

VAN, TEXAS. Van is on Farm Road 314, State Highway 110, and Interstate 20 near the Van field fourteen miles east of Canton in east central Van Zandt County. The first settlers in the area had arrived by the time of the Civil War. By 1874, according to some sources, the town was known as Ratty Towns or Who'd-a-Thought-It, gaining its name when a citizen named Ratty Towns tried to open a store. It was later named Swindall for George Swindall, who donated land for a school west of the present business district and land north of that site in 1891 to the Methodist Church. In 1894 schoolteacher Henry Vance established a post office, and the name Van was chosen when the post office renamed the community for resident Vannie Tunnell and postmaster Vance. A Pure Oil company survey near the town in 1927 led to the discovery of oil at the property of W. T. Jarman on October 13, 1929. Consequently, Van experienced a boom, growing from a rural farming community with a school, a post office, and a general store to a substantial community where thirty buildings, including hotels and stores, had been constructed in only ten days. In November Sun Oil, Shell Petroleum, the Texas Company, Pure Oil, and Humble became coowners of the field, with Pure Oil as chief operator, and in 1930 the Texas Short Line Railway was extended from Grand Saline. The population numbered 894 throughout the 1930s, and state highway maps in 1936 showed two churches, three seasonal industry sites, and numerous dwellings at the townsite. The population declined to 620 during World War II, as workers moved away to jobs in war-related industry, but increased steadily thereafter. Businesses in the community fluctuated from a high of fifty in 1934 to a low of fifteen in 1945, but remained between thirty and forty throughout most of the town's history. Mechanization of the oilfield occurred in the 1940s, and by the 1950s Van had a Humble Oil refinery, five churches, and a consolidated independent school district. A total of 591 wells made up the Van field when Pure Oil became a division of Union Oil in 1965. The population of Van grew from 1,103 in 1962 to 1,820 by 1974, when the community received a government housing project. With its close proximity to the county center at Canton, however, Van continued to grow slowly, reaching a population of 1,854 by 1992 and 2,362 in 2000.

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