

The first people to roam the land that we know as Pearland were Karankawa Indians. That was back in the 14th century and possibly earlier. They lived here for centuries without interaction with other inhabitants.

Then, Europeans discovered the Texas coastline. In 1528, Al Nunez Cabeza de Vaca landed in Galveston and in the summer of 1685 La Salle, the French explorer, anchored in Matagorda Bay. Eventually, the Spaniards and the Karankawa Indians occupied the Texas coastline together. By 1821, the entire state had fewer than 3,000 non-Indian residents.

premier port and the hub of the state rail system. According to the census of 1880, Galveston had a population of 15,000 residents and was the largest city in Texas.

In 1883 a switch and temporary station were built in Pearland. For a short time, it was named the Mark Belt. But things changed when a man named Count Witold von Zychlinski (pronounced zuch-LIN-skee) rode into town "behind the reins of a fancy rig drawn by a team of black horses," recounted Julia Martin Hunter to her grandson Tom Hunter. Count Zychlinski and his family were Polish nobility or knights, according to information Tom Hunter recently



Witold von Zychlinski,
Founder of Pearland

Pearland History— A Look Back in Time

A New Era on the Horizon

A new era emerged for Texas when Moses Austin of Missouri obtained a grant of 200,000 acres of land. That land was set aside for 300 American families. A few months later Austin died and his son, Stephen F. Austin, inherited the land project. Seventy-one of those 300 Americans chose to make their home in Brazoria County. From the 71 settlers, Dr. Johnson Calhoun Hunter and Israel Massey came to live in Pearland. They are the first known residents of Pearland.

So How Did Pearland Come to Be?

Like many other cities in America, Pearland exists today because of the railroad. In 1850, the United States Congress granted federal land to develop railroads. Government leaders believed that railroads would attract settlers to undeveloped areas of the Midwest and the South. And they were right. That's exactly how Pearland was first found. The Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railroads worked together to construct a new line connecting Galveston to markets up north. At that time and for decades following, Galveston was Texas'

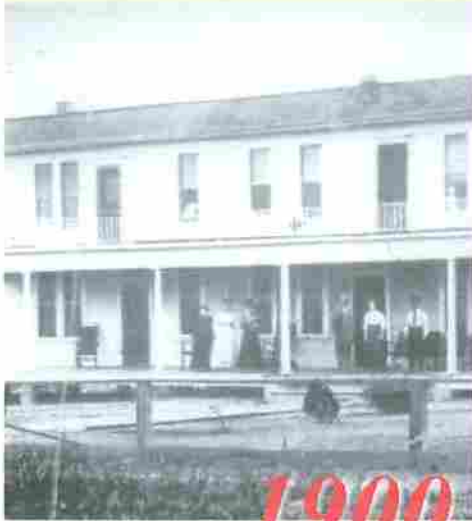
received from Zychlinski's great grandson William Willoughby of Illinois. Zychlinski, our city's founder, bought 2,560 acres of land from Brazoria County businessman L.W. Murdock. He had pear and other fruit trees planted everywhere to spruce up the prairie lands. He also developed the town in May 1894. He named east-west streets Walnut, Pear, Broadway, Jasmine, Plum and Orange. He then named his property Pearland and filed the plat or map for record on September 26, 1894 at the county seat of Angleton.

New Residents Arriving

S.M. Christensen and William T. "Billy" Magee settled in Pearland and had a significant impact on the city as well. Christensen owned Southern Homestead Company, which advertised in newspapers across America. In an effort to increase the population in Pearland, Southern Homestead Company claimed in advertisements that Pearland was a Garden of Eden with the lands being fertile and easily cultivated. People did in fact start moving here. But tough times were just around the corner.

The Great Storm of 1900 decimated Galveston, but it also had an enormous impact on Pearland. Our city was nearly depopulated after the hurricane, even though no one was killed in Pearland. People just simply fled to other areas. It took more great advertising to entice people to live in coastal communities like Pearland. Just as the population was returning to its former count, the city was hit by yet another devastating hurricane in 1915. Most buildings and homes were damaged if not destroyed. As a result of both hurricanes, most of the pear trees were ruined and that's why there aren't many around today. There is one pear tree by the Chamber of Commerce Building off Liberty Dr. across the street from the Pearland Library.

Baseball was definitely the favorite pastime in Pearland. In fact Tom Hunter, grandson of Julia Martin Hunter, found a book titled *Roadside Baseball* by Chris Epting. Quoting Hunter from the Historical Society Newsletter, "along with the obvious references to Yankee Stadium, Fenway Park, and Wrigley Field are descriptions and photographs of such obscure places... Included in the section on Texas are several old ballparks one would expect to find: Buff Stadium, Colt Stadium and the Astrodome. And then, amazingly, on page 162, Zychlinski Park, 2319 Grand Blvd., Pearland. I was astonished when I turned to this page. How did the place where I spent half my childhood, either at recess from elementary school or playing baseball in the summer



Suburban Gardens Hotel

1900



Pearland Depot

1914



Drilling crew at Hastings Oil Field

1937

Moving into the 30s

After surviving the hurricanes came the Great Depression of the 1930s. The estimated population in 1930 was 260. "The 1930s were rough, but I don't remember it being hard. People lived more simply then. As kids, we had to find entertainment. There was no television back in the 30s and 40s. We had school dances and the whole town would come to them," said President of Pearland's Historical Society John "Mickey" Mark. He moved to Pearland in 1940 when he was 11 years old. By 1940, Pearland was an unincorporated village with 350 people living here. There was a post office and 13 businesses, according to the Texas Almanac. The city had about the same population that it had in 1900. Not much growth at all. "When we moved to Pearland in 1940, I remember two big dance halls and there were four or five beer joints. It was a "honky tonk town" and we were known for our dances. Oil fields were booming and rice fields were everywhere. I also remember a fabulous ballpark with a wood fence and stands with dressing rooms under it. But the storm of 1941 demolished the field," Mark explained.

end up in the same book as the House That Ruth Built?" He goes on to say "for nearly two generations, the team (as well as the people of Pearland) played baseball in Zychlinski Park, a popular activity during the depression era."

“ I also remember a fabulous ballpark with a wood fence ... ”

Sailing into the 50s

During the 50s and 60s Pearland didn't have local government, so the Lions Club took on the responsibilities of a government. They implemented the city's first garbage collection, paved sidewalks, installed street lights and markers and formed a youth baseball program with a lighted park. Things seemed to be improving and life was getting easier. "Pearland really started to grow by the 1960s. It was no boom town like it is today but it was growing. In 1964, Pearland was incorporated," said Mark. By the 1960s, Pearland boasted a population of nearly 1,500 and there were 41 businesses.



Suburban Gardens Baseball Team.

An Explosion of Growth

Things started booming and people started flooding the small town of Pearland in the 70s and 80s. According to *Pearland, Texas A Centennial Celebration* book written by Barte Haile, "between 1971 and 1994, an average of 58 people moved to town each and every month!" That's a lot of growth. But look at the explosion of growth our city has seen in the last few years. According to the Mayor's 2006 State of the City address, 2,610 new homes were started in 2005, averaging about 217 new homes per month, which averages to about

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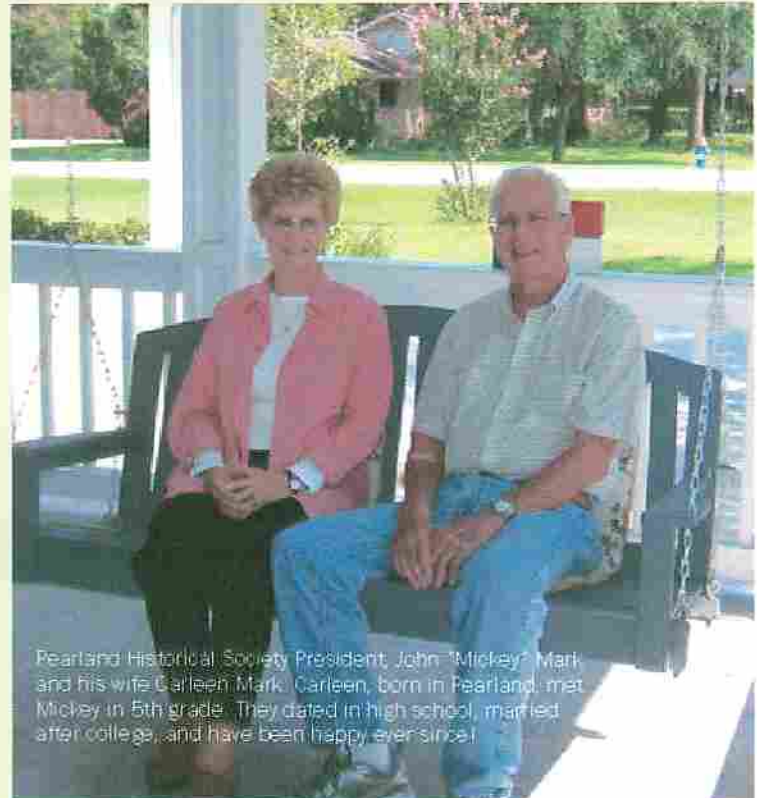
500 people moving to Pearland per month. From 58 people per month to 500 people per month, that's why our population stands at 70,558 inside the city limits as of April 2006. People continue to move to Pearland for a number of reasons. One is because of its location to Houston and the Medical Center. Another is that 83% of Pearland is residential, with a number of master planned communities. In addition, the schools are great and everything you need is inside the city limits. Currently, there are 750 businesses registered with the Chamber of Commerce. Pearland Independent School District is the largest employer followed by Wal-Mart and then the City of Pearland.

Things are certainly different today than they were when the Karankawa Indians roamed the coastal plains or when Count Zychlinski, in all his grandeur, rode through town behind a horse drawn carriage. Our city has blossomed into a place where you can raise a family and feel secure, you can unwind from the stresses of a big city and you can enjoy all the comforts of a relaxed community. Although Pearland is considered one of the fastest growing communities in Texas today, it still retains that small-town appeal with big city opportunities. ■

Sources:

Pearland, Texas A Centennial Celebration, written by Barte Haile.

Pearland Historical Society Newsletter, written by President John D. "Mickey" Mark.



Pearland Historical Society President, John "Mickey" Mark and his wife Carleen Mark. Carleen, born in Pearland, met Mickey in 5th grade. They dated in high school, married after college, and have been happy ever since!



This home was built in 1910 by John Howard on North Houston St. and has been occupied by his descendants since that time.

Interested in the history of “Old Pearland?”

Join the Pearland Historical Society,
an organization dedicated to
preserving the heritage and history
of Pearland.

Membership dues: \$15 per year
includes subscription to Quarterly
Historical Society Newsletter

For more information call
Historical Society President,
John D. “Mickey” Mark

281-485-1751

Did You Know?

- The Chamber of Commerce Building off Liberty Dr. is the oldest building in Pearland. It was actually the old train depot. Inside you can still see the ticket windows where they sold train tickets to passengers.
- Telephone Road got its name because it ran parallel with the first telephone lines strung from Houston to Alvin.
- Pearland could have been called Figland because of the number of fig trees in the area. From the mid-teens to the 1940s, there were more fig trees than pear trees in Pearland. Fig trees brought a considerable amount of money to farmers in Pearland. In fact, there were so many figs that Pearland had a fig packing plant.
- In 1937, Pearland established its first high school and adopted the name Oilers because of the many oil fields in town. Pearland's Oilers were here long before the Houston Oilers who came about in 1960.
- Count Witold von Zychlinski, Pearland's founder, originally named our city with a hyphen, Pear-Land. But within a year, our Polish noble founder was gone and Southern Homestead Company became the new owners of the town. Over time, the hyphen was dropped. At least, Zychlinski saved us from naming his town Zychlinskiville! Can you imagine saying that!
- Many roads in Pearland are named after early settlers like Yost Blvd., Hatfield Rd., Lizer Rd., Massey Highway, Doherty Rd. and Cunningham St.
- There are not many pear trees in Pearland. There is one that produces fruit, by the Chamber of Commerce Building off Liberty Drive.
- In the 30s, oil was discovered at Hastings and Marvel. Pearland also became a rice farmland. Rice became the dominant industry.
- The Pearland Oiler High School Football team grew from 6-man to 11-man in 1949.