

CARROLL SHELBY. BOWERY STAGE. TEX RITTER. RED RIVER STEAMBOATS.

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UPPER EAST SIDE OF TEXAS

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SINGING VALENTINES. HUDDIE LEDBETTER. DIVERSE VOICES. LIGHTEN UP.



*An artist's rendition of the Heroine steamboat shows the vessel's combined purpose of carrying passengers, soldiers, and shipments. In 1999, the remains of the Heroine were uncovered from the Red River near the Lamar-Red River county line. The ship is believed to have hit a submerged log and sank in about 1838. The joint excavation and study by Texas and Oklahoma authorities greatly enhanced the understanding of steamboat travel on the river. PHOTO COURTESY OF DR. KEVIN CRISMAN, TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY.*

## Red River Steamboats Brought Settlers to East Texas

By Steve Freeman

Taking a look at the Red River today—often shallow and showing many sand bars—doesn't conjure up images of passing seafaring vessels, but the Red River of yesteryear was a key passageway for transporting early settlers and facilitating commerce to and from the nation's newest frontier.

The first steamboat traversed the Red River 200 years ago. Back before railroads crisscrossed the expanding west, a primary mode of transportation if not hauled by teams of horses were ships. All that was needed was a waterway — various luminaries like Sam Houston, David Crockett, and James Bowie came to Texas via steamboat, according to *The Handbook of Texas*.

And not just one or a few steamboats forged the river either. Armchair expert Mike McCrary of northwest DeKalb has documented some 200 steamboats making the voyage. He believes that the Red River is underappreciated and overly ignored by people today.

"It was simply a way of life for the early settlers; it's a story never told," he said.

McCrary, 71, lives a few miles from the river. He began studying it with a particular interest in steamboat travel 20 years ago and has collected 25 notebooks of information.

The Red River borders the northern edge for some 200 miles of its total 1,600-mile stretch from the Texas panhandle to mid-

Louisiana. From there it joins the Atchafalaya River and proceeds to the Gulf of Mexico. Geographically, the river's Texas portion connected the Northeast Texas region to "civilization," including vibrant New Orleans and points further up the Mississippi River — St. Louis and via manmade canals Chicago, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh.

The Texas portion enters the state on the very northeast corner and divides the state's northern border from Oklahoma. The river's prominence has resulted in historic land deals between the U.S. and Spain, Mexico, and the Republic of Texas itself. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 solidified the river's presence on U.S. maps of the time.

Early steamboats were named Laconia, Violet, Red Warrior, Bull of the Woods, Belle Gates, Napoleon and Arkansas Traveler. They carried passengers, pecans, corn, buffalo hides, cotton, ammunition, bootleg alcohol, coffee, tobacco, and cattle. McCreary said the only other option—travel by horse-drawn wagon—would have taken several months whereas steamboat travel took a week from New Orleans. They also carried both Confederate and Union troops at times.

Seeing a ship on the river today would be shocking. Since the 1890s, merchants and travelers started preferring the faster and more direct routes of the growing railroad industry. Besides, a good look at a map shows that the Red River's disadvantage was its meandering course.

Still, the river and the boats that traveled it were instrumental in settling the area and then supplying its people with products, staples, and equipment. In return, the river's eastern and southern route helped settlers sell cotton, animal hides, wood, and other items to big city markets.

Several plantations, including those owned by Native Americans in northerly Indian Territory, were located along both sides between Texas and Oklahoma. The latter state's Fort Towson, opened in 1824 north of where the river meets the Red River and Lamar county lines. The fort was a key frontier outpost that played roles in protecting settlers and keeping the peace.

The river was a gateway to Texas then. Early Anglo settlements offering welcoming ports were at Pecan Point and the former Jonesborough in Red River County. Fannin County also includes various state historical markers related to early steamboat travel and its settlement.

"There sometimes were eight boats at a landing at one time; they were thick on the river," McCrary said. Some catered more to passengers by offering private cabins and dinner service. One journalist said menu items on the R.W. Powell steamboat rivaled any restaurant in New Orleans.

It was on a trip to the fort to deliver military supplies and troops for the Texas Revolution against Mexico that gives a good understanding of steamboat traffic 200 years ago. In 1999, waters in the area receded enough to reveal a sunken steamboat called the Heroine, which ran aground more than 150 years earlier. Teams from both states, including Texas A&M University raised what remaining pieces of the boat they could and they're now on display at the Oklahoma History Center.

Dr. Kevin Crisman, professor of nautical archeology at A&M, was instrumental in resurrecting the ship and conserving and restoring what remained of its body and the cargo. Artifacts included barrels of pickled pork, beans, and flour—a year's worth of food for the fort's soldiers.

Another tragedy occurred on Caddo Lake when the Mittie Stephens steam-

boat caught fire, killing more than half of its 107 passengers in 1869 while in route to Jefferson. Jefferson became an important port in Texas between 1845 and 1872 because an impassable logjam that stretched 75 miles on the Red River north and south of the city of Shreveport caused the waters of the lake and Big Cypress Bayou, flowing through Jefferson, to rise enough for steamboat travel. Today, the Graceful Ghost Paddle Wheel Steamboat in Karnack retells the story during a ride on the lake.

It all started to change after the Civil War. Ambitious railway companies started laying tracks in Texas that originated from all points east. The International Railroad Company built to Longview in the early 1870s and the Red River Railroad Company arrived in 1879.

Once called the "Almighty's natural highway" in a newspaper of the day, the river's importance subsided in time. The unpredictable water level, rising or falling 15 to 20 feet in many cases, made travel decisions a daily task. Railroad systems were transforming travel and moving freight. The river was eventually dubbed a "steamboat graveyard," said McCrary.

One of the busiest ports, Jonesborough, had even vanished by 1950.

"You hardly see anyone on the river now when it was once a busting area; it's pretty dead now," said Crisman. "The importance of the steamboats really can't be underestimated. They were like interstate highways and airports are to us today."



# Carroll Shelby's Legacy Races On

## East Texas Chicken Farmer Became International Auto Icon

By LouAnn Campbell and Steve Freeman

The name Carroll Shelby is hardly recognized by most East Texans, but the Shelby name is admired far, far beyond the region that gave him his start.

Just using the word “Shelby” conjures up images to many of classic sports car designs, racing championships, 5,000-plus member car clubs, car museums in Las Vegas, Nevada, and Boulder, Colorado, and memorabilia for sale up to hundreds of thousands of dollars on eBay and elsewhere.

The son of a rural Texas mailman, Carroll Shelby went on to acclaim as, first, a celebrated race car driver, and then designer of one of the most famous American performance race cars — the legendary Shelby Cobra sports car, which also influenced his designs of versions of Chrysler Viper and the ever-popular Ford Mustang. The Los Angeles Times called him a “cult classic car designer.”

But there is so much more to the man, the proud Texan, who became an iconic figure in 20th century America. The larger-than-life entrepreneur created an auto parts and design-licensing empire, appeared twice on the cover of Sports Illustrated magazine as “Driver of the Year,” and helped found the famed Terlingua International Chili Championship. His “Carroll Shelby's Original Texas Brand Chili” is still available on grocery shelves.

“I like to get into things other people are not in, to see if I can make it work,” he once said.

All the while, Shelby achieved notoriety by being named to both the international and national motor sports halls of fame. And since art imitates life, Hot Wheels® cars produced 11 toy car designs in his honor, the most recent

being the 1968 Ford Mustang Shelby GT500.

Even after his death at age 89 in 2012, the legacy of Carroll Shelby lives on in his family, in Shelby Corporation, in his children's health and education foundation, and in East Texas. It's there that he was born, is buried, and there that his scholarship program at Northeast Texas Community College (NTCC) still trains and certifies auto mechanics.

### A Texas Original

From humble beginnings, Carroll made his way in life with the lessons learned during the great depression

era. Born in Leesburg between Winnsboro and Pittsburg on January 11, 1923, he grew up and learned the value of hard work and developed a passion for airplanes and racing cars.

As a young adult, he followed his interest in flying by joining the U.S. Army Air Corp, becoming a sergeant. He was first stationed at Lackland Air Field and in Wichita Falls as an instructor pilot.

“He probably loved airplanes more than cars; a lot of people don't know that,” said Aaron Shelby, grandson of the late Carroll Shelby. “His stories about flying are comical. He would



*Carroll Shelby accepts the grand prize in his signature overalls at the 200-mile race at Riverside International Raceway in 1960, shortly before his retirement as a racer due to health issues.*



drop love letters to my grandmother (Jeanne Fields) who was home on the farm near Dallas.”

After World War II, Shelby attempted various odd jobs — a trucker, oil driller, and chicken farmer — but nothing suited him, nothing brought him passion, as much as his memories of speed — either flying or driving. He went on to racing champion and car design fame, but his roots were deeply embedded in East Texas.

“I think East Texas was Carroll’s heritage. And for me that’s my family’s heritage. It will always hold a dear place in our hearts,” Aaron said.

Shelby owned a variety of ranches in Northeast Texas with miniature horses and African cattle while keeping his hand in high-performance design into his later years.

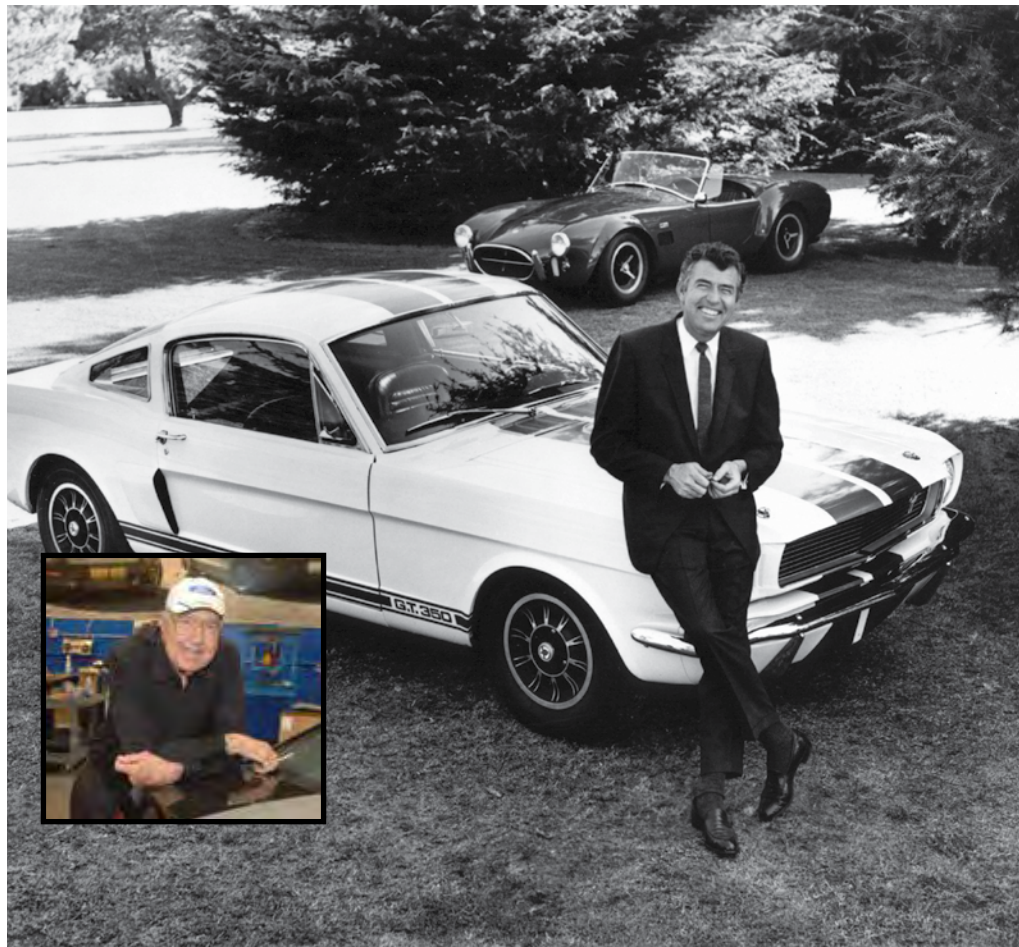
He was buried in his hometown of Leesburg, but not before he inaugurated scholarships for student auto mechanics at NTCC that actually saved the program.

The Carroll Shelby Automotive School at NTCC began over a meal between Shelby and the college’s vice president, Dr. Jon McCullough, in 2007. Shelby found out the college had a culinary program and he and his new friend, Jon, would partake of the chef’s food. The conversation naturally steered to auto mechanics and when Shelby found out the program was too expensive for most East Texas kids to pursue and that a gift of \$50,000 in scholarships would help 18 to 20 students, his decision was definitive.

“All he said was ‘done!’” McCullough said.

The sports car legend had a heart for guys who grew up in East Texas and just needed a chance to succeed, he added. Shelby’s foundation became annual benefactors and its chief made occasional trips to the campus to meet and talk with students, who loved his life stories.

From the six students enrolled prior to that, the program has 53 this year. Shelby also chipped in one-quarter of a million for equipment, tools, and machinery.



*Shelby’s attraction to sports cars and driving are evident in photos taken in his later years (inset) and in 1965 next to the popular Ford Mustang Shelby GT350.*

## The Starting Line

It was in 1952, just short of his 30th birthday, that Shelby got into a race car for the first time and won a race in Norman, Oklahoma. He drove a little MG. Realizing that he was pretty good at racing cars, the victory changed the course of his life. He surrounded himself with good people and became an accomplished race car driver.

He won four races in borrowed cars before the Aston Martin sports car team noticed and added him to their team to race throughout the world. He raced MGs, Cadillacs, Ferraris, Maseratis, and Aston Martins on the most famous speedways in the world.

While arguably one of the most famous race car drivers of all time, his greatest moment was winning LeMans 24-hour Race in an Aston Martin DBR1/300 in 1959.

Shelby’s personality, good looks, driving expertise, and trademark striped

overhauls enhanced his popularity. But his health presented problems that would take him out of racing for good.

In February 1960, Shelby experienced chest pains and doctors eventually diagnosed it as “angina pectoralis,” in which the coronary arteries are starved for blood. In December, Shelby competed in his last race and won the USAC driving championship for 1960.

Shelby was told that if he didn’t stop and take care of himself, he may see the same fate as his father, who had died of heart disease. He wasn’t sure what to do next after eight years of racing cars. However, he did own a small sports car dealership in Dallas.

Meeting Chrysler Corporation’s Lee Iacocca and some people from the Ford Motor Company through racing would prove to be the connections Carroll needed in order to begin building and designing race cars.

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## **SHELBY** *continued from page 13*

"He basically hounded them for about a year," Aaron said.

When Carroll was in England, he saw the AC Ace Car, a little English sports car with a small motor in it. He felt that if he could get some money and some of Iacocca's V-8 engines, he could make something out of them. Iacocca was known to say they finally gave it to him so that he would stop bothering him.

The year the first Cobra came out was 1962. Model 260 was a little Cobra which led into the 289.

"With bailing wire and duct tape, he got the whole thing put together," Aaron said.

Only one Cobra was produced first because Carroll didn't have the money for more. He was able, however, to get every car magazine in the country to test the car.

"For every test he would paint the car a different color so they all thought there were a handful of these cars out there."

The first Cobra is still part of the Carroll Shelby estate. The car is on display in the Shelby American Museum in Las Vegas.

The Cobra's development and acceptance led into the rest of his admired design and production. It got him back into the racing world, which he really enjoyed. It also resulted in the formation of the Shelby American Racing Team and the arrival of the bigger 427 Cobra. That is what led to Ford wanting his help with the Mustang.

Naming the Mustang GT 350 was simple. At the factory in Los Angeles, there were two buildings and it took Carroll 350 steps to go between the buildings.

According to Aaron, "The GT part was pretty easy — 'Grand Touring' — since it was going to be a race car. A lot of people think the 350 equated to the engine. It was close to the engine size, but not quite. It was really walking off the 350 steps between the two buildings."

Mustang was well on the way to becoming

iconic and Shelby's influence in turning out muscle car varieties garnered more success for the East Texan. By some estimations, Shelby's high performance designs resulted in some 14,000 Mustangs and 1,000 Cobras produced and sold since then.

### **Non-Stop Legacy**

Today, Shelby's companies are engaged in the manufacturing and marketing of performance vehicles and related accessories worldwide, as well as the licensing of the Shelby brand to third parties in connection with various products, including vehicles, memorabilia, video games, models, toys, branded apparel, styling, and performance parts.

Shelby American employs 125 in Las Vegas and produces seven to 10 vehicles a week. The last super-car Shelby conceived, the Shelby 1000, is a \$210,000 Mustang that can hit 200 mph.

With his extensive business dealings set, Shelby took on some philanthropic endeavors and side business-type hobbies in his senior years.

The Carroll Shelby Children's Foundation was set up after he had his heart transplant in 1990. Shelby was one of the nation's longest-living heart transplant recipients and was also a kidney transplant recipient. His health care needs opened his eyes to others.

The foundation is dedicated to providing financial support for children and medical professionals to help overcome life-threatening health issues worldwide, in addition to its commitment to education. The foundation has helped numerous youngsters undergo major coronary surgeries and provided seed monies to launch health care programs and facilities. Organizations conducting research in coronary and organ transplant management also receive grant money from the foundation.

The fact that Shelby's life was filled with diverse interests — hot rods to health care and education — only illustrates his Texas-sized personality.

"He could relate to anyone," said Aaron of his grandfather. "He could associate with anyone and that's what I hear the most today is what people tell me about meeting him. It was like you were talking to a friend. It didn't matter if you were talking about cars or cows or airplanes or medical stuff. You just felt like you were just having a conversation with a friend of yours. It takes a special personality to be able to do that."

While perhaps not original with him, the East Texas native lived by a mantra he quoted often. Shelby once famously looked into a camera during an interview and summed his life up succinctly:

"Yesterday's history. Tomorrow's a mystery. So live for today."



*Shelby checks out the work of students at Northeast Texas Community College with Chase Burge and Ron Hillman. His scholarship program continues.*



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## Blues-Folk Artist Leadbelly Had East Texas Roots

BY STEVE FREEMAN

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The roots of blues and folk music have many strands, and one of the best started in

East Texas. That's where a blues original picked up a guitar for the first time on his way to influencing many musicians to follow.

Born January 20, 1888, Huddie "Leadbelly" Ledbetter moved with his family from Louisiana to a small farm in Harrison County in 1898 according to the Texas State Historical Association. A natural talent for the guitar, Leadbelly was soon drawn to performances after leaving home at age 13. He became a minstrel in Shreveport and later in Dallas and Fort Worth. Farming was in his past — he still worked as a farmhand in counties east of Dallas in the summers — but his future was bound to include singing and playing his guitar, which he did frequently in saloons and dance halls in the region.

The people who came to recognize Leadbelly's gift helped him achieve his place in music history. Blind Lemon Jefferson of Dallas partnered with Leadbelly and together bolstered each other's artistic growth and recognition. Leadbelly developed a unique style with 12-stringed guitars that got him noticed even more.

Also, famed Texas folklorist John Avery Lomax — an early recorder of unrecognized artists who were seminal in the genre's origins — considered Leadbelly a real talent. Lomax helped Leadbelly gain national prominence starting with performances in New York City.

Leadbelly's life includes convictions of criminal activity. He was convicted of murder, and sentenced to 30 years but was released in seven because he wrote a song in honor of Texas Governor Pat Neff. It was during one of his run-ins with the law — and taking a bullet to the stomach — that Leadbelly earned that nickname and added to his legend.

He is best known for writing the song "Goodnight Irene," recorded by the Weavers in the early 1950s. His influence goes much further. Folk artists Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger were among his admirers.

Leadbelly, who died in 1949, was inducted posthumously in the Blues Hall of Fame and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. He is buried near Shreveport.



Keith Richards of The Rolling Stones once said he tries to “Keep rolling, to grow up the art of rock n’ roll, to age with the weather-beaten dignity of my mentors, the great, hard-living bluesmen like Leadbelly.”