawa:* One of the most powerful Indian tribes in early Texas, the Karankawa included several independent seasonal nomadic groups who shared the same language and much of the same culture. They included the Cujanes, Cocos, Guapites (Coapites), and Copanes.
  Spanish explorer Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca recorded that when he came to a Galveston beach in 1528, he was met by the Karankawa who lived there.
  In 1685, French explorer René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, met the Karankawa Indians when he established Fort St. Louis near Matagorda Bay.
  Between 1685 and 1700, Franciscan missions and Spanish military outposts (presidios) were established in present-day eastern Texas at Nacogdoches, Goliad, and San Antonio.
  European settlers and later Texan colonists repeatedly attacked and defeated the Karankawa people.
  By the 1840s, the Karankawa, exiled, split into two groups, one of which settled on Padre Island while the other fled into the Mexican state of Tamaulipas.
  In 1858, Juan Cortina led a group of Texan colonists against the Karankawa on Padre Island and killed them.
  By 1891, the Karankawa were believed to be extinct.
- *The Apache:* Dominating almost all of West Texas were the Lipan and Mescalero Apaches. They followed the buffalo herds. Buffalo provided most of their needs for food, clothing, and tipi covers. The Apache of the Panhandle Plains traded extensively across the Southwest. They gradually moved southward into Central Texas. The Lipan Apache they were pushed farther south by the formidable Comanche and Kiowa.
  In 1757, Spanish friars established Mission Santa Cruz de San Sabá north of San Antonio for the Lipan Apache. The missionaries hoped to convert the Lipans; the Apache hoped the friars would protect them from the Comanche and other enemies. Neither the missionaries or the Apaches anticipated the deep hostility of Apache enemies who completely destroyed the mission in 1758.
  By 1767, the Apaches had moved back into the landscapes of Texas and Mexico.
- *The Caddo:* Some Caddo communities had settled along the Red River and in present day East Texas from their homelands in present-day Louisiana, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. As many as 25 separate Caddo groups were linked by language and customs, including the Hasinai alliance. Europeans fought to claim alliances with the Caddo because the Caddo homelands were located in prime trading areas. Savvy and skilled traders, the Caddo facilitated trade with Europeans. During the 17th and 18th centuries, an increasing number of European goods and settlers moved into Texas, along with cholera and smallpox. About 95% of the Caddo population was decimated by disease by 1816.
- *The Jumano:* The Jumano Indians lived in land from northern Mexico to eastern New Mexico to west Texas. Renowned for their trading and communication skills, the Jumano helped establish

trade routes as wells as information and diplomatic relationships between Texas's Native Americans and the Spanish and French settlements in the 17th century.

In 1682, Spaniards founded the first permanent Spanish settlement near present-day El Paso. Catholic missions soon followed in east Texas.

- *The Tonkawa:* The Tonkawa people banded together in the 1700's in central Texas. The original Tonkawa were called the Mayeye and were first mentioned in 1687 in French correspondence about Fort St. Louis. They had frequent contact with Spanish explorers and took part in Spanish mission life.

  Epidemics, scarcity of buffalo, and war with other tribes and with the Spanish decreased the Tonkawa population in the 1700's. By the late 1800's, most Tonkawa lived in Indian Territory.
- *The Comanche:* The Comanche became exceptional horse people. They migrated into Texas in order to hunt bison and capture the wild horses that roamed the land. They eventually claimed vast areas of north, central, and west Texas.

  The Comanche were first recorded by Europeans in 1734, when a small scouting band appeared in San Antonio looking for their enemies, the Lipan Apache.
- *The Atakapa:* The Atakapa lived around the Gulf Coast of Texas and were accomplished farmers and hunters. Where the land wasn't too marshy or salty, they farmed corn and other vegetables. They also fished and hunted for alligator and bison.

  The Spanish built San Ildefonso Mission in present-day Milam County in hopes of converting the Atakapas; the effort failed and the mission was abandoned in 1755.

1800's

- In 1821, Texas became part of the new nation of Mexico. Stephen F. Austin brought the first Anglo-American colonists to south central Texas. Other colonists soon came from the U.S. Austin ensured that slavery was allowed in the Texas colony; this was against the wishes of the Mexican government. He also led raids against the Karankawa.

  Dissatisfaction and conflict between the settlers and the Mexican government grew, resulting in the Texas Rebellion and war. On October 2, 1835, Texans held off Mexican forces at Gonzales, Texas. In February 1836, the famous battle took place at the Alamo in San Antonio. The defeat became a rallying cry, and in April 1836, Texans defeated Mexican forces at San Jacinto. Texan settlers declared independence.
- By 1837, the new Republic of Texas organized areas into counties. The Republic existed until 1845.
- In 1845, Texas joined the United States. The Wichita, Lipan, Comanche, Kichai, and Caddo tribes signed a treaty at Council Springs, Texas, recognizing the jurisdiction of the U.S. government.
- In 1846, Mexico declared war on the United States in an effort to reclaim Texas and other territories. Over 6,000 Texans fought in the Mexican-American War.
- In 1848, Mexico ceded Texas and much of what is now the American southwest to the U.S.
- In 1850, Texas relinquished its claims to Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas, and Oklahoma.
- During the Civil War, Texas seceded from the Union. In 1870 it was readmitted to the Union.
- Skirmishes and battles continued between Texas settlers and native peoples after the Civil War. The "Buffalo War", 1873-1874, was waged against white hunters in Oklahoma and Texas by Cheyenne, Arapaho, Comanche, and Kiowa tribes to try to save the remaining buffalo herds.
- By the end of the 1870s, most remaining Native Americans had been moved to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma. Some escaped to Mexico.
- In 1898, over 300,000 Texans fought in the Spanish-American War.
- By 1901, the new, booming oil production industry was attracting many new residents.

Texas Vital Records

Texas Birth Records
Online Indexes/Images
FamilySearch.org: databases of Texas birth/christening records 1840 - 1981
Ancesty.com: databases of Texas birth indexes/records 1903 - 1997
Texas State Library and Archives Commission: birth indexes from 1903 through 2010

Pre-1873 Births
Before 1873, very few government offices recorded births in Texas.
Search family papers, church records, cemetery records, newspaper articles, military records, and censuses for clues to birth dates and locations.

Births 1873 - 1902
Some counties and towns began recording births in Texas as early as 1873. Delayed birth records, aka "probate births," were also created.
Obtain a Copy
With approximate birth years and places, contact the appropriate **County Clerk or District Clerk** to obtain copies of births recorded during this period.

Births 1903 to the Present
Statewide registration of births began in 1903 in Texas.
Birth records 1903 - present are kept at the Texas Bureau of Vital Statistics.
Obtain a Copy
Request a certified copy of a **post-1902 birth record** or a **post-1902 birth verification letter** from the **Texas Bureau of Vital Statistics**, Department of State Health Services.
Copies of birth certificates for births that occurred within the past 75 years can be requested only by the decedent's child, spouse, parent, sibling, or grandparent.

Texas Marriage Records
Online Indexes/Images
FamilySearch.org: indexes of Texas church and county marriage records 1837 - 2010
Ancestry.com: indexes of various Texas county marriage records 1817 - 2015
Texas State Library and Archives Commission: marriage indexes from 1966 through 2005.
Texas Vital Statistics website: download of marriage or divorce records by year beginning 1966

Pre-1837 Marriages
Look for church records of marriages, references to marriages in family papers, in military records, censuses, death and probate records, cemetery records or newspaper articles.

Marriages 1837 to the Present
As counties were formed, county clerks began recording marriages. Marriage license applications and certificates are kept at the county offices, not by the state.

Obtain a Copy of a Marriage Record 1837 to Present
Obtain a copy of a marriage record from the appropriate **County Clerk**. Ask for a copy of the application for the marriage license. Applications give additional personal information.

Texas Divorce Records

Online Indexes

FamilySearch.org: index of state divorce verifications 1968 - 2010, index of Gonzalez County divorce records 1911 - 1958

Ancestry.com: index of divorce records 1968 - 2014

Texas Vital Statistics website: download of index of divorce verifications beginning 1966

Divorce Records

County courts presided over divorce actions and created the court records.

Obtain a Copy

The **State Bureau of Vital Statistics** can provide a *verification* of a divorce in Texas from 1968 to the present.

Obtain a *copy* of a Divorce Decree only from the **District Clerk's Office** in the county where the divorce was granted.

Texas Death Records

Online Indexes/Images

FamilySearch.org: five databases of Texas death records recorded 1890 - 2000

Ancestry.com: five databases of death records of years 1903 - 2000

Pre-1903 Death Registrations

A few death registrations and delayed death records were created from 1890s - 1902, as reported from obituaries and probate records. These delayed death registrations are grouped with the death certificates created after 1903 at the **Texas Bureau of Vital Statistics**.

If no county created a death record, search family papers, church records, newspaper articles, military records, cemetery and probate records.

Deaths 1903 to the Present

Death registrations were required by the state beginning in 1903. They were recorded by the counties. Death records are kept at the Texas Bureau of Vital Statistics.

Obtain a Copy

Request a certified copy of a **pre-1902 death registration,** a **post-1902 death record**, or a **post-1902 death verification letter** from the **Texas Bureau of Vital Statistics**.

Copies of death certificates for deaths that occurred within the past 25 years can be requested only by the decedent's child, spouse, parent, sibling, or grandparent.

Order online on the website *Texas.gov.*

Texas Genealogical/Historical Organizations

- **Briscoe Center for American History** (University of Texas at Austin) - newspapers, photos, biographies, private collections, the American South, military history, Western Americana, Natchez Trace Collection online
- **Clayton Library Center for Genealogical Research** - strong genealogical collection for Texas, adjoining states, and Tennessee - in Houston
- **Dallas Public Central Library** - genealogical collection with records for Texas, Oklahoma, the South, Mid-Atlantic, and New England states

- **Daughters of the Republic of Texas** - especially good collection for the Mexican colonial era in Texas, the Texas Republic, and genealogical reference works
- **East Texas Research Center** (Ralph W. Steen Library) - the pre-Civil War period, the East Texas lumber industry, and oral histories
- **Fort Worth Public Library** - newspapers, obituaries, biographies, histories and genealogies covering the entire Southwest, the Midwest and the original thirteen states
- **Galveston and Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library** - records of ethnic Germans in Texas, and a database of immigrants to the Gulf Coast.
- **Harrison County Historical Museum** - locate selected early *Missouri* and *Texas* settlers (Missouri Confederate soldiers fought here during the Civil War) - family folders, books, letters, diaries, journals, and surname lists for northeast Texas
- **Natchitoches Genealogical and Historical Association** - "French" records of what is now the state of Louisiana dated from the early 1700's, with an index by the Parish Clerk - *many references to Americans bound for Texas*
- **National Archives at Fort Worth** - microfilm and computer research, archived records
- **Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center** (Texas State Library and Archives Commission) - original manuscripts for Texas while a part of Mexico, as a republic, and as a state, records and microfilms including all counties, vital records, newspapers, books, and maps
- **San Antonio Public Library** - good genealogy and Texana collection
- **Texas State Genealogical Society**
- **University of Texas Arlington Central Library** - good Texas newspapers collection

Texas Church Records

During Texas' colonization period, Roman Catholics were the most numerous, but early citizens included members of other religious faiths such as Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Christian or Disciples of Christ.

Catholic Records

- Catholic Diocese Archives of Texas, in Austin, TX
- Various archdiocese archives in the state. The San Antonio archdiocese records begin in 1703.

Baptist Records

- Baylor University's Texas Collection, Baylor University Library, Box 6396, Waco, TX
- Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, A. Webb Roberts Library, Box 22, Fort Worth, TX
- A collection of Baptist records maintained outside the state is at Samford University Library, Birmingham, AL. This collection includes books, church and association minutes, church and association histories, and 1800's Southern Baptist newspapers, many of which are indexed.

Methodist Records

- Bridwell Theology Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas

Presbyterian Records

- Presbyterian Theological Seminary Archives, Austin, TX

Texas Land Records

Spanish and Mexican Land Grants

Prior to establishment of the Republic of Texas in 1836, European settlers in Texas received land grants from Spain and/or Mexico.

Public Land Grants from Republic of Texas and the State of Texas

Eleven land districts, each encompassing a number of counties, were established in 1836 under the Republic of Texas, and a central GLO was organized at Austin. The system of land districts continued when Texas became a state with previous land grants being acknowledged. Nearly 150 million acres of state public land in Texas were granted to settlers after 1836.

Headright Grants:

- The Republic classified the land previously granted by Spain or Mexico to earlier settlers as Class 1 Headright Grants. Families received 4,605.5 acres of land; single men 1,476 acres.
- To encourage settlement in Texas, the Republic granted various classes of Headright Grants between 2 March 1836 and 1 January 1842.

Pre-emption (Squatter) Grants:

- The state of Texas issued these grants of no more than 320 acres between 22 January 1845 and 1854. Recipients had to live on their land at least 3 consecutive years.
- After 1854, married men received 160 acres; after 1870, single men received up to 80 acres.
- Pre-emption Grants were discontinued after 1898.

Bounty Grants:

- Between 1837 and 1888, Texas issued land in payment for military service to the Republic.
- Legislatures changed the amount of land given through the years.
- Later bounty land was granted to widows, surviving veterans, disabled Confederate veterans and builders of railroads, canals, roads, mills, or factories.

Contracted Grants:

- Individuals who contracted with the Republic and/or the State of Texas to bring colonists received payment in large amounts of land.

Land Grant Records

Texas' GLO maintains its own archives and records division, housing all early land grants - those dated in the 1700s and original grants issued by both the republic and state.

Indexes of land grants are maintained at the Stephen F. Austin State Office Bldg., Austin, TX.

Obtain a copy of a land grant index entry for an individual name with arrival date and county from the **State Office Bldg**.

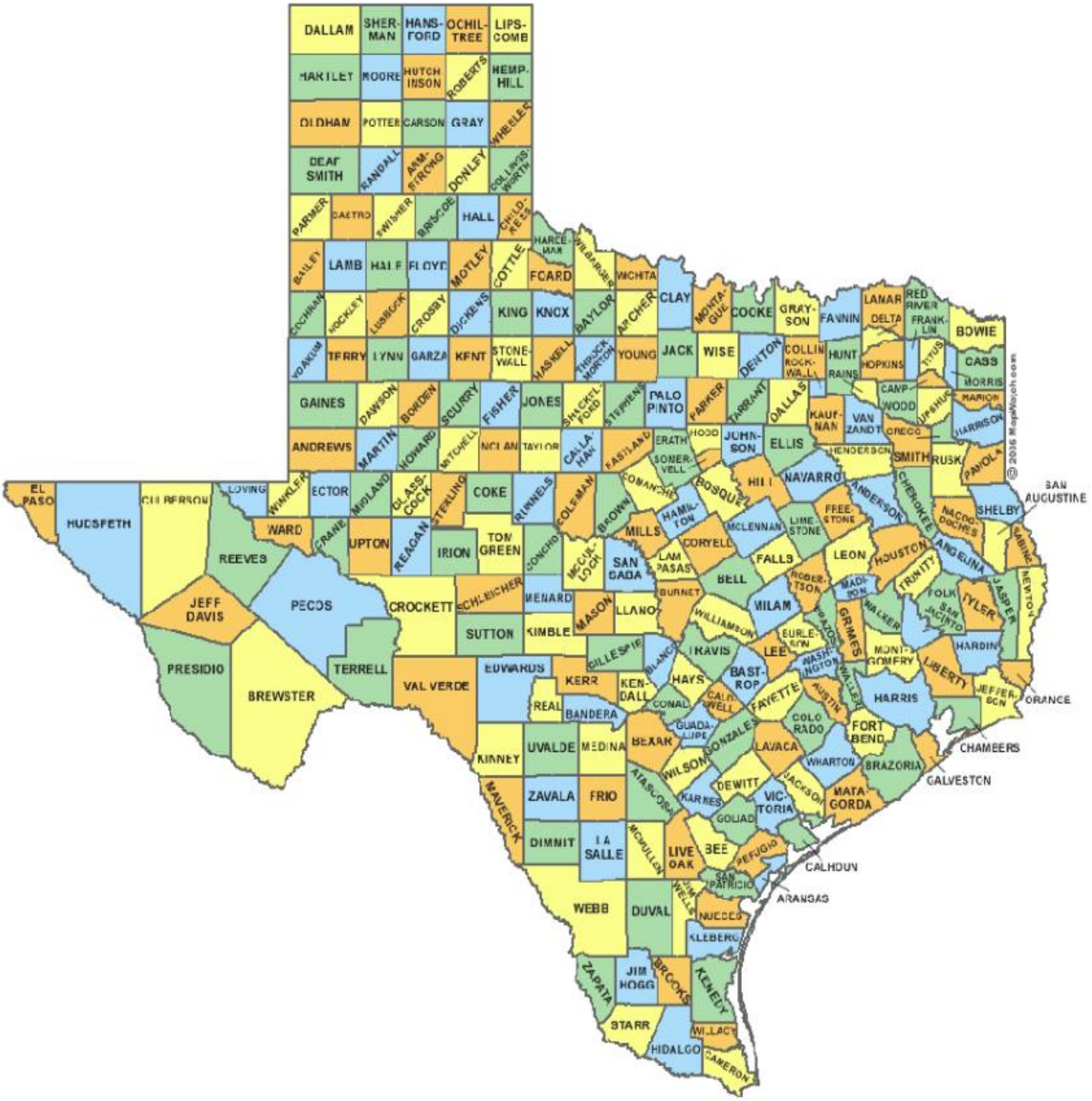
Private Land Purchases and Sales

After the land had been granted to settlers, succeeding land purchases were recorded by the counties in which the land was located. All deeds are indexed by grantor and by grantee.

Obtain a copy of a land deed from the appropriate **County Clerk's Office**.

The Atlas of Historical County Boundaries – Interactive maps and text covering the historical boundaries, names, organization, and attachments of every county, extinct county and unsuccessful county proposal from the creation of the first county through December 31, 2000. - http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/index.html

Texas Counties



Migration Routes through Texas

Colorado River (Texas)| · Pecos River| · Red River · Rio Grande · Sabine River| · Butterfield Overland Mail · Camino Real de los Tejas · Camino Real de Tierra Adentro · Chisholm Trail · Coushatta-Nacogdoches Trace · Jones Plummer Trail · Preston Trail · San Antonio-El Paso Road · Santa Fe Trail · Texas Road · Southern Pacific Railroad · Texas and Pacific Railway

Texas Genealogy Websites

NOTE: Look for the *GenWeb* or *Genealogy Trails* of any county in which your ancestors lived.

Burnet County Obituary Index – Alpha lists of obituaries from 1876 – 1910 by surname and year with the name and date of newspaper – more years will be added - order a copy of an obituary at the email address given – https://sites.google.com/site/obitindex/
Fort Bend County Obituaries – search index and images of obituaries that were published in the Fort Bend Herald from August 1, 2007, to the present - obituaries dating before August 1, 2007, are being progressively added each month - http://catalog.fortbend.lib.tx.us/polaris/default.aspx?ctx=14
Gazetteer of Deceased Texas Physicians – biographies of over 12, 000 doctors in the 19th and 20th centuries - http://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/gazetteer/
Grand Prairie Area Deaths, *Dallas and Tarrant County, TX:* index of deaths mostly in 21st century, a few in the 1900's includes names, ages, dates of obituaries – view images of obituaries - https://gpgstx.org/areaDeaths.php
Hale County, TX Yearbooks and Historical Maps - view historical maps – read pages selected years of 1900's and 2000's Plainview High School Yearbooks - http://plainviewtx.org/400/Hale-County-Resources
Handbook of Texas Online - encyclopedia of Texas history, geography and culture including indigenous Native Americans and minorities - https://tshaonline.org/handbook
Online Texas Death Records and Indexes - links to indexes by county - https://www.deathindexes.com/texas/
Portal to Texas History - digitized books, maps and photos of college yearbooks, church records, county histories and newspapers - https://texashistory.unt.edu/
Texas Digital Archives (Stephen F. Austin State University) - inscriptions, photos of burials in Oak Grove Cemetery and in Zion Hill - Park Street Cemetery - personal histories, photos and other items of East Texas historical interest - https://digital.sfasu.edu/
Texas State Library and Archives Commission – index of Confederate pension applications, lists of indigent Confederate families and Republic claims – view images of pension applications on Ancestry.com or order copies – https://www.tsl.texas.gov/arc/genfirst.html

Texas African American Research

Access Genealogy – links by state to websites of African American genealogy, cemeteries, and censuses
Digital Library on American Slavery – search database of detailed information about slaves, free people of color, and whites in the fifteen slaveholding states in the United States and the District of Columbia from 1775 to 1867 - http://library.uncg.edu/slavery/
Slave Confederate Payrolls - digitized payrolls list names of slaves of 10 southern states who worked for the Confederate Army and whose pay went to their masters - https://catalog.archives.gov/search?q=719477

Texas Cemetery Research

Brown County Cemeteries - Index of over 50 cemeteries with maps, burial lists, grave photos, may include images of death certificates, veteran status and the deceased's family information - http://www.browncountytexasgenealogy.com/pvgs_cemeteries.html
Fort Bend County Cemeteries - list of cemeteries and of burials in each cemetery - http://www.fortbend.lib.tx.us/departments/genealogy/obit_db_cemetery_list/obit_db_cemetery_list.html#C

Grand Prairie Area Cemetery Records - *Dallas and Tarrant County,TX:* search a list of burials in 15 area cemeteries, including tombstone photos, transcriptions, and personal information; also cemetery histories, photos, and maps - https://gpgstx.org/cemeteryRecords.php
Hale County, TX Cemeteries - Search burials in Hale County cemeteries by name or date - http://unger.myplainview.com/cemetery/cemetery.php
Wichita Falls, TX, Cemeteries – burial lists and maps of Hillcrest, Lakeview, Riverside, and Rosemont cemeteries - http://www.wichitafallstx.gov/728/Burial-Records

Texas Military Research

Brown County Military database: information covers before the Civil War through the Vietnam War, casualty lists, pensions, veterans census, Texas Ranger Indian War Pensions Brown and Coleman County - http://www.browncountytexasgenealogy.com/pvgs_military.html

Texas Native American Research

First People - Links to State Recognized Tribes, sorted by state - http://www.firstpeople.us/FP-Html-Links/state-recognized-tribes-in-usa-by-state.html
Native Languages of the Americas: Native American Cultures: type the name of a state in the search bar for information about indigenous peoples living in that area – http://www.native-languages.org/home.htm

Texas Newspaper Research

Hale County, TX, Newspapers – view pages of 1900's Hale County Newspapers from Abernathy, Hale Center, and Petersburg - http://unger.myplainview.com/halecountynewspapers2.html
Texas Digital Newspaper Program – search or browse thousands of Texas newspapers - https://texashistory.unt.edu/explore/collections/TDNP/

Above information courtesy of:
FamilySearch.org Wiki
Ancestry wiki on *Rootsweb.com*
American Indians, A Story told for Thousands of Years – Bullock Museum website - https://www.thestoryoftexas.com/discover/campfire-stories/native-americans
Eastman's Online Genealogy Newsletter
Family Tree Magazine