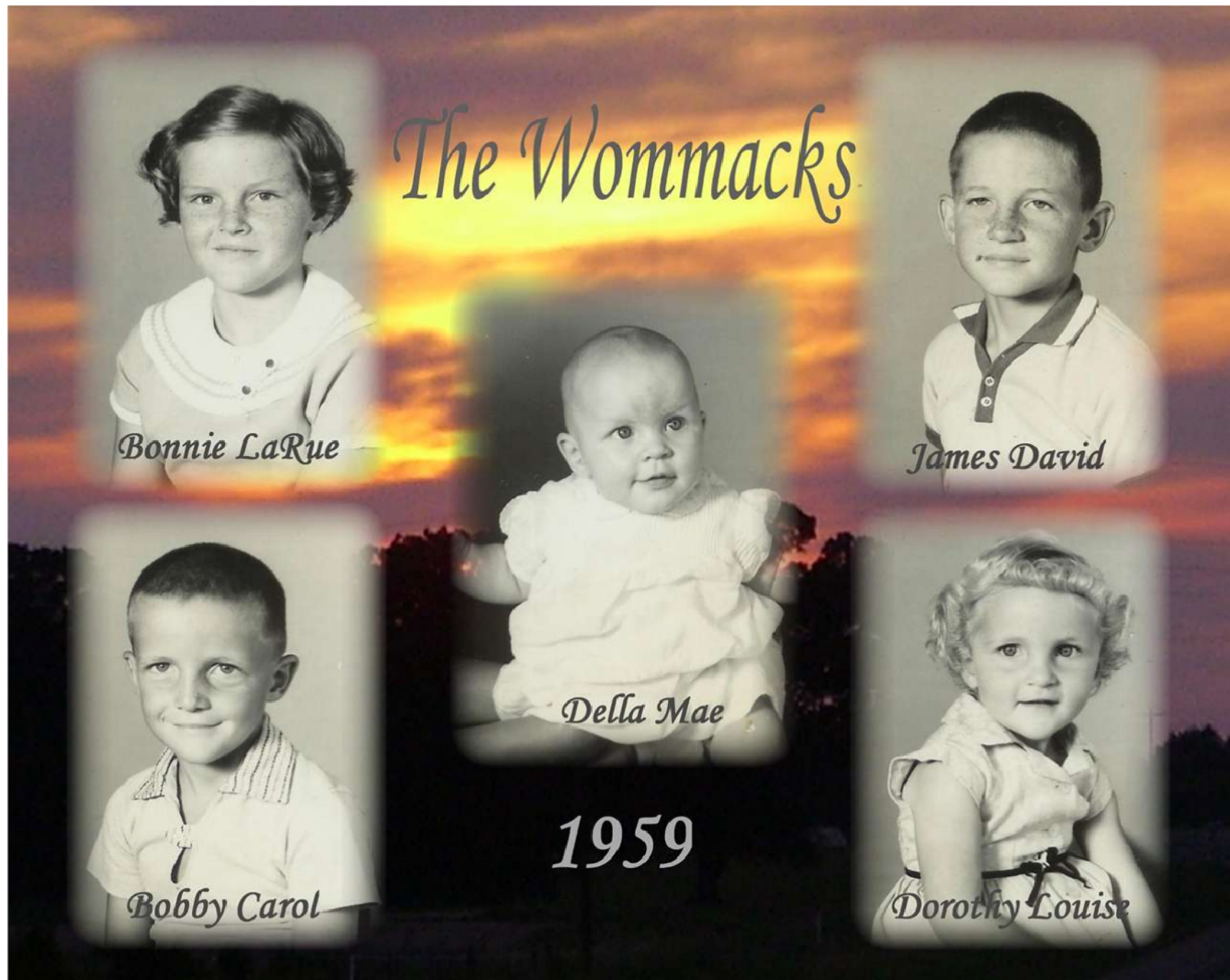




How often do you look at yourself in the mirror and wonder;
Where did I get my hair, eyes, nose?
How did I end up here?
Where did we come from?



I grew up surrounded by family. Everyone was kin, even if I had no idea of how or why, I knew if they lived in the area, they were kin. That's just how it was. I was the normal kid with a big family and a huge extended family. I rarely listened to the family stories. I just wanted to go outside and play. So in 1978, while I was pregnant with my second child, I thought nothing of promising my grandmothers if it was a girl I would name her after both of them, never bothering to take into account I didn't even know their full given names. I wasn't concerned, after all, I was sure it was going to be a boy.

So on March 7, 1979 when my daughter was born, I grew a little concerned when I had to come up with a name for her from Ola Annice Crocker Hancock and Ethel Ewildi Jenkins Wommack. All I could ever remember anyone ever calling them was simply Momma and Granny, although some would often refer to Granny Wommack as "Punk". I knew one day I would have to explain to Annice Ewildi Hicks what her name meant.

I started collecting family facts in March of 1979. I went to all the family reunions I could, and researched everything I could find on the Internet. My girls grew up going, what we playfully called, "cemetery hopping". They learned the alphabet reading tombstones. Then, in 1998 we lost our parents family home to a fire. My parents got out of the house safely, but we were not able to save anything. You never think about what is important from your childhood

until you don't have anything but the memories. Since then, my grandparents have all past and so have my parents. With their passing, we also lost any hope of capturing all the stories we grew up with.

One year for Christmas my sister, Bonnie, went around to all the aunts and uncles and collected all the pictures she could and put them on a CD so we could have that at least have some of our family pictures back. I have also been able to collect a few pictures and stories as I have visited with family and friends.

This is my attempt to look at who we are and how we got here. The information is as factual as I could find, but I was always more interested in the story of who we are, then the "black and white" of dates and places.

I have attempted to add facts to our story when possible. I find it very interesting to try to imagine what was going on in the world at different points of our family history. Some of the black and white facts about where we ended up are;

- United States declared its independence in 1776.
- We were established in the Americas as early as 1650's and had many ancestors fight in the Revolutionary War
- Texas declared its independence from Mexico in 1836 and existed as the independent Republic of Texas for nearly a decade. In 1845, it joined the United States as the 28th state.
- We were well established in Tejas before it was a state.

I have never been able to find the real story of why we settled in what is now Cass County Texas, but I know that all branches of our family, Wommack, Jenkins, Hancock, Crocker, Hicks, and McCord, has been here for more that eight generations.

To better understand what it means to have been here for that long, I thought I would share what I have found out about life in Cass County Texas over the years.



Cass County, bordered by Arkansas and Louisiana on the east, is located in northeastern Texas on the state's eastern boundary; it is one county removed from the northern boundary. Linden, the county seat, is in the south central portion of the county fourteen miles southwest of Atlanta, the county's largest town. The county's center lies at approximately 33°05' north latitude and 94°21' west longitude. U.S. Highway 59 connects Linden, Atlanta, and Queen City with Jefferson to the south and Texarkana to the north. The county's transportation needs are also served by State highways 8, 11, 77, and 155, and by two rail lines, the Missouri Pacific and the Louisiana and Arkansas. Cass County comprises 937 square miles of the East Texas timberlands, an area that is heavily forested with a great variety of softwoods and hardwoods, especially pine, cypress, and oak. The terrain ranges from nearly level to hilly, with an elevation ranging from 200 to 632 feet above sea level. Several stony hills in the western part of the county rise to a height of more than 200 feet and have been protected from erosion by the ironstone material that caps them. The largest of these hills are the Cusseta Mountains, five miles east of Marietta. Northern Cass County is drained by the Sulphur River, and the remainder is drained by Cypress Creek. The soil is light-colored and predominantly sandy and loamy. Between 21 and 30 percent of the land in Cass County is considered prime farmland. Mineral resources include ceramic clay, granite, industrial sand, oil, gas, iron, and lignite coal. Temperatures range from an average high of 92° F in July to an average low of 31° F in January. Rainfall averages almost forty-seven inches a year, and the growing season extends for an average of 237 days.

The Caddo Indians, an agricultural people with a highly developed culture, had occupied the area for centuries before the arrival of Europeans, but disease and threats from other Indians forced them to abandon the region in the final years of the eighteenth century. During the 1820s bands of Shawnee, Delaware, and Kickapoo Indians inhabited the area for a few years, but they abandoned their settlements in the mid-1830s.

It seems probable that the first European entry into what would become Cass County occurred between 1687, when Henri Joutel traveled north in search of Henri de Tonti, and 1690, when Tonti returned to Texas in search of survivors of the LaSalle expedition. Prolonged European activity in the area began in 1719, when Le Poste des Cadodaquious was founded by Bénard de La Harpe.

Anglo settlement in the area that became Cass County began in the 1830s. Among the earliest settlers was Reece Hughes, who built a cabin near three mineral springs which later became known as Hughes Springs. The county was formed from Bowie County in 1846. Jefferson was chosen as the first county seat, but, after several fiercely contested elections, in 1852 Linden became county seat. The county's boundaries were reduced in 1860 with the formation of Marion County, but, with the exception of small adjustments, have remained unchanged since that time. The county was originally named Cass County in honor of Lewis Cass, a United States Senator from Michigan who had favored the annexation of Texas. During the secession crisis Cass, who had formerly been known as a Northern man with Southern principles, resigned his post as secretary of state when President James Buchanan declined to defend the federal forts in Charleston, South Carolina.

When word of his actions reached Texas, the name of the county was changed to Davis in honor of Jefferson Davis. The republican-controlled state legislature of 1871 changed the name back to Cass.

As settlers began to pour in, the lands to the west were being settled, so that Cass County was never really a frontier community in the sense of being on the western edge of settlement. Neither was it isolated from access to larger markets, except for a very brief period during its earliest years. Jefferson, a major riverport in antebellum Texas, served as a supply point and shipping center for produce. Those who settled Cass County were for the most part southerners, and many of them were slaveholders. The white population built a way of life similar to the one they had known in the older Southern states and an agricultural economy based on cotton as the cash crop and corn and hogs as primary food crops. During the antebellum years agricultural production in the county expanded steadily; the amount of cotton produced grew from 1,573 bales in 1849 to 9,968 bales in 1859. Corn production expanded also, from 167,250 bushels in 1849 to 289,979 bushels in 1859. The number of hogs in the county expanded only slightly, from 16,732 in 1849 to 17,432 in 1859. The labor force in this agricultural economy was composed almost entirely of black slaves. As agricultural production expanded, the slave population grew faster than the free. In 1847 the 943 slaves in the county constituted roughly 31 percent of the total population of 2,949. The 3,475 slaves in 1860 constituted 41 percent of the 8,411 people counted. In 1847 one free black lived in the county, and the census of 1860 reported none.

Cass County's white population overwhelmingly supported the secession movement during the winter of 1860-61. When the secession ordinance was voted on in February 1861 Cass County voters approved it by a vote of 423 to 32. They also wholeheartedly supported the war effort of the Confederacy, but no estimates of the number of men from the county who served in the Confederate armed forces are available. Because Cass County was never invaded it escaped the physical destruction that devastated other parts of the South. Nonetheless, the war years were trying times for the county's citizens. They were forced to deal with disruptions to the local economy caused by an unstable Confederate currency and the lack of a market for their cotton, as well as concern for those on the battlefield. The end of the war brought wrenching changes in the county's economic foundation. While the end of slavery meant freedom for the black, it meant a serious loss of capital for the white slaveholder. In 1859 Cass County slaveholders had paid taxes on 4,697 slaves valued at \$2,387,500.

Throughout 1867 and 1868 there were repeated reports from agents of the Freedmen's Bureau in Marshall that freedmen were being cheated and physically abused in Cass County, but neither federal troops nor an agent of the bureau was ever stationed in the county. Thus the county never experienced military occupation by a conquering army. Still, the county's citizens felt the effects of Reconstruction because troops stationed at various times in Marion, Bowie, and Harrison counties occasionally passed through Cass County while chasing fugitives or traveling to their posts. Military commanders also removed Cass County officeholders as "impediments to reconstruction."



Reconstruction, however, was of short duration in the county, as the county was returned to white Democratic control at the election that determined the contents of the Constitution of 1869.

This represented 60 percent of all taxable property in the county. The loss brought about by emancipation, together with the widespread belief that free blacks would not work and the uncertain status of the South in the nation, led to a loss of confidence that caused property values to plummet in 1865.

The voters of Cass County supported the Democratic candidates in 1848, 1852, 1856, and 1860 and in every presidential election from 1872 to 1892. Republican William McKinley actually won pluralities of the county's votes in 1896 and 1900, but for the first half of the twentieth century the Democrats dominated the area, winning virtually every presidential election there from 1904 through 1964; the only exception was in 1956, when Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower carried the area. The county's political balance shifted substantially after 1968, when independent candidate George Wallace won a plurality of the county's voters, and 1972, when Republican Richard Nixon took the county by a more than two-to-one margin over Democrat George McGovern. For the rest of the century the county's voters shifted back and forth; Democratic presidential candidates carried the area in 1976, 1980, 1988, and 1996, Republicans in 1984 and 1992. In the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, however, Republican George W. Bush carried the county with solid majorities.

For more than sixty years after Reconstruction, the economic base of Cass County was agricultural, as it had been since the county's beginnings. Cotton remained the principal cash crop, and corn remained the principal food crop. Hogs remained the other principal food product until, beginning in the 1920s, changes in diet led to declining swine production. As late as 1940, 57 percent of the county's labor force worked in agriculture, and three-quarters of the county's cropland was devoted to cotton and corn. Although cotton provided the major source of income, however, it did not provide prosperity for many of the county's residents. From 1880, when the statistics were first compiled, through 1930, each census recorded a higher percentage of farmers who did not own the land they farmed. In 1880, 24 percent of the farmers in the county were listed as tenants. In 1930, 61 percent of all farmers in the county fell into that category.

Though agriculture was the foundation of the county's economic base, the county was never exclusively agricultural. Manufacturing provided jobs for a small portion of the county's population beginning in 1850, when twenty-four persons were employed to produce goods valued at \$13,860. With the exception of a modest decline in the early 1900s, the number of those involved in manufacturing expanded steadily. In 1940, 842 individuals manufactured products valued at \$1,340,999. Although the number had grown, those employed in manufacturing in 1940 constituted less than 8 percent of the county's labor force.

One other important industry in Cass County was the lumber industry.

The abundant forests in the county initially provided wood for houses and fences for the county's residents, but production gradually expanded to include the production of lumber and lumber products for export. By the 1940s Cass County lumbermills were producing 75 million board feet of lumber annually. Most of this wood was softwood from the shortleaf pines prominent in the county's forests. Though the timber industry was important, it employed about the same number of individuals as manufacturing and thus provided jobs for less than 10 percent of the county's labor force.

In many areas there seemed to be little change in the county between the end of Reconstruction and 1940. Cotton and corn remained the principal crops, and most people in the county worked in agriculture. The county was still overwhelmingly rural. In 1890, 14 percent of the population lived in the county's four largest towns. In 1940 the percentage had not changed. Still there had been changes, some of which were dramatically altering the lives of Cass County residents. First, there were dramatic changes in the county's transportation system. During the antebellum period, the primary major market and supply center had been the riverport and supply center, Jefferson. In 1873 the Texas and Pacific Railway was constructed through eastern Cass County, and the towns of Atlanta and Queen City grew up along that line. In 1876 the East Line and Red River was constructed through the southwestern corner of the county; its principal Cass County station was Hughes Springs. The two railroads gave residents more reliable transportation for their crops and enabled Hughes Springs and Atlanta to develop as supply centers. Within the county the predominant means of transportation remained horses and mules into the 1930s. By 1940, however, the automobile had become predominant. In 1922 only 775 automobiles were registered in the county. By 1940 there were 5,504. By 1940 the major highways that crossed the county in the 1990s had been constructed.

The 1930s saw the birth of a new industry in the county, as the oil reserves beneath the surface were tapped, beginning with the exploration of the Rodessa oilfield south of Atlanta. By 1936 over 100 wells had been drilled. Although this activity brought a new town, McLeod, and prosperity to some landowners in the area of the oilfields, its impact on the economic base of the county is hard to measure. Although exploration and production continued, Cass County never really became a major oil-producing county. In 1937, following the initial boom, the wells in the county produced 11,511,838 barrels of oil. But over the next several years production declined sharply, and in 1948 the county's wells produced only 880,575 barrels of oil. More than 510,600 barrels of oil and 8,417,449 cubic feet of gas-well gas were produced in the county in 2000; by the end of that year 112,600,392 barrels of oil had been taken from county lands since 1935.

Profound changes also occurred in the size and structure of the county's farms. Although the county's population had increased from 30,030 in 1930 to 33,496 in 1940, the number of farms in the county had dropped from 5,841 to 4,404. The size of the average county farm had increased from sixty-eight to ninety-two acres. For the first time since 1910 a majority of the farmers in Cass County owned all or at least part of the land they farmed, with farm tenancy dropping from its 1930 high of 61 percent to 48 percent in 1940.



These changes were largely the result of the Great Depression of the 1920s and 1930s and federal programs implemented to deal with the crisis.

The depression, which began for farmers in the mid-1920s, had hit Cass County farmers hard. Between 1920 and 1930 the value of the average farm in the county plummeted from \$2,504 to \$1,554. The farmers' initial response to falling crop prices had been to plant more cotton. The 1929 cotton crop was the largest ever reported to census takers, both in output (37,508 bales) and in acreage (123,753 acres planted). In fact, 60 percent of the county's total cropland had been planted in cotton, the largest proportion ever recorded. During the 1930s, under the programs of the New Deal, county landowners began to restrict the acreage planted in return for payments from the federal government. Apparently, many Cass County farmers, like others throughout the South, took the land that was to lie fallow away from tenants and sharecroppers.

Though the number of farms cultivated by owners in Cass County fell by only twenty-six between 1930 and 1940, the number of farms cultivated by tenants and sharecroppers fell by 1,411. The exodus from the farms was forced on landless farmers by landlords during the hard years of the depression. Later, during the 1940s and 1950s, farmers voluntarily left the land as other sectors of the economy and parts of the country provided greater opportunities. By 1959 only 13 percent of Cass County farmers were tenants. The trend continued until 1969, when the figure had fallen to 7 percent.

The trend towards larger and fewer farms begun in the 1930s also continued. By 1982 only 894 farms were in operation in Cass County, and their average size had grown to 277 acres. The trend away from cotton continued and expanded to include all harvested crops. In 1930 the county's farmers reported that they had harvested crops from over 206,000 acres of cropland in 1929. In 1982 the total cropland harvested was only 25,000 acres. Replaced by a wide variety of crops, the former mainstays of cotton and corn had been totally abandoned. The county's farmers had turned to livestock, particularly beef and poultry, as their major source of income. In 1982, 80 percent of the county's total agricultural income came from livestock. Pine and hardwood production in 1981 totaled 16,920,041 cubic feet.

As the changes in agriculture that had begun in the 1930s continued in the 1940s and 1950s, the county began to change in other ways. The percentage of the county's residents who lived in the four largest towns doubled between 1940 and 1950, as many of those who were leaving the farms moved into town. These four towns continued to grow, until, by 1970, 43 percent of the county's population lived in them. In 1980 the 12,661 people who lived in the four largest towns were also 43 percent of the county's total population of 29,430.

The county's manufacturing base continued to expand in the 1940s, and by 1947, 1,008 people were employed in Cass County's forty-one manufacturing establishments. But afterward, the continued growth of Lone Star Steel in neighboring Morris County made that county the industrial center of the region, and manufacturing in Cass County declined precipitously.

In 1958 the number of Cass County manufactories had fallen from forty-one to twenty-one, and those twenty-one employed just 174 people. Afterward, manufacturing in the county expanded slowly until in 1982 it employed 700 people.

The decline in manufacturing in the late 1940s and 1950s, coupled with the changes in agriculture, led to a fall in the county's population as people left to take advantage of opportunities elsewhere. The shrinkage continued until 1960, when Cass County's population was recorded as 23,496. After that, the county grew slowly in the 1960s to a population of 24,133 in 1970, then more rapidly in the 1970s to a population of 29,430 in 1980. During the period of decline, the county's black population fell more rapidly than the white population; it continued to decline through the 1960s. In 1970 the 6,395 blacks constituted just 26 percent of the county's total population. The black population grew only marginally during the 1970s; the 6,460 blacks present in 1980 constituted only 22 percent of the county's population.

In 1982 many county residents worked at jobs beyond the county line, predominantly at Lone Star Steel in Morris County and Red River Arsenal and Lone Star Army Ammunition Plant in Bowie County. Of those who worked in Cass County, the largest numbers worked in manufacturing, trade, and local government. Income figures for 1981 indicated that Cass County was poorer than most Texas counties. With a per-capita income of \$7,457 annually, it ranked 218th among the state's 254 counties. By way of contrast, Bowie and Morris counties ranked 139th and 29th, with per-capita incomes of \$9,065 and \$11,602, respectively. In 1990 Cass County had 29,982 inhabitants.

In 2000 the census counted 30,438 people living in Cass County. Of these about 78 percent were Anglo, 20 percent were black, and 2 percent were Hispanic. Seventy-five percent of the county's residents over twenty-five had completed high school, and 12 percent had college degrees. In the early twenty-first century timber, paper industries, agribusiness, and some manufacturing were the key elements of the area's economy. Over 23,502,000 cubic feet of pinewood and over 10,733,000 cubic feet of hardwood were harvested in the county in 2003. In 2002 the county had 956 farms and ranches covering 193,244 acres, 40 percent of which were devoted to crops, 39 percent to woodlands, and 18 percent to pasture. In that year farmers and ranchers in the area earned \$32,268,000; livestock sales accounted for \$29,098,000 of the total. Poultry, cattle, nursery plants, and watermelons were the chief agricultural products.

Communities in the county include Linden (2000 population, 2,256), the seat of government; Atlanta (5,745); Hughes Springs (1,856); Queen City (1,613); Avinger (464); Bloomburg (375); Bivins (195); Marietta (112); Domino (52); and Kildare (49). Atlanta hosts a Forest Festival in August.

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