

SAMPLE HISTORY: Events

NOTE: This sample history, comprised of fictional information, represents in format, scope of content, documentation and length the type of narrative history required for a historical marker application. It is presented as a general guide for developing a narrative of a historic event.

THE POST OAK COUNTY SEAT ELECTION OF 1876

I. CONTEXT

Prior to the 1840s, nomadic Indian tribes including Kiowas and Mescalero Apaches lived in what is now Post Oak County. Early Anglo homesteaders included buffalo hunter Archibald Kyle and wild goat rancher Nelson Pope, with both arriving by 1849 in what was then part of Milam County. Permanent settlement began in the 1850s with the establishment of Fort Gompers, a small stockade to protect settlers against Native American raids, and later by the establishment of the village of Youngstown. The area was attached to Simpson County for judicial purposes in 1858.¹

The Texas and Northern Railroad built across the future Post Oak County in the fall of 1875, and the New York and Texas Land Company established the towns of Jergenson and Whitley. At about the same time, land speculator John E. Brinkley bought several thousand acres south of Jergenson, in the center of what would become Post Oak County, and there he platted the town of Smackdab. The stage was therefore set for a fierce competition to secure the county seat, and by the end of 1876 the Texas Rangers, the governor and the legislature would all be involved in the determination of the seat of Post Oak County.

II. OVERVIEW

The arrival of the Texas and Northern Railroad to what would become Post Oak County in late 1875 brought an influx of new arrivals, including settlers, businessmen, and many others. Tom Huxtable (June 11, 1843-June 11, 1876), noted buffalo hunter, moved from his settlement

at Buffalo Gap to near the new townsite of Jergenson in January 1876.² Huxtable's settlement included a small dugout dwelling and a postal stop on the Butterfield Overland Stage route from Fort Worth to El Paso, as well as a large general store that supplied area settlers. By April, Henderson moved his store to the growing town of Jergenson.³

Meanwhile, John E. Brinkley (May 3, 1847-December 30, 1906), who had previously established the towns of Indianola, Belle Plaine, and Rayner, purchased 5,283 acres from rancher Stanley J. Hollingsworth on November 23, 1875. Two weeks later, Brinkley recorded a plat for the proposed town of Smackdab, complete with four city parks in each quadrant and four major boulevards, with Broadway and Grand running north-south and Main and Pecan running east-west, all intersecting at the center of town at a large central square.⁴

By March 1876, a number of new settlers had moved beyond the rim in extreme western Milam County. They petitioned the Texas Legislature for the creation of a new county, rather than having to return more than sixty miles east to conduct their business in the town of Flanders. Chester J. Hornswaggle, Timothy Eanes Wilson, Matthew R. Timpson, and Alexander Kleb were the four men who canvassed the area for signatures for the proposed new county. Three of the petitions had the proposed name of Post Oak County on the top, but the fourth one was to be named for early settler Tom Huxtable. Legend has it that some of the signatures, in order to reach the required number of 150, included the names of horses and itinerant cowboys. Subsequent research confirms that at least ten of the names cannot be verified through other documentation, including the names Pokey McDougal, Lefty Leinart, and Stubby Leak.⁵

On March 30, 1876, the Texas Legislature approved the creation of the new county, naming it Post Oak and ordering Hornswaggle, Wilson, Timpson and Kleb to hold an election of all eligible voters before the end of April to establish the first commissioners, county judge,

county clerk, county treasurer, sheriff, and most importantly, the site of the county seat. The election of April 18, 1876 started a firestorm of controversy that culminated in the death of nine pioneer citizens and the legislature imposing martial law on Post Oak County.⁶

The problems began when the votes were first canvassed by the committee. Even though 152 signatures had been collected for the county's creation in March, more than 1,100 votes were counted for the organization election in April. Judge Thomas C. Beaufort of neighboring Smedley County threw out the first election results, which had Jergenson winning the county seat, and ordered a new election to be held on May 2, 1876. Early that morning, the bridge across Wilson Creek was mysteriously destroyed, keeping a sizeable number of voters from Gable's Gap from reaching the Jergenson townsite to vote, and as a result, Smackdab took the second election for county seat, 83 to 80.⁷

Brinkley scheduled May 30, 1876 as the day to draw lots for building and residence sites in his newly platted town of Smackdab. All seemed to go without a hitch, but over five nights in the following week, each new property owner in Smackdab was systematically terrorized and harassed, often in the middle of the night in their new homes. Many had their newly built wooden business houses burned to the ground by unknown assailants.⁸

Retribution came to Jergenson with tragic results on an unseasonably hot day. On the afternoon of June 6, 1876, James T. Honeycutt, a business associate of Brinkley and a major investor in land in Smackdab, rode his horse into Jergenson, intending to confront Wesley Adamson, the manager of Huxtable's 5H Ranch, and the man Honeycutt suspected of arranging the recent violence in Smackdab in an attempt to wrest the county seat back to Jergenson. At precisely 1:15 p.m., Honeycutt emerged from the alley next to the Black Cat Saloon, having spotted Adamson leaving that establishment. The two men quarreled loudly for several minutes

before Adamason turned his back and unhitched his horse, intending to leave before the fight escalated. But Honeycutt grabbed Adamason by the shoulder and threw him against the porch post, and then unsnapped his holster. Honeycutt shot Adamason first in the shoulder, and Adamason was able to draw his pistol and shoot Honeycutt three times before Honeycutt hit Adamason again, leaving both men mortally wounded. One of the stray bullets also hit the clock in front of J. Peterson's jewelry store, memorializing the time of the affray for all time. Most tragically, another bullet ricocheted and struck Mrs. Elizabeth Tisdale, the wife of the Presbyterian minister Rev. John Tisdale. Mrs. Tisdale died almost instantly, and her death sparked a violent outpouring between the Huxtable and Brinkley camps.⁹

For the next two weeks, violent ambushes occurred with frightening regularity, and nearly every business house in both towns was destroyed by fire. Six more people were killed during that time, three from each side of the Huxtable and Brinkley quarrel. Gregory Williams, Joseph G. Helms, Warren H. Toliver, Samuel G. Mickelson and R.Y. Mason were among those killed during the two weeks. Huxtable himself was killed on his 33rd birthday when he was ambushed riding home alone late on the night of June 11th. When word of the civil strife reached the State Legislature, Governor Richard Coke instructed the Texas Rangers to dispatch their forces at once, under the command of Captain Jack Thompson. At the same time, the Texas Legislature, meeting in an emergency session, declared Post Oak County to be under martial law, and declared all prior elections, filing of deeds, and other legal proceedings since its inception to be null and void. After the Texas Rangers quelled the violence, the Texas Legislature voted unanimously to award the county seat to Jergenson, while Smackdab retained the county jail and other minor county offices.¹⁰

Jergenson thrived as county seat in the decades that followed. The Texas and Northern Railroad connection made Jergenson a viable commercial center even in the hardest of economic downturns. Construction of U.S. Highway 190 in the late 1920s connected Jergenson with neighboring county seats and offered a fast road to Fort Worth and Abilene. The establishment of Languid Army Air Field during World War II solidified Jergenson's position as the largest city in the county.

Meanwhile, Smackdab has consistently come in second in many competitions with Jergenson. Smackdab came in second in the voting for the establishment of Middle Texas College in the 1890s, as well as coming in second for the surveyed route of U.S. 190. The city of Smackdab retains the layout of its original grand design, including the major boulevards, parks and other public spaces, but the central square that was intended to house the county seat remains vacant to this day, a constant reminder of the events of 1876. The rivalry between Smackdab and Jergenson is still heated to this day, and is perhaps most visible in the annual football game, with the all-time standings since 1891 currently at 54 wins each and 8 ties.

III. SIGNIFICANCE

The controversial events associated with the Post Oak county seat election of 1876 are indicative of other similar developments in Texas counties in the late 19th century. Although the Post Oak County example is perhaps the most exaggerated and bloody, several other counties experienced similar periods of controversy and violence in their developing years. The final choice for county seat, imposed by the state legislature, set Jergenson on a course for greater economic success than its rival city, and to this day, the fateful decisions of 1876 continue to play a part in the development of the county.

VI. DOCUMENTATION

¹ Prater, Elihu. *Beyond the Rim: A History of Early Post Oak County*. Jergenson: Post Oak County Historical Commission, 1978. p. 13.

² Prater, p. 77.

³ Prater, p. 78.

⁴ Deed records: V. 61, p. 15, Office of the Post Oak County Clerk, Post Oak County Courthouse, Jergenson.

⁵ Texas Registry of Legislative Actions, March 30, 1876; Prater, pp. 111-115.

⁶ Texas Registry of Legislative Actions, March 30, 1876.

⁷ Prater, pp. 111-112.

⁸ *Smackdab Sunlight*, June 9, 1876, p. 1.

⁹ *Dallas Morning News*, June 8, 1876, p. 14, col. 3.

¹⁰ Texas Registry of Legislative Actions, June 30, 1876.