

A HISTORY OF TRINITY COUNTY

A THESIS

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A HISTORY OF TRINITY COUNTY

A THESIS

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By

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CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND

Trinity County as a separate political division of the State of Texas was carved out of Houston County by an act of the legislature of February 11, 1850.¹ As constituted at present, it lies between parallels thirty and thirty-two degrees of north latitude in the pine forest region of East Texas. Comprising seven hundred sixteen square miles, it is approximately thirty miles long and twenty-five miles wide. In shape the county resembles a parallelogram, but its boundaries follow the irregular meanderings of rivers and creeks. The Trinity River forms the boundary on the southwest and the Neches on the southeast.²

Lying across a ridge, the county is well drained by the Trinity and Neches Rivers and some of their tributaries. The most important of these latter streams are the Tanta-bogue, White Rock, White Oak, Caney, and Kickapoo, which flow into the Trinity River; and the Alabama, Elm, Piney, and Cedar, which empty into the Neches. Other creeks found in the county are the Turner, Chalk, Hackberry, Turkey, and

1 H. P. N. Gammel, Laws of Texas, vol. III, p. 639.

2 By an act of the legislature in 1858 a portion of the original county was taken from the southwest corner and attached to Walker County, and in 1875 the southeast corner was added to Polk County. Ibid., vol. IV, p. 926; vol. V, p. 453.

Cochina.

The county is supplied with many springs. A number of them form a chain across the county from east to west. Some possess valuable medicinal qualities, testing as much as six and one-half grains of sulphur to a gallon of water, while others are entirely free from minerals. Scattered over the county, also, are numerous small lakes, which furnish an abundant water supply for the lumbering mills.

The altitude of the county ranges from fifty to three hundred fifty feet above sea level. In general the surface is rolling, with here and there a range of low hills and some prairie land. Several of the creeks have along their banks in places slight elevations which give the appearance of low mountains, forming deep valleys and rocky walls.³

The soils in Trinity County are mainly the typical sandy, forest types, but there are also some excellent alluvial valleys. Along the streams, which often overflow, is found a dark fertile land. The soil of the prairie lands is, for the most part, a black, stiff lime earth, and that of the oak uplands, a dark gray loam. On the pine hills is found a light sandy land with a deep subsoil of clay. There are deposits of chalk, salt, sulphur, and lignite coal in the county, with an immense quantity of sand and rock.⁴

3 J. A. Udden, Economic Geology, pp. 86, 87.

4 Ibid., pp. 88, 89.

The climate of the county is mild and moist, and is subject to sudden changes. The warm summers are modulated by the moist atmosphere. The average temperature for July ranges between eighty and eighty-five degrees, Fahrenheit. Snow seldom falls and when it does it usually melts rapidly. There are, however, rare exceptions when it lasts a day or two. The mean temperature for January is between forty-five and fifty-five degrees.⁵

No part of East Texas has more beautiful and valuable forests than Trinity County. Here are to be found four species of oak, three species of pine, six kinds of hickory, three varieties of magnolia, and two sorts of cedar. Growing in abundance in every part of the county are the elm, sweet gum, black gum, black jack, cottonwood, sycamore, ash, bois d'arc, pecan, and walnut. The pine timber, from which the county has received its greatest wealth, consists of the long-leaf, short-leaf, and loblolly. The virgin forests were practically void of all undergrowth, permitting the pine trees to grow to immense proportions.⁶

Among the many beautiful wild flowers native to this county are the violet, phlox, verbena, poppy, yellow jasmine, hollyhock, sweet william, water lily, niggerhead, woodbine, field daisy, and Indian paint brush. Of the

5 Texas Almanac, 1941, p. 512.

6 3. B. Buckley, Geological and Agricultural Survey of Texas, pp. 76, 77.

flowering shrubs which aid in making the piney regions a beautiful country are the dogwood, redbud, magnolia, huisache, and red maple. The holly, yaupon, and smilax are beautiful evergreens which grow luxuriantly throughout the county.

The indigenous fruits growing in the forests are plums, blackberries, mulberries, huckleberries, mayhaws, black haws, red haws, May apples, maypops, grapes of many kinds, and persimmons.⁸ Cotton, corn, peanuts, field peas, sugar cane, oats, sweet and Irish potatoes, pumpkins, cushaws, and melons are the principal crops. Clover, hegari, sorghum, and maize have been recently introduced and have expanded as the cotton acreage has been reduced. There are vast amounts of vegetables of all kinds produced for home use and for the market. The tomato is the large commercial crop, but peaches, pears, and figs grow to perfection and make good market crops.⁹

In the forests of Trinity County are found many kinds of game, such as deer, panthers, wolves, foxes, bob-cats, skunks, coons, opossums, minks, rabbits, squirrels, and armadillos, some of which are valuable for pelt, fur, or food. The piney region is richly supplied with wild turkey, which ranks next to the deer as prize game to the hunter.

7 B. C. Tharp, Structure of Texas Vegetation East of the Ninety-eighth Meridian, p. 46.

8 Ibid., p. 35.

9 Ibid., pp. 40-43.

Practically all species of ducks and geese migrate through this section of the state seasonally, and found at all times are doves and quail. Besides the game birds, the bird life of the county is notable for its variety and beauty, including many songsters. Best known and loved is the mockingbird, but others which are found in great numbers are the wren, blue jay, redbird, blackbird, and whip-poor-will. Noteworthy, because of the many legends concerning it, is the road runner, which is often seen on the highways. The great horned owl and other members of the owl family, as well as a great variety of hawks, are found. Among other unprotected birds are the English sparrow, buzzard, crow, and woodpecker.

The Trinity and Neches Rivers abound in many kinds of fish, among which are the catfish, buffalo, gaspergau, bass, and minnows. The catfish is the most widely distributed, and many of them grow to a size of fifty to seventy-five pounds. All the creeks, small streams, and lakes are also abundantly supplied with many kinds of fish, but lake fishing is the most popular for the sportsmen.¹⁰

In Trinity County are thousands of semi-wild hogs which run on the range practically the year through. In the autumn the owners corral as many of them as will be needed for the supply of meat for the ensuing year and fatten them on corn.

10 Texas Game, Fish, and Oyster Commission, Bulletin Number 5, 1932.

Early in the twentieth century many farmers began to pay more attention to hog-raising, and now have entered into the business on a large scale.¹¹

The cattle of the county have been improved from those introduced by the Spanish and brought by the early Anglo-American settlers. From the lanky longhorn, principally, has been bred the fine ranch animal of today. The Hereford is the predominant animal on the range, but the shorthorn is the favored animal on the farm. The Brahma has been introduced and crossed with other breeds to produce an animal peculiarly adapted to this region. Among the dairy breed also are the Jersey, Guernsey, and the Holstein.¹²

So far in this introductory chapter an attempt has been made to analyze the organization and location of Trinity County with a short description of its topography, geography, and resources. It remains in this section to consider the human interest and history wrapped up in its place-names, famous landmarks, historic structures, and important land grants. There is more in a geographic name than cold type can indicate; and this county is particularly rich in the largely unwritten lore of place-name origins. The names applied to the towns, villages, creeks, and lakes often give an insight into the background of those who designated them.

11 Texas Almanac, 1941, pp. 221, 222.

12 Ibid., pp. 217-220.

A Biblical influence, for example, is shown in the naming of the river from which the county and its largest town took their names. In the last years of the seventeenth century, Captain Alonzo De Leon led a group of Spaniards across the plains of North Texas. These explorers were devout in their belief in the Trinity; that is, the union of three persons--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost--in one God-head, so that all three are as one God as to substance, but three persons as to individuality. When these devout Catholics came to a stream where three branches in its upper basin unite into one main river they named it the Trinity River.¹³

Chivalry, evidently, was a marked characteristic of many of the early settlers of this county, for the map is liberally besprinkled with feminine names honoring maidens or matrons of the county, as for instance, Centralia and Crecy. Former homes of the newcomers were commemorated in such names as Sumpter and Selma. Literary and historical influences are to be noted in the naming of Carlisle, Crete, and Friday. Surnames of the founders were probably the greatest source for place-names, as: Pennington, Jossierand, Randolph, and Westville. Geographic surroundings played a part in the designation of Groveton, Centerville, Glendale, and Woodlake. Often a double influence was shown in

13 Fannie May Barbee Hughes, Legends of Texas Rivers, pp. 38, 39.

selecting a place-name as McKim's Prairie, in which the surname of the founder and the topography are both applied. Two horse thieves were put to death by being hanged from a limb. The surrounding community was called Nogallows.¹⁴ An old slave bought a large tract of land which he resold in smaller lots to other Negroes, and his settlement was known as Nigtown. Two other interesting names are Chita and Sebastopol.

The citizens of Trinity County have been guilty of neglecting many places of historic interest. Many landmarks, therefore, are in ruins or have disappeared entirely. Under the program of the Commission of Control for Texas Centennial Celebrations, however, markers were erected to call attention to some of these. Five and one-half miles southeast of Groveton on State Highway 106, for instance, is the site of the town of Sumpter, which was established in 1850 and became the county seat in 1854. It rapidly declined after a fire in 1872, which destroyed the courthouse and records. Fifteen miles west of Groveton on State Highway 94 is the site of Sebastopol, which was established in 1856 and named for a naval station in Russia. It became an important town because of the river trade but declined after railroads were built through the county.¹⁵

14 When the post office was established here, the spelling was changed to Nogalus.

15 Texas Almanac, 1941, p. 83.

There are other sites which are commemorated by the older citizens and are frequently pointed out by them. In this list may be mentioned the old Contraband Trail, over which herds of cattle and horses were driven into Louisiana. Another is the stage line between Crockett and Livingston, by which mail and passenger service were rendered. Another such route ran between Crockett and Moscow. The camp meeting sites at New Prospect and Millican's Chapel have an outstanding interest. The burying grounds of the Indians in the Big Thicket,¹⁶ the Mt. Zion Cemetery, and the graveyard at Millican's Chapel are worthy of being honored. In addition there are some well-remembered swimming holes and picnic grounds scattered over the county, the race tracks at Trinity, and Pennington's tournament line, which have been places of happy memories for several decades.¹⁷

As noted above, Trinity County has had several outstanding structures, but the materials used were not durable. Although non-existent at present, some of them are worthy of

16 This area has been described by Royal Dixon in "Plant and Animal Life in East Texas" as the "land of perpetual romance, covering approximately a million acres of land in East Texas and as yet little disturbed by the hands of man." T. C. Richardson, editor, East Texas, Its History and Its Makers, vol. II, p. 739.

17 The information regarding historic sites was secured in a personal interview with C. J. Shields, Trinity, Texas. Subsequent citations of this nature will be indicated as Personal Interviews, followed by the name and address of the person concerned, as for example, Personal Interview, C. J. Shields, Trinity, Texas.

mention here. At Pennington a monument was erected in 1936 to mark the site of the Pennington Academy, the first institution of higher learning in Trinity County. After the founding of Sam Houston Normal Institute at Huntsville in 1879, it was closed.¹⁸ The double-pen log cabin erected at Sumpter as the home of Solomon Adams, which was the most imposing residence in the county, should be listed as one of the county's historic structures. The first courthouse and the first jail, erected in 1854, have been described in full detail by the old settlers who helped in the building. The plan for the jail is, perhaps, the only one of its type ever used. The Trinity County Lumber Company's mill, built at Groveton in 1882, was until 1900 the largest one in the entire South and, when it closed in 1930, was the oldest.¹⁹ The Four Pines Farm, a model farm home built in 1918 by Mrs. Helen Kerr Thompson in connection with her Woodlake project, is of special interest to those who are trying to improve farming conditions. The bath house at Sulphur Springs, near Trinity, was crude in appearance and lasted for only a short time, but it is remembered by many as a place of happy memories. The stately bridge over the Trinity River six miles south of the town of Trinity and the imposing post office building within the town are most noticeable recent additions

18 Personal Interview, H. A. Holly, Pennington, Texas.

19 Records of the Trinity County Lumber Company, Groveton, Texas.

to the county's historic structures.

It seems appropriate to list in connection with Trinity County's famous landmarks and historic structures a few of its early and important land grants and surveys. The county is included in the Joseph Vehlein colonization grant which was conferred by the Mexican Government in 1827.²⁰ Several surveys were afterwards made from this grant to would-be-colonizers. The most important of these was a league of land ceded in 1835 to Maria Guadalupe De Castro, a widow with two children, by the state of Coahuila and Texas.²¹ Another important survey made in the same year and by the same authority consisted of a league of land allowed Pedro José Caro. José Chopá also received a league of land from the Mexican authorities in 1835.²² These grants were used by roving hunters and others in search of adventure. As early as 1840, G. W. Wilson secured titles to a large tract of land on which the town of Trinity was later located. This became known as the Wilson Survey. On the fertile prairie lands in the northeastern part of the county, Daniel Dailey settled in 1852, cleared his title to several thousand acres of land, and in turn sold it to those seeking homes in this location. It is recorded as the Dailey Survey.²³

20 Louis J. Wortham, History of Texas, vol. I, p. 186.

21 Translation of Empresario Contracts, vol. II, Records of Land Titles, Number 969.

22 Ibid., Numbers 1015 and 1223.

23 Deed Records, Book B, pp. 178 and 426.

Others not to be overlooked, because they, too, claim importance as town sites, mill sites, or both, are the John Johnson, J. D. Parker, J. E. Baumgartham, DeLafosse, Hardin, Carmona, and Hamilton Surveys.²⁴

24 Office Files of the Tax Assessor-Collector, Trinity County.

CHAPTER II

INDIAN HISTORY

The history of the Indians of Trinity County is an integral part of the history of the Indians of East Texas in general. Chronologically, the story of the Indians of this region falls into two parts: first, those who passed from the scene before the coming of the first white man, leaving to archaeologists the only evidence of their existence; and secondly, the tribes living within the present bounds of this county when white men came. It is a matter of regret, however, that there is so little available information concerning the inhabitants of the county prior to the advent of the first white men. Every available source has been sought with little advantage. It is known, however, that climate and plant and animal life made this territory a more than habitable region, and it is believed that there were people here long before recorded history. Scattered over the county are a number of mounds which have been attributed to the Indians living in or wandering over this section of the state at some unknown time. From one of these mounds near the town of Trinity were taken arrow points, knives, axes, and shells; in the vicinity of Pennington one was found to contain broken pieces of pottery, arrow-heads, carved stones, and shells; and similar articles were taken

out of those around Apple Springs. Several caves which have been discovered along narrow streams, where the banks are high and steep, are thought to be the work of Indians living here before the coming of the white settlers. Although it cannot be proved by whom these mounds and caves were made, indications are that whoever did make them were considerably advanced in civilization. A very old lady living within the city limits of Trinity hired a colored man to dig in her yard where she believed were buried valuable Indian treasures. The old Negro worked faithfully for days under her keen and observing eyes. One afternoon she was called to her telephone and talked for several minutes. When she returned to her charge, he informed her that he had decided to quit. An officer was called to search the old Negro, as she concluded that the treasure had been uncovered during her absence, and this was the reason for her workman's quitting the job. The officer failed to find the hidden valuables and the matter was dropped.¹

As has been noted, in the extreme western part of the county is a small stream known as Tantabogue Creek. This rivulet was named for the tribe of Indians who lived on its banks as early as 1790. These Tantabogue Indians were believed to be a branch of the great Caddo family, known as the Heinal Indians.² As the white people settled in the

1 Personal Interview, the late Mrs. Jane Alston, Trinity.

2 Handbook of American Indians, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin No. 30, p. 189.

county, the Indians moved westward. They lived in permanent abodes, tilled the soil, and maintained a rather high cultural state. Moreover, they were always peaceful and friendly.³

At a very early date a tribe of Indians known as the Alabamas located on a small stream in the southeastern portion of the county. They lived, for the most part, by hunting and cultivating small patches of Indian corn, beans, and melons. They built log huts and had some live stock.⁴ It was at this stage of civilization that they were found by white settlers in 1844. The older citizens of the county remember them as a peaceable tribe who gave no trouble. Some think that they later migrated to Oklahoma, while others believe that they moved westward where their identity as a tribe was lost. A few are of the opinion that these Indians returned to the group of Alabamas in the Big Thicket, and were later placed in a reservation in Polk County.⁵

Between the Alabamas and the Tantabogues was another tribe, known as members of the Kickapoo family. They migrated to Trinity County at some unknown date and settled on a small creek which was named for them. These Indians easily made friends with the white people with whom they came in contact, and within the limitations of their superstitions remained

3 Personal Interview, Mrs. Maud McGar, Trinity, Texas.

4 Handbook of American Indians, p. 253.

5 Personal Interview, Will Gates, Trinity, Texas.

on good terms. It is fairly certain that they later drifted northward to the Indian Territory.⁶

Early settlers say that there was little variation among the dialects of the three groups. Manners and customs were similar, but each group remained much to itself. The tribes associated as freely with the white people as they did with other Indians. Each clan had its chief, held its pow-wows and its religious ceremonies, but never united for them. They wore their native dress, ate wild uncooked food, and clung to their many superstitions.

The homes of these Indians were usually small log huts. The cracks were filled with mud and moss. In these dirt-floored hovels there were no windows, but, as a rule, each had four doors. In some cases they built tepees which were also made of pine poles. These met at the top and spread out circularly on the ground which formed the floor.⁷

The women and children remained at home to till the fields and gardens while the men hunted and fished. Each individual possessed such personal property as a pony, several guns, many bows and arrows, numerous knives, two or three blankets, and a great many hatchets and tomahawks. The squaws made blankets of the moss gathered from trees, baskets of the wild cane and bark of trees, vases, bowls, and cups

6 Handbook of American Indians, p. 191.

7 Personal Interview, Walter Scott, Trinity, Texas.

of gourds, and many articles of pottery from clay. All of these were readily bought by the white people and sent back to relatives and friends in the states from which they had come.

In each Indian community was a burying ground. Their funeral was a serious and solemn occasion. For a coffin they cut down a green tree comparable in size to the deceased individual. A section somewhat longer than the person to be buried was cut off and split into two pieces. Each piece was hewed out to make a space for the body. Then the corpse and as much food and personal belongings as could be crammed in were put into one-half of the hewn log and covered with the other. A grave was dug and the log casket lowered into it. As the dirt was thrown into the hole the braves tramped it down with their feet. During this procedure they sang weird songs, or made uncanny sounds with their mouths. This continued for hours or as long as dirt could be packed in the grave.⁸

A story is told of Old Joe, a brave from the Kickapoo tribe, who, for some unknown reason, shot a woman in the foot with his bow and arrow. When the crime was reported to his chief the accused was tried by the clan and ostracized. After all other Indians had drifted out of the county, Old Joe continued to live in the bottoms of Kickapoo Creek. Twice a

⁸ Personal Interview, Will Gates, Trinity, Texas.

year he appeared at the towns and communities to sell the blankets, baskets, and bowls which he had made. He always rode his paint pony and stayed until all his wares had been sold.

So long as they remained in Trinity County the Indians made semi-annual trips to the larger settlements to dispose of hand-made merchandise. They went also to the farming districts and to the newly settled communities in order to secure work. The braves hired out to clear the land, to make fences, and to build houses. The squaws worked around the house. On these journeys the men rode ponies, taking the baggage and small children; while the women walked and carried their babies on their backs. They always traveled in a single file and at a specified distance apart.

Neither the county nor the state provided schools for the Indians; but the braves taught the boys to ride, hunt, and fish. The girls learned to work the small patches of land, to make blankets and baskets, and to keep silent. Each seemed to know how to attend to his own affairs and to be friendly and peaceable. None could read or write but all learned to count and make change.

The early white settlers recall some of the superstitions of the Indians of this county. The sun and moon had a deep influence upon them. If it rained while the sun shone, the evil spirit, they believed, was disturbing the dead; this also indicated that there would be rain the following

day. To see the new moon through the brush was a bad omen, but to look at it over the left shoulder was sign of good luck. For the best results seeds were to be planted at certain changes of the moon. A thick shuck on corn presaged a cold winter; if the shuck was thin, the winter would be mild. The howling of a dog or the hooting of an owl was a warning of evil. The first cry of the katydid foretold the coming of frost. To kill a snake and turn its stomach up to the sun would bring rain.

They had queer remedies too. Mullein leaves cooked with honey from the wild bees made an excellent cough syrup; tea made from the manure of goats and chickens cured many ailments; while a poultice made of leaves from peach trees frequently was used on wounds. The Indian chief blew his breath in the face of the new-born baby to prevent illness; the sole of the father's moccasin was burned and the ashes dusted on the baby to cure the hives.⁹

⁹ Personal Interview, H. A. Holly, Pennington, Texas.

CHAPTER III

EARLY SETTLEMENTS

Attention now turns to a new phase in the history of Trinity County. As was noted in chapter one, a contract was made by the Mexican Government with Joseph Vehlein in 1827 for the colonization of two hundred families. The future Trinity County was included in this grant. The contract was not fulfilled; although in 1835 other grants were made from it, none was consummated.¹ From 1835 to 1840, however, this general area was inhabited by roving hunters and adventurers who, characteristically, remained but a short while and passed on. A decade later men came with their families looking for permanent places of abode.²

Many motives prompted these emigrants to leave their homes in the older states and come to Texas. It seems necessary at this point to mention a few of these reasons in order to understand why Trinity County later was settled by a great number of these groups.

Times had been very hard in the United States between 1837 and 1841 so that many persons failed in business or found it difficult to make ends meet. The annexation of

1 Gammel, Laws of Texas, vol. I, p. 103.

2 George L. Crocket, Two Centuries in East Texas, p. 76.

Texas to the United States and the triumphant conclusion of the Mexican War induced many other people, mainly from Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee, to come to Texas. After the battle of Gettysburg and the siege of Vicksburg during the American Civil War, Texas became a mecca for planters from Mississippi and Louisiana. From 1854 to 1869 the State of Texas had permitted each railroad company to survey and receive sixteen sections of land for each mile of road constructed with the understanding that the company was to dispose of the land within a specified time.³ To carry out this order there were millions of acres of land throughout the state offered for sale at extremely low prices.

After entering Texas, numbers of emigrants were attracted to Trinity County by the fertility of its soil and its abundant supply of wood and water. The Trinity and Neches Rivers provided excellent outlets to the Gulf of Mexico and the wild game and plants furnished adequate food.⁴ Another incentive was the excellent prospect for rail transportation, which, it was believed, would bring prosperity to the county. Business and professional men rushed into the county until it became a prominent section. A large number of this group came from other states but the greater part came from adjoining

3 Gammel, Laws of Texas, vol. VI, p. 485.

4. Lewis W. Newton and Herbert P. Gambrell, Social and Political History of Texas, pp. 81, 82.

Texas counties. By 1870 railroad companies had thousands of acres of land in Trinity County which they were offering for sale as lots, homes, and farms. Also homesteads and land could be secured for army service and by preëmption titles. For these reasons a tide of American immigration started in the middle forties and continued to flow into Trinity County in an ever increasing volume.⁵

In so far as is known, the first permanent white settler within the bounds of Trinity County was Jesse James, formerly of Sumpter, Alabama, who located on Alabama Creek⁶ in 1844. He was joined the next year by a former neighbor, John Gallion, who bought from the Indians live stock and whatever improvements they possessed. T. L. Treavatham, a wealthy slave-holder for whom this settlement was named, was next to locate here. With his slaves he opened an extensive cotton plantation.⁷

Letters from these early settlers soon induced some of their relatives and friends in Alabama to join them in Texas. In 1848 and 1849, consequently, Solomon Adams, Benjamin

5 For the information regarding the attractions to settlers coming to Trinity County see a special edition of The Trinity County Star, March 31, 1905, which comprises an account of Trinity County prepared by H. K. Phillips. Subsequent references to this will be referred to as Trinity County Star.

6 This settler was the uncle for whom the notorious bandit, Jesse James, was named. The location of his settlement was noted in chapter two.

7 Personal Interview, the late Charles Willis, Groveton, Texas.

Ellis, James Marsh, and C. C. Taliaferro, Henry Ward, and Robert Wright set out with their families, slaves, and household goods for Trinity County.⁸

Soloman Adams preëmpted land upon which the town of Sumpter was later built. Immediately after the county was organized he, James, Gallion, Ellis, and Ward were appointed to locate a center point and lay off a section of land as a town site which would become the county seat. The name chosen was Sumpter, in commemoration of their home in Alabama. Lots were sold at public auction and the proceeds used to erect the necessary public buildings.⁹

Sumpter now had become a primitive village. Adams had built a double-pen log house which he used as a hotel and store. The next business house to go up was a combination blacksmith shop and saloon owned and operated by Robert Wright. The citizens were high-minded and progressive. They soon erected the county's first courthouse, the jail, and the post office; and they succeeded in establishing a stage line which gave both mail and passenger service. William Rogers built a cotton gin which added much to the prosperity of the community. Following the construction of a saw and grist mill, log cabins began to give way to a better type of

8 Personal Interview, the late Mrs. Callie Randolph Crow, Trinity, Texas.

9 General Land Office Files of Records of Certified Copies of Patents of Sumpter, section 40, pp. 131-133.

houses. The old courthouse was replaced with a more pretentious frame structure and furnished with new and modern furniture. A large frame building was erected by the Masons of the county for a Masonic Hall, the lower floor of which was used for church and school purposes. Another saloon and tenpin alley was built on the adjoining lot. The Eureka Hotel went up in competition to the Adams House, and the town took on the proportions of a thriving inland city. Plans were made for the construction of a railroad through the county with Sumpter as a division point, but before this work got under way rumblings of the Civil War were heard and the project was dropped. Then followed a period of depression from which the town never recovered. In 1868 a fire destroyed the courthouse and all records and did much damage to the entire town; while in 1870 the county seat was moved from there to Pennington. It was then clear that Sumpter, the once prosperous town and seat of justice, was doomed.¹⁰

In 1848 Dave Chandler founded East Prairie in what is now the eastern portion of Trinity County. He with G. P. Bean,¹¹ Hembric Dial, and later settlers engaged in farming and stock raising. A few of them owned slaves whom they used

10 See a column entitled "Memoirs," prepared by D. H. Hamilton, which appeared in The Trinity County News, October 15, 1927. Subsequent citations to this column will be made according to the newspaper and date.

11 G. P. Bean was a first cousin of the renowned Peter Ellis Bean.

on cotton plantations. The post office created for this settlement in 1854 was known as Nogallows for reasons which have been explained.¹²

In 1849 the Honorable Y. W. Randolph, from Selma, Alabama, with his large family founded a settlement known eventually as the Randolph Community. Farming was the leading interest there; but J. M. Evans operated a saloon while L. M. McClendon, a young doctor also from Selma, Alabama, conducted a drug business and practiced medicine.

In 1858 Callie Randolph, daughter of the founder of the community which bore her name, married R. D. Crow, a sawmill operator and farmer living near Sumpter. The particular area in which the newly-weds built their home was bountifully supplied with wild crab-apple trees and springs of clear, cool water. So they called the settlement Apple Springs. It grew rapidly, and soon included a general store or two, three or four saloons, a blacksmith shop, the union church building which also served as a schoolhouse, and in due time a cemetery.¹³

As early as 1845 Colonel Daniel Dailey secured title to a large tract of land in that portion of Houston County which later became a part of Trinity. J. E. Baumgartham

12 Personal Interview, John Standley, Huntsville, Texas.

13 Personal Interview, the late Mrs. Callie Randolph Crow, Trinity, Texas

acquired the land adjoining the Dailey tract on the east.¹⁴ The ensuing settlement was then called Tyler Prairie; but in 1854, when Hill Pennington bought the first lot in the newly surveyed town site, the name was changed to Pennington. Those early settlers were progressive and built with a view to permanence. They set before themselves lofty ideals and sought to fulfill their ambitions. This was accomplished in part by the founding of Pennington Academy, a co-educational institution authorized by the Legislature of Texas to issue degrees in arts and sciences.¹⁵ Dr. D. W. Steele, who was chosen to direct the affairs of the school, proved to be a capable administrator. From its beginning the academy was a success and drew students from a large area of East Texas.¹⁶

From 1870 to 1872, and again from 1874 to 1882, Pennington, a prosperous farming and trade area and the leading educational center, was the county seat of Trinity County.¹⁷

In addition to the towns and communities which have been mentioned, by 1854 a number of river boat towns had sprung up in the county. The first and most important of these was Sebastopol, founded by William McKim, who in 1850 located on a large tract of the Trinity River bottom lands

14 Deed Records of Trinity County, Book B, pp. 343, 366.

15 Gammel, Laws of Texas, vol. IV, pp. 511, 604.

16 Personal Interview, Mrs. John Standley, Huntsville, Texas.

17 Gammel, Laws of Texas, vol. IV, p. 878.

and engaged in farming and stock raising. He saw the need of a landing for the boats which were making frequent trips up this waterway. So he moved near the banks and opened a general merchandise store and named the port Sebastopol. When the town had reached its zenith there were several general stores, three or four grocery stores, a drug store, a post office, a number of warehouses, many saloons, several wharves, a union church, a school, and many homes.

Other Trinity River boat towns to grow up were Alford's Bluff, Chalk Bluff, Dunkin Shoals, and Ryan's Ferry; while Esom Hill was located on the Neches. As the river trade boomed so did these towns; but when the last boat came up in 1878, there began a period of decline for these important commercial centers and eventually all of them disappeared from the map.¹⁸

The town of Trinity, located in the southwestern corner of the county, had its beginning in the late fifties, when James William Kaiser with his large family settled on the prairie lands north of the Trinity River and began a successful farming business. At first it was known as Kaiser's Prairie. Other settlers soon to follow were J. P. Barnes, Calvin Elliott, Benjamin Gibson, George B. Harris, Brown and Bob Martin, George Ramey, and R. T. Walker. Until 1870, when it was made a division point on the international and

¹⁸ Personal Interview, H. I. Phillips, Carlisle, Texas.

Great Northern Railroad, which had been completed through the county, Trinity's prosperity was due to its farming and stock raising industries. In 1872 a branch of the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad crossed the county from east to west and established offices in the town. This resulted, of course, in further growth of the community. In fact, Trinity became the county seat in 1873.¹⁹ The change, however, did not prove satisfactory. As a result of the county-wide election held in October, 1874, the seat of justice was moved back to Pennington.²⁰

The town of Centralia, which came into existence in 1873, was established in a fertile farming district in the northeastern part of the county, between Elm and Cedar Creeks. Preston Ainsworth, the first settler, secured title to the land and sold some of it to Frank and Amos Gibson, who were responsible for much of the town's development. Charles Cochran put in the first general store about the same time that Isham Standley opened a saloon. Dr. J. W. Bowman was the physician, and Judge Arthur Barney the legal adviser for the community. Other early settlers who became prominent citizens in this neighborhood were four brothers, A. B., A. J., W. B., and W. D. Womack. These farmers depended upon corn and cotton as their staple crops. Later they

19 Personal Interview, Walter Scott, Trinity, Texas.

20 Gammel, Laws of Texas, vol. VIII, pp. 72.

tried the fruit and trucking business but continued to raise an abundant supply of feed for the great number of horses, cattle, and hogs which they raised.²¹

One of the most prosperous but least known villages in Trinity County is Nigtown, a small farming community established in 1873 by a progressive group of ex-slaves under the leadership of Jeff Carter. Although born under the handicap of slavery, Carter by hard work succeeded in securing a fairly good education. In Nigtown he organized a school for both the children and the adults of the neighborhood. He taught the school himself until his death in 1905. Two of his sons became Methodist preachers and the majority of his settlers were highly respected by the white people. The farms were well planned; fine cattle and hogs were brought in, and an excellent poultry business began. A high standard of living has been maintained throughout the years by the Negroes in this community.²²

The Chita settlement on Caney Creek, in the southwestern section of the county, was founded in 1878 by J. A. Parker. A. M. DeLafosse came to this community and secured a title to much of the land in this area. On his death it was divided among his many sons and daughters, most of whose descendants still live on farms given to them by their

21 Trinity County Star, March 31, 1905.

22 Ibid.

father. The Reverend W. A. Vaughn, a Baptist minister, who early settled in this neighborhood, had a great influence upon its people. With the decline of Sebastopol, Chita became an important village.²³

In its early history there were founded throughout the county several unimportant settlements which later were absorbed by or consolidated with one of the towns which have been mentioned, or have disappeared with the development of the lumbering industry. In this group is Brush Prairie, which was settled by Carter Brent in 1866. Another one was New Prospect, a camp meeting site from 1865 to 1880. A school established here in the last years of the nineteenth century was called Thornton, because the majority of the school population bore that name. Whit Boone migrated to the county about 1876 and settled on Caney Creek in a farming district which was called Boonetown. As early as 1878, H. C. Millican, a Methodist minister, established a well-known camp meeting site four miles south of Trinity. Uncle Billy Skains was regarded as the founder of the Skains' Lake settlement, the early home also of William Middleton, who moved from Sumpter. The large lake for which the place was named was ideal for fishing and became a very popular resort for the anglers.²⁴

23 Personal Interview, W. A. Parker, Trinity, Texas.

24 Trinity County Star, March 31, 1905.

As late as 1880 the most important resources of Trinity County were unknown to the outside world. Even its inhabitants considered the vast pine forests more of a liability than an asset. Small quantities of lumber had been cut by sawmills of the portable type, but none had been shipped to other sections of the state and nation. Yet the close of the period under review represents the end of one era and the beginning of another. The history of the lumber industry, however, will be reserved for a later chapter.

CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

Life in Trinity County has not been made up entirely of work, hardships, lawlessness, and wrangles. Friendliness, hospitality, and sociability are traits which have seemed indigenous to the county. The early settlers, as a rule, came to stay; and as their children grew up and married they took up residence in the neighborhood where they were reared. Thus something approaching patriarchal relations was established. There was but little foreign immigration of any kind into the county. Indeed, the inhabitants are mostly pure or Anglo-American stock.

The first homes in the county were almost as crude as the tepees and huts of the Indians scattered along the Alabama, Kickapoo, and Tantabogue Creeks. In fact, the first families from the state of Alabama occupied Indian hovels until they had time to clear and fence land for their farms. Other migrants lived in their covered wagons while clearing the land and making the first crops. The majority, however, immediately set to work erecting permanent abodes of pine poles from which the bark had been taken. These poles, about eight inches in diameter, were notched to fit as closely together as possible. The resulting cracks were filled with mud. A roof was made of

clapboards, while the floor was native dirt. In each house two or three small openings were made for windows and another larger one for the door. Shutters were contrived by splitting logs into boards. The size of a residence depended upon the number in the family and their industrious traits. Houses were enlarged as the family increased or became more prosperous. After 1857, when a small portable sawmill was set up near the center of the county on one of the best roads, homes in the form of frame buildings rapidly supplanted the log cabins, which then were used for barns, cribs, or smokehouses.¹

The same general plan was used for nearly all homes constructed during the period from 1857 to 1861. There were two large rooms separated by a wide hall, while across the front and rear were long galleries. The gallery in the rear was enclosed with planks, forming two small rooms, one of which served as the kitchen while the other one was known as the boys' room. There usually were four glass windows in each front room, but for the back rooms wooden shutters were used. On one side of the house, usually the north, was a chimney made of mud and moss. Such vines as the Virginia creeper, honeysuckle, woodbine, cypress, and morning-glory grew luxuriantly on the porches and around the windows, while in the spacious yard were found many varieties of

1 Crocket, Two Centuries in East Texas, p. 111.

flowers and shrubs. Adjoining the yard was a garden patch in which beans, pumpkins, turnips, and a few other vegetables were grown. Between the yard and the barns was a well, walled in with rocks; or perhaps a spring which had been deepened and rocked in to give the necessary supply of water.²

For the frontiersmen in Trinity County the variety of food was truly limited; but that which was lacking in quality was made up in quantity. A meal usually consisted of an abundance of dried venison dipped in wild honey. The venison was sometimes cooked while fresh to vary the menu. Flour, when available, was an expensive luxury. Trading boats came up both the Trinity and Neches Rivers; but few families had money to buy anything more than coffee, tobacco, and snuff, which were considered absolutely indispensable. Corn, which was scarce, was ground into meal with hand mills.³

These frontier dietary conditions did not long prevail, for these new-comers were hard workers and looked ahead. Soon they began to ship pelts of the wild animals to eastern markets and in exchange acquire breadstuff and other commodities which they could not obtain in this new state. They added milk, butter, cheese, and a more palatable meat to

2 Personal Interview, H. A. Holly, Pennington, Texas.

3 D. H. Hamilton, History of Company M, p. 68.

their diet by taming the local semi-wild animals. A greater variety of fresh vegetables was provided when the settlers learned to plant seeds in both the spring and autumn. They began to cure meat by dipping in a solution of salt and smoking it for several days over a fire made of hickory logs. The process of pickling the flesh of animals resulted in a more savory taste. Wild grapes and berries were converted into preserves, jellies, and varied beverages, which added zest to the meals. The care of poultry produced large flocks of chickens, turkeys, geese, ducks, and pigeons. Sugar cane added syrup and sugar to the food supplies. Finally, grist mills became as common as the corn fields, so meal was easy to obtain.⁴

Clothing consisted mainly of homespun cloth and buckskin when the first colonists from Alabama settled in Trinity County. Most of the settlers owned a spinning-wheel and a loom for making cloth, since calico cost fifty cents a yard. Some of the people made shoes out of the hides of the cattle. Most of them, however, went barefoot. The women and girls spun yarn which they used in knitting gloves and socks. Coon skins sufficed for caps, deer hides made durable jackets, while bear skins served as over-breeches.

As with the homes and the food, prosperity was evidenced by more elaborate clothing. In the last half of the century

4 Personal Interview, H. A. Holly, Pennington, Texas.

homespun dresses and shirts were replaced with those fashioned out of Georgia stripes. Jeans was bought for trousers and jackets; calico was in great demand as a dress fabric; and men's caps and hats were made of a heavy rough woolen cloth. There were no sewing machines.

After 1880 the leg o'mutton sleeves, the hooped skirts, and the many ruffled petticoats were considered necessities. Milady's wardrobe included several brooches and breast-pins, at least one pair of earrings, two bracelets, many tucking combs, a bright colored poke bonnet or two, numerous handkerchiefs, and a pair of high-heeled pumps with shining buckles. The skirts were floor-length except in the back, where an extra six or eight inches was added. The majority of the maidens, however, were less copiously supplied with wearing apparel. They had to be content with three or four dresses of Georgia stripes for everyday wear, a calico dress for special occasions, coarse heavy shoes for work, regular shoes for social affairs, a fascinator for the head when the weather was cold, and a poke bonnet for spring and summer. The only change the season made in styles was one in colors. Dark colors were used for winter, and light shades for summer.⁵

The furniture of the poorer classes of the hardy frontiersmen in Trinity County was made with such tools as that

5 Personal Interview, H. A. Holly, Pennington, Texas.

early day furnished from the timber of the vast forests. It was neither extensive in amount, nor was it ornate in the style of workmanship; for the needs of the people were simple. The furniture of a cabin usually consisted of a table, a bedstead or two, a trundle bed, a few chairs, and a large storage box. The mattresses were made of cloth woven in the home and filled with feathers plucked from geese, chickens, and other fowls, or of moss. On the front gallery of many homes was a long towel which hung from a wooden roller fastened to the wall. Well out of reach of the children was a small oblong mirror which hung securely from a nail. Under the mirror was a small shelf on which a comb was kept. Other pieces of furniture which were used by each member of the family, and visitors as well, were the red cedar water bucket and small wash pan kept on the front gallery water shelf. The common drinking cup was a long-handled gourd called a dipper.⁶

The pioneers who settled Trinity County were, as a rule, a strong, healthy, robust group. Even the women and children showed great resistance to the common ailments of malaria, jaundice, typhoid, pneumonia, and dysentery. Snake bites and stings of many insects were daily occurrences. The few doctors in the county were too busy farming to devote much time to curing the ills of the people. Then, too,

6 Trinity County News, October 7, 1927.

hours and even days often passed before the physician could span the distance between himself and his patients. So each family depended largely on its own medicine chest, which contained a large bottle of quinine, plenty of capsules, some calomel, blue mass, Dover's powders, asafetida, and an assortment of pills. Bleeding was a common cure for many ailments. Various teas and a great variety of poultices were made from wild plants because of their medicinal value.⁷

The first church built in Trinity County was located at Pine Springs in 1852, with Reverend James Simmons, a Baptist minister, as pastor. Gibson Hardin, who served at Sumpter as early as 1854, was the first Methodist minister.⁸ As settlements were made throughout the area other churches were organized. The usual plan was to erect a small log or frame building which was used by all denominations. There were few ministers in the county before 1860. No regular services, therefore, were held. When some circuit rider or missionary came to a community, however, he was given an opportunity to preach to all. Protracted meetings lasting many weeks frequently were held under brush arbors on camp grounds. People would come from miles in every direction to attend the services characterized by impassioned sermons,

7 Personal Interview, Will Gates, Trinity, Texas.

8 Trinity County News, October 10, 1927.

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conversions, fervent prayers, calling for mourners, frequent shouting, and other ecstatic occurrences. No musical instrument was available, but in every congregation there was at least one who could raise the tune to the hymns.⁹

According to the census report of 1870, there were nine churches within the entire county, four Baptist, four Methodist, and one Christian, with a total property evaluation of \$6,500. Subsequently, in spite of appalling lawlessness, church organizations of Baptists, Christians, and Methodists spread rapidly until there was one of each in every town and community. No Presbyterian church was founded until after mill operations were begun in 1882. Since that time one has been built in nearly every town. There has never been a Catholic nor an Episcopal church within the county.

The first schools in Trinity County hardly deserved the name. All of them were one-room log shacks furnished with split-log benches. There were no trained teachers and but few books for the pupils. A. Polen, William Hubbard, and Gibson Hardin conducted a school before 1860 at Nogalus, Pennington, and Sumpter, respectively. In 1867 there was a school of some considerable importance conducted at Sumpter by J. P. Stevenson and J. C. Landrum. Still before 1886 little had been done for the education of the people of the

9 Personal Interview, Will Gates, Trinity, Texas.

county. At this time, for instance, there were within this area eight community schools whose terms ran three or four months of the year. As yet there were no school buildings worthy of the name and teachers were on a parity with the buildings.

The development of the sawmill industry brought about an increase in the scholastic population, the number of schools, and the teachers employed. At Willard the lumber company provided for a school year of nine months as early as 1890. An independent school district was organized at Groveton in 1895 and the next year a commodious two-story building was erected. The school district at Trinity became an independent district in 1898, constructed a four-room building, and required all teachers to hold at least a first-grade certificate. The first county institute, organized in 1899 at Glendale, consisted of fifteen teachers. By 1905 the school population justified a county superintendent, who, when elected, organized several consolidated schools in the rural districts. Soon many of them, as well as the independent districts, voted bonds for the erection of greatly needed buildings. Adequate equipment was purchased; libraries were enlarged; and, generally speaking, the schools were modernized in every respect.¹⁰

The first literary society in the county was organized

10 Records in the Office of the County Superintendent, Trinity County.

in 1872 as a part of the work of Pennington Academy and was patronized by the community at large. Other communities soon adopted the idea. With the literary features were combined lectures and debates on temperance and other social problems. School entertainments were social functions. The frequency of the programs depended upon the ingenuity of the teacher, but for a school to close without a final concert was out of the question. The program consisted of speeches, dialogues, songs, music, debates, spelling matches, and, at times, a play.

In the pioneer days of Trinity County the people had but few commercialized amusements; but the frontiersmen were resourceful enough to devise their own. One of the most interesting pastimes was horse racing. The settlers loved horses and they wanted sports with plenty of action; so a combination of the two easily became a popular recreation. As late as 1880 a big horse race was the great event of the year. Crowds were drawn from a radius of many miles. There were no seats, no grand stand, nor any of the equipment now usually considered essential to a race track. All the preparation required was to step off the various distances and mark them with a stone or a post. Sometimes wires were stretched on either side of the track to prevent the crowd¹¹ from surging out in the way of the horses. Betting was universal, since few people found anything morally wrong with it.¹¹

¹¹ Personal Interview, John Standley, Huntsville, Texas.

Contemporary with the horse race was the dance. In the case of the latter, people also experienced much anticipation, made elaborate preparations, and traveled long distances. The big dances, or balls as they were called, took place on the most popular holidays, and in the homes of the most prosperous farmers. People came on horseback, in buggies, and wagons. It was necessary for the guests to arrive early in order to get the horses watered and fed, attend to their toilets, and eat supper. After the supper the house was cleared of furniture with the exception of seats around the walls. There were never chairs enough, but the deficiency was made up by laying boards across chairs and boxes. The fiddlers spent some time tuning up. When all was ready the caller took his place and summoned the guests to prepare for the first set. The primary prerequisites for a caller were a pair of strong lungs, a sense of rhythm, and enough leadership and personality to get the crowd to enter into the spirit of the dance. The floor was occupied by four or five sets of cotillions, quadrilles, reels, or other popular dances. As the exhilarating strains of some lively tune, punctuated by the prompter's calls--"Salute your partners," "Gentlemen to the right," "Sashay all," "Do-si-do," and "Swing corners," filled the room, every face would glow with happy excitement of the dance which continued until daybreak.

Eventually the popular dances were generally supplanted

by parties. These were strictly community affairs held in private homes. Practically everyone was invited. Early in the evening the crowd gathered. In preparation, the bedstead had been taken out of the front room, which was filled with chairs, boxes, benches, and trunks, on which the guests sat. Somebody would start a game of "snap," which often proved to be the only activity throughout the entire evening. Occasionally, a candy-breaking, a candy-pulling, or an ice cream supper was substituted.

There were also special features which were peculiar to the rural districts. The farmer and his wife turned the extraordinary activities of the farm into occasions for social gatherings and festivities. The neighbors were invited to contribute their strength and skill toward finishing the special work to be done and afterward to share in sport and feasting. Logrolling is a fair example of those gatherings. When the farmer had a piece of ground to be cleared, fenced, and made ready for the plow, he would invite all of his friends and neighbors. Armed with saws, axes, and plows, they would assemble at the appointed time and set to work. Meanwhile a great feast was prepared at the house by the ladies. Chicken and dumplings, strong coffee, biscuits, ham, bacon, sausage, and boiled custard were served at noon. The day's activities usually closed with supper followed by a dance.

This work might be varied for different occasions, as

rail splitting, house raising, and cotton chopping; but the general character of the gathering was pretty much the same. The quilting bee was also a favorite social event. An enterprising housewife would piece several quilts from the scraps of goods left over from her year's sewing, card the cotton, procure the linings, get out the quilting frames, prepare a big dinner, and invite the neighbor women in to help with the quilting. The response was generous. The prospects of a good dinner and the opportunity to visit and gossip all day had a powerful appeal. The quilting was sometimes combined with the outdoor activities; or, perhaps, the men gathered out-of-doors, or on the gallery, to smoke and chew tobacco, or to discuss crops and politics. As the afternoon wore on, a drive or deer hunt was organized.¹²

Notwithstanding the fact that the young people of Trinity County married young, as a rule, the courtships were usually long, often having their origin in childhood attachments. Several weeks in advance of the wedding the engagement was announced. Then the necessary preparations followed. Among the well-to-do these took on elaborate proportions. The exact date was determined by the arrival of the preacher, but Wednesday was regarded as the best day of the week on which to wed. A general invitation was sent out by word of mouth. On the appointed day the guests began arriving hours

12 Personal Interview, H. A. Holly, Pennington, Texas.

before the time of the ceremony, which usually occurred in the late afternoon. The wedding usually took place on the front porch of the home of the bride's parents, for the simple reason that the crowd could not be conveniently assembled within the house. The ceremony was followed by a wedding feast. The guests were served in relays. Some ten or twelve could eat at one time. When they had finished, the dishes were quickly washed and the tables reset, and so on until all had eaten. Then came the dance which lasted until daybreak. The guests were fortunate if they got a little time to rest before starting to the infair, or the reception, held that afternoon and night at the home of the groom's parents. Here the supper and dance of the previous night were repeated. For this the bride required a second-day dress.

A few nights after the wedding the charivari took place. This affair was planned with the utmost secrecy. On the night selected the friends would gather at some designated place. Each person carried a tin pan, a cow bell, a plowshare, or something to make a noise. The party would leave their horses, and other conveyances, at a considerable distance from the house where the bride and groom were spending the night and proceed the rest of the distance with great stealth. Then after they had surrounded the house, bedlam would turn loose. The custom required that, following refreshments, the crowd would have a party for an hour

or two and then depart.¹³

Thus life in Trinity County was often gay; but along with the many pleasures there were also sorrows. In the event of sickness neighbors immediately went to help. This usually meant preparing soup, milk, fruit juice, or brandy for the sick individual, or to sit up and nurse the patient. In case of death the family's closest friends remained to comfort, console, and make funeral preparations. The custom was to close the eyes of the afflicted as life expired and then to straighten the body. Two or three planks were procured, placed on boxes which were set in the front room, and covered with a sheet. On this cooling-board the corpse was laid. Three or four men went to assist the blacksmith in making the coffin, while the women looked after the preparation of the shroud. In the case of men and boys, the best suit generally was used for burial, but for women and girls an entirely new outfit was made. After the dead body was fittingly dressed and placed in the casket the cooling-board was removed and the coffin put in its place. Then friends came to view the remains. A trusted Negro servant usually prepared meals for the family and close friends, and laid away all personal belongings of the deceased and other articles which would remind the bereaved family of their sorrow. When the preacher arrived, a procession, including

13 Personal Interview, H. A. Holly, Pennington, Texas.

a wagon bearing the coffin, followed by similar vehicles in which members of the family and close friends rode, moved to the cemetery where the people of the community were waiting. Here a rather long service followed. When the grave was filled, the family and friends returned home to resume their daily routine, realizing that regular hard work was an antidote to their troubles.¹⁴

14 Ibid.

CHAPTER V

FEUDS AND FACTIONS

The course of the political life in Trinity County during the period from 1850 to 1860 ran more evenly than that of most counties of the state. For the early times in the state this newly organized county made a creditable showing. The population increased from two hundred fifty to thirty-one hundred. The first few scattered clearings had grown to improved farms. The task of making homes had kept the inhabitants busy; there was plenty of game for all; and land was practically free. The strong ties of birth and former residence in other states were of considerable influence in promoting peace and harmony in the new settlements, and a sort of kindred spirit prevailed over the entire county.

The days of prosperity and happiness of these people came temporarily to an end in 1860, for the dark days of the Civil War were approaching. Within the bounds of Trinity County many individuals were opposed to secession, but when the die was cast, this opposition ceased. Soon the best manhood of the county had joined the ranks of the Confederate army.

During the war Trinity County, because of its isolation, became infested with a body of desperate criminals.

Some of them were deserters from the army, others were murderers and thieves, while all were organized to carry on a reign of terror and crime. Civil laws broke down. The county sheriff, a faithful officer, whose experience in dealing with lawlessness would under normal conditions have been effective, did not have the coöperation of the best citizens. Believing that the civil laws were inoperative under the circumstances, some began to resort to other methods of redress. A vigilance committee, comprising the better element of the citizens, was determined to accomplish without law what could not be done through the orderly processes. The rope was the only effective remedy and it was constantly applied. After seven men had been suspended from trees, other rogues took the hint that they were unwelcome citizens and fled from the county.¹

At the close of the war, conditions, as in other sections of the South, bordered on a state of chaos. The former slaves became a menace. Political conditions throughout the county were almost unbearable. It appeared that the citizens had no political rights. The freed slaves became the tool of the carpetbagger and the scalawag for their political purposes, while the white man was denied the privilege of voting. The first election after the war was conducted by a board which administered the laws with a high

1 Trinity County News, February 2, 1928.

hand. The Iron-clad Oath excluded all ex-Confederate soldiers from voting. Other self-respecting white men refused to participate; and, consequently, the carpetbagger, scalawag, and Negroes easily gained political dominance. So many of them were candidates for office that there were not enough left to serve as judges and clerks of the election.

Oppressed by military rule and other forms of injustice through fraudulent transactions, the people became discouraged and feared that they could never regain their political rights. In 1866 three companies of Illinois Infantry were assigned to this county. From the beginning the people sensed trouble. The autocratic actions of the first commanding officer produced constant friction between the soldiers and the citizens. Fortunately, he was succeeded by another who was more judicious, and sought the advice of the best citizens. After this there was little further trouble with the soldiers.² In civil matters there was some mismanagement by the elected officers. Then the younger citizens were urged to seek election to the offices so that the county might be rid of the carpetbagger and scalawag regime.³

The result of misrule in political matters, the presence of soldiers, and the autocratic methods of those in

2 Hamilton, History of Company M, pp. 80-83.

3 The Sentinel, March 16, 1867.

charge of the affairs of the county were not calculated to have a very ameliorative effect upon those men who had just returned from years of fighting for a lost cause. There was a spirit of resentment on all sides. The hatred for the Federal soldiers, the Freedman's Bureau, and the Registration and Election Board were intense. Consequently, there was for some time a reign of lawlessness within the county. Almost every man went armed with two six-shooters. Murder was so common that people ceased to think of it as a crime. Many Negroes were killed. Property was safe only under lock and bar. A band of horse thieves carried on their work through stations where the horses were secreted. Attempts to execute the law frequently were frustrated by mobs of desperate men who preferred to take matters in their own hands. In Trinity County, too, the Ku Klux Klan was active with its secretive work. Although it depended more upon appealing to the superstitions of the Negroes than upon actual violence, this organization here, as in other sections of the country, doubtless did more harm than good. Despite these abnormal conditions, however, some citizens of the county preferred to obey the laws, and stood at all times for high ideals.⁴

By 1870 Trinity County, which had passed through ten years of misgovernment and lawlessness, faced a period of

4 Hamilton, The History of Company M, p. 79.

economic depression. This caused feuds and factions to spring up between individuals and families, as well as among churches and religious bodies. A feeling of distrust, envy, and hatred prevailed. There were disputes over boundary lines between farms, regarding the ownership of the semi-wild animals on the open range, the exchange of work, and over relatively trivial matters. Methods used to settle these grievances included horsewhipping, tarring and feathering, mobbing, and shooting from ambush, as well as fighting out in the open. When either of the first two of these courses was used, one of the last three followed. Women and children often took part in these crimes inspired by hate.⁵

The spirit of animosity, likewise, was shown by the religious groups of Trinity County, between which altercations were often intense and bitter. Ministers of the Gospel frequently harassed and berated the members of alien denominations for their doctrines and beliefs, and declared that their particular faiths were the only means by which entrance was gained into the kingdom of heaven. Such sermons

5 An old settler tells the story of two neighbors who quarreled because the cows of the one broke into the field of the other. The farmer's only son was whipped, tarred, and feathered by the cattleman's five boys. Soon thereafter two of the latter were shot and killed from ambush by the owner of the farm. After burying his two sons, the ranchman went to the home of his enemy and shot him from the back. As her father fell mortally wounded, the farmer's daughter pulled the gun from its rack over the front door and boldly shot the cattleman in the head.

usually produced debates, attended by all the members on each side, which frequently ended in bitter disputes and fights.

The first significant religious feud in the county involved the Primitive and the Missionary Baptists. The latter called the former hard-shells and foot-washers, while the Primitives retaliated with such statements as "You save others; why can't you save yourselves?" and "Charity begins at home." When the Methodist Episcopal Church was established in the county, the two groups of Baptists tended to forget their own disagreements and aligned themselves against the new order. The major argument related to the rite of baptism. When the disciples, or the Christian Church, entered the scene of conflict, the Primitive Baptists and Methodists withdrew from the arguments, leaving the Missionary Baptists and Christians to fight it out. This they did quite vigorously.⁶

During the period under review, however, the most frequent differences of opinion among the inhabitants of Trinity County related to political principles. In the absence of well-defined parties the scene of sharp political battles turned upon local issues, particularly the personalities of those seeking public office. In many instances these office-seekers displayed a bitter, malignant, and demoniacal zeal.

6 Personal Interview, the late Charles Willis, Groveton, Texas.

The intense interest of the citizens in political questions was indicated by the large proportion of eligible voters who cast ballots in county and local elections. Any faction which had a grievance sought remedies in political action at the ballot box. The voters, being almost all Democrats, showed unusual unanimity in national politics; yet there were some bitter struggles in national campaigns, as the McKinley-Bryan presidential campaign, and that of Joseph Weldon Bailey for a place in the United States Senate. Among the gubernatorial contests which were fiercely fought were those of James S. Hogg, Thomas M. Campbell, and James E. Ferguson.

Usually several weeks before the date for the election intense activity began. Both sides of the contest employed speakers to carry the personalities or propositions to the people. In joint debates some of the most able men of the county were pitted against each other. The hot, summer days seemed ideal for political picnics, barbecues, and graveyard workings, at which the contestants, their friends, or both, entertained with long and relentless attacks on the opponents. Frequently these assaults were made not only with belligerent words but with fisticuffs, while at times six-shooters were brought into play. What may have been lacking in political acumen was made up in enthusiasm. Neither scorn nor abuse could turn either faction aside. Sometimes political recruits and votes were gained by more buoyant

means, and even by a spirit of reverence. The last was the tool used by the women, who then could not vote. On the day of election, a line of hopeful yet grave-faced women moved silently towards the church, where they spent the day in prayer and song. About noon appeared a procession of children carrying banners upon which were written appropriate mottoes or guiding principles.⁷

Another inevitable friction in Trinity County was a racial difficulty between the Negroes and the white people. Among the whites cliques and clubs were formed, principally by the young, brazen, and head-strong men, whose purpose was to torment and frighten the Negroes. In a great many instances the parents strenuously objected to their sons' conduct in such matters, but could do little or nothing about it. School children, going to and from school, frequently engaged in brawls and fights with the Negro pupils. White men were known to have assaulted Negro women. Many floggings and murders occurred. Usually when an individual was brought to trial for such charges he was acquitted regardless of the evidence against him. The Negroes, however, were by no means guiltless. They were often impudent, insulting, and mean. Especially was this true among those who had acquired some property, or those who were part white. Yet the Negro was always punished for his bad deeds, if not

7 Personal Interview, the late Mrs. Callie Randolph Crow, Trinity, Texas.

by the laws of the county, then by mobs and individuals.⁸

As has already been stated, there was a moral breakdown in Trinity County during the years following the Civil War. From then until 1880, when, as will be explained, the mill operations began, there remained among the people of the county a large number of the former lawless men. These, together with some who came with the mill activities, continued to maintain a condition of disorder. With the passing years the plight grew worse, until at the close of the century, when there was a reign of lawlessness which was appalling. Groveton became the center of this disorder, while Trinity was almost as bad. The county was divided into two groups--those in favor of saloons and those opposed to them. A long and bitter fight was waged.

Drunkenness was so common that it was not regarded as unusual. Laboring men quickly spent their meager wages in the saloon or gambling den. Poverty was acute. At Christmas time the merchants bought no toys because there were no purchasers. Drunken marauders would ride through the streets at will, firing their six-shooters promiscuously. It was not unusual for a drunken desperado to ride his horse into places of business, or into a saloon and take his drink while seated in the saddle. These disturbances became so daring on Saturdays that women and children never appeared

⁸ Personal Interview, the late Charles Willis, Groveton, Texas.

on the streets on that day, and many of the merchants closed their stores and went home to remain in seclusion.

Many decent people in the county longed to take measures to end such conditions; yet they were intimidated by the low element and would not, either through fear or for business reasons, lift hand or voice toward that end. Even Captain Bill McDonald, the well-known Texas Ranger, who was sent to the county to restore law and order, was discouraged when he said:

If a whole community has no use for the law and order, it's not worthwhile to enforce such things. You've got to stand over a place like these with a gun to make them behave, and when you catch a man, no matter what evidence against him, they'll turn him loose. In Groveton, for instance, when I was there, they had only two law-respecting officers--the district clerk and the county attorney, and the county attorney they killed. Good citizens were so completely in the minority that they were helpless.⁹

When the saloons first were voted out in 1900 many persons advocated open defiance of the law and insisted that the saloon keepers continue their business. The relief sought in local option had not been realized. Prohibition, in fact, proved to be worse than the open saloon. The old days returned by way of the bootlegger and dive-keeper, besides the eight places where intoxicants were openly sold. Harsh methods were used to remove individuals not in the favor of the anti-prohibitionists. Men walking

⁹ Albert Bigelow Paine, Captain Bill McDonald, Texas Ranger, pp. 265, 266.

along the road in broad daylight, for instance, were shot from behind. At nightfall the assassin might lie in wait by the road-side. If he got the wrong man by mistake, it did not matter, for it kept him in practice. Sometimes the victim was called to the door at night and shot down in the dark.

These ruthless acts, finally, stirred into action a few who determined to end this lawlessness whatever might be the cost. The plan adopted was one of anarchy. Ten men went in a body to one of the saloons, herded the operators into a closely guarded rear room, and with sledge hammers destroyed every barrel and bottle of whiskey to be found. Nailing the doors fast and hard, they marched to other dives to find them all closed and the keepers gone. When this work of destruction was finished, the small group of ten men had increased to two hundred.¹⁰

Four decades have passed and most of the actors in these dramatic episodes have gone to their reward. A long period of lawlessness was outlawed by a band of law-abiding citizens acting in an unlawful manner. From that day to the present Trinity County has been a place where men and women can live in peace.

¹⁰ The American Lumberman, September 13, 1908.

CHAPTER VI

RECENT HISTORY

As has been noted, the vast potential supply of building materials induced many of the early settlers to make their homes in Trinity County. It was many years, however, before the inhabitants realized what boundless wealth lay stored up in the splendid forests of long-leaf and short-leaf yellow pines. Until the building of the railroads into this section the pine timbers had but little commercial value. The prospects of rail connections revealed to financiers the great potentialities of the virgin forests of pine trees. It is not remarkable, therefore, that capitalists should enter this field and begin developments on an extensive scale. With this movement the interests of a great number of the people in the county, as well as others from many parts of the United States, were directed to the lumber industry. Population increased, new towns sprang up, and Trinity County began a new era.

In 1880 John Martin Thompson and Henry Tucker, representing the Thompson-Tucker Lumber Company of Rusk County, came to Trinity to investigate the possibilities for a large sawmill.¹ Hiring horses from the livery stable of George

¹ The American Lumberman, September 18, 1908.

Gibson, they rode down the right-of-way of the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad, about twenty-six miles east of Trinity, where they purchased a section of land from J. T. Evans at one dollar an acre.² Benjamin Thompson was sent to superintend the construction of a sawmill at a site selected called Willard and to buy another section of land. The heavy machinery was shipped by rail to Lovelady, a small railroad town in Houston County, and thence transported by ox teams. Operations were begun in 1881 with a capacity of twelve hundred feet per day. The next year a planing mill was added and new machinery for a larger sawmill was set up near by. At this time, also, Henry Tucker sold his interests to J. Lewis Thompson, who became the superintendent of the new plant and remained so until it closed in 1911. In connection with the erection of the mill, a commissary, a depot, a post office, a church, and a school were built. The mill site thus became a prosperous community.³

In 1881 the Trinity County Lumber Company, which began construction of the Groveton, Lufkin, and Northern Railroad, bought five sections of land around Groveton, twenty miles east of Trinity, on the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad for the purpose of engaging in the lumbering business.⁴

2 Deed Records, Book B, p. 197.

3 Personal interview, E. O. Kirkland, Trinity, Texas.

4 Deed Records, Book B, p. 209.

L. T. Sloan, of Iowa, who became the first president, directed the construction of the mill and a home for himself. On the second day of September, when the first lumber was cut, the capacity was one hundred thousand feet daily. A large amount of the fine finishing materials used in the interior of the present State Capitol was sawed and planed by this plant, from 1882 to 1885. In 1890 W. T. Joyce, a Chicago capitalist, bought and enlarged the sawmill, making it the largest lumber mill in the South. At the peak of production it had a capacity of three hundred thousand feet per day on a twenty-four hour run.⁵

Simultaneously with the building of the mill began the establishing of a permanent town. North of the mill was laid off a ten-acre tract of land for the town site. Major W. S. Peters, representing the Trinity and Sabine Land and Railway Company, deeded blocks nine and ten to the county to be used as a public square.⁶ The first building erected in this newly organized town was a shack used by William Magee for a saloon; the second was a restaurant conducted by "Shug" Magee and his wife, "Aunt Mollie." Tom Wortham built the first residence. Centrally located and with good railroad connections, the village grew rapidly and became a thriving trade center. In 1882 it was made the county

5 Trinity County Star, March 31, 1905.

6 Deed Records, Book B, p. 227.

seat,⁷ and immediately work was started on the erection of a courthouse and jail. Although the scene of much lawlessness, Groveton has remained the seat of justice, and until 1930 it was an important lumbering center. In 1932 after the surrounding area had been stripped of its timber, mill activities ceased. During the following year the railroads were discarded. The town still remains the center of a prosperous farming community, however, and maintains fine churches and good schools.

Pete and Frank Josserand, also, were among the first to see the possibilities of the lumber industry in Trinity County. In 1882 they purchased from M. K. McDuffy a small mill two and one-half miles east of Groveton. After enlarging the plant, the Josserand brothers began making heavy shipments of lumber to many points west of the Mississippi River. In connection with the mill a commissary, a church, a school, and a post office were established. The town named Josserand remained an important community until 1909, when the great forests surrounding it were cut. Then its nine hundred inhabitants moved on to other mill sites to find employment.⁸

Trinity, since the early seventies, as noted previously, had been the largest and most important town in the county, but did not become a lumbering center until 1910, when the

8 Personal Interview, Louis Josserand, Houston, Texas.

Thompson Brothers Lumber Company, with Hoxie Thompson as president, established a sawmill here. A peculiarity of Trinity as a mill site is the fact that the town already existed prior to the advent of the lumber industry. Also the mill has operated continuously since it was built in 1911. Because of its superior qualities as a lumbering center, the class of Forestry of Yale University was sent here to study in the spring of 1911. In this locality other sources of profit from the forest resources have been found, as, for example, the making of crates, baskets, boxes, and tool handles. Trinity has been benefited, furthermore, by a bottling works and a clay products factory which have been located here. It has also become widely known as the home of the Trinity Roundup, an annual celebration for the early settlers.

Other mill towns built in Trinity County, along the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad, were Saron, Bissel, Westville, and Glendale. In each case were established the usual commissary, post office, church, school, and railway station, resulting in thriving villages with some social life. Among the workmen were a number of both whites and blacks. Special arrangements were made for the social well-being of each group.⁹

Carlisle and Baccus, though not sawmill towns, owe

9 Personal Interview, Lee Dunlap, Trinity, Texas.

their existence to the lumbering industry. When, in 1900, the Onalaska mill was erected on the line between Polk and Trinity Counties, the Waco, Beaumont, Trinity, and Sabine Railroad was extended as far as Livingston to give the new mill shipping facilities. Carlisle and Baccus were created as logging stations. When the lumber business declined so did these stations. These two villages, however, have continued to exist as centers of agricultural communities.¹⁰

During the period of the mill industry in Trinity County agriculture had been neglected. Fine farms had grown up in brambles. The county denuded of its forests faced a serious problem as many destitute inhabitants were without employment. Early in the twentieth century the large and profitable business of lumbering was on the wane, and then arose the problem of what to do with thousands of acres of cut-over timber land. A change of conditions was inevitable. The places where once stood towns throbbing with life, sending their products of lumber to all parts of the United States and European countries, were waste lands.

The first attempt to solve these problems was made at Glendale, a mill site which closed in 1896. The idea of bringing in a number of families from the North to try their agricultural methods on these cut-over timber lands was proposed; and a colony of people from Missouri and Illinois

10 Personal Interview, H. I. Phillips, Carlisle, Texas.

were induced to undertake the task. The first group, consisting of ten people, arrived September 10, 1897, and at once began the work of repairing homes and preparing the soil. Four months later the number of people had grown to more than three hundred. They reopened the sawmill to get the needed supplies to repair homes and churches, to build fences, and to make crates and boxes. The Glendale Orchard Company was organized with a capital of \$50,000 and more than a thousand acres of land were planted in peach, plum, and other fruit trees. The venture did not prove successful; the orchards could not withstand the cold winters and the dry summers. So in 1910 for the second time this community became waste land.¹¹

The idea of using the cut-over timber lands for agricultural purposes also led to the founding of Helmic. Those who undertook this work selected the fertile lands which were well drained by the Elm and Alabama Creeks. Dairying was a principal industry, yet some beef cattle were raised and hogs and sheep were produced for the market. A large-scale poultry business was introduced. Sugar cane, feed, fruits, and vegetables became the staple crops, while less attention was given to corn and cotton. With the erection of stores, schools, and churches, the community became one of the successful farming centers of the county.¹²

11 Personal Interview, Frank Gray, Trinity, Texas.

12 Personal Interview, J. A. Collins, Helmic, Texas.

Other communities resulting from the attempt to turn the waste lands into farms were Crete, Crecy, Friday, and Woodlake. Crete was located on the bottom lands of Piney Creek, Crecy a few miles farther northeast, and Friday on the banks of White Oak Creek. In each of these settlements comfortable farm homes were built and the people turned to the raising of fruits, tomatoes, sugar cane, feed, and truck produce. The cut-over lands were admirably suited to a great variety of live stock. Herefords and Brahmas replaced the native scrub stock, and pure bred poultry and hogs were introduced, indicative of good living.¹³

Of this group of agricultural centers Woodlake was an outstanding experiment. Mrs. Helen Kerr Thompson had received by deed from her husband, J. Lewis Thompson, the twelve thousand acres of cut-over land surrounding the mill site at Willard. Here she planned to build a model agricultural and stock farm which would prove to the people of the county that an application of intelligent work would turn waste timber lands into fertile fields. Her first step was to stock the land with a pure breed of Hereford cattle. Then, operating on the principle that poor land cannot be made to pay for the time and expense of cultivation, she put the land in proper condition by the use of fertilizers and the growth of leguminous plants. She also

¹³ Trinity County News, October 15, 1927.

followed the practice of crop rotation with a crop for every month of the year. Her poultry business was the largest in all Texas. Then with the coöperation of other farmers, she tried the tomato industry as a mere experiment. As a result Trinity County became a tomato-growing center. In an attempt to encourage the youths among her tenant population to deeds of activity, she allowed each child over fifteen years of age the privilege of cultivating one acre of cotton.¹⁴ Mrs. Thompson's efforts have produced one of the most beautiful farms in East Texas.

In order to open sections of fine farming lands in Trinity County to settlement, and to give them an outlet to the markets, good roads were necessary. In 1925, therefore, a bond issue of \$577,000 was voted by the people and the constructions of three highways was begun. By 1936 State Highway 94 extended across the county in a northeast-southwest direction, State Highway 106 crossed Highway 94 approximately at right angles near the center of the county, while State Highway 45 served the western portions.

In 1933 three Civilian Conservation Corps camps were established over the county and the Texas Forest Service was made responsible for planning and guiding the work projects on forest conservation. The Trinity County Lumber Company of Groveton and the Texas Long Leaf Lumber Company of Trinity

14 Personal Interview, Mrs. Helen Kerr Thompson, Woodlake, Texas.

coöperated in providing financial assistance in the detection and suppression of forest fires on their land. The enrollees of these camps also worked on needed improvements, such as erecting several lookout towers, stretching miles of telephone lines, and constructing fire-truck roads and bridges.¹⁵ The Works Projects Administration, since 1936, has been responsible for many new school buildings, especially in the rural districts, a new post office, and some other necessary public buildings.¹⁶ Woodlake became, in 1934, a Federal experiment in planned colonization with homes for about one hundred families. These projects have also enabled a large number of men and women of the county to secure work, some of whom had been unemployed since the decline in the lumber industry.

During the last generation several organizations have been active in the material development of Trinity County. In this list are the 4-H Clubs, an organization of farm boys and girls through which the farm youths have been encouraged to develop the highest type of farm life. The Future Farmers of America have inspired much activity and progress both in agriculture and live-stock production. One of the best indications of a growing interest in farm program development is to be found in the organization of a coöperative farm program

15 Texas Forest Service, Circular Number 8, 1940.

16 Works Projects Administration, Bulletin for 1940.

to foster diversification and balance crops. In this, special emphasis is given to home orchards, gardens, dairies, cows, hogs, poultry, and small acreage of tomatoes.

The Agricultural Adjustment Administration, since 1936, has done much to raise farm income to a level more equitable with non-farm income, to conserve soil resources, and to provide funds, so that the farmer is relieved of the vain attempt to get sufficient money to operate from year to year.¹⁷ By buying hundreds of acres of land where valuable trees formerly flourished and turning them into the Davy Crockett National Forest, the Federal government recently sponsored an intelligent and progressive campaign of reforestation in the southeastern part of the county. Trees of value are protected, seedlings are planted as needed, and forest fires are combatted. The Forward Trinity Valley Association has proposed a chemurgic program to broaden the field of farming by bringing agriculture and industry into closer coöperation through science and research.¹⁸

Such is the history of Trinity County. In some respects it has not been a story of progress, but in facing courageously the many obstacles which have been confronting it, its people have successfully overcome many barriers.

17 Agricultural Adjustment Administration, Bulletin for 1940.

18 Chemurgic Program for 1941 by Victor H. Scoffelmeyer.

Still to many people the term Trinity County correctly connotes pine trees and sandy land, mosquitoes and malaria-- a section of the state where it is easy to make a living but hard to make a fortune.

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