

LEBANESE COMMUNITY IN NORTH TEXAS

QUICK OBSERVATIONS

Country/region of origin	Lebanon/Syria
Population	
Population (Census 2000)	
Main reasons for migration	Political instability
Years in this region	From 5 to 80 years
Primary areas of residence	Plano, Lewisville, Farmers Branch
General level of education	Bachelor's degree
Employment	Professional, technical
Principal religions	Islam, Orthodox, Maronite
Languages	Arabic
Media (newspapers or radio)	None
Community newsletter	None
Cultural organizations	Two churches

Companies set up to encourage Lebanese emigration appeared soon after the civil wars of the mid-nineteenth century, and late in the 1800s. Maronite Christians from Mt. Lebanon (Syria, at that point in time part of the Ottoman Empire) began settling in Oklahoma. The terrible winter of 1916, in which ¼ the Lebanese-Syrian population froze to death, together with the conscription of young men into the Turkish army, left few people to work the fields, and more fled the country.

Formerly known for their skill as middlemen in the silk export trade between Syria producers and European merchants, the networks they set up as peddlers carrying packs that weighed up to 200 pounds soon led to their accumulation of capital. This was invested in setting up dry goods stores in North Texas where they retailed the objects they had previously peddled. At the same time, their contacts with Americans through these businesses helped them assimilate relatively quickly. They also opened candy shops and restaurants.

Cosmopolitan and traditionally seeking to link their fortunes to nations outside their immediate geographic sphere, Lebanese Americans have risen to prominence in North Texas as businessmen and professionals.

The Lebanese Civil War between 1975 and 1990 brought new numbers from this area, including many Lebanese Muslims. Primarily unmarried young adults and middle-aged heads of family, the Lebanese community is also more evenly formed of men and women than in other Arab immigrant groups. This may be due to the fact that Lebanon is a country with more of its people living outside than inside the country, and Lebanese nationals have more readily been able to obtain visas for tourism or study in the United States.

Israel's defeat of the Arab armies in 1967 brought more immigrants—primarily Muslims—to the region. Their standard of education is high, and graduates of the American University of Beirut are recognized as elite leaders in all fields. Seeking the best in Western education, many Lebanese youth immigrated to the United States to study and subsequently found work in the North Texas regions. They respect and appreciate the American way of life and the personal freedoms it offers.

Plano, Carrollton, Lewisville and North Dallas are the areas of residence for a large number of Lebanese. In other cities with significant Lebanese/Syrian populations, a cultural center develops as the meeting place for community, but institutions such as the Lebanese Cultural Centers in San Francisco, San Diego and in Mexico (Merida, Vera Cruz, Mexico City) are lacking in North Texas. Instead, two churches, one in North Dallas and the other in Lewisville, are centers for the Christian Lebanese. For several years, an Arabic language Saturday school in North Dallas served about 30 children, and two Arabic newspapers have briefly operated in North Texas, but all of these have ceased operation.

Occasionally, a Lebanese/Arabic band forms in the region, performing in one of the numerous Lebanese/Syrian-owned restaurants. Many of the latter present him or herself as ‘Middle Eastern’ or ‘Greek’ because even the Americanized feel defensive and try to avoid some unpleasant or prejudicial act that might result from being viewed as ‘Arabs’

OTHER SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Country/region	Primarily young adults (18-34) and Middle aged (34-60)
Population (community leaders)	50% men, 50% women
Population (Census 2000)	Distant relatives remain, phone weekly
Main reasons for migration	Every 2-5- years

Material Source: DFW International
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OUTREACH STRATEGIES

- Arab youth activities
- Be a friend
- Be interested in them, their culture, food and history
- Offer ESL classes
- Feel free to talk about spirituality and faith
- Young Professionals lunches

HOW DO YOU OPEN THE DOOR TO CONVERSATIONS ABOUT FAITH?

- Share your everyday relationship with God... answered prayers, Scriptures that comfort
- Ask about how needs are met through their faith... loneliness, courage, direction
- Offer to pray for their needs
- Give books/videos that tell a faith story
- Discover their interests and find Christians in that field to share their story
- Look for Bible stories or principles that teach a value they respect.
- Understand Islam family life