
Texhoma — A Panhandle Town

JOHN W. MORRIS, University of Oklahoma, Norman

Texhoma is located near the heart of the High Plains on the Oklahoma-Texas boundary, partly in Texas County, Oklahoma, and partly in Sherman County, Texas. In many respects this community is representative of the villages and towns on the High Plains, and as such illustrates the adjustments made to compensate for the environment in which it has developed.

The physical environment of Texhoma is a varied one; often it is an environment of climatic extremes. Mile after mile of apparently level land, only infrequently broken by an intermittent stream or gully, is characteristic of the surrounding landscape. Winds that blow almost continuously day and night, often of high velocity, are always to be considered in the activities of the area. A variable annual rainfall that may range from less than 10 to over 25 inches gives the inhabitants much cause for concern. And the temperature conditions vary as much as the wind and the rain. Thus, the people must be prepared to adjust to a physical environment that varies, and sometimes changes abruptly, from desert to humid conditions.

Economically the High Plains are noted nationally for two products—wheat and cattle. Section after section of growing wheat, upon which scores of cattle, both feeder and registered stock, graze during a part of

the year, are the most common features of the cultural landscape in the Texhoma vicinity. If, however, the lands have been prepared for planting and the rains do not come, or the moisture content of the soil is low, dust storms or gravel storms may result. In a few places the discovery of petroleum or natural gas has caused or is causing variation in the usual activities, but for the most part this is only temporary.

On dust free days the location of Texhoma can usually be determined from a distance of several miles. The break in the skyline caused by the number of trees that have been planted plus the towering elevators indicate the presence of the settlement. As is true in most High Plains towns, the elevators, especially if they are the newer concrete structures, also indicate that the community is served by a railroad as almost all wheat is moved from the storage elevators by rail.

Like most incorporated communities in the High Plains, the population of Texhoma has varied greatly from decade to decade changing with the different climatic cycles, world demand for wheat and beef, and technological advancements. The 1940 census registered a population of 768; by 1950 the population had advanced to 1,763, or a gain of almost 130 per cent. This gain was largely due to the more intensive cultivation of the land resulting from war conditions and a small nearby oil development. The 1960 census listed a population of only 1,261, or a decrease of 502 persons. Drought conditions during the mid-1950's, a return to more extensive land utilization, and a greater use of machinery decreased the demand for farm labor. Of the 1,261 persons living in Texhoma in 1960, 911 lived in Oklahoma, 350 in Texas.

Texhoma is typical of the communities in the High Plains in that its streets have been developed along a rectangular grid pattern (Fig. 1). Usually the blocks are 300 feet square. Variations may exist where new additions have been added to the original townsite, as in the northern part of the community, or where land has been set aside for special uses such as the school block. With the exception of streets adjacent to the railroad, or where U.S. Highway 54 crosses the town, all streets are oriented due north-south or east-west.

A majority of the homes of Texoma, both old and new, reflect somewhat an adjustment to the natural environment. In the town there are 405 dwellings distributed fairly evenly throughout the built up area. The most common type of construction material used is stucco, 199 of the houses or 49.1 per cent being covered by this material. Stucco is a product well suited to the area since it does not weather easily and is much more resistant to the "blasting" given by the occasional sand and gravel storms than is the paint covering of the frame homes. Between 25 and 30 of the houses now covered by stucco were originally built as frame homes. The owners found it cheaper to change to stucco than paint so frequently. Many of the original stucco homes were built as four room houses with pyramid roofs. Some later added porches or other rooms. The newer stucco homes are built according to the varying types of modern architecture with the stucco being colored rather than the usual dull gray so common prior to 1945. The stucco covered homes are more numerous in the area immediately north and west of the commercial district in the older residential sections.

Brick or stone houses are not uncommon in the town, some 31 residences, or 7.7 per cent of the homes, being built of these materials. Usually the houses constructed of brick or stone are larger than the stucco or frame houses. There is no definite pattern to their distribution throughout the community.

Frame homes numbering 175, or 43.2 per cent of the total, vary in size from the smallest to among the largest in the community. Several of the smaller houses, about 30 per cent, have been covered with tar papers of various kinds, again an attempt to combat the sand, gravel, and dust storms in this area where the average wind velocity is 14 miles per hour.

Although the number of inhabitants decreased during the past decade, fifteen homes were constructed in the three year period 1958 through 1960. Six of the houses were brick, two stucco, and seven frame. This is about the same percentage as the older houses, slightly more than 50 per cent being brick and stucco.

The commercial area of Texhoma is largely along Second Street with the principal east-west extension along Main Street. Clothing stores, drug stores, automobile agencies and garages, suppliers of agricultural machines, and grocery stores occupy the most space. Other businesses such as cafes, a theatre, a bank, an insurance agency, and a widely read weekly newspaper are also in this area. An old hotel building and a few remodeled business buildings serve as apartments. In July of 1961 only two small buildings were vacant. The business district is unusually large for a town of 1,200, but Texhoma is the principal service center for an area of over 1,000 square miles. The principal business day is Saturday when the ranch and farm families come to town to secure their weekly supplies. The periods of greatest activity occur during the harvesting season and when large numbers of cattle are ready for marketing. Different merchants estimated that at these times as many as 150 to 200 buyers will be in Texhoma at the same time.

The elevators in Texhoma have a capacity of 3,500,000 bushels, making it one of the largest wheat collecting centers in the High Plains. During the harvesting season, in addition to the regular freight runs, special trains of wheat leave the community daily. Wheat is shipped to both northern and southern terminals, some of the latter going to Houston for export.

The first elevators were located in Oklahoma. When the large, modern structures now used were built the intention was to locate all of them on the Texas side of the state boundary where taxes are lower. A mistake in surveying, however, resulted in the erection of one and a half tanks north of the state line.

Just to the east of Texhoma is a large stockyards area occupying several acres. These pens can handle as many as 8,000 head at a time. And during certain periods of the year the pens are full and often lines of trucks are waiting to discharge their animals. Smaller feeding pens are located just north and east of the town. Sales are held two or three times a week or as the supply and demand requires. In 1960, 1,143,011 head of cattle were sold for a total of \$124,198,548.32, or approximately \$108 per head. Between 60 and 70 per cent of the cattle marketed are shipped by truck to such centers as Kansas City, Omaha, and Chicago. Most of the cattle sold go to feed lots or to pastures as replacements.

At the time when many of the smaller incorporated communities of the High Plains seem to be giving "up the ghost," Texhoma is again looking toward the future. Many ranchers and farmers in the area take pride in their "city." Funds for the building of a modern library building were given by one individual. There is talk of adding more elevator storage space and enlarging the stock yards. A single high school now serves the entire town and a large consolidated district, although the elementary children must attend school in their respective states. Homes are being improved by the planting of more trees and shrubs to help "break" the

winds and dust storms. The people have studied the environment in which they live and, for the most part, have made the necessary adjustments to keep their town alive.

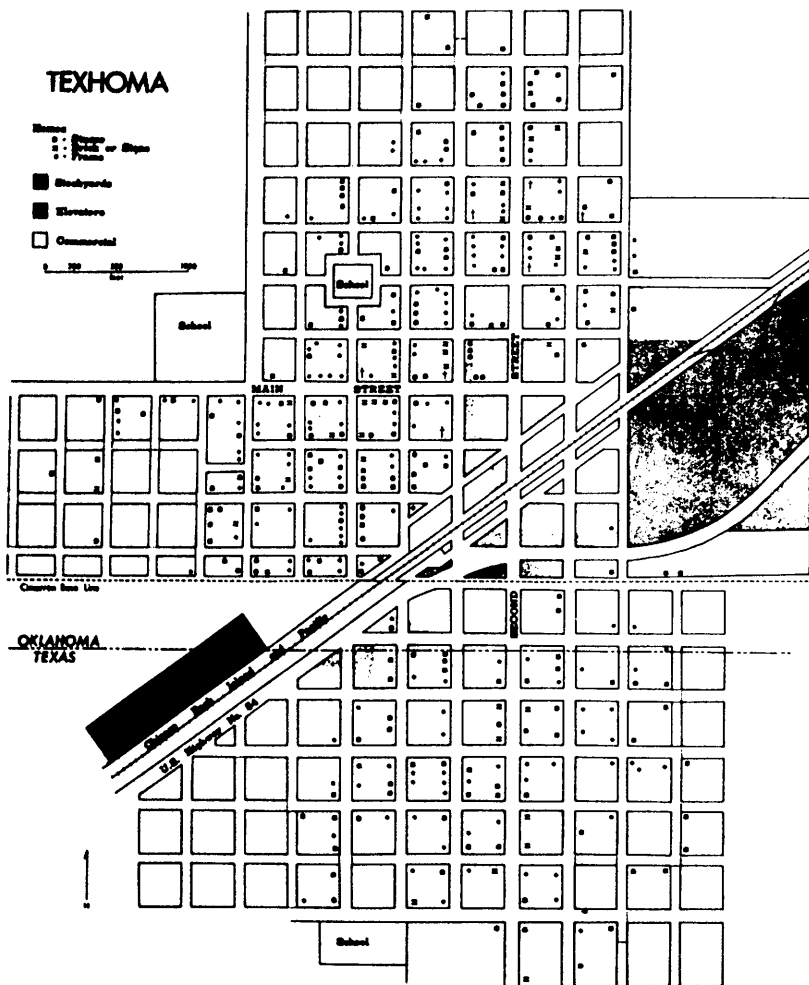


Figure 1.