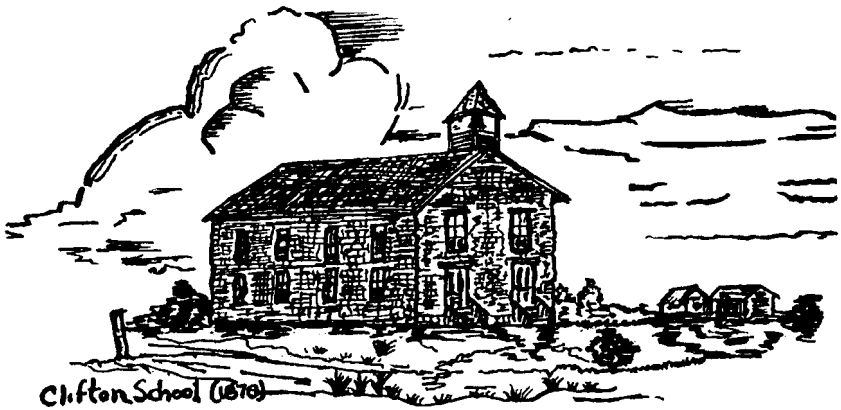




Old City Hall
Clifton

A History of
Bosque County
Texas

By
William C. Pool



Clifton School (1870)

Bosque County, Texas

William C. Pool

ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

William C. Pool



SAN MARCOS RECORD PRESS

San Marcos, 1954

TO
MARY RUTH AND HER
GRANDPARENTS

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By WILLIAM C. POOL

PREFACE

In 1904 the people of Bosque County gathered on the lawn of the old Emerson Hotel at Meridian to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the organization of the county. On this occasion two young Meridian attorneys—Hugh J. and Calvin M. Cureton—read a paper entitled *Sketch of the Early History of Bosque County*. This rare historical narrative was published by the *Meridian Tribune*. A half a century has passed since publication of the Cureton pamphlet; yet it remains the only printed work on the history of the county. In addition to the Cureton story, articles relative to the history of the lands along the Bosque have appeared from time to time in the newspapers of Texas and at least three research projects on Bosque subjects are buried deep in the unread manuscripts that represent theses for the Master of Arts degree at the University of Texas.

The intent of this study is to relate the history of the settlements in Bosque County between the years 1850 and 1954. After a summary of the geographical and geological features of the Bosque region, a brief background of the Sterling C. Robertson colony and early history of Milam County is presented as a background to the progress of the central Texas frontier. Permanent settlement in Bosque County dates from the year 1850, the year that Albert Barton and Ewell Everett brought their families to the hither edge of what was then McLennan County. Other pioneers followed Everett and Barton, the Norwegian migration came in 1854, and organization of the county followed. The Bosque region exhibited all of the elements of a frontier society for twenty years after the Civil War. The narrative that follows the discussion of the rebellion is primarily concerned with the political and economic growth of the agricultural society along the Bosque River and its tributaries. After a brief history of the towns and communities, the narrative closes with a summary of the military campaigns of the Bosque detachment of the 36th Division in the second World War.

A major portion of the history of Bosque County represents a condensation of the writer's thesis, "A History of Bosque County, Texas," which was accepted in 1946 as partial requirement for the degree of Master

of Arts at the University of Texas. The author is indebted to H. Bailey Carroll, Professor of History at the University of Texas, who directed the original research and gave encouragement to the publication project; to Oris E. Pierson of Clifton, Texas, whose encouragement through the years has been a constant source of inspiration; to the late Hugh J. Cureton, Meridian attorney, who furnished many of the primary sources for the history of the 1880's and 1890's; and to the late Henry D. Wintz of Meridian, who made the Jacob de Cordova papers available for study. I am deeply grateful to my wife, Sarah Jeannette, for her ready cooperation in the more arduous features of preparing the manuscript for publication.

San Marcos, Texas

WILLIAM C. POOL

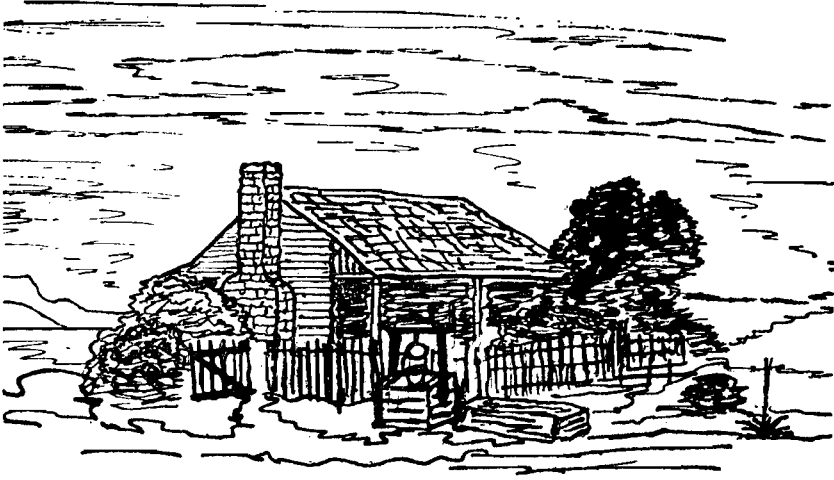
March 15, 1954

Contents

PART 1	
Background and Early Settlements.....	1
PART 2	
The Norwegian Episode	35
PART 3	
Growth and Development.....	49

Illustrations

MAPS OF BOSQUE COUNTY FOLLOWING PAGE 34



Part One

Background and Early Settlement

PART ONE
BACKGROUND AND EARLY SETTLEMENT

1

GEOLOGY

Bosque County is situated in North Central Texas on the Grand Prairie sub-division of the North Central Plains. The county is bordered by Erath, Somervell, and Johnson counties on the north, by Hamilton County on the west, by Coryell and McLennan counties on the south, and by Hill County on the east. The Brazos River, flowing southward to the Gulf of Mexico, forms a natural boundary between Bosque County and Hill County. Within these boundaries lies an enclosed area of 906.1 square miles or 579,909.5 acres.¹ In 1950 the lands of Bosque County supported a population of 11,836—a considerable decrease from the 1910 high of 19,013. This figure gives the county a relatively scattered population of approximately twelve persons per square mile and is a significant factor in the evolution of an agrarian culture.²

With the northwest corner of the county located on the ninety-eighth meridian, the Bosque region represents the typical transition area supporting a culture that is a combination of the cultures of the woodlands to the east and the semi-arid plains of western Texas. The early pioneers were in the process of leaving the woods and entering the lands that border on the Great Plains when they migrated to the North Central Texas region. They found that the hard soils and grass-covered prairies formed a natural highway extending through the central and eastern sections of Bosque County: a trail that had been used by the Indians of Texas before the coming of the white man and was to be used by the Spanish explorers of the eighteenth century, surveying and ranging parties of Texas pioneers, the Santa Fe Expedition of 1841, and still later by the cowboys of the Chisolm Trail era.

As has been noted before, the surface of Bosque County belongs to the Grand Prairie sub-division of the North Central Plains and is primarily an area of limestone soils. The name Grand Prairie was given to this region by Dr. Robert T. Hill, dean of Texas geologists, and is generally applied to that section of Texas bordered on the east by the Balcones Fault and on the west by the North Central Plains.³ The Grand Prairie is distinguished by multiple ranges of flat-topped hills or mesas separated by lowland areas of grass-covered prairies. Outcroppings of white limestone are characteristic of the region. The geology of the Grand Prairie

¹ General Land Office (Chart showing acreage of Texas Counties). *Texas Almanac* [1952] gives the area of Bosque County as 1003 square miles.

² *Texas Almanac* [1952-1953], 519.

³ R. T. Hill, "Geography and Geology of the Black and Grand Prairies, Texas," *Twenty-first Annual Report, United States Geological Survey, part VII*, 480; J. A. Udden and others, *Review of the Geology of Texas*, 19f.

region of Texas is adequately illustrated by the stratification of Johnson Peak, a 1300-foot elevation near Iredell in northwest Bosque County. Johnson Peak has a cap rock of fossiliferous, semi-crystalline Edwards limestone (once known as *Caprina* limestone). This limestone stratum, imbedded with deposits of flint, has resisted the erosion of centuries and gives a tableland appearance to Johnson Peak and the kindred hills.

Below the limestone cap rock of Johnson Peak there is a slope of chalky, cracked limestone known as the Comanche Peak formation from a stratum found on Comanche Peak in southern Hood County. These two limestone strata rest on a third layer known as the Walnut clays, a formation composing the level platform from which the mesas rise. The Walnut clays (also known as the Walnut prairies) are encircled by a fourth formation known as the Paluxy sands, a formation characterized by red, sandy soils and dense growths of timber. The lower slopes of the Johnson Peak profile include the stratum known as the Glen Rose formation. On the surface the Glen Rose formation is characterized by yellow clay marls, outcrops of sand, and deposits of limestone. The Trinity sands, once the shoreline of a great area, form the lowest stratum of the Cretaceous formations of Bosque County. These sands are buried beneath the surface of the central Texas counties and contribute to the tremendous underground water reservoir of the Texas artesian system.⁴

The geological stratification of the Grand Prairie region has resulted from an evolution involving the following stages:

(1) Water was present in the pores of rocks found in the Mesozoic sea. With the passing of time this water dissolved, was redeposited, and crystalized the structure of the chalk rocks. A hard, semi-marble substance was formed as the result of this process.

(2) The old sea bottom was then raised into land by a periodic upheaval of the earth. Layers of mud and silt were lifted along with the limestone deposits but the limestone formed the hardest section of the uplifted strata.

(3) Then erosion, resulting from the elements of weather, began to wear the land, continuing until the softer layers of soil and rock were washed away and the unyielding limestone cap rocks remained. Finally the limestone began to wear with the passing of time and the ever present process of erosion continued until only fragments of limestone deposits remain in West Central Texas.⁵ It is significant to note that with the exception of these limestone deposits, used extensively for building materials, Bosque County has no known mineral resources.

⁴ R. T. Hill, "The Flat-topped Mountains of West Central Texas which Were Once the Bottom of the Sea," *Dallas Morning News*, November 6, 1932, p. 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*

TOPOGRAPHY

Bosque County can be divided into four major topographical divisions, namely: (1) the Brazos River valley and Brazos drainage basin on the east, (2) the central prairies, also known as the Walnut prairies, (3) the Bosque River valley, and (4) the western hills of the Lampasas Cut Plain type. Each of these sections warrant detailed study and will be considered separately.

The sandy slopes of the Brazos River valley extend westward for a distance of ten to twelve miles from the right bank of the river. The valley has an indentation of 575 feet below the surrounding plain in the Kimball Bend region; the average depth of the valley is 400 feet. The Brazos basin is characterized by red sandy soil and growths of post oak, cedar and other trees native to the area. The alluvial lands nearest the river include some of the most desirable farms of the county, a feature partially nullified by the completion of Whitney Dam in 1951.⁶

The drainage system of the Brazos River includes the following small streams of eastern Bosque County, listed in order as they empty into the Brazos from north to south:

(1) Hill Creek, an intermittent stream, is formed in northeastern Bosque County by the confluence of the north and south forks of Hill Creek and flows southeast six miles to enter the Brazos River near the community of Brazos Point.

(2) Rock Creek, an intermittent stream, rises in northeastern Bosque County and flows northeast four miles to join the Brazos River near Brazos Point.

(3) Grass Creek, an intermittent stream, rises in northeastern Bosque County and flows northeast six miles into the Brazos River.

(4) Plowman Creek, an intermittent stream, rises in northeastern Bosque County and flows eight miles to join the Brazos.

(5) Steele Creek rises near Walnut Springs in northern Bosque County and flows east twenty-two miles to enter the Brazos River near the community of Steiner. Steele Creek was probably named for James S. Steele, who was granted land at the mouth of the creek on August 17, 1835. The stream appears in some of the early journals as Steel or Steel's Creek but modern geographers seem to prefer the name Steele.

(6) Cedron Creek, an intermittent stream, rises in central Bosque County near Pilot Knob and flows east eleven miles to join the Brazos River. This stream was known as "Cedral Creek" to George Wilkins Kendall and the Texas Santa Fe Expedition.

⁶ Whitney Dam, provided for by the Flood Control Act of 1945, was completed during the year 1951-1952 at a cost of approximately \$15,000,000. The reservoir will have a capacity of 2,017,000 acre-feet and the uses will include flood control, irrigation, municipal water supply, and power. *Texas Almanac* [1952-1953], 146.

(7) Rocky Creek, an intermittent stream, rises in eastern Bosque County and flows east seven miles into the Brazos River.

(8) Little Rocky Creek, an intermittent stream, rises in eastern Bosque County and flows east three miles to join the Brazos River.

(9) Coon Creek, an intermittent stream, rises in eastern Bosque County and flows northeast eight miles to empty into the Brazos River near Smith's Bend.

(10) Childers Creek, appearing on modern maps as *Childress* Creek, rises in central Bosque County and flows southeast twelve miles to join the Brazos River in northeast McLennan County. A study of early Texas maps tends to substantiate the belief that *Childress* Creek is a misnomer and that the stream was actually named for Captain Goulsby Childers, pioneer settler in Milam and Bell counties. As an Indian fighter, Goulsby Childers was a friend and companion to George Bernard Erath.⁷

The central prairie belt covers more than half of the surface of Bosque County and is found in the eastern section of the county between the Brazos and Bosque river basins. This extensive prairie region, composed of Walnut clays and black soil, is one of the most fertile farming and grazing sections of the county. Well drained by tributaries to the Brazos River, the eastern prairies were populated between the close of the Civil War and the year 1900 by settlers from Germany. In recent years large-scale ranching has made its appearance in this section of the county. In the extreme northeastern part of the prairie belt, the Powelldale Mountains (a chain of conical-shaped hills) rise from the grasslands to give the immediate vicinity a rough-appearing landscape.

The western hill section, including the valley of the Bosque River, extends from the river to the western boundary of the county. This region is composed of numerous ranges of flat-topped hills of the Lampasas Cut Plain type. These hills are generally covered with growths of scrub cedar and oak and are featured by the Edwards limestone cap rock of the Johnson and Comanche peak variety. Several of the western ranges have elevations ranging from 1000 to 1250 feet and are known as "mountains" by natives of the county. The Bosque hills are drained by the Bosque River drainage

⁷ Research reveals that "Childress" Creek appears as *Childers* Creek on the following maps: J. de Cordova's Map of the State of Texas, New York (Johnson and Browning), 1854 and 1856; Johnson's New Map of the State of Texas by Johnson and Ward, 1862; J. de Cordova's New Map of the State of Texas, 1849; and probably others. Dr. G. C. McGreagor in 1871 speaks of a journey to Childers Creek in Roger Norman Conger (ed.), "Journal of a Saddle Trip Through Central Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LV (October), 1951, 262f. By the year 1876 the spelling *Childers* appears as *Childress* on Colton's New Map of the State of Texas, New York (C. W. and C. B. Colton), 1876. Among others, Charles W. Pressler's Pocket Map of the State of Texas, Austin, Texas, 1879, completed the misnomer by listing the small Bosque stream as *Childress* Creek. The natives of Bosque County seem to say *Childers* Creek when speaking but they do not question the corrupt spelling.

Information concerning the streams of Bosque County is based on a study of the Reconnaissance Map, United States Geological Survey, Department of the Interior (Waco, Granbury, Cleburne, and Meridian sheets).

system. The Bosque River (listed on some maps as the North Bosque to distinguish it from the East, Middle, and South Bosque rivers) rises near Stephenville in central Erath County and flows southeast through Erath and Bosque counties to enter the Brazos River at Waco in McLennan County. In the early days the stream of settlers entered the Bosque River valley in central McLennan County and followed the stream to the northwest in search of new homes. The Bosque valley supports more people per square mile than any other section of the county. Four principal towns—Valley Mills, Clifton, Meridian, and Iredell—are located on or near the banks of this stream.

The Bosque River has the following tributaries, listed in order from northwest to southeast:

(1) North Mustang Creek, an intermittent stream, rises in southwestern Somervell County and flows south eight miles to enter the East Bosque River, tributary to the Bosque River, one mile north of Flat Top Mountain. The stream derives its name from the wild mustangs once common to the region.

(2) Rough Creek, an intermittent stream, rises in southwestern Somervell County and flows south for eight miles into the East Bosque near Flat Top Mountain.

(3) Flag Creek, an intermittent stream, rises in southeastern Erath County and flows east seven miles to join the East Bosque River northwest of Walnut Springs.

(4) East Bosque River rises in southeastern Erath County and flows southeast eighteen miles to its junction with the Bosque River near Pilot Knob.

(5) Duffau Creek rises in southern Erath County and flows southeast twelve miles to join the Bosque River west of Iredell.

(6) Spring Creek, an intermittent stream, rises in northwestern Bosque County and flows southeast twelve miles to join Meridian Creek. The stream was so named because of the many springs along its course.

(7) South Mustang Creek, an intermittent stream, rises in western Bosque County and flows southeast seven miles into Meridian Creek.

(8) Meridian Creek rises in eastern Hamilton County and flows east for twenty miles to join the Bosque River north of Clifton. Major George Bernard Erath named Meridian Creek because the stream was located near the ninety-eighth meridian.

(9) Gary Creek, an intermittent stream, rises near Sugarloaf Mountain in Western Bosque County and flows southeast for eight miles to join Neils Creek. Gary Creek was named for William Gary, pioneer settler along Neils Creek.

(10) Neils Creek rises in southeastern Hamilton County and flows east twenty-four miles to a junction with the Bosque River four miles north of Valley Mills. Neils Creek was one of the many streams named

by George B. Erath, probably in honor of Neil McLennan or Claiborne Neil, who accompanied Erath and others on an expedition along the Bosque River in 1837.

(11) Hog Creek rises in northeastern Coryell County and flows southeast twenty-six miles through southwestern Bosque County and northern McLennan County to empty into the South Bosque River about six miles west of Waco. This stream received its name from the wild hogs found along its course by Neil McLennan.⁸

3

CLIMATE

Bosque County has a mild climate characterized by long and dry summers. The average mean temperature is 70.6° Fahrenheit and the rainfall varies from twenty-five to thirty-five inches annually with an average of thirty-two inches.⁹ During the summer months, hot winds cause considerable damage to the crops of Bosque County. January and February are the coldest months of a short winter. During the winter months infrequent freezes result from typical Texas "northers" that vary in intensity from the mild cold fronts of early autumn to the strong north winds that bring extremely cold weather into Texas from December through March. Light snow and sleet often accompany the "norther" into the central Texas region.¹⁰

4

PLANT AND ANIMAL LIFE

The territory included within the boundaries of Bosque County borders the Western Cross Timbers on the northwest and lies within the Black Prairie and Edwards Plateau vegetational zones. Post oak, black-jack, live oak, cedar, and mesquite are the prevailing timbers. Wide stretches of mesquite cover the lowlands. The slopes of the flat-topped hills, on the other hand, are covered with a growth of cedar and scrub live oak blended with scattered groves of Spanish oak, pin oak, shin oak, post oak, burr oak, red oak, yaupon, and redbud. The alluvial soils of the river bottoms support dense growths of pecan, American elm, cottonwood, ash, sycamore, river birch, and a variety of the oak species.¹¹

All of the grasses of the Grand and Black prairies abound in Bosque County. The most common of these grasses include Big and Little Blue-stem, both vigorous, long-lived bunch grasses of the *Andropogon* species;

⁸ Reconnaissance Maps, United States Geological Survey (Waco, Cleburne, Granbury, and Meridian sheets).

⁹ *Texas Almanac* [1945-1946], 141,423.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Texas Almanac* [1945-1956], 135, 156; Benjamin Carroll Tharp, *The Vegetation of Texas*, 14 (hereafter cited as Tharp, *Vegetation of Texas*).

Grama grasses (both side oats and blue grama); and Buffalograss. Sections of the Walnut prairies, as well as the slopes of the river valleys, are covered by vine-mesquite. Rescuegrass and Bermuda-grass are common in the arable sections of the county while Johnsongrass is universally prevalent.¹²

During the spring months the broad prairies and flat-topped hills of Bosque County are covered by a colorful assortment of wild flowers. The mountain flowers include the redbud, mountain laurel, Indian paintbrush, mountain daisies, yucca, mountain pinks, and prickly pear. The prairies and river valleys, on the other hand, are blanketed with a growth of fox-glove, mints, winecups, squaw weeds, pink and white primroses, prickly poppies and thistles, buckeye, wild plum, black-eye Susans, nigger-head, golden rod, dandelions, and the Texas bluebonnet.¹³

In concluding the brief discussion of plant resources, it is significant to note that the character of native vegetation common to the Bosque territory has undergone a noticeable change since the 1890's. As the Bosque lands were occupied by settlers, native grasses were plowed under and large sections of land put under cultivation. Trees were felled for houses and fences. In many instances grass was eliminated entirely by erosion and overgrazing. These factors, combined with the construction of roads and other barriers to the prairie fires that had aided materially in cleaning the prairie, have led to the spread of brush (especially cedar and mesquite) over what was once level grasslands. As this process continued, scrub timber overran large areas and the soil began to wash with each rain of the season. As a result, perennial streams such as Neils Creek, Meridian Creek, Childers Creek, and Cedron Creek became intermittent while other smaller streams were turned into dry branches.

The game animals of the Bosque area include the red fox and an increasing number of deer. Squirrel, racoon, opossum, and armadillo are abundant in the woodlands along the rivers and creeks. The rabbit family is well represented by the cottontail and the jackrabbit or hare. Due to the unrelenting pressure of stockmen, the wolf, coyote, and bobcat (once numerous in Bosque County) are now almost totally extinct. Snakes are numerous, including three poisonous species—the rattlesnake, cottonmouth moccasin, and copperhead. Of these deadly reptiles, the rattlesnake is most common, wintering in the crevices of the limestone hills and roaming the fields during the summer months.

¹² *Grass Yearbook of the Department of Agriculture*, 1948, 639-693; Tharp, *Vegetation of Texas*, 14.

¹³ Tharp, *Vegetation of Texas*, 14; Eula Whitehouse, *Texas Flowers in Natural Colors*.

INDIAN TRIBES

Before permanent settlement, the territory along the Bosque River was occupied by three Indian tribes—the Caddo, the Tonkawa, and the Tawakoni. Of these primary tribes, the Tonkawas, referred to as “Tonks” by the pioneers, were the most numerous. They lived in skin tents (tipis) and followed the bison; also hunting deer, antelope, and other smaller animals. Therefore, their wanderings carried them over greater central Texas but they were most frequently found between the Brazos and Colorado rivers and north of the old San Antonio Road. The Indians of the High Plains (Comanches and Apaches) despised the shiftless Tonkawas and classed them as ill-natured vagabonds, petty thieves, and, worse still, cannibals. To avoid attack from the west became paramount with the Tonkawa tribes and the pioneers of central Texas found them frequently on the move. The Tonkawa braves were subsequently used as guides or spies for detachments of frontier troops in pursuit of the Comanches or other plains tribes.¹⁴

The Tawakoni Indians were found along the Brazos and Trinity rivers and occasionally in the Bosque territory. Like the Tonkawas, the Tawakonis were enemies to the Apache and Comanche tribes and were generally friendly to the Texans. Their importance in the early history of Bosque County resulted from an association between the early settlers and the Waco tribe, a sub-division of the Tawakoni group that located along the banks of the Brazos River near present Waco. To be specific, both the Tonkawa and Tawakoni tribes were sub-divisions of the larger Caddo group and, except for occasional depredations, did not molest the pioneer settler.¹⁵

In contrast to the friendly Indians of Central Texas, the Comanche warrior (a native of the Great Plains) was the dread of every frontier settler. These wild Indians roamed the lands adjacent to the headwaters of the Colorado, Brazos, and Red rivers, where they depended largely on the buffalo to support their nomadic existence. These western tribes were a menace to the security of the settlers from the time of the Spanish missionary and *conquistador* to the close of the 1870's.

BACKGROUND TO SETTLEMENT

Although it is not the purpose of this study to present a detailed history of the Sterling C. Robertson colony and the old Milam Land District, the background to the settlements along the Brazos and Bosque rivers to the north of Waco village is both necessary and essential for

¹⁴ Frederick W. Hodge (ed.), *Handbook of the American Indians North of Mexico*, II, 778f (hereafter cited as Hodge, *Handbook*).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 701, 887.

a proper understanding of subsequent events. Bosque County received its name from the Bosque River, a stream that was probably named by members of the Marquis de Aguayo expedition that journeyed from San Antonio de Bexar to the Spanish missions of East Texas in the year 1721. Historical records seem to indicate that the Aguayo group abandoned the old San Antonio Road in favor of a more northerly route to East Texas. Their choice of a new trail carried them to the dense timber area at the confluence of the Brazos and Bosque rivers. The wooded section near the junction of the two streams prompted the Spanish to name the smaller water-course the "Rio Bosque."¹⁶

After the Aguayo expedition, the Bosque region passed unnoticed in the stream of history until the period of the filibustering expeditions from the United States into Spanish territory west of the Sabine River. One of the more important of the filibusters to become interested in Spanish Texas was Philip Nolan, an adventurer and trader from the area around Natchez, Mississippi. Although his interest in the Black and Grand prairie region of Texas covers the fifteen-year period from 1785 to 1800, Nolan's last and most noted expedition left Natchez, Mississippi, in October, 1800, with the grass-covered prairies of Central Texas as its primary objective. The Nolan group consisted of some twenty men, among them Ellis P. Bean, Mordici Richards, John Adams, Robert Ashley, Joseph Reed, six other Americans, five Spaniards, and a negro named Caesar.¹⁷ The Nolan expedition crossed northeastern Texas and reached the Brazos River near the mouth of Noland's Creek in northwestern Hill County. They explored the surrounding prairies from their camp on Noland's River, reporting "plenty of deer and elk, some buffalo, and wild horses by the thousands."¹⁸ The expedition met a tragic end on March 21, 1801, when they were surprised by the arrival of 150 Spanish troops. In the battle that followed, Nolan was killed and the remainder of his command surrendered; the Americans were then marched to Nacogdoches, thence to San Antonio, and finally to prison in Mexico. The Marquis de Aguayo and Philip Nolan expeditions into Central Texas are significant because of the place names that had their origin at this early date.

A more direct approach to the territory west of the Brazos River came when fifty-two businessmen of Nashville, Tennessee, organized a land company known as the Texas Association on March 2, 1822. The company sent Robert Leftwich and Andrew Irwin to Mexico City to make application for a grant of land in Texas. After a three-year delay, the Mexican government approved the request, but in the name of Robert Leftwich instead of the company that he represented. In 1826 the Texas

¹⁶ Eleanor Claire Buckley, "The Aguayo Expedition into East Texas, 1719-1721," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XV, 33.

¹⁷ Henderson Yoakum, *History of Texas, 1685-1846*, I, 111f, contains a detailed account of the Nolan expedition and the memoirs of Ellis P. Bean.

¹⁸ Maurine Theresa Wilson, *Philip Nolan and His Activities in Texas*, Mss. (unpublished Master's thesis), Library, University of Texas.

Association ceased to exist, being replaced by an organization known as the Nashville Company. Dr. Felix Robertson and Sterling C. Robertson soon set out for Texas at the head of a group of thirty explorers. On October 15, 1827, the government of Mexico awarded the Nashville Company a new contract to colonize the area north of the old San Antonio Road between the watershed of the Brazos and Colorado rivers on the west to "the belt of Oaks east of the Brazos which run north from Hueco village known as the 'big forest' and in English as the 'cross timbers'," hence to the "heights that divide the waters of the rivers Brazos and Trinity," and finally down the Navasota River to its junction with the old San Antonio Road.¹⁹

During the next three years (1827-1830), the Nashville Company failed to establish a single colonist on their Texas grant. A short time before the terms of the original contract were to expire in 1830, Sterling C. Robertson and Alexander Thompson formed a sub-company for the purpose of introducing three hundred settlers to their Texas lands. The two ambitious empresarios ran into additional difficulty, however, when the colonization law of April 6, 1830, abrogated Anglo-American migration to Texas. Robertson then asked Stephen F. Austin for help and influence in Mexico City and the already confused status of the so-called Robertson colony became more confused when Austin obtained title to the lands that had been in possession of the Nashville Company, Robertson, and Thompson. After much argument and ill feeling between Robertson and Austin, the territory was finally restored to Robertson. In 1835 Juan Alamonte recorded in his report on Texas that to the northwest of San Felipe "there is a colony under the administration of a certain Robertson. This same colony used to be in charge of Austin."²⁰

The first town in the Robertson colony was Sarahville de Viesca, also known as Viesca and Fort Milam, situated on the west bank of the Brazos near the falls of the river in present Falls County; Viesca was established in 1834. The following year Nashville-on-the-Brazos was surveyed and established on the west bank of the river upstream from the crossing of the old San Antonio Road. Nashville, located on a bluff high above the river, soon became the leading town of the colony. Port Sullivan was established in 1839 north of the junction of Little and Brazos Rivers. Nashville and Port Sullivan became temporary stops for many settlers on their way to McLennan and Bosque counties.²¹

The convention at Washington-on-the-Brazos in March, 1836, changed the name of the territory between the Navasota and Colorado Rivers from

¹⁹ Translation of Empresario Contracts, General Land Office.

²⁰ Juan Alamonte, "Statistical Report on Texas, 1835," translated by C. E. Castanada, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XVIII, 198; Eugene C. Barker, *The Life of Stephen F. Austin*, 330f; *The Niles Register*, XXIX, 402.

²¹ Katherine B. Henderson, *An Early History of Milam County*, Mss. (unpublished Master's thesis), Library, University of Texas; Eighth United States Census, Population Schedule, Milam County, Texas (hereafter referred to as Census of 1850).

the municipality of Milam (known as the municipality of Viesca under Mexican rule) to Milam County. In 1837 the territory was divided into two sections with the creation of Robertson County east of the Brazos River. Between 1837 and 1840 several new families arrived in the area around Port Sullivan, Nashville, and Cameron. W. W. Oxsheer, pioneer settler on Little River near present Cameron, recalled that:

There were at that time in Milam County, prior to the arrival of himself and his uncle, William Wilson, Josiah Turnham, Shapley P. Ross, Daniel Munroe, Giles O. Sullivan, John and William Thompson, and their widowed sister, Mrs. Frazier, Mat Jones and Dad Anders. All of these lived near the present town of Cameron. At old Nashville lived John Beal, W. D. Thompson, Daniel Cullins, and C. C. Bowles. At Port Sullivan lived A. W. Sullivan and John C. Pool. There may have been another family or two in these settlements or in other parts of the country but I have mentioned all that I can remember when I came here in 1842.²²

Of course there were other families in the Milam country by the year 1842. Neil McLennan brought his family to Pond Creek in 1837, Benjamin Bryant resided at Bryant's Station on Little River, George B. Erath had been in the Nashville vicinity since 1837, and Goulsby Childers had been a resident of Nashville and Three Forks since 1839-1840. Other families resided on the San Gabriel River in southern Milam County.²³

The residents of Milam County in the early 1840's are typical of a large number of pioneer settlers that can be classified as "ordinary Texans" since they held neither high public office nor military positions of great importance. Their primary contribution to Texas history lies in the fact that they "built cabins and cleared up a few acres to plant corn," served as Indian scouts and fighters on an otherwise unprotected frontier, and surveyed the lands to the west. John C. (Jonathan) Pool, resident of Nashville and Port Sullivan, 1838-1853, personifies this breed of frontiersman. A native of Texas, John C. Pool was born somewhere in the Department of Nacogdoches of Spanish Texas on November 19, 1818. He spent his childhood on the Texas-Louisiana frontier, served in Captain Michael Costley's company of rangers "raised under the order of Genl. Sam Houston" from September to December, 1836, and (accompanied by his mother, Nancy Roberts) moved to Milam County in the year 1834 to settle at old Nashville. On February 4, 1838, John C. Pool appeared before the "board of Land Commissioners for the County of Milam and proved according to law that he was born in the Republic and was 17 years old at the Declaration of Independence;" hence, being a single man,

²² L. W. Kemp, "Early Days in Milam County: Reminiscences of Susan Turnham McCown," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, L, 367.

²³ Olive T. Walker, "Esther Amanda Sherrill Cullins," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XLVII, 234f; *The Papers of Mirabeau Bonaparte Lamar* (edited by C. A. Gulick, Katherine Elliott, and Harriet Smither), 6 vol., contains a wealth of source material on the Milam frontier, 1836-1845.

he was entitled to and received "one third of a League of Land on the Rio Bosque." It can be assumed, therefore, that he had been in the Bosque territory prior to the year 1838.

Johnathan Pool's military service to the Republic of Texas included three months during the spring of 1839 as a private in George B. Erath's company of Texas Rangers; other names appearing on the muster roll include John Beal, Daniel Cullins, and Neil McLennan. On April 12, 1840, Pool married Caroline Lane and settled at Nashville, where his success as a farmer and stockraiser is evidenced by the fact that he furnished five beeves and 110 pounds of pork to General Edwin Morehouse and Colonel F. A. B. Wheeler for their expeditions up the Brazos against the Indians in 1840-1841. In 1841 the Pool family moved to a 662-acre tract of land at the junction of Little and Brazos rivers at Port Sullivan. Here John C. Pool continued farming and stock raising until his death on January 7, 1853. Charles Goodnight recalled that in 1848 he hired to John Poole [Pool] "a farmer and stock raiser, a very kind and noble man . . . the only man who ever gave me any good advice when I was a boy." Pool's intention to settle on his Bosque valley land ended with his early death.²⁴

During the years between 1830 and 1835, the lands along the Brazos River were explored as far north as the confluence of the Brazos and Nolands rivers. More extensive explorations were made, however, during the years following the Texas Revolution. Between the years 1837 and 1839 numerous small surveying parties and Indian scouts proceeded up the Brazos beyond the line of settlement and into the region of the North Bosque River and Comanche Peak. The Army Papers of the Republic of Texas reveal that several such expeditions were led by George B. Erath, who visited the area around Waco (including an Indian scout to the headwaters of the Bosque River) in 1837 and noted that the location would be an excellent site for a town. In the spring of the same year (1837), Thomas H. Barron and a battalion of rangers established Fort Fisher at Waco Spring. Although Fort Fisher was occupied only three weeks, it was a significant factor in the opening of lands around the Brazos and Bosque rivers.

Concerning Erath's scout to the headwaters of the Bosque in 1837, Frank Brown, pioneer Nashville resident, recalls that on reaching the Bosque, Erath and his men "were so impressed with the beauty of the country that they commenced taking up the rich land" and that these surveys were the "first locations made in the [Bosque] valley." Erath's small group continued surveying "until famine forced them home." A study of the land map of

²⁴Information on the life of this early Texas pioneer can be found in the Tom M. Pool Papers, Archives, University of Texas Library; Public Debt Papers, Archives, Texas State Library; Muster Rolls, 1838-1843, Archives, Texas State Library, Book of Muster Rolls, p. 164, General Land Office; Census of 1850, Milam County; and J. Evetts Haley, *Charles Goodnight, Cowman and Plainsman*, 8.

Bosque County reveals that Erath was probably accompanied by John McLennan, Claiborne Neill, Anson Darniel, John C. Pool, and W. H. King.²⁵

The northern frontier of Milam County was stabilized in 1844 when George Barnard located Torrey's Trading House on a tributary to Tehucana Creek about eight miles below Waco.²⁶ The lands of McLennan County were settled between 1845 and 1850; the town of Waco was surveyed in 1849, and McLennan County was created by legislative act in 1850. In the meantime, the territory along the banks of the North Bosque River had been explored and surveyed through the efforts of George Bernard Erath and his assistants, Neil McLennan and Lowry Hampton Scrutchfield. Meridian Creek and Meridian Knobs were named by Erath as early as 1837.²⁷

During the year 1841, the Texan Santa Fe Expedition crossed the Bosque territory en route from Brushy Creek near Austin to Santa Fe, New Mexico. The hardships of travel through the central Texas region are described by George Wilkins Kendall in his *Narrative of the Santa Fe Expedition*. According to the Kendall account, the members of the expedition saw their first antelope between the South and Middle Bosque rivers, forded the main Bosque with some difficulty near the present Eichleburger Crossing in McLennan County, and entered the confines of Bosque County proper a considerable distance east of Valley Mills at a point "between Willow Creek, a tributary of Childers Creek, and the cedar brakes of the Brazos."²⁸ Following the level grasslands across the prairies of eastern Bosque County, the expedition crossed the headwaters of Coon Creek and continued northward to cross Cedron Creek, Steele Creek "about six miles east of the present town of Morgan," and departed from the Bosque territory by way of the Powell-dale Mountains and Kimball Bend.²⁹ In describing the scenery of north-eastern Bosque County, Kendall writes that:

The location upon which we were encamped being in the edge of the timber, with rich prairie directly in front of us, was one of the finest we had yet met on our route. The valley of the Brazos at this place abounded with

²⁵ Army Papers [Republic of Texas], Archives, Texas State Library; Lucy A. Erath, "Memoirs of George B. Erath," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XXVII, 146f; Roger N. Conger, *Highlights of Waco History*, 25f; Frank Brown, "Nashville: The Ancient Capitol of Robertson's Colony and Milam County," *Proceedings Fifth Annual Reunion of Old Settlers Association of Bell County* [1904], 56.

²⁶ Torrey's Trading House in McLennan County, so designated because it was officially authorized by a law of the Republic of Texas, January 14, 1843, was actually one in a series of trading posts established by the firm of David, John, and Thomas Torrey of Houston. Other stores were established by the Torrey brothers at New Braunfels, on the Navasota River, and at the Falls of the Brazos (Viesca). In 1848 George Barnard bought out the Torrey interest in the McLennan County store and went into business for himself.

²⁷ Dorothy Waites Renick, "This Place We Call Home: A Serial History of Waco and McLennan County," *Waco Times-Herald*, March 9, 1924; Lucy A. Erath, "Memoirs of George B. Erath," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XXVII, 146f; *Waco Tribune-Herald*, October 30, 1949 (Centennial edition), I, col. 2.

²⁸ George Wilkins Kendall, *Narrative of the Santa Fe Expedition*, I, 90ff; H. Bailey Carroll, *The Texan Santa Fe Trail*, 44-59 (Hereafter cited as Kendall, *Narrative*, and Carroll, *The Santa Fe Trail*).

²⁹ Carroll, *The Santa Fe Trail*, 49f.

every species of timber known in Texas; grapes, plums, and other fruit were found in profusion; honey could be obtained in almost every hollow tree; trout and other fish were plentiful in the small creeks in the neighborhood and the woods and prairies about us not only afforded excellent grazing for our cattle and horses, but teemed with every species of game—elk, deer, bears, wild turkeys, and at the proper season, buffalo and mustang.³⁰

In the spring of 1849 the Texas frontier was further stabilized by the establishment of a system of frontier defense that included military establishments at Fort Graham, an outpost on "the east bank of the Brazos River at the old Waco Indian village of Jose Maria . . . [that] was named for William M. Graham, who was killed in the battle of Molino del Rey in 1847," and Fort Gates on "the north bank of the Leon River above Coryell Creek."³¹ Fort Graham was garrisoned by Companies F and I of the 2nd Dragoons on March 27, 1849, and Fort Gates by a cantonment of troops under the command of William Montgomery on October 26, 1849. Since these posts furnished a degree of protection against the western Indian tribes, they were significant factors in the settlement of Bosque County. Also during 1849 William Whiting, Lieutenant, Topographical Engineers, surveyed and established a military road connecting Fort Graham and Fort Gates; a route from the Hog Creek area to the mouth of Steele Creek that was known by the name "military road" during the early years of Bosque County.

On March 1, 1849, the village of Waco, McLennan County, was surveyed by George B. Erath. The town square was laid off and "the lots on both sides" of Main Street sold for \$5.00 per lot. Among the crowd gathered for the occasion were Shapley Ross, Neil McLennan, and Lowry H. Scrutchfield. McLennan County was created by legislative act in 1850, the year that the first pioneer settlers pushed northward along the Bosque and Brazos rivers into the territory that would eventually become Bosque County.

Two of the most significant pioneers in the development of the central Texas frontier were never permanent settlers in Bosque County. Nevertheless George Bernard Erath and Neil McLennan are significant to the history of the territory and deserve special mention. George B. Erath (1813-1891) was born in Vienna, Austria, educated at the Polytechnic Institute of Vienna, and migrated to America in 1833. He came to Texas the following year, settling at Tenoxtitlan in Robertson's colony where he began his work as a surveyor. Erath joined John H. Moore's ranger force in 1835 and in 1836 he took part in the battle of San Jacinto as a member of Jesse Billingsley's volunteer battalion. At the close of the Texas revolution, Erath returned to Robertson's colony and settled at Nashville-on-the-Brazos. During the years 1837 and 1838, he was active in the frontier militia at Fort Milam, Bryant's Station, and Nashville. As a soldier and surveyor, George Bernard Erath introduced scores of settlers to the lands along the South, Middle, and North Bosque rivers. In 1851 he moved to the new village of Waco and con-

³⁰ Kendall, *Narrative*, I, 102-103.

³¹ *The Handbook of Texas*, I, 625-626.

tinued his surveying along the Texas frontier. As a member of the Eighth and Ninth Congresses of the Republic of Texas, 1843-1845, and the First Legislature in 1846, George B. Erath was one of the best known and best loved men of his age. His significance in the history of central Texas cannot be overestimated.

Neil McLennan (1787-1867) was born on the Isle of Skye, Scotland, and came to America in 1801 to settle first in North Carolina and later in Florida. In 1835 the Neil McLennan family, accompanied by the families of John and Laughlin McLennan, his brothers, purchased a small schooner at Pensacola and sailed to Texas. Landing at the mouth of the Brazos River, the McLennans continued up the stream until their boat struck a snag and sank near Fort Bend. The families then continued overland to the northern frontier of Milam County, where they settled on Pond Creek. During the winter of 1837 the Indians killed Laughlin McLennan, his wife, and his mother and captured his three children. John McLennan was killed in another Indian attack in 1838. Neil McLennan, an experienced Indian fighter and surveyor, moved to the South Bosque River in 1845 and established the home where he lived until his death in 1867.

7

EARLY SETTLERS ALONG THE BOSQUE

According to earlier historians of Bosque County, the soldiers returning from the war between the United States and Mexico carried into north and east Texas the news of a "beautiful land on the west of the Brazos River, and northwest of Waco; where rich valleys . . . lay between hills of Alpine beauty."³² As Roger Norman Conger writes in his *Highlights of Waco History*, "firsts in anything are of interest, and particularly in the field of history." With this statement in mind, it is significant to note that the families of Albert Barton and Ewell Everett were the first permanent settlers within the boundaries of present Bosque County. Albert Barton came to the Bosque territory in 1850 to establish a home near the confluence of Steele Creek and the Brazos River where he operated a ferry across the Brazos until he drowned in the river in the fall of 1850. Ewell Everett also arrived in the county during the year 1850 and established a homestead near the present town of Valley Mills. Another pioneer of the Steele Creek-Brazos River area was R. S. (Sam) Barnes, who migrated to the region from Tennessee and Milam County during the year 1850. After Barton's tragic death, Barnes married the widow Barton and lived near the junction of Steele Creek and the Brazos until his untimely death as the commander of a company of Texas State Troops in the battle of Dove Creek.

³²H. J. and C. M. Cureton, *Sketch of the Early History of Bosque County*, 3 (hereafter cited as Cureton and Cureton, *Bosque County*); *Waco Tribune-Herald*, October 30, 1949, p. 22.

During the year 1850 the Universal Immigration Company of England purchased 27,000 acres of land along the upper Brazos and soon dispatched thirty families (about 125 persons) to Texas to launch the so-called colony of Kent. The English immigrants arrived at Galveston in the fall of 1850 to begin a long overland journey to central Texas. In January, 1851, they founded the town of Kent at the foot of an elevation known as Solomon's Nose on the west bank of the Brazos River at Kimball Bend. Sir Edward Belcher, leader of the group, attempted to interest other settlers in his project but his efforts were futile. Hardships of the frontier proved too much for the adventurous English and the town of Kent was abandoned in 1852.⁸³

In the meantime other permanent settlers established homes in the Bosque territory. During the years 1851 and 1852, the families of Lowry Hampton Scrutchfield, J. K. Helton, William Gary, Jasper Mabray [also spelled Mabry in many early documents], William McCurry, and F. M. Gandy settled in the Bosque River valley. The fall and winter of 1852-1853 brought the families of Frank M. Kell, Samuel S. Locker, John Thomas, William R. Sedberry, and A. C. Pearce to the Bosque region. The pioneers listed above were a part of the relatively small group that can be called the "founding fathers" of the new county. It will be noted by the reader that the Norwegian pioneers (leaders such as Kleng Peerson, Ole Ween, Jens Ringness, Ole Canuteson and others) have been omitted at this point in the narrative. The Norwegian settlement in the hills of western Bosque County is of such great significance to the subsequent history of the county that a separate section will be devoted to the story.

Lowry Hampton Scrutchfield (1824-1900) was born in the Ayish Bayou district of the department of Nacogdoches, the son of pioneer parents from Tennessee that migrated to Texas prior to the James Long expedition of 1819. After spending his childhood in East Texas, Scrutchfield followed his mother and half-brothers (John C. Pool and William and Thomas Roberts) to Nashville-on-the-Brazos sometime during the spring of 1834. He grew to manhood on the frontier of the Sterling C. Robertson grant, living in the homes of John C. Pool at Port Sullivan and Neil McLennan on Pond Creek. McLennan taught Scrutchfield the art of surveying and between the years 1840 and 1850 Scrutchfield followed the surveying parties of George Bernard Erath, Neil McLennan, and others northward along the Brazos River and its tributaries.

After assisting Erath in the surveying of Waco in 1849, Lowry Scrutchfield remained in McLennan County long enough to marry Nancy Proffitt in 1851. He came to the Bosque territory as a permanent settler sometime during the year 1851 or 1852 and established a home on the east bank of the Bosque River a short distance north of the present town of Valley Mills. Lowry Hampton Scrutchfield became a leader in the exploration, early settlement, and political organization of Bosque County. After serving as chief

⁸³ Dorothy Waites Renick, "The City of Kent," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XXIX, 51; Cureton and Cureton, *Bosque County*, 3.

justice from 1854 to 1858, he played a leading role in the Bosque militia companies of the Texas State Troops during the years of the Civil War. A colorful figure in his later years, Scrutchfield was the personification of a frontiersman who preferred his coonskin cap and buckskin jacket long after his section of Texas had attained the advantages of a settled society.³⁴

J. K. (Joe) Helton (1817-1906), another pioneer of the Bosque region, was born in White County, Tennessee, and came to Texas in 1842 to settle in Rusk County. He later moved to Harrison and McLennan counties before coming to the Bosque territory in 1853. Another leader in the early years of the new county, Helton began a serious study of law after his election as county judge in 1862 and was admitted to the bar in 1867. Joe Helton represented the Bosque district in the House of Representatives of the Texas Legislature, 1874-1876, and again served as county judge from 1876 until 1880. Retiring from public life in 1880, he practiced law at Meridian until his death.³⁵

Frank M. Kell, a pioneer settler on the Bosque River near present Clifton, was born in Warren County, Indiana, April 21, 1832. Kell came to Texas with his parents in 1838 and resided in Anderson and Bell counties before migrating to Bosque County in 1854. He returned to the Columbia Anna Church community of Bell County to marry Sarah Potter in 1854; Kell then brought his bride to his tract of land on the Bosque River.

A pioneer settler in southern Bosque County, W. S. Barnett was born May 11, 1842, in Ohio County, Kentucky, the son of Dr. Alexander Montgomery and Martha (Timmonds) Barnett. The Barnett family came to Texas in 1851 and settled at Waco, where the elder Barnett practiced medicine until he preempted a section of land near Valley Mills. For many years Dr. Alexander M. Barnett was the only practicing physician between Cleburne and Waco; he died in the year 1892. W. S. Barnett grew to manhood on the Bosque frontier, served as a member of George Bernard Erath's Company of minute men in the year 1859, and joined J. W. Sedberry's Company of the 15th Texas Volunteer Infantry during the Civil War. Barnett married Nannie T. Odle on January 18, 1866, and resided in Bosque County for the remainder of his life.

Primary information is fragmentary concerning other pioneer families that migrated to the Bosque territory prior to the organization of the county in 1854. Jasper N. Mabray, a native of Alabama, a veteran of the Mexican War, and Indian fighter, settled on the east bank of the Bosque River below the confluence of Neils Creek sometime during the year 1852. About the

³⁴ Nacogdoches Archives, Library of the University of Texas; Valley Mills *Tribune* (undated newspaper clippings in the possession of Mrs. L. H. Raley, Valley Mills, Texas); Tom M. Pool Papers, Archives, Library of the University of Texas; Journal and Account Book of Lowry Hampton Scrutchfield (in possession of Mrs. Pete Rowe, Hillsboro, Texas).

³⁵ *History of Texas, Supplemented . . . With Biographical Sketches of Many of the Leading Families of Central Texas*, Chicago (Lewis Publishing Company), p. 489 (hereafter cited as *Biographies of Central Texans*).

same time William Gary built his cabin on the west bank of the Bosque a short distance above the mouth of Neils Creek and claimed the distinction of being "the upper settler on the Bosque" during the year 1852. Other members of the Gary clan settling in the same region prior to 1854 included Matt Gary, Gaffey Gary, and Isaac Gary. Besides his vocation as a farmer, Isaac Gary organized a small school for the children of the lower Bosque River valley and had the distinction of being one of the first, if not the first, school teachers in the new territory.

William McCurry, a native of South Carolina, settled on Neils Creek several miles west of the Bosque River settlements, and Samuel Locker, who was born in North Carolina, located in the Bosque River valley near the lands of Frank M. Kell. Other neighbors of Kell and Locker included the families of Monroe Locker and T. A. McSpadden. John Thomas settled near Hog Creek in the southwestern corner of Bosque County and A. C. Pearce resided in the Bosque River valley before moving to the new town of Meridian to become a merchant and tavern keeper.

Other heads of families arriving in the Bosque territory prior to 1854 included James Mabray, Lum McCurry, Archabal (Archie) Kell, J. P. Locker, Nathaniel Morgan, Captain C. B. Underhill, Israel B. Standifer, Presley Bryant, and possibly others.

In the summer of 1852, Ole Canuteson, a pioneer Norwegian settler in Texas, left north Texas on a journey down the Brazos to the lands adjacent to the Bosque River. In an account of conditions in the Bosque territory, Canuteson reported that:

In the summer of August, 1852, I started out [from Dallas County] with a man by the name of Bryant, to search for vacant land, the Legislature having just passed an act donating 320 acres to actual settlers.

The waters of the Bosque was the objective point, and at Fort Graham, then a military post where soldiers were stationed, we took the military road leading to Fort Gates, on the Leon. On approaching the Bosque on the north side from where the town of Valley Mills now stands, [we] found shelter and hospitality at the house of the then well known pioneer settler Jewell [Ewell] Everett. Next morning his son, Francis, went with us up the Bosque valley, and when we reached the place where, later on, the old town of Clifton was started, and about 100 yards from where the store house built by W. T. Kemp now stands, we overtook three men eating their lunch. They were L. H. Scrutchfield, Jasper Mabry, and a man by the name of Bell, brother-in-law of Mabry, that had just come from east Texas to prospect for land on the Bosque.

We kept up the stream and crossed Meridian Creek to the north side of the Bosque and fixed our camp for the night, close to the spot where Meridian was afterward located. We found a bee tree and killed a turkey and had quite a feast that night. In the morning we returned down the valley and some distance below where Clifton now is, Bryant and I parted company with them. They went to their homes down the Bosque and we went over to William McCurry's, who had just settled on Neill's Creek on a place known later as the Conway place.

Mr. [William] McCurry had just been out with a surveying party conducted by that well known pioneer, George B. Erath. Mr. McCurry went with us up on Neill's and Meridian creeks and pointed out to us vacancies that had been shown him by the surveying party. I concluded to enter land on Neill's Creek, went to Waco and engaged Major Erath to come and survey these lands and found enough to accommodate many more than at first contemplated. This was the beginning of the Norwegian settlement in Bosque County.

William [Geary] Gary was the upper settler on the Bosque, on the north side a little above the mouth of Neill's Creek. Judge Scrutchfield lower down on the same side, and still lower down Jewell [Ewell] Everett. On the south side just opposite from Scrutchfield the Mabry family had just located, which were the only families that lived at that time in what afterward became Bosque County.³⁶

News of the Canuteson journey to the Bosque hills soon spread to the Norwegian settlements near Brownsboro, Henderson County, Texas, and the following year (1853) another group of explorers led by Kleng Peerson, Ole Ween, Carl Questad, and others left east Texas in search of new lands. The result of these early explorations was the establishment of the Norwegian settlement in western Bosque County.

Between the years 1854 and 1856 other prominent early settlers established homes in Bosque County. T. C. Alexander, born in Tennessee in 1824, settled at Meridian in 1855 to become the first lawyer in the new county. Alexander was soon joined in the legal profession by Henry Fossett, a native of Maine. Fossett and Alexander founded the Bosque County bar and played leading roles in the Civil War; Fossett as a captain in the Confederate forces operating along the west Texas frontier and Alexander as a member of the Tenth Texas Infantry, Confederate Army.³⁷

William S. Gouldy, listed as a farmer and native of Tennessee, settled near present Valley Mills; one of his neighbors was John Odle, another native of the state of Tennessee. Other pioneer farmer-stockmen included William R. Sedberry, who came to Texas from North Carolina; Ward Keeler, a native of New York; James Lane of South Carolina; Elijah Cutbirth, who was born in Arkansas; Jonathan McFaddin of Missouri; and George Cranfill, another native of Missouri. All of these heads of families were permanent settlers before the year 1860. George Cranfill settled near the Bosque-Hamilton county line and gave his name to the geographical feature known as Cranfills Gap and to the western Bosque town of the same name.³⁸

³⁶ O. Canuteson, "Early Days in Bosque," newspaper clipping dated December 22, 1900, in Tom M. Pool Papers, Archives, University of Texas Library.

³⁷ *Biographies of Central Texans*, 291; *Eighth United States Census* [1860], Bosque County, Texas (microfilm, Texas State Library).

³⁸ *Eighth United States Census*. Jonathan McFaddin, the son of Wyatt and Rebecca (Hammitt) McFaddin, was born in Randolph County, Missouri; came to Texas in 1849 and "served as a state Ranger and also in the Confederate Army." (Brown, *Indian Wars and Pioneers of Texas*).

In the year 1856 James Buckner Barry (1821-1906) moved to Bosque County and established a farm home on the East Bosque River northwest of present Walnut Springs. Buck Barry was a veteran of Jack Coffee Hay's company of Texas Rangers during the years 1845 and 1846 and later became one of the most noted Indian fighters of the Texas frontier. After the establishment of peace along the frontier, Barry continued to be active in state and local politics as a champion of the Grange and Farmer's Alliance. He served a term in the Texas Legislature, 1884-1886, and represented the Populist Party in the election of 1896 as their unsuccessful candidate for state treasurer. For over five decades James Buckner Barry played a leading role in the history of Bosque County and the state of Texas.³⁹

Samuel Fossett, pioneer merchant of Meridian, was born in Maine in 1831 and came to Texas in 1856 to "make his way to Bosque County" where he "joined the ranger service as a private." During the years of the Civil War, Fossett commanded his own company of Bosque militiamen. Establishing a mercantile business at Meridian prior to the war, Fossett returned to civilian life in 1865 to serve Bosque County as sheriff, 1870-1872, and become one of the leading merchants of Meridian.

The first full-time ministers of the gospel in Bosque County seem to have been John P. Clarke, H. R. Pinnell, and John Abney. Clarke, also a school teacher, established the Cumberland Presbyterian Church on Hog Creek a few miles northwest of present Valley Mills. His small chapel served both Bosque and Coryell counties. John Abney established a Methodist church at Meridian during the late 1850's; Pinnell also served the early Methodists of the county. Although some of the early circuit riders were probably neglected by the county records, Abney, Pinnell, and Clarke are the only three "ministers of the gospel" listed in the census of 1860.

The first Baptist church in the Bosque territory was a log cabin erected near present Valley Mills by F. F. Bloodworth. D. C. McCauley and John Clabaugh, the "financial agent of the Texas Baptist State Convention," held services in this building during the year 1855. On June 23, 1855, the little cabin became known as the Liberty Hill Baptist Church; ten charter members belonged to this first organized church in the new county. L. D. Stringer later presided over Liberty Hill as minister and John Clabaugh traveled on to Meridian and Gatesville to preach the first Baptist sermons heard in these two frontier towns. By the end of the year 1855 the Liberty Hill congregation boasted thirty-eight members.⁴⁰

³⁹ James K. Greer, *A Texas Ranger and Frontiersman: the Days of Buck Barry in Texas* (hereafter cited as Greer, *Buck Barry*).

⁴⁰ *The Texas Baptist*, July 25, 1855.

COUNTY ORGANIZATION

By the winter of 1853-1854 the population of the lands along the Bosque River was sufficient to warrant political organizations. Bosque County was created from the McLennan territory by an act of the state legislature on February 4, 1854. This act defined the boundaries of the new county and provided for a commission of six members to locate the county seat "as near the centre of the said county as possible."⁴¹ As a result of the legislative directive, Lowry H. Scrutchfield, Samuel S. Locker, William McCurry, Jasper N. Mabray, and William Gary (T. E. Everett could not attend) assembled at a post oak grove east of the Bosque River and north of Meridian Knobs and Bee Mountain on June 27, 1854. They decided to accept a grant of 100 acres of land from Dr. Josephus Murray Steiner of Fort Graham⁴² and an additional twenty acres from J. T. Eubanks. The commissioners then decided to locate the county seat on this tract of land; Jasper N. Mabray proposed that the future town be named Meridian because of the proximity of the site to Meridian Knobs and Meridian Creek.⁴³

During the week that followed, George Bernard Erath of Waco surveyed and laid off the town of Meridian on sixty acres of the Steiner-Eubanks grant. Town lots were to be sold at a public sale on July 4, 1854, and on the appointed day several hundred people gathered on the post oak-crowned hill east of the Bosque. The real estate sale had been advertised and pioneer settlers came on horseback and by ox wagon, some from as far as Gatesville and Waco. The entertainment of the day featured a barbecue dinner and an address by Nicholas W. Battle,⁴⁴ Waco lawyer and candidate for district attorney. In describing the events of this historic day, H. J. and C. M. Cureton recorded in 1904 that:

Fifty years ago today was held the first barbecue . . . It was held in a beautiful post oak grove upon a little ridge, gently rising up from the first valley of the Bosque River. The stately trees in front of the Emerson Hotel now mark the exact spot . . . it is perhaps worthy of mention here, that when the venerable George B. Erath was marking out the last town lot in

⁴¹ H. P. N. Gammel, *Laws of Texas, 1847-1854*, III, 1492.

⁴² Josephus Murray Steiner (1823-1873) came to Texas with the troops of the United States Army during the Mexican War. At the conclusion of the war, he was stationed at Fort Graham in Hill County. In September, 1853, he killed Major Ripley A. Arnold, his commanding officer. Steiner was tried for the crime and acquitted in a court martial held at Austin in April, 1854. Dropped from the rolls of the Army in 1856, Steiner later served as Indian agent and superintendent of the State Insane Asylum at Austin.

⁴³ Cureton and Cureton, *History of Bosque County*, 5f.

⁴⁴ Nicholas W. Battle (1820-1905) was born in Warren County, Georgia. He studied law at William and Mary College and was admitted to the Georgia bar in 1844. Battle and his wife, Mary Ann (Cabiness) Battle moved to Waco, McLennan County, Texas, in 1850. He served as district attorney, 1854-1858, and as district judge, 1858-1861.

what was then thought might be the future capitol of the great state of Texas, Mrs. Swenson, now living in Clifton, and her sister, Mrs. Pederson, now deceased, daughters of Ole Pierson, held the surveyors chain.⁴⁵

Aside from the Bosque residents, special mention is made of the contributions of George Bernard Erath and Dr. Joseph Murray Steiner to the early history of Bosque County. The Cureton sketch also makes special mention of Captain R. S. (Sam) Barnes, "who had been a soldier under Houston in the battles of the Republic . . . also a member of the celebrated Mier expedition."⁴⁶

After the establishment of Meridian on July 4, the first county election was held on August 7, 1854. Three ballot boxes were provided for the voters: one located at the junction of Steele Creek and the Brazos River, a second at the site of Meridian, and a third in the Bosque River valley between present Clifton and Valley Mills on lands later owned by Tom M. Pool. Sam Barnes was appointed election judge at the Steele Creek voting place. Israel B. Standifer served in a similar capacity at Meridian, and J. K. Helton presided over the ballots cast under the historic live oak tree west of the Bosque River.⁴⁷

On the day of election only twenty citizens cast their vote. The primary sources indicate that there were no qualified voters at Meridian, five at the Steele Creek site, and the remainder at the Bosque valley location. As a result of the balloting, Lowry H. Scrutchfield, who "not only had a fair knowledge of law but was well informed on surveying," was elected chief justice (county judge); other county officials included T. Bryant, sheriff; Isaac Gary, tax assessor-collector; Archabal Kell, treasurer; A. C. Pearce, district clerk; Jasper N. Mabray, county clerk; J. K. Helton, justice of peace and J. H. Mabray, Sam Barnes, O. Dennis, and Israel B. Standifer, county commissioners.⁴⁸ The chief justice and county commissioners comprised the "county board," the most important agency of local government at this time.⁴⁹

⁴⁵Cureton and Cureton, *History of Bosque County*, 5.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷The source of historical information concerning the first election, as well as the account of the founding of Meridian, has been H. J. and C. M. Cureton's *Sketch of the Early History of Bosque County*. This rare pamphlet is actually an address read at the "Old Settlers Reunion and Semi-Centennial celebration" of the organization of Bosque County, Meridian, Texas, July 4, 1904, and printed by the Meridian *Tribune* Printing Company.

In 1926 the Old Settlers Association of Bosque County was formed and the organization received a deed from Tom M. Pool to a plot of land around the old live oak tree that sheltered the Bosque valley ballot box in 1854. The Association erected a historical marker near the tree and this source of information lists twenty voters in the first election. The names are: L. H. Scrutchfield, J. K. Helton, Captain Underhill, James Mabray, William Gary, Gafey Gary, Isaac Gary, Matt Gary, John Robertson, John Thomas, F. M. Kell, Archie Kell, William McCurry, Lum McCurry, Samuel S. Locker, Nathaniel Morgan, R. S. Barnes, J. P. Locker, Jasper N. Mabray, and Kleng Peerson.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹Stuart A. McCorkle and Dick Smith, *Texas Government*, 326f.

In the fall of 1854 William McCurry built a one-room log courthouse at Meridian; this small structure, located on a site now occupied by the First National Bank of Meridian, housed the county government until the year 1860. The first term of county court, an emergency session held under the trees, authorized McCurry the sum of \$125 for his construction work. The first district court was held at Meridian on June 9, 1856, with R. E. B. Baylor⁵⁰ on the bench and Nicholas W. Battle as district attorney.

In the second election (1856) Lowry H. Scrutchfield, Jasper N. Mabray, and Israel B. Standifer were re-elected to their respective offices. John Hanna, "as picturesque and striking a figure as ever portrayed the part of a fearless peace officer in any melodrama,"⁵¹ was elected sheriff; John C. Scowe became the new county treasurer; Milton Jacks, Temple Spivey, and Marshall Ham were chosen county commissioners.⁵² In 1858 several changes occurred in the county administration. William R. Sedberry succeeded Lowry H. Scrutchfield as chief justice; A. C. Pearce was elected sheriff; Robert O. White became the new county clerk; J. B. Wood had a majority for county treasurer; and William B. Moore, Richard J. Hart, and Fielding Lewis joined Milton Jacks as county commissioners.⁵³

Of all of the newcomers to Bosque County in the late 1850's and early 1860's, probably the most noted was Jacob de Cordova (1808-1868). Known as the "greatest stabilizing factor of every settlement" where he appeared, Jacob de Cordova was born in Kingston, Jamaica, on June 6, 1808, and came to Texas in 1819 as the companion and interpreter of his father, Joshua de Cordova. In his late teens, Jacob de Cordova journeyed to Philadelphia where he married Rebecca Sterling on September 4, 1828. After a short stay in his native Jamaica, 1833-1835, de Cordova moved his family to New Orleans; he brought them to Galveston in 1837 and moved on to Houston in 1838.

Jacob de Cordova was challenged by the complex Texas land situation, a hodge-podge of Mexican grants, conflicting claims and titles. As a result he began to make long journeys and personal surveys in frontier settlements to check land boundaries and titles. Due to his fast and accurate work, the de Cordova land agency soon became the largest in Texas.

In 1842 the de Cordova family moved again, this time to the frontier settlement of New Braunfels in Comal County. There Jacob de Cordova built a country home that he called "Wanderer's Retreat." In 1845 Jacob and Phineas de Cordova established the Texas Land Agency in Austin, advertising that the company would devote attention to the "location of land

⁵⁰ Robert Emmett Bledsoe Baylor, born in Kentucky, was a veteran of the War of 1812, a member of the Kentucky legislature, 1819-1821, and the Alabama legislature, 1824-1826, United States Congressman from Alabama, 1828-1830, and the commander of a battalion of Alabama volunteers during the Creek Indian troubles of 1836. Lawyer and Baptist minister, Baylor came to Texas in 1841 to become one of the most prominent church leaders and jurists of his day.

⁵¹ James K. Greer, *Grand Prairie*, 15.

⁵² Election Returns, 1856-1858, Archives, Texas State Library, Austin, Texas.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

script, the investigation of land titles, the sub-division and sale of lands, and the collection of debts in Western Texas." During the years immediately following 1845, Jacob de Cordova traveled the length of the frontier of Texas; he was accompanied on many of these extended trips by his beautiful wife, Rebecca.

During the year 1848, de Cordova became the "agent for disposal of lands which General Thomas Jefferson Chambers sold to J. S. Syndor of Galveston, and which Syndor sold in turn to N. A. Ware and Jonas Butler." It is significant that the Chambers tract included the land around Waco Village. Although de Cordova surveyed and explored the Texas frontier as far west as the Panhandle Plains, he found time for many other noteworthy accomplishments. In 1849 he compiled and executed the first authentic map of Texas. He also wrote and published the first Texas guidebook, a book on the geology of Texas, and in 1858 he published his famous *Texas, Her Resources and Public Men*.

After years of travel in the eastern United States, England, and Europe, Jacob de Cordova found "the homesite of his dreams in Bosque County" some eighteen miles northeast of Meridian near the "ox-bow bend of the Brazos called Kimball Bend." Here he built his second "Wanderer's Retreat" between the communities of Kopperl and Kimball. It was from this location that Jacob de Cordova embarked on his last great constructive scheme. After the close of the Civil War in 1865, he secured the financial backing for the "erection of dams and mills along the Brazos." The machinery for the first unit of his Brazos River project had arrived at Galveston when Jacob de Cordova sickened and died at his Bosque home in 1868.⁵⁴

9

THE BOSQUE FRONTIER, 1854-1861

By the year 1856 the population of Bosque County had increased only slightly; a majority of the settlers were located along the Bosque River south of present Meridian. The centers of population included Meridian, Norman Hill, Flag Pond, Searsville or Rock Church on Hog Creek, and Clifton (then known as Cliff town). T. C. Alexander, writing for the *Texas Almanac* in 1857, describes Bosque County as a section featured by a "hilly and rolling surface, healthful climate, and fertile soil." Alexander listed the population of the young county as 896; in addition there were "121 Negroes valued at \$62,000." It is also significant that Galveston was listed as the seaport and Houston and Galveston as market centers for the Bosque territory.⁵⁵

During the two decades from 1850 to 1870, the settlers on the Bosque frontier lived in constant dread of the western Indians. All during this period bands of murderous Kiowas and Comanches descended on the central Texas

⁵⁴ The material on Jacob de Cordova is based on a brief biography found in the *Waco Tribune-Herald*, October 30, 1949, p. 19, and from information gathered during an interview with Henry Wintz of Meridian, Texas, in 1946.

⁵⁵ *Texas Almanac* [1857-1858].

settlements on brief but often bloody raids. Indian raids usually came during the light of the moon; the excellent horsemanship of the savages making these long range depredations possible. The frontier defense organizations of the state, national, and Confederate governments were never adequate to meet the danger; the Bosque citizens, therefore, were constantly on the alert with their local militia organizations. Lookout Mountain, located near Martin's Gap on the Bosque-Hamilton county line "where the village of Fairey now stands," and Meridian Knobs near the village of Meridian served as observation posts; scouting parties were stationed at both locations almost constantly. Early sources reveal that these pioneer scouts usually consisted of "from 8 to 10 men . . . with two men in turn detailed as sentinels to keep constant vigil from the top of the mountain."⁵⁶

One of the more significant of the Indian raids into the Bosque settlements occurred in the spring of 1854 and involved the Norwegian families living in the vicinity of Gary Creek. The elder Ole Canutson, a resident of the area, returned from a brief trip to the Brazos River at Kimball Bend to find that his house had been raided by the Indians during his absence—his wife and some \$900 were missing. Canutson immediately spread the alarm along Gary Creek but a lack of firearms prohibited any attempt to follow the Indian trail until the following morning. After a night spent in the safety of a cedar grove, the Norwegian neighbors hurried across country to secure aid from the settlers along the Bosque River. A posse was organized at the cabin of William McCurry and the Indian trail followed as far north as the Paluxy River. Mrs. Ole Canutson was discovered unharmed at the home of Ole Pierson and the money was safely hidden in a mattress, but the Indian trail was soon lost.⁵⁷

During the same month another Indian party was discovered in the southern section of Bosque County and several Indians were killed as they fled from the settlements. This particular group of Indians was discovered by a man named Chesser, a veteran of the Mexican War of 1848 who lived "on what was known as the old Scrutchfield ranch." Chesser sounded the alarm in the southern section of the county and a group of settlers that included Lowry Scrutchfield, J. K. Helton, Matt, Gaffey, and Isaac Gary, John Thomas, the Everetts, and Jasper Mabray organized to give pursuit. The trail was followed south to the Middle Bosque River where Abe Flannery and Bill Edwards joined the Bosque settlers. A herd of stolen horses was soon discovered in a narrow ravine and Abe Flannery, assisted by Chesser, killed two Indians on the spot. A large number of Indians then fled in terror, pursued by the settlers. The chase was soon called off on the advice of Chesser, and the Bosque settlers returned for a closer inspection of the ravine where the first contact was established. The second inspection revealed a cave where an additional thirty or forty Indian warriors were in hiding. Several of these Indians were killed in the attack that

⁵⁶ Cureton and Cureton, *History of Bosque County*, 10-11.

⁵⁷ Greer, *The Life of Barry*, 91.

followed; others fled the scene of battle. Darkness stopped the flight and on the following morning the settlers were unable to locate the Indian trail.⁵⁸

During the year 1857, Creath and Francis Renfro were murdered by Indians near the headwaters of Neils Creek. The Renfro family had settled near the Bosque-Hamilton-Coryell county line earlier in the year. The scalped body of Francis Renfro was found immediately but three years passed before the remains of Creath Renfro (the father of Francis) was discovered in a dense thicket on Neils Creek. The Renfro murders aroused the Bosque frontier. Later in the year 1857 Frank and Abe Kell, Allen Anderson, Jim Babb, Ross Cranfill, and Robert Renfro discovered a small party of Kiowa Indians leaving the western settlements of Bosque County. A running fight followed during the course of which some four Indians were killed. According to legend Robert Renfro, son and brother of the men previously murdered, was allowed to end the life of one of the Kiowa warriors. The chief of the raiders escaped death after displaying great skill in the use of his shield and Spanish lance in a running combat with Frank Kell.⁵⁹

Comanche and Kiowa depredations continued through the years 1858; one of their more significant raids of the year resulted in the murder and mutilation of a man named Peter Johnson and the capture of his small son. The Johnson raid took place near a flat-topped mountain afterwards known as Johnson's Peak. Young Johnson lived with the Indians only a short while before escaping to roam the frontier for several days. He was finally rescued and returned to the settlements by James Buckner Barry. The western tribes were so troublesome during the year 1858 that they interfered with the attendance at the first school established at Meridian. John Abney, A. C. Pearce, and Ward Keeler, school trustees, were responsible for the appointment of B. Toliver as a commissioner in charge of a militia company of twenty-five men to protect the county and the school children from the Indians.⁶⁰

Early in the year 1860 two brothers named Monroe were killed by the Indians on Spring Creek about eight miles west of the village of Meridian. Other Indian victims of the late 1850's and early 1860's included a man named Knight, killed near Neils Creek; a Bosque resident by the name of Bean; the wives of two men named Lemley and Wood; a schoolmistress; and a circuit-riding minister. The intensity and scope of the Indian raids increased during the years of the Civil War; the isolated raids included in the scope of this narrative were only the more significant depredations. Every Bosque citizen was a potential Indian fighter but men like James Buckner Barry, R. S. (Sam) Barnes, Jasper N. Mabray, Samuel Fossett, S. S. Totton, Lowry H. Scrutchfield, Frank M. Kell, and Henry Fossett were leaders among the defenders of the frontier.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ McConnell, *West Texas Frontier*, I, 286.

⁶⁰ Cureton and Cureton, *History of Bosque County*, 11; Greer, *The Life of Barry*, 100ff; McConnell, *The West Texas Frontier*, II, 13.

THE CIVIL WAR

On February 23, 1861, the voters of Bosque County went to the polls and decided to secede from the United States by a vote of 223 to 79. Since the future of civil government on the frontier of Texas was most uncertain during the spring of the year 1861, the residents of Bosque County followed an example set in other parts of Texas and called a mass meeting to consider the organization of a Committee of Public Safety. The meeting was held at Meridian on March 17; County Judge William R. Sedberry presided; John Abney stated the purpose of the meeting; and Sam Barnes, J. K. Helton, Jerry Odle, John Abney, Jack Smith, and James Lane were appointed to a committee on resolutions. After a brief deliberation the committee reported that "whereas the Southern Confederacy is having an unnatural curse and sanguinary war waged against it by Abraham Lincoln and his abolition hordes . . . and our soil is being desecrated by the vandal tread of our Yankee enemies, making it imperative that a large share of our best citizens go to the seat of war" and "whereas it was believed that in the midst of solid Confederate citizens were persons hostile to Confederate institutions and the cause," be it resolved that "any man now living in our midst, who has been or may hereafter be guilty of using language derogatory of the Southern Confederacy or its cause, or by any act giving evidence that he is unfriendly to the Confederate Government," that the committee test him by ordering him to enlist in the Confederate Army, and if he refuses "give him a free pass" to "the Lincoln Government" or execute him as a common spy.⁶¹

The county provided clothing and provisions for the soldiers and others during the war years. On August 21, 1861, the county court "ordered . . . that \$100 be appropriated for purchasing clothing, camp equipage, etc. for such soldiers as are now about to volunteer and engage in the services of the Confederate army, and J. D. Alexander be appointed quartermaster to make the purchases." The following April (1862) another order provided for the purchase of 200 pounds of lead, fifty pounds of powder, and 10,000 gun caps. T. C. Alexander, then stationed at Virginia Point on the mainland side of Galveston Bay, was appointed the agent to make these purchases at Houston, and was further instructed to forward the supplies to M. W. Fuller at Meridian "by the first conveyance."⁶²

Bosque County's chief contribution to the fighting east of the Sabine River was to the muster roll of the Tenth Texas Infantry Regiment organized in Bosque and McLennan counties by Allison Nelson.

Allison Nelson (1822-1862) was born in Fulton County, Georgia, on March 17, 1822. A graduate of the United States Military Academy, he

⁶¹ Cureton and Cureton, *History of Bosque County*, 9f.

⁶² Juddie Martin, "History of Bosque County and Meridian," *Waco Times-Herald*, October 24, 1926.

resigned his commission to study law. After admission to the bar, Nelson served as mayor of Atlanta in 1844 and as a member of the Georgia legislature from 1849 to 1853. With the outbreak of the Mexican War, Nelson raised a company of troops and served as its captain. In the year 1856 he purchased land in Bosque County near the present location of Meridian. Between 1855 and 1858 Nelson served as an agent to the Indians under Lawrence Sullivan Ross. Elected to the Texas Legislature in 1860, Nelson attended the secession convention in 1861. In the early months of the Civil War, he organized the Tenth Texas Infantry, received a commission as brigadier general and was later promoted to major general. Allison Nelson died at Austin, Arkansas, twenty-five miles northeast of Little Rock, on October 7, 1862.⁶³

The county was represented by another group of Confederate troops. During the year 1861, Company H of Hawpe's Brigade was organized in Bosque County. This organization, commanded by Colonel T. C. Hawpe of Dallas and later designated as the 31st Texas Cavalry of the Confederate Trans-Mississippi Army, served with distinction in the campaigns of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Missouri. Of the 105 Bosque soldiers in Company H, only 17 survived the war; a few had been captured, but most were either killed or were the victims of disease. Lars Olson of Cranfills Gap and C. A. Poulson of Clifton were both veterans of Hawpe's Brigade.⁶⁴

Most of the Bosque County soldiers found themselves engaged in frontier defense, a pressing problem inherited by the Texas and Confederate governments. To afford some measure of protection, the frontier counties were organized into three so-called frontier districts and militia companies were established in each county. Bosque County became a part of the Second Frontier District, commanded by Major George Bernard Erath with headquarters at Gatesville, Coryell County. Three militia companies were organized in Bosque County. They were:

(1) W. S. Goulady's Company of Texas State Troops, commanded by Captain W. S. Goulady of Valley Mills, and staffed by George W. Haley, 1st/Lieutenant; Jasper N. Mabray, 2nd/Lieutenant; D. R. Wood, 3rd/Lieutenant; and Lowry H. Scrutchfield, 1st/Sergeant.⁶⁵

⁶³ *Handbook of Texas*, II, 269; John Henry Brown, *History of Texas*, II, 417; *War of the Rebellion*, Series I, volumes 9, 13, 17, 22, 23, 30-32, 34.

⁶⁴ Juddie Martin, "History of Bosque County and Meridian," *Waco Times-Herald*, October 24, 1926; John Henry Brown, *History of Texas*, II, 439.

⁶⁵ Other members of Goulady's Company included sergeants B. T. Whitehead, M. A. Britain, H. W. Fitzgerald, and A. C. Pearce; corporals J. S. McGee, A. Green, J. T. McDaniel, Z. Cranfill, and B. H. Adams; privates A. Abbott, D. H. Bowman, H. B. Bible, J. B. Butler, C. P. Brewton, Hugh Batey, N. W. Cooke, D. B. Cutbirth, O. Colwick, A. J. Cunningham, Nelson Dulaney, L. N. Deek, J. J. Dodson, H. M. Davis, A. E. Everett, S. J. Grimes, W. C. Grimes, Richard Griffen, A. V. Gates, C. P. Hollis, James Heffley, Thomas Hammonds, Moses Isenhower, J. J. Jacob, W. K. King, G. H. Kirby, M. Looney, J. S. Lee, A. B. Lane, J. M. Dillard, John Magill, J. A. McMurry, G. McCallister, W. J. McCurry, Abraham Meyers, J. M. Norris, John Odle, J. D. Odle, L. R. Parks, J. P. Parks, Talbot Reeves, Henry Riddel, J. C. Stuteville, Jacob Timbrook, S. Townsend, Wilson Vandyke, Henry Ward, O. Wald, A. Willingham, J. T. Walling, Wilson Wood, J. S. Williams, and Lawrence White.

(2) Samuel Fossett's Company of Texas State Troops, commanded by Captain Samuel Fossett of Meridian, and staffed by A. B. Irwin, 1st/Lieutenant; H. A. Brown, 2nd/Lieutenant; Isaac C. Gary, 1st/sergeant; James Lee, 2nd/sergeant; W. J. McMurry, 3rd/sergeant; W. B. Casey, 4th/sergeant, and Thomas Harrison, 1st/corporal.⁶⁶

(3) S. S. Totton's Company of Texas State Troops, commanded by S. S. Totton, and staffed by S. P. Conway, 1st/Lieutenant; Lowry Scrutchfield, 2nd/Lieutenant, and W. S. Pitallo, 1st/sergeant.⁶⁷

These frontier defense companies were little more than the home guard; their principal duty consisted of long range penetrations of the Indian country of the western plains. These extended Indian scouts often covered weeks on the trail and hundreds of miles of terrain. During these long marches to the headwaters of the Colorado, Concho, and Brazos rivers, the poorly equipped men often suffered great hardship. The journal of Lowry H. Scrutchfield for the year 1864 records a day by day account of an Indian scout that left Meridian on September 29 and proceeded to San Saba by way of "Cow Hous creek," and Lampasas. After leaving Lampasas the Bosque, Johnson, and Hamilton county companies were placed under Scrutchfield's command; the militia followed the San Saba River past the site of the old mission and Fort McKavett before turning to the northwest to continue on to the region adjacent to the Double Mountain and Clear forks of the Brazos River. The militia then returned to the central Texas settlements by way of Fort Phantom Hill, Sabana River, Dublin, and Hico. The Bosque County contingent arrived at Meridian on November 17 and "all got drunk."⁶⁸ This extended scout of nearly two months duration had covered the entire west Texas frontier far beyond the line of settlement and represents routine patrol activity in the last years of the Civil War.

THE BATTLE OF DOVE CREEK

On December 14-15, 1864, word reached Meridian that Captain N. M. Gillentine of Erath County had discovered an abandoned Indian camp "in the big shinnery on the Clear Fork of the Brazos River near old Fort Phantom Hill." As a result, an immediate call was issued for the Bosque militia to assemble near Meridian preparatory to an expedition to west Texas.

⁶⁶ Other members of Fossett's Company included corporals F. M. Gillespie, Thomas Splawn, and R. S. Barnes; and privates Stephen Bozarth, W. G. Burrell, James A. Callahan, Hugh Dennis, Bird Ferris, A. J. Ferris, G. H. Fry, G. D. Greer, F. M. Gandy, B. Huse, John D. Irwin, O. J. Johnson, Hampton Johnson, F. J. Kelly, James Lane, William McCurry, Abraham Meyers, Davis Neely, William Powell, Peter Pierson, Even Questad, S. H. Robinson, P. B. Swenson, W. S. Simmons, John L. Thomas, Charles Vaughan, John F. Darden, and H. A. White.

⁶⁷ The muster roll of Totton's Company includes names appearing on either Fossett's or Gouldy's rolls. Duplication of personnel seemed to be rather commonplace.

⁶⁸ Journal of Lowry H. Scrutchfield in private possession of Mrs. Pete Row, Hillsboro, Texas.

The troops of the Second Frontier District were assembled in haste. In Bosque County, the southeastern sub-division of the district, the state militia assembled at Meridian between December 16 and December 19, 1864. "Owing to the worthless quality of the caps furnished by the state," Captain S. S. Totton and L. H. Scrutchfield made a trip to Waco for supplies. Scrutchfield recorded the following in his diary:

Friday Decr 16th 1864

Order came for the Molition to meet at Meridian on the 18th

Capt Gilantine had discovered a camp & trail of Indians on the Clear fork 35 miles above Phantom Hill Capt Totton started to Waco in the evening rode late in the night got to Waco bought 6000 capps got some Tonks⁷⁰

17 Capt left that night for home I staid

18 Came home with the Indians

19 Reach Meridian at 9 oc [9 o'clock] at night
in the rain ⁷¹

The Bosque militia proceeded from Meridian to Camp Salmon in the northeastern part of present Callahan County, arriving there on Christmas Day, 1864. The assembled force (from all counties of the Second District) was organized into a battalion under the command of S. S. Totton, who found "it to consist of 325 men rank and file." The combined frontier force at Camp Salmon consisted of the company from Bosque County commanded by Totton and R. S. (Sam) Barnes, W. A. Cathey's company of Johnson County, James Cunningham's company of Comanche County, G. Graham's company of Coryell County, and a company from Erath County commanded by N. M. Gillentine and William H. Culver. From Camp Salmon, Totton led his force to the region of the Clear Fork in hopes of finding the Indian trail and following it southwestward. Scrutchfield's diary contains the following entries for the last few days of December:

27 March all day Camp in a Muskeet flat on Hubbards Creek

28 left camp in the evening march 5 miles Camp

29 March 3 miles Camp

30 March all day Camp on tht Clear fork no grass very cold

31 March half day to grass Kill several buny

Jan 1856

1 March to Elm Creek Close to the Indians camp Killed a Buffalo
in the evening ⁷²

In the meanwhile the Confederate troops assembled at Fort Chadbourne on December 31, 1864, under the command of Captain Henry Fossett. According to the plan, Totton and his state militia were to join the Confederate

⁷⁰ Tonkawa Indians to be used as guides for the expedition.

⁷¹ Scrutchfield Papers, Archives, University of Texas Library. For a detailed account of Dove Creek see William C. Pool, "The Battle of Dove Creek," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LIII (April, 1950).

⁷² *Ibid.*

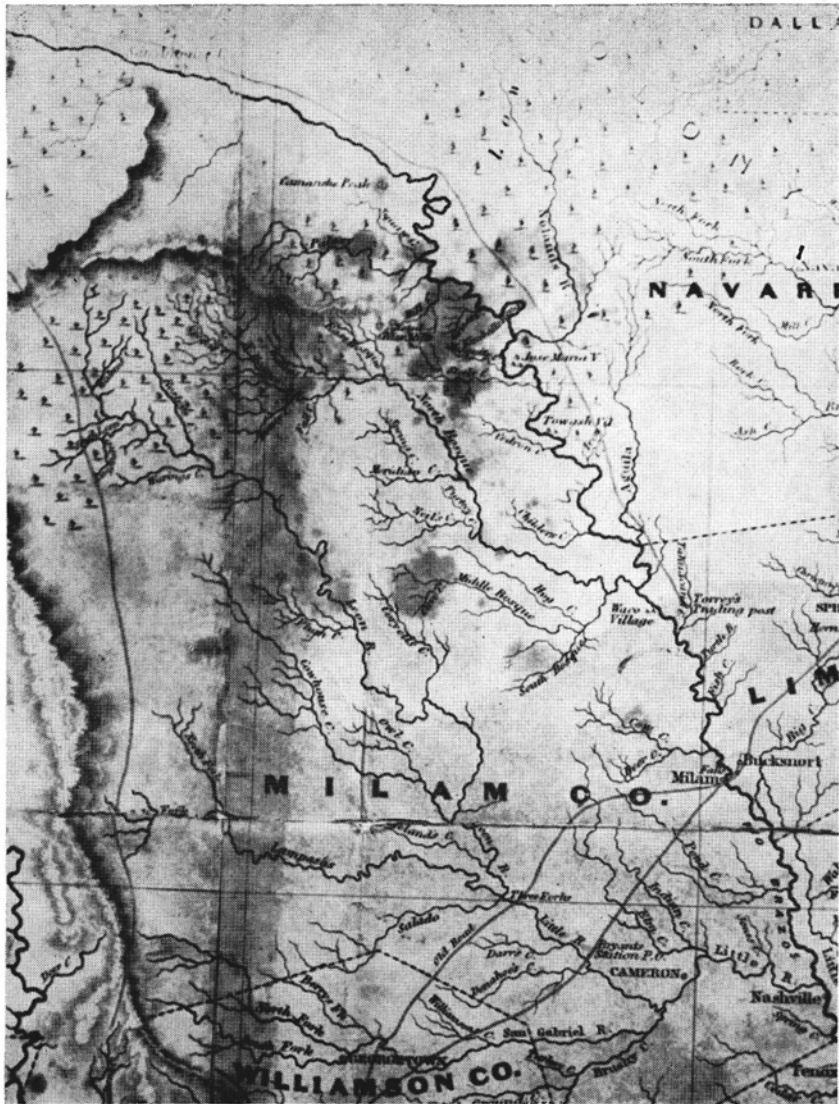
regulars at Fort Chadbourne; this they did not do as requested but instead lost valuable time approaching Fort Chadbourne by way of Elm Creek, Oak Creek, and the Colorado River.

On the morning of January 7, 1865, Fossett's "spies" returned to his camp on the North Concho River with the report that the Indians had been discovered in camp on Dove Creek, a small stream flowing northeast into Spring Creek. Fossett made a hasty decision to attack the Indian encampment immediately and moved his small command to the Middle Concho River. It was here that the tardy county militia made its first contact with the Confederate force; advance scouts R. S. Barnes, N. M. Gillentine, and W. H. Culver rode into the Confederate camp and then scurried back to bring up the central Texas militia.

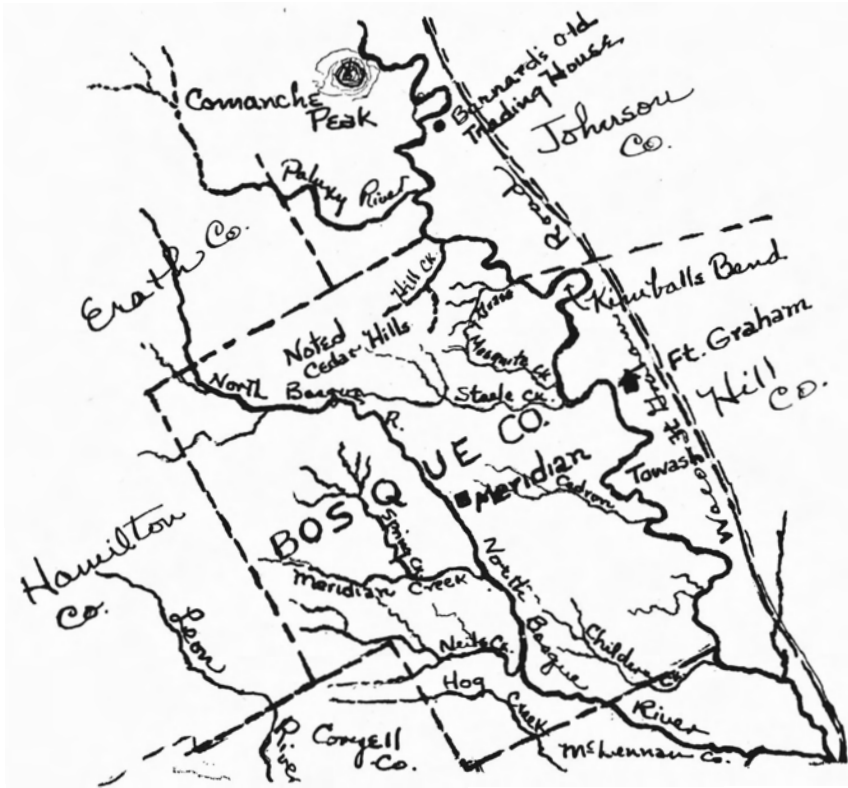
The militia made rendezvous with the Confederates shortly after daylight on January 8, and the combined commands moved forward to attack the Indians. The battle of Dove Creek raged all day on January 8, 1865. The skirmish was severe from the very beginning when the militia crossed Dove Creek and filed into open ground near the thicket in which the Indians were hiding. The first burst of fire killed Captain Barnes, Captain Collier, Captain Gillentine, and sixteen other men and wounded several others. The Texas forces never recovered from this disastrous beginning, and although they held their ground all day, the retreat toward safety became a rout in the gathering dusk at the close of the day.

On the night of January 8-9, 1865, the Confederate force and state militia camped together on the south bank of Spring Creek. The dead had been left unburied on the battlefield, provisions were lacking because the pack train had failed to arrive on the scene, and the weather was bitter cold. As the weary men gathered near the campfires to discuss the battle, rain began to fall. By midnight the rain had turned to snow and by daybreak on January 9 the ground was covered with from twelve to fourteen inches of snow. During the night of January 8, casualty lists were prepared; the Bosque County list revealed that R. S. Barnes, J. S. Mabray, A. E. Everett, N. H. Bible, S. M. Wray, and J. D. Steene had been killed; and J. C. Isaacs, W. Warloupe, W. M. Snell, and W. E. Pearce were wounded.

After remaining in camp on Spring Creek during the snowstorm of January 8-10, 1865, the Bosque militiamen began their long trek home on January 11. Accompanied by the men from Coryell County, they traveled by way of Mukewater Creek, Pecan Bayou, Leon River, and Hulls Creek. The Bosque County group reached home on January 21, 1865.



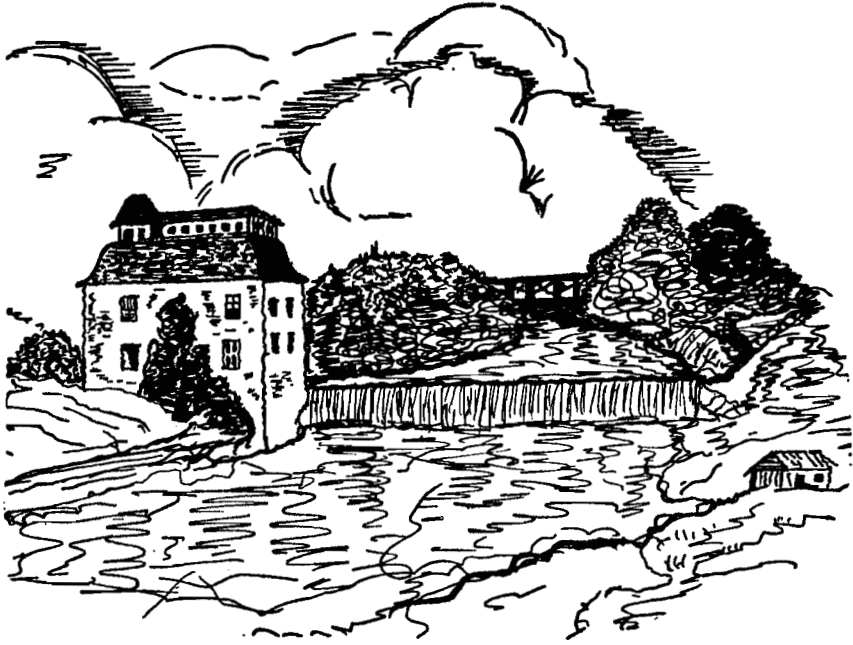
J. de Cordova's Map of the State of Texas, Houston, 1849. Note the place names that appear along the Brazos and North Bosque rivers.



A sketch of the Bosque frontier during the year 1855; note that Meridian was the only settlement important enough to be indicated (based on J. de Cordova's Map of the State of Texas.) New York (Johnson and Browning), 1855.



Bosque County in the mid-1880's



Part Two

The Norwegian Episode

PART TWO
THE NORWEGIAN EPISODE

1

THE BACKGROUND

Bounded roughly by Bee Creek to the north, Gary and Neils creeks to the south, the Bosque River to the east, and extending into central Hamilton County to the west, the extensive Norwegian settlement in Bosque County has been of vital significance in the history of the area during the last century. The first Norwegian immigrants, "a peculiar people . . . in the eyes of Americans,"¹ came to the United States from an overpopulated country to find an abundance of level, rolling, and unoccupied land in the new world. Spurred to adventures across the Atlantic by inherent traits of independence and democracy, a strong desire for land, agrarian poverty, the exclusion of landowners from political power, and opposition to the established church, the first group of Norwegian pioneers arrived at New York City on the sloop *Restaurationen* during the year 1825.² The guiding spirit and leader of this early group was Kleng Peerson, an adventurer who visited the United States in 1821 and returned to Norway to solicit passengers for the voyage of the *Restaurationen*.

Kleng Peerson was born in Hesthamer parish near Stravenger, Norway, on May 17, 1782 or 1783. Historical sources reveal very little about the early life of this man. It is known that he traveled extensively—visiting Denmark, Germany, France, and England prior to 1821. Peerson returned to Norway in 1821 and became a Quaker. Persecuted because of his unorthodox religious beliefs, Peerson turned his attention toward America. Accompanied by Knud Olson Eide, he sailed the Atlantic and landed at New York in August, 1821. Eide died soon after his arrival in America, but Peerson studied the opportunities of the new land for some two and a half years before returning to Norway to recruit colonists. Urging his friends to emigrate to America, he returned to New York to be on hand to greet the "sloopers" in 1825.

After establishing a colony in Kendall County, New York, Kleng Peerson set out on foot in 1833 to visit the frontier of the American midwest. His explorations carried him to Chicago, then a village of "20 huts in a

¹Oris Emerald Pierson, *Norwegian Settlements in Bosque County, Texas* (unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Texas Library, Austin, Texas). This significant and definitive work on the Norwegian colonies in Texas was completed by Oris E. Pierson of Clifton, Texas, during the year 1946. Formerly principal and instructor of history in the Clifton Public Schools, Pierson is now a federal civil service employee at Clifton and is currently serving as chairman of the Bosque County Centennial Commission. He has the distinction of being one of the most significant promoters of interest in local history of the central Texas area. The "Norwegian Episode" is largely a brief of his longer work on the same subject.

²These earliest arrivals were referred to by their own people as "sloopers," a name derived from their mode of transportation to America, *see* Pierson, *The Norwegian Settlements in Bosque County*.

swampy section," and Milwaukee, an outpost of "3 cabins." By 1834 Peerson was back in Kendall County, New York, urging the Norwegian settlers to move to La Salle County, Illinois. Between the years 1837 and 1847, Peerson was instrumental in establishing colonies in Shelby County, Missouri; Lee County, Iowa; and Henry County, Illinois. In 1849 an overland trek took him to the new state of Texas "to investigate the possibility of a new settlement." After residing near Dallas for four years, Peerson moved to Bosque County in 1854. Settling in the Norse community, he was a resident of the county until his death on December 16, 1865. Kleng Peerson is buried in the cemetery of Our Savior's Lutheran Church at Norse.

As early as 1841 a farmer-physician named John Nordboe, a native of Ringebu in the province of Gudbrandsdal, settled on a 1920-acre farm near Dallas. Although he made no attempt to establish a colony in Texas, Nordboe has the distinction of being the first permanent Norwegian settler in Texas. The large scale Norwegian migration to Texas was due to the efforts of John Reinert Reirson. Arriving in New Orleans late in 1843, John Reinert Reirson journeyed up the Mississippi River to visit the Norwegian settlements of the midwestern states. On his return to New Orleans, the Texas consul suggested that Reirson consider Texas as a possible location for a colony. Reirson then wandered overland to Texas, where he visited Austin for a conference with Sam Houston. In 1844 Reirson returned to Norway, arranged his notes on America into a book titled *Veiviveren* (the *Pathfinder*), which was published and distributed widely.

Early in the spring of 1845 Reirson and a small group set sail for America, arriving at New Orleans in June. The joint resolution providing for the annexation of Texas passed the national Congress on March 1, 1845, so the little Viking group turned westward. Reirson led his colonists to Henderson County, Texas, where a colony first known as *Normandiet* and later as Brownsboro was established. Although Reirson expected an additional group of settlers later in the year, additions to the colony were delayed. One of the groups expected by Reirson was forced to remain in Norway until 1846, while the second went up the Mississippi River to join the Norwegians of the midwest. In addition to the Brownsboro pioneers of 1845, about fifty Norwegian settlers found their way to Henderson County during 1846 and a small number joined the Brownsboro group in 1847. In 1848 Reirson established another settlement in Kaufman County at a location known as Prairieville. A few of the Brownsboro settlers moved to Prairieville; in 1850 these pioneers were joined by fourteen families from Norway.⁸

⁸The early colonization activities in Texas are discussed in detail in Pierson, *Norwegian Settlements in Bosque County*, 1-40.

THE MOVE TO BOSQUE COUNTY

Brownsboro and Prairieville soon proved to be unsatisfactory as permanent homes for the Norwegians of Texas. The summer heat brought disease; medical attention was difficult to secure; the fertility of the soil was vanishing; and East Texas bore little resemblance to their native Norway. Once again it was Kleng Peerson who led his kinsmen to a new land. Between the years 1850 and 1853, Peerson explored the region west of the Trinity River and reported that the lands he saw were excellent for farming and stock raising. When the Texas Legislature created Bosque County on February 3, 1854, and free land was offered to those interested in settling the new region, the Norwegian pioneers of East Texas welcomed the news and immediately preparations were made to move from Henderson and Kaufman counties to the new territory. Because of the difficulties related to securing adequate wood for fuel and an ample water supply, the first Norwegian homesteads in the Bosque territory were located in the rather thickly wooded areas adjacent to the streams of the new county.

Ole Canuteson was the first Norwegian settler to move to Bosque County. According to his own account, he migrated to the new territory in 1854 and chose a homesite in the Neils Creek valley "on the north side of Neils Creek about 8 miles from its mouth, and about 13 miles due south of Meridian."⁴ Canuteson's 320-acre tract of land included the north bank of Neils Creek, a spring, and "large supplies of timber, enough for fuel supplies and building and fencing needs."⁵ Canuteson was followed by others. Ole Pierson came to East Texas from Norway in 1853 and was among the Norwegian group to move to Bosque County in 1854. Also primarily interested in timber and water, Pierson selected a tract of land on the north bank of Gary Creek; his home was built on a knoll only five hundred yards from the small stream. Stock pens were constructed of rail and rock.⁶

Another Norwegian pioneer who arrived in Bosque County in 1854 was Hendric Dahl. Described as "hardworking, energetic, and business-like," Dahl reached Kaufman County from Norway in 1852; two years later he evacuated his family to the Bosque territory and selected his homestead in the Gary Creek valley "almost six miles southwest of the present town of Clifton." Hendric Dahl chose one of the most scenic locations along Gary Creek, a spot "where one can view the winding Gary Creek valley to the southwest and the larger and more picturesque Neils Creek valley to the southeast." Dahl secured a patent to his desired homesite from Jasper N. Mabray in a transaction that saw 320 acres of Bosque land traded for a horse.⁷

⁴ Bosque County Deed Records, K, 252, cited in Pierson, *Norwegian Settlements in Bosque County*.

⁵ Pierson, *Norwegian Settlements in Bosque County*, 40.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

Jens Ringness brought his family from Norway to East Texas in 1852 and entered the Bosque region in 1854. Described as an "easy going, shiftless, not-too-eager-to-work dreamer," Jens Ringness was one of the most interesting of all the early settlers of his region. He settled near Neils Creek, an abundance of wood and water governing his choice. In addition to a knowledge of farming, Ringness possessed a great inventive skill and spent many hours tinkering in his small blacksmith shop. One of the products of his scientific mind was the disc plow, and the following story is told concerning this invention:

When Ringness prepared for the journey from East Texas to Bosque County, he was aware that difficulties would be encountered en route, for they had to travel over uncharted land, following only their sense of direction, with an occasional cow trail or a short stretch of road on the open territory. Ringness overhauled his wagon for the journey, for he knew it would take a week or more of hard driving ahead, to make the trip. The weather had been dry for some time in Kaufman County and this fact had resulted in the tires on the wagon wheels becoming loose. Ringness had "shrunk" the iron tires in his shop and had tightened the wheels well for the journey . . . During the trip across part of the country, the rains came. There were no roads, and the mud became almost impassable. To make any progress at all it was necessary for the whole family to get out of the wagon, and as many as could had to help push the wagon. One day when Ringness was back of the wagon pushing . . . he noticed that one of the wagon wheels was cutting a furrow. The wooden spokes had become water soaked and as a result started expanding. The iron rim prevented outward expansion so the wheel had "cupped" into a concave shape [causing] the wheel to dig out a furrow in the mud. Ringness's mind went to work. His inventive power soon took possession of him, and when they reached their destination, he began "idling" away his time thinking, and hammering, and shaping sections of iron . . . In the course of time his dream came true. He made the first disc plow in his shop in Neils Creek valley.⁸

Several years later Ringness decided to return to Norway for a visit. He also intended to stop in Washington, D. C., to patent his invention. While visiting in New York, and prior to reaching Washington, Ringness sickened and died.⁹

Berg Rogstad, another one of the original members of the Bosque colony, arrived at Prairieville, Kaufman County, in 1853. After his marriage to Mrs. Johan Bronstad, the widow of a pioneer settler of Prairieville, Rogstad brought his family to Bosque County the following year. He chose his land on "the western fringe of the settlement" about sixteen miles west of Clifton. Rogstad chose his homesite "away from the creeks" but once again near timber and water. In 1855 the Rogstads became the parents of a son—John Rogstad—the first Norwegian child born in Bosque County.¹⁰

⁸ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

Other Norwegian settlers who arrived in Bosque County in 1854 included Carl Questad and family; Canute Canuteson and family; Ole Ween, a single man; the Jens Jenson family; and Andrias Bretta, another single man. The families that have been mentioned in this narrative made up the original Norwegian settlement in Bosque County; for the remainder of the pre-Civil War period, population growth was very slow in the Norwegian colony.

The trail from Henderson County to the Bosque frontier was beset with hardship and endless toil. It is significant, however, to note that the Norwegian pioneers, neighbors long before reaching western Bosque County, joined hands in a community effort designed to overcome the difficulties of erecting new homes, barns, and fences in an unsettled region. Oris E. Pierson describes these cooperative efforts as follows:

What now is regarded as toil and labor was then made to appear as amusement. The men held fencing bees. For days before the time set for congregating, the men in the community cut posts and sharpened them . . . When all was in readiness there were the Dahls, the Canutesons, the Ringnesses, the Colwicks—all meeting at some designated place to build a fence. Each had his yoke of oxen hitched to his wagon loaded with posts. From early morning till late in the afternoon the pickets were driven into the ground and bound together with wire at the top. It was not easy work, nor was it fast, but fences had to be built.

House construction was no less difficult and toilsome than fence building. The first homes were built either of logs or stone. The logs were cut to the desired length, and the ends were then notched so that when the logs were crossed alternately at the corners they tied one another in place. Naturally the trees were not straight enough to make the walls tight. It was necessary to fill the gaps and cracks between to keep the cold winds out . . . Some few homes were made of stone. These were more substantial, but they also required much more labor for construction. The pioneers . . . had to go to the stone quarry and fashion the stones, piece by piece, by hand. Sometimes only rock hammers and chisels were available for this work, while in other cases some few saws were available.¹¹

As has been mentioned, Norwegian migration to the Bosque area between 1857 and 1869 was slow; however, additions to the colony included the families of P. Paulson (1857), G. Jenson (1858), Jo Wilson and John Johnson (1859), and Ovie Colwick. Single men arriving during the same period included Ole Orting and Ole Wold (blacksmiths), David Lund (farmer), Neill Canuteson and Ole Canuteson (laborers), C. Strand, A. M. Lindberg (rockmason), and B. Swenson (farmer).¹²

The Bosque Norwegians were inherently opposed to slavery and subsequently to secession and the Civil War. During the war years the Bosque contingent remained aloof from the war effort and emigration from Nor-

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 52f.

¹² Census of 1860, Bosque County, Population Schedule (microfilm), Texas State Library.

way ceased altogether. The fact that these people spoke very little English has been cited as a factor in their inactivity regarding the Confederacy. An interesting story is told concerning the military career of a Bosque Viking by the name of Otto Swenson. Called to the colors of the Confederate Army "late in the war," Swenson was sent to active duty east of the Mississippi River with very little military training. Knowing "very little about the nature of the conflict," Swenson simply had no interest in the fighting. Since he had not been issued a uniform, Swenson solved his problem by walking away from his company, drifting around in enemy or neutral territory until the war officially ended, and then leisurely walking back to Bosque County, Texas.

At the close of the war between the states immigrants again began to arrive in Bosque County; some of these newcomers came from East Texas; others came directly from Norway. Jens and Chris Jenson settled in the Gary Creek valley, where they erected rock homes. Y. Grimland settled seven miles west of Clifton and became one of the best known members of the colony. This educated man served his neighbors as "counselor, business advisor, legal advisor, lawyer and arbiter" in any of their disputes, justiciable and otherwise. The Grimland farm, "located on the south bank of Gary Creek," soon became known to all of the settlers and his home became a business office. Ole Reirson, the nephew of the elder Johan R. Reirson, arrived in 1867 or 1868 to establish a home on "upper Meridian Creek, just north of the Berg Rogstad place."¹³

The hardships of travel during the frontier period are nowhere better illustrated than in the story of the journey of the Peter Hoff family from Galveston to Norse. According to Pierson, difficulties began when the Hoff family, who had already decided on Bosque County before leaving Norway, docked at Galveston to find themselves in a strange new world. Their story is as follows:

They arrived at Galveston just before Christmas in 1867. Many problems were facing them. They could speak almost no English, but by using some letters which they carried, they managed to make themselves understood. There were no railroads as yet by which they could travel, and since Hoff knew he must have a wagon on the farm, he decided to make his first major purchase in Texas . . . he stacked his belongings into as small a section of the wagon as possible and then he and his family found room . . . He told a kindly old gentleman in Galveston of his plight—trying to get to Bosque County without transportation power—and his newly-found friend suggested a solution. He would use his team hitched to Hoff's wagon for one day, and when night came they would go to the nearest farm and explain the situation. They would ask for lodging for the night and the next morning the farmer would be asked to furnish power . . . for another daylight trek . . . The plan sounded good to Hoff, but he doubted seriously that it would work out in practice. He was willing to try it, however, for even a trial would bring him one day nearer his destination.

¹³ Pierson, Norwegian Settlements in Bosque County.

It worked—the farther into the interior the more enthusiastic the “chain of farmers seemed to become.” Finally the Hoffes reached Bosque County—a tribute to “true Texas hospitality.”¹⁴

Other newcomers arrived in Bosque County during the year 1868 following a severe epidemic that brought death to twelve persons among the thirty-three Norwegian families residing at a place called Four Mile in Kaufman County. As a result, in the spring of 1868, acting on the advice of the Reverend S. S. Reque, the families residing at Four Mile moved in mass to the Bosque settlement. Many of the Four Mile-group settled “along the northwestern fringe of what may have been called the colony [in Bosque County].”¹⁵

3

DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSITION

By 1870 the “Viking pioneers” were firmly established in the Bosque territory; their troubles, however, were by no means over. Bosque County was still a frontier region during the 1870’s and 1880’s and the great multitude of hardships that characterize frontier society were present to plague the settlers along Neils, Gary, and Bee creeks. During the early 1870’s, the only cotton gin serving the Norwegian community was the so-called “Solberg gin” on the Jens Ringness farm. Some of the difficulties confronting a Bosque farmer of this period are related in an account by W. T. Tergerson of Cranfills Gap. According to the story:

In 1872 or 1873 Mr. Tergerson yoked up his oxen to the wagon to go to Solberg’s gin with his cotton. It was a long way to travel in that way, to go from what is now known as the Mustang community to the Ringness place. We see Mr. Tergerson as he slowly moved along the trails and across the wilderness, urging his oxen on. By late afternoon he managed to make the long trek to the gin . . . only to learn that so many farmers were waiting ahead of him that he could not possibly get his bale ginned that day. He was concerned about his family so he resolved to leave the wagon . . . at Solberg’s gin and walk home that night . . . and in the wee hours of the morning he arrived at his home.

There was not much time for sleep for he had to return to Solberg’s gin as early as possible the next day . . . he arose and started on his journey again. By noon he arrived at the gin, but he learned . . . that during the night the gin burned down and not until almost one year should have passed would Solberg be able to rebuild. He must now go to Clifton, nine miles farther away from home. This he did, and after three days had passed, he returned to his home with his single bale of cotton . . .

On another occasion Mr. Tergerson took another bale of cotton to Cranfills Gap. This was several years later. The power used by this gin was horsepower—real horsepower. The horse marched round and round, turning a large cog wheel by means of a long bar to which the traces of the horse were attached. When the lint was separated from the seed, the farmer picked

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 70-71.

up the lint from the floor, carried it to a huge hopper and packed the bale by "tromping" around. On this particular day the horse which was used for power had had a hard day, and when time came for Mr. Tergerson to gin his cotton, the horse gave out and there was no power . . . Tergerson unyoked the oxen from his wagon and hooked them to the power wheel of the gin and in that way furnished power to gin his own cotton.¹⁵

If rockmasons and blacksmiths are included in the occupation of farming, farm labor would be the only industry carried on by the Norwegian settlers. As the years went by and the Bosque farms became more productive, a surplus of both wheat and flour resulted. Flour mills were established at Clifton and in the Norse community (Norway Mills). Since Waco needed more flour than the mills of the McLennan County town could produce, the merchants of Waco were glad to purchase the Bosque surplus. As a result, an important freight road was established to link the Bosque hills with Waco. Jim Hoff was one of the most noted of the early freighters. After leaving the vicinity of Norway Mills, the wagon road ran southeasterly to parallel the watercourse of Hog Creek, then across the rolling prairies to the South Bosque River, "a favorite overnight campsite," and hence along the South Bosque to Waco. Great strides were made in agriculture between 1870 and 1900; the walking cultivator replaced the old double shovel in the cultivation of row crops, and the disc plow replaced the "old walking mould-board."¹⁶

A history of the Norwegian colony in Bosque County would be incomplete without a discussion concerning the historical development of the Lutheran Church. Predominantly Lutheran in doctrine, the first immigrants to the East Texas settlements carried with them a "staunch faith in religious principles." The family Bible, family worship books, and Luther's *Catechism and Explanation* were brought to America and Bosque County by each individual family. Emil Frederickson, the first Norwegian Lutheran pastor, came to Texas in 1854 and subsequently served both the East Texas and Bosque settlements until 1858. Frederickson originated church activity among the Norwegians of Texas, but organized religious endeavor did not begin in Bosque County until after the Civil War. It is significant, however, that Emil Frederickson baptised Gunnerius Ringness (the son of Jens and Kari Ringness) on October 14, 1855. After this date Frederickson worked very little in the Bosque region. Services were held at the Jens Ringness home with Jens Ringness and Ole Pierson in charge of baptisms.¹⁷

In 1866 the Reverend S. S. Reque came to Bosque County "to investigate the possibility of organizing a church and calling a pastor."¹⁸ On June 10, 1867, the first Norwegian Lutheran church was organized in Bosque County at the Jens Ringness home. Reque remained with the small congre-

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 72-75.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 85-86.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

gation until 1869; he was replaced by O. Estrem, who guided the church from 1869 until 1877. The first church building was completed during Estrem's ministry. With the completion of Our Savior's Lutheran Church at Norse in 1878, O. D. Nelson led the entire congregation in a march from the "rock school building" that had been serving as a meeting place to the new Norse church.¹⁹ Estrem resigned as minister in 1877 and during the same year the venerable Reverend J. K. Rystad commenced a pastorate that was to last without interruption until 1925. During this forty-eight-year period, the Reverend Rystad "served his people well" and the Norse church became the principal place of worship for all of the Norwegian community.

In the meantime, other churches had been established. In the early 1880's a meeting was held at the home of Salve Knudson, and as a result a new congregation known as the "Rock Church" or "St. Olaf" group was organized. The new church, built of rock "hand hewn in nearby quarries," was completed in 1886. G. G. Odegaard and Herman Estrem served the St. Olaf Church as outstanding ministers. In 1917 the church at Cranfills Gap was built as the result of an additional growth and expansion within the mother church. The Trinity Lutheran Church of Clifton was built in 1907 with P. E. Thorson as pastor.²⁰

Accustomed to dependence on their own kinsmen, the Norwegian settlers decided to organize a mutual fire insurance association. After two years of preliminary discussion, organization of the Norse *gjensidige brandforsikringselskab* was completed during the summer of 1883 and the charter became effective on January 1, 1884. The Norse Mutual Fire Insurance Association was so successful during the first ten years that in 1894 a resolution was adopted limiting membership to "Scandinavians or those who had married Scandinavians" and providing also that "no one living outside a twenty mile radius of Norse was eligible for membership."²¹ In January, 1906, a revised constitution written in English was adopted to provide for "non-Scandinavian members," an evaluation limitation of \$2500 on all homes insured, and a reappraisal of all homes once during every ten year interval. After the depression of 1929, values declined rapidly and "it seems both strange and ironical that in 1932 there was recorded the greatest number of fires and the greatest losses ever sustained by the company." Assessments were so regular that many members refused to pay and subsequently cancelled their insurance. Feeling that the values of 1926 were too high for 1932 standards and that many of the fires were of doubtful origin, the directors of the Norse Mutual called a special meeting on November 19, 1932, and adopted resolutions reducing the evaluation of all insured property by 25 per cent and providing that "any person who had sustained a loss" would be required to use 75 per cent of the insurance collected "to replace a home on his property." Strange enough, fire losses in the Norse community came

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 92-97.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 117f.

to an abrupt halt in November, 1932. Since 1932 the Norse Mutual has experienced smooth financial sailing and on December 21, 1946, the total value of insurance in force was \$1,054,158.²²

Another monument to the industry and faith of the Bosque Norwegians has been Clifton Junior College. It seems that public opinion in favor of a Lutheran school crystalized slowly during the early years of the Norse community. On May 6, 1896, a small group of men met at the home of T. T. Hogevald and formed a corporation known as "the Lutheran College of Clifton, Texas." The Reverend J. K. Rystad was chosen president and T. T. Hogevald secretary. The charter of the new school was speedily approved; N. Jacob Nelson and T. T. Hogevald donated eight acres of land, and on June 1, 1896, the charter was approved by the state of Texas. The first building, debt free, was dedicated on October 14, 1896. For twenty years the institution operated as a Lutheran high school; the status of a two-year college was not reached until 1923. Clifton College was accredited by the state educational agency on October 3, 1927. Never a large school, Clifton Junior College experienced financial difficulties from the beginning. In 1942 a fire destroyed the two dormitories. Although these buildings were replaced in 1945 and 1946 and the school experienced a minor boom after the close of the second World War, the struggle for survival ended in the winter of 1953-1954 when Clifton Junior College merged with Texas Lutheran College of Seguin, Texas.

The Norwegian pioneers of the Bosque region were a gay, lighthearted people fond of frequent platform dances, community picnics, and tournaments. A combined picnic and tournament was held annually during the early years on May 17 and July 4. Dinner on the ground featured "large baskets, filled to the brim, with all varieties of good eats." Refreshments consisted of "beer, alcohol, 'toddlies,' whiskey, home-made wines," and real "soda pop." Dances were held on these occasions and the merriment lasted from late evening until daylight of the following day. The real feature of the picnic, however, was the tournament, "a display of horsemanship in which silk ribboned riders attempted to gather iron rings from post supported brackets while his horse ran at full gallop." After each contestant had had three trials, he presented his lance or cue with his total number of rings to the judges. If his riding skill met the high standards set for tournament riders, the horseman received credit for all the rings that he had gathered in his three runs. Prizes would be awarded to the winners; first prize usually consisted of an excellent saddle with lesser awards going to the second and third place contestants. A list of the most frequent winners of the Bosque tournament would include the names of Ed Erickson, Tom C. Parks, Will Ragsdale, and Oscar Reesing.²³

Other festive occasions among the Norwegian settlers included weddings and the unique Christmas custom known as *Jule Bokking* (*Jule* mean-

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 98-107.

ing Christmas, and *Bokking* meaning deceptively-dressed or hooded). This native festival began the night following Christmas day and "on every evening till New Year *Jule Bokking* was the best and most enjoyable sort of fun." The main purpose of the game, of course, was "to disguise oneself in such a way that recognition would be impossible" and then visit the homes of neighbors.

During the early years, the Norwegian colony retained its old world traditions and customs and remained aloof from other Bosque residents. In other words, the Norwegian language, the old customs, and intramarriage gave rise to the practice of self-segregation. According to Oris E. Pierson, all these activities "brought unfavorable reports from surrounding areas. Much adverse criticism resulted and . . . in many cases unpleasant situations and controversies arose . . . As the country became more thickly settled, this antagonistic attitude between the groups increased in both volume and intensity. Fist fights . . . bordering on gang fights, became rather common affairs."²⁴ This trend, however, changed about the year 1910, and during the past forty years the differences of nationality have been largely removed. A great factor in this Americanization process came "when the blue-eyed Viking began seeking his mate among the American element in Bosque County;" consequently, intramarriage has long since given away to intermarriage. Where segregation and isolation "ruled supreme in 1870, amalgamation, racial mixture, and religious toleration were the ruling principles half a century later."²⁵ Everywhere those of Scandinavian descent "have been absorbed into the American way of life."

4

Gustav W. Belfrage

Gustav W. Belfrage was born at Stockholm, Sweden, on April 12, 1834; his mother was a baroness, his father a major and Royal Court Chamberlain to the king of Sweden. After an unhappy childhood Belfrage attended the Government Forestry School in Stockholm during the years 1854-1855. For some unknown reason, probably his fondness for alcohol, he left school without a degree, spent two years as forester on the estates of the king, lost his government position, and migrated to America sometime during the early 1860's. After his arrival at New York, Belfrage worked as an interpreter at the old Castle Garden. Although he knew six languages, he soon lost his first job in America "owing to his excessive drinking" and became a "down and outer, walking the streets of New York" until a charitable organization made it possible for him to travel

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

"to the southern states."²⁶ He finally arrived at Waco, Texas, in 1863 where S. J. Forsgard, a Swedish merchant, gave him a job as a clerk in his bakery and confectionery shop. Here in central McLennan County, Belfrage began his study of Texas insects..

After living at Waco until 1869 or 1870, Belfrage moved to the Norse community in Bosque County to continue his work as an entomologist. Belfrage, who has been recognized as one of the really careful and conscientious collectors of the United States, has been primarily responsible for the "extra-ordinary knowledge of the insects of Texas." As a collector he supplied many museums, among them the British Museum, the museum of the Academy of Science at Stockholm, and the National Museum at Washington, D. C.

During the period from 1870 to 1879, Gustav Belfrage lived at the home of Carl Questad. In the latter year (1879), Belfrage moved to a little house that he built near Meridian Creek on the Chris Pederson farm. By this time the naturalist was a confirmed alcoholic, a vice so excessively practiced that Belfrage often drained his specimens for the alcohol. He died of chronic alcoholism on December 7, 1882. According to professor Geiser, his estate included:

An old sofa, mattress, cotton pillow, sheet, piece of ducking, and quilt for the bed; a handful of old clothes, some of them ironic reminders of days of greater prosperity; stove, table, chairs; gallon cans, washbasins, coffee pots, and frying pans: these made up the total of his stock of furniture and clothing. But in the house was housed, also, a library of 194 bound and unbound volumes and pamphlets, mostly on zoological subjects; a great collection of 37,000 insects, pinned in insect-proof cases, besides other insects preserved in alcohol; all housed in a little hut . . . later sold to Andrew Stark. . . . The total value of the estate, including the great collection of insects, was fixed by the appraisers at \$491.40.²⁷

²⁶ Samuel Wood Geiser, "Pioneer Scientist Lies in Unnamed Grave," Dallas *Morning News*, February 23, 1930, Feature Section, p. 3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*



BOSQUE
COURTHOUSE (1886)

Part Three

Growth and Development

PART THREE
GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

1

RECONSTRUCTION AND AFTER

The reconstruction period in the history of Bosque County was one of confusion and lawlessness. During the year 1870, conditions were so bad that the *Daily State Journal* of Austin reported that "they appear to average about two killings a week in Bosque. A short time since two Lindsay's charged with stock stealing were lynched while under arrest, and now comes word that two of the relatives named Wheeler have been dispatched. There are no laws and no civilization in Bosque." Other examples of this approach to anarchy are not difficult to find. During the year 1871, James Gathings and Sol Nicholson killed a Negro man and woman in Bosque County and fled eastward into Hill County. A few days later Governor E. J. Davis sent a certain Lieutenant Prichett and four Negro soldiers to arrest Gathings and Nicholson. The state officers went to the Hill County home of Colonel J. J. Gathings and demanded the opportunity to search his house for "little Jim" Gathings. Upon being informed that the Pritchett party had left their search warrant at Waco, the elder Gathings refused to allow the Negroes to search his home but relented to a search by the white officers at the point of a gun; young Gathings was not to be found. The officers and Negroes then started for the village of Covington, where Colonel Gathings had them arrested for attempting a search of his property without a warrant. Pritchett then sent word that he intended to mob Colonel Gathings, and angry Hill County citizens stood guard at the Gathings home for eight nights; the mob did not appear.¹

With the death of President Lincoln and the triumph of the radical Republicans in Congress, all ex-Confederate soldiers and sympathizers were removed from local office by Congressional decree. As a result Bosque County experienced a complete turnover of county officials; county judge J. K. Helton was replaced by Thomas L. Green, who served until 1876; Jasper N. Mabray, the veteran county clerk, was removed in favor of Henry W. Sadler; Sherod Townsend, the sheriff, was ousted and replaced by Johnathan James, who was followed in turn by Samuel Fossett and John A. Biffle before Captain J. J. Cureton's election in 1876. Many changes also occurred in the ranks of the county commissioners between 1866 and 1876. The election of 1876 returned the old timers to control of county politics.

When reconstruction came to a close, Bosque was still a frontier county. The population was small and vacant land could be found in all sections of the county. Furthermore, Indians occasionally raided the settle-

¹ *Biographies of Central Texans* (Lewis Co.), 100; *Daily State Journal* (Austin), January 23, 1870.

ments west of the Bosque River. In 1867 Karl Quested narrowly escaped death at the hands of the Comanches and Ole Nystel was taken captive. He was held by the Indians for three months and bartered to a keeper of a Kansas trading post for merchandise worth three hundred dollars.² Beginning in the early 1870's, however, Bosque County began to realize some of the benefits of a settled society. The campaign to bring new settlers to Bosque instituted by Jacob de Cordova, land agent for Richard B. Kimball and resident of Kimball Bend, paid large dividends as the agrarian communities of the Civil War and reconstruction periods grew into small towns.

Among the new settlers to come to the Bosque territory was Captain J. J. (Jack) Cureton, who moved to Bosque from Palo Pinto County. Cureton was born in Arkansas and came to Texas in 1846 with Colonel Yell's Volunteers. At the close of the war with Mexico, he drove a herd of Texas Longhorns across the deserts to the new state of California. Returning to Arkansas after a boat journey around Cape Horn, Jack Cureton married and returned to Texas in 1854, settling on the Brazos River in the Palo Pinto region. Active in frontier defense, 1854-1865, Cureton brought his family to the Hog Creek section of Bosque County in 1868.³

The settlers in the Northern section of the county around Walnut Springs and along the watercourse of Steele Creek were made to feel more secure by the presence in the community of Dr. William Henderson Russell, an old-time country doctor who carried his drugstore in his packsaddle, mixed his own prescriptions by measuring the drugs with the point of his knife, and wrapped the powders in cornshucks, "fashioned, rolled, and cut by himself."⁴ A native of Mississippi who settled in Bosque County in 1860, Henderson Russell began his study of frontier medicine as a student of Dr. William Bateman, the pioneer Meridian physician. After five years of practical study, Russell entered Louisiana State University Medical School at New Orleans, and, after attending lectures during the year 1870, received the degree of Doctor of Medicine. He then returned to Bosque County to practice medicine in the northern part of the county. In 1875 he opened a drug and grocery store at his home and secured a United States post office known as Russell Gap. Dr. Henderson Russell

² B. B. Swenson, "The Early Memoirs of B. B. Swenson," *Temple Telegram*, February 25, 1934, Archives, University of Texas Library.

³ W. E. Cureton, "A Sketch of the Life of Captain J. J. Cureton," in Marvin Hunter's *Trail Drivers of Texas*, 778. The Cureton family in 1868 included William E. Cureton (1848-1926), who was educated at Rock School, Hog Creek, served two terms in the Texas Legislature, directed the American Livestock Association for a time, and was vice-president of the Old Trail Drivers Association at the time of his death.

⁴ John A. Lomax (ed.), "A Trip to Texas," by Susan Frances Lomax, *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XLVIII (October, 1948), 258n (hereafter cited as Lomax, "A Trip to Texas.")

took care of the health of Bosque settlers living in a fifteen-mile square between the Bosque River and Steele Creek. He was a man of character, intelligence and force—a credit to his profession.⁵

In the autumn of 1869 John Avery Lomax brought his family to Bosque County from their home in the Black River region of Mississippi. The journey was made by wagon and the route progressed from:

Shreveport to Corsicana; then to Hillsboro; crossed the Brazeros at Towerash; then to what is now Morgan (it was then the Nickels farm); then on to Dr. Russells on Steels creek—but one house then between Morgan and the Drs. Oh what a bleake looking country it was—not a tree in sight.⁶

The John Lomax family continued on to the Bosque River at Meridian; there they built a new home. Some of the hardships of the Bosque frontier in the 1870's are revealed by Susan Frances Lomax, who remembered that:

I never did see an Indian although they made raids all over this country in those days. We rented land across the Bosque River the first year. All the boys and my husband had to go to work—took their dinner. I was left with my little baby and John all day alone. I felt like I might be skelped anytime . . . We had to take our mules up a ravine moonlight nights as the Indians made their raids on those bright nights. One time in my life I was sorry to see the moon shine.⁷

Another indication of a settled society was the rise of Masonic lodges in Bosque County. The first Masonic order chartered in the county was the Meridian Lodge Number 268, an organization that met "at the Post Office on Thursday preceeding the full moon of each month." The Meridian Lodge was chartered as early as the year 1860 and had members from all over Bosque County. The officers for the year 1860-1861 included W. R. Sedberry, John Abney, J. Fields, W. H. Bridges, and T. C. Alexander. The list of master masons included A. C. Pearce, James Buckner Barry, M. W. Fuller, A. T. Norris, G. W. Martin, R. S. Barnes, A. S. Thomas, J. S. Hanna, W. T. Kemp, and others.⁸

The John Armstrong Lodge Number 291 was chartered during the year 1866 and was located on Hog Creek in southeastern Bosque County. During the year 1867-1868 the officers of this organization included L. H. Scrutchfield, J. W. Adams, W. C. Barnett, W. H. Maples, A. M. Barnett, and S. M. Adams. Master masons included B. H. Adams, John Armstrong, M. W. Corbell, L. L. Clark, D. B. Cutbirth, J. D. Odle, and others.⁹ Three years later the John Armstrong Lodge, meeting in "the

⁵ *Ibid.*; *Biographies of Central Texans*, 268.

⁶ Lomax, "A Trip to Texas."

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Proceedings of the M. W. Grand Lodge of Texas at its Twenty-fifth Annual Communication*, Galveston (*Galveston News*), 1861.

⁹ *Proceedings of the M. W. Grand Lodge of Texas at its Thirty-second Annual Communication*.

Lodge Room on Hog Creek [Rock School]" had a membership of forty-five. The Kimball Lodge Number 292 was also chartered during 1867-1868 and moved to Kopperl in the early 1890's. The Clifton Lodge was not chartered until the mid-1870's.

One of the centers of population during the 1870's and 1880's was the agrarian community located along the banks of Hog Creek in the extreme southeastern section of the county. The lands around this little stream, named by Neil McLennan and George B. Erath in 1837 because of the large number of "wilde Mexican Hogs" found along its water-course, were among the first occupied territory of the county. The pioneer settlers in this region included the families of John Armstrong, Lowry H. Scrutchfield, J. K. Helton, W. C. Barnett, J. W. Adams, Dan, Ben, and William Cutbirth, P. Nowlin, John Thomas, Jonathan McFadden, J. T. Vaughan, Jerry Odle, William S. Gouldy, J. P. Hinton, B. T. Whitehead, C. H. McSpadden, B. H. and S. M. Adams, W. H. Maples, and J. J. Cureton.

During the year 1867 the Hog Creek community was consolidated by the construction of a rock school and church on the east bank of the small stream. The building was constructed from the limestone rock gathered from the Bosque hills, construction was supervised by two brothers named Logan. After completion, this historic structure went by the names of Rock School and Rock Church. Y. A. Hamilton and W. E. Rosborough taught the children of Hog Creek during the school terms of 1868 and 1869. During the year 1870, John Armstrong conducted the school; Armstrong, born in Tennessee in 1819, had received his education at Center Academy and Roseville, Tennessee. He came to Texas in 1853 and moved to Bosque County where he practiced his dual profession of farming and teaching. On Sundays Rock School became Rock Church as the Cumberland Presbyterians, Primitive Baptists, and other congregations used the building. On Saturday night "before the full moon of each month" the members of the John Armstrong Lodge Number 291 held their meeting in the second floor room of Rock School. This rock building served southeastern Bosque County as a community center until the year 1906; the battered building still stands on Hog Creek.

In the spring of 1878 Hog Creek and neighboring communities in Bosque and Coryell counties were aroused by the brutal Vaughan murder. J. T. Vaughan, a thrifty bachelor, kept a small country store on Hog Creek, not far above Rock School. Over the years, Vaughan accumulated a considerable amount of money, and since banks were few and far between, he kept his savings in an iron safe at the rear of the store. On a night in May, 1878, Vaughan was brutally murdered and his money stolen by persons unknown. A search was immediately started and it seemed that the trail led to the vicinity of Babbville, in Coryell County, the home of William (Bill) Babb; Bill Ike Babb, his son; Dave Ware, and Jasper Whitley. Together, these men were known as "the Babb gang," a typical frontier group of the type that would ride their horses into various Waco

saloons and order a drink from the saddle. Known to be the most daring men in their territory, the Babbs were feared and disliked in Coryell County.

John Stull, a deputy United States marshal of Turnersville, had great dislike for the Babb crowd and had them arrested on suspicion after the Vaughan murder and robbery. As a result, Bill Ike and Bill Babb, Dave Ware and Jasper Whitley were placed in the Bosque County jail at Meridian. It is significant, however, that Stull was unable to prove the guilt of these men and they were soon released for lack of evidence. In the meantime, another trail had been found that led to the hills of Lampasas County and pointed a finger of suspicion toward the Horrell brothers. As a result, Tom, Mart, and Sam Horrell and Bill Crabtree were arrested and lodged in jail at Meridian. Evidence of their guilt multiplied as time went by, and the Bosque public became convinced that the Horrells killed Vaughan and robbed his store. On a night in July, 1878, an angry Bosque mob stormed the Meridian jail and killed the Horrell brothers and Bill Crabtree.¹⁰

Peace and quiet did not return to the Bosque-Coryell frontier with the lynching of the Horrell brothers and Bill Crabtree. On December 8, 1878, John Stull, the Coryell marshal responsible for arresting the Babbs, was killed in his Turnersville home in a double murder that included a man named Smith, who was spending the night at Stull's house. Once again the killers were unknown and once again suspicion pointed toward the Babbs. Although no evidence was compiled against them, William and Bill Ike Babb were forced to leave Coryell County by irate citizens.¹¹

2

THE CATTLE INDUSTRY

As the pioneers of the Texas frontier migrated northward along the rivers and streams of upper Milam County, they brought their small herds of cattle into the region. The cattle industry, therefore, was introduced into Bosque County before the organization of the territory to become a primary industry in the economy of the land. Although the primary stock-raisers were hampered by their remoteness from market centers, the cattle industry experienced a substantial growth in the years following the Civil War when Texas cattle trails were established to connect the range country with the railroads of Kansas.

One of the factors responsible for the growth of the cattle industry in Bosque County was the Chisolm Trail, the most significant of all Texas cattle trails; entering the Bosque territory east of the Bosque River, this famous trail followed the grassy prairies east of Clifton and Meridian to cross Steele Creek at the Samuel Nichols farm (now the town of Morgan)

¹⁰ For a complete account of the career of the Horrell boys and their associates see James B. Gillett, *Six Years with the Texas Rangers*, 102-117.

¹¹ J. B. Cranfill, *Dr. J. B. Cranfill's Chronicle: A Story of life in Texas*, 221ff.

and the Brazos River at Kimball Bend. During the high point of the cattle drives, 1870-1878, the Bosque portion of the trail was well marked and the town of Kimball flourished as a typical frontier "cowtown."¹²

The open range, unhampered by cedar rail fences and Bois d'Arc hedgerows, existed along the Bosque River and its tributaries until the early 1880's. Barbed wire, invented in 1874, was brought into the Bosque territory in the years following 1880, spread quickly, and by the year 1885 the open range was a thing of the past. Soon after the coming of barbed wire the cattle holdings of the Bosque stockmen increased. For example, 26,113 head of cattle were listed for the county in 1880; a decade later the number had increased to 49,327.¹³ Every farmer-stockman of the region owned some cattle, but it must be remembered that these holdings were small when compared to those of the large ranchers of south and southwest Texas. Barbed wire, welcomed by many, led to the serious problem of fence cutting on behalf of the small landowners who opposed this novel method of fencing the range. Fence cutters, armed with wire cutters and firearms, operated in small organized bands and roamed the country side at night. Officers of the law were helpless against these organized groups and fence cutting became a serious problem during the mid-1880's

In the spring of 1888, a group of stockmen assembled at Meridian to organize an agency for protection against fence cutting. As a result, the Central Texas Wire Fence Protective Association was formed with Frank Kell (Clifton) as president, John H. Gouldy (Meridian) as vice-president, L. W. Chase as secretary, and Parker Kellum (Valley Mills) as treasurer. A central committee consisting of Tom M. Pool, C. S. Hayes, John N. Hill, T. L. Dunlap, and John Goodman was appointed and the constitution stated that the purpose of the organization was "to assist by all lawful means the officers and courts of the state in bringing to justice those who destroy property by cutting down and destroying fences."¹⁴

Another stockman's organization of a similar nature was the so-called Anti-Wolf League, chartered at Meridian on April 28, 1888, and designed to rid the timberlands and prairies of the Bosque territory of the predatory wolf and coyote. Dr. W. H. Parks of Iredell was named president of the Anti-Wolf League; Tom M. Pool served as vice-president;

¹² Edwin Seymour Nichols to William C. Pool, December 9, 1945. Edwin Seymour Nichols (1863-1949) was born near Morgan, Texas, and was the son of Samuel Stillman and Elizabeth Jane Nichols, pioneer residents of the Steele Creek valley. Nichols was proud of the fact that he was born and reared where the Chisolm Trail crossed Steele Creek. He grew up to be one of the best riders and ropers in the Bosque region. Nichols' colorful career on the Bosque frontier included participation in the task of constructing one of the first barbed wire fences in the region and a trip "up the trail" in 1883. His memoirs have been edited by his daughter, Ruby Nichols Cutbirth, and published by the Texas Folklore Society under the title *Ed Nichols Rode a Horse*.

¹³ *Report on the Statistics of Agriculture in the United States at the Eleventh Census*: 1890, p. 308.

¹⁴ *Constitution of the Central Texas Wire Fence Protective Association* (Meridian), 1888.

John H. Gouldy was secretary. A bounty of five dollars was offered for every wolf or coyote scalp brought before the central committee. This bounty proved to be the downfall of the League. The resulting poor financial support caused the Anti-Wolf League to die a debtor institution before the end of the year 1888.¹⁵

A list of the leading ranchers of the 1880's and 1890's would include the names of Edward G. P. (Parker) Kellum, Leroy Parks, Tom M. Pool, and William E. Cureton. An economic history of the period would be incomplete without special consideration for these men.

Edward G. P. Kellum was born in Chickasaw County, Mississippi, on January 9, 1851, and came to Texas with his parents in 1854. The Kellum family settled on a McLennan County farm, where Parker lived until he moved to the Valley Mills community in the year 1874. Edward G. P. Kellum accumulated "some two thousand acres of land" and became a "heavy dealer in live stock" with some 2600 head of sheep and "many head of cattle" on his ranch, a tract of land that commanded "a broad sweep of the Bosque River valley." In addition to his ranching, Parker Kellum became a merchant in the town of Valley Mills and one of the "founding fathers" of the community.¹⁶

Tom M. Pool (1849-1927) was born at Port Sullivan, Milam County, Texas, and moved to McLennan County with his widowed mother in 1853 to settle near Bosqueville. After Caroline Pool's death in 1855, Tom Pool grew to manhood in the Bosque frontier home of Lowry H. Scrutchfield. Educated at Clifton Academy, the Rock Church School on Hog Creek, and Salado College, Pool became a successful farmer-stockman on a 2360-acre tract of land that extended across the Bosque River valley between Valley Mills and Clifton. In 1873 he married Mellie Cutbirth of the Hog Creek community and subsequently became the father of ten children. He has been described as "prominently identified with political circles . . . a staunch and substantial Democrat of the old school." In 1886 and 1887 Pool served as county commissioner from the Valley Mills district and, aside from a long tenure on the local school board, this was the only political office that he ever held.¹⁷

Leroy Parks was born in Marshall County, Mississippi, on October 5, 1827, and located on the Bosque County frontier in 1859 after residence in Nacogdoches and Anderson counties. On his arrival in Bosque County, Leroy Parks built "a little cabin, 16 x 16 on a small tract of land west of the Bosque." He was interested in raising both cattle and horses and during the 1870's possessed 300 head of horses and 1500 cattle.

¹⁵ *Bosque Citizen* (Meridian), May 3, 1888.

¹⁶ *Biographies of Central Texans*, 796.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 640; Tom M. Pool Papers, Archives, University of Texas Library.

Parks also added to his original land holdings, finally accumulating 4600 acres of Bosque land. In 1856 Parks married Susan Wheeler, theirs being the first marriage license issued in the new county.¹⁸

One of the most colorful of all the Bosque stockmen of the 1880's and 1890's was William E. Cureton, a man whose name has appeared before in this narrative. William E. (Bill) Cureton was born in Franklin County, Arkansas, in 1848 and came to Texas in 1854 with his father, Captain J. J. (Jack) Cureton. After crossing the Red River at Preston Crossing and passing "a little village on the Trinity named Dallas," the Cureton family settled on "Keechi Creek, then Milam district, now Palo Pinto County, where they built the first house in that part of the country."¹⁹ Young Cureton spent his boyhood on the Palo Pinto frontier in the midst of rather frequent Indian raids and other frontier hardships. William E. Cureton came to Bosque County with his father in 1868 to settle on Hog Creek. He later moved to Walnut Springs, and, after participating in several cattle drives to Arizona and California in the early 1870's, entered politics as a strong advocate of the principles of the Populist Party. Cureton served two terms in the Texas Legislature, 1894-1898, as a representative of the Populist Party. After active interest in the political career of James E. Ferguson, Cureton moved to Austin where he died in the home of his son, Calvin M. Cureton, in 1926.

3

AGRARIAN POLITICS

During the period of American history extending from the end of Reconstruction to the Populist revolt of the late 1880's and early 1890's, both national and state politics were dominated by the forces of big business; the ethics of business became the ethics of politics. During this era the farmers and ranchers of the American west found that their interests were completely disregarded by the national leaders of both the Democratic and Republican parties. As a result the farm groups of the United States sought relief in nation-wide farm organizations and third parties.

Late in the 1870's the Bosque farmers gave support to the Granger movement. The National Grange, or Patrons of Husbandry, made its appearance in Texas with the organization of a local lodge in Bell County during the year 1873. Within five years the Grange had spread through all central Texas counties. In Bosque County, the agrarian order was well established by 1880, and several cooperative mercantile establishments

¹⁸ *Biographies of Central Texans*, 438; Cureton and Cureton, *History of Bosque County*, 8. John Parks, the father of Leroy Parks, was a native of North Carolina, trans-Allegheny frontiersman, and veteran of the War of 1812. He lived in Tennessee and Mississippi before coming to Texas in 1839 to settle in Nacogdoches County. In 1844 the Parks family moved to Anderson County and on to the Bosque region in 1859.

¹⁹ Tom M. Pool Papers (undated newspaper clipping), Archives, University of Texas Library.

had been instituted within the boundaries of the county. The Greenback Party, a political expression of the Grange, had only limited success among the Bosque voters. During the mid-1880's the Farmers Alliance experienced a rapid growth in the county and the Grange soon assumed a position of secondary importance.²⁰

The Farmers Alliance of Texas, organized in the neighboring county of Lampasas in 1875, was created to combat "thieves, land sharks," and the activities of "cattle kings."²¹ During the formative years the Alliance was hampered by poor attendance and the difficulties of organization, but by the year 1882 a total of 125 alliances existed in the counties of north and central Texas. The Bosque Alliance was subdivided into many local organizations, quarterly meetings were held at the courthouse, and cooperative enterprises were established. During the year 1886 the leaders of the Bosque Alliance were J. W. Stinson, president; C. H. McSpadden, secretary; Zeke Ogden, A. J. Walton, J. L. Owenby, Koss Barry, John F. Gore, W. W. Hines, J. C. Crabb, W. A. Jackson, Jot Pope, and D. O. Barton.²²

On June 23-24, 1892, the agrarian discontent culminated in the State convention of the Peoples (Populist) Party of Texas at Dallas. The cheering delegates "reaffirmed the platform" of the national party and promised to enact radical reforms of the abuses and usurpations of power by those elevated to positions of power by the Democratic and Republican parties in National and State Governments."²³ Over a thousand delegates, mostly from north and northwest Texas, took part in the proceedings as the convention nominated T. L. Nugent of Tarrant County as the party candidate for governor.

Although Nugent was defeated in the election of 1892, the Populist Party remained a power in Texas politics until 1902. In Bosque County, as elsewhere, a great majority of those supporting the party were farmers and stockmen. Among the leading Populists of the county were William E. Cureton of Walnut Springs, who served two terms in the Texas legislature; James Buckner (Buck) Barry, also of Walnut Springs, who ran for state treasurer on the Populist ticket in 1898; Koss Barry, farmer-stockman of Walnut Springs; James L. Owenby, a farmer of the Morgan community; William Hines, a farmer near Clifton; N. A. Massey, Walnut Springs; and Calvin M. Cureton, a publisher of Walnut Springs. The *People's Tribune* (Walnut Springs), edited by James Day, became an "organ of the Populist Party in 1895."²⁴

²⁰ Roscoe Martin, *The People's Party in Texas, A Study in Third Party Politics*, University of Texas Bulletin, No. 3308; Hugh J. Cureton to William C. Pool, Tom M. Pool Papers, Archives, University of Texas Library.

²¹ Ralph Smith, "The Farmers Alliance in Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XLVII, 194f.

²² *Bosque Citizen* (Meridian), June 23, 1886.

²³ Ernest William Winkler, *Platforms of Political Parties in Texas*, University of Texas Bulletin No. 33, pp 293-314.

²⁴ *Biographies of Central Texas* (see biographical sketches of the men named above).

The political philosophy behind the discontent that motivated the surge to populism in Texas during the decade from 1890 to 1900 was admirably stated by James Buckner Barry, who wrote the editor of the *Bosque Citizen* that while he had no fears of "Texas democracy," he had "no confidence in national democracy," and held:

To the principles as taught by Jefferson, Jackson, Calhoun, and our own Sam Houston. I do not believe in Horace Greelee's democracy at all, and very little in Cleveland. My best lesson in politics was taught by a lot of yearling colts and a jackass. I once took the bell off of a grey mare that had kept the colts on good grass and water, and hung it upon the jackass's neck. To my surprise the colts followed the jackass and helped him destroy my neighbors substance, thinking it was the good old grey mare yet wearing the bell. Since that lesson I have used my five great senses to find out whether I was following the jackass or the grey mare.²⁵

One of the most bitter local questions ever to come before the voters of Bosque County was the famous "courthouse battle" of 1884-1886. The small log cabin built by William McCurry in 1854 was used as the county courthouse until it was replaced by a two-room frame building in 1860. This second courthouse burned in 1871 and Bosque remained without a seat of government until 1875, when a two-story limestone courthouse was built by A. J. Green and Dave Neely at a cost of \$10,000. Early in the year 1884 a small group of Bosque citizens decided that the county should replace this relatively small courthouse with a new limestone building. Those favoring the new courthouse moved rather quietly and in the summer election of 1884 the so-called courthouse faction was successful in electing R. G. Childress county judge, and John S. Goodman, E. G. W. Ogden, A. J. Walton, and Tom M. Pool as county commissioners. After the election those opposed to the construction project (and records indicate that a considerable number of the voters were opposed to the scheme) organized under the name of the Anti-Courthouse Party and the battle commenced.

In spite of the opposition, county judge Childress and the commissioners court of Ogden, Walton, Goodman, and Pool supervised the drawing of blueprints and made plans to raze the old building in favor of a new \$60,000 limestone building. The belated opposition now cried that such an ambitious program would bankrupt the county and place an unfair tax burden on the citizens. They also suggested that since the courthouse party was obviously in a minority, that the county judge and commissioners should resign their posts. Commissioners Ogden and Walton faded into the background, but Childress, Goodman and Pool announced that a building contract had been let. On the day that workers were to begin tearing down the old building, a huge crowd gathered around the square at Meridian; malcontents were making threats, and numerous six-shooters were

²⁵ *Bosque Citizen* (Meridian), July 3, 1886.

in evidence. It is significant, however, that the better judgements prevailed, and, although curses flew thick and fast, no violence resulted as the building that had served as a courthouse for a decade was torn to the ground. The construction of the new courthouse proceeded without interruption through the year 1886 and the new building was finished before the end of the year. The men primarily responsible for the new seat of county government were Judge R. G. Childress, John Goodman, and Tom M. Pool—the only three names appearing on the cornerstone.²⁶

Local politics of the later period, 1910-1932, continued to reflect the traditional agrarian philosophy. It is significant that the voters of Bosque County gave James E. and Miram A. Ferguson overwhelming popular majorities in every state election in which the Fergusons were involved between 1916 and 1934. Another significant development in local politics of the 1920's was the arrival of the Ku Klux Klan. In March of 1922 the *Clifton Record* carried a notice to the effect that "the Ku Klux Klan made its first appearance in Bosque County last week at Walnut Springs when they left a notice of warning with the editor of the local paper for publication."²⁷ Although the Klan was active in local politics for almost a decade, its influence was limited and its revival of brief duration.

One of the most colorful political campaigns in the history of the county came with the national election of 1928 when Alfred E. Smith, the "happy warrior" from the sidewalks of New York, represented the standards of the Democratic Party against Herbert Hoover, the popular choice of the Republican opposition. After Smith received the nomination of the Democratic Convention at Houston, the anti-Smith forces organized with Alvin S. Moody of Houston as chairman. As elsewhere in the Southern United States, the Texans objected to Al Smith's Roman Catholic background, his opposition to prohibition, and his New York mannerisms which were foreign to rural America. In Bosque County the anti-Smith Democrats were led by T. Mitchell, Iredell merchant and county chairman of the Democratic Party. On July 10, 1928, the Democratic Executive Committee met in "extraordinary session" at Meridian, elected J. C. Phillips as chairman *pro tem* and Henry D. Wintz as secretary, and requested that Mitchell resign as county chairman on the grounds that "the Republican party is the enemy of the southern farmer."²⁸ Besides Wintz and Phillips, the "regular" Democrats attending this executive committee session included R. W. Sparks, A. Curtie Odle, John L. Snider, and Luke Sheppard.

T. Mitchell, however, refused to resign as party chairman, so the pro-Smith Democrats ran their own candidate for the post of party chairman

²⁶ Hugh J. Cureton to William C. Pool, Tom M. Pool Papers, Archives, University of Texas Library.

²⁷ *Clifton Record*, March 17, 1922.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, July 20, 1928.

in the July primary; Will C. Pool, Bosque valley farmer, was the one chosen to oppose Mitchell. The campaign for this usually insignificant post was intense; on the eve of the primary election Mitchell reflected the political temper of the times when he wrote:

One more time we wish to urge every true Democrat to vote on July 28. A true Democrat is one who stands by Democratic principles and refuses to vote for Al Smith after he bolted the prohibition platform of the Houston convention. It takes courage to stand up for your conventions . . . I believe by the November election 75 per cent of the men, 85 per cent of the ladies and 99 per cent of the ministry in Bosque County will be against Al Smith . . . not half of the people of this county have or will bow their knee to Al Smith, the Pope of Rome and their wet Tammany Hall.²⁹

The following day (July 26) T. Mitchell of the anti-Smith forces defeated Will C. Pool for county Democratic chairman by the vote of 1924 to 1830, a forerunner of a more one-sided tally in the coming November election. The bitter battle among the Democratic family continued, however, and when the county convention assembled at Meridian on August 4, the pro-Smith wing of the party was strong enough to choose Koss Barry of Walnut Springs as secretary and maintained a substantial majority on the resolutions committee.³⁰ Therefore, a resolution was adopted to the effect that "all good loyal Democrats will support the nominees of the Democratic Party from President down; and all who aid, assist, or help in any way the election of the nominee of the Republican Party are unfaithful to the Democratic Party and unloyal to its principles and traditions."³¹ It is significant, however, that too many Bosque voters were against Al Smith and in the November election Hoover carried the county by a vote of 1398 to 1190.³²

4

TOWNS AND TRADE CENTERS

After one hundred years of settlement, the most striking fact concerning the population statistics of Bosque County is that the towns, admirably suited to the farming and ranching economy of the region, have remained small in both number and size. Bosque towns were established between 1852 and 1882 along the banks of the river or on one of the two railroads. Without exception, each town passed through a period of growth and expansion followed by a leveling off or recession. It is not the purpose of this narrative to attempt to discuss the causes of this pattern of economic development; they are self-evident to the student of Texas history.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, July 27, 1928.

³⁰ The committee on resolutions consisted of R. W. Sparks, J. N. Fallis, Koss Barry, H. J. Cureton, T. W. Elliott, T. L. Dunlap, T. C. Hill, Bill Woods, Frank Frazier, J. G. Simms, Wilburn Phillips, George P. Robertson, J. C. Phillips, and Will C. Pool.

³¹ Clifton *Record*, August 10, 1928.

³² *Ibid.*, November 16, 1928.

Information on the towns, society, and economy of Bosque County during the year 1871 was recorded by Dr. G. C. McGregor, a physician of Waco, who made a saddle trip through central Texas from the vicinity of Brenham, Washington County, to Meridian and Fort Graham in Bosque and Hill counties, and on to Groesbeck in Limestone county. In part, the McGregor account reads as follows:

From Waco we left on Saturday for Meridian in Bosque County: about 22 miles we came to Mr. Daniel McNeill's on Hog Creek a very pretty country. I found Mrs. McNeill looking well and glad to see her old acquaintance. We stayed until Sunday and left for Valley Mills, a small town on North Bosque, a lovely stream that has much water and fine fish with splendid farms along the river valley. Here we found D. McNeill (Wild Archy) who went with us to Childer's Creek where we found Sandy McNeill. They live in a prairie country and is quite rocky. We remained here until Monday morning. The crops on the prairie are poor from the drought. There is a good deal of stealing about here but the thieves are summarly dealt with. We left Monday for Meridian, passed over a large prairie country to the Bosque River near Clifton, a place with a few stores and a flouring mill. This is certainly a beautiful valley with rich lands and fine water but chills and fever. All the way up to Jack Lewis' it is fine country. Meridian is a poor place with some 6 stores and a poor looking court house and rotten jail.

From here we turned our course for Fort Graham and went across to Steels Creek and down it to Louis Whitlys where we found the family all pretty well . . . We found the land very good there and beautiful farms on the Brazos River. They are all suffering from the dry weather. We crossed the river and found it about 15 inches deep . . . Fort Graham is on the East side of the river is not even a respectable one horse town.³³

Before tracing the highlights of the history of the towns of the Bosque territory, it might be well to mention the fact that the historian finds it most difficult to distinguish between fact and legend concerning the origin of the towns and communities of the county. Dates vary with their source and are difficult to establish accurately. More confusion results from the desire of present communities to be represented as the "first" of the Bosque towns. Since nearly all communities date their origin from the arrival of the first settler, usually a homesteader seeking a land claim with no thought of "establishing" a town, these dates of origin have been accepted with the mental reservation that the so-called town often followed the first settlers by several years.

Clifton, located on the west bank of the Bosque River about three miles below the mouth of Meridian Creek, was established in the winter of 1852-1853 when the families of Samuel Locker, Monroe Locker, Frank Kell, and T. A. McSpadden settled in the Bosque River valley near the site of the present town. These early pioneers were soon joined by others. W. T. Kemp

³³ Roger N. Conger (ed.) "Journal of a Saddle Trip through Central Texas in 1871," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LV (October, 1951), 265.

and J. M. Stinnett became the first storekeepers of the community; C. C. Dewey, a native of New York, settled nearby to follow the occupation of wheelwright; and the Norwegian settlers in the hills west of the river (Jens Ringness, John Johnson, Niell Swenson, Charles Questad, Hendrick O. Dahl, Ole Pierson, Ole Canuteson, and others) provided an agricultural basis for the community.

By the year 1860 the population of the Clifton community was sufficient to support a school. As a result, the Texas legislature incorporated "the Clifton Academy" on February 11, 1860, and named William R. Sedberry, C. C. Dewey, W. B. Moore, L. H. Scrutchfield, John Locker, Samuel [R. S.] Barnes, and J. Stinnett as the board of trustees.³⁴ The water mill was constructed on the Bosque River in 1867 and became one of the most famous landmarks for miles around. Like other communities on the Texas frontier, Clifton grew slowly during the decade following the Civil War. In 1881 the Santa Fe Railroad reached the Bosque River at Clifton and the town gradually moved from the river bank near the water mill to the immediate vicinity of the local railroad station. By 1886 the population of the little town had reached 350; the community business center consisted of six mercantile establishments, two drug stores, two blacksmith shops, a flour mill, two saloons, a grain warehouse, and two cotton gins.³⁵

Clifton experienced considerable growth as a trade and business center between the mid-1880's and 1910. Among the business leaders of this period, the historian finds the name of J. K. Bass, a native of North Carolina, who came to Texas in 1849 to reside in Washington County prior to his move to Clifton in 1884. During the next eight years, Bass was a partner in the mercantile firm of Lockett and Bass and later a clerk in other establishments of the community. In 1892 he purchased a local cotton gin, a business that proved most successful in the years to come.³⁶

The Merchant and Exchange Flour Mill of Clifton, the "first steam flour mill" of the community, was established during the year 1888 by Willis Helms. Helms, a native of Kentucky, migrated to Texas in 1871 and settled on a Brazos River farm. He came to Clifton early in the year 1888 to supervise the construction of his milling enterprise. Destroyed by fire in 1894, the Merchant and Exchange Mill was rebuilt in 1895 on a larger scale and became the foundation of Clifton's small industrial output.³⁷

A business history of Clifton during the 1890's would be incomplete without mention of the mercantile firm known as P. E. Schow and Brothers. This famous merchandizing house was established near the Santa Fe Railroad tracks in September, 1889, by the three Schow brothers, all natives of Norway. Otto E. Schow, born in 1867, came to the United States in 1884

³⁴ Gammell, *Laws of Texas*, V (1861-1866), 258. Joseph Hayes and J. Warren, residents of Coryell County, were also named as trustees.

³⁵ James E. Nielson, *Bosque County Directory*, 6f (Hereafter cited as Nielson, *Bosque County Directory*).

³⁶ *Biographies of Central Texans*, 814-815.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 711.

to settle at Waco, Texas. He moved to Gatesville in 1885 and came to Clifton in 1889 to join his brothers in their business. John E. Schow, also born in Norway (in 1858), migrated to the Norwegian colony of Bosque County, Texas, in 1883. Peter E. Schow, born in 1864, came to Texas in 1882 to settle in Bosque County. In 1883 he joined the construction crew of the Santa Fe Railroad and later worked with the Texas and Pacific and Missouri, Kansas, and Texas railroads before returning to Clifton in 1889 to form the business partnership with his brothers. A historical source for the year 1895 described the Schow enterprise as "a corner location in the business center of town . . . adjacent to the railroad" with a frontage of thirty feet and a length of one hundred fifteen feet. The building was described as "two stories high" containing "shelf hardware and groceries" on the first and "heavy hardware, stoves, and ranges" on the second. A warehouse to the rear of the main store housed "wagons, carriages, and other agricultural implements."³⁸

Meridian, the county seat and oldest "surveyed" town of the county, had its origin on July 4, 1854, when Major George B. Erath finished his surveying task and lots were sold at public auction. Later in the year 1854, William McCurry erected a hewn-log cabin courthouse, A. C. Pearce built a tavern, and law offices were opened by Thomas C. Alexander. Named by James N. Mabray because of its location near Meridian Knobs and Meridian Creek, the small village on the Bosque became the center of frontier defense for the county and surrounding section during the pre-Civil War period. Sam Barnes, Allison Nelson, Lowry Hampton Scrutchfield, James B. Barry, and other frontier defense personalities were frequent visitors. Plans were made and military expeditions launched against the plains Indians from this county seat community.

After the Civil War, Meridian grew rapidly and in 1881-1882 when the Santa Fe Railroad missed Meridian by a few miles there was much talk of moving the town to the railroad. Although East Meridian grew up near the railroad station, the old town remained the center of population. By 1888 the population of Meridian had reached 1100, the new limestone courthouse was the pride of the county, and the old Emerson Hotel was the gathering place for visitors and local residents alike. The business district, located around the courthouse square, consisted of a bank and insurance office, the offices of twenty land agents and lawyers, four dry goods stores, two drug stores, five grocery stores, and two saloons.

Oldtimers of Meridian recall such pioneer citizens as Henry Fossett, Thomas C. Alexander, and J. K. Helton, founders of the Bosque County Bar Association; John Harvey, who came to Meridian in 1861 to establish a "general variety store;" Dr. James J. Lumpkin, pharmacist and doctor of medicine; O. L. Lockett and James Monroe Robertson, also lawyers; and

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 326f

Carey Stiles and James U. Vincent, two journalists who edited and published the *Bosque Citizen*.³⁹

Valley Mills, located near the east bank of the Bosque River eleven miles south of Clifton and twenty-four miles north of Waco, dates its origin from the early homesteads of Ewell Everett and Lowry Scrutchfield established during the winter of 1850-1851. In the month that followed, the families of W. C. Barnett and Albert Sears joined the small settlement and in 1855 Liberty Hill school was established on a hill in the northern section of the present town. During the first two decades, the history of Valley Mills was closely related to the development of the Hog Creek communities of Searsville and Rock Church. In 1864 the postoffice was moved from Searsville to Valley Mills. Two years later (1867), E. P. Booth built a flour mill on the river and the name *Valley Mills* had its origin. Dr. J. L. Sears, pioneer physician and pharmacist, settled at Searsville in 1854. In 1856 he became the postmaster at Searsville, served as food commissioner at Waco during the years of the Civil War, and moved to Valley Mills in 1866 to build a log home on a high point overlooking the Bosque River valley.

By the year 1888 three hundred people resided in Valley Mills. The business district of this small town included eight general merchandise establishments, two drug stores, a saddle shop, a hotel, two blacksmith shops, two cotton gins, a livery stable, and the flour mill that gave the community its name. Residents of the community during the 1890's remember that James W. McInturff owned "a steam threshing machine and a cotton gin." A second cotton gin, "a large plant operated by a forty-horsepower engine . . . capable of handling thirty bales daily" belonged to Edgar A. Wilson. Between 1900 and 1950 Valley Mills became the trade center for southern Bosque County; the population in 1950 was 1036.⁴⁰

Walnut Springs was established near a large spring on Steele Creek in the year 1861 when Jim Mize and Bill Auling built homes near the creek and moved their families to the new settlement. Other pioneer settlers of the Walnut Springs community were William Henderson Russell (who lived nearby at Russell Gap), Isaac Rundell, Allison Nelson, Robert Young, and James Buckner Barry. After the Texas Central Railroad built through the community in 1880-1881, Walnut Springs became the location of the divisional machine shops and experienced a significant growth. In 1886 the *Bosque Citizen* recorded that "Walnut is now in the lead as to population [in Bosque County], with natural advantages inferior to none and superior to most." No doubt the natural advantages referred to by the editor included "the headquarters of the Texas Central Railroad, two hundred [railroad] families, a roundhouse and machine shops, a good school." In 1885

³⁹ Nielson, *Bosque County Directory* (1888); *The Bosque Citizen* (Meridian); *Biographies of Central Texans*.

⁴⁰ Nielson, *Bosque County Directory* (1888), 6f; *Biographies of Central Texans*, 443, 447; *Texas Almanac* [1936, 1945, 1952]. Mrs. A. E. Morris to William C. Pool, Tom M. Pool Papers, Archives, University of Texas Library.

Central College was established at Walnut Springs with T. W. Elliott, W. H. Davis, and Dr. J. H. Wysong as the faculty. In 1892 Central College was incorporated into the public schools of the community. When the Texas Central Railroad began to curtail operations in the early 1920's, the town experienced a rapid decline in population and in 1950 this small ranch village had a population of only 750.⁴¹

Iredell, located on the Bosque River sixteen miles northwest of Meridian, originated in the late 1850's when Ward Keeler settled near the site and Ransie Walker built a cabin "about two miles below the town on the north side of the river" near the confluence of Walkers Creek and the Bosque. Named for Ire Keeler, the son of Ward Keeler, the settlement was moved in 1880 from its original site near the Walker homestead to the south bank of the Bosque near the Texas Central Railroad station. Later in the same year, a flood completely destroyed the village; twenty-seven business houses and homes washed down the Bosque, and the town was rebuilt on higher ground.

Other pioneer residents of Iredell included George Washington Roberts, a native of Georgia, who came to Bosque County in 1867 as a farmer and Baptist minister (Roberts organized a Baptist church near Iredell in 1868); William Mingus, who located near the town in 1867, and established "a crude log cabin, sixteen by sixteen" later replaced by "a box house where he kept a stage tavern for travelers;" Joseph B. Parks and Francis Conoley, both business men; and Dr. M. B. Grace, the pioneer physician of the community. Iredell remained a small town throughout its history and in 1950 had a population of 350.⁴²

Morgan, named for Thomas Morgan of the Gulf, Colorado, and Santa Fe Railroad, was established in the narrow valley of Steele Creek in the early 1880's. Although the Samuel S. Nichols family and others had resided near the site of Morgan for several years, the town was the direct result of railroad construction in Bosque County. Although the population has remained small, Morgan has been a trade center for northeastern Bosque County since the establishment of the Santa Fe and Texas Central railroads. In 1950 the population of this typical ranch town was 401.⁴³

Kopperl, located in northeastern Bosque County west of the Brazos River, was named for Moritz Kopperl, Galveston banker. The community was founded during the years 1881-1882 when the Santa Fe Railroad built through the area. In 1952 the population of this little hamlet stood at 250. It is significant to note, however, that the recreational possibilities afforded by Lake Whitney could bring prominence to Kopperl as a tourist center.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Nielson, *Bosque County Directory*, 7; *Bosque Citizen* (Meridian), June 26, 1886; A. L. Bronstad, *History of Education in Bosque County*, 150f.

⁴² Nielson, *Bosque County Directory*, 5; *Biographies of Central Texans*; *Texas Almanac* [1952], 91.

⁴³ Nielson, *Bosque County Directory*, 6; *Texas Almanac* [1952], 91.

⁴⁴ Nielson, *Bosque County Directory*, 7; Fred I. Massengill, *Texas Towns*, 126; *Texas Almanac* [1952].

Other trade centers of Bosque County include *Cranfills Gap*, named for George Cranfill; the small village of *Mosbiem*, known as Live Oak prior to 1885 and settled by Bill Ike Babb (1864), Brit Adams (1867), W. H. Maples (1866), and William Hill (1865); *Cayote*, a rural community on Childers Creek in southeastern Bosque County, was established by A. W. Blackwell, Roden T. Crane, A. H. Evans, and Art Richards between the years 1866 and 1871; and *Steiner*, named for Dr. J. M. Steiner, post surgeon at Fort Graham during the early 1850's, was located at the confluence of Steele Creek and the Brazos River.

The county's contribution to the ghost towns of Texas is the community of Kimball, located on the west bank of the Brazos River in the southern part of Kimball Bend. Kimball, named for Richard Kimball of New York, was settled in 1854 as a part of the vast colonization scheme of Richard Kimball and Jacob de Cordova. The town was surveyed near the ford on the Brazos known as Kimball's Crossing; a man named Payne established a ferry across the river; a school known as Kimball Academy was opened; and business houses were constructed around a town square. Kimball reached the height of its growth and prosperity during the period of the cattle drives (1870-1880); during this time the village was a bustling cowtown since the Brazos River at flood stage often halted several thousand head of cattle for weeks at a time. A frontier entrepreneur named Wash Sotter built a chute to aid (for a small fee) the cowboys in getting the Longhorns into the waters of the river. Brick stores and saloons, clustered about a square, formed the most impressive business center in Bosque County. These days of prosperity were numbered, however, and when the Santa Fe Railroad missed Kimball by only a few miles in 1882, the town began a slow decline that lasted well into the 1900's and ended with the disappearance of this Texas town.⁴⁵ After the completion of Whitney Dam, the flood waters inundated the site of this historic town.

The 36th Division in World War II

Bosque County sent thousands of young men to fight on the global battlefronts of World War II. These men served in all branches of the military service and any attempt by the local historian to collect and evaluate the battle experiences would be an impossible task. Bosque's military history, 1940-1945, is closely related, however, to the war record of the 36th Infantry Division of the United States Army. During the years of peace from 1920 until 1940, a small unit of the Texas National Guard was maintained in Bosque County with headquarters at Clifton. The personnel of this detachment (the roster changed from year to year) participated in the usual weekly drill period and attended the annual summer encampments,

⁴⁵H. D. Wintz to William C. Pool, October 27, 1946, Tom M. Pool Papers, Archives, University of Texas Library.

held during the late 1930's at Camp Hulen near Palacios, Texas. During the depression decade, the Clifton boys relied on their Guard activities for a little additional spending money; there was no talk of war in those days. During the last year of peace, the Clifton detachment of the Texas National Guard was known as Headquarters Detachment, 1st Battalion, 143d Infantry Regiment. On November 25, 1940, only a few weeks after the local unit had returned from the Louisiana maneuvers, Headquarters Detachment, 1st Battalion, 143d Infantry, was mobilized into the United States Army at Waco, Texas, under the name Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 143d Infantry. In this early period of extreme shortage in the military, there was no place for the regiment to go for training. As a result, Headquarters Company returned to Clifton and remained at home from November, 1940, until January, 1941. During this two month period, daily drill periods were held in the city park; there was very little equipment for additional training. In January, 1941, Headquarters Company joined the rest of the 143d Infantry at Camp Bowie, Texas. Camp Bowie was still under construction at the time and the Clifton detachment was forced to pitch camp in the middle of a recently plowed cornfield "in mud up to the knees."

At this time, the muster roll of the Company included 1/Lieutenant Elmore C. Canuteson, T/Sergeant Raymond C. Pederson, S/Sergeant Johnny C. Olson, Sergeant L. T. Golden, corporals James D. Wesley and Eben C. Bergman, Pfc's Ralph E. Gray and Wilbur P. Parks, privates Jodie W. Amundson, Milton E. Bradstreet, Arthur P. Bronstad, Arthur L. Bronstad, Raymond W. Cooksey, David M. Cormany, Leonard O. Cottle, P. O. Dahl, Jr., Owen C. Dahl, William Dyess, Tilden E. Ellingson, Rufus A. Golden, Hershel D. Humphries, John L. Lambert, Walter A. Leigon, Ibrey C. Linberg, Peniel D. Pederson, Charles E. Reese, Elmer Z. Rice, John T. Spangle, Charles M. Tennison, and Jay E. Wilson—a total strength of thirty men.⁴⁶

While at Camp Bowie, the Texas Division was strengthened by the addition of selective service recruits. During the year 1941 the Division was triangularized from four (a square) to three infantry regiments, fought General Walter Kruger's Third Army in the swamps of Louisiana, and moved overland to sandy Camp Blanding, Florida, in February, 1942. While in Florida the Texans were primed for overseas shipment but orders were changed and the 36th Division spent the summer of 1942 in the Carolina maneuvers before moving to blustery Cape Cod for winter quarters at Camp Edwards, Massachusetts.⁴⁷ After staging a mock invasion of Martha's Vineyard in October, special sections of the division received training at Piney

⁴⁶ Roster, Headquarters Detachment, 1st Battalion, 143rd Infantry, Clifton Texas, 25 November 1940, archives, Adjutant General's Department, Austin, Texas. Several men transferred to other branches of the service prior to overseas shipment.

⁴⁷ S/Sgt. Richard A. Huff and others (ed.), *The Fighting 36th, A Pictorial History of the 36th Division*.

River, Virginia. The 36th sailed from the New York port of embarkation on April 2, 1942, and arrived at Oran, Algeria, eleven days later.⁴⁸

The division was held in combat reserve during the completion of the North African campaign, moved westward for summer camp near Rabat and Casablanca, and still later entered invasion training at Arzew. On the morning of September 9, 1943, the 143d Infantry received its baptism of fire on the beaches near Salerno. During the long campaign against the German Army in Italy, the 36th Division troops took part in bitter engagements at Mt. di Chiunzi Pass, the plains around Naples, the Volturno River, Mt. Sammurco, the Rapido River (where the severe reverses were attributed to the innate stupidity of General Mark Clark), Anzio, Velletri, and the Tuscany hills. After regrouping and training, the 36th Division formed a part of the assault force that landed on the shore of southern France on August 13, 1944. Following a successful beachhead, the line of advance followed the Rhone River valley through Gap, Grenoble, and Lyon, then angled eastward across the Moselle River, through the Voges Mountains to the plains of Alsace, where bitter fighting took place near Colmar. Crossing into Germany at the town of Schweigen, the division progressed to the little town of Tergern See on the Austrian border before the end of the war in May, 1945.

Although several men in the company received the Purple Heart, the only two fatalities were Leonard O. Cottle, killed in a training accident, and Captain Raymond C. Pederson, killed by an artillery shell at Venafro, Italy.

6

CONTEMPORARY BOSQUE COUNTY

In summary it may be said that the hard limestone soils and grass-covered prairies of north Central Texas have had a marked influence on the cultural pattern of Bosque County. During the past century of development, the Bosque territory has retained the characteristics of a typical agrarian society. The population of the county increased from a mere 2005 in the year 1860 to a total of 17,390 in 1900 and an all time high of 19,013 in the year 1910. In keeping with a national trend, the population of the Bosque territory began to decrease during the decade from 1910 to 1920. This significant decline in numbers has continued down to the present day. The Census of 1950 lists the population of the county at only 11,836. There is not a single town in the county with a population of two thousand

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Jodie W. Amundson to William C. Pool, January 10, 1952, in Tom M. Pool Papers, Archives, University of Texas Library. Amundson recalls that twenty soldiers were on the muster rolls of Headquarters Company at the time of overseas shipment. These were: Elmore C. Canuteson, Raymond Pederson, Johnny Olson, Lud T. Golden, Eben C. Bergman, James D. Westley, Ralph E. Gray, Wilbur Sparks, Jodie Amundson, Arthur P. Bronstad, Arthur L. Bronstad,, Raymond Cooksey, Owen Dahl, Hershel Humphries, John Lambert, Peniel Pederson, Charles Reese, J. T. Spangle, Charles Tennison, and Jay E. Wilson.

or more. Clifton, described as "a distinctive community" and the "principal Norwegian-descent center of [the] state," was Bosque's largest town with a population of 1,833 in 1950; Meridian ranked second with 1,145, followed by Valley Mills with 1,036.⁴⁹

The present economy of Bosque County is based on farming and livestock. The number of farms has declined from 2229 in 1930 to a mere 1558 in 1950. This decline in the number of farms (accompanied by a rise in absentee ownership) is reflected in a sharp slump in cotton production from a grand total of 39,704 bales in 1906 to only 2830 bales in 1945 and 4385 bales in 1950. Other significant elements in this changing agricultural pattern have been a decrease in farm tenantry, the general mechanization of agriculture, and an increase in the total volume of farm production and the real value of farm commodities.⁵⁰

The principal crops grown on the Bosque farms are corn, oats, wheat, grain sorghums, and cotton. In recent years Austrian winter peas, clovers, combined maize, and alfalfa have been added as soil-building crops. The diverse scope of the county farm produce during the mid-1930's is revealed by the agricultural statistics for the year 1935. In that year Bosque farm lands yielded 191,586 bushels of corn, 105,919 bushels of wheat, 1,310,166 bushels of oats, and 5,862 tons of hay.⁵¹ Vegetables and orchard fruits are grown in Bosque County but not on a commercial scale.

Residents of the Bosque farm and ranch suffered great financial hardship during the years of depression and drought that began during the 1920's and lasted through the 1930's. The New Deal, 1933-1940, combined with the increased demand for foodstuffs that followed in the wake of the second World War, rescued the farmer from the perils of "hard times" and prosperity has been the keynote of the period since 1942. It is significant to note that far-reaching changes have been characteristic of the history of the Bosque farm during the last twenty-year period. Prior to 1933 the farmer of the area gave very little thought to the related problems of soil and water conservation. As a result thousands of acres of fertile soil washed down the small streams into the Brazos and Bosque rivers to build up the stream beds and contribute to the already acute water shortage. Although there is room for much improvement in the future, soil conservation programs of recent years have made great strides toward a remedy of these defects in agricultural methods. Other factors of primary importance in promoting a better life for the rural population are: the rural electrification program that has been instrumental in bringing electric power and light to the farm and ranch, and the Texas farm-to-market road program that has linked every Bosque community with the other communities of the county as well as to the larger cities of central and north Texas.

⁴⁹ *Texas Almanac* [1952], 70.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* During the year 1940, Bosque County had approximately 581,402 acres of land in 2032 farms. The average size of the Bosque farm was 286.1 acres. *Texas Almanac* [1945-1946], 183.

⁵¹ *Texas Almanac* [1936], 234.

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