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## Daily review (Edinburg, Tex.) [Centennial Edition] 100 Years of History Hidalgo County\_Part 01

The Daily Review

Allan Engleman

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# THE DAILY REVIEW

CENTENNIAL EDITION

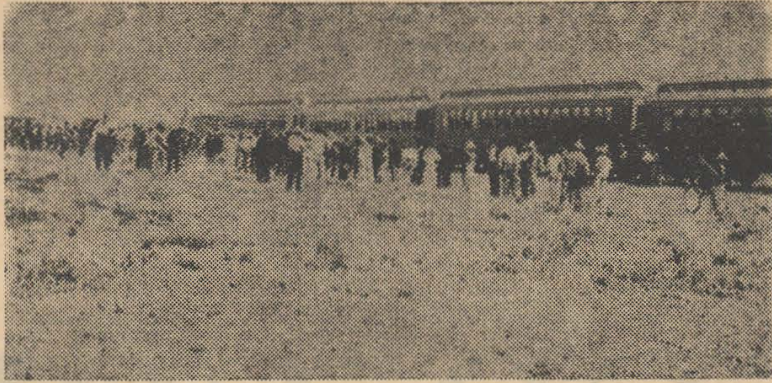
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1952

EDINBURG, TEXAS

# 1852      100 YEARS      1952                     OF                     HISTORY HIDALGO COUNTY



Prepared through the cooperation of the Hidalgo County Centennial Writers Committee and the Junior Historians of Edinburg.



Picture  
Courtesy  
H. P. Griffin

## The Faithful Falcons - 1747

By AIDA BARRERA

THE heritage of the Falcon family goes all the way back to the time that Jose de Escandon came to complete the chain of settlements between the Rio Grande and La Bahia de Espiritu Santo in 1747. The Falcons were a reputable family from Cerralvo, Nuevo Leon. Two of the brothers, Blas Maria de la Garza Falcon and Miguel de la Garza Falcon, were captains for Escandon. Escandon's captains were carefully selected from a large group. Each man had to pass a series of tests which Escandon had prepared for him, and having fulfilled the requirements, he was eligible for the captaincy. The two Falcon brothers both qualified for the position. They helped Escandon on his first "entrada" to Nuevo Santander. They were both eager to fight against the Indians and any other obstacles which Escandon's army might have to overcome. Blas Maria was ordered to proceed along the south bank of the Rio Grande River. Miguel was ordered to cross the Rio Grande at San Juan Bautista, (near present Eagle Pass), and to explore below that point on the north bank.

Having served exceptionally well in Escandon's original "entrada," the Falcons were called upon to help with the actual settling of the colonies. Blas Maria was given authority to gather a group of people and take them to the site at the juncture of the San Juan with the Rio Grande. Blas Maria then gathered forty families, including some of his own relatives, and took them to the proposed site. He didn't have much trouble gathering the people since the land offered great opportunities. Cheap land was the thing which attracted ranchers with large herds; the poor came because they wanted to live in a land free from taxation for a long period of time; tradesmen came seeking a new market for their goods; and, as usual, adventurers came seeking glory and honor for the King of Spain.

IMMEDIATELY after their arrival the group of people started to make the colony prosper.

per. Irrigation was started so that corn, cane, frijol, cotton, fruits, and other plants could be raised. Canoes were built at once, since the people expected to do extensive business in the salt trade from the salines located to the north east. Ranching was started, and later proved the most profitable business.

THE colonists then began to look forward to establishing their ranching lands across the river. Fifteen families were given permission to establish their ranches on the north bank of the river by Escandon. Blas Maria got his herd together and moved them across the river to the place which later was called Carnestolendas, (now Rio Grande City), and established his ranching headquarters there. Likewise, his father-in-law, Don Nicolas de los Santos Coy, established his ranch near by at a place which he called Guardado, (now Garceno). Several other people established their ranches north of the river by Escandon. Blas Maria got his herd la Garza Falcon and Joaquin de la Garza Falcon. Most of these people lived on the south bank, but chose their ranching lands on the "porciones" on the north bank. These settlers made improvements of different types under the condition that when the time came, their houses, pastures, and fields would be deeded to them.

Camargo proved to be the most prosperous of the colonies which had been founded about the same time.

Among the Falcons' other achievements, is the founding of the little village of Falcon for which the Falcon Dam is being named. The dam will cover an area of five miles in length, with a highway running along its top. The lake will be about 6 miles wide and about 22 miles long. It will serve to store the precious waters of the Rio Bravo for the use of the highly developed areas of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. This huge dam and lake is a fitting monument to the faithful pioneer service of the Falcon family.

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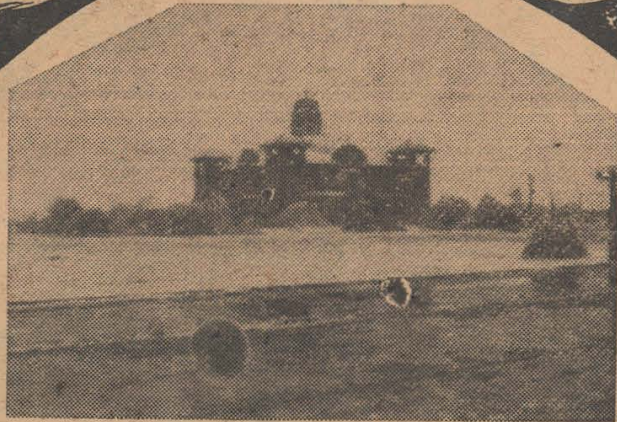
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Snow on the courthouse, 1926

Picture Courtesy Mrs. R. B. Curry

## Fathers Of The Valley—1800

By Dorothy McWhorter

For one hundred years, 1849 through 1949, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate in the Rio Grande Valley have labored long and well. The centennial has been celebrated, and it is fitting that historians try to evaluate the Oblates' accomplishments.

The first Oblates came to Texas from Canada. Listening to the pleadings of Bishop Mary Odin, C. M., the first Bishop of Galveston, Father Adrien Pierre Telmon decided that if any place in the world needed priests, that place was Texas and that the Oblates were the priests.

Once the decision had been made Father Telmon lost no time; the first Oblates were ready to start for their new mission field in October, 1849. With Father Telmon were Fathers Alexandre Soulerin and Augustine Gaudet, and Lay Brother Henri Menthe.

On December 2 the party en route for Brownsville reached Point Isabel, a little seaport town some twenty miles east of Brownsville. About 1800 it had been a summer resort for Mexicans and Spaniards. At this time, however, it was the base for the Fourth Artillery, United States Army, under the command of General Zachary Taylor.

Brownsville, however, was the destination of the Oblates. Once more the army, in the person of Lieutenant Garesché, came to the rescue. He secured a military conveyance drawn by four mules, and on December 5 the Fathers set out. The weather was intensely hot, the so-called roads were very bad, and after four hours of jolting and bumping the Fathers finally reached their destination.

The arrival of the missionaries caused quite a lot of excitement among the townspeople. Since they had pressed Bishop Odin to send "ministers of the Gospel" to Brownsville, the citizens felt that they should extend a formal welcome to the missionaries. That evening a representative body gathered in a large barn and invited the Fathers to come to meet them. The solemn event was even more dignified because of the patriarchal appearance of the welcoming committee, all of whom wore beards.

The receiving party must have felt awkward, since their request for priests was not based on religious motives. The Fathers soon came to realize that the inhabitants of Brownsville had no desire to listen to them but merely wished to impress their Mexican neighbors, since the Mexicans had refused to trust the American strangers who had neither priest nor altar.

As no preparations had been made to provide a home for the priests, the barn in which they were gathered was offered as a dwelling place. A local hotel-keeper was charged with the task of feeding the priests until other arrangements could be made. Having thus welcomed the Oblates and made arrangements for their welfare, the citizens bade the Fathers good night and left them to survey their

new surroundings. Their home was no mansion, but, housed at least, the Oblates next determined to find a place in which to say Mass and perform their ministry. No provision had been made in this regard either; however, a wealthy, retired merchant offered his empty store.

Trial after trial was in store for those first four Texas Oblates. Most of the people, even the Mexican Catholics, were indifferent. In four months the Fathers had four different lodgings and three churches. A Mormon took up house-to-house collections for them, and a German Lutheran gave them hospitality. All of these factors only made the Fathers more determined to succeed. A drive for a church was begun, and the church itself was finally completed. A mission station was opened at a ranch four miles away, where Mass was celebrated every Wednesday.

By 1850 some progress had been made, but the health of the Fathers was completely undermined. The tropical heat, the unsanitary conditions, and the poor food had lowered their resistance. In September all were recalled to France, but in fifteen months the Oblates were back, stronger than ever to take up the work of the four pioneers.

Six Oblate priests and one lay brother were aboard the ship, *La Belle Assise*, when it set sail from Le Havre on March 23, 1852, bound for Texas. Father Telmon's health did not permit him to return, and the second band of Oblates was under the direction of Father Jean Marie Casimir Verdet. With him were Fathers Parisot, Vignole, Olivier, Gaye, Keralum, and Lay Brother Roudet. The trip was a long one, too long to suit the passengers, but they finally reached New Orleans.

Things were different for this second group. The territory stretched from Brownsville to San Ignacio, a distance of almost two hundred miles. The people, for the most part, lived on ranches dotted here and there throughout the countryside, and the only possible way to contact them was to go to see them. Horses being the only means of transportation, the Oblates used them and soon earned for themselves the title, "The Cavalry of Christ."

Sacrifice has been at all times intimately bound up with the spread of Christianity. Every age and every clime has had its martyrs. Texas was no exception. The Oblates in Texas were not called upon to shed their blood for the faith; theirs was a special kind of martyrdom, for they were martyrs of charity and devotion to duty. Faithful until death, eight Oblates died of the dreaded Yellow Fever, while the work was continued with even greater zeal. So frequently did the terrible scourge make its appearance and with such disastrous results to the Oblates that the Superior of the mission, Father Gaudet, felt impelled to write to the Superior General, "Our mission can be called, with very good reason, the Calvary and the tomb of our Congregation."

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Surveyors and excavators working on main irrigation canal.



Picture courtesy Mrs. H. P. Griff.

## Hidalgo's Two Musketeers—1905

By Shirley Ann Wallace

Pancho Garza was of Mexican descent. He was tall, dark skinned, dark haired, and dark eyed. Pancho was the forerunner of the modern gangster—akin to the Dillingers, Pretty Boy Floyds, Dutch Flegenheimers, Richard Lepkes, and other noted characters.

Pancho was twenty-five when he roamed the countryside in and around the town of Hidalgo in 1905.

Pancho challenged the police force of Reynosa on a moonlight night. Pancho loved moonlight nights—mostly because he had a girl friend in Hidalgo who was a fair and dazzling senorita.

The Reynosa police force accepted the challenge, and the irresistible force met the immovable object, and Pancho and his gang shot and wounded two policemen in a lane, and then they hurriedly retreated to the American side.

Now Pancho really got started; there is no estimating the number of thefts and murders he committed. Pancho's downfall came when he made the fatal mistake of sending word that he was going to kill Sheriff John Closner and Manuel Samano. Now John Closner was THE law in the territory just north of the Rio Grande River and he wasn't going to let any boy bandit push him around. Manuel Samano was a prominent merchant in Hidalgo. He was afraid Pancho meant what he said about killing him so John Closner promised to protect him.

The sheriff and his deputies had long been on the trail of the tricky Pancho. They wanted desperately to catch him so they carefully laid a trap for him.

Pancho came riding into Hidalgo one moonlight night on his big, black horse. He called for his sweetheart from the road, but she did not answer. He rode into the yard and called again, but still got no answer. He rode his horse up on the porch and kicked the front door open with his booted foot. Suddenly he caught a glimpse of cold steel in the moonlight flooded room.

Pancho Garza was soon to cease his banditry because he alighted from his horse and boldly walked into the house. He drew his guns but he never got to use them again. Suddenly guns flashed in the moonlight. Pancho died in the front room of his senorita's castle.

Pancho Garza had robbed and killed and even kidnapped—he had ridden his horses to the right and to the left of sections in and around Hidalgo,

and when he died, he died with bullets in his right side and bullets in his left side.

After Pancho's death, the members of Pancho's gang were very angry, and especially was Pancho's right hand man, Narcos de Luna.

Sheriff John Closner was cleaning up the county of cattle rustling from across the border. This irritated the political gang that had formerly ran the county. This group of crooked men hired Narcos de Luna and promised him \$500 if he would finish the job that Pancho had started—that of killing John Closner.

De Luna was a nightly visitor at the Hidalgo saloon. One night De Luna had one drink too many and he began to tell all the people in the saloon how he was going to kill the sheriff.

One of Closner's friends told Closner that he had better be on his guard while De Luna was around.

Closner handled the case in his own way as usual. Never in his life had Closner shot a man. He had shot over and below many outlaws but he had never killed anyone. The sheriff always used his brains. He said that anyone with brains could always outsmart a person holding a six-shooter.

Closner and his three deputies knew that De Luna was to go to the La Noria ranch, which is north of the present day Mercedes.

They went out to the ranch and waited for hours one October night, while the shadows deepened and the calls of the doves were all that could be heard.

Suddenly they heard the sound of an approaching horse. As the rider reined in his horse, the deputies ordered him to halt. Instead, De Luna stepped behind his horse for protection, fired twice, and then ran toward the chaparral.

The three deputies fired into the brush again and again and then they started to leave.

Closner instantly ordered them to stay in the ranch house, because, as he told them, they might have wounded De Luna and Closner thought a wounded man was like a mad dog as you could never tell what one was going to do next.

They waited there all night and the next morning, just as dawn began to break, the sheriff and his deputies went out to look for De Luna.

They found him sprawled in the brush—dead.

And so, De Luna failed to do the job that Pancho Garza had also failed to do, and Sheriff Closner continued to clean up the county of cattle rustling until it was spotless.

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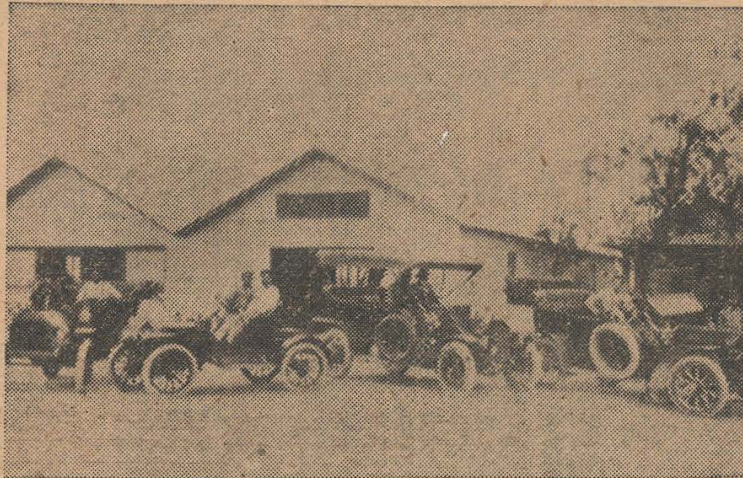
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A 1910 view of an Edinburg garage and customers

Picture Courtesy Mrs. H. P. Griffin

## The Royal Salt Mine - 1730

By Dorothy Burnett

About twenty-six miles, as the crow flies, northeast of Edinburg, is a piece of property which in the past two centuries has been fought over more than any other in Texas. Armies, courts, and scheming speculators have all contended for it. This is El Sal del Rey, once the royal salt mine of the King of Spain.

To get to the lake one must go about seventeen miles north of Edinburg to San Manuel, little more than a filling station stop. There, one turns east, and after about eight miles of newly-cleared land, he comes on a sign pointing north down a dirt road, with thickets of mesquite and prickly pear on each side. Driving down the lane about a mile and a half, one reaches a locked gate. Anyone who wishes to continue on his journey may climb over this gate and trudge through sand about a half mile to the lake.

The lake is surrounded by ground slightly higher in elevation than the surrounding country. There the water is so filled with salt that, after getting one's feet wet in the water, upon drying they are completely covered with salt. When there is no water in the lake, the glistening salt looks like ice on a frozen lake.

The mining operations at the lake have long been deserted, and, though some might think this is just another place that has fallen in ruins, it has a colorful and interesting history.

El Sal del Rey provided Central America and Mexico with salt in the eighteenth century. As early as 1730 Mexican oxcarts had, by continuous travel, etched a road to the Gulf so deep that the scars may still be seen. Over this road, laid out in the early days of settlement of the Rio Grande Valley, the oxcarts loaded with salt rumbled eastward to cross the shallow waters of Laguna Madre over an oyster reef ford. Thence they wound among the sand dunes of Padre Island, off which ships waited in the Gulf to convey the salt to Mexican and Spanish ports. Other caravans carrying salt plodded southward through the chaparral to settlements of the Rio Grande Valley and northern Mexico. The traffic dwindled during the Mexican War, but increased again during the Civil War, when salt was

shipped by way of Corpus Christi to the Confederacy.

Even as early as 1798 the King of Spain had proclaimed a law that all minerals belonged to the crown. This ordinance has remained the law of Mexico to the present time. Since Texas land titles depended on Mexican laws, the Republic of Texas adopted the system of state-ownership of minerals, thereby placing ownership of El Sal del Rey in the government of the Republic. After Texas' annexation to the United States, the state retained possession of mineral rights.

In 1861 the Confederacy needed six million bushels of salt per year to supply its nine million people. The scarcity of salt caused the price to soar to as much as \$3 per bushel and in some places to \$1.30 per pound in spite of the government's effort to control prices. Salt was so essential to the Confederates that salt and salt works became military objectives and salt workers were even exempt from the draft.

One of the first war measures provided for the production and utilization of the salt of El Sal del Rey. The governor of Texas appointed an agent to take possession of the lake. The reasons for the resolution were the need of the state for revenue and its desire to supply the people with salt at a reasonable price.

After eighteen months, the state's possession of El Sal del Rey ended rather abruptly. On November 2, 1863, the Union general, Nathaniel P. Banks, made his third attempt to take Texas by landing at Port Isabel. He sent Colonels John L. Haynes and E. J. Davis to make a raid on the lake. The raid was made and the works plundered. Thus the state's operation of the lake ended, and it became the property of the landowners.

One of the most famous cases fought for possession of the lake was the Lewis and Reynolds case, the first probate suit filed in Hidalgo County. It was filed in 1852 and was settled only a few years ago.

Among some of the more recent owners are Henrietta M. King of the great King Ranch and Lloyd M. Bentsen, the premier Valley developer.

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Pioneers John  
Conway (left) and  
Col. Sam Fordyce



Picture Courtesy  
Mrs. H. P. Griffin

## Citrus King Of Texas—1892

By Jackie Lee Carter

In the early years of the twentieth century many persons came to the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Some looked out over the vast expanse of mesquite and cactus and saw only dry desert with no promise for the future, but John H. Shary envisioned endless opportunities for farmers. He saw that the Valley could be made to flourish by building irrigation canals to the Rio Grande; some of the richest delta soil in North America would then be an agricultural cornucopia.

John H. Shary was born of Austrian emigrant parents on a Nebraska farm on March 2, 1872. He attended country schools and high school and worked his way through two years at Doane College, Nebraska. Evenings and holidays he worked in a drugstore. The pay was small, but during his apprenticeship he learned the drug business and at eighteen passed an examination to become a registered pharmacist. Later with his father's assistance, he opened and successfully operated two drugstores. At twenty-two he became a traveling salesman for a California concern. For many years thereafter his travels took him through most of the states and Canada, affording him an opportunity to study existing and potential developments.

Impressed with Texas, he joined associates in acquiring a thirty-thousand-acre ranch between San Antonio and Corpus Christi, where 27,000 acres were sold in four years at a reported profit of \$100,000. In 1912 he had bought and sold all the land he could find in the Corpus Christi area and was looking for new fields.

On the suggestion of a fellow realtor, Shary investigated the Valley, and before his eyes the endless sagebrush turned into towns and roads and mile on mile of blooming citrus trees.

In the first decade of the century, the Valley developed slowly. In 1904 the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexican Railway came to Brownsville,

and the stage to Corpus Christi became a thing of the past. In 1906, Shary began development in the Valley, successfully operating in sections where now are the towns of San Juan and part of Pharr, McAllen, Sharyland, and West Sharyland. These lands were later subdivided into small farms on which thousands of grapefruit, orange, and other citrus groves sprung up as if by magic.

John Shary, the pioneer in citrus fruit growing, soon took his place among Texas colonizers who have no peer. From 1906 to 1910 he and George W. Paul developed some 250,000 acres in the Corpus Christi, Sinton and Robstown areas.

There were two distinct land booms in the Valley. The boom in the years 1901 through 1910 primarily concerned sugar cane land. When the sugar cane industry failed in 1910, the first land companies failed. When Shary planted the first large commercial citrus orchard in the Valley in 1916, he started the second or citrus land boom.

The "gold rush" of the Lower Rio Grande Valley was on. At the height of his activities, Shary had as many as thirteen hundred men in the field. With branch offices in several midwestern cities, including St. Louis and Chicago, he operated special trains to bring the "snowdiggers" to see the magic Valley. The railroads were taxed to handle the heavy traffic of prospective buyers. From one to two thousand land seekers came each week on special trains which were switched off to sidings near luxurious clubhouses maintained by the land companies.

In 1912 and 1922 "hard" roads were built, and Shary produced the first commercial crop of citrus fruit in the Valley. The following year he made an extensive tour through the California fruit-growing regions to study marketing problems. The study resulted in the building of the first modern commercial packing plant and in the organization of the Texas Citrus Exchange with headquarters at Mission, Texas.

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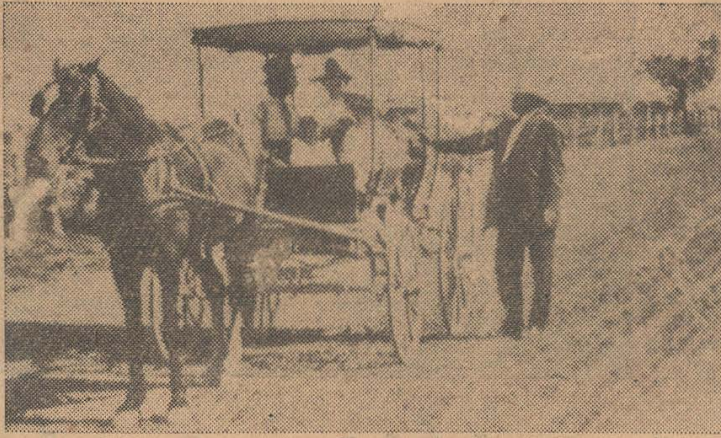
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Mission, Texas

An early picture of Hidalgo County Transportation and roads



Picture Courtesy Mrs. H. P. Griffin

## Edinburg Gets County Seat—1908

By Vilma Gorena

An important step in the historical development of Hidalgo County was taken in October 1908. Conceived by D. B. Chapin, then county judge of Hidalgo County, it is the most talked about, and by far the favorite of subjects among the Valley's early settlers.

Until 1908 the courthouse was situated in Hidalgo, within a short distance of the Rio Grande River. During the rainy season the river would rise and fall, cutting a natural path nearer and nearer the courthouse. It was thought that the courthouse would eventually be in the river's path.

In 1886 it happened! The rampaging river threatened the courthouse and it had to be abandoned. This happened time and again. In 1904 the river again threatened the courthouse and the people began to get ideas about the safety of the records. The thing to do was move the county seat to some other place.

No one around McAllen, or any of the neighboring towns, was willing to donate land; so John Closner and William F. Sprague donated the land. A site called Chapin (now Edinburg) ten miles northeast of McAllen in the brush was selected as it was geographically closer to the center of the county.

Closner and Sprague held a mutual interest in the project, so they secured the money to purchase 50,000 acres of land, of which the present town of Edinburg is now the center.

Chapin knew that under the law if a petition was presented to the County Judge and passed around so that enough of the voters signed it, he could order an election for the purpose of moving the County seat.

The petition was circulated and a vast majority of the voters in the county signed it. Then Chapin issued an order calling for an election.

However, a strong willed minority was up in arms against any proposition to move the county seat.

The day before the election Chapin resigned. The judgeship was given to S. P. Silver. Tom Mayfield and Alfredo Vela were the election judges. Silver was to certify the result of the election and in that way Chapin could not be accused of fraud.

Of course the result of the election was what was expected. Plans began to materialize, and everyone began to get excited over the expected triumph.

The Hidalgo County Commissioners Court record shows that Judge S. P. Silver certified the following results of the election. "Whereas I have opened said returns and counted the same, and

have found that the vote cast at said election as appears from the returns thereof and from an actual count of the ballots have been as follows:

The actual total vote cast at said Election in said County is as follows to-wit: 513 votes.

That the total vote cast in said election "For removal to Chapin" to-wit: 422 votes.

That the total vote cast at said Election "For remaining at Hidalgo" is as follows to-wit: 9 votes.

And it appearing that the said town of Chapin received more than a Two-thirds (2/3) majority of the votes so cast at said election—

The excitement over the proposed move didn't last very long however, because before anyone knew it, a certain party of the opposition from McAllen, put a telegram through the Corpus Christi District Court requesting an injunction against the moving of the county seat.

This upset everyone's plans. The proponents of the move saw that they must move fast before the opposition could stop them.

So early in the morning of the 13th, a party of men consisting mainly of John Closner, the Sheriff, D. B. Chapin, County Attorney, A. Y. Baker, Tom Mayfield, County Treasurer, Andres Chavez, County Clerk, and Joe Alamia, Assessor and Collector, went to Hidalgo in a wagon caravan. By six o'clock the loaded wagons were at San Juan Plantation. Early in the morning of Oct. 14th the caravan approached Chapin.

Ten engineers and about four hundred Mexican workmen were peacefully sleeping in their camp when the wagon caravan pulled in. Then the celebration started. After an old Spanish custom the rooting and shooting started and the movers proceeded to rouse the sleepers. All the surrounding brush was cleared, tents were put up, and the records put in them. By morning, Chapin was a different town altogether. Morning found some of the men busy writing away on some of the deeds essential to establish residence. Lumber was brought from McAllen that day and construction was begun on a two story wooden building where the Hotel Edinburg now stands. E. M. Card surveyed the site and engineered the layout of the county square.

In 1909 bonds were issued, and in 1910 the present county building was erected. John Closner donated four blocks in the center of Chapin for county use only.

Because of the rapidity and confusion attending the fastest transfer of a capitol in the history of Texas, rumors still circulate about this unusual occurrence. Many people still think that the records were stolen from Hidalgo.

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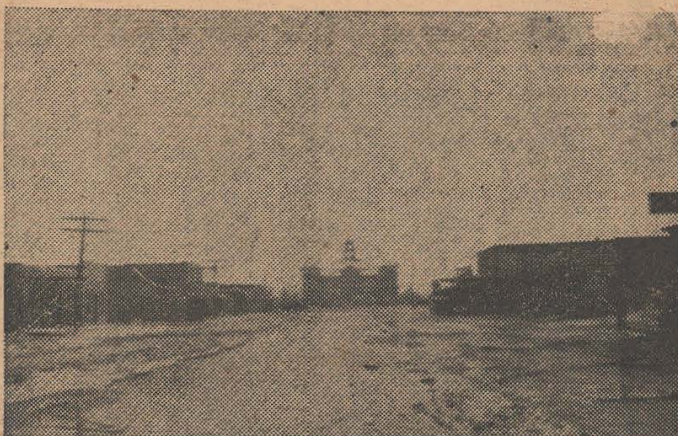
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1926 view of  
Harriman St. in  
Edinburg, looking  
west



Picture Courtesy  
R. B. Curry

## The Legend Of Juan Grande—1820

By Frances Garza

Near the Starr County line, in Northwest Hidalgo County, sitting quietly like an oasis in the desert, calmly awaiting its decay, stands a house—not an ordinary house, but one of beauty, serenity, wealth, and intrigue.

The house is surrounded by large trees, and a flagstone path leads to a lake fronting the silent house. The structure itself proves the wealth and mystery for which it stands.

To begin at the beginning, one must go back to the time when oxcarts, laden with rich merchandise, were brought from ports of entry — Bagdad and Reynosa, mainly — to the floundering, up-cropping Texas border towns. At this time, there was but one resting place where the weary drivers could stop to rest themselves and their teams. This place, like so many Western buildings, was not elaborate; in fact, the word "building" was giving the structure the benefit of the doubt. Drivers, stopping at this refuge from the sun, could purchase "refreshments" and listen to the tales of Juan Grande.

Juan Grande, proprietor of the saloon, sat many an hour telling of his bravery executed during the famous Mier Expedition. To hear him tell of it, one would think the big fellow was leader, troops, and ammunition rolled into one. The trip of the Texas Army across the river to persuade the mayor of Mier to surrender, the alarm sent by informers that Ampudia, General of the Mexican Army, was arriving with troops outnumbering the Texans, the short-lived battle, the capture of the Texans, as well as the imprisonment, and the drawing of the black and white beans, became well-known and yet remained interesting.

The stories might well be true, however not proven, for as Juan told the tales, the listener's eyes never left his face, so interesting did he make them.

Juan received his name because of his stature and no one knew him by any other. "Big John", as his name would mean in English, was tall and heavy-set, with large muscles protruding from his hairy arms.

Soon it became known that Margo, a beautiful girl, was working with Juan Grande to help him relieve the drivers of their loads, and that she was the apple of the big fellow's eye. Even though Margo was helping Juan, he was insanely jealous of her, and several times he was known to have beaten her severely. Every day she would lure the drivers in for a drink, and, when the strong potion put them into a sleep which took them days to overcome, they would awake to find their goods,

wagons, and teams gone.

Before long, it was generally known that Juan had acquired an accumulation of loot, and, with this knowledge, came the usual stream of curiosity as to where it was hidden and where Margo spent her evenings. At last, upon a plot of ground desired by all, a building began to take shape. Materials brought from far places brought curious people from everywhere, and it soon became known that Juan Grande was building himself a house finished with the finest and richest materials.

Marble, teakwood, mahogany, solid oak, maple, and walnut made up the basic structure of the house, while gold ornaments, silk tapestries, satin drapes, and the finest of foreign furniture gave the massive residence an elegance and beauty rarely seen by the wealthiest of men.

Into the house went Juan Grande's wildest dreams, and some say that it was to please the beautiful Margo, for it soon became evident that she spent her evenings with him and her days with her distressed parents. Every day at noon, she would take him his lunch in the fields when he chose to work, for it was no longer necessary to operate the drinking establishment because over the years they had acquired a fortune.

Many people witnessed these daily trips, and, when she did not return one day, a search party consisting of sympathetic peons started out. Combining the brush for miles around, searching every sand dune and ravine, they finally came onto her body, the throat cut clean.

The searchers then set out to find her murderer. Although not certain that it was her jealous lover, they were willing enough to accept him as such, because of the misery he had caused her parents. Although they searched for many months, they found no trace of the self-styled hero of the Mier Expedition.

Many people have tried to locate the treasure, but superstitious rumors and imagination, increasing through the years, have discouraged their attempts.

One of these groups, some boys from a nearby settlement, were positive of the treasure's hiding place which they believed to be beneath the flagstone path, but quickly changed their minds when an image of Margo, dressed in white, appeared with slit throat and dagger to persuade them to leave the loot behind.

Thus ends the strange story of Juan Grande, and no one has seen him since. The treasure has never been found. Many have tried and failed; many more will try, and who knows but that it will be found someday?

This page of Hidalgo County History presented by—

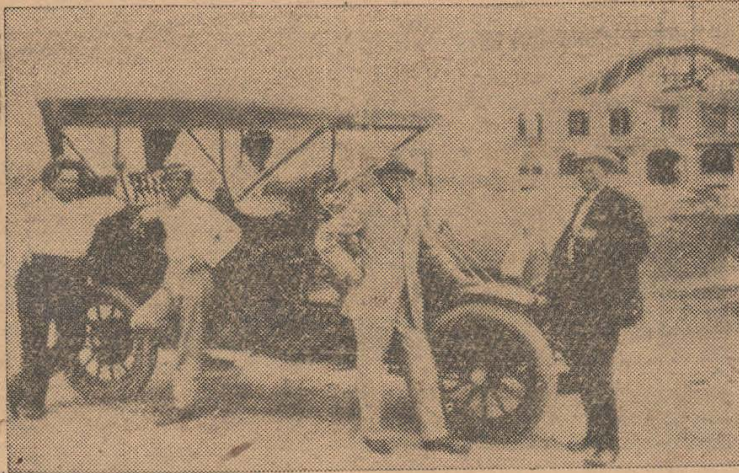
### Valley Brick & Tile Company

GUENTHER WEISKE, PRESIDENT

RUDY NORDMEYER, SEC.-TREAS.

MISSION, TEXAS

A. Y. Baker, W. N. Doughty, John Closner and D. B. Chapin in an early pose



Picture Courtesy Mrs. H. P. Griffin

## Valley Terminology—1802

By Joyce Jean Turner

Have you ever wondered why a town should be named Yturria or a Lake be called El Sal Del Rey? The Rio Grande Valley has hidden an enormous amount of history in her heart and tries to shadow it with her swaying palms, sunny skies and gay fiestas.

The Spanish influence is found in many towns. Norias was named for Judge James B. Wells (Norias in Spanish meaning "wells"); San Benito, originally known as "Bessie" for B. F. Yoakum's daughter, was named by Rafael Moreno, a camp cook in honor of Benjamin Hicks, one of his close friends.

San Juan was named for John Closner who promoted the Valley more than anyone else but received less credit. The people thought highly of him, so named their town, "Saint John." La Noria Cardenena, "Wells of the Cardenenas Family;" La Feria and Port Isabel had the "original grant names" after the La Feria Grant and the historic Spanish land grant, Santa Isabel Grant.

Physical features had a part in the naming of towns, lakes, and ranches, too. Roma was named for the Eternal City, seat of the Catholic region embraced by early Spanish settlers along the Rio Grande. An old feature is that it has seven hills just as Rome, its namesake, has. Cuevitas, meaning "Little Caves," was so named because the first settlers had to make their homes in caves to escape murder by the Indians.

El Sal Del Rey, which means "Salt of the King," was so named because the salt from this deposit was hauled out by the subjects and sent to the king. Mission's namesake was the La Lomita Mission which gained fame. La Lomita means "The Little Hill" which describes its situation in the Valley. In 1802, the people fled there in refuge from the flood as it was the highest part of land in that area. It was then thought of as sacred and holy by the settlers. Penitas means "Point of Land" and describes it very aptly.

Many sections have taken vegetative sources as their names. Los Fresnos took her name for a resaca which had, in turn, taken its name from a clump of ash trees growing on a bank. Sandia (meaning "Watermelon" in Spanish) ships train loads of watermelons out every year. Could there be a better name? Gran Geno acquired its name from an orange berry bush and was the home of Colonel John Davis Bradburn, the "Benedict Arnold" of Texas.

Encino was named for an oak tree and Alamo for a cottonwood tree. Palo Blanco means "White

Tree," El Potrero de los Nogales was the home of General Jose M. Carvajal, the Border's revolutionary hero and Hidalgo County's first court interpreter. He planted pecans wherever he went and this place is named "Pasture of the Pecans." La Coma named for an evergreen bush with blue berries containing chicle which Mexican children love to chew. This was the home of William F. Sprague who brought the first big cotton gin to the Valley.

Foreign towns have been the namesakes for a few of the Valley towns. Edinburg was named by John Young of Edinburgh, Scotland. Harlingen was named for a city on the banks of a canal, Van Harlingen, Holland.

Women have had honors, too. Donna is named for Donna Hooks Fletcher, daughter of T. J. Hooks. She tells the story of coming home and seeing a crowd of people gathered around the railroad station. She, too, wanted to get in the excitement so strolled there to see what it was all about. She found, to her amazement, a sign being hung declaring the names of the town as Donna. She lives there still, as does Mrs. Elsie George live in Elsa, the town that was named for her. Mercedes took its name after the wife of Don Porfirio Diaz, president of Mexico during that era; Lasara for Laura Harding, wife of W. A. Harding, and Sara Gill, wife of Lamar Gill; Faysville for the wife of Pat Devine, Fay, and San Perlita was named after Pearl Johnson.

Many families were honored by having towns take their names. Some of the families are Barreda, Yturria, who owns all the land around the town, Sebastian, Armstrong and others.

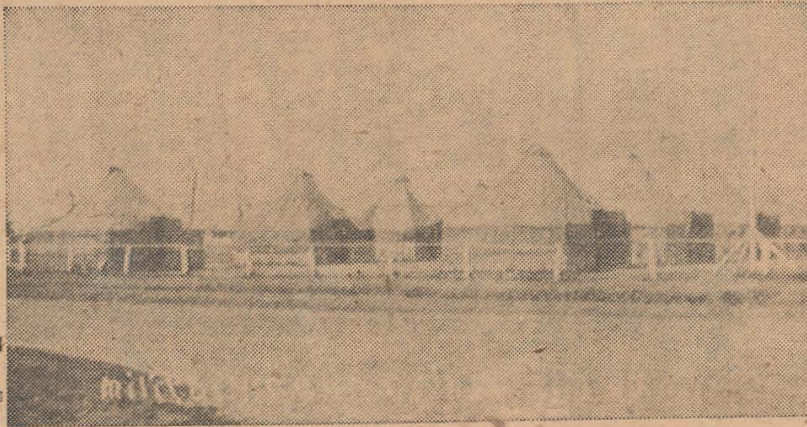
Promoters and interesting people have helped in the naming of towns. McAllen was named by John McAllen, a trader and rancher; Pharr took the name from a pioneer developer from Louisiana, Henry N. Pharr; an oil well caused the start of Sullivan City named by Captain Sullivan who operates a boat in Port Isabel today; Weslaco took initials and letters to form its name, for its originator was the W. E. Stuart Land Company. Sam Fordyce took her name from a railroad builder of the same name. Brownsville was named for Major Jacob Brown who was killed defending Fort Brown during the Mexican war. Major Brown was the only one killed in the battle; Edcouch for Judge Ed Couch; and Hargill for W. E. Harding and Lamar Gill. Linn has two versions to its name. Some of the old-timers say it was named in memory of Lynn Dowdie by his father while other sources say G. W. Lynn was the town's namesake.

This page of Hidalgo County History presented by—

**Bentsen Bros.**

MISSION, TEXAS

1915 view of courthouse square where a platoon was stationed.



Picture courtesy Victor Closser

## The Martyr Of Hidalgo—1854

Sara S. Weaver

Out from the far southwest poured the heat of the rising sun on that fateful thirteenth of November in 1872. It beat upon the low, winding, yellow Rio Grande, and upon the lonely scores of miles of chaparral desert that stretched to the north—to where the mesquite and tasijilla and chaparra prieta met and mingled and gave way before the march of the liveoaks. Down at Fort Brown the sun's rays danced over the sabres and bayonets marshalled for reveille and flashed from the gilded cross over the nearby Mission church. Seventy miles to the northwest they flashed again. The half dozen lonely houses scattered in between—built of adobe mud and latticed branches, tule thatched—were themselves as grey as was the brush that engulfed them. But on this far distant trail the same rays sparkled upon another cross, carved and polished, small and beautiful, worn upon the breast of a traveling priest.

Father Keralum had started before day from the hospitable roof tree of the Camparnas, for the next abode of his widely scattered parishioners, El Rancho de Las Piedras, was nearly twenty miles distant. His mare was safe but slow, the heat was unusual for the season and the road was but a tangle of cow trails. The twenty miles would be long work at best and at Las Piedras, he had rather hoped, in addition to the pre-arranged baptism, to meet a wedding party. However, that might be at the groom's home, on beyond. When last he had made his rounds, in early summer, carrying the sacrament to those so far removed from human intercourse, the patriarchal mother had there lain dead. The possibility of Christian burial was, he had assured the stricken family, a direct gift from Heaven. The Order of the Oblate Fathers had profited accordingly—and most deservedly.

So it was that in black sombrero and black cassock, heralded by the shining cross, the good Father Keralum wound slowly through the thorny waste that Hidalgo County was, on that early November morning fifty-four years ago.

Father Keralum knew the trails—or supposed he did. He knew the climate, too. His cloak, tied

to his saddle, awaited the Norther that always followed unseasonable heat. For eighteen years he and his brothers had come this way every few months—carrying the Bread and the Cup.

The trail grew fainter and narrower, the brush higher and thicker. Somehow he lost his horse. Somehow the chaparral engulfed the martyr Priest. But we do know that until the last he clung to the Holy Chalice.

Ten years later—on November 30, 1882, the Cup was found beside his blanched bones, with his watch and his golden cross. With the bones these precious relics were carried to the Brownsville Church and there remain, although his own ashes were in 1920 returned with pomp and ceremony to Hidalgo County, to lie in the Mercedes Cemetery under a beautiful marble monument of heroic size. The auxiliary figures of the monument of the Virgin and St. Peter are dominated as are the miles around, by a Crucifix adorned by Mary, the Sacramental Cup beside her. Each statue is the gift of a devout and grateful Mexican family. The pediment was given by Father Keralum's own order.

The Latin inscription reads:

It was in 1875, three after all hope of ever finding Father Keralum had been abandoned, that a thatch-roofed chapel was constructed by his brother Friars about six miles south of where Mission now stands, at the cost of Mr. John Bourbois, then owner of the Lomita Porcion (portion of the hill where now stands the beautiful, brick and stone Novitiate chapel—begun in May, 1912 and dedicated in April, 1913). Early in 1900, pioneer days still in the lower Valley, the adobe chapel, that still stands, was built next the older, more fragile structure in the Valley below the school. Then followed St. Peter's Novitiate. By 1912, enough permanent Missions had been founded so that this particular establishment might turn from preaching to teaching and with its well-watered acres become an eternal monument to the memory of the lost Priest, Peter the Martyr.

His other memorial, more permanent perhaps, is the name of the McAllen council of the Knights of Columbus—Keralum.

*This page of Hidalgo County History presented by—*

### First National Bank

MISSION, TEXAS

MEMBER OF FEDERAL DEPOSIT INSURANCE  
CORPORATION AND FEDERAL RESERVE SYSTEM

1001 Conway

Phone 88

Harriman street,  
looking east from  
courthouse square,  
1907.



Picture courtesy  
Mrs. H. P. Griffin

## El Mesquite - - 1528

By Mary K. Elliott

Cabeza de Vaca, a nobleman of Spain gave up the luxury of a fifteenth century palace to accept a command of "explorations and extensions" in the new world.

It was in 1528, he and his men were cast on the Texas soil. It was then that he spent six years among the Indians.

Cabeza de Vaca wrote, "They brought us children to touch, and gave us much mesquite-meal. This mesquite is a fruit which while on the tree is very bitter and like the sweet carob bean. It is eaten with earth and then it becomes sweet and very palatable. The way they prepare it is to dig a hole in the ground, to the depth that suits them, and after the fruit is put in the hole, they pound it into meal with a piece of wood; they then put earth to the mixture and they put it into a hole. Then they empty it into a vessel, and pour water to cover it fully so that there is water on top. Then the one who has done the pouring tastes it, and if it appears to him not sweet enough he calls for more earth to be added, and this he does until it suits his taste.

Then all squat around and everyone reaches out his hand and takes as much as he can. The seeds and the peeling are set apart on hides, and the one who has done the pounding throws them back in the vessel, pouring water over them again. They squeeze out the juice and water; and the husks and seeds they again put on hides, repeating the operation three or four times. Those who have taken part in the banquet, which is for them a great occasion, get very big bellies for the earth and water which they swallow."

The mesquite has long played a dominant part in the shaping of Texas History and that of the Southwest. Morelos in 1810, constructed the first Mexican cannon of a hallowed mesquite log wrapped in raw hide to help gain Mexican Independence. In 1854, James G. Bell recorded in his diary on a trip to California that the Pima Indians on the Gila River utilized the mesquite the same way as Cabeza de Vaca found the Indians doing on the shores of Texas. During the Civil War when coffee became unobtainable in Texas the mesquite bean was roasted and used as a substitute as well as okra seed, wheat, corn, acorns and other materials. The Lipan Indians

and perhaps other tribes made bows for their arrows of mesquite wood wrapped in raw hides. The pioneers used the mesquite in building their homes and making furniture.

At the headquarters house of the King Ranch there is beautiful furniture made from mesquite.

In the hot arid region of the Americas the mesquite bean is considered by the natives as a valuable source of food. Captain L. H. McNelly and the rangers, who guarded the King's Ranch from gangs of cattle thieves in 1875, often ate mesquite beans on their long hard rides when their rations were used up, thus, they could continue their vital services as protectors of the border. Even today the Mexican peon carries mesquite beans to stay his hunger as he travels thru long stretches of barren country.

The mesquite tree has spread rapidly over Texas, covering much of our grazing land and sapping the moisture from the grass. The labor and cost of eradicating it has caused the rancher and the farmer to hate it. Yet they advise the newcomer to pick a ranch with big mesquite on it because they will find good rich land there.

The farmer says, "Plant your beans as soon as the mesquite leaves come out. Jack Frost will not catch them then." It has also been said that if the mesquite were tall and large it would only be necessary to dig thirty or forty feet for water. If the mesquite was only bushes one would have to go fifty or sixty feet down and if they were less than two feet tall it was better to dig for wood than to dig for water.

For landscaping the home grounds the mesquite is an object of beauty with its feathery leaves allowing little sunbeams to trinkle through. Its shade is welcome in summer and during the winter its leafless branches allow the sun to warm the earth. It is a tree easily climbed, to the delight of the children and the thorns warn them they are out on the limb too far for safety. Swings and climbing ropes leaves little impression on the mesquite tree. Flowers beneath the shade of the mesquite withstand our hot summer sun and potted plants store up more food for winter.

Thus it is apparent to all good Texans that the mesquite is a part of Texas to preserve as a substantial contributor to its prosperity and legendary lore. Texans should be proud of it.

This page of Hidalgo County History presented by—

## McAllen State Bank

McALLEN, TEXAS

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FEDERAL DEPOSIT INSURANCE CORPORATION AND  
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Offices of the first Hidalgo county irrigation project.

Picture courtesy Mrs. H. P. Griffin

## First Commissioners' Meeting - 1852

By Morgan Groves

In 1850 John Young, E. D. Smith and John McAllen founded Edinburg on the Rio Grande opposite Reynosa. Here they set up a trade in which they swapped hardware, guns and foodstuffs for cow hides, wild mustangs, salt, and cattle on the hoof. Young shipped his hides out by steamboat to Brazos Santiago and by ocean-going clipper to London.

The old steamboat Rancho, and later the Besse, tied up at Edinburg once or twice a week to unload and load cargo. The old store was visited by many famous men on the border—General J. M. Carvalal, Texas' most famous filibusterer; Colonel John Davis Bradburn, the infamous "Benedict Arnold" of Texas; Captain Richard King, who bought lands and had the legal papers witnessed by Smith; Captain E. J. Kenedy, Lt. Col. Robert E. Lee, Ranger Capt. John S. (Rip) Ford—all visited the place.

The 1851 revolutionary filibustering expedition of Carvalal and Ford was probably planned in Smith's store, as both knew Smith intimately. Ford married Smith's youngest daughter. Carvalal and Ford took every Mexican city in the Lower Rio Grande Valley but Matamoros and might have set up an independent Republic of the Rio Grande but for a serious lack of artillery and ammunition.

On Sept. 2, 1852 the first Hidalgo County Commissioner's court met in Smith's store in Edinburg. The judge (then called chief justice of Hidalgo county), Madison W. Stevens was an opportunist, a Ranger, a sheriff of Cameron county (1848-1850), a steamboat woodyard operator, a drifter, and also a Justice of the Peace at the same time that he was county judge. In 1854, two years later, he disappeared from all Hidalgo county records.

The commissioners of 1852 were Dr. Eli T. Merriman, Mariano Munguri, who signed the court minutes with an "X", Yndelico Dominguez, and Sixto Dominguez. Dr. Merriman was a Yankee Army surgeon formerly of the American Army of Occupa-

tion (1846). In 1852 he bought the lands of the Santa Ana and Alamo grants and planned a vast cattle ranch. Mariano Munguri was of an old Spanish family of Gran Geno; Sixto Dominguez ran black Spanish cattle at Ojo de Agua Rancho; Yndelico Dominguez owned the vast rancho of Rosario de Guadalupe on the river just west of the Rio Rico road.

The county clerk, Thaddeus M. Rhodes was a rancher of Relampago, a famous man on the border, as he obtained a tremendous reputation as a medicine man among the Indian tribes of the Casas Chiquitas Campacuas and Catonames which congregated around Rosario in the early days.

Rhodes was county judge seven consecutive terms, 1876-1890 and for a medicine peddler did right well in a material way. By 1870 he owned all the land from Relampago 15 miles inland and had huge herds of horned cattle.

The county treasurer was Francisco Tagle, Spanish-American bookkeeper for Smith in his store and cotton gin. Incidentally, this seems to have been the first gin on the border. Tagle was an excellent financier and the county funds, though small, were efficiently administered. Even after ten years, the county funds never ran over a few hundred dollars. On Aug. 18, 1861, the balance on hand was \$92.90. The sheriff got \$3 a day and what fines he could collect. The judge got \$109 for the year 1852-53, and not until 1880 did the judge get as much as \$50 per month.

The early commissioners' court meetings were often disorderly and marked by fights, brawling and drunkenness. In Sept., 1853, Martin Norgraves, the county clerk, was fined in court by Judge Knepf for insolent language and intoxication. In Feb., 1854, Elisha Thoroughman, deputy sheriff, was literally run out of the county for continued brawling and charged with horse theft.

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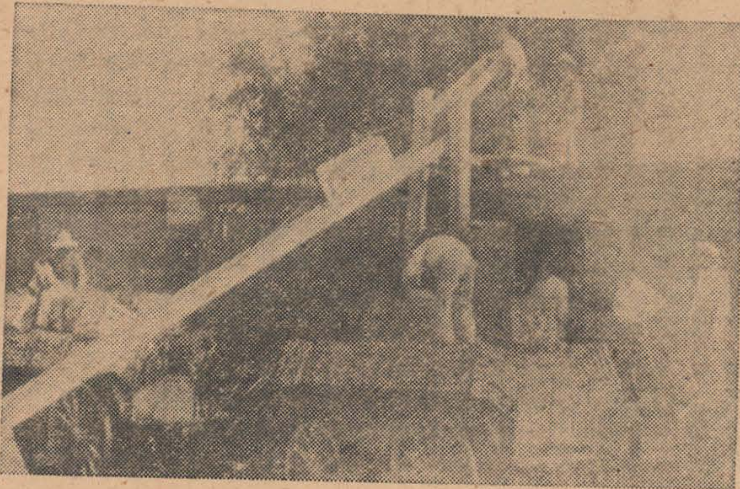
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Icing and loading of vegetables during early days of railroad.

Picture courtesy Mrs. H. P. Griffin

## The Texas Mustang—1785

By Wanda Davis

Mustangs were escaped descendants of the Arabian horses brought to this country in the sixteenth century by Spanish explorers who wrote, "Next to God we owe our victory to the horses." Hernando Cortez, Hernando de Soto, and Francisco Vasquez de Coronado brought horses with them to the new world. The word mustang came originally from the Spanish, *mesta*, meaning a group of stock raisers. Horses which escaped from a range controlled by a *mesta* and ran wild were *mestenos*, to the Anglo-Americans, mustangs. By the year 1806 there were many thousands of wild horses roaming the Texas prairies.

These herds of mustangs roamed the ranges until the "wild mustangers" or mustang hunters came into Texas. Their purpose, it was said, was to replenish the stock of both Texans and Mexicans. Many times the mustangers practiced highway robbery and became known as the "prairie pirates." Philip Nolan, one of the first mustangers, was horse trading with the Indians as early as 1785. Nolan, suspected by the Spaniards of being involved in an American scheme to take Texas and New Mexico, was killed in March, 1801.

The Spanish and Mexican governments enacted laws regulating the hunting of mustangs and designed closed seasons. The Spaniards also levied a tax of fifty cents on every wild horse taken. On February 16, 1852, Texas took a step forward out of its wild, untamed youth, for the state legislature enacted a statute concerning the regulation of wild horse hunters. This act provided that the hunter must pay twenty-five cents to the county treasurer for each mustang caught and fifty cents for a passport establishing him as a man of good character. Such a provision arose because many wild horse hunters were robbers and notorious killers.

The mustanger's occupation was a dangerous one, for the mustangs were wild and often vicious. The hunters took every precaution in capturing them as it has been said by the old settlers that a mus-

tang would "suddenly jump upon his conqueror and stamp him to pieces, his vengeance all the hotter for the delay." In 1848 a wild, unbroken mustang could be bought for as little as four dollars. These unbroken animals ran away at the first opportunity; however, if they did not escape, they could be reared with little trouble. Mustangs that could not be tamed were either shot or turned loose to roam the range again. Those that were tamed were driven to the settlements, where they were sold for from eight to fifteen dollars per head. The mares were usually more easily tamed than the stallions. Averaging fourteen of fifteen hands high, mustangs were poor work horses but, being hardy and natural pacers, made excellent saddle horses.

The area between the Nueces River and the Rio Grande was known far and wide as the land of the wild horses. The mild climate and green pastures allowed the horses to live on the open range the year around. When rain and cold weather came, the horses sought shelter in the river bottoms.

Ulysses S. Grant was astonished at the skill of the mustangers who caught the wild horses. In 1846 while in Corpus Christi, Grant purchased several wild horses to be tamed for his personal use. Much to his dismay, however, the negro boy in charge of the horses was extremely careless and allowed them to escape to the open prairies.

Horses played an important part in the history of Texas. Without them the cattle industry never would have existed, for the mustang possessed "cow sense" as well as horse sense. Descendants of the Arabian horses which were brought in by the early Spaniards were the first mounts of the cowboys who rode them from Texas to the plains of western Canada. These horses were vital to the greatest of all plains Indians, the Comanches, who on foot would have been only another tribe of squat, bow-legged Indians. Later the mustangs were used as foundation stock in developing Texas breeds well known for their ability and stamina.

This page of Hidalgo County History presented by—

**BRUMLEY'S**

"STORE FOR MEN"

EDINBURG, TEXAS

The old Buck Horn Saloon in Edinburg—first building at corner of 12th and Cano.



Picture courtesy Mrs. A. E. Cleavelin

## Oil In The Valley - 1910

As told by Otto Woods,  
discoverer of oil in the Valley.

I am not a Texan by birth, but can almost claim to be, for I came to Texas at the tender age of nine months from Arkansas with my parents, Dr. and Mrs. H. B. Woods, 3 brothers and 4 sisters. Thinking I was grown, I started in the first Texas oil field at the famous Spindletop in 1901. I feel as if I have been in the oil business all my life, starting at such an early age, and haven't yet lost the "fever" for wildcatting.

My first visit to the Valley was in 1910, having been sent to Monte Cristo from Houston as a Melado Land Co. representative. I bought land in Monte Cristo and was joined by my wife, Ludie Cartwright Woods of Center, and my two small daughters, Mozelle and Dixie Lee. In Monte Cristo I set up business as a contractor of land clearing, road grading, fencing, canal and lateral and plowing, and also drilled the Monte Cristo water wells.

Around 1915 I began drilling in the Valley. At that time drilling was something most men only dreamed of, due to the extreme cost and unavailability of equipment and being so far removed from other sections. The Valley had scarcely begun to develop commercially.

In the five years following I drilled two dry holes and was drilling a third in Hidalgo County on the Oblate Fathers' property in 1920. A New York Syndicate which had invested money in the well sent a representative to the Valley. He turned out to be a person claiming the ability to prophesy things in the future. He told me there would be no oil found on Oblate Fathers Hill and there wasn't.

He became interested in me and one day on the way to Laredo on the old Military Road, he had me stop the car and called me off to the side and said, "Here's where you will find a big production."

In 1934 I got a lease at Fordyce and when trying to decide just where to drill, I happened to remember the prophecy. So, with tongue in cheek, decided to drill on that spot, ranching at Monte Cristo between drillings. The site was located about 300 yards north of the Mission-Rio Grande City Branch of the Mo. Pac. Railway, a siding named Cuevitas (little caves or cellars), about one mile south of Sullivan City.

August 21st sand was topped. There was trouble making drill stem tests because of gravel up above falling in the hole. The test showings were very poor but when I looked at the sand I couldn't believe the oil wasn't there, so decided to go ahead and set the casing. Ben King, an old friend who had drilled with me before, helped me secure the

casing and I took him as partner.

The plug was drilled in September. Oil followed the drill stem out of the hole but no unusual gas pressure was noticed at that time.

As work continued on the hole, gas pressure began to be troublesome; a liner was set and tubing run the following day, through which light green oil flowed from the test under light pressure. Finally the well was swabbed and the well began to flow.

When it began to flow steadily, the pressure began to increase until the well was roaring away with a heavy flow through tubing and heads through the casing. Since we didn't have any tanks set up (you never do on wildcat wells) we had to run the well wide open into big earthen tanks we threw up, at a rate of two or three thousand barrels a day. When we did get the tanks set up, they were in the wrong place and had to be moved. We made an open test on the well and it made a thousand barrel an hour.

The state-wide ruling on proration of oil production had gone into effect before my well came in. The Railroad Commission Supervisor, Layton Stanberry, came to the Valley to order me to kill the well and stop a leak in the casing. I stalled him for three days with first one excuse and another. Having known him back in 1907 as a school teacher didn't help any; he was still "hard-boiled" and we finally had to kill the well. Proration did not seriously affect drilling activities or possibilities but it did curtail my income at a time when it was very much needed to continue work in the field.

All we could do was go back to work and bring the well in all over again, hoping and praying it could be done, for everyone feared the well was ruined. In the meantime, we put down three more wells nearby. The three most hectic days of my life were when these three wells came in, one a wild gasser out of control, one flowing salt water and one flowing 22 barrels an hour under heavy pressure. Then the discovery well began to flow again also, strong and steady as ever.

Business boomed; land prices skyrocketed. Two new townsites were laid out nearby. Oil men from all over the southwest and sightseers filled the surrounding towns and we were treated like royalty. A big banquet was given in our honor by Bill Morris and the Chamber of Commerce presented the crew with a \$125.00 purse, besides gifts given by various others, in appreciation of their efforts on the first oil well in Hidalgo County.

Oil in the Valley was an established fact at last!

This page of Hidalgo County History presented by—

### SOUTHERN OIL SERVICE

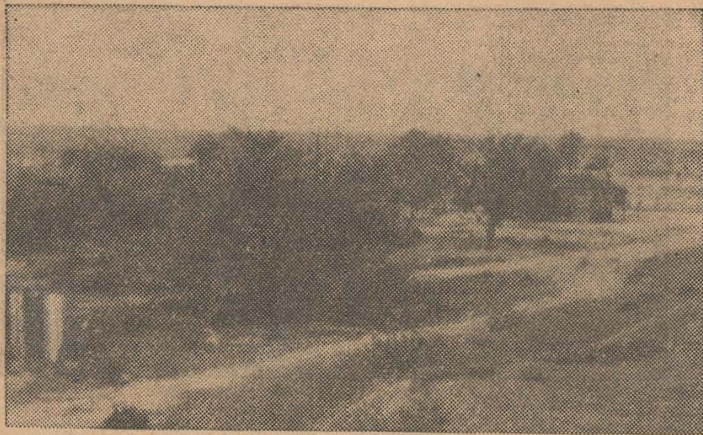
& SUPPLY CO., INC.

DRILLING MUD  
CHEMICALS

RIG TIMBERS  
CEMENT

P. O. Box 517  
EDINBURG, TEXAS

Hidalgo county's first oil well—Otto No. 1, 1934.



Picture courtesy Mrs. Glenn Fankhauser

## Early Hidalgo Transportation

By Dora Mae Kelley

After Captain Miflin Kenedy established La Parra ranch in Kenedy County, he soon recognized the need for transportation between his ranch and the nearest centers of trade. It took a week's traveling by stage to get from San Antonio to Brownsville. Accordingly, he drew up plans for an elaborate stage coach which he sent to New Hampshire. At New Hampshire it was built and set up by a famous wagon maker. The stage coach's nameplate bears the year of 1852 as the year of its construction. When it was completed, it was sent from New York to the mouth of the Rio Grande aboard a three-masted schooner. Upon arriving at the mouth of the Rio Grande, this elaborate coach was delivered to Captain Kenedy. Thus "The Kenedy Concord" started its adventurous life which led it to be known as the most famous coach on the Rio Grande border.

From that day until the coming of the railroad, "The Kenedy Concord" was one of the most useful means in civilizing and Americanizing Southwest Texas. Its owner, Miflin Kenedy, was one of the pioneers who converted this section from a primeval nature and prepared it for the coming of the white man and his civilization. In his prosecution of this job, the old stage coach played the part of a faithful and willing servant.

During those days of the late eighteen hundreds there was extreme danger and hardship. On more than one occasion "The Kenedy Concord" saved its master's life from those who wanted to end it.

If it were possible for the "Concord" to have the power of speech, it could relate wonderful, thrilling incidents in which it was involved. Let us go with it into some of those thrilling adventures in which it participated in days gone by.

Once, Captain Kenedy with a party of friends was returning from the interior of Mexico to Brownsville, when, on a dark night, as the coach was cautiously winding its way down the steep mountains from Monterrey, it was suddenly set upon by a band of Mexican bandits. Before the revolutionists were repulsed by the occupants, Don Castillo, a highly respected citizen of Matamoros, fell back against the great cushions of the coach; his life snuffed out by a bullet from an enemy's gun.

Captain Kenedy remembered another occasion when the calm courage of his Spanish wife saved a whole party from a similar fate. Enroute from the ranch to Brownsville, the coach stopped in the dense chaparral for the night. The impen-

trable brush made travel by night extremely perilous, notwithstanding the presence of an armed escort of a half dozen true and tried plainsmen to guard the party from harm. Late in the night, when the party was wrapped in peaceful slumber, between the yelps of the coyotes and the night-hawk's screech, the watchful Captain detected the sound of moving brush. He quickly and quietly awakened his men and warned them to prepare for trouble. With a gun in hand, he challenged the sound with the well known Mexican martial cry, "Quien vive?" meaning, liberally translated, "Who goes there?" "Pas'sainos", meaning, "Your countrymen", came the reply. Although Captain Kenedy was a cool determined man who didn't know the meaning of fear, he wasn't altogether at ease with the intricacies of the Spanish language. Kenedy scenting danger met the reply with "Pase", meaning to order them to "Pass on." Instantly, a dozen highwaymen stepped out into the opening. The guards immediately covered them. The assailants evidently hadn't expected any resistance after receiving the seemingly hospitable invitation to enter. About this time, the Captain's wife, who had been comfortably resting in the bottom of the coach, jumped down and rushed to her husband exclaimed, "No, no, mi capitan, you do not mean for them to pass; you mean for them to retire." With this her sharp eyes quickly but carefully scanned the faces of the amazed desperadoes. Recognizing one of them, she called out in her native tongue, "Look you sire; go away from here at once, or when I arrive at Brownsville, I will tell your mother of your shameful conduct." This clever ruse worked. The desperadoes instantly disappeared into the chaparral. From that day to this, the incident remains a secret to all but a few and its silent witness, the old "Concord".

After the historical sea battle between the Kearsarge and the Alabama off Cherbourg, during the war between the States, Commodore Raphael Semmes, the gallant commander of the defeated Alabama, sought solitude in his sorrow. He made his way aboard an English vessel to Bagdad, a Mexican city at the mouth of the Rio Grande. There he was met, through the generosity of its owner, by the faithful "Kenedy Concord". The "Concord" carried him to Matamoros, where he was banqueted by sympathizing and admiring friends. Later, the "Concord" transported him to San Antonio.

This page of Hidalgo County History presented by—

W. G. "BILL" CAMPBELL  
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CARL SCHUSTER  
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FRANK SCHUSTER  
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## GATEWAY

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Favorite early sport along the border — cock fighting.



Picture courtesy Mrs. H. P. Griffin

## Better Roads Worst Need — 1852

By Morgan Groves

When State Senator Israel B. Bigelow introduced the measure to set up a new county—Hidalgo—into the Texas State Legislature (the 15th), he was well aware the isolated ranchers of the Old Reynosa Spanish jurisdiction needed a governmental unit nearer home than Brownsville.

Bigelow had been a stage line operator out of Point Isabel and appreciated the difficulty in those days of going 100 or more miles by rough, hazardous tracks to Brownville, the Cameron county seat. Steamboat travel on the Rio Grande was much safer but the boats came at widely spaced intervals. There was no carriage road on the north bank of the river, and even as late as 1870 stages from San Antonio to Reynosa crossed over to the Mexican side and from there proceeded to Matamoros.

The so-called military Highway of General Taylor is nothing but a myth, as Taylor's troops all went up the river on the Mexican side. The river road in Hidalgo county was never improved much and today is mostly abandoned or plowed up.

In 1849 the Cameron county court set about trying to do something to improve the old Sal del Rey road which ran down through the Llano Grande Grant to Rosario at the river. Judge Ed Dougherty, the early Hidalgo-Cameron district judge was commissioned to do this work. Many of the roads or trails above old Edinburg (which was located opposite Reynosa) were in bad shape and the Cameron commissioners were glad to be rid of a thankless job and turn it over to the new Hidalgo commissioners court which met first on Sept. 2, 1852.

All of this territory north of Reynosa was known as "La Habitation." The settlers could build homes anywhere on the large grants of land. After the Mexican War merchants began to come into this region and most of them located near the Spanish towns. Some of the first storekeepers in Edinburg were E. D. Smith, John Young, John McAllen, and Juan de la Vina.

Trade went up and down the river, and ships would stop at this port for sugar cane, cotton, and hides. Circus ships would often visit the town to entertain the people. This was the most important town in the county.

Shortly after the first Hidalgo commissioners court meeting, a courthouse was built of brick with the interior finished in hardwood. It had a high ceiling and was a very good structure.

One of the main roads that crossed to the North side of the river was at old Edinburg where it connected with the San Antonio de Bexar road—used by the Spanish in earlier days for contact with Texas and with the salt mine at El Sal del Rey.

Another road that was important during the early days followed the Gulf coast from the mouth of the Nueces River to the Rio Grande. The San Patricio colony, that was organized as a buffer colony in 1828 between the American settlement in Texas and Mexicans in Tamaulipas sought trade with Matamoros. In 1832, a road was laid out between these two towns. This road was used by Taylor in transporting his men to Point Isabel, and was then known as the "Gateway to the Valley," a name later adopted by Edinburg chamber of commerce.

An interesting note about El Sal del Rey: The lake contained salt 99.4 percent pure sodium chloride. The mines in Bavaria are supposed to be the only ones where salt is produced that will compare to the purity of the Hidalgo county mine. It covers about 640 acres, and when salt is removed, the hole immediately fills up. In 1811 Capt. de la Vina was put in charge of mining the salt for the King of Spain. The salt was free to anyone, but later loaders located near the lake started charging 50 cents a load to dig and load the salt. In 1849 Capt. G. K. Lewis began mining the salt. Wagon trains from as far away as Oklahoma territory visited the lake for loads of salt. The old roadbed in Hidalgo county can still be traced through the chapparals near the river.

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Typical early Mexican farm laborer's dwelling place.

Picture courtesy Mrs. H. P. Griffin

## County Land Grants - 1798

In connection with the Santa Anita Grant in Hidalgo County, Texas, which was granted to Manuel Gomez under date of December 31, 1801, it is interesting to note that Manuel Gomez made an application for this grant of land in accordance with the accepted procedure which was being followed at the time, which application was made about the 20th of June, 1798. The owners of adjacent tracts of land were notified, and in this particular case, the only person who owned adjoining land was Juan Jose Balli, who was the then owner of the San Salvador del Tule Grant, and thereupon a commission was delegated to make an inspection of the properties and report their findings back to the Chief Justice at Reynosa. This commission made an inspection on the ground and reported back that the land in question embraced 14 sitios for large stock, one sitio for small stock,  $3\frac{3}{4}$  caballerias and 58,555 square varas. They reported further that on the North side of the said lands they found dense mesquite groves but good pasturage with a thick abundance of prickly pear, and that the North part of said lands was inhabited by wild horse stock known as Mustangs; that on the South side of said lands they found numerous wild animals such as tigers, lions and numerous and countless snakes, but that there was a scarcity of deer, wild boar, jack rabbits, rabbits and mice, and that the lands were all together unfit for agricultural purposes since they were a sandy loam specially adapted for pasturage and stock raising.

These commissioners appraised the land at being worth approximately 6 reales (75 cents) per sitio (4,428 acres). Subsequently, in accordance with the procedure applicable to the situation, the property was offered for sale at auction; that said property was offered for auction for a period of thirty days beginning the 30th of April in the year 1799, and that no bidders appeared; that, therefore, it was ordered on the final day of said auction, when it was finally sold and knocked off to Manuel Gomez for the sum of 25 pesos; provided, further, that the purchaser was in duty bound and had so agreed to settle on said lands notwithstanding the fact that his life was in danger due to Indian depredations.

When this grant of land was finally patented in the year 1881, a survey was made, and it was determined that the actual acreage contained in the Santa Anita Grant was  $21\frac{1}{2}$  leagues, or a little more

than 93,000 acres.

One type of grant which was made by the Crown of Spain, and an example of which is found in Hidalgo County is the grant of common grazing lands, or town commons, which were referred to as "ejidos". At the time of the Visita to the Town of Reynosa, as was customary in all cities, the commissioners who were appointed to make the partition and distribution of the portions were also authorized to and did grant to the Town of Reynosa four leagues of land as town commons. Since the Town of Reynosa was located on the South bank of the Rio Grande River at a point just opposite the present village of Penitas, and since the town commons were to extend for a distance of one league in all directions from the town proper, the "ejidos" of the old Town of Reynosa extended across the river, and they included approximately two leagues of land on the North side of the river, which two leagues are known as Los Ejidos de Reynosa Viejo. These grazing were granted to the settlers of the Town of Reynosa and in the grant, which is a part of the Visita, it was stated as follows: "The town shall enjoy all within the said limits; and the Mission all that may belong to it and that looks towards those that shall be set apart for its benefit, and the one and the other may freely let their stock loose thereon without injury to third parties."

The town commons, or ejidos, were used by the residents of the old Town of Reynosa until about the year 1800, when the town was moved to the present site opposite the City of Hidalgo, and after the abandonment of the town, it was ordered by an order issued at the City of Victoria, Tamaulipas, on October 5, 1836, that the common lands of old Reynosa be reduced to private property, to effect which it was ordered that the alcalde should proceed to the sale thereof at public auction to the highest bidder or bidders. Pursuant to this order, a sale was made on the 9th day of November, 1836, and one Fruto de Cardenas, acting for ninety-six inhabitants of old Reynosa, purchased the town commons for the sum of \$210 pesos. The testimonio of title or deed to the property was not actually signed and delivered until the 24th day of September, 1941, and in the meantime, the Congress of the Republic of Texas, on the 19th day of December, 1836, had enacted a law declaring that the Rio Grande River should constitute the boundary of Texas on the Southwest.

*This page of Hidalgo County History presented by—*

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HIDALGO COUNTY, TEXAS



## The White Gold Of Bagdad—1840

By Margaret Looney

"The South, to survive, must have the money that cotton can bring it," reasoned Lincoln. "That cotton must be traded in foreign ports in exchange for guns, food and supplies which the agricultural South does not produce. Cut this life-line and the South can not wage a fight necessary to defeat us." This is precisely what he set about to do. He would blockade all Southern ports. This meant the patrolling of three thousand miles of coastline and two hundred harbors. Impossible?—No, just a tremendous task.

Cotton was soon piled high on the wharves at Brownsville. Again the South faced disaster but in their moment of distress an idea was conceived that offered at least temporary relief. Why not use Bagdad, Mexico? The Yankees would not dare fire into Mexican soil and risk war with Mexico.

In the sleepy little border town things began to hum. After entering Mexico, loaded wagons reached the little "villa". Within a few days a multitude of ships bearing foreign flags lay in the harbor. Saloons prospered; rapidly scores of crude living quarters were constructed; barely liveable hotels were established. This boom town was to serve as the artery for the life blood of the Confederacy for the next few years.

Bagdad, Tamaulipas, Mexico was started by Franciscan Friars about 1690 and then abandoned. It was resettled in 1770. In 1840, it became a customhouse port for goods entering Mexico. This small town was destined to become a thriving city for a few short years and then to be tragically ruined by one of those strange freaks of nature that some call a "destroying angel".

The population of Bagdad reached a high of 15,000 while Brownsville's population reached 25,000, but Matamoros, a near-by town, surpassed all, reaching a 60,000 population.

Business at Bagdad became so tremendous that the construction of a town south of the city was proposed. Although this was considered, it was never acted upon. There was also a plan to build a railroad to Bagdad but this also remained just a plan never to be realized.

Bagdad became a city of sin and pleasure, as well as one of big business. Fortunes were made and lost over the gaming tables. For an example of the high cost of cotton, a man paid twelve cents a pound for cotton and resold it in Bagdad for a dollar and fifty cents a pound.

Bagdad was full of runaway slaves, many of whom helped in the cotton smuggling. Wages were high, and a few months' labor provided a man with enough money on which to retire comfortably. Wages for ordinary laborers were from five to six dollars a day. A man who owned a lighter, and would use it to take cotton out to larger ships in the harbor, could receive as high as fifty-five dollars a day.

The port also served as an illegal port of entry for Confederate soldiers, with a price on their heads. The capture of Admiral Raphael Semmes, a Confederate officer, was greatly desired by the Federals after the Admiral's ship had been sunk off the English coast. It had been impossible for Semmes to land at any Southern port so effective was the blockade. A barely believable chain of events transpired and the Admiral was slipped through Bagdad into Texas. He finally regained Confederate lines.

As is well known, the Confederates bravely battled through the last years of the war but the North's vast supply of men, food and arms was too great for the poorly equipped South. In 1865, Lee surrendered the Rebel Army to Grant, the Union commander, at Appomattox Court House. For Texans the war was not over. Due to poor communication, Texans did not know of the South's surrender and on May thirtieth, at Palmetto Hill, north of Brownsville, a battle was fought in which the Rebels won a slight victory.

With the defeat of the South, Bagdad lost much of its importance as a cotton port. However, the foreign influence remained and French, Austrians, Belgians, Mexicans and Americans mixed freely.

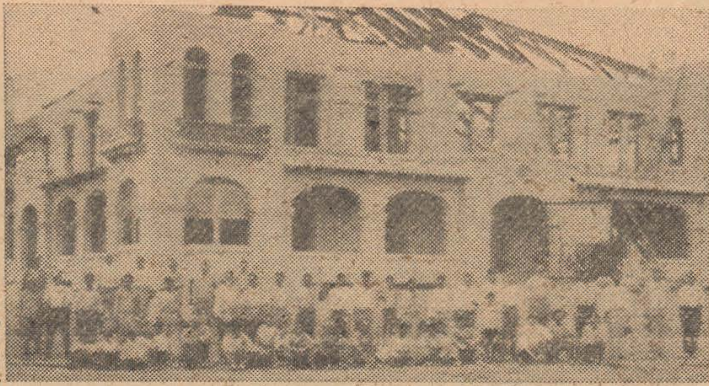
With sunrise of January 6, 1866, came pillage and destruction for Bagdad. A group of Negroes led by Colonel Crawford, a Civil War officer, and troops led by Colonel Adolfo Garza and Major Mejia swept down upon the town soon overpowering the French soldiers guarding the city. After becoming intoxicated with mescal, a native drink, they began their mad work of pillage, rapine and murder. As opposing troops advanced upon the looters, they fled to the Texas shore taking with them as much of loot as was possible.

On September 3, 1867, a storm hit the Gulf Coast of Mexico and Bagdad was completely demolished. It would seem that after having served its purpose, nature mercifully destroyed Bagdad, thus saving it the inevitable decay and deterioration that accompanies the decline of great cities.

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Edinburg court-  
house shown near  
completion, 1909  
with building crew.



Picture courtesy  
Mrs. H. P. Griffin

## A Trip To La Coma Ranch -- 1903

### FROM THE HIDALGO ADVANCE

The name La Coma is derived from a tree which bears a delicious berry and which is abundant in this country.

From whatever direction you approach the La Coma Ranch you are struck with wonder. After traveling all day through brush and passing an occasional dilapidated ranch, suddenly there before you looms the high smoke stack of a fine cotton gin, and a snug brick residence, surrounded with well-cultivated and neatly arranged gardens and fields. Water pipes carry water to all parts of the house and through the vegetable and flower gardens. Although La Coma is over 80 miles from any railroad, nearly all the luxuries of civilization are there. True you cannot step to the telephone and order up your fresh fish and oysters, but you do not miss them.

When Mr. Sprague desires a fine porterhouse steak, he selects a fat beef and it is slaughtered. His vegetable garden furnishes all the luxuries for his table all the year round. In fact there is nothing that needs to make life pleasant that cannot be obtained on the La Coma Ranch.

Step into the hallway of the Sprague mansion, and you will at once feel that you are in an air of refinement. It is hard to realize that you are so far from the centers of travel.

In the parlor you will see a magnificent piano, beautiful pictures and bric-a-brac without end. Mrs. Sprague and her sister Miss Anna will make you feel at home in the fullest sense of the word. There are no electric lights but that fact is hardly noticeable when the acetyligas (with which every room in the house is provided) is lighted.

Space does not permit of a detailed description of this magnificent ranch. There is a cotton gin which will compare with any west of San Antonio. There is a general store where all ranch supplies, including everything from a paper of needles to agricultural implements, are to be had. There is also a good public school under the direction of Miss Anna Kenedy, who is the sister of Mrs. Sprague, and she is doing good work in the cause of education.

The trip from Hebronville, 85 miles to La Coma was recently taken by friends from Providence. It must indeed have been a unique ending

to a wedding journey, this trip through 85 miles of ranches in various conditions of wilderness or dilapidation, and finally to come upon the cultivated farms connected with the ranch, the village of small houses for the Mexican laborers, and at last the commodious residence surrounded with flower gardens, and neatly kept vegetable gardens and fields. As far as the eye can reach, looking between the beautiful miskeil trees, a sufficient number of which have been left standing, are seen the windmills and the cottages far and near.

When visitors are expected at La Coma, what is called the "outfit" is sent to meet them, and doubtless the bride on her way to her future home must the same experience as did these visitors.

The "outfit" is a great, white-covered prairie ambulance drawn by four horses, relays of which are placed at suitable distances. This ambulance is fitted up with conveniences for making the long and rough journey as comfortable as possible. A large tin tank under the box holds plenty of water and cooking utensils are stowed away in suitable receptacles. For the midday meals, two of which must be cooked and eaten before arriving at their destination, food is also stored.

The "outfit" started by moonlight, hours before the sun rose each morning, but it takes two days for the trip even without storms or other detentions.

Kid meat was broiled for these outdoor dinners and coffee was made and with bread and fruit added, the meal was fit for an epicure to say nothing of satisfying the appetite of hungry travelers.

Arriving, they entered a modern house from a spacious piazza, and found it beautifully furnished—a fine piano in the drawing room, plenty of books in the library, and all over the house open plumbing and lighting with acetylene gas, the latter manufactured on the premises, of course.

The host told a visitor that he would agree to show him a deer in 15 minutes. They started out, and in 10 minutes saw two. Other game is plenty. There are antelopes, wolves, wild bear, jack rabbits, cotton tails, wild turkeys, mallard duck, broad bills, prairie pigeon, quail and sand crane. Between the Rio Grande, the Palo Blanco creek and their tributaries there is plenty of fishing. One fish caught there is much larger than the tall man that caught it.

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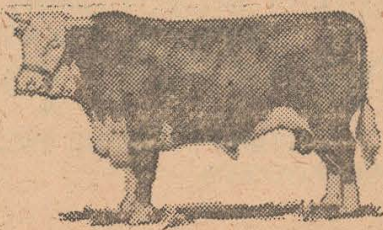
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COMMUNITY SALES YARD





Picture Courtesy  
Mrs. H. P. Griffin

Cornerstone ceremony present courthouse, 1910.

## First Commissioner's Meeting - 1852

THE STATE OF TEXAS )  
COUNTY OF HIDALGO )

Know all men by these presents that at a special term of the County Court of Hidalgo County held at Edinburg by order of the Hon. M. M. Stevens Chief Justice of said County the following proceedings were had and adopted.

The Court being called by the Deputy Sheriff The Hon. M. M. Stevens Chief Justice and I. W. Berne and Yndalecio Dominguez, commissioners were present.

Jose Mario Dominguez, Justice of the Peace for Precinct No. 1 of said County of Hidalgo presented Bond and affidavit and the same being found in accordance with the law of the State was approved.

Nicholas Grasanto Justice of the Peace for Precinct No. 1 of Hidalgo County presented Bond and affidavit and the same being found in accordance with the law of this State were approved.

Simon Holland, Constable for Precinct No. 2 of Hidalgo County presented bond and Certificate, and the same being found in accordance with the law of this State were approved.

Alberto Garza Constable for Precinct No. 3 of Hidalgo County presented bond and Certificate and the same being found in accordance with the law of this State were approved.

Thadeus Rhodes Clerk of the County Court of Hidalgo County Presented bond and affidavit and the same being found in accordance with the laws of this State were approved.

Irineo Zamora Justice of the Peace of Precinct No. 3 of Hidalgo County presented bond and affidavit and the same being found in accordance with the law of this State were approved.

G. S. Wood Sheriff of Hidalgo County presented Bond and affidavit and the same being found in accordance with the law of this State were approved.

Nepunuceno Cabazos Constable of Precinct No. 1-Hidalgo County presented his bond and affidavit and the same being found in accordance with the law of this state were approved.

E. T. Merriman Commissioner of Hidalgo County presented affidavit and was approved.

M. M. Stevens Chief Justice of Hidalgo County

presented affidavit and was approved.

Yndalicio Dominguez Commissioner of Hidalgo County presented affidavit and was approved.

Pedro Royez Dpty Sheriff presented bond and Certificate and the same being found in accordance with the law of this State were approved.

Francisco Tagle Treasurer of Hidalgo County presented bond and affidavit and the same being found in accordance with the law of this State were approved.

I. W. Berne Commissioner of Hidalgo County presented affidavit approved.

F. E. Enrique Justice of the Peace for Precinct No. 2 Hidalgo County presented bond and affidavit and the same being found in accordance with the law of this State were approved.

M. M. Stevens Justice of the Peace for Precinct No. 2 Hidalgo County presented bond and affidavit and the same being found in accordance with the law of this State were approved.

Wm. S. Garner Constable for Precinct No. 2 of Hidalgo County presented bond and affidavit and the same being found in accordance with the law of this State were approved.

"Resolved" That there be established two Public Ferries, One in front of Edinburgh, and the lic Ferries.

"Resolved" That Tomas Garza, Juan Guzman and Francisco Billa be appointed road Commissioners, And Sr. Yago Garcia overseer from Edinburgh to John Youngs upper line Antonio Beillo from John Youngs upper line to Rosario—and Martin Garzie as overseer from Rosario to the lower line of Hidalgo County to open and repair the Road—

The Court not having any other business to transact adjourned until the next Regular term.

Subscribed to this the 2nd Day of the Month of September A. D. 1852

M. M. Stevens  
Chief Justice Hidalgo County  
E. T. Merriman  
Sixto Dominguez  
Marciano Menguia (X--his mark)  
Yndalicio Dominguez  
Commissioners

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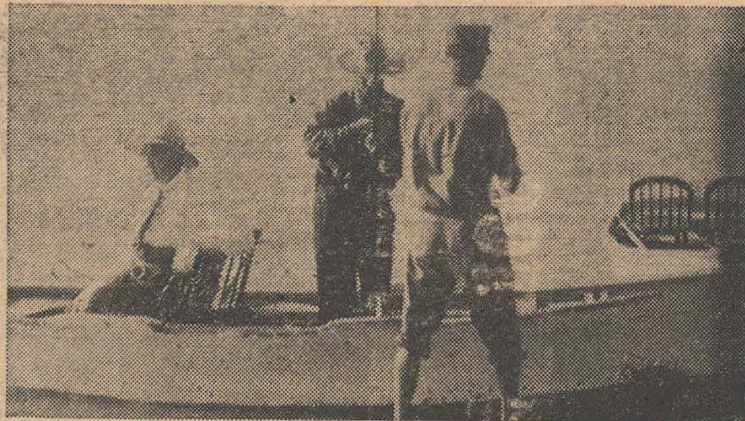
### Golden Jersey Creamery



Dairy Products and By Products

EDINBURG, TEXAS





President Harding visits Valley.

Picture Courtesy Mrs. H. P. Griffin

## Edinburgh—Circa 1893

(Editor's Note: A description of Hidalgo, or old Edinburgh, in a 50-page Valley booklet published in 1893 made the town sound very attractive. The booklet was entitled "Twin Cities of the Border" and concerned itself mainly with stories of Brownsville and Matamoros, although short articles were included on Hidalgo and Starr counties. It was compiled by Lieut. W. H. Chatfield, U.S.A., then stationed at Fort Brown.)

Hidalgo, or Edinburgh, as it is commonly called, is the county seat (of Hidalgo County), and has a population of 389. The town presents a very attractive appearance, and is especially remarkable for a scarcity of jacals (thatched-roof mud huts) and unsightly buildings of all descriptions. This is owing to the fact that most of the old town, which was established during the Mexican War, has been washed away by the Rio Grande. Jetties have been built, and the high bank of the river in front of the town has been sloped to prevent further encroachments, if possible, and thus far have proven effective.

The County Court House is a handsome brick building, located in the center of the town. A neat iron fence extends around the grounds, which embrace two acres; the grading has just been completed and the entire grounds seeded with fine grass, which will make a handsome lawn in a few months; trees and shrubs have also been planted, and every evidence of thrift and enterprise is visible. The interior of the Court House is handsomely finished in hard woods; the spacious rooms have very high ceilings and are thoroughly lighted and ventilated by large windows and doors. A symmetrical cupola surmounts the building, and everything about is complete and tasty.

The County Jail forms a wing on the west side of the building and corresponds with the main structure in neatness and correct architecture. The total cost of these buildings was \$20,000. They were built in 1886.

The town is laid out with broad streets and avenues running at right angles to each other. There are no paved streets, but the soil is very firm and has enough gravel in it to keep the roadways in excellent condition. There are a number of handsome dwellings in the central portion of the town; some are of brick burned in the vicinity, but the majority are frame buildings.

There is a neat little Catholic Church one block

west of the Courthouse, on Main Street, which has a seating capacity of about 200 and is thoroughly ecclesiastical in design and finish. The Methodist Church, which is situated at the east end of Main Street, near the river, is not in very good repair and shows few signs of recent occupancy.

There are several flourishing schools in the town, taught by American and Mexican young women of marked ability, who are carrying forward the noble work of fostering a love of the land of their birth in the minds of the youth under their charge.

There are three general stores, which do a fair amount of business for such a small town. William Odell is the principal merchant. He occupies a fine brick building at the southeast corner of the block north of the Courthouse, and has a complete stock of dry goods, groceries, notions, hardware, boots and shoes, hats, caps, etc., sufficient to supply the brisk trade of the town and surrounding ranches.

The Post Office is in Mr. Odell's store, that gentleman serving the public as postmaster in the most obliging and satisfactory manner.

The elegant modern brick dwelling of Mrs. Stein on Main Street, is the most noticeable private residence, yet there are a number of others which present a thoroughly home-like and comfortable appearance. The cottages of Judge Dougherty and Sheriff Closner are models of neatness and good taste. Mr. Closner's house is nestled in a bower of shade trees and vines, and roses were blooming in abundance on the February morning when the compiler viewed it.

The Customhouse is a very ordinary board structure, with a flag-staff in front of it, from which the Customs flag is flung to the breeze. There are numerous Mexican "bancos" all along the Rio Grande—places where the river has suddenly changed its course and left a slice of Mexican soil on the north side. There are also Texas "bancos" similarly formed on the south side of the stream. The Customs officers are sometimes puzzled to determine whether they are on United States soil, and have authority to seize contraband goods. The Customs officials on duty at Edinburgh are J. B. McAllen, deputy collector and inspector; F. More and C. Schunior, mounted inspectors.

This page of Hidalgo County History presented by—

### WALSH'S BUILDING SUPPLIES

BY

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MISSION, TEXAS



Portrait of A. Y. Baker

Picture courtesy A. Y. Baker, Jr.

## A. Y. Baker, Political Ruler - 1920

By Allan Engleman

Out of every newly-developed country comes color, heartache, poverty, and riches in a greater degree than normal. Each section of the United States have their own heroes, their martyrs, their bandits and their political rulers.

No history of Hidalgo county would be complete without the mention of A. Y. Baker and the part he played in the development of the political and economic history of Hidalgo county.

Baker died at the pinnacle of his career. He had announced his intention to retire from the political post he had held 18 years — Hidalgo county sheriff — 10 months before his death on Nov. 1, 1930, and he died three days before candidates of an opposing political faction won a sweeping victory at the general election polls.

According to Review files, A. Y. Baker was 55 years, 10 months old at the time of his death, apparently caused by a stroke of apoplexy while planning a new irrigation district on 69,000 acres of land lying north of Edinburg.

He owned the Southtex Motor Co., distributors of Chrysler automobiles, was president of the Edinburg State Bank & Trust Co., the Edinburg Improvement Assn., Edinburg Building Co., and the Edinburg Hotel Co. He was a member of the Masonic Lodge, Knight of Pythias, Rotary club and the Methodist church. He was one of the largest land owners in this section at that time.

But his was no "get rich quick" story.

A. Y. Baker was born in Uvalde in 1875, and became a peace officer just as soon as he could be

legally called a man—at the age of 21. It was then—in 1896—that he joined the Texas Rangers and worked his way down the Rio Grande to the border crossing at old Edinburg, where he joined the U. S. Customs service in 1904.

In 1907 Baker was appointed county treasurer, and Sheriff John Closner stepped down from his post in favor of Baker in 1912. During the next 18 years he became known as "the man on the horse" because of his tireless enforcement of the peace all over the county. At one time, during the unrest along the Mexican frontier, it was said that outlaws and river bandits placed a bounty of \$10,000 to \$20,000 pesos of Mexican gold on his head.

He was married to Miss Lena Sappington of Sam Fordyce, Texas on Sept. 20, 1905 and made his home in Hidalgo the following year. Three years later, when the courthouse was moved to Chapin (now Edinburg) he moved his home to the new town.

Anderson Yancy Baker was praised by his friends and criticized by his enemies, having, like most men, plenty of both. His undisputed political reign of the county received national attention, he and other Valley leaders were men of foresight and faith that did more than their share to turn this area from a land of coyote and mesquite into a widely-known garden spot.

To quote one of our contemporaries in the editorial columns of the Review of Nov. 9, 1930; "Time will etch the name of A. Y. Baker in indelible characters in the annals of this section of Texas."

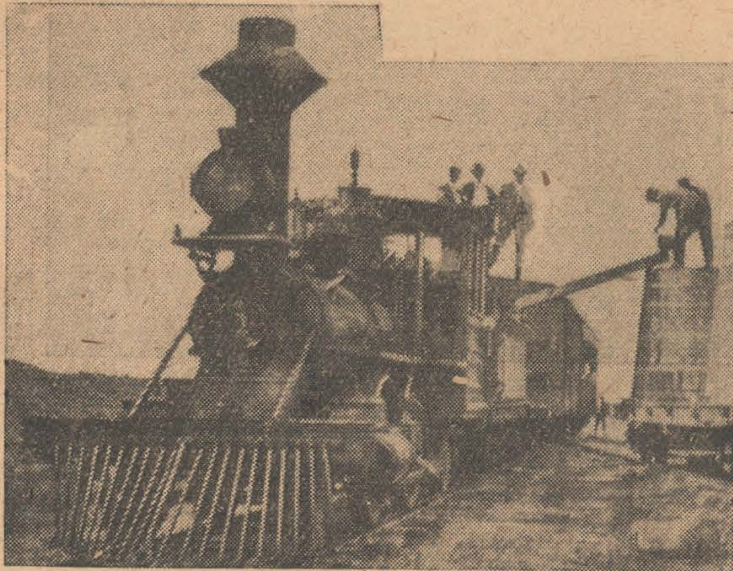
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### Baker's Center Service

Texaco Products — U. S. Tires

A. Y. BAKER, JR. Owner EDINBURG

First Train  
in Texas at Browns-  
ville in 1868.



Picture Courtesy  
Mrs. H. P. Griffin

## The Border Patrol - 1924

"A mobile force of men stationed along the international boundaries separating the United States from Canada and Mexico, and at a number of points on the Gulf Coast."

The above sentence is a definition of the United States Border Patrol, which has played such an important part in the history of Hidalgo County.

The Border Patrol is a branch of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Headquarters for the organization is in Washington, D. C., but for operation purposes the agency is divided into districts, which in turn are subdivided into subdistricts.

From the mouth of the Rio Grande below Brownsville, extending westward to the Zapata County line, and embracing the territory north thereof to Duval, Jim Wells and Kleberg counties is the territory known as Subdistrict No. Three with headquarters in Brownsville.

This subdistrict, the activities of which are centered in the Rio Grande Valley, originally started out with only 11 men who were transferred from mounted guards into the new agency when it was launched July 1, 1924, following its creation by an Act of Congress.

The purpose of the Border Patrol is to prevent the illegal entry of aliens into the United States, as well as discover and take into custody those who have already effected an illegal entry.

A better understanding of the activities of the Patrol is brought about when a brief outline of its need and origin prefaces the story of its functions.

From the time settlers first came to America until one hundred years after the United States had gained independence, the type of people coming to our shores were truly pioneers, and a class of people who helped make a new country. However, as the United States progressed, it appealed not only to a high class of aliens, but to many who were already parasites in their original countries, so it became necessary for Congress to stipulate certain requirements for immigrants to meet before entry was granted; else, America would be overrun with a population of inferior people.

As time passed, the opportunities offered by the United States brought many immigrants to apply for admission, among whom were large numbers unable to meet the requirements of the immigration laws. It was then discovered that, although those having no right to enter could be refused admission, the thousands of miles of territory between ports invited illegal entries, and smuggling of aliens became a lucrative profession with many. In 1912 the first serious effort to counteract this illegal entry of aliens unable to gain legal admission was made, and a number of mounted or "outside" guards were employed, who performed duties similar to those of the present Border Patrol. In 1917 this force was expanded and, for the first time, began to be really effective. These mounted guards were under the supervision of the regular Immigration Service.

In 1924, it was decided to specialize to a greater extent in the enforcement branch of the Immigration Service, so the Border Patrol began operation July 1, 1924. Its first personnel consisted of the mounted guards who were transferred into the new branch. Taking the title of Patrol Inspector, D. W. Brewster was in charge of these mounted guards, as well as the newly created Border Patrol until 1926, when the supervision of the two branches were divided and the Border Patrol became a unity. The late D. P. Gay was named Chief Patrol Inspector in charge of the Brownsville Subdistrict, and continued as such until his death in 1936.

Today the Border Patrol is still considered undermanned by many. Others feel that the Patrol is not needed. The problem of aliens slipping into the United States across the Rio Grande has not changed. Hundreds of "wetbacks" are still arrested daily and either fined, given prison sentences or sent back into Mexico.

An airlift to fly the "wetbacks" into the interior of Mexico was operated out of Brownsville for a time but severe criticism and a lack of funds brought the modern day "answer" to the problem to an end.

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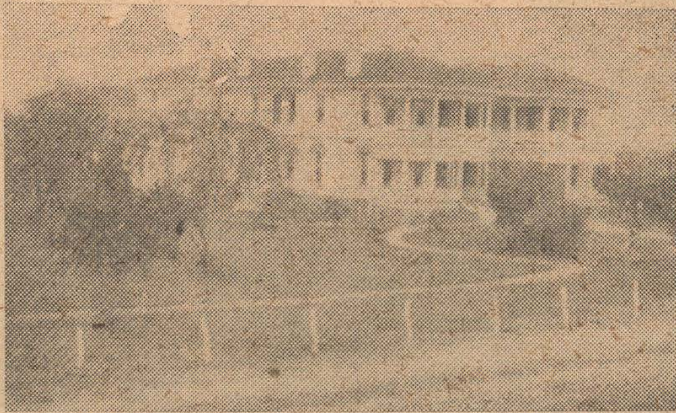
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Santa Gertrudis  
Ranch House, 1910.

Picture Courtesy  
Mrs. H. P. Griffin

## The Battle Of Ojo De Agua—1915

By Louis Conslor

Few Texans can recount the battle of Ojo De Agua. Few Texans indeed can even tell you the location of the little Spanish-American village. The battle deserves more credit than it has ever received, or will ever receive, in a history book. In odds it ranks second only to the battle of the Alamo.

In 1915 the Spanish-American citizens of the village were in constant fear of their lives. Bandit raids from across the Rio Grande were too much for the undermanned Texas Rangers to cope with and United States Army troops were ordered into the area to back up the Texas' lawmen.

In general the duties of the Army Detachments were to patrol between each post at irregular hours, set in coordination with the Rangers and, by use of their signal troops, to keep the main body informed as to any activity which might indicate a crossing of the river in force and to prevent smaller infiltrations.

Such were the duties of the small detachment of eight cavalymen of G troop, Third Cavalry, under command of Sergeant Shaeffer and six Signal Corps men of Field Company D Signal Corps under Sergeant Smith.

On the afternoon of the 21st of October, 1915, there was no unusual occurrence to break the tedium of the regular routine. As darkness fell the regular sentry was posted. The scheduled two hour radio check with Mission was carried out at eight, ten and 12 p.m. The scheduled patrol left shortly after dark and returned by midnight. Sometime after midnight the sentry became uneasy and awakened Sergeant Shaeffer with the report that he had heard unusual noises in the brush as though something was moving in the dense shadows which the eye could not penetrate. The Sergeant looked over the small clearing and, having heard such reports on many previous nights, discounted the sentry's uneasiness and ordered him back to his post.

About one a. m. an intense volley of rifle fire was delivered on the two small buildings which composed the troops' sleeping quarters. The fire came from all directions except from a resaca in the south. Some of the shots came from the tops of the two trees directly across the road as the hail of bullets not only riddled the

walls of the buildings but numerous bullet holes were also found in the roof of each. The radio equipment was wrecked beyond repair. The tumult brought Sergeant Shaeffer out with his rifle blazing, thereby drawing the enemy fire away from his men. He made an excellent target in his white underwear in the moonlight and his body was soon riddled with bullets.

This distraction momentarily lessened the fire of the raiders and the men who were not killed or too badly wounded in the first volley hastily went under the buildings and by direction of Sergeant Smith, arranged the baled hay and sacked oats that were stored in the buildings into a crude breastwork. The hail of lead from the raiders was renewed with greater vigor. The wounded who had been hit while still in their beds on the porches were hit again repeatedly. They called to their comrades for assistance, but none came.

Every man in the detachment at Ojo except one private had been killed or wounded by this time. The few rifles the troops had would not drive the bandits away so the unwounded private, named Becker, rushed time and time again into the buildings to get shotguns and ammunition. After the troops began pouring shot into the bandits their will to attack suddenly lessened.

After a while the bandits began to retreat. The shots of the raiders lessened and then ceased. Two nearby houses of Mexican-Americans in the village of Ojo burst into flames as the raiders withdrew.

Soon after soldiers of Troop G, Third Cavalry, under the command of Captain McCoy arrived from Mission. The troops had been called to the scene of the battle by one of the Mexican-Americans, who in later years was threatened time and time again for his loyalty.

The dead were cared for and the wounded were initially sent to the Field Hospital in Harlingen where their wounds were carefully dressed prior to their transport to the Station Hospital in Fort Sam Houston.

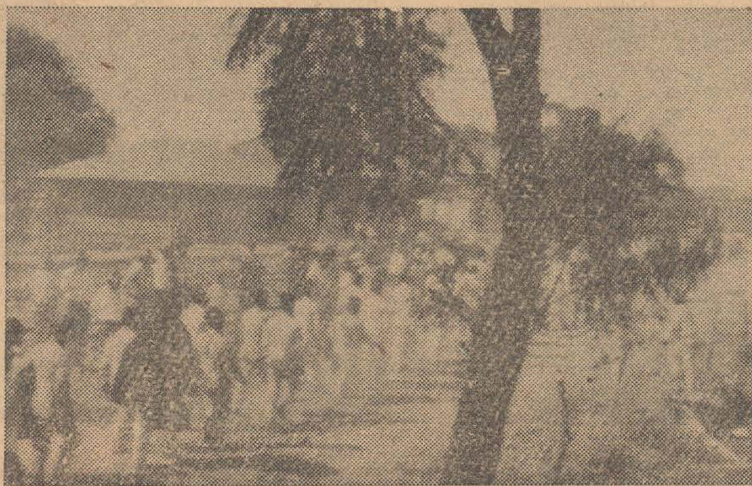
The mists of thirty six years makes it difficult to quote exact figures but memory indicates the defenders had six dead and seven wounded. The attackers are reported to have left 16 dead. "The Eye of the Water grows dim and Texas has forgotten".

*This page of Hidalgo County History presented by—*

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Cornerstone Laying  
for present  
courthouse, 1910



Picture Courtesy  
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## Vegetable & Citrus History - 1902

By W. H. Friend

The first Valley irrigation project of any importance is said to have started in 1890, when a sugar industry was established near Brownsville. The development of irrigation facilities were quite slow until about 1902 when several projects were started, including a rice growing enterprise North of Brownsville. The rice project failed and later on, the sugar industry passed out of the picture due to several causes.

The completion of the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railroad in 1904 served as a great stimulus to agriculture in this region, and the larger land holdings were broken up into small farms, and facilities for irrigation were expanded. Development has been quite rapid since the completion of the first railroad and was further stimulated by the extension of the Southern Pacific Railroad into this region in 1926.

The completion of a system of hard surfaced highways soon after this date and during the "golden days" of 1926 to 1930 did much to develop the country, and then, in 1935, came water transportation.

The commercial production of vegetables started at about the same time that citrus fruit were first planted in this region. Statistics dealing with car lot shipments of vegetables show that the first appreciable amounts of produce were shipped in 1907. Onions and cabbage from the Mission territory were the first crops to be shipped in large quantities and these crops are still money makers for many Valley farmers.

They continued to furnish the bulk of the tonnage shipped from this region until 1922, when beet and carrot production became popular with growers in the Mercedes-Weslaco districts. Lettuce has been produced in limited quantities in the San Benito-Rio Hondo region since 1911, but it has never become an important vegetable crop because of extreme sensitivity to weather hazards. A wide

variety of vegetable crops have been grown since 1922, but cabbage, tomatoes, potatoes, carrots, beets, onions, green corn, beans, watermelons, spinach, parsley, broccoli, lettuce, cucumbers, cantaloupes, and turnips, in the order named, are our more important vegetable crops.

Parsley is one of the most interesting of the vegetable crops that played a part in the evolution of our vegetable industry. Small fortunes have been made with this crop, but it has never become one of our major vegetable crops, because of the unstable market demand for this commodity.

The first plantings of citrus are reported to have been made in about 1907, but commercial production dates back to about 1917, the zero date of the Valley's citrus industry. The commercial acreage in 1923 amounted to 5,600 acres and the crop for that year amounted to 41 car loads. The first packing plant was built at Harlingen that season.

Production of citrus fruits increased steadily but rather slowly until it seemed to become fixed at about 7,000 car loads per year during the period from 1930 to 1935. About this time, the trees which had been planted by eight large orchard development companies, came into bearing, and resulted in the record crop of 1936-37 (30,000 car loads).

The Valley is still considerable behind California and Florida in orange production, and the freeze of a few years back was a critical one, but we have already become an important factor in the grapefruit business. During the developmental stage of our citrus industry many problems have been encountered and some of them have been solved. We now know that we can produce large quantities of grapefruit of exceptionally fine flavor, but, in general, we are not ready to boast about the external appearance of all of our fruit.

There are, also, many other unsolved problems dealing with variety and root-stock utilization, planting methods, orchard soil management, and the control of insect pests and diseases.

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Mexican bandits wreck train. 1915.

Picture Courtesy Mrs. H. P. Griffin

## County Agriculture Statistics - 1890

(Editor's Note: Lt. W. H. Chatfield, U. S. A., wrote his opinions, together with statistics, of Hidalgo county's agriculture prospects in 1893 in a booklet called "Twin Cities of the Border". These are his remarks.)

The north bank of the Rio Grande from Penitas to its mouth is slightly higher than the interior country. There are several points on the river where the bank is lower than the average, and it is through these natural openings in the embankment that the water escapes from the main channel and finds its way to a chain of resacas and lakes which connect with the Arroyo Colorado; the later stream is then raised from almost a dry bed to a surging torrent, pouring its waters into the Gulf of Mexico about twenty five miles north of Point Isabel. There are also numerous lakes and resacas lying between the Arroyo Colorado and the Rio Grande, which are filled by the overflow, thus impeding travel and destroying crops which have been planted in the bottom lands.

Storage reservoirs could be easily constructed by throwing up levees around the lakes and along the banks of the resacas, as far as necessary to hold the water set back by dams built across them at intervals. Such reservoirs have already been successfully tried near Brownsville, and it is only necessary to attempt on a large scale what has been demonstrated to be practicable on a small scale.

It is believed that such a system would meet the requirements of the flat country, but a feeder could be provided by damming the Rio Grande and storing water in immense reservoirs built among the hills of Starr county, north of Rio Grande City.

As soon as water is provided there will be an end to drouths, which have recently (1891 and '92) nearly ruined the whole population of Hidalgo County, and there will begin an era of prosperity which will be almost too brilliant to contemplate. All classes will share in that prosperity; landowners will be relieved of the burden of taxation, for they can immediately dispose of a portion of their lands to parties who will pay cash for them, and the part which is retained will rise rapidly in value and be very productive if cultivated; farm laborers will earn good wages instead of being dependent upon the farmer's bounty; stock-raisers will be enabled to put fat cattle on the market instead of having their ranges covered with the bones of animals that have succumbed to the pangs of starvation and thirst; where dense chaparral now covers vast areas, fields of corn, cotton, tobacco, sugar cane, and every other species of agricultural prod-

ucts, will fling their emerald banners to the balmy breezes, and the earth will sing for every joy in its plethora of wealth. The section which has so long been considered as a hiding-place for bandits, and given over almost entirely to the "coyote and wild hog", will suddenly appear before the footlights and astonish the world with performances which have never been paralleled in the Western Hemisphere.

### COUNTY STATISTICS

(From Report of Commissioner of Agriculture, 1890-91)

The population of Hidalgo County in 1880 was 4,347; 1890, 6,534; increase 2,187.

The assessed value of all property in 1890, \$2,196,151; in 1891, \$2,029,691; decrease \$166,460.

Improved lands sell for three to six dollars per acre, unimproved for fifty cents to three dollars per acre. There are 318,080 acres of State school land in the county.

There were 27 marriages in the county during the year, and no divorces.

The county has a total school population of 1,687, with two school houses, and gives employment to twenty-one teachers. Average wages paid teachers, \$50 per month. The total number of pupils enrolled during the year was 442; average attendance, 397; and the average length of school term, 6.33 months. The estimated value of school houses and grounds is \$500, school apparatus, \$250; making total value of school property \$750. Total tuition revenue received from the State, \$6,748.

The value of field crops reported for 1890 was \$2,707, the principal item being 1674 bushels of corn, which was the product of 2,463 acres planted in that staple.

Acres in melons ten, value \$62; number of grape vines 750, value \$300.

Stands of bees 307, pounds of honey 1,283; value \$355.

Number of sheep sheared 15,955; pounds of wool clipped 28,253; value \$3,707.

The rate of county tax on the \$100 valuation from 1890 was 48 cents. On December 31, 1890, there was a balance in the county treasury of \$529.03. The indebtedness on Dec. 31, 1890: Outstanding courthouse and jail bonds \$20,000; all other bonds \$11,000; total bonded indebtedness \$31,000. All other indebtedness \$5,000; total county indebtedness \$36,000. The county expended during the year \$774.13 for repairing public buildings; \$218 for roads and bridges; \$3,800 bonds redeemed; \$384 for grand jury; \$437 for petit jury. Total amount expended for the support of the county government \$9,186.30.

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