Tobacco was first cultivated in the Americas in 6000 BC. Some thought it was a new medicine. Few thought of it as a health hazard. England was the first country to take up smoking for pleasure and profit.

1492 Christopher Columbus mentions tobacco in his journal on his first voyage to the New World. By 1493, tobacco has reached Europe. It soon will reach all parts of the known world, spread by sailors on trade routes.

1602 King James of England authors *A Counterblaste to Tobacco*. It says, “Smoking is a custom loathsome to the eye, hateful to the nose, harmful to the brain, dangerous to the lungs.” The king notes that autopsies found smokers’ “inward parts … infected with an oily kind of soot.”

1614 Tobacco grown in the first English colony, Jamestown, Va., enters the global marketplace under English protection. It will be used as a “cash crop” for approximately 200 years in America, lasting twice as long as the gold standard.

1760 Peter Lorillard opens a tobacco “manufactory” in New York City to process tobacco for pipes, cigars, and snuff. In 1790, this company creates the first advertising campaign for tobacco by distributing posters through the post office.

1775-83 Benjamin Franklin uses 5 million pounds of tobacco as collateral for a loan from France to finance the American Revolution. He is assisted by financier Robert Morris, also of Philadelphia, a leading tobacco exporter.

1861-65 During the Civil War, tobacco is given with rations by both North and South.

1870s The tobacco industry began inserting cigarette cards featuring famous sports figures to stiffen cigarette packages and promote the product.

1881 James Bonsack revolutionizes the tobacco business with the first cigarette rolling machine. It can produce 120,000 cigarettes a day.

1891 The first issue of *The Texas Sanitarian*, published by Thomas J. Bennett, MD (1921-22, TMA president), contains the earliest known warning to Texas doctors about the potential harmful effects of tobacco.

1899 Texas bans the sale, gift, or barter of tobacco products to a minor, defined as anyone under age 16. In 1989, the legal age to purchase tobacco products in Texas is raised to 18. In 2009, it is raised to 19.
Modern advertising was born in the early 20th century, and the tobacco industry embraced its methods. Celebrities and sports stars all endorsed cigarettes. Even physicians and nurses were depicted in cigarette advertisements, which appeared in medical journals and included many health claims. By the time the U.S. Public Health Service concluded that cigarette smoking caused lung cancer and other diseases, few were able to kick the habit. But change was on the way.

1901 Anticigarette laws are considered in 43 of the 45 states. In Texas, Senate Bill 299 is introduced but does not pass.

1903 The U.S. Bureau of Soils revives tobacco growing in East Texas. Packing houses open in Palestine and Nacogdoches.

1917-18 The U.S. joins World War I, and cigarettes are part of soldiers’ rations.

1920s The father of public relations, Edward L. Bernays, creates a successful ad campaign for the American Tobacco Company targeting women, who had won the right to vote but are not allowed to smoke in public.

1933 The Journal of the Texas State Medical Association and the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) first publish cigarette advertisements (Chesterfield). JAMA stops accepting these advertisements in 1953 as does the Journal in 1967.

1939 Alton Ochsner, MD, and Michael DeBakey, MD (TMA member), publish the first of several articles linking lung cancer to smoking.

1939-45 During World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt makes tobacco a protected crop, and cigarettes are included in soldiers’ rations.

1954 Eva Cooper is the first to sue a tobacco company, R.J. Reynolds, for her husband’s death from lung cancer. The tobacco companies win all such lawsuits.

January 1964 Smoking and Health: Report of the Advisory Committee to the Surgeon General is released, confirming that smoking can cause lung cancer, bronchitis, and other diseases. Charles LeMaistre, MD (TMA member), is on the advisory panel.

1965 All cigarette packs must display the surgeon general’s warning: Caution: Cigarette Smoking May Be Hazardous to Your Health.

1970 President Richard Nixon approves the law that bans cigarette advertising on radio and television, effective Jan. 2, 1971.
Early government warnings barely loosened the tobacco industry’s grip on society. But as more understood that tobacco threatened the health of smokers and nonsmokers alike, a public revolt began. Legislation, lawsuits, and public health campaigns were the weapons of choice. Editorial cartoonists targeted tobacco-industry hypocrisy.

1977 Doctors Ought to Care (DOC) is founded in Miami, Fla., by Alan Blum, MD, and Rick Richards, MD. It begins the first paid marketing campaign against the tobacco industry.

1979 The Medical Student Section of the American Medical Association House of Delegates introduces a resolution in favor of a ban on smoking on commercial aircraft.

1980s Flight attendants’ testimony helps to end smoking on commercial flights.

1989 The University of Texas (UT) M.D. Anderson Cancer Center is the first hospital in Texas to go smoke free. In 1994, UT M.D. Anderson Cancer Center is the first American university to stop taking tobacco research money. Joel S. Dunnington, MD, TMA’s leading antitobacco advocate, spearheads these efforts.

1994 States and insurance companies join class-action suits to recover medical costs of tobacco-caused disease.

1999 The U.S. Department of Justice sues the tobacco industry. In 2006, the tobacco industry is convicted of civil fraud and racketeering. This judgment is upheld in 2009.

2003 Dallas is the first city in Texas to establish a smoking ban. El Paso passes a sweeping smoking ban in 2004.


2009 The Texas Medical Association introduces educational tools to help physicians discuss healthy lifestyle changes and joins the AMA Healthier Life Steps program.

2010 As of July, 35 states have enacted statewide smoke-free laws that are protecting more than 306 million people. Texas is not among those states.

Unless otherwise noted, all images courtesy of Alan Blum, MD, director, The University of Alabama Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society. All posters from the collection of Joel S. Dunnington, MD (TMA member).