

A View Through History
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Bluebonnets and Other Wildflowers Have Graced Milam County for Centuries

They're everywhere! They're back and they are everywhere! The annual welcomed invasion of wildflowers has again graced the prairies and hillsides of Milam County. Each Spring, Milam and its neighboring counties of Central Texas become palettes of color as various wildflowers dot the landscape. Bluebonnets, paintbrushes, winecups, primrose, Indian blankets, and many other wildflowers brighten this area of Texas from late February through the month of May.

The State Flower of Texas, *Lupinus texensis* or the Texas Bluebonnet, seems to be the favorite among many locals and visitors to our home county. While the bluebonnet may not always be the most plentiful blooms along our roadsides, it has a monarch-like quality that propels it to the forefront of the celebrated wildflower season. The bluebonnet gained its high rank and became a symbol of Texas on March 7, 1901, when the Twenty-seventh Texas State Legislature officially made it the state flower. However, the lawmakers of the early twentieth century did not come to this decision quickly and easily. Debates over which flower should be named Texas' most famous flower were common in the Spring of 1901. Some House and Senate members wanted their favorite flower to be designated the top flower of our state and some for good reason. For example, the cotton blossom was a strong contender for the honor, citing its economic impact on Texas. After all, Texas leads the nation in cotton production and the growth of these beautiful white flowering plants can be seen across much of the state, including Milam County, each Summer. Also, the prickly pear cactus blooms were suggested by legislative members from West and South Texas, as cacti produce various bright colors when flowering. These cactus flowers were touted as being representative of the heartiness and strength of Texas. And, East Texans declared, "what about the Yellow Rose of Texas." This flower has been clearly marked in Texas' history in both legend and song.

Yet the Texas Legislature meeting in Austin selected the Bluebonnet out of the many possibilities presented to them. The bluebonnet was nominated by the National Society of Colonial Dames of America. This group of women heavily encouraged the legislative body to select their flower choice by hanging pictures and paintings of bluebonnets all over the State Capitol Building. This organization even placed small flowerpots teaming with bluebonnets on each legislative member's desk. Plus, some of the Central Texas' representatives focused on the fact that the bluebonnet commonly grows from the Texas Hill Country to the prairies of North and Central Texas and from the plains of South Texas to the Coastal Bend Region. Even a form of bluebonnet scientifically

named *Lupinus Havardii*, or the Big Bend-Chisos Bluebonnet, grows several feet tall in the West Texas deserts. Facts such as this made it seem clear that the bluebonnet grows in most parts of The Lone Star State. Thus, the Texas Government took a final vote, passed a law, and declared the Bluebonnet the Texas State Flower.

According to websites for the Texas AgriLIFE Extension and Texas A&M Horticulturalists, at least five varieties of bluebonnets grow in the State of Texas. The *Lupinus subcarnosus*, is generally known as buffalo clover, and it rivals the *Lupinus texensis*, or Texas bluebonnet for the number one position. These two varieties of bluebonnets that thrive in Milam County are also found from Leon County in the East to Hidalgo County in South Texas and from North of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex to West of Llano and Mason Counties. You may see the bluebonnets on the Farm-to-Market roadsides outside of Cameron or Thorndale, or along the Interstate Highways and toll roads of Houston and Austin. Nevertheless, these annual wildflowers still symbolize the spirit of Texas and link us to our historic past.

Just imagine all the wildflowers seen by the Native Tribes, and early American and European Settlers who first came to Texas. Think about how these flowers, whether bluebonnets or not, have been woven into the history, legends, and folklore of our state. Native American have many traditions and stories that date back hundreds of years to explain why the bluebonnets cover the prairies of Texas in the Spring. One example is the Jumanos Tribe's story of a Spanish Nun mysteriously visiting them in the 1700's. She was said to be dressed in blue and the Indians called her "The Lady in Blue." After telling the Jumano people living in Texas about Christianity, it is said that the nun disappeared on that spring day leaving the prairie covered in blue flowers, or bluebonnets. The same result occurs in a Comanche tale where a young girl gives up her doll which wears a blue feather. The little girl's favorite item is her sacrifice in a ceremonial tribal bonfire and her unselfish gift causes the land to be covered in bluebonnets. The early Spanish priest noticed the beauty of the Texas Bluebonnet and had them planted around the mission chapels in the 1700's.

History shows that European and American settlers coming to Texas in the 1800's marveled at the huge expanses of wildflowers found on our state's landscape. Many wrote in their journals and correspondences that the hills and valleys of Texas were painted with vibrant colors. German botanist Ferdinand Lindheimer helped to popularize the bluebonnets and other Texas wildflowers by studying and documenting Texas native plant life.

So, if you are like the early Texans and cannot help but notice the recent on slot of wildflowers in Milam County, then give a little thought about the history and sense of pride those multitudes of bluebonnets and other wildflowers give to us Texans each time they come back again.

