



## Real County, Texas

### Early History



#### **A BRIEF HISTORY OF REAL COUNTY, THE NUECES RIVER CANYON AND THE ADJACENT COUNTRY**

By Byrde Pearce Hamilton

*(Source: Excerpt, pp. 85-90, dated 1936, from a two-volume typescript on Uvalde and Surrounding Areas, compiled by El Progreso Library under the direction of Miss Florence Anthon. Hamilton acknowledged his sources: Postmaster Jim Gray, J. E. Gildart, J. R. Stewart [editor of The Messenger of Light, Camp Wood], Mr. Hoj and Sowell's History of Indian Fighters. Much oral history which would otherwise be lost to us is contained in these two volumes, which are in the vault of El Progreso - Reprinted in "Branches and Acorns" ♦ SWTGS Quarterly Vol. II, n. 3, p. 23-25 - March 1987)*

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Real County is not a very large or old county. It was organized only 23 years ago, in 1913, but the recorded history of the country where Real now is extends back to 23 January 1762, when the San Lorenzo de la Santa Cruz Mission at present-day Camp Wood and Nuestra Senora de la Candaleria at present-day Montell were established by the Franciscan Spanish monks. With the establishment of these two old Spanish missions in the Nueces Canyon, the history of this section, including what is now Real, Edwards, Uvalde, Bandera, and Kerr counties, began to be recorded. It is practically impossible to write the history of any one of the counties without including a little of each of them inasmuch as

their colorful Indian war-time histories are so closely interwoven.

The Santa Cruz Mission was established at the request of the Lipan Indians. The bloodthirsty Comanches were warring upon the Lipan and other Indian tribes here. Lipan Chief Cabezon, located at El Canon on the east bank of the East Fork of the Nueces River in present Real County, sought protection and requested that the mission be established. The mission was founded by Franciscan Fathers Diego Ximenes, who was president of the Mission of the Rio Grande, and Joachin Banos together with the Spanish Captain Rabago and Lipan Chief Cabezon. It was some years before the mission was completed, during which time a garrison of twenty soldiers was placed near its site. This marked the very earliest attempt at settlement. San Lorenzo de la Cruz was short lived, both as a mission and as a presidio. In 1767, the services of the friars were judged unprofitable by Nicholas La Flora on his trip through El Canon. The Lipans were fickle and they were soon pursued to their new shelter. In 1769, the presidio was withdrawn farther to the southwest “ to San Fernando de Austria below the Rio Grande.

For almost a century following the abandonment of the mission, most of Nueces Canyon was occupied by warring Indian tribes. It was only rarely traversed by civilized wanderers and there is no record of any further attempts at settlement until the year 1857. The old mission, which was still standing at that time, was occupied as an army post by Lieutenant Hood, who changed the name to Camp Wood.

Camp Wood Postmaster Jim Gray, who located here in 1898, said that years ago he examined the old site, which had been a Texas Ranger camp following its abandonment as a government post, and identified seventeen foundations of old fort buildings. Gray located the old blacksmith shop and picked up a handful of old hand-forged nails, some of which he now keeps as souvenirs. He told of the old cemetery on the site where the Pope house now stands. Captain Cunningham is among those whose remains lie buried there. The government is negotiating with owners of the old mission site to get permission to erect a monument designating the spot.

During the Civil War Comanches raided Camp Wood, killing Albert Schwander's wife and capturing his little son and a little Mexican girl. Two years later Schwander heard of the children in Mexico and went there and bought them from a Mexican family to whom they had been sold by the Indians.

From 1857 until 1882, the country was only sparsely settled, but pioneers began to push forward and a substantial settlement became permanently established around the old army post. Some of those living in the settlement were John Blalock, Joseph Sinclair, Bob John, Jim Rhodes, Jack Cromains, Vance Walling, Bill Welch, Y. O. Coleman, Jerry Ellis, Bart Gorman, Vince Holt, and John Arnold (for whom Arnold Crossing is named). These pioneers were in the cattle business, running Texas Longhorns. Very few sheep and goats were found here. Breeding cattle had not started then; however, a few Hereford cattle were just beginning to be introduced into the country. Up until this period much trouble was encountered by Indians stealing cattle and horses.

The last Indian battle in this section of the country took place in the main Frio Canyon about seven miles above the town of Leakey on 19 April 1882. Mrs. McLarren and Allen Lease, a youth who lived with the McLarren family, were slain. It was about 2 pm when the Indians, who had been hiding on top of a cliff overlooking the valley and the home, swooped in for the raid while Mrs. McLarren and the children were working in their little garden. Allen Lease was killed, and Mrs. McLarren was left for dead. Her young daughter Maud, in an attempt to make her mother more comfortable, ran past the dead body of Allen and through bunch of Indians to secure a pillow, which she placed under the dying woman's head. It was strange that the Indians made no attempt to molest the child, who then ran for help. By the time help came at sundown, Mrs. McLarren was barely alive. She faintly asked for water, which was given, but within three minutes she was dead. Allen Lease, his face eaten off by the dogs,

was still lying at the foot of the hill where he fell.

Among the first recorded Indian battles in Nueces Canyon is one which occurred at Five Oaks ranch, five miles south of Camp Wood. This battle occurred in 1844 while Captain Hays and fourteen rangers, including Kit Adkland, Creed Taylor, Sam Berry, Noah Cherry, Mike Cheveliar, Tom Galbreath, and an Irish Ranger called Paddy, were scouting through the Canyon and stopped around noon to rest and rob a bee tree. Mr. Cherry, who was up in the tree, which is one of the five oaks and still has bees in it, saw the Comanches and gave the alarm. During the battle many of the Indians were killed as well as the Irish Ranger, who was the Rangers' only casualty. The old oak tree still bears the marks where the Rangers started cutting into it, the cut places having grown over with bark and having large knots where the cuts were made.

A battle at Bandera Pass took place in 1843, with five Rangers killed and six wounded as they fought the Comanches under Captain Jack Hays. Kit Adkland, one of the Rangers, killed the Comanche chief. A large number of Indians were also killed. Between thirty and forty Rangers, greatly outnumbered by the Comanches, took part in this battle.

Lafayette Monroe Pullen settled in 1876 in the Edwards County section of the area. He assigned in the burial of Mrs. Nick Coalson and her two small children, who were killed by the Indians at the Coalson place on 1 June 1879, one year after the death of Towser Coalson, who was killed by Indians the Coalson goat camp five miles from the head of Cedar Creek. There were no caskets; bodies were laid to rest wrapped in quilts. Fear of attracting nearby Indians dictated the type of funeral rite held. There were no songs, no audible prayers, and no service of any kind.

Real County was established by an act of the Legislature February 1913. Postmaster Jim Gray and Jim Grantland, both of Camp Wood, were members of the surveying crew. Real County was taken from the counties of Bandera, Edwards, and Kerr, and took its name from Julius Real, a prominent businessman of the section. The first county election was held in July 1913, at which time Leakey was named as the county seat. The first county officers were:

County Judge -- W. H. Carr

County Clerk -- John Burns

County Assessor -- Zack Eppler

County Treasurer -- Joe Haines

Sheriff -- Bud Huffman

Commissioners: J. H. Chisum, Precinct 1, Mr. Marshall, Precinct 2, George Fields, Precinct 3, George Burditt, Precinct 4

The area of Real County is 619 square miles.

According to the 1936 Texas Almanac, the population was 2,107, or 3.5 to the square mile.

The assessed valuation in 1935 was \$1,146,760.

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