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# Faces, Places & Open Spaces

Photography by Ralph Duke • Text by Christine Wylly

A publication of the Amarillo Chamber of Commerce

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Faces, Places, and  
Open Spaces

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HPNbooks

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San Antonio, Texas



The downtown Amarillo skyline features buildings constructed from the 1920s like the historic Santa Fe Building, to the twenty-first century Globe News Center for the Performing Arts. The Chase Tower, constructed in 1971 is the tallest building between Fort Worth and Denver, and Albuquerque and Oklahoma City.

First Edition

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### **Amarillo: Faces, Places, and Open Spaces**

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Thanks are also in order to the staff of the Amarillo Chamber of Commerce who provided Ralph and me with guidance, information, and valuable input. I wish to acknowledge the Amarillo Convention and Visitor Council for their contributions to this book. Beth Duke also kept us on track with details about historic downtown Amarillo. Gratitude goes to the staff of the Historical Publishing Network, to Ron Lammert for his leadership, to Donna Mata who kept me grounded, and Colin Hart who provided technical support.

Finally, thanks goes to my six wonderful grandchildren for giving me the vision for this book. The history of Amarillo is their heritage, the future of Amarillo is their promise, and this book about their city is part of my legacy to them.

**Christine Wylly**



*Amarillo Chamber of Commerce, founded in 1926 is located in the historic Lee Bivins home at 1000 South Polk Street. The stately three-story Georgian-Revival-style house was built by the pioneer rancher and his wife Mary E. Bivins in 1903.*





# Foreword

When we started this project, I looked forward to working with Ralph Duke and presenting a beautiful book to the people of Amarillo. From the beginning, our vision was to highlight the modern, cosmopolitan side of the city, while at the same time celebrating our Western heritage. I'm delighted say, we have done that. I trust that the faces you see, the places we share, and the open spaces we love bring you joy.

Christine Wyly

As a native of Amarillo and a commercial photographer for more than forty years, I was excited when the Amarillo Chamber of Commerce selected me to do the photographs for this book. I am honored that readers will be able to see some of the images through my viewfinder. I hope the photos will bring a smile to their faces or a happy memory. Please enjoy the pictures for years to come. Sit back and take in Amarillo's faces, places, and open spaces. Without photos, we have no history.

Thank you,  
Ralph Duke



*The Amarillo Chamber of Commerce sitting pretty in the snow and holiday glow.*

# Introduction

Amarillo is a city of contrasts. Perched on top of the high mesa named Llano Estacado, it is a place where rustic, rural influences embrace a culture of arts and philanthropy. It is a city where traditions tied to its wild west past coexist with long held customs of refinement. Amarillo is a cosmopolitan city with a small-town friendly attitude. Amarillo is and has been home to some of the most interesting characters ever to pull on a pair of boots, yet the city thrives because of the hard working, everyday kind of folks who are the foundation of its population.

The city sprang up at the playa lake named Amarillo Lake, also known as Wild Horse Lake because wild mustangs drank there. It was a place where buffalo hunters and traders had set up a nineteenth century hide market. The railroad made that market viable, and when buffalo hides became a rarity, the railroads carried beef out of the Texas Panhandle. Cattle were driven into the city and millions were penned close to downtown near the railroads. Early in Amarillo's history the railroad began to ship grain grown by farmers drawn to the area by promises of cheap land. Today all manner of goods ride the rails out of and through Amarillo, and the railroad remains an integral part of the Amarillo economy. The rumbling sound of trains on tracks, the thunderous clap of train cars coupling together, and their piercing horns at crossings can be heard throughout Amarillo. The railways that crisscross Amarillo transport tons of coal into area power plants and still export grain and beef as well as other products that originate in the Texas Panhandle. Amarillo would not have existed without the railroad; if the Fort Worth and Denver City Railway had bypassed Amarillo in the beginning, it would have died like Tascosa and scores of other ghost towns across the west. Today the city, seat of Potter County, also spreads into the northern portion of Randall County and has a population of over 190,000.



*This early morning image of sunrise over a rail yard east of downtown, depicts the never-ending activity of the railroad silhouetted against the ever-changing Amarillo sky.*



Those early pioneer farmers and ranchers who settled the Texas Panhandle had plenty of backbone and many endured the dust, blizzards, and heat to become successful. However, some were more fortunate to find they had settled atop one of the richest fields of oil and natural gas in the world. Natural gas was discovered north of Amarillo in 1918. Oil was discovered in 1920 in Carson County to the east of Amarillo, and pipelines were developed in the 1920s and 1930s. Oil and gas exploration, production, refinement, and transportation facilities have been part of the Amarillo landscape since that time. The Panhandle Field is said to be the largest volume gas field in the United States. It also produces helium in Potter County where the Federal Helium Reserves are headquartered.

Today, Amarillo has been named as one of the West's best places to live by "American Cowboy" and according to a recent Gallup Survey, it was ranked as the tenth happiest small city in the United States. Amarillo is known to many as a gateway to the American Southwest and into Palo Duro Canyon. It is known for its proximity to oilfields lined with pump jacks and its wide open plains dotted with grazing cattle. Amarillo's beautiful skyline with its unique skyscrapers is known to travelers, treasured by locals, and is included in many photography collections. Amarillo welcomes many visitors who travel into the city on Interstate 40. Those visitors often stay in the city to enjoy the many attractions tied to its American West history.

A long-time involvement with aviation and being centrally located has made Amarillo a transportation hub beyond the impact of the railroads. In 2011 over 418,000 airline boardings will take place at Rick Husband Amarillo International Airport. The airport serves as a refueling stop for military and civilian aircraft alike and its primary runway is one of the longest commercial runways in the United States. NASA used the airport as an occasional refueling stop for their modified Boeing 747s with the piggy-backed space shuttles aboard. The newly renovated airport has been upgraded to implement a



new baggage system and create a more comfortable, efficient experience for air travelers. Passengers arriving at Rick Husband Amarillo International Airport are greeted with images of historic Texas Panhandle and graphically created ranch brands incorporated into a sleek modern look.



*The 1927 Fish Building in downtown Amarillo was renovated during 2010. Its transformation into a 107 room Courtyard by Marriott Hotel was unveiled in January 2011.*





As more people discover Amarillo's assets and amenities the city continues to expand. Amarillo's strong economy, coupled with an increasingly well trained workforce, draws new business and residents each year. The area's fine public school systems include Amarillo Independent School System, Highland Park Independent School System, River Road Independent School System, Bushland Independent School System, and the Canyon Independent School System. Amarillo is home to a number of private, parochial, and religious schools as well as Amarillo College, a fully accredited community college, which offers a strong academic, medical, and technical curriculum. West Texas A&M University in Canyon, approximately twenty miles south of Amarillo, is part of the Texas A&M University System and has a satellite campus in Amarillo. The University's sports programs (nicknamed the Buffaloes) participate in NCAA Division II Lone Star Conference competition. Wayland Baptist University has a branch campus in Amarillo as well. Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center in Amarillo educates medical students, pharmacy students, and students in physical therapy and other healthcare fields. Long time and new residents alike are finding that living in Amarillo offers opportunity, stability, and a high quality of life.

The best way to sum up Amarillo is to quote the people who know it best, Amarilloans. Many say they have left Amarillo, swearing to never come back, yet



they couldn't stay away for long. Quite a few say "if you wear out a pair of shoes in Amarillo, you'll never leave." Some recognize that "Amarillo has come a long way from where it started." Other comments range from "very windy," to "it's the easiest city to get where you want to go," and "the nicest people I've ever met live in Amarillo...hands down, no contest." One former resident says "Amarillo is a great place to retire...slow and easy is the pace." The resident who offers up

the best quote says "Amarillo is a place that will slowly capture you and hold you forever."

The FACES of Amarillo reflect fortitude against the elements, generosity, hard work and cooperation, friendliness, optimism, and hope for the future. The PLACES in Amarillo are reminiscent of western heritage, traditional, cosmopolitan, modern and state-of-the-art, imaginative, and Texan to the core. The OPEN SPACES provide room to grow, are windswept, magnificently huge, and have a stark beauty Amarilloans love with a passion.



*Opposite, top: Amarillo is known as an oil and gas town. Its fortunes have literally ebbed and flowed with the rise and fall of the oil and gas industry.*

*Opposite, bottom: The Amarillo Livestock Auction serves the Texas Panhandle ranching industry by handling more cattle than any other commission auction company in the United States.*



*Above: The Rick Husband Amarillo International Airport had its beginnings in 1929, and annexed a portion of the deactivated Amarillo Airbase in 1968. The 13,502-foot primary runway served as an alternate landing site for NASA's space shuttle.*

*Left: The Globe News Center for the Performing Arts started with a vision and a gift from Caroline "Carol" Bush Emery. The specially designed facility provides acoustical excellence and a state-of-the-art setting for the Amarillo Fine Arts community.*



Above: Drummer, Jamie Hand, is shown here during a performance of the popular band Tom Velasquez and The Global Nomads at a recent Amarillo Chamber of Commerce event.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THE AMARILLO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE.

Right: Andy Chase Cundiff is one of Amarillo's most popular local entertainers.

Opposite: J. Patrick O'Brien, Ph.D., president of West Texas A&M University is shown here at the Amarillo Chamber of Commerce "Good Times Celebration" Barbecue Cook-Off.



# Chapter 1



# FACES

friends,  
neighbors,  
and characters

Amarillo is a musicians' town. Songwriters have hailed from Amarillo for decades and today's music is still being written by Amarillo residents. Amarilloan Susan Gibson wrote the 1998 country western hit *Wide Open Spaces*. Charlie Phillips, recording artist and co-writer of the 1958 song *Sugartime* and several other hits, has been a long-time Amarillo resident who still performs with his band, the Sugartimers. Songwriter Terry Stafford, who grew up in Amarillo and graduated from Palo Duro High School, wrote the song *Suspicion* recorded by Elvis Presley, as well the song some consider the city's anthem, *Amarillo by Morning*, made famous by George Strait. Singers and musicians, John Rich, J. D. Souther, Joe Ely, Kevin Fowler, and *American Idol* finalist Lacey Brown are all from Amarillo. Actors Cyd Charisse, Ron Ely, and Carolyn Jones were from Amarillo and contemporary actress Francie Swift is from Amarillo. Jodi Thomas, M. K. Wren, Kimberly Willis Holt, Jennifer Archer, and Jason Boyett are Amarillo authors.







Opposite: Amarillo has many talented musicians. Popular events like the "Good Times Celebration"® Barbecue Cook-Off and the Polk Street Block Party, feature bands that perform country western, jazz, blues, rock, and pop.

Above: Amarillo singer/songwriter, Ed Montana, has performed across the country singing at rodeos and with the Coors Cowboy Band.

Right: Chuck Alexander, a long-time Amarillo musician, performs at weddings and local events.





*Opposite: Amarilloan Lacey Brown made Amarillo proud when she became the twelfth place finalist on the ninth season of American Idol.*

*Above: Amarillo fiddle player, Jimmy Young was a member of the Texas Playboys and sang with the legendary Bob Wills. He is also well known to Amarillo music fans as a member of the Coors Cowboy Band, and as a performer at the Big Texan Opry.*

*Right: This gentleman, a vendor at the Working Ranch Cowboys Association World Championship Ranch Rodeo, portrays an elegant western style area residents are accustomed to seeing among ranchers, horsemen, and craftsmen.*







*Above: Many gatherings in Amarillo feature face painting for the young and the young at heart.*

*Opposite: Kwahadi Dancers perform in full regalia after achieving the rank of Eagle Scout and completing extensive training.*

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