

Growth of American Slavery Coincided With Westward Move

By: Karla Price

In 1825, 443 slaves lived in Texas. By 1860, that number had grown to 182,586. One out of every four white families owned at least one slave.

The institution of slavery as practiced in the United States was more than 200 years old by the time it arrived in Waco. When the Civil War began in 1861, the 400,000 people brought from Africa in earlier years had grown to a slave population of 4 million.

Slavery was first established in the Chesapeake Bay area of Virginia in 1619, when the first 20 slaves arrived, said Baylor University professor Stanley Campbell.

Between 1619 and 1640, the law treated slaves no different than indentured servants from Europe, said Campbell. They usually were freed after working a predetermined time.

There's even some evidence in Virginia that the slaves, having served out their terms, were freed and were acquiring property," said Campbell.

In the following years, however, the situation changed drastically. Between 1640 and 1660, a growing group of black indentured servants were being held for life. The first slave statutes were written in 1661 in Virginia and Maryland, and they dealt with the obligations of slaves and their treatment.

In all, about 400,000 men and women were imported from Africa as slaves. South Carolina imported slaves from the Caribbean. Many Africans were taken to the Caribbean to be "seasoned" before moving to America.

As the country expanded, so did the number of states and territories with slave populations. Texas was one such territory.

Ships from New Orleans or from up the Red River came to Texas carrying slaves, beginning in the 1820s. Many Alabama and Mississippi planters brought their slaves with them, on wagon or by foot. By this time, few were brought from Africa or the West Indies because it was illegal, but about 500 slaves were illegally imported during the 1830s.

In 1825, 443 slaves lived in Texas. By 1860, that number had grown to 182,566. One out of every four white families owned at least one slave, and the state ranked 10th in the nation in total slave population.