

# **GHOST TOWNS of TEXAS**

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PART 1  
UTOPIA

KRISTENSTAD PAGES 9 - 11

# Kristenstad

To older businessmen of central Texas the name of De Cordova Bend brings to mind long-ago trips to purchase charcoal for their firms; to fishing enthusiasts it denotes the Brazos River with its steep banks and glimmering catfish; but to the romanticist with a free Sunday afternoon the name suggests a trip to the remarkable ghost town located there.

Only the river and the mountains which form its eastern bank and the twelve acres surrounding a publishing office remain unchanged, mutely watching a second reawakening come to De Cordova Bend of the Brazos, located between Granbury and Glen Rose. Over a decade ago this was the site of a self-sustaining colony, one operated on the idea of "sell much, buy little." In 1949 it became a beehive of activity as the nursery for Leonard Brothers' store of Fort Worth. Today the site of the settlement is a fishing paradise, made so by the addition of Whitney Dam to the mighty Brazos.

In 1949 the six-thousand-acre tract of land making up the bend (all except the plot surrounding the publishing house) became the property of the Leonard brothers. They sent purring Caterpillars and burrowing tractors into the curve of the river, threw up windmills to groan and squawk. Hulls of native stone houses — the post office, the commissary and the school house — built almost nineteen years before were occupied by the 1949 pioneers until their homes, with modern conveniences, could be completed. They planned an \$18,000 road-improvement program to replace the sandy lanes of the area and reached an agreement whereby a school bus would transport children to a nearby school.

In January, 1928, John B. Christensen first began Kristenstad, a work-if-you-eat settlement. A Missourian by birth, but of Danish descent, Christensen invited thirty-five families to make their livelihoods from the natural resources in the area and from the fruits of their labors. Out of native stone they built a commissary, limekiln, post office, school-

## GHOST TOWNS OF TEXAS

house, charcoal factory, chair plant, publishing house and their homes. They constructed a brush arbor where non-sectarian church services were held.

The entire population of approximately two hundred lived in an area two miles in length and cultivated approximately twelve hundred acres of land. They budded native pecan trees, raised hay, corn, peanuts, cotton and grain for their livestock, which pastured along the river banks.

Residents of Kristenstad settled the area because they believed in their right to own land and in their ability to become self-sustaining. Since their chief industries were stock raising and dairy farming, the people formed the Kristenstad Marketing Association to relieve individuals of the time and expense of carrying goods to market. Daily a truck bounced over the sandy land with its load of milk cans. So that people might purchase goods at wholesale prices, a commissary was established, and a separate system based on metal tokens in five-, ten-, twenty-five- and fifty-cent denominations was devised. All intra-community transactions were conducted with these tokens.

Old-fashioned straight and rocking chairs with cowhide bottoms were produced at a plant in this settlement and were shipped throughout fifteen southwestern states. Grape juice made from wild grapes gathered along the river was sold in nearby metropolitan areas. Even the children of the village collected numerous herbs, flowers, roots and barks to be sold to medical institutions.

Founder of the original community was a graduate of the University of Missouri who decided to come to Texas. In the Lone Star State he engaged in the buying and reorganizing of the short-line railroads. It was while he was working on an interurban connecting Glen Rose and Walnut Springs that Christensen was inspired by the ability of the Scandinavian people to live well on just a few acres of land, and it was at this time that De Cordova Bend of the Brazos River entered his dreams as the ideal location for the organization of a Scandinavian colony.

After Christensen completed arrangements for the six thousand-acre tract of land, almost encircled by the river, he divided the plot into small sections which he sold to thrifty people who wanted to till the soil. He required no down payment when he sold these plots, but instead threw a cow

## UTOPIA

in with the bargain. He required, in return, that half the livestock produced in Kristenstad become his personal property.

For a time the colony thrived and prospered, but death came with the depression. The chair factory was destroyed by fire, and the proposed dam of the river which Christensen prayed would bring a better road to his settlement died on the blueprints. The drought brought death to cattle. Final nail in the casket of the Brazos River settlement was the death of its founder and director in 1936.

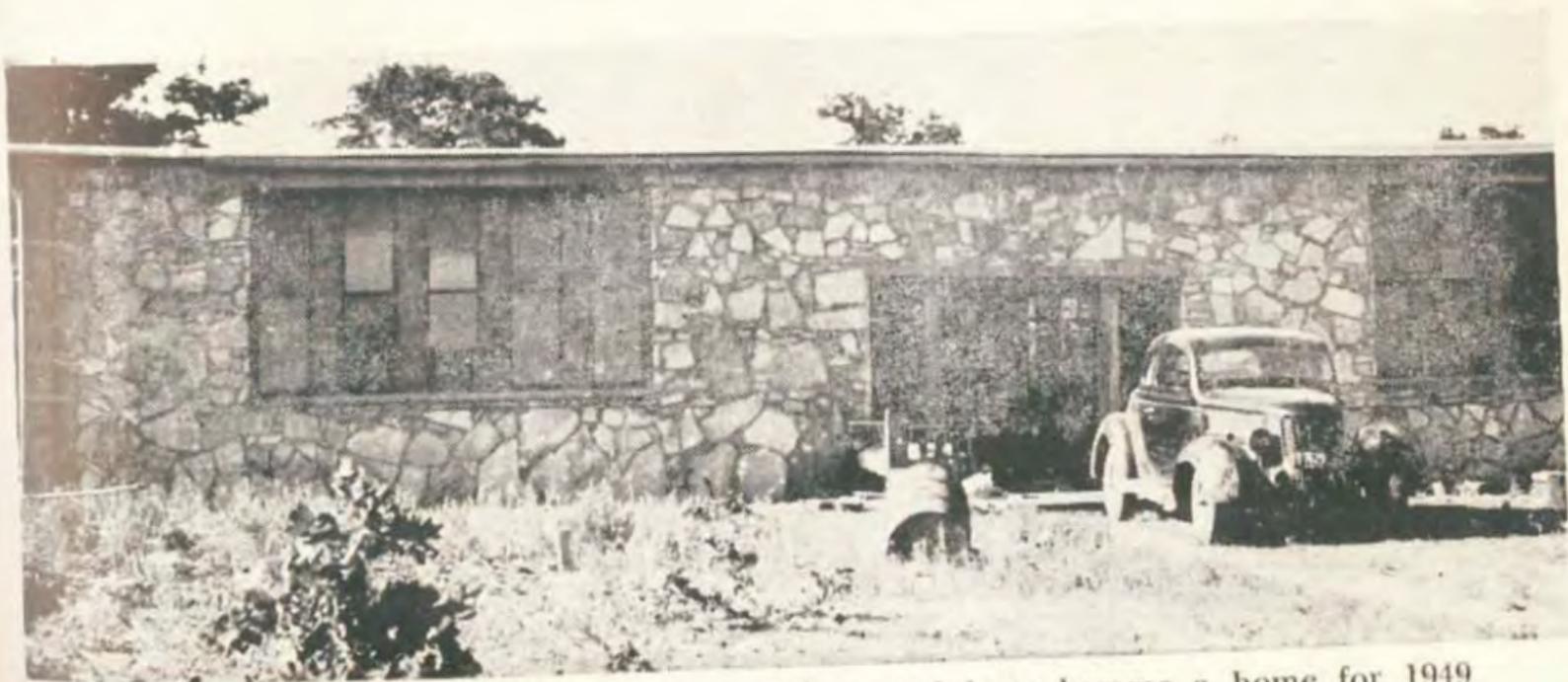
"He was about six-foot tall and a very likable person, big and fat and bald-headed," one of the present residents of the Bend recalled.<sup>1</sup>

Christensen's home, razed in 1949 to make room for new buildings, was connected with the office by a tunnel, only entrance to the office building.

The twelve acres surrounding the Interpreter's House, publishing plant which printed pamphlets and a newspaper, are located in the center of the Bend and are not a part of the fishing stampedes or the plowing and planting by workmen hired by the Fort Worth concern.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with residents of Cordova Bend. Names are unknown. July, 1949.



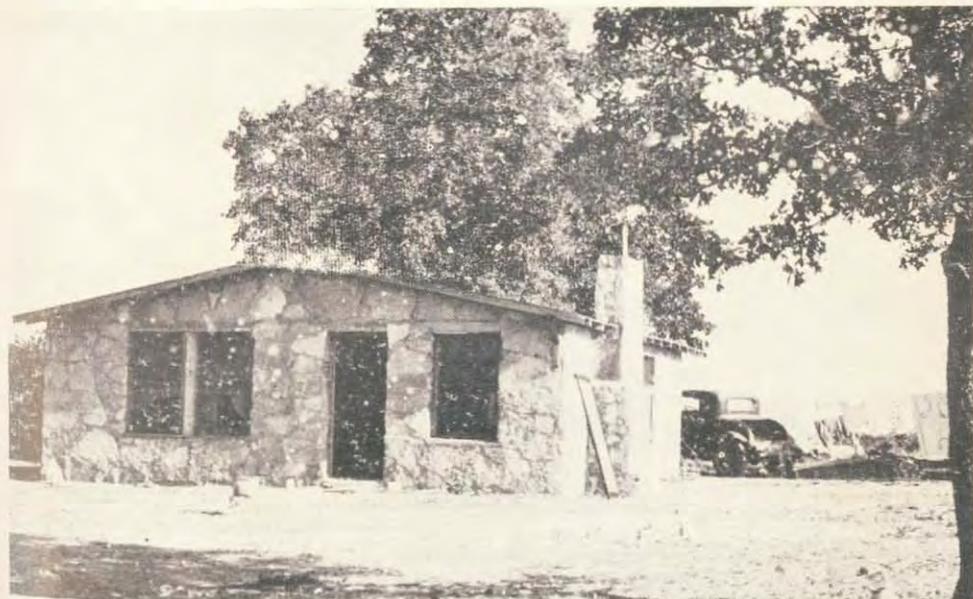
The native stone school buildings at Kristenstad later became a home for 1949 pioneers who moved into the bend of the river:



Chimney and fireplace which was in the office of the founder of Kristenstad are shown above. Only entrance to the office was through a tunnel connecting the office with the home.



Shown are ruins of the rock commissary at Kristenstad. This was the center of activity when approximately 35 families lived in DeCordova Bend of the Brazos River.



The rock house pictured is typical of those built in DeCordova Bend of the Brazos River for residents of the work-if-you-eat settlement known as Kristenstad.