

BULLET POINTS

Spring 2024

Former Texas Rangers Association



The Texas Rangers and Fredericksburg

By Mike Cox, Historian, Former Texas Rangers Association

Republic of Texas-era Rangers are believed to have had a semi-permanent camp at the future site of Fort Martin Scott in the early to mid-1840s. Proving that, however, is another matter.

During Fort Martin Scott's active years (1848-1853), officers stationed there focused on the post's primary mission of protecting the new German settlement of Fredericksburg along with westward-bound travelers. They also kept busy with correspondence, reports, muster rolls and all the other required paperwork detailing all aspects of the Army's presence in Gillespie County.

On the other hand, early day Texas Ranger records are at best scanty, at worst lost. An 1857 fire that gutted the Adjutant General's office in Austin is believed to have destroyed some Ranger records. The 1881 fire that destroyed the state capitol resulted in the loss of other Ranger-related material. Finally, it's likely some Ranger activities were never put down on paper.



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"Give me a few Texas Rangers and I will get it done." – Sam Houston

Still, the general consensus is that prior to the federal fort's establishment, Rangers at least periodically camped on the west side of Baron's Creek a little over two miles from the newly founded town of Fredericksburg. Given the site's proximity to the Pinta Trail, an old Indian trace extending from San Antonio to the one-time Spanish mission near present Menard, it makes sense that Rangers would find the location a good place to spread their bedrolls.

In his book *Fort Martin Scott: Guardian of the Treaty*, the late Kerr County historian Joseph Luther notes that the post first was known as Camp Houston in honor of former Republic of Texas president Sam Houston. However, it's unclear whether the name was bestowed by the Rangers or the Army. It seems more logical that the Rangers would have named their camp after the hero of San Jacinto than the federal military, but the answer to that so far has been elusive.

While no primary source linking the Rangers to the fort site before federal troops arrived has turned up, there's ample documentation that Rangers were no strangers to the Fredericksburg area, both before and after the settlement of the community.

Captain John (Jack) Coffee Hays' San Antonio-based Ranger company occasionally traveled northwest on the Pinta Trail in pursuit of raiding war parties. For instance, the *Vicksburg Daily Whig* reported on July 27, 1843, that Native Americans "had been committing depredations recently in the vicinity of Bexar.... Capt. Hays started, with 30 men, in pursuit of the Indians—believed to be Comanches."

If the warriors fled northwest from San Antonio, they probably followed the Pinta Trail. How far Hays' men pursued the Indians, and whether he caught up with them, went unreported. Future Fredericksburg being only a two to three-day horseback ride from San Antonio, it is certainly plausible that Hays periodically camped on Baron's Creel near the trail.

Legend has it that on other occasions, Hays survived an encounter with Comanche at Enchanted Rock, only 17 miles north of the future fort. Also, Hays' Rangers are said to have engaged in a sharp fight with Comanche at Bandera Pass, roughly 38 miles southwest of present Fredericksburg. While no records have been found to prove that either fight actually occurred, it is well-documented that in the summer of 1844, Hays and 15 of his men defeated a much larger contingent of Comanche about 30 miles south of future Fredericksburg near where the Pinta Trail crossed the Guadalupe River. Known as the Battle of Walker Creek, the fight took place in what is now Kendall County in the vicinity of present Sisterdale.

Hays was not the only Ranger who operated in the Fredericksburg area. The *New Orleans Daily Delta* of Sept. 4, 1847, noted that a company of Rangers under Capt. Benjamin Highsmith “is stationed for the present at Fredericksburg.” The article also noted that three companies of Rangers had “recently been posted in that vicinity.” A Ranger captain identified only as Conner (possibly John H. Conner) camped for a time on Sandy Creek, 18 miles above Fredericksburg.

The *New Orleans Times-Picayune* reported on Nov. 26, 1851, that, “The volunteer [Ranger] company commanded by Capt. H. [Henry] McCulloch was mustered out of service at Fort Martin Scott on the 5th inst.”

The Army left Fredericksburg at the end of 1853 because the frontier had moved farther west, but Native American depredations continued. The situation had grown so serious by the summer of 1854 that the commander of U.S. forces in Texas, Maj. Gen. Percifer Smith, asked Gov. E.M. Pease for six companies of “well mounted and armed” Rangers. If Pease approved the requisition, Smith said four of those companies would be mustered in “at or near Fort Martin Scott.” Acknowledging the dangerous condition along the frontier, the *New Orleans Crescent* reported on Aug. 23, 1854, that Pease had replied on August 8 that he would indeed authorize the use of Rangers.

Of course, Texas did not have six companies of Rangers. But by November 3, the state had mustered in five companies. The *Austin State Gazette* said that the Rangers were “fine men, from every part of the state, and well mounted and equipped,” as reported in the *Daily American Organ* on Nov. 18, 1854.

That winter of 1854, an expedition under Colonel Andrew Gray, charged with locating a suitable transcontinental railroad route, passed through Fredericksburg and possibly spent the night. A letter written by someone identifying himself only as “Viator” noted that they had “encountered a deserted post, known as Fort Martin Scott.” On Feb. 17, 1854, the *Washington Sentinel* reported escorting the party were “some true old Texan rangers, and some truly raw ones; but all can properly come under the designation of good fellows.”

Bottom line, contemporary newspaper reports make a reasonable case that the Fort Martin Scott site—both before and after the post’s establishment—was more an occasional Ranger overnighting place than a maintained camp.

A Ranger presence at Fort Martin Scott during the Civil War is better documented.

On Jan. 2, 1861, the Texas legislature passed “An Act for the Protection of the Frontier” authorizing a regiment “of mounted men” to guard the state’s vulnerable western flank. With the rank of colonel, former Ranger Captain Ben McCulloch (Henry McCulloch’s brother)

would command this new Ranger-like force, formally designated as the First Regiment of Texas Mounted Rifles.

Under the law, enlistees had to furnish their own horse, weapons and “all accoutrements and camp equipage,” while the state would provide ammunition, medicine and food for the horses. Privates would earn \$25 a month.

A ranging company known as the Gillespie Rifles was sworn in at Fort Martin Scott later that January. Hotelier Charles Henry Nimitz—grandfather of future Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz of World War II fame—commanded the 200-man force.

While those frontier defenders took their oath at the abandoned garrison, no other use of what little remained of the former Army post by Rangers is known. Later in the Civil War, Rangers maintained a base along Whitlock Creek west of town known as Camp Davis. The camp could have been named for Confederate President Jefferson Davis, but the captain in command of the company was H.T. Davis. Either way, neither man was slighted.

Editor’s Note: This is an excerpt from an article that appeared earlier this year in a special supplement to the *Fredericksburg Standard*.

Message from FTRA President Matthew Lindermann

I hope this finds everyone doing well. This year sure got off to a busy start. For instance, January brought 11 Ranger Memorial Cross dedication ceremonies at three different cemeteries in El Paso.

In February, Foundation President Joe Davis and I spoke to the Texas Ranger Division at their in-service training in Kerrville about the history of the association and plans for the future. The Association hosted a reception that evening where we were able to visit one-on-one with many of the Rangers, and I am excited that 16 active Rangers made an application for new membership.

Ranger Eric Lopez and Kristen Rocco were married at the Heritage Center on Feb. 24.

Texas Independence Day (March 2) was celebrated at Luckenbach with a well-attended event planned by Bob Bailey. Danny Thiele and others in the Masonic Ranging Company participated in a ceremony in which the faded and tattered Texas flag that flew above the famous store was honorably retired and replaced with a new one. This was followed by a cannon salute. Visitors from several states were present for the festivities.

Speaking of visitors, many folks braved the cold weather to attend Celebrate Texas at the Heritage Center on March 9. There were lots of exhibits, demonstrations, good food (chili and cobbler) cooked on site. Rangers Joe Davis, Wayne Fricke, and I had the pleasure of swearing in several Junior Rangers.

On April 9, former Ranger Leroy Tillman Kelso who served under Capt. Dan Roberts in the Frontier Battalion in 1874 – 1875 was honored with a Ranger Memorial Cross Dedication at the Fitzhugh cemetery in Hays County. Descendants of Ranger Kelso who were recognized during the ceremony were very appreciative of the Association's Memorial Cross program.

Acclaim Press, the publisher of our 125th Anniversary coffee table book, gave the following update as of the end of March: One hundred biographies have been submitted, and at least 155 pre-sale orders have been received. Fortunately, It's not too late to send in your information if you'd like you and your family's story preserved on acid-free paper that will outlast us all. Acclaim will make one final call before designing the book's layout. If you know of any former rangers who haven't submitted their information, please encourage them or their families to do so. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to have your story saved for posterity. We are also interested in any Ranger-related photographs that you may be willing to share.

Don't forget to send in your RSVPs for this year's annual FTRA meeting to be held on May 11 at the Heritage Center. We will be honoring six of our retired Rangers who passed on last year.

I have enjoyed serving as your president this past year and I am looking forward to many good things to come.

Message From FTRF President Joe Davis

Here's hoping everyone's doing well as we head toward summer.

Last year was a very busy one as we celebrated the 200th Anniversary of the Texas Rangers. With the Rangers nine months into their third century, the men and women now wearing the *cinco peso* continue to serve and protect the citizens of this great state.

The Board of Directors of the Former Texas Rangers Foundation held their annual meeting January 22 this year. Officers and directors were nominated and elected to serve during 2024. Updates on Phase 2 of the Texas Ranger Heritage Center were discussed as well as our upcoming annual fundraiser Silver Stars & Six Guns gala. We will update you as plans develop.

Our annual Celebrate Texas event was held on March 9 at the Texas Ranger Heritage Center. This year, it was in conjunction with the celebration of the 175th anniversary of the founding of adjacent Fort Martin Scott. Both events drew large crowds. The Commanche and Ranger camps were set up on FTRF grounds. A chuck wagon crew was on hand to demonstrate cowboy cuisine by cooking up a big pot of Texas chili and peach cobbler for those in attendance. Entertainment this year was provided by Pistol Packing Paula and trick roper Kevin Fitzpatrick. It was a great day!

On Monday, April 8, we had nearly 400 people in attendance at the Heritage Center to view the eclipse. People came from all across the United States and several foreign countries. A large group came from California. We sold out all our parking spaces for \$100 each. A sack lunch which included a hot dog, chips, a Moon Pie, a Milky Way candy bar and a bottle of water sold for \$5. After the eclipse, the group from California enjoyed an evening meal prepared by our great local cook, Dale Curry of Action Catering. The meal consisted of chicken fried steak with all the trimmings. There were 70 from the California group plus all our volunteers. It turned to be a great day with high compliments on our facility from people who visited Fredericksburg for the first time. A special thanks to all our volunteers and the Boy Scouts. We could not have done it without them.

Our annual Silver Stars & Six Guns gala is going to be held September 27-28 this year in Boerne at the Bevy Hilton Hotel. Friday night we'll be recognizing our volunteers and members. Saturday night's gala will include a banquet, live and silent auctions and live entertainment. This year, we'll be honoring one of our longtime supporters, Stan Harper, who passed away earlier this year. Mark your calendars and plan on attending to help support our mission. More information will be forthcoming as it develops.

I want to encourage everyone to check our website, www.trhc.org for updates and general information. We also have a new Facebook page, Former Texas Rangers Foundation, Association and Heritage Center. Check it out, I think you will enjoy it. It will better inform you and the general public what the FTRF is all about.

Don't hesitate to call our office if you have any questions or suggestions. We value your input. Our phone number 830-990-1192. If you're ever in Fredericksburg, come by our office (103 Industrial Loop) and see us.



Ranger memorial crosses

Jan. 19-20, 2024: FTRA honored 11 Rangers over a two-day period in El Paso. By cemetery, these Ranger graves received Ranger memorial crosses: Evergreen Cemetery, O.W. "Doc" Irwin and Baz Outlaw; Concordia Cemetery, James Biggs, Robert J. Carr, Patrick Doland, Carl Kirchner, Ernest St. Leon and Robert Ross; Restlawn Cemetery, Walter Beach and Herff Carnes.

April 14, 2024: Ranger Leroy Kelso, Fitzhugh Cemetery, Hays County.



In memoriam

Walter Baldree

Longtime FTRF member Walter Henry Baldree, 65, died March 19, 2024. He was one of the first members of the Maj. John B. Jones Masonic Ranging Co.

A native of Weatherford, he was active in Masonry and various other organizations, including the Lipan Volunteer Fire Department.

Survivors include his wife Wanda Halman Baldree and four children: Walter Henry Baldree Jr. (Hank); Miranda Baldree Clinton and spouse Colby Clinton; Christopher Baldree; Hannah Baldree Richards and spouse Jeremy Richards; and two grandchildren, Emerson Clinton and Eryn Clinton.

Services were held March 23, with burial following at Evergreen Cemetery in Lipan.

Bob Connell

Retired Texas Ranger Bob Connell died Jan. 26, 2024, in College Station.

Born in Hunt County, Texas, near Greenville in 1932, while attending Greenville High School Bob met Ettabel Denson—the woman who would become his wife of over 70 years.

During the Korean War era, Bob served in the U.S. Army. While in the Army he married Etta and they moved to Tacoma, Washington while he was stationed at Fort Lewis. After his discharge from the Army, Bob and his wife moved back to Greenville for a short while before Bob was accepted into the Texas Department of Public Safety Highway Patrol. His first duty station was Navasota, where he served from 1959 to 1969. Bob was then promoted to the Ranger service and worked for two years in Bay City before being assigned to Bryan. When he retired in 1992, Bob had been with the DPS for 37 years.

Survivors include two children, Karen McCarroll and husband Chuck of Navasota and Clint Connell and wife Andrea of Austin. Bob and Etta's extended family also includes six grandchildren, eight great grandchildren, and four great-great grandchildren.

Janie Dean

Janie Hill Dean, wife of the late retired Texas Ranger Capt. Jack Dean, died Dec. 25, 2023, at a care facility in Kerrville. She was laid to rest in the Texas State Cemetery in Austin, next to her husband.

She was born Janie Lee Hill in Denison, Texas on February 12, 1938, to Gerald Almedia Hill and Myrtie Garner Hill. Raised in Fort Worth, Janie graduated from Diamond Hill High School. She eloped to marry her high school sweetheart, Jack O'Day Dean, on December 20, 1955. Moving during Jack's career with the Texas Department of Public Safety, Janie lived in Pecos, Tyler, McAllen and Waco, until they settled in San Antonio (Leon Valley) where they

spent the next 44 years, until the captain's death in 2022. Janie retired as a personnel coordinator for the Xerox Corporation.

Survivors include a sister, Jean Maltbie; her sons, Kyle Dean (Carol) and Cody Dean (Laura); and her grandson, Jackson Dean.

Stan Harper

Stan Harper, 85, longtime supporter and friend of the FTRF, died Feb. 20, 2024. He served as an advisory director on the FTRF board and was a generous sponsor for the annual Silver Star & Six Guns galas. Services were held at Blessing Colonial Chapel in Mansfield, followed by interment at Emerald Hills Memorial Park in Kennedale.

Gloria Ann Neel

Gloria Ann Neel, 86-year-old widow of former Co. A Texas Ranger Charles A. Neel, died Dec. 29, 2023. Following services in San Antonio, she was interred Jan. 12, 2024, at Garden of Memories Cemetery in Lufkin, where she and her husband spent most of their lives.

Texas Ranger Scrapbook

Travis County. –Gazette: Lieutenant Reynolds gets \$200 reward for the apprehension of J.C. Stephens.—Lieutenant N.O. Reynolds arrived from Kimble county with a scout of seven rangers. He brings three prisoners, named respectively J.C. Stephens, Stark Reynolds and Andy Darnell. Stephens is charged with the conniving [of] the escape of prisoners from the jail at Henrietta, in Clay county. Stark Reynolds is a horse thief. His dodging period has lasted for nine years. Andy Darnell is charged with cow stealing in Wilson county.

Dallas Daily Herald, March 5, 1878, p. 3.

How to donate

You can donate to the Texas Ranger Heritage Center capital campaign by visiting thrc.org/donate or mailing a check to FTRF, P.O. Box 3195, Fredericksburg, TX, 78624. To contribute by credit or debit card contact the FTRF office. The Former Texas Rangers Foundation is a 501c3 nonprofit organization. All donations are tax-deductible according to IRS regulations to the extent allowed by law.

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