

A HISTORY *Of* **LEON COUNTY**



With Informal Sketches And Interviews



by

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LEON'S PIONEERS

Seeming unrequited toil
 Through the frontier years,
Unrecorded deaths and losses,
 Unremembered tears,
Unexpected failures,
 Unmentionable fears—
All these were the daily lot
 Of Leon's Pioneers

Working in the morning
 While the forest clears,
Listening in the evening
 While daylight disappears,
Dwelling in sequestered spots—
 Leon's Pioneers.

Slow but sure the progress,
 Snail-like through the years,
Civilization's apogee,
 Barbarism's biers—
This the well-deserved crown
 Of Leon's Pioneers.

—J. Y. G.

PREFACE

Readers of this history are advised that this is not a complete history of Leon County, because there is no complete history of this or any other county. History to be complete would have to be recorded every day, and certainly nobody in Leon County did that—everybody was too busy trying to make a living. There aren't even any files of newspapers of the county, which makes the work fall further short of any pretensions of completeness.

At most, the writers attempted to give an outline of the county's growth, with a few sketches and interviews. No complete history of the chief early families of the county was attempted, as such a job would be almost impossible and would require far more time than was available. No attempt was made to interview all the interesting old-timers still living, as that, too, would be impossible. The writers are sure there are numerous interesting incidents and interesting persons who have been omitted entirely, but that, too, was unavoidable, as a complete book would require the exclusive time of a writer a year or so, and the following pages were written only in spare time and in moments stolen from something else.

As for the errors that some may uncover in these pages, the writers apologize, but not too profusely. They are only amateur historians, but know enough to be aware that even professional historians fall into all sorts of errors.

For their efforts, they had the fun of writing these pages, they learned something about Leon County, and they may break even on the cost of printing, which is all they expected.

May 23, 1936
Centerville



A HISTORY OF LEON COUNTY

It is difficult to determine when the first European saw the area now known as Leon County.

It is not improbable that La Salle wandered over a part of this area before he was murdered by his discontented associates.

With trade going on—though illicitly—between Spanish Mexico and French Louisiana, persons of both nationalities very probably traversed this area on their pioneer trading expeditions.

It is equally probable that Spanish military expeditions reached Leon County. Recent researches have shown that in the decade 1770 to 1780, during which the American Revolution was in progress on the Atlantic seaboard, the Spanish settlement of Bucarelli was established on the borders of Leon County, at Midway, in Madison County, as a likely site for a permanent Spanish colony which would be far enough from the range of the Plains Indians to insure the safety of the settlers. It seems reasonable to believe that Europeans of the Bucarelli settlement would have made hunting forays and exploratory expeditions into adjacent Leon County.

Had the Bucarelli settlement prospered between the years 1773 and 1779, it is well within the realm of speculation that there never would have been a Nacogdoches, and that the fame which attaches to Nacogdoches as a Spanish outpost would have accrued to Bucarelli on the border of Leon County. Bucarelli, however, proved vulnerable to the attacks of the Comanches and Apaches, nemeses of Spanish colonial attempts in Texas, and in 1779 it was abandoned, after certain harrowing experiences had convinced Gil Ybaro, the leader, that a settlement farther removed from the natural range of the mounted Plains Indians, was indicated. Foiled again by the poor, nondescript aborigines, whom they had made formidable by mounting them, the Spanish were compelled to move farther away from their habitat, and in East Texas Nacogdoches was established.

The Old San Antonio Road

But the existence of Nacogdoches gives further proof that Europeans early traversed this section of Texas. For as a meager line of communication with the mother government as represented by the older San Antonio, and more remotely by the thriving City of Mexico, the Old San Antonio Road was laid out. This important highway followed the southern border of Leon County, coming into the County near Normangee on the west and leaving it at the Trinity River near Midway on the east. Many historical associations attach to this route, which, in its day, was no more than a trail for pack mules, laden not as the rich caravans of the legendary East, but probably for the most part with the necessities of life required by the small settlement of Nacogdoches and such commodities as the people of this settlement might offer in exchange. Today the Old San Antonio road is the route of a modern highway, a part of the state system. Then it was a mere trench.

The Spanish burros traveled one behind the other, and the trench-like effect derived from the abrasion of the feet of the animals, all in the same track. It was laid out with some engineering instinct, however, as early writers noted. The road from the Navasota River to the Trinity River, along the southern border of Leon County, passes over firm ground, prairies and timber alternating, missing heavy sand on either side, and leading by convenient water holes.

One legend of the Leon County section of the road survives. According to tradition, a caravan of pack mules laden with silver from Mexico, encamped one night between the Navasota and the Trinity. During the night there was an attack by Indians, and, to prevent the treasure's falling into the hands of the attackers, the bags of silver were thrown into a lake. The *cargadores* were overpowered and all of them murdered by the Indians, except three, who succeeded in making their escape and getting back to San Antonio. Years later one of the three returned to search for the lost treasure, and, failing in his quest, he told his story to some of the settlers along the route, who believed it enough to drag all the water holes between the two rivers. If it was ever found, nobody ever revealed the discovery. Occasionally coins of Spanish imprint have been turned up along the Old San Antonio Road. One picked up in 1935 bears the imprint of the Spanish sovereign in 1775, the year before the American Declaration of Independence.

Leon County Indians

It seems clear that no white settlement was made in Leon County prior to the coming of the Americans about 1840. What records we have of Indian life in this area also date from the first explorations of Americans. Unquestionably Indians have ranged over this part of the state from time immemorial, but when the first Americans saw the County, only the Keechis and the Kickapoos had permanent homes here. The Kickapoos had a permanent encampment on the west bank of the Trinity River, in the vicinity of a place now known as Kickapoo Shoals. The village was located on land included in an eleven-league grant made to Ramon de la Garza, May 7, 1831. Every vestige of this encampment had disappeared by 1850.

The Keechi tribe had a village on the Ramirez league of land, about two and a half miles north of Centerville, the present county seat, near the hills on the upper edge of a bottom prairie that extended down to Little Keechi Creek. Springs furnished a supply of pure water. The prairie soil was fertile and probably produced well the favorite crops of corn and beans. One writer records that as late as 1851 there was still to be seen evidence of rude cultivation by the Indians of a part of the prairie contiguous to the village. The same writer noted that farmers occasionally had turned up old gun barrels or other evidence of Indian occupation. (It is well to remember that these Indians had long been supplied with European firearms by French and Spanish traders. Even as the Spanish had mounted their enemies with the horse, so they armed them with guns and supplied them with ammunition.

With East Texas Indians of 1821, the bow and arrow were probably fast disappearing.)

Both the Kickapoos and the Keechis had the reputation of being great thieves. This was particularly true of the Keechis. The Kickapoos abandoned their homes in Leon County shortly after the first Americans penetrated the area with surveyor's compass (or "land-stealer") in the thirties, and went to West Texas, where, in conjunction with the Lipan Indians, they gave the western settlers a great deal of trouble.

The location of land in the eastern and central parts of Leon County caused the Keechis to remove from the village on Keechi Creek to the Navasota River in the western part of the county. The Keechis were strong in their professions of friendship for the whites. At the same time they engaged in constant thieving expeditions. Confronted with the evidence of their depredations, they laid the blame on other Indians. In 1835 an expedition under a Colonel Coleman expelled the Keechis from the area of Leon County and pursued them to the headwaters of the Trinity River. The Keechis were not heard of again. It seems that their identity as a separate tribe soon was lost by absorption in other tribes.

Leon County in 1836

At the time of the Texas Revolution in 1836 there were no permanent settlers north of the Old San Antonio Road between the Brazos and the Trinity Rivers. Fort Parker, which had been established between the old town of Springfield, and Groesbeck, in Limestone County, suffered a massacre by Indians in 1833, and the few settlers who remained in this area fled for safety east of the Trinity River. There was no evidence that there was any permanent white settler in the area of Leon County before 1839. This impression is strengthened by reports of observers of the "Runaway Scrape," in 1836, when, following the fall of the Alamo and the advance of Santa Anna on the heels of the retreating Houston, American settlers in Texas began fleeing toward the borders of the United States. At this time, early in 1836, says one who met the crowd of refugees on the Old San Antonio Road, between the Navasota and the Trinity, there was not a single white settler within the limits of Leon County.

This is not to say that land in this County was not held by certain owners even before 1836. Early land grants included that to Manuel C. Rejon, Maria de la C. Marquez, and Pedro Pereira, in 1833; and to Jose M. Sanchez, S. M. Marshall, K. Midkiff, Isaac J. Midkiff, Shelton Alphin, Adeline Jacques, William Johnson, N. S. Allen, Allen Dimery (a free negro), Manuel Skinner, Alse Garrett, Jose M. Viesca, John Scritchfield, Thomas H. Garner, Elam W. Gilliland, Allen C. Bullock, James Riley, M. B. Thomas, Mark Copeland, Robert Rogers, and Benjamin F. Whitaker. Some of the surveys were on parts of larger grants, for Leon County did not escape the early miasma of shady titles.

Preludes to Settlement

In 1838 the area included in Leon County became a part of Robertson County, the southeastern corner of that vast Colorado-Brazos-Trinity county.

A company of rangers to protect such settlements as might be made north of the Old San Antonio Road and between the Navasota and the Brazos, was organized. The headquarters of this organization was at Old Fort Franklin in Robertson County, and Captain Chandler was in charge. At about the same time another organization was formed to protect settlers between the Navasota and the Trinity. Captain Greer was in command of this minute company, which included John Karnes, the Burnses, the Taylors, Irwin and three of his sons, and the Stateys. The company built a blockhouse on the north bank of Boggy Creek, between Centerville and Leona. The blockhouse was built two stories high; the upper story extended over and beyond the walls of the lower, so that defenders could prevent approach to the ground entrances. The blockhouse became known as Fort Boggy. The creek bottom had furnished the idea for a name for both the fort and the creek. The fort has completely disappeared. A writer in 1893 recorded that there were then remains still to be seen. The subsequent owner of the land is said to have moved the building from its original site for use as a barn. The establishment of the fort with its company of frontier rangers removed the only remaining obstacle to settlement of Leon County—fear of Indian massacres.

Motives for Settlement

Broadly speaking, the settlement of Leon County from about 1840 merges into the biggest factor in American life in the nineteenth century: the Westward Movement. The settlement of Western New York, the Great Lakes region, the Trans-Allegheny area, the Northwest Territory, the Mississippi Valley, and Oregon, are parts of the same movement which caused the settlement of Texas. General statements of motives often do not account for each individual case, but on the whole, the motives which impelled the frontiersmen to come to Texas were the same as those which sent settlers into other areas of the West: pressure of economic conditions in the older-settled communities, land hunger whetted by the lure of cheap land, visions of "get-rich-quick" opportunities by which the far pastures were always the greener, justifiable hopes of bettering one's station in life, desire to escape punishment for wrong-doing, the general restlessness of a people which had been on the move for more than two hundred years, and, in the South, the consistently high prices for cotton, which encouraged extensive farming operations with slaves and made imperative the acquisition of new cotton lands. It appears that this last was an important factor in the settlement of Leon County, though unquestionably the other motives account for a part of the immigration.

Beginnings of Settlement

The first permanent settlements in Leon County were made near Fort Boggy, about where Leona is now located, and on Rogers Prairie along the Old San Antonio Road. In 1840 and in 1841 many families settled near Fort Boggy. The Greers, the Middletons, the Burnses, the Taylors, the Patricks and the Stateys were among the earliest. Before the middle of the decade came Colonel John Durst, Henry J. Jewett, James Fowler, William Evans, Onesimus Evans, Riley and William Wallace, the Marshalls, the Kings, E. Whitton, Sam Davis, Thomas H. Garner, McKay Ball, Dr. A. D. Boggs, Moses Campbell, William Pruitt, Thomas Thorn, P. M. Sherman, D. C. Carrington, J. J. McBride, John J. Goodman and William Little. Some of these settled near the Fort and at Leona, others on the Lower Keechi Creek, on Leon Prairie, and along the Old San Antonio Road.

Moses Campbell opened the first store in the county at Fort Boggy. Riley Wallace, who built the first grist mill in the County near the Fort, was also the first postmaster. Thomas H. Garner operated the first sawmill on a branch of Beaver Dam Creek. Elisha Whitton very early built a grist mill at Cairo, a steamboat landing on the Trinity River.

Cairo, the river port, namesake of the Mississippi port, was founded by Captain Chandler and the Rogers family. Here in 1841 Colonel Alexander Patrick landed with his family. At about the same time Navarro, the river port in the northern part of the county, was established by Captain J. J. McBride, John J. Goodman, and William Little. Both of these river ports did a large business as shipping and distributing centers until the advent of the railroad in the seventies destroyed the advantage of their location.

Although the Keechis and the Kickapoos had been expelled from the County, the danger of Indian attacks that might result in massacres was always present. Indians made occasional cattle-stealing incursions. In 1841 the son of Stephen Rogers was killed by Indians who set on him while he was swimming in a pool of water near his home. In the same year Captain Greer, the commander of Fort Boggy, and two or three companions, who were exploring Upper Keechi Creek, were attacked by a band of ten mounted Indians, who swooped down upon them from a line of timber along the margin of the creek, as the whites were crossing a small prairie. The Texans spurred their horses to shelter, but Captain Greer, being poorly mounted, was overtaken and shot to death with arrows. His companions escaped, made their way to Fort Boggy, and with assistance, returned the next day for the body of Captain Greer.

Captain Greer and young Rogers are the only Leon County residents known to have suffered death at the hands of Indian invaders of this area.

Organization of Leon County

In the same year that Texas was formally admitted into the United States, Leon County came into existence by an act of the State Legislature, at the instance of McKay Ball, Fort Boggy resident, and member of the

Legislature from Robertson County, of which the area of Leon County was then a part. The creation of Leon County was an act of Texas' first legislature, as distinguished from the Congress of the Republic, which it replaced in 1846. From the time of their coming to Leon County, the settlers had been governed in their local affairs from Franklin, the county seat of the huge Robertson County.

Naming of the County

McKay Ball unquestionably was responsible for the adoption of the name "Leon" by the Legislature, and also for the location of the county seat at Leona, which was about the center of population in the County at the time. As to the naming of the County, it seems clear at this time that the adoption of the name "Leon" arose from the name of Leon Prairie, which had derived its name from the circumstance that in the early days of settlement, a Mexican lion (Spanish "leon") had been killed in this region. Although the Texas Almanac, published by the Dallas Morning News, ignores this theory and states another, in the minds of the early settlers and their children, the name of the County came from that of the Prairie where the lion had been killed. Mr. Horatio Durst, formerly of Leona, in a statement written shortly before his death in 1928, in his eighty-seventh year, declares that his father, John Durst, who came to Leon County in 1844, had killed the lion near their homestead on the northern edge of the Prairie, and that the naming of the Prairie arose from that circumstance.

First District Court

The first session of district court in the new County opened at Leona October 12, 1846. R. E. B. Baylor, widely known early Texas educator and jurist, was the presiding judge. Thomas Johnson was the district attorney, and William B. Middleton the sheriff. The other officers of the new County were I. P. Reinhardt, county clerk, and David M. Brown, chief justice. (It is well to recall that our methods of local government have undergone some changes since 1846, and that the state's constitution has been changed several times in the intervening years.) Onesimus Evans was the foreman of the first grand jury, which returned only two indictments at this first term of the court.

Records of the district court from its first session are still preserved. It began its first duties on a manslaughter charge growing out of the fight over the county seat. The record of the first court reads as follows:

"Be it remembered that on the second Monday in October, in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and forty-six, the twelfth day of said month, there was begun and holden the district Court for said County of Leon, at the courthouse thereof in the town of Leona. Present the Hon. R. E. B. Baylor, Judge of said court, William Keigwin, clerk of said court, William B. Middleton, Sheriff. On motion of Thomas Johnson, Esq., District Attorney, and it appearing that the venire facias returnable to the court was issued without the seal of said

court or the private seal of the clerk of the same, it is ordered by the court that the same be requested; and it was further ordered by the court that a *venire facias* issue returnable instant; and it was done." It appears, therefore, that even the County's first district court was unable to settle down to its proceedings without delay; and observers have noted that this inability has become traditional.

The first grand jury was composed of the following citizens: Thomas Middleton, Thomas Thorn, Granville Nelson, Madison Langham, Albert Rogers, George Allen, George Service, James Johnson, Jacob Langston, Onesimus Evans, John Copeland, Marvel McFarland, Willis Wallace, George Toby, Zoroaster Robinson, Joseph Copeland, Thomas R. Thurman, Christopher T. Dotson, Robert Rogers, and Stokely Choat. This grand jury found only two bills: one for manslaughter and another for assault and battery. Evidence was heard in charges of card playing, illegal burying of a slave, and a challenge to fight a duel.

The first petit jury was composed of Aaron Kitchell, Clay Cobb, James Bloodworth, John Kinney, William Murrahly, Jackson N. Jones, William King, Washington C. Barfield, Paschal C. Langham, James M. Langham, Samuel Duckworth, and Martin D. Taylor.

The Question of the County Seat

From Fort Boggy and Leona population gradually spread over the whole area of the county. By 1848 there were many complaints that Leona, the county seat, being near the southern border of the County, was inconvenient to most of the people, and agitation began to move the county seat nearer the territorial center of the County. An election was ordered. The issue was between Leona, and Centerville (then spelled "Centreville"), which had been located within a radius of five miles of the geographic center of the County. Centerville was chosen by the electorate after a hotly contested poll, and in 1850 the county seat was moved to the new location, where it has since remained, in spite of subsequent efforts to change. Later efforts to move the county seat from Centerville were hampered by the law requiring a majority of two-thirds to move a county seat from any site within six miles of the geographic center of the County.

Security for Settlers

The organization of Leon County by act of the Legislature occurred in the same year as the admission of Texas into the United States. These two important facts—the organization of the new County, and the advent of the authority of the United States in Texas, by which the pioneers were made secure in their lives and their property—probably account in large measure for the great increase in population of the area during the ten years immediately following the creation of the County. The annexation of Texas offered the guarantee of stable government, under the protection, if necessary, of the United States military, and the creation of the new County provided

stable local institutions of government which could develop as the needs of the area demanded.

By 1850 Leon County had 621 negroes; by 1855 this number had increased to 1,455, with a value of \$757,296, which was \$300,000 more than the assessed valuation of all the taxable land in the County in 1855. By 1870 the total population of the County had increased to 6,523. Ten years later it had nearly doubled to a total of 12,817. In 1890 the population was 13,841. The great increase during the quarter century following the Civil War can probably be accounted for by the disruption of the older South by the War, resulting in great migrations to the newer South beyond the Mississippi, which had not felt the ravages of extensive military operations. Thus, fifty years after its first American settlers had arrived, Leon County was occupied by more than 13,000 people of this identical original stock. The census of 1930—forty years later, and eighty years from the date of the first settlement—placed the population of the County at nearly 20,000, an increase of about 7,000 in the forty years. Present indications are that the County will fall little short of doubling its population during the second fifty years of its occupation by Americans; that is to say, by 1940, Leon County probably will have a population of more than 26,000 people.

Early Transportation

The problem of transportation was an important one to early settlers. Houston was the early trading point for the County, and later Navasota. Supplies were brought from these points by slow ox-teams, the round-trip to and from Houston occupying about six weeks as a rule, and that to and from Navasota three weeks. An early chronicler depicts such trips in the following language:

“In the early fifties the means of travel and transportation in Texas were of the most primitive and limited character. Everybody, men and women as well, rode horseback. Carriages and buggies were almost unknown. The supply of goods and groceries for Leon County were obtained for the most part from Houston and Galveston. Steamboats navigated the Trinity river during the winter and spring, brought up supplies and carried off the produce of the country. During the low water season, wagons drawn by four to six yoke of oxen hauled the cotton to Houston and brought back the necessary supplies. These land ships would often be six weeks in making the round trip from Centerville to Houston and back. Time was no special object. People then lived slow, compared with those of the present fast age. They were in no hurry to make money and get rich, and did not live by steam and electricity. Kerosene was unknown and the saucer lamp and the tallow dip were the illuminants in those days. Wherever night overtook the teamster he stopped, unyoked his oxen, and hobbled them, and turned them out into nature's pasture to feed on the nutritious grass that grew everywhere. He built his camp fire, cooked and ate his frugal supper, and slept on his blanket under his wagon. In the morning he awoke early, recruited his fire, cooked and ate his breakfast, gathered and yoked up his oxen, and

pursued his journey and as he moved on, his cheerful song kept time to the rifle-like report of his long whip. In those days the teamster was a lord. Kings might well envy him in his state of content and satisfaction."

In 1847 the Trinity River was made to do this work, in season, by small steamboats. One of the earliest was Captain Webb's steamer *Reliance*. The planters of the area themselves early formed a stock company for the purpose of handling river freight. In 1848 and 1849 this company operated the *Jack Haynes* and the *Magnolia*. The river traffic led to the growth of the river ports, which included Cairo, Commerce, Navarro, and Brookfield's Bluff. All of these, except Navarro, were mere points for the shipment of cotton and the discharge of cargoes of supplies required by the people. Navarro grew into something of a village in the days preceding the War. An elderly Leon County citizen recently recalled that as late as fifty years ago there still stood the remains of a huge warehouse at old Cairo.

Early County Government

All of the records of the Commissioners' Court of Leon County prior to 1873 were consumed in the fire which destroyed the courthouse in 1885. William B. Middleton was the first sheriff of the County, and his first tasks arose out of manslaughter charges, which had been made against certain prominent citizens of the County as a result of the bitter agitation which preceded the moving of the courthouse from Leona to Centerville. The first courthouse at Leona was a log building. In Centerville the County officials occupied at first a two-story frame structure, forty feet square, with projections on each side, which cost the tax-payers \$2,200. This was replaced in 1858 by a brick building of the same design, costing \$8,000. This was the building which burned in 1885. In 1887 the present building was completed and paid for from the receipts of a bond issue of \$28,000, which was sold to the permanent school fund. The first jail in Centerville was a double-log structure, the only opening to which was in the top. This was later replaced by a remodeled private brick dwelling, which is still the property of the county, being now used as the office of Sheriff Lee Thomason. The present jail was built in 1913.

Notable Characters

Notable characters had been included among the first families which migrated to Leon County following the construction of Fort Boggy. One of the most notable of these was Major John Durst, a native of Arkansas County, Missouri, who, left an orphan at an early age, had made his way to New Orleans, where he became a protege of a Major Davenport. Having acquired business experience and learned the Spanish language under his mentor, in 1823 Major Durst was sent to Nacogdoches, where he was soon placed in charge of the entire business interests of his company. Major Durst is said to have been the first American resident of Nacogdoches. When Texas was joined with the State of Coahuila, Major Durst became a member of the leg-

islative body which held its sessions at Monclova, in Mexico. At a session of the legislature it was learned that Santa Anna had determined to wage war against the Texans, and Major Durst, escaping Mexican officials who were under orders to imprison Texas representatives as a move to surprise the Texans, journeyed the distance of 960 miles to Nacogdoches to inform Texas leaders, including Colonel Thomas J. Rusk, of the impending invasion. In 1844 Major Durst purchased a tract of 2,000 acres near Leona in Leon County, from Allen Dimery, a free negro. He then moved his family and a large number of slaves to the Dimery tract, where, until his death in 1851, he resided in a large rock house.

Henry J. Jewett, a lawyer, was one of the early settlers of the County and attended as a member of the bar the first court held in the County. When the thirteenth judicial district was organized in 1853, he was elected district judge and served until shortly before the outbreak of the Civil War, when he was defeated by John Gregg. When Judge Gregg resigned to go into the army, Jewett was elected to the vacancy. Shortly after this his mind became deranged, and he was compelled to resign. He wandered away from Leon County and at the close of the War was in Matamoros, Mexico. Later the report reached his friends in Leon County that he had escaped from an asylum in New York City and drowned himself in the North River.

William B. Middleton helped build Fort Boggy about 1840, and was a member of the minute company. Middleton volunteered as a member of the ill-fated Mier expedition and was among those captured by the Mexicans. He was fortunate in the drawing of the beans. Upon his release after a hard career as a prisoner of the Mexican government in Mexico City, he returned to his home in Leon County, where he was shortly elected the first sheriff of the County. He served several terms in the State Legislature, being a member of that body when Texas joined the secession movement. He died in 1878, leaving no descendants.

Life Among the Early Settlers

W. D. Woods, who was a resident of Centerville for more than forty years, paints a graphic word picture of life in the County during the early period of its history:

"On the 14th of November, 1851, I arrived in Centerville, the county seat of Leon. The town was then one year old . . . There were perhaps in the County 200 or 250 voters . . . Game was abundant. The uplands were covered with sage and other grasses from two to four feet high. The glades and bottom lands were set with a luxurious growth of gramma grass, so high that when a deer entered it his course could be followed by the opening of the grass, and occasionally his head and ears could be seen as he leaped along. Cattle and hogs kept fat winter and summer on the range . . . A feeling of social and neighborly kindness pervaded the whole community. The advent of a new-comer was the signal for universal rejoicing in the neighborhood . . . If he needed beef he was informed by an old settler of his mark and brand, and told to go among his cattle and make his own selection free of charge . . . The coffee pot was always on the fire, and the guest soon after

his arrival was invited to partake of its contents. If he was a stranger he was invited to make himself at home and stay a week. . . . Time was no special object. . . . Kerosene was unknown and the saucer lamp and the tallow dip were the illuminants in those days. . . . Most of the cultivation was done with oxen. The farmer would plow one yoke from morning till noon, then turn these out on the grass and yoke up another pair for the afternoon's plowing."

Growth of Schools

The first school in Leon County was located near the Durst and Pruitt homes, on Rocky Branch, near Leona. The first teacher was an Englishman by the name of Scott, who was employed to teach the children of these two families. The first town school and the second school of any description was located at Leona and was taught by a William Keigan. The first school at Centerville was taught by H. A. McWhirter in the rear of his store.

One of the early teachers in the County was Captain J. E. Anderson, whose teaching career in Leon County, beginning at Red Land in 1855, and ending at Jewett, covered a period of about fifty years. From Red Land Captain Anderson went to Jewett in 1875 to start a private academy. Later the academy was merged with the public schools at Jewett, with Captain Anderson still in charge. Every summer at Centerville he conducted a normal school for the training of prospective teachers who wished to take the examinations for certificates.

It was not until 1882 that the state public school system was adopted in its full efficiency. A County Teachers' Institute was organized in 1886. By 1893 there were 2,250 white pupils and 1,600 colored, distributed among fifty-one white and thirty-five colored schools, with a total of 105 teachers.

In 1936 there were thirty white schools, forty-two colored schools, 140 white teachers, seventy-one colored teachers, and 6,117 scholastics.

Early Churches

Leona had the first church in the County. Elder Z. N. Morrell, a missionary of the Baptist Church in the Brazos-Trinity area, organized a Baptist church at Leona shortly after the original settlement of the region. Under the leadership of Rev. Nash, Rev. Create and others, this organization had great influence on religious life in the frontier County.

A Methodist church was organized shortly. A historian in 1893 stated that it was difficult to determine which denomination—Methodist or Baptist—had the greater number of communicants. The bulk of the early settlers adhered to one or the other of these, says the historian, though there were increasing numbers of communicants of the Church of Christ and the Presbyterian Church. The negroes for the most part adhered to the denominations which claimed the greater numbers among the whites.

W. D. Woods, writing in 1901, referring to early religious life among Leon County pioneers, left the following description:

"While the Baptist Church preponderated in the neighborhood at the time the church was open to all denominations. Once a month a good and truly pious old Baptist minister, by the name of Coker, mounted his horse and came down to minister to the spiritual wants of the village and vicinity, without fee or charge. I can now hear, ringing in memory's chambers, his fervent petitions, in which he invoked all of the blessings upon the little town of Centerville and the 'invicinity thereof.' In the honest simplicity of his soul, he would often thank the Lord that 'he was sent all the way from Alabama to preach to the heathen here in Texas.' There was another preacher, the Methodist circuit rider, Parson Wright, who preached in the village church during his monthly round. The writer heard him preach first in December, 1851, in a little log schoolhouse, with puncheon floor and split log benches, located in the woods about five miles from Centerville. His congregation consisted of a dozen or more, and the surroundings were of the most primitive character, but these things had no effect on the man. The work of this good man in that early day was not one of ease or profit. His circuit comprised some half dozen counties. He traveled horseback, with Bible, hymn book, blanket and saddle bags and change of linen, when he was so fortunate as to have a change. He was a God-fearing, pious and exemplary Christian man. He, too, has been dead for many years. He never had an enemy, and his death was mourned by all who knew him."

Leon County and the Civil War

Leon County had passed hardly a score of years as a settlement when it was engulfed in the secession movement. There were men in the County possessed of large slave properties, many of them refugees from the older southern states, who had sensed the impending storm. Slave property in its bulk was considerably more valuable than any other class of property in the County. The sentiment in Leon County was in favor of secession.

There were many, however, who counselled moderation, and a few who strongly urged against the secession movement which was carrying Texas into the Civil War. D. M. Whaley, the first Leon County citizen to take out a company of soldiers after hostilities began, urged Leon County to support Governor Houston, who had set his face against secession. The newspapers took the same view. The Pioneer, established by W. D. Wood, in 1851, counselled moderation during the period of the fateful fifties. The Experiment, published at the opening of the War by B. W. Campbell, was of like tenor.

The voters were deaf to this counsel of caution, and in the election of delegates to the state convention which passed the ordinance of secession, favored a slate unanimously in favor of disunion.

Recruiting then began in Leon County, as in all the counties all over the South. D. M. Whaley was one of the first to go, and was made a colonel before he was killed in Virginia. Captain J. P. Madison followed with a

company, and in it Judge Robert Gould early rose to the rank of colonel. Captain J. M. Black, Captain G. H. Black, Judge W. D. Wood, Captain D. C. Carrington, and Dr. Wilson each led companies of Confederate soldiers from Leon County, in the total number, it has been estimated, of 800 men. Of these only one company penetrated farther east than the Mississippi River. That of Captain Whaley suffered by far the heaviest losses of any that left the County; only twenty men and one officer returned from this company. It is estimated that probably two-thirds of the men in the other companies returned after the War.

War Problems

Those who remained in Leon County during the War evidently went about their accustomed ways with slight interference. A big problem that faced the citizenship during these four years was that of caring for the destitute among the families of soldiers in the field. A letter written by J. M. Reed in 1863 reveals that this problem was a serious one. The Commissioners' Court had placed a tax of ten dollars and more on each family, but people of Leon County then, as now, objected to extra taxation, even though they sympathized with the purpose. Mr. Reed's letter suggests assembling of a mass meeting at Centerville to form a permanent organization and to insist upon regular donations from the people for relief of soldiers' needy families. A General Aid Society would be formed, and each taxpayer would pay his war tax in corn, meat, or money at a place of deposit in each beat. From all accounts this plan was carried out in substantially the form described in this letter, and served satisfactorily for the remainder of the War.

In 1890 the Confederate veterans of Leon County organized the Confederate Veterans' Association, with Captain T. G. Nixon of Rogers Prairie as commander.

The close of the war and the dispersal of the soldiers provided an exciting interlude at Centerville. This was the sudden and unexpected appearance on the public square at Centerville of about twenty of a band of guerrillas, under the leadership of the notorious Quantrell. From all accounts the band was dispersed as quickly and as unexpectedly as it had appeared.

Reconstruction

During reconstruction two companies of Federal soldiers were located at Centerville, but this period, from all accounts, proved less troublesome in Leon County than it proved in other parts of the South. Older citizens recall that elections were held at the point of the bayonet, and that white voters walked to the places of registration between rows of negro soldiers, their former slaves. Preparations were afoot at one time to stage a rebellion against the prosecutors of martial law, but the election of Governor Coke and his success in wresting the governor's office from Governor E. J. Davis restored the ante-bellum political status and obviated the sources of irrita-

tion which were engendering violence. The Federal soldiers were encamped on Beaver Creek south of Centerville.

Advent of Rail Transportation

Immediately following the Civil War, Leon County began to see the results of the era of railroad-building, which had the whole country in its grip. In 1872 the International and Great Northern, a Jay Gould project, completed its line through the northern part of the County. This had two important results: first, the river trade on the Trinity collapsed, and the railroad became the sole artery of transportation and communication; and second, new towns arose along the line of the railroad, causing a great shift of population from the older-settled parts of the County. Jewett, Marquez, Oakwood, and Buffalo were established in short order and immediately became the largest towns in the County. The southern and eastern parts of the county suffered, particularly Centerville and Leona, the two oldest settlements of any note. Many families moved from these older towns to the railroad. A letter written in 1876 by Mrs. Harriet Durst to a friend in Nacogdoches mentions families that had moved to Buffalo and others who were waiting impatiently to move. Indeed, the urge to move to the railroad seemed to have derived from the same adventurous spirit that had sent many to Leon County from the older-settled areas in the South of the United States. The Centerville newspaper, *The Experiment*, followed the migration, moving to Jewett.

The International and Great Northern, which is now a part of the Missouri Pacific system, was followed by other lines. The Trinity and Brazos Valley, which is now a part of the Burlington-Rock Island system, built shortly after the turn of the century, traverses the County through Normangee, Flynn, Concord and Newby, and the Houston and Texas Central, later absorbed by the Southern Pacific system, had stations at Normangee, Flynn, Robbins, and Jewett, until three years ago, when it was abandoned and its tracks removed.

Highways

These three railroads constituted the County's only means of transportation until 1931, when the completion of Highway 75 through Leona, Centerville, Corinth and Buffalo, and Highway 43, through Marquez, Jewett, Buffalo, Keechi, and Oakwood, resulted in another major change. Trucks and automobiles now carry most of the passengers and a large part of the freight of the County over these new concrete highways.

JOURNALISM IN LEON COUNTY

Both bright and gloomy, is a short description of journalism in Leon County.

"When I was just a school boy," B. T. Gresham of Centerville, veteran citizen of this county, recalled one day last winter by the fireplace in the justice of the peace office in the court house, "the editor of the newspaper here (the paper's name has been forgotten and the editor's name is not important) one afternoon got up out of bed, looked in a cracked mirror hanging on the wall, tied his razor to a shingle, and slit his throat so deep he nicked the inside of his neck bone. His head was flopping from side to side. He was dead when us schoolboys got there."

On the other hand, another editor of a later paper in Centerville was converted to the ministry in the midst of his editorship, immediately burned his newspaper files containing anti-prohibition editorials, began preaching, and today is one of the respected pastors of Texas.

But both bright and gloomy would describe any profession which dates over a period of more than 75 years, as journalism in Leon County does.

Bravely named, the first newspaper issued in Leon County, so far as we can find out was the Leon County Pioneer, published in 1850, four years after the county was created, by W. D. Wood, who was just beginning his long career of editor, writer, lawyer, jurist, law-maker and banker. Coming to Centerville from Alabama W. D. Wood and a brother got a small amount of type together and printed the sheet. Only vague rumors of it are now available, although in somebody's attic somewhere there may be a yellowed pamphlet entitled "How I Started the First Newspaper In Leon County," by W. D. Wood. Judge Wood, who turned to writing in his later years, states in his "History of The Wood Family" that he published such a pamphlet, but a search by the present writer has failed to unearth a copy.

What The Pioneer looked like, and what advertising patronage it had, is not known.

Also, what eventually happened to The Pioneer, is now unknown.

It is known that later a paper called The Experiment, was published nineteen years afterwards, and, so far as we know, is the earliest paper of which a copy is still extant.

An earlier paper, however, was published, although what it looked like cannot be learned. This paper was The Times, and it was only in March of this year that a reference to it was discovered, in a letter written to the editor telling him of the conditions among the poor. The letter was addressed to "Mr. Cammer," and was dated January 6, 1963. On the back of the letter was the following note:

Mr. Cammer:

Inclosed you will find two dollars which you will please send me your paper to that amount. I do not recollect your subscription price but when the two dollars are out I can subscribe again. Send the Times to Leona.

The letter was written by J. M. Reed.

What papers, if any, were published in Centerville after The Times in 1863 and The Experiment in 1869, is not known. The next known paper was The Centerville Democrat, published by Col. Thomas F. Martin, that interesting impractical character who was lost the minute he left his print shop. R. A. McLaughlin was telling the writer about Col. Martin one day early this spring, and of some of the pranks played on him. Typical was the time a group of young bucks in town formed a fictitious "Science Society" and contributed an article on the opportunity for stocking the creeks of Leon County with fresh-water oysters. Col. Martin thought the idea was splendid and played up the story in big fashion, not knowing that oysters live only in salt water.

Following Col. Martin's death in 1909, The Democrat was suspended until 1910, when R. A. Gates bought it and changed the name to The Centerville Record. Mr. Gates published The Record until 1915, when he joined the Methodist ministry and sold the paper to G. W. Engledow, who published it until the early 1920's, when the paper was suspended. Centerville was without a paper until 1934, when Grady L. Webster began publishing The Leon County News, which he sold to H. B. Fox, the present publisher in November, 1935.

But while Centerville was the location of the first newspaper efforts in Leon County, other towns had interesting papers, of which the most interesting, it is universally conceded, has been The Jewett Messenger, for fifty years in the Robinson family and for the last forty under the editorship of Jack Robinson, an editor recognized as unique in Texas journalism. "We guarantee to interest if not to please" has been the slogan carried on the front page under the nameplate on The Messenger for the past twenty-five years, and that the paper has lived up to it is evidenced even today when on Thursday mornings people all over the county go to their postoffice and pull out their copy and wonder "what ole Jack Robinson's got to say this time."

The sheer impossibility, however, of writing an accurate and complete history of journalism in Leon County or of anything else, for that matter, is humorously demonstrated when one sets out asking old-timers who have nothing to depend on except their recollections.

"Everybody who could tell you about the early newspapers is dead," Jack Robinson pointed out in his shop in Jewett one Friday afternoon this spring. We were trying to get a connected history of newspapers in Jewett, but had to give it up.

Editor Robinson himself once edited a paper in Oakwood and claims he can't remember what the name of the thing was. "I had all sorts of papers anyway," he asserted, recalling that he once had a paper at Marquez, and that he had a paper in Buffalo which was run by a young man who rode a bicycle over from Jewett along dirt roads every day. The paper at Oakwood, he claims, was run by a negro. "Weren't anything but niggers there then anyway," he declared with a humorous glint in his eye. "Why, right here in

Jewett," he added, "I ran a paper for fifteen years and made a living at the same time selling pianos and sewing machines."

So far as can be learned, the first paper in Jewett was The Advance, which was moved over from Centerville when the railroad came through Jewett. In Centerville, the paper had been called "The Experiment," and it has been concluded that the name "Advance" characterized the editor's feelings about his move. The editor was Jim Holland.

Following The Advance, The Independent Farmer was published at Jewett by Ed Farrar until about 1891, when H. S. Robinson, father of Jack Robinson, bought it, changed the name, and brought The Jewett Messenger into existence. Jack Robinson began editing it a few years later, and has been at it ever since. The Jewett Populist, Editor Robinson recalled later, was published also at Jewett, by Thorn Bros., from 1895 to 1902.

"The Jewett Sun," Editor Robinson recalled also, "shone in Jewett for a year and a half." It was published by W. F. Bookman.

The Oakwood Oracle, now published by Roy Perry, has been at Oakwood for an unremembered number of years, and for all Jack Robinson knows he may have run his paper there by the same name.

The newspaper situation at Buffalo is still more complicated. Now named The Buffalo Press and published by H. B. Fox, the paper was once The Buffalo News, then The Buffalo Banner, then The Buffalo Booster. Editor A. R. Crawford once published a paper at Buffalo, but moved to Normangee nearly a quarter of a century ago and has been there since.

The Normangee Star, still published by Editor Crawford, was once called The Normangee Bell.

Marquez once had a newspaper, The Marquez Listings, and Jack Robinson says the paper he owned there he believed was called The Marquez News. Fred Carrington also owned a paper one time at Marquez, but traded it off and has forgotten what for. Brad Robinson, present tax assessor-collector of Leon County, ran a paper at Marquez for a while in his young days.

The truth of the matter is that no detailed history of Leon County journalism is possible, but the county has been served by some sort of paper almost since its beginning, and today the newspaper prospects in Leon County are brighter than they have ever been.

SOLD EGGS TO JAY GOULD

Fred Carrington, Marquez postmaster and banker, once sold eggs to Jay Gould, the famous American financier, in Marquez.

Gould, owner of railroads, inspected his property personally, riding in a private car. He limited his traveling, however, to daylight hours, and stopped at night. One of his stopping places was Marquez, and he often had his food stock replenished from Mr. Carrington's store.

THE REBELLION AGAINST THE YANKEES IN CENTERVILLE

The exciting times when two competing railroads built parallel tracks in front of his house were recalled one morning this spring by Col. Marcus Palmer of Newby, oldest living white man in Leon County.

"I saw more fighting Irishmen on those two tracks than I've ever seen since," he recalled with a smile.

The two railroads were the Houston and Texas Central (H. & T. C.) and the Trinity and Brazos Valley, (T. & B. V.), now called the Burlington and Rock Island. Their tracks ran side by side through the county, and were evidence of the fierce fight in those days for railroad rights.

Col. Palmer could sit on the front porch of the home he has lived in for 65 years and watch the two competing construction crews hard at work at what was an economic folly, which today would not be allowed by the state.

The two railroads were completed and both continued to fight for existence for a quarter of a century, when finally the H. & T. C. gave up the ghost and removed its tracks, leaving what has turned out to be the most nearly level and best graded country road anywhere in the state. The railroad dump, bridges and right of way were bought by the county, and planks laid across the bridge ties, and today a car can drive across the county high upon the railroad dump.

But Col. Palmer didn't get warmed up until he got off on the Civil War, the damned yankees, and the Reconstruction days in Leon County.

During Reconstruction he was living in Centerville. The insults and high-handedness of the Yankee soldiers stationed in the town finally became too much for the patriotic Leon County Texans.

Secretly, a rebellion was engineered, Col. Palmer recalled. Arms of every sort—muskets, Springfield rifles, pistols and shotguns—were collected in the homes of the Confederate citizens. Plans were to arm the loyal men simultaneously and march against the approximately seventy-five Yankee soldiers in control.

"If necessary—if they wouldn't leave town we was going to fight it out."

The rebellion came dangerously close to being accomplished, but older heads persuaded the younger men to hold off a while, and shortly afterwards the Yankee troops were moved out. How near Centerville came to witnessing real bloodshed has been little known, Col. Palmer indicated.

Col. Palmer moved to Leon County with his father in November, 1849, settling at Alabama Crossing, a place named because so many settlers there, including the Palmers, came from Alabama. Col. Palmer was born three years earlier in September, 1846, the same year Leon County was created.

STEAMBOATING ON THE TRINITY

Commodore Hatfield, colorful, bearded adventurer of the present day, who sailed down the Trinity River in a motor launch, was doing for a stunt what bearded steamboat captains did for a living back when Leon County was in the making.

Seven weeks by ox cart from Houston by way of Navasota was too irksome a trip for many Leon County pioneers, and they organized a stock company for shipping in supplies by steamboat on the Trinity River, bordering the eastern side of the county.

Captain Webb and his steamer "Reliance" were familiar sights to river dwellers in 1847. Later the planters of the county organized a stock company and had two boats operating between points on the river in Leon County and Trinity Bay. Among the steamboat landings were Cairo, Commerce, Navarro, and Brookfield's Bluff, but of these Navarro up in the eastern end of the county was the most prominent, and the village by the same name was a mildly flourishing place in those days.

Large warehouses stood on the banks of the river, and records today show the townsites of Navarro and Cairo, with lots marked off. Today scarcely a sign of the towns can be found.

Centerville was served mainly by the Cairo landing, and there are bills of lading still extant in the old files of descendants of the early planters.

WHEN THE RAILROAD CAME TO LEON COUNTY

"Centerville thought it was just about ruined," was the way Mayor Gilbert Gresham of Centerville put it in telling about the coming of the railroad to Jewett, during the first Annual Chamber of Commerce banquet at Hotel Sullivan in Centerville, March 19, 1936.

The "coming of the railroad" to Leon County was indeed good news for the people along the northern edge, and dejecting news to people in Centerville and to others through the heart of the county who put up a stiff fight for the route and lost.

People in Centerville shook their heads like a town would today if left off a highway, and everybody almost who could, packed up and moved to Jewett. Even the Centerville newspaper did.

"Regular trains are now running on the International road to Marquez, forty miles from Hearne, in Leon County," The Texan, newspaper of Anderson county, commented, in December, 1871, "and they will be running to Jewett, ten miles farther on, the first of the month. The Experiment (newspaper of Centerville), is making arrangements to move to Jewett and will issue its paper at that place as soon as trains commence running."

Even the welfare of the county seat was thought threatened, and people around Centerville back in 1870 were dejected. In fact, some people claim, it took them sixty years to get over the blow, and it was not until 1931 that they came to life again. This, of course, is an exaggeration, but it is undeniably true that Centerville did take on new growth in 1931 when highway 75 came through, connecting the isolated place with the world at large and bringing in new business and new blood.

In fact, the railroads, as much as they have meant to Leon County and Texas as town-builders, over-reached themselves and in the end left towns with nothing but a dump and a few rotten cross ties, and no spirit. Three railroads through the county were too much, particularly with their being concentrated in the western end, and today there is mute testimony to the fact in the abandoned H. & T. C. line which once served Normangee, Robbins, Flynn and Jewett, but which now is a dump used by wagons.

Today Centerville, without a railroad, is forging ahead of towns in the county with two railroads.

Typical sentiment in this connection was expressed in an editorial in The Leon County News at Centerville in its issue of March 26, 1936. It follows:

RAILROAD NOT NEEDED IN CENTERVILLE

Far be it from The News to be an upstart, but there is one phrase in The Dallas Journal's nice editorial about this paper, re-printed in this week's "Country Editor" column on this page, that has us stumped.

The phrase is: "Considering that it (The News) is printed in a town without a railroad, it is really an achievement."

This, if The Journal editor will pardon us for saying it, sounds like saying: "Considering that it is printed in a town without any pyramids, it is really an achievement."

How a railroad in Centerville would help improve The Leon County News or anything else, any more than would a chain of catacombs under the town, is hard to say.

There used to be a time when the "coming of the railroad" was magic that meant life in fact to a town, but now the rails are no longer monopolists in the field of transportation, and there is a newer form of "rails" running through Centerville whose "box cars" can turn aside and cross the square and back up to The News shop and unload newsprint, without needing a wrecker crew to get them back on the tracks.

Highway 75, on a bee-line between Dallas and Houston, is the successful competitor of the railroad that didn't come through Centerville, and the trucks are the box cars that will back up to anybody's back door.

Centerville has all the transportation facilities it needs; and there never has been a railroad here and there never will be. Truck lines handle all the freight this town has to bring in or send out, and they give quicker service than a freight train could. As for passenger service, nearly everybody has a

car, and if a person hasn't there are six Bowen Buses running north and six running south through Centerville every day in the week, and what town ten times the size of Centerville can boast such service on passenger trains?

When it is realized that there are today 26,000,000 automobiles and 3,000,000 trucks registered in the United States—enough to haul the entire population of this town all at one time—it can be realized that the railroads take only a secondary place in transportation.

In a word, a new era of transportation is upon the world, and the railroads have but a minor part to play in it, and a part that is likely to diminish swiftly.

When a truck can haul freight from the factory door in Dallas to a business door in Centerville, why should anybody want to double the time of loading and unloading by hauling the freight to the train in Dallas, loading it on, shipping it to Centerville, loading it on a truck, and hauling it fifty yards and unloading it again in the business house? Particularly when the cost is the same, if not less, by truck?

The fact is, the chief use of the railroad these days, besides handling the mail—a job it will not always have—and hauling the bulkier freight, is in making long journeys. Right now, the most comfortable way to ride to, say St. Louis, is on an air-conditioned train. But with the coming of safer airplanes, who will poke along on a train?

And as for a railroad to Centerville, the town had much rather have a waterworks system. It won't whistle at night and wake up people.

LEON COUNTY OIL

If there is any oil in Leon County, it is still here, because little has been taken out yet.

That there is oil here is a rather general belief, not by Leon County land owners alone, but by oil companies which have been paying lease money for more than ten years.

Several attempts for oil have been made, and at present three deep gas wells with immense pressures are standing idle between Centerville and Buffalo.

Earlier attempts resulted in dry holes or "busted" drillers. Machinery is still standing west of Centerville, evidence of an attempt that didn't pan out.

Geologists claim there is oil in the county, and at this writing indications are that more tests will be made.

THE OLDEST HOUSE IN LEON COUNTY

A house as old as Leon County itself and the oldest structure in this part of the state, is still standing in the county and is occupied by a descendant of the family that built it.

Built in 1846, the same year Leon County was created and four years after Fort Boggy itself was built, the Marshall home—a two room hand-hewn log house—stands today in the southeastern part of the county about ten miles from Centerville near the Middleton road, its still solid timbers and sturdy walls a silent testimony to the building ability of the early settlers of this county.

Jack Marshall, descendant of James Marshall, builder of the house, lives in the log structure.

The two-room house separated by an open hallway is located in a small valley whose hills are topped with trees, forming one of the most picturesque spots anywhere in Texas.

The gum logs themselves, except for a few weak timbers, are as sound as the day they were hewn ninety years ago.

How long it took to build the house is not known, but it is known that the house was started before Leon County was created, and was in Robertson County at the beginning. Jack Marshall can recall his grandfather's telling about dragging the logs one at a time to the building site with a team of oxen.

A unique feature of the house, to present day people, is the wooden hinges on one of the doors. These hinges, without a nail or a piece of iron in them, have been swinging the doors to the house for ninety years and are still in good condition.

The house is built well off the ground, undergirded by huge timbers. The interior walls are lined with rough clapboards, and the rafters are round limbs. Originally there was a rock chimney at each end of the house, each so large that a six-foot log could be burned in it. Now, however, the chimneys are but rock piles. "They fell down," Jack Marshall said.

The house itself, however, has not fallen down, and Jack Marshall expects to live out his days in it.

If the stout log house, the oldest structure of any sort in Leon County, continues to receive good treatment and its foundations are kept in place, its life is almost unlimited.

OIL

Large oil companies have been paying lease money on land in Leon County year after year for the past ten years.

BURIED GOLD, PERHAPS, AT OAKWOOD

Were fabulous treasures hidden in Leon County in the dark early days?

Nobody knows, but Mrs. Sophie Patrick of Leona, who has a lively recollection of early days as well as a keen familiarity with present-day affairs, has a story about an underground chamber discovered in the early part of this century near Oakwood.

The underground rooms, Mrs. Patrick recalled one afternoon at the home of her neice, Mrs. Gilbert Gresham of Centerville, were concealed, with only a tunnel leading into them.

Discovery of the chamber was made after a lightning bolt blasted out a tree and revealed a tunnel. Men explored, and found a two-room underground structure, obviously man-made and built for secrecy.

"But lest I disappoint you," Mrs. Patrick hurriedly put in with her quaint smile, "there was nothing but debris found there."

Mrs. Patrick has an immense stock of Leon County stories in her head, and has preserved many of them in writing.

KILLED BY INDIANS

Direct word of mouth account of the brutal slaying of a Leon County youth by the Indians was related late one afternoon this spring by Mrs. Molly Rogers in Marquez.

Mrs. Rogers remembers hearing her grandmother tell of the death of a young son of Stephen Rogers in 1841. The youth was swimming in a pool near his father's house when the Indians, in a surprise attack, slaughtered him.

"That night," Mrs. Rogers said her grandmother told her, "settlers were afraid to burn lights for fear of more attacks, and persons sat up with the body in the dark."

Mrs. Rogers, who has lived in Marquez most of her life, having been born at Leona, remembers the early times of the county, and is one of the five oldest living citizens of Marquez.

There is only one other established account of murder by the Indians in Leon County.

Capt. Greer, commander of Fort Boggy near its beginning, was shot by a band of Indians on Keechi Creek. He was a member of a scouting party which was suddenly set upon by the Redskins. His companions escaped and were able to recover Capt. Greer's body the following day.

If there were other Indian murders in the county, they have not been revealed. The Indians, however, were recognized as champion thieves, and the accounts of thefts by the savages are numerous.

THE DR. BLACKWELL INCIDENT

One of the tales old timers tell is called "The Dr. Blackwell Incident," an account of a quack doctor who had a nifty racket until the sheriff noticed the scar on his chin corresponded to the scar on the chin of a man pictured on a Man Wanted circular a sheriff in another county sent him.

In 1900 a man came to Centerville, called himself Dr. Blackwell, showed his doctor's diploma, and began practicing. Some people in this area took to him readily, and a few swore some of his cures were almost miraculous. Others, however, shook their heads.

For two years "Dr. Blackwell" practiced here.

Then one day the sheriff accosted him, accused him of not being "Dr. Blackwell," and obtained a ready admission.

The man, who had worked in a drug store and traveled with a veterinary surgeon and picked up a few medical phrases, had stolen a doctor's diploma in another section of the state and was using his name.

The man left town, after he had spent a while in jail here.

CAPT. DAVIS' BOOTS

Tales of Indian fights, run-ins with damnyankees in later days, and of present day affairs are included in the stock stories of Joel R. Leathers, 78-year-old pioneer of a pioneer Leon County family.

Sitting in his rocking chair at his home near Middleton, in the vicinity of Nip-and-Tuck, Mr. Leathers one Sunday afternoon this spring got started on some of his stories and kept going until after dusk. Some of his stories were:

Mr. Leathers' grandfather, who came to this area in 1836, 100 years ago, and a friend, a Mr. Davis, were out riding in what is now Houston County one afternoon when they were set upon by mounted Indians. Mr. Davis was killed and Mr. Leathers escaped only by hard riding. The Indians were after the men's horses, and were afraid of shooting for fear of killing the animals. Knowing this, Mr. Leathers leaned over alongside the horse's neck and rode furiously. The Indians even tried roping him, but failed and he made it to safety. Later a party returned and found the body of Mr. Davis, with his boots missing. Still later a peace treaty with the Indians was signed. One of the Indians signing the treaty was wearing Mr. Davis' boots.

The Yankees

Mr. Joel Leathers was only a young boy during the Civil War and the Reconstruction days, but he remembers much of those times and has more information passed on to him by persons who had it first hand.

The Yankee camp was located about a mile south of Centerville on what

is now the Bob Johnson farm, and consisted of about seventy-five soldiers, living in tents. Voting was done under the bayonet, and everybody had to go to Centerville to the court house to cast a ballot; there was no precinct voting then because the Union soldiers insisted on supervising all vote-casting.

In a hot sheriff's race during Reconstruction days between the Yankee candidate, a man named Conroy, and Bob Lacey and Henry Nobles, two persons were known to have been killed. A negro was overheard to admit that while he had told the Leon County natives he wouldn't vote for the Yankee, he really was. That night a man met the negro on a road.

"Want a drink of whiskey?" the man asked him.

"Yessuh," the negro said.

"Well, open your mouth."

The negro opened his mouth, and the man stuck a pistol in it and fired. The Yankees were a long time finding out what caused the negro's death.

Another night the man met a Yankee orderly alone, shot him down, took the saddle off his horse, and dropped saddle and Yankee both down a well. The incident happened near Raymond.

"That man didn't care for anything," Mr. Leathers added.

Too Many Potatoes

One time the mill near the Leathers' home, a turbine or tub mill, got behind on its work and the Leathers family had to wait three weeks to get some corn ground.

"We had to eat Irish potatoes for bread," Mr. Leathers recalled. "I ate Irish potatoes straight for three weeks, and after that I didn't eat another one until after I was married."

Two Fits In One Night

A traveling man spending the night above the store of Jerome Black at Jewett turned the joke on a man named Jennings, the practical joker of the time.

Jennings had to sleep with the traveling man, and told him that he was subject to fits. During the night he pretended a fit, but had no more gotten well into it when the traveling man jumped astraddle of him and pinned him down.

"That's all right, take it easy," the traveling man said, "I know how you feel, I have fits myself."

Later in the night a fit hit him, he jumped up, and ran off. He wasn't caught until next day, and Jennings was a long time getting over it.

**OLD TIMERS STAY UP LATE AND
 * * * * *
 RECALL EARLY TIMES AT COUNTY
 * * * * *
 CENTENNIAL BANQUET THURSDAY**

(Editor's note: Believing that persons long years from now who might stumble onto a copy of this booklet would be interested in an account of the Leon County Centennial banquet, held in Hotel Sullivan in Centerville, Thursday night, May 14, 1936, the following account is being included, re-printed exactly as it appeared in The Leon County News.)

More than 250 present-day citizens and old timers who trace their ancestry back to the beginning of Leon County and coincidentally back to the beginning of the Texas Republic gathered at Hotel Sullivan in Centerville last Thursday night for the Leon County Centennial banquet and were regaled by impromptu reminiscences of Col. Marcus Palmer of Newby, oldest living white man in the county, who helped engineer an incompleated rebellion against the Union soldiers in Centerville during the Reconstructon days and who says "he knows where there's a Yankee buried on the court house square here," and Col. Bill Brady of Normangee, who lacks two months of being as old as Col. Palmer and who says all Confederate soldiers were alike when they were hungry and were next to a potato patch.

Whimsical recollections were mixed with more serious ones as prominent Judges, Civil War veterans, and descendants of the first families of Leon County were introduced by Judge C. G. Haley, who served as master of ceremonies for the affair sponsored by the Leon County Centennial Advisory Committee.

Practically all the towns in the county were represented, as well as towns throughout a wide area of East Texas.

Following a formal program, in which County Supt. C. R. Lacey of Centerville welcomed the guests, and Judge Fontaine Kirby of Freestone County made the chief address, reviewing the lives of early Texas political leaders and defending the Texas democracy championed by Joseph Weldon Bailey, prominent guests and old timers were introduced.

Judge Dean Recalls

Judge S. W. Dean, present district judge here, who was born in Leon County in Reconstruction days in 1868, recalled earlier times in the county's history as told him by his grandfather, Starling Dean, for whom the judge is named. Starling Dean settled on Cobb's Creek, started to move to Grimes County but liked the country less and less the further he got away from the Leon County country, and returned and settled permanently.

His grandfather, Judge Dean recalled, fought at San Jacinto with Sam Houston, was wounded and later narrowly escaped being shot ac-

cidentally by a fellow soldier. "Wounded, my grandfather wrapped himself in a blanket and was sitting on a horse," Judge Dean said, "when a Texas soldier, thinking he was a Mexican, leveled a gun and said 'Watch me kill that damned Mexican.' A friend struck his arm and the gun fired in the air overhead, but it was a close call."

"Friends Gone"

Judge S. W. Robinson of Teague, one time sheriff of Leon County, stirred the crowd when he told of his trip back to Centerville earlier Thursday afternoon and his wandering over scenes familiar to him many years ago. "I wandered into the court house and around the square, and almost looked for old Dunc Carrington, Rach Durst, and all those old friends, they were all gone. I'm the only one that's left."

Judge Robinson recalled that his father fought with Sam Houston at San Jacinto, and was appointed to head off the famous "Runaway Scrape," the flight of settlers before the threatening on-coming of Santa Anna.

He brought a laugh when he recalled early court scenes and practices in Leon County.

"In those days, if a man was tried for hog theft, he went to the penitentiary; if he was tried for horse theft, he went to the penitentiary; but if he was tried for murder, he went free." This he attributed to the disjointed times due to the presence of carpetbaggers during Reconstruction days.

Editor Jack Robinson

Jack Robinson, celebrated editor of the Jewett Messenger, was then giv-

en the floor and kept the audience laughing as he reviewed his life within Leon County in the past near three-quarters of a century.

"I'm glad to come back to my old home town and see it progressing," he said, reminding the crowd that Centerville was his home town, as "I was born three miles out here in a pine thicket—I don't recollect exactly when. My grandfather gave the land Centerville is built on, my father helped build the first house here, and I attended Redland College (one room school) out west of here and graduated in a cotton patch on a farm now owned by Joe Scale of Centerville.

"I am glad to see the town progressing," he continued. "Don't slip backward, but keep going. They used to say, 'Hitch your wagon tongue to a star,' but I suggest you tie your old cars to a comet and fly."

Editor Robinson later privately confided that he had a nine-page speech prepared but that his wife, who was sitting next to him, wouldn't let him deliver it.

Col. Palmer

Following the reading of letters and telegrams from persons who could not be here, including one from Cong. Luther Johnson, who was to have been the principal speaker, and brief remarks by A. A. Allison, Corsicana postmaster; Wm. J. Stringer, publisher of the Teague Chronicle and himself a former Leon County resident; Crawford Reed, formerly of Flynn; Wayne Howell of Corsicana, Col. Marcus Palmer of Newby got started on humorous reminiscences. "I know a heap of things about this county some of these young bloods

don't," he said. "There's a Yankee buried back of Gresham's store," he began significantly, "but I didn't have anything to do with it. You know, I never have gotten to where I could love a Yankee, even today." Col. Palmer insists that Republicans and Yankees are one and the same thing.

"I've been voting Democratic all my life. I was marched to the polls by two Yankee soldiers who tried to force me to vote Republican. But I voted Democratic and got cheered when I came out of the court house.

"I remember the old log jail in Centerville. I remember a man who broke out of jail and there was a horse saddled and waiting for him when he got out. I won't mention his name because some of his kinfolks is here right now.

"I see the younger generation is making progress, and I'm lad to see it."

Bill Brady

Col. Bill Brady of Normanee replied to some of the remarks his Civil War fellow-veteran, Col. Palmer, made, and the two got into a lively conversation that kept the audience laughing. Col. Palmer accused Col. Brady of stealing potatoes during the Civil War.

"Did anybody ever see a Confederate soldier or any other kind that wouldn't steal when he was hungry?" Col. Brady asked with a twinkle in his eyes. After the banquet the two old friends got together in the lobby of the hotel and talked until 12:30.

Others who were introduced in-

cluded Horatio Durst Jr. of Crockett, descendant of John Durst, who had a major part in founding Leon County; Fred Carrington of Marquez, descendant of one of the first families of the county; T. W. Nash, of Leona; Judge B. T. Gresham, Mrs. Lizzie McDaniels; Willie Cox, Flynn, whose father owned the land where Fort Boggy stood and who himself saw the Fort and reported that the replica going up on the square here has marked resemblance.

Prizes Awarded

Judge Haley awarded prizes in the Leon County Historical Essay contest, with first prize going to Laura Beth Grayson of Marquez; second to Hardy Thompson Jr., of Leona; and third to Proctor Hardin of Oakwood.

In the formal program, numbers from the towns of the county included: from Marquez, dance by Miss Jennie Proctor Barkley; from Jewett, song by Miss Marguerite Price; from Oakwood, piano selection by Miss Evalyn Dorman; from Normanee, reading by Miss Mary Belle McDonald; from Flynn, reading by Doyle B. Reed; from Teague, song by Mrs. Clara Stringer Owens; from Centerville, song by High School Choral Club.

Judge Haley praised the Women's Civic League of Centerville for its part in assisting in the banquet, and praised particularly Mrs. Lee Thomason, president, and Mrs. E. P. Powell.

The banquet was served by a group of Centerville High School girls and boys.

COMMUNITY NAMES IN LEON COUNTY

The Bible, geography, botany, allegory, and the commonest incidents were drawn on to secure the names of communities in Leon County, which vary from the musical and pleasant to the downright funny.

From the musical, smooth-flowing name of Normangee or Vanetia, one can encounter such blunt names as Nip-and-Tuck and Pigeon Roost, not to mention such earthy names as Bear Grass, Black Gum, Cedar Creek and Sand Flat.

Some of the most picturesque, earthy names in existence have been given communities in the county, though many of the names no longer apply.

Flynn, for example, once was called Big Tussel, and there is a place over near the Trinity River in the southeast part of the county called Lick Skillet.

The Ridge, the area between Keechi and Boggy Creeks south of Centerville, has had a varied time with its name. Once it was called Pleasant Ridge. Then somebody who picked a poor piece of land in the area started calling it Nubbin Ridge. This aroused the ire of native citizens in the section and a compromise name of just "The Ridge" was adopted.

Nip-and-Tuck is one of the more humorous names. It is a place in the vicinity of Raymond and Guy's Store. The name derived from early days when water was scarce in the county. There was a spring in the vicinity and people from miles around came there each morning after water. A saying grew up that it "was nip and tuck as to who got there first each morning," and thereafter the place was called Nip-and-Tuck.

Origin of all the names of the communities of the county, some of which are no longer in existence, is not known, though the origin of the names of the chief towns is known and the origin of others can be guessed. For example, Nineveh or Corinth are clearly of Biblical derivation. Concord and Friendship are of allegorical derivation, and Sand Flat was named for geographical reasons.

Of the chief towns, their names originated as follows:

Centerville—Because it is in almost the exact center of the county. The geographical center is located about one mile northwest of town.

Jewett—Named for Judge Henry J. Jewett, prominent in the early days of the county.

Buffalo—Named, it is supposed, because of buffalo in the vicinity in early days. General Stephen F. Austin's map of Texas, a rare copy of which is in the possession of Mrs. H. H. Brown of Centerville, shows that buffalo and wild horses were present in this area in early days.

Marquez—Named for Marie de la C. Marquez, who was given an eleven-league grant of land in the western part of the present county in 1833.

Normangee—Named for Judge Norman G. Kittrell, a prominent judge of the state who lived in the county. His first name and middle initial, Norman G., were joined to form Normangee.

Oakwood—Named, it is supposed, because of the various kinds of oak trees in this area.

Leona—Named, being the first county seat, to correspond with the county's name of Leon, which is Spanish for lion. Leona is Spanish for lioness. As to where the Leon came from, see the chapter on How Leon County Got Its Name.

Middleton—Named for William B. Middleton, Texas patriot and first sheriff of Leon County.

Origin of names of the other communities is in some instances partially indicated by their nature, and in many instances altogether unknown. Many of the communities, such as Navarro and Cairo, steamboat landings on the Trinity before the railroad came through the county, no longer exist.

Names of some of the communities follow:

Bear Grass	Robbins	Flo
Friendship	Red Land	Nineveh
Blackgum	Centerview	Russell
Wealthy	Newby	Sand Lake
Cross Roads	Sardis	Sand Flat
Commerce	Corinth	Nip-and-Tuck
Vanetia	Cedar Creek	Lick Skillet
Flynn	Keechi	Malvern

THE TREE OF JUSTICE

“Five men have been hanged from that tree, not countin’ niggers.”

This is what joking old-timers in its 86-year-old county seat town of Centerville will tell visitors who look gullible, pointing to the century-old oak tree standing on the square in front of the Leon County court house here.

Reaching higher than the top of the court house, the old tree, called “the tree of justice,” stands in the middle of the wide square where in earlier days it has witnessed both heroic and shameful events.

It was under the tree that General Sam Houston spoke to Leon County citizens during the early days of the state, when he came over from Huntsville to visit relatives living east of Centerville.

A first cousin of Sydney Houston, Gen. Houston visited occasionally in this county, spending his nights in a log house built in 1856.

It is from this historic old house that logs were taken to reconstruct Fort Boggy, first outpost of civilization in Leon County, on the square in Centerville near the “tree of justice.” The Centerville Chamber of Commerce sponsored the project, which will be open for Centennial visitors.

The “tree of justice,” which was saved as a landmark when the forest

growing in this area was cut down to make room for the court house, has lent its limbs three times to the followers of "Judge Lynch."

As late as 1919 a negro preacher was hanged from the same lower limbs where two other negroes swung during carpetbag days. Preaching a sermon Sunday night, the negro preacher went to the barn of a white man near the edge of town and waited until dawn, when he waylaid a young farmer on his way to milk and shot him through the head. The two had had an argument the previous Saturday over cotton.

A posse sought the negro a week along the bottom lands near here before he was found and brought to jail. While the sheriff was out of town, a mob made a key and opened the jail and hanged the negro to the tree. The body was found swinging in the air the next morning.

A more gruesome lynching occurred in Reconstruction days when a negro was hanged on the tree and allowed to swing two nights and a full day. Old-timers can recall how the negro, swollen from long hanging "bounced when he hit the ground," when he finally was cut down. Details of an earlier lynching are not recalled, though it is considered authoritative that in all three negroes have been lynched on the same limb of the "tree of justice" here.

The tree today, however, stands forgiven for its part in the misdeeds of the past, and cars and teams park around it and farmers enjoy its shade in the summer time. Nearby a replica of old Fort Boggy will stand, calling attention to travelers on highway 75, which passes alongside, to some of the early events in this East Texas county.

DRAWS MEXICAN WAR PENSION

The War between the United States and Mexico came to an end with the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848, but Mrs. Maria Cessna Hopkins, Leona resident, born in the year the War ended, draws a Mexican War pension from the Federal government.

Her late husband, Dr. Sim S. Hopkins, long a prominent physician at Leona, served in the Mexican War as a young man under twenty.

As a member, also, of the celebrated Mier Expedition, Dr. Hopkins was among those who drew the beans. It was said, according to the doctor's story, that some of the Texans were able to draw white beans when they found that the white ones were larger than the black. By feeling for the larger sizes, some were able to save their lives.

NEIGHBORLY CALLS

A letter written by Mrs. Harriet Durst in 1876 to a friend in Nacogdoches, tells of saddling her pony and going to call on friends living ten to fifteen miles from her home at Leona. On one such excursion of neighborliness, Mrs. Durst's horse went into a hole in a ford and she had to postpone her calls until a later date, though she suffered no ill effects from the plunge.

TURN OUT THE LITTLE ONES

It is told on a former county judge in this county that, during a campaign, when the issue of penning hogs was rife, he was asked his position on the hog law.

"Well," said the politician, feeling himself on the spot, "I think we ought to put up the big ones and let the little ones run out."

RESULTS OF BLOOD TESTS

A time-honored Leon County story concerns the county's well known prolificity in black-eyed peas and watermelons.

A Leon County resident at a city clinic had to have a blood test made. The laboratory men were worried when they looked at the results.

"This man's test," they reported to the chief, "shows twenty-five per cent watermelon juice and seventy-five per cent black-eyed pea liquor."

Neither of these crops is a joke now, however, as farmers are making more money each year from them.

POKER

Poker playing was a hearty pastime in the early days in Centerville. One night a prominent lawyer was barred from a game because he was a bad loser when he was drunk, and he was drunk. The lawyer went outside and chunked bricks through the windows.

LEON COUNTY TODAY

No history of Leon County would be adequate without a survey of present-day conditions, with a hint of the future.

Of the 704,640 acres of land in Leon County, only 97,951 acres were planted to crops in 1935, while 160,000 acres are available for cultivation and an unestimated number of acres of timbered land are yet to be cleared and are as suitable for cultivation as any in the county.

Ignoring the possibilities of oil in this area, Leon County almost certainly is destined to become one of the major food-producing sections of the Southwest, as soon as this Southwest provides enough metropolitan stomachs to be fed. And that the Southwest will provide such, is the confident predictions of conservative bankers, economists, etc., who claim Texas and other states in this area will double their population in the next ten years.

If Houston and Dallas continue to grow, and manufacturing industry is attracted to the Southwest, as it eventually will be, a gradually growing market for foodstuffs will be developed, and there is no county anywhere which can produce garden truck with as much abundance and as much economy as the sandy loam of Leon County, where the average rainfall of 36.62 inches assures a natural supply of moisture.

Leon County garden truck is by no means as early as truck from the Rio Grande Valley, but neither is it as expensive to produce and, it can be remembered, people eat vegetables the year-round now and are as hungry late in the season as they were at the beginning.

It's unexplained but true that Leon County has remained a largely undeveloped county. Its people have been as educated as people in other places, but it has been only in the last four years that an infiltration of outsiders began which is resulting in a sort of awakening of the county. The foundations have long been here, and every evidence now is that they are being used.

In the present year of 1936, four major school building projects are underway, and in the past three years a total of ten major projects have been completed.

Leon County today constitutes one of the opportunity spots of Texas, where concentrated development has never been attempted.

Aside from its agricultural resources, it contains what is considered one of the largest natural gas deposits in the state, as gas wells between Centerville and Buffalo testify. These wells have never been used, but contain immense pressures of gas, and the entire field is yet to be developed and exploited for the people of Texas. Oil has already been discovered near the northeastern edge of the county, and about half the county is under lease and has been for several years.

But in addition to its oil and gas possibilities, Leon County stands with the top-ranking counties of Texas in hog production. It is recognized as one of the cattle counties of the state.

Moreover, the possibilities for dairying and poultry raising in Leon County have scarcely been touched, and large increases in these industries can be expected, now that the highway brings the Dallas and Houston markets within three hours of any farm in the county.

There is not a town in Leon County with a population greater than 800, yet there is scarcely a county in the United States having a population of 20,000, as does Leon County, which doesn't have one or more towns of from 1500 to 3000 population. The peculiar situation in this county is explained by the fact that the heart of the county was virtually inaccessible throughout its entire previous life up to 1931, when highway 75, a concrete thoroughfare on a bee-line between Dallas and Houston, was built through the very center of the county.

From the swift developments in the three years since the coming of the highway, indications are that Centerville, the county seat, will become a sizeable town equal to the average county seat town in Texas.

LEON COUNTY IN BRIEF

Created in 1846 from Robertson County.

Area, 1,101 square miles.

Population, 1930 census, 19,898, present; more than 20,000.

Population per square mile, 18.1.

Assessed valuation in 1935, \$6,154,560.

Crop land harvested in 1935, 97,951 acres.

Total tilled and raw land available for crops, 162,219 acres.

Altitude, 375 feet.

Rainfall, 36.62 inches.

Soils, loam, sandy loam, and sandy clay.

Large timbered areas, covered with pine, post oak, pin oak, white oak, red oak, live oak, ash, sweet gum, cottonwood and pecan.

Average crops: 15,000 to 30,000 bales of cotton.

300,000 bushels of corn.

Forage and truck products in abundance.

Total crop value, \$2,240,000.

Total livestock value, \$1,600,000.