

The Bandera PROPHECY

December 12, 2022

Today in Texas History

By Bandera Spirits of Texas

On this day in 1910, the "Toonerville Trolley" streetcar line began operating between Houston and the suburban community of Bellaire. Railroad executive William Wright Baldwin, acting as president of the South End Land Company, founded Bellaire and Westmoreland Farms after purchasing the 9,449-acre Rice Ranch in 1908. The development was six miles from Houston on the eastern edge of the ranch named for its former owner, William Marsh Rice.

By 1910, Baldwin had invested over \$150,000 in capital improvements to turn the treeless prairie into an attractive location for residences and small truck farms. From the site to Main Street in Houston he constructed Bellaire Boulevard.

He also incorporated the Westmoreland Railroad Company to build an electric streetcar line down the center of the boulevard. The Toonerville Trolley operated from 1910 until bus service replaced it on September 26, 1927. The line was typical of the many electric streetcar lines that played an important role in the urban growth of Texas.

The town of Bellaire was eventually surrounded by Houston, but it remained a separate community with an estimated population of 18,584 in 2016.