

The Railroad Brings a "New Town"

The original plat of Round Rock as laid out by the Texas Land Company in 1876 on land acquired from Washington Anderson.
Plat from the Williamson County Clerk.



Scan for sources and information about Historic Preservation in Round Rock

Arrival of the Railroad

Located east of Old Town in present-day downtown, New Town developed because of the arrival of the International and Great Northern Railroad in 1876.

In 1876, Washington Anderson sold 150 acres of land to be used for railroad right of way and a subdivision platted as Round Rock. The Texas Land Company, a subsidiary of the railroad company, laid out the blocks and named the streets. The subdivision came to be called New Town by locals, and the original settlement along Chisholm Trail became known as Old Town. Round Rock Avenue was designed at a diagonal as a direct route back to Old Town, though the two areas did not grow together until the mid-20th century.

Round Rock Train Depot, 1904



International and Great Northern Train Depot in Round Rock, pictured in 1904.

Photo from UNT Portal to Texas History.

Sam Bass

With the arrival of the railroad also came opportunistic thieves who robbed trains carrying valuable goods, such as money being transported to banks.

Sam Bass, born in Indiana in 1851, became a train bandit notorious in Texas. In the late 1870s, Bass caught the attention of Texas politicians who sought to capture him to demonstrate law and order in the post-reconstruction era. Sam Bass and his gang of thieves managed to evade the Texas Rangers until Jim Murphy, a member of Bass's gang, tipped off the Texas Rangers that they would be heading to Round Rock.

On July 19, 1878, Sam Bass and his gang were casing a local bank when a shootout with local law enforcement and the Texas Rangers ensued. Deputy Sheriff Grimes of Williamson County and gang member Seaborn Barnes died during the shootout and Bass was shot. Bass escaped with gang member Frank Jackson, but he was later captured before dying from his injuries on his 27th birthday, July 21, 1878.

Businesses of New Town

By the late 1870s, New Town experienced more economic growth as it was the end of the line for the railroad. Goods traveling on the railroad had to be loaded or unloaded in New Town from another mode of transportation, making the town a natural location for specialty industries like wagon shops, saddlery shops, and hotels for travelers.

Captain J.C.S. Morrow, Sam Houston's son in law, established the Round Rock Broom Factory. A broom produced at the Factory won a gold medal at the St. Louis Worlds Fair in 1904.



Left: Nelson Hardware Building, Right: Anderson-Nelson Company

Left from staff files. Right from Martin Parker. Both are in the Downtown Commercial Historic District and feature pressed metal facades.

The railroad greatly increased the variety of building materials available in Round Rock. New Town had many businesses that sold lumber, bricks, roofing, doors, and windows. As a result, architecture in Round Rock diversified.



Author Karen R. Thompson claims this is the only known authenticated photo of Sam Bass.

L-R: Sam Bass, Joe Collins, John E. Gardner, Joel Collins.

Photo from Thompson, Karen R., 2002, Round Rock, Texas: From Cowboys to Computers.

Infrastructure Investments

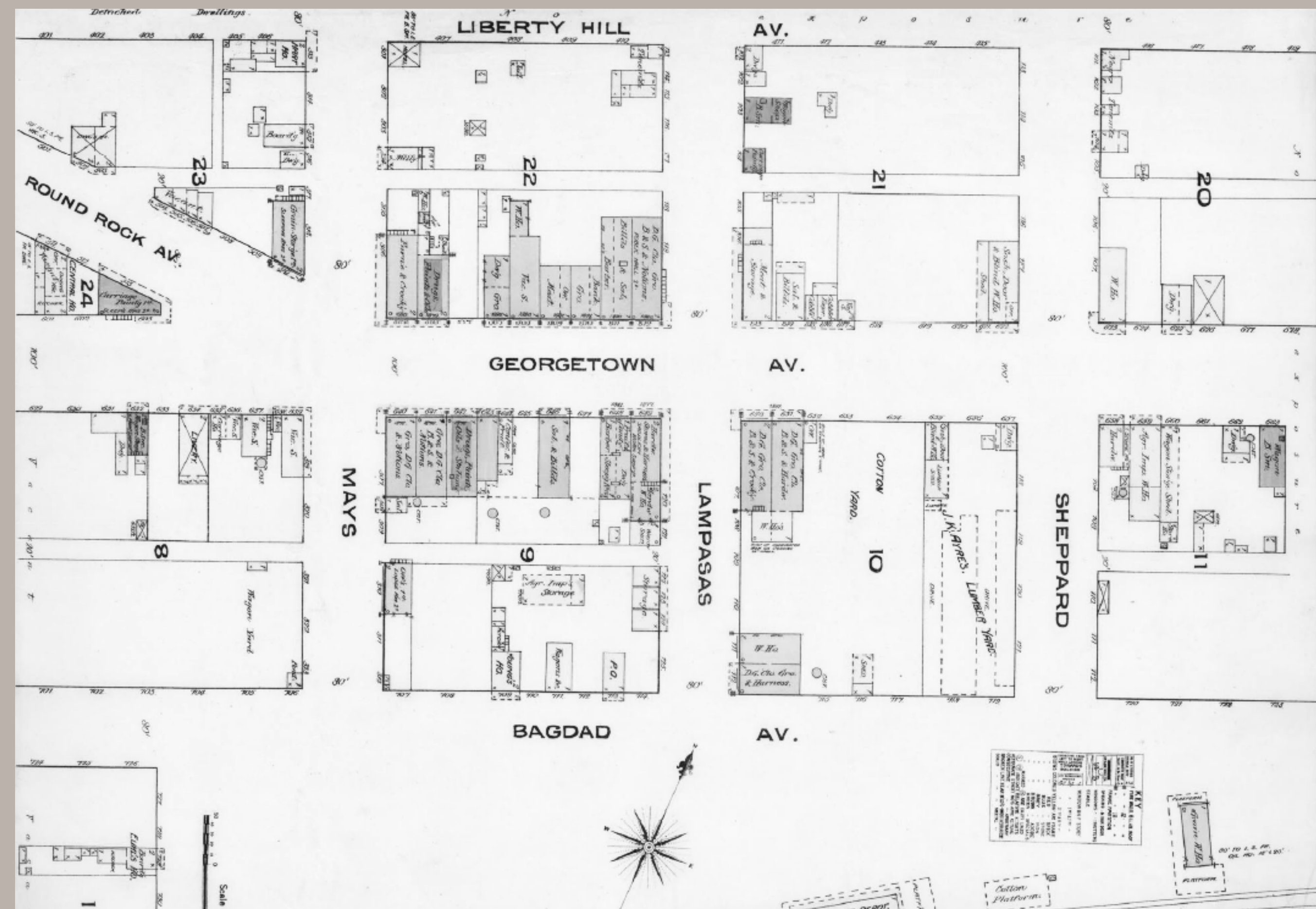
New Town did not have modern water infrastructure until the 1930s. Before that, Round Rock residents either had cisterns, got water from a downtown well, or bought barrels from Anderson's Spring. The water infrastructure and a new city hall were paid for by the Public Works Administration (PWA). The PWA was a New Deal program created to jumpstart the United States economy during the Great Depression.



New Town during the Spanish American War Parade, 1898.

Photo from Martin Parker.

Sandborn Map of "New Town," 1885



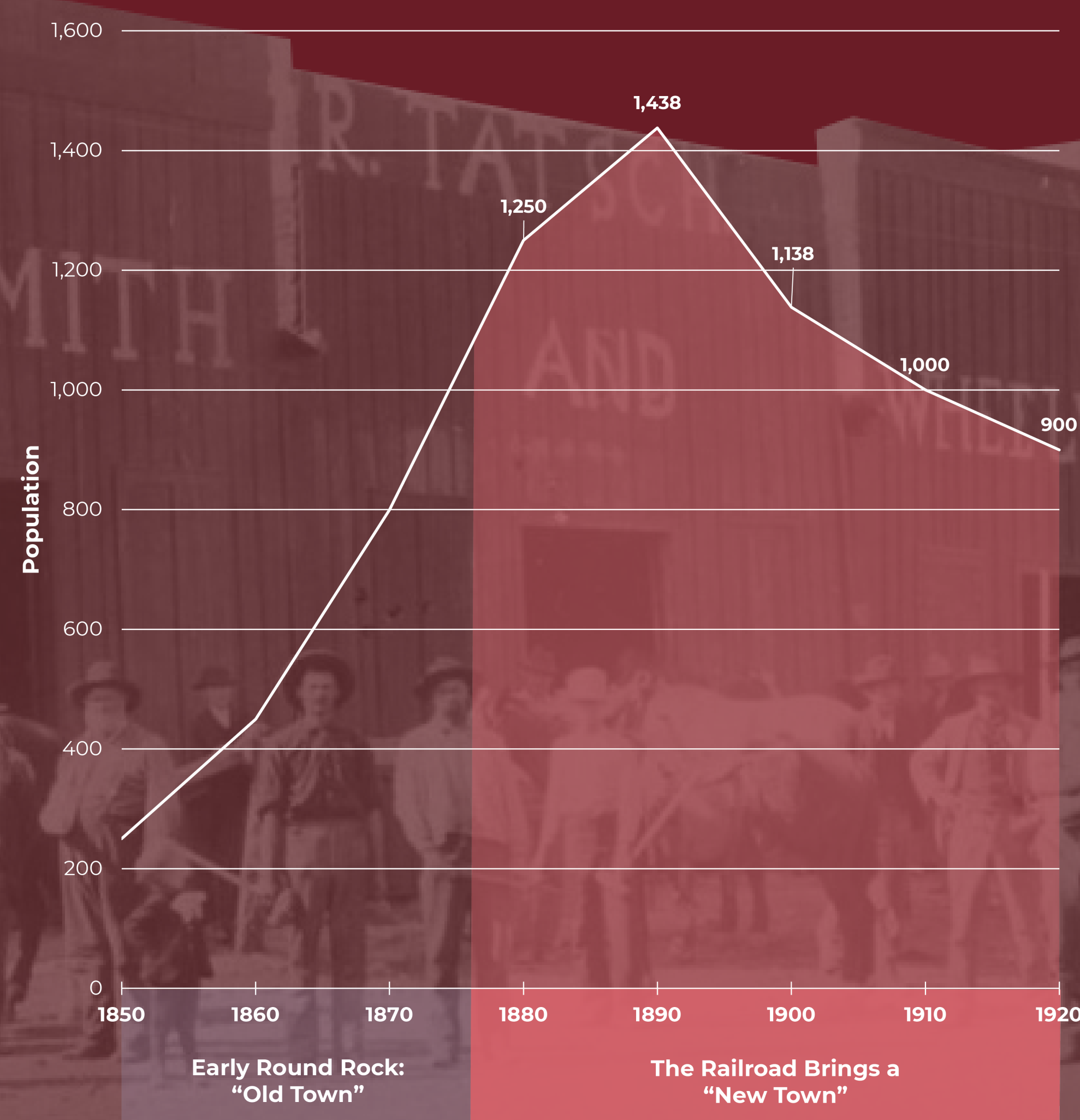
Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Round Rock, Aug. 1885.

Map from Library of Congress.

Blacksmith and wheelwright, 100 block Lampasas Street, 1880.

Photo from UNT Portal to Texas History.

Population, 1880-1920 Census



Early Round Rock: "Old Town"

The Railroad Brings a "New Town"

This is the third in a series of five banners about Round Rock's history.