

## Entrance

### TITLE PANEL:

# Roanoke, Texas: From Character Comes Community

### INTRODUCTORY PANEL:

Residents ignored social conventions and depended on each other to keep their small town on the map and build a viable future.

[Merriweather font]

[Colors forest green, maroon, and beige]

### MAIN TEXT PANEL 1:

Roanoke, Texas, was first settled in 1847, when Charles and Lewis Medlin led 20 families from Missouri. Most were ranchers and farmers. When the Texas & Pacific Railroad built a track here in 1881, the story goes, the project's surveyor named the town after his home of Roanoke County, Virginia.

From the beginning, citizens of Roanoke found ways to subvert standard racial and gender norms. The town boasted female-owned business and landowners and a postmistress who served for 35 years. One of the town's most respected ranchers, John Dolford "Bob" Jones, was a freed slave, whose mixed-race family owned integrated businesses long before the Civil Rights era. During the Great Depression, the community banded together to keep businesses open despite economic hardship.

This exhibit tells the story of how Roanoke's residents created a prosperous community in the context of a nation grappling with conflict over race, class, and gender.

[\[Visitors enter permanent exhibit gallery, North\]](#)

## North Wall, West section

### Secondary text panel 1:

#### **"A remarkable man"**

John Dolford "Bob" Jones, born around 1859, was the son of white slave-owner Leazer Alvis Jones and an enslaved woman, Elizabeth. While enslaved, Bob worked as a shepherd. Emancipated at the age of 15, Bob later bought 60 acres from his father with money he earned from droving (or walking) longhorns. He later increased his holdings to almost 2,000 acres. In 1869 he married Almeida Chisum, who also had

recently won her freedom. She was the daughter of white cattleman John Chisum and an enslaved woman, Jencie. Bob and Almeida had 10 children together.

The first mayor of Roanoke, Hugh Jenkins, said, “Bob Jones was a man of good principles, straight, honest and honorable. He helped lots of people along life's way.”

In 1948 two of Bob's sons, Jinks and Emory, started the Jones Auction Barn, and their wives, Lula and Elnora, operated what was possibly the state's first integrated café, Jones Café. The family held an annual picnic that was open to all, eventually hosting up to 2,500 people.

Most of the Jones' land was taken in 1947 and 1948 by eminent domain for the building of Lake Grapevine. In 2008, the City of Southlake opened the Bob Jones Nature Center and Preserve, honoring the former slave who made such an impact on the people of this area.

***[chat label, photo]***



***Jones family, 1890s***

**Reproduction of original photograph**

**This photograph shows the Jones family in front of their home in Roanoke. Bob built the first school for Black children in the area so his grandchildren could attend school without traveling all the way to Fort Worth.**

**[chat label, photos]**



***Jinks, Lula, Emory, and Elnora Jones, ca. 1970s***  
**Reproduction of original book**

**These newspaper articles describe the legacy of the Jones family through interviews with Jinks and Emory Jones and their wives, Lula and Elnora.**

### **North Wall, East section**

#### **Secondary text panel 2:**

**“Any mail today, Miss Ida?”**

Ida Cowan was appointed postmaster of Roanoke by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1910, after her father, William Cowan, left the position he had held since 1898. “Miss Ida,” as she was called, was one of the first woman postmasters in the North Texas area.

The post office was the center of life in Roanoke. Miss Ida supervised up to three mail carriers, who distributed mail to around 300 families in rural areas. Patrons congregated at the post office on the corner of Oak and Main to gossip, discuss politics, and compare the latest home remedies. They always greeted her with, “Any mail today, Miss Ida?”

Miss Ida, a local newspaper noted, “was never too busy to listen to those in distress ... or to send a doctor—never too busy to address a letter for a blind person, or find the address of a soldier in the service.”

As a woman appointed to a position mostly held by men, Miss Ida became a well-respected leader of the Roanoke community. In 1945, she retired after 37 years of service. She died in 1971, and her gravestone bears the inscription, “Any mail today, Miss Ida?”

***[chat label, photo]***



***The Roanoke Post Office, 1915***  
Reproduction of original photograph

This photograph of Roanoke Post Office staff in 1915 shows Ida Cowan, the town’s postmistress, standing with her colleagues C.A. Cowan, Charlie Fanning, and Henry Howe. Also shown is Jim Seagraves, second from left. “Miss Ida” is remembered as a vanguard for women’s employment in the early 1900s.

[chat label]



**Denton Record-Chronicle, July 4, 1945**  
Original newspaper

This newspaper article announces Ida Cowan's retirement after 37 years as postmaster in Roanoke. It also includes a story about a party the town gave in her honor. She was an important part of the town's daily life, and the article reflects on the attendees' respect for her. One of her gifts was a guinea hen, so she could start on her retirement dream of building a guinea farm.

## North Wall

*[chat label]*



*Silver Spur Saloon, ca. 1886-1896*  
Reproduction of original photograph

In the late 1880s, the Silver Spur Saloon occupied the first floor of the town's only two-story stone building. Inside, saloon customers could buy drinks with cow hides. In a show of ingenuity or willful ignorance on the part of the bartenders, patrons would steal the hides from the back and reuse them to buy more drinks. A brothel occupied the second floor. Because of a local ordinance forbidding two businesses from sharing the same entrance, visitors had to take the outside staircase to go upstairs. Needless to say, the building was the social center of early Roanoke.

*[chat label]*



***Foot-pump organ, 1899***  
**Miller Organ Company, Pennsylvania**  
**Wood, ivory**

**Alma Peterson Mason, a lifelong resident of Roanoke and organist for the Old Baptist Church, owned this home organ. She served family-style lunches out of her home for downtown workers. The Roanoke Public Library now stands where her house used to be.**

*[chat label]*



***Purple Heart medal, 1944***  
**Metal, gold, satin**

The museum's Veterans display exemplifies the sacrifice of Roanoke residents. This Purple Heart belonged to Pvt. Earl T. Willis, who was wounded on the Anzio beachhead in Italy on Feb. 11, 1944. On May 18, 1944, Pvt. Willis was killed in action on the Italian front. This medal is a rare donation; most families don't part with their Purple Heart medals. It was donated by Pvt. Willis' daughter, who was an infant when he died.

***[chat label]***



***Wedding dress, 1950***

**Silk, lace**

**Handmade wedding dress, bolero, and veil worn by Roanoke resident Patsy Luttrell Turner. Patsy married Curtis Turner on December 29, 1950. She was 16 and he was 18. According to Patsy, "I was going to wear a two-piece suit and thought I knew what was going to happen." Louise Nelson, Byron Nelson's first wife, provided the material for the gown because she decided Patsy needed a proper dress. Dorothy S. Brown sewed the dress, and they presented it as a surprise gift to Patsy. The Turners were married 65 years.**

## **South Wall, East section**

### **MAIN TEXT PANEL 2:**

During the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Roanoke's population was shaped by the growth of the surrounding areas, including Dallas/Fort Worth and Denton. As small towns, like Roanoke, shrank, residents feared losing their local identity.

To keep from becoming a ghost town, Roanoke incorporated in 1933, built infrastructure, and voluntarily joined with other one-school districts to create Northwest ISD. Then, in 1993, two small restaurants—Babe's Chicken Dinner House and Classic Café—opened on Oak Street.

Local leaders believed these restaurants could revitalize the town. They encouraged other restaurants to open downtown and completely renovated Oak Street. They billed Roanoke as "The Unique Dining Capital of Texas" to visitors. Their bet paid off.

Residents soon stepped up to make sure the city didn't forget its history. The owners of the former saloon donated this building to be a museum while families gave their memories. It's the cultural center of Roanoke, which now has a firm place in the growing D/FW landscape.

**[chat label]**



**Cornerstone, 1933**  
**Concrete**

Workers found this small, handmade cornerstone in the old fire station and jail at Main Street and Oak. It has '1933' and 'Built by J.R.P.' scratched into it. The date marks Roanoke's incorporation. Though we don't know for certain, we think the initials JPR refer to "Joe Parish," the builder.

***[tombstone]***



***Town gavel and property inventory ledger, 1934***  
**Wood, twine**

***[chat label, photo]***



***Fire station, 1960***  
**Reproduction of original photograph**

**Residents built the original fire station and city jail in 1949. The night watchman cell also was there since the town didn't have a police department. All city personnel except for the water superintendent were volunteers.**

***[chat label, photo]***



***Oak Street, ca. 1995***

**Reproduction of original photograph**

**Oak Street, with Babe's Chicken sign on the right. The photo shows the original landscape. The town took a chance on dining to attract more business. Residents responded by donating land, buildings, and artifacts to promote Roanoke.**

***[chat label, photo]***



***Rock building, 2007***

**Reproduction of original photograph**

**The rear view of the former Silver Spur Saloon before renovation. The owners donated the building to the city with the provision that it be turned into something benefiting the community. In 2008 it became the Roanoke Visitor Center and Museum and is now the oldest commercial building in the city.**

***[chat label]***

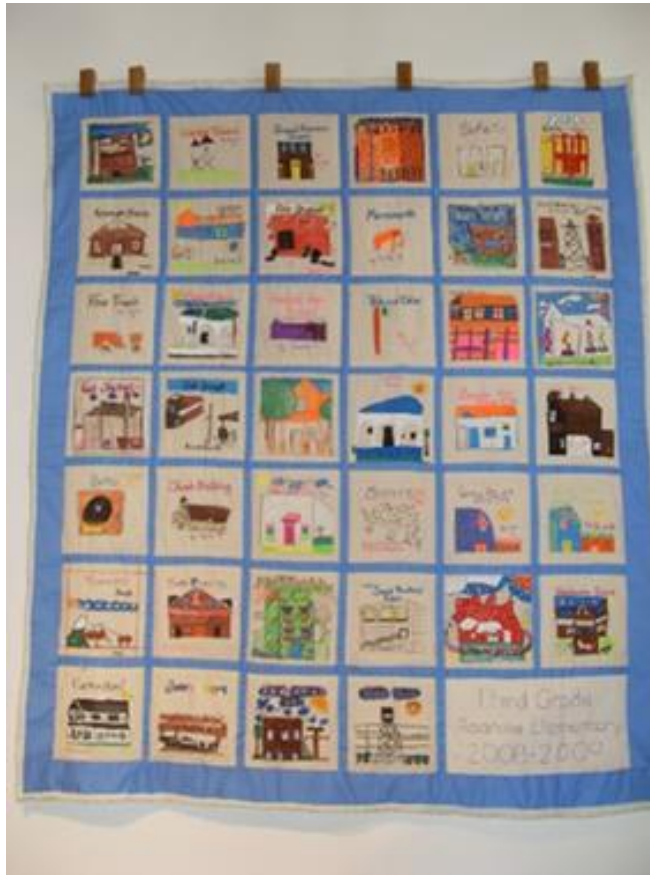


***Roanoke Visitor Center and Museum, 2012***

**Reproduction of original photograph**

**Festival goers dance during Celebrate Roanoke in front of the former Silver Spur Saloon building, now the Roanoke Visitor Center and Museum. The festival is Roanoke's largest annual gathering and celebrates the city's history.**

*[chat label]*



***Quilt, 2009***

**Cotton, fabric, paint**

**From 2007 to 2009, third-grade students at Roanoke Elementary took field trips to downtown Roanoke to learn about city government and local history. Afterward they drew their favorite memories on quilting squares. Quilters Vertalee Coleman, Ann Clark, and Wanda Smith created four quilts and donated them to the Museum. These former students come back frequently to see their artwork.**