



Zavalla at 125: A Deep-Rooted Legacy in Timber, Rails, and Resilience

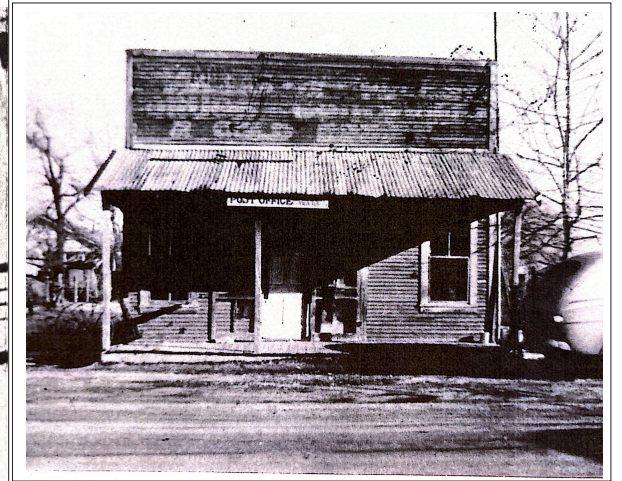
by The Zavalla Eagle Staff



Roger Tompkins Grist Mill & Cotton Gin circa 1905



S.N. Carpenter Store, built 1866, Left Eunice Elliot, right Betty Carpenter, The History Center Diboll



**Miles Store & First Post Office inside store, built 1901, The History Center Diboll
First Postmaster : Jesse C. Fondren**

As Zavalla celebrates 125 years of history in 2025, this East Texas town honors its heritage—rooted in timber, shaped by railroads, strengthened through hardship, and still thriving today. While many associate Zavalla with the woods and waters of Sam Rayburn Reservoir, the story begins decades earlier, along the railroad and among the longleaf pines.

Note: This article tells the story of Zavalla as established in 1900 and is not to be confused with “Old Zavalla,” the earlier settlement located 11 miles south along the Angelina River in Jasper County, which vanished from maps by the 1870s. A separate article will detail the history of Old Zavalla.

Foundations in Faith and Forest

Zavalla’s roots stretch to the 1840s, when East Texas opened to settlers following Texas’ entry into the United States. In southeastern Angelina County, a few hardy families settled near Concord Church along the Angelina River bottomlands, coming together for companionship and safety. Over time, the area around present-day Zavalla saw slow, steady growth.

By 1866, S.N. Carpenter opened the area’s first general store. Through the post-Civil War years, new settlers arrived, many rebuilding their lives, bringing with them livestock, plows, and determination. Carpenter’s store became the commercial and social anchor of the area for decades.

Railroads and a Town is Born

The 1890s brought “Railroad Fever” to East Texas. Hopes were high that the iron rails might pass near the community, unlocking access to markets beyond. In 1900, the Southern Pacific extended the Texas & New Orleans Railroad through Angelina County. On that lifeline, the community of Zavalla was officially established.

Named for its location on the Zavalla Prairie, within the old Lorenzo de Zavala land grant, Zavalla quickly became a bustling stop. Businesses sprang up along the tracks. By 1903, the town boasted multiple general stores, drugstores, hotels, churches, doctors, and a thriving school. The pine forest, waiting to be milled, became the town’s economic engine.

Timber, Cotton, and Livelihood

Logging shaped early Zavalla. Amos Hodge

opened the town’s first sawmill in 1901, processing up to 100,000 board feet a day. Nearby longleaf pines were tapped for turpentine before being felled. Communities like Saron, Nancy (formerly Dunkin), Sulphur Springs, and Shawnee Prairie emerged to support mill workers and farmers.

Cattle and cotton provided steady income, with farmers bringing their harvest to town for ginning and sale. Spring roundups brought buyers from across the region, and local cotton gins ran late into the night. Merchants like Aaron Barge and the Gibson family supported these farmers, often extending credit until harvest time.

The Lake That Changed Everything

In the mid-20th century, Zavalla entered a new era with the construction of Sam Rayburn Reservoir. Completed in the 1960s, the lake forever altered the landscape—and Zavalla’s destiny.

One of the greatest impacts was the loss of the community of Concord, submerged by the new reservoir. Families displaced by the rising waters found new homes in Zavalla, and their children enrolled in Zavalla ISD. Though the physical town of Concord was lost, its people and traditions became woven into the fabric of Zavalla. A separate article will explore Concord’s history and the emotional toll of its disappearance.

At the same time, the lake brought new life. Tourists, weekend anglers, and retirees from the cities discovered Zavalla. Subdivisions like Pleasure Point sprang up on the lakefront, and some visitors chose to stay, building homes and becoming part of the community. The economy began to shift from timber alone to include outdoor recreation and real estate, while retaining its rustic charm.

Incorporation and Modern Growth

In 1975, Zavalla officially incorporated in

response to the growing need for municipal services. C.M. Cryer became the town’s first mayor, with a city council formed to guide growth and manage infrastructure. Civic pride flourished, and local families—many descended from the town’s earliest settlers—remained involved in every aspect of community life.

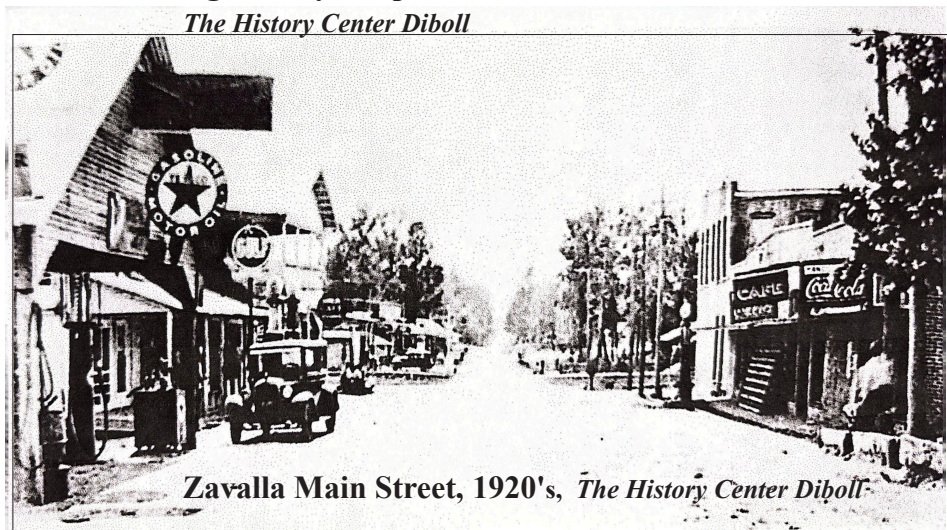
The town’s economy diversified. The Magcohar (now Dresser Industries) clay plant provided jobs and stability for generations. The Civilian Conservation Corps’ earlier work at nearby Boykin Springs laid the groundwork for Zavalla’s emergence as a gateway to the Angelina National Forest and the Heart of Lake Sam Rayburn.

Zavalla Today: Proud of the Past, Rooted in Community

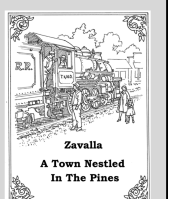
Now, 125 years since the railroad brought Zavalla into being, the town is a living tribute to its founders and to the generations who followed. From logging camps to lakefront homes, from saloons to school gyms, Zavalla has adapted without losing its character.

It is a place where the names Barge, Carpenter, Gibson, Mott, Colwell, Boulware, Renfro, Reppond and Cryer still echo across church rolls, business names, and school rosters. It is a place where the school is a source of pride, where traditions still matter, and where the woods and waters continue to shape daily life.

Zavalla may be small—but its story is long, deep, and full of heart.



Zavalla Main Street, 1920's, The History Center Diboll



Echoes from the River: The Forgotten Town of Old Zavalla

by Honey Casey

Long before the town of Zavalla, Texas, took root in Angelina County, another Zavalla stood on the banks of the Angelina River—a thriving early Texas settlement that has nearly faded into legend. This was Old Zavalla, founded in 1834 in what is now Jasper County, approximately 11 miles south of present-day Zavalla.

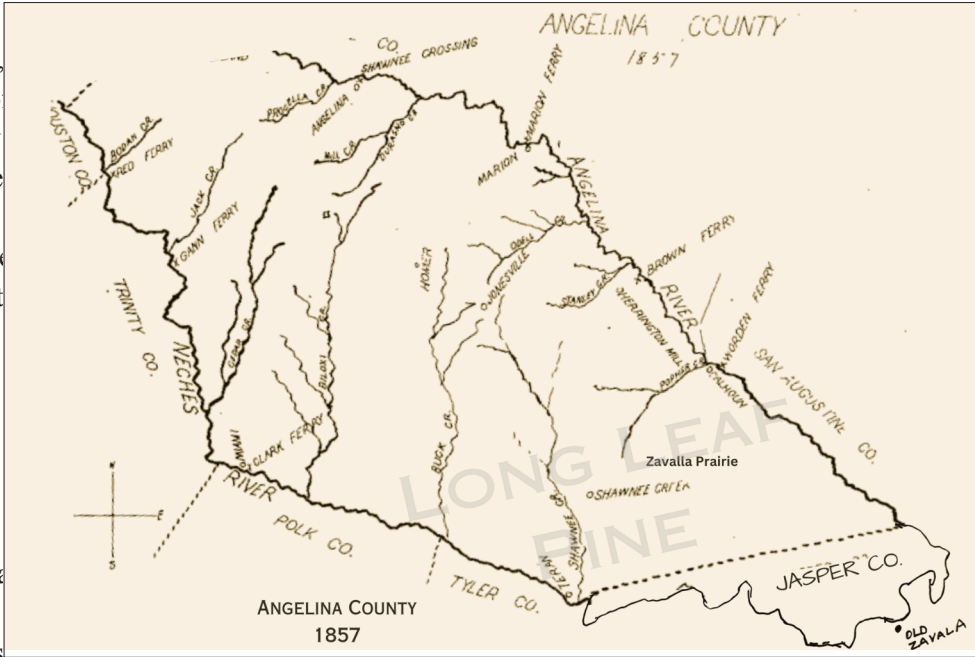
The name “Zavalla” first appears in Texas history in 1829, when the Mexican government issued a land grant to Lorenzo de Zavala to settle 500 families in Southeast Texas. Though Zavala would go on to play a prominent role in Texas’ path to independence—ultimately serving as the first Vice President of the Republic of Texas—he never resided on the grant land that bore his name. In 1830, he sold his interest to the Galveston Bay and Texas Land Company while living in New York City.

Old Zavalla was instead brought to life under the direction of land speculator Thomas B. Huling. Located along the Morris Ferry Road, the town was strategically positioned on the Angelina River, becoming a steamboat stop and commercial hub. It boasted between 30 and 40 families, a post office, and a courthouse by 1839. The town was officially incorporated in 1838 by the Republic of Texas and served as the seat of government for Bevil’s Settlement.

Despite Huling’s efforts to attract English immigrants to the area, Old Zavalla struggled to grow. Disaster struck in the 1840s when a fire destroyed most of the town—including the courthouse and all official records. Huling later sold the land to Jerich Durkee of London for \$1,000 and an unusual payment of 5,000 tin boxes of “Green Mountain Vegetable Ointment.”

Durkee attempted to revive the town, but it continued to decline. The post office closed in 1856, and by 1878, the town had all but vanished from county records. In 1936, a Texas Centennial marker was placed at Hamilton Cemetery to commemorate the lost community—a rare physical reminder of a once-hopeful frontier town.

A 1936 article in the Lufkin Daily News reflects on Old Zavalla’s legacy, describing it as one of the earliest towns in Texas. The article credits Miss Adina Zavalla, a direct descendant of Lorenzo de Zavala and president of the De Zavalla Chapter of the Texas Historical and Landmark Association, with preserving its memory. She uncovered rare

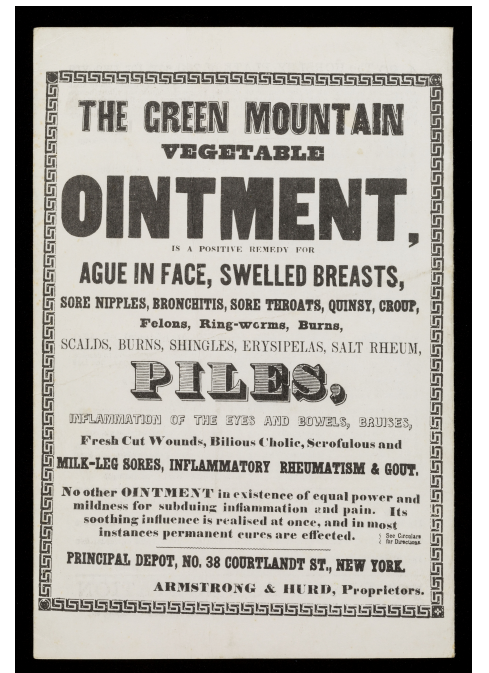


documents including bonds, land deeds, and anecdotal recollections of the town’s layout and architecture.

Today, the only remnants of Old Zavalla are scattered wells, fig trees, and flowering myrtles—silent witnesses to the rise and fall of a pioneer town. Though little remains, its story still echoes along the riverbanks, a tribute to the enduring spirit of early Texans.



Tanner, Henry Schenk, 1786-1858. Map of Texas with parts of the adjoining states., map, 1836; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. , University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting University of Texas at Arlington Library.



LET US HELP YOU WITH ALL OF YOUR REAL ESTATE NEEDS

Clint Wade
REALTOR® BROKER
 (817) 235-9570
clint@TheOutlawTeam.com

Stacy Wade
REALTOR®
 (936) 661-5516
stacy@TheOutlawTeam.com

www.TheOutlawTeam.com

A proud member of

Zavalla Through The Years in Pictures



Zavalla Community Resources

ZAM Outreach, Inc.

Thrift Shop - 1043 E. Main St.
Open Mon, Fri, and Sat 10a to 2p

Zavalla Food Pantry

21898 S. Hwy 69
Open 1st and 2nd Tuesdays 8-10am

The Little Free Food Pantry and Library

Under the Gazebo at Blueberry Bog
116 W Main St

Food Handouts Monthly in Community

First Baptist Church - 1034 E Main St
2nd Mondays - 10am till gone

Johnson Baptist Church - 26534 US 69
1st Saturdays at 10am till gone



Picture Key

1. 147 Bridge Post Card. Cattle grazing before lake was filled in.
2. Barge Store Building post fire 1980's
3. DairyMart on Main Street
4. Mott's Garage
5. W. C. Long (school teacher), Berwyn Walker, Johnny Carter on Main
6. Main Street 1950's
7. Barge Feed Store (on right)
8. Sam's Dam Supply Store
9. Old Bank Building (also held a jail)
10. Service Station "Bus Stop"
11. Unknow boy on Main Street
12. Barge Cotton Gin
13. Miles General Store & Original Post Office 1901
14. 2nd Post Office
15. Whites Auto Stores
16. Dr. Alexander Office
17. Coleman's Station / Store
18. Inside Coleman's store, Gladys

Texas State Gazetteer & Business Directory, 1914

ZAVALA.

Population 100. On the T. & L. and the T. & N. O. Rys., in Angelina county, 22 miles southeast of Lufkin, the county seat and nearest banking point. Telephone connection.

Barge C M, general store.
Cammack & Mettaufer, general store.
Cansler C E & Son, general store.
Carpenter S N & Son, general store.
Gibson & Calwell, general store.
Mott J R Drug Co, furn and livery.
Mott & Hopson, general store.
Williams J P, general store.

Finding Zavalla

Historical preservation project of
Zavalla Prairie Community Connections



Looking for submissions from our community past and present. Share your memories, pics, recipes, and history. Submissions can be emailed to zavallacommunity@gmail.com



Zavalla Bayou Bash Set to Bring Fun, Flavor, and Community Spirit: Sept. 6th



Zavalla Prairie Community Connections and The Pineywoods Beyond Foundation are proud to present the Zavalla Bayou Bash, a family-friendly event aimed at boosting tourism and supporting economic development in Zavalla.

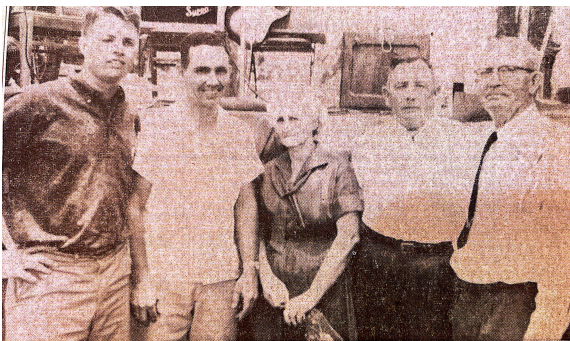
The Bayou Bash promises a day of food, music, local vendors, and outdoor fun—celebrating everything that makes Zavalla a hidden gem at the heart of the lake. This is more than just a good time—it's part of a larger effort to bring energy and opportunity back to our small town, while showcasing the natural beauty and strong community spirit that define us.

Whether you're a lifelong resident or just passing through, come out and be part of Zavalla's rising future. Your attendance helps support local businesses, community programs, and the vision for a stronger, more vibrant Zavalla.

Don't miss it—September 6th at the Rodeo Association Grounds - let's make this Bash a tradition! To stay informed and for vendor information follow us at www.zavallabayoubash.com



Tradition of Community Service : 1961 Homecoming



HARD WORKERS—These are the committee people who worked long and hard for the Zavalla Civic Organization's first town homecoming. Left to right are Richard Donovan, David Renfro, Mrs. Thelma Gibson, Ellis Marshall and Arthur Fuller. Marshall is president of the civic group. Possibly 1,500 people attended the first homecoming last Saturday. (Free Press Photo).

AGE FOUR The Angelina County Free Press, Diboll, Texas, Friday, July



OLD TIMERS—These are but three of the real old timers who attended the Zavalla homecoming Saturday. Left to right are A. O. Graham, Justice of the Peace who has lived in the town 33 of his 81 years; A. M. Hawkins, a Zavalla resident all of his 70 years; and W. D. Barge Sr., who was born near Zavalla Prairie on Jan. 4, 1877, many years before the present town existed.

The Forgotten Depot: Zavalla's Last Link to Its Railroad Roots

By The Zavalla Eagle Staff

In 1900, Zavalla, Texas was born alongside the iron rails that cut through the East Texas pineywoods. Like so many small towns across the South, Zavalla owes its very existence to the railroad. And by 1901, a modest but proud wooden depot stood sentinel beside the tracks, just across from what is now Warren Street. It would become the beating heart of Zavalla's early days.

For seventy years, the depot was more than a place for trains to come and go. It was a hub of communication, a gateway for goods and people, and a gathering place where the pulse of the town could be felt in every whistle and rumble of a passing locomotive.

Many of Zavalla's old-timers still hold vivid memories of the depot, whether as a place of daily business or as the backdrop to childhood adventures. James King, a lifelong resident, fondly recalls sneaking down to the tracks on his bicycle, tugging the rope on the water tower beside the depot and watching as water spilled out—just the sort of mischief that marked many a boyhood summer.

But like the steam that once rose from the engines, time drifted on. By 1971, the trains had stopped, and the depot, long a symbol of Zavalla's founding spirit, was sold and removed from the town. It quietly slipped away, out of sight and eventually out of mind for younger generations.

Yet the story didn't end there.

The depot found new life—briefly—miles away in Nacogdoches County, along Highway 59. Reimagined as a retail space, it served a different purpose, but still stood as a quiet testament to Zavalla's past. Today, the structure remains, but it's a shadow of its former self. Empty and weathered, with windows missing, peeling paint, and the pineywoods creeping back around it, the depot is in danger of being lost forever.



The Zavalla depot is more than a forgotten building. It is a physical remnant of the town's founding chapter—a time when progress came on steel rails and the future blew in with the smoke of a train. Unless an intervention comes soon, the forest may reclaim what history has left behind.

But perhaps, with enough will and community spirit, this piece of Zavalla's heritage can be saved—and brought home once more.



AT THE HWY 63 & HWY 147 FORK
ZAVALLA, TEXAS

SUPPORT THOSE BUSINESSES THAT ADVERTISE WITH US !

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADVERTISE WITH US PLEASE CONTACT US AT;

email: thezavallaeagle@gmail.com

website: www.Zavallaeagle.com