

Rotan is at the intersection of State highways 70 and 92, near the Double Mountain Fork of the Brazos in northwest Fisher County. A community called White Flat, named for the powdery white gypsum sand that lies near the surface of the land, had been established at the site before county organization in 1886. By 1900 White Flat had a school that also served as a Methodist church. The settlement struggled to survive until 1906, when lots were staked for rapid development after the Texas Central Railroad decided to locate its western terminus there. Early ranchers included J. W. Burrow and Alex and Warren Haynes, who sold land for the townsite to the railroad. The first lot buyers included H. C. Shelton, James B. Day, E. R. Day, J. A. Mardis, and W. E. Schick. The Texas Central built through the town in 1907. A post office application that year necessitated a name change, as there was already another White Flat post office in Texas, and the community was renamed for Ed Rotan of Waco, a major investor in the railroad. Rotan grew rapidly as the trade center for northern and western Fisher County and the southern part of Kent and Stonewall counties. By the time the community incorporated in 1909, it had two banks, three hotels, three churches, telephone, water, and light service, an ice house, and a bottling works. By 1914 Rotan had an estimated 500 inhabitants and a weekly newspaper, the *Advance*. The Rotan Gypsum Plant was founded in 1923. A series of gins was built in the town, including the Rotan Gin, built in 1925, and the Farmers Gin, a cooperative established in 1935. Rotan grew to 1,638 inhabitants and 100 businesses by 1930. In 1935 the Rotan Gypsum Plant was sold to the National Gypsum Company, which began a series of expansions that eventually made the facility one of the largest gypsum plants in the country. Rotan's population rose to 2,029 in 1940 and 3,159 in 1950. Thereafter the community began a slow decline, as larger farms and new farm technology led to the decline of the rural population it served. Residents numbered 2,788 in 1960, 2,404 in 1970, and 2,284 in 1980. The railroad, which had ceased passenger service in the 1920s, was discontinued in the late 1970s. In 1990 Rotan's economy depended on agribusiness, an oil mill, and the gypsum plant, and the community had a population of 1,913. The population dropped to 1,611 in 2000.