

A HISTORY
— Of —
BRENHAM

Brenham Elementary School Library
Brenham, Texas



By
Mrs. Robert A. Hasskarl
Brenham, Texas, 1933

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To
My Mother
Mrs. Olga Knolle
This Book Is
Affectionately Dedicated

PREFACE

This book aims to offer in simple form the important facts relating to the history of Brenham.

Special effort was made to secure accuracy in all references to dates and persons, so that this book may be used with confidence as a work of reference.

It is only just and proper that thankful acknowledgement should be expressed for the first history of our city, published by Mrs. R. E. Pennington, in 1915, under the title of "History of Brenham and Washington County, Texas." Mrs. Pennington's work stands as an invaluable contribution, and is authentic, especially regarding names, dates and events as herein quoted from her publication.

The present book serves the purpose of segregating the important matter, pertaining to Brenham, from Mrs. Pennington's historical account of Washington County, up to the year 1915, and recording important events which have occurred since that time, up to 1933.

A HISTORY OF BRENHAM

In 1844, when Texas was a republic, Brenham came into existence and the people honored a hero when they gave the town its name.

Among the most interesting characters in the early history of Texas is that of Richard Fox Brenham, the Mier martyr, for whom the city is named. He arrived at Washington, on the Brazos, in the spring of 1836, and for seven years served the Texas Republic as physician and soldier. The crowning act of his useful life was at the hacienda de Salado, when he courted death unselfishly, and gave his life for his fellow man.

Dr. Brenham's first place of residence was with Sanford Woodward, on Woodward's Creek, about three miles east of the city of Brenham. This was his home up to 1839, when he went to Austin. He never lived in what is called Brenham, for the place was not named for him until 1844, about one year after his death.

Dr. Brenham was a strikingly handsome man, of tall and commanding physique. He possessed a superior education, a magnetic personality, a cheerful disposition, a rare gift of oratory, and being naturally witty, always pleased a crowd. Many incidents illustrating the sterling character of Dr. Brenham were told by the early settlers. When he lived they so loved him that when the time came to name the town they christened the little place, Brenham, in his honor.

Dr. Brenham joined Alexander Somervill's Expedition to Mexico. Brenham with 299 others went with Captain William S. Fischer, of Washington County, to a point opposite the Mexican town of Mier, where the expedition was defeated. Brenham with others was held prisoner and perfected plans to escape. To gain freedom it was necessary to charge through a narrow door to a courtyard, where guards were stationed with fixed bayonets. As the prisoners had absolutely no means of defense, not even a club, it was obvious that

the foremost man would perish. Dr. Brenham volunteered for this fatal mission; he said he was unmarried, and being a soldier of fortune, was alone in the world. He led the dash for liberty, and killed two of the guards, and had severely wounded the third, when he stumbled and fell directly on the bayonet of his fallen enemy. Thus, Feb. 11, 1843, did the self-sacrificing and chivalrous Dr. Brenham give his life that his fellow men might have life and liberty.

This man was a hero; and many incidents of his illustrious life are a reminder to stimulate the loftiest patriotism, and to make his memory loved and venerated with pride by every loyal citizen of Brenham.

In 1848 a tomb was constructed on Monument Hill near La Grange, Texas, wherein the remains of Dr. Brenham along with the other ill-fated men of the Dawson-Mier expedition were enshrined.

During 1933, this tomb was covered with granite and beautified. The dedication ceremony was held September 18, 1933. An appreciation of Dr. Brenham's sacrificial service in connection with the Mier expedition is expressed by means of the following quotation, inscribed on a slab of the tomb: "Greater Love Hath No Man Than This, That A Man Lay Down His Life For His Friends."

The little town grew steadily and permanently, but with all the sunshine there were some shadows, too. During the Civil War many husbands, fathers and sons donned the Confederate uniform and marched away; and some never returned. Those who came back had to establish anew their households. Great calamities came with the awful yellow fever, and with the big fire and two storms. The sturdy city overcame its difficulties; and with unfaltering courage has forged to the front until now it can point with pride to commercial connections, railroads, modern stores, industries, and estimable women and business men. It is one of the most important little cities in the interior of Texas.

After the Republic of Texas was established the counties

were organized. Washington County was created March 17, 1836. The first county seat was Washington on the Brazos. In September 1841, the county seat was removed to Mount Vernon.

Between 1836 and 1844 the population in the southern and southwestern parts of Washington County increased so rapidly that a change of government was agitated, and the settlement where Brenham now stands was suggested as being more centrally located. Jesse Farral and James Hurt aided the cause of the settlement by the promise of 100 acres of land for a town site. On January 31, 1844, Congress responded to the popular appeal and ordered an election for the selection of a permanent county seat. Mount Vernon, Independence, Turkey Creek and Brenham announced. In the contest neither town received a majority, and another election was ordered. Turkey Creek and Mount Vernon dropped out of the race, leaving the field clear for Brenham and Independence. After an extremely exciting race Brenham was victorious by three votes. Her success she owed to the ability and management of J. D. Giddings, one of the most influential citizens in the whole country. On horseback he visited every community and made speeches in behalf of the place so recently named Brenham.

The town commissioners consisted of eight men and they were authorized to survey and sell lots. An auction sale of town lots the latter part of April attracted many people to Brenham. Lots on the corners of the court house square brought only \$15.00 to \$17.00 and some excellent sites were purchased at \$3.00.

For many years Brenham was governed by a board of aldermen, according to an incorporation of the city in 1860. In later years, a new charter was obtained from the State government and since then the affairs of the city have been administered by the Mayor, who also acts as city manager, and four city commissioners. The city is divided into four wards, each of which, is entitled to representation in the city administration by a commissioner.

The first building to be erected on the original town site was the court house. It was a small two-story wooden structure, situated on what is now the court house square. The present court house was built in 1884, at a cost of \$65,000.00. The brick was manufactured in Brenham, and when completed the building was the most imposing in the whole State.

Asa M. Lewis, in the spring of 1844, built a handsome home for those times, on the lot where the Simon Theatre now stands. This was the second building to be erected in the town, and it was a matter of great pride that it was cemented inside and out, and was equipped with glass windows—the only ones in the whole settlement. At the close of the '40s and beginning of the '50s Brenham had quite a few citizens.

The first stores handled merchandise, and dry goods—there was one tinshop and a saddle shop. The first meat market had no scales, so the weight of the meat was judged by holding it in the hands. Business was done on a strictly cash basis.

The first census of Washington County was taken in 1850 by James A. Wilkins and there was a population of 5,983. Brenham city was not separately returned until the census of 1860, when the population consisted of 600 whites and 300 slaves. The census of 1930 was 6,079.

The great trouble and expense incident to hauling merchandise, etc., by wagons from Washington and Houston, brought Brenhamites to the early realization of the necessity of establishing railroad communication with outside points. The most earnest advocate of a railroad, was J. D. Giddings. With the aid of his brother D. C. Giddings, he organized the Washington County Railroad Company, which received its charter Feb. 2, 1856; and he was the first president of the organization. J. D. Giddings made several trips to New York and Pennsylvania, where he personally purchased the rolling stock and all the supplies. Among the purchases was a big engine, named the "J. D. Giddings," which was con-

sidered the finest in Texas. Beginning with Oct. 1, 1860, trains were operating from Hempstead to Brenham, a distance of 21 miles. In 1871 the Houston and Texas Central bought the short line which they extended to Austin. During 1930 this railroad line was bought and consolidated with the Southern Pacific System. Brenham's second railroad, the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe, was built in 1879. The present Station was built in 1905.

Patriotism asserted itself in 1861, and many veterans who helped Texas wrest her freedom from Mexico marched side by side with beardless youths, at the Southland's call to arms. It was a sad crisis in the life of the little town. An old newspaper of this period states that Washington County had, in June 1861, an army of 1,000 men, all fairly armed, and that at a nearby camp, 600 men drilled daily during that month.

Reconstruction came with the end of the awful war. In July 1865, Brenham was made a military post, and Federal soldiers were camped at Camptown; from which circumstance this colored residential addition to Brenham derives its name. It seems that Brenham has long been a military post because before 1900 the 2nd Texas Infantry Band was organized. Company 'L' 2nd Infantry was organized in 1914. Company A, 111th Supply Company in 1917. Headquarters Troop of the 3rd Texas Cavalry was organized in 1917. At present the Cavalry Troop is stationed at Firemen's Park in splendid quarters furnished by the city. Headquarters of the 141st Infantry have been maintained in Brenham since 1924. The band, the company of infantry and cavalry troop at various times efficiently performed long and arduous tours of duty at the Mexican border. All of Brenham's military units served with distinction during the World War. The 2nd Texas Infantry Band is the original "Old Grey Mare Band" which during the war achieved much national fame and some European recognition, as an excellent military musical organization.

In ~~1886~~
1865 the bank of Giddings and Giddings, the first

bank opened its doors for business. At present Brenham has three banks.

Next to the Civil War, the saddest and greatest trouble ever visited upon the city was the yellow fever epidemic of 1867. Great numbers of the population were afflicted with the disease and many died. The death list of the Federal soldiers was very great. It took Brenham many years to recover from this blow.

Another disaster came with the big fire of 1873, in which all the buildings lying between Baylor and St. Charles Streets, from the Southern Pacific Railroad on the south to the Citizens drug store on the north, were totally destroyed. All of these buildings were constructed of wood. Some of the merchants who were in business in Brenham during and immediately after the war, reconstruction days and throughout the yellow fever epidemic were: Bolling Eldridge, Thomas H. Dwyer, William Zeiss, Alex Simon, W. A. Wood and the bank of Giddings and Giddings.

The only hotel in the town was the McIntyre Hotel, a two-story structure situated on the lot where the St. Anthony now stands. The present hotel was rebuilt in 1927.

To replace the old city Hall, which was burned, a new one was built about 1905.

One of the oldest purely social organizations in Texas was the Germania Verein, organized December 4, 1870. On October 18, 1929, the Elks Club and the Germania Club merged.

Serious trouble with the Federal soldiers, stationed at Camptown, and the burning of a part of Brenham, April 25, 1867, resulted in the organization of the Brenham Volunteer Fire Department, which was in reality a military organization, whose duties were to protect the lives and property of the citizens during reconstruction days. The Hook and Ladder Company was organized and numbered 22 men. Brenham Protection Fire Company presented its organization at the same time, and these two companies constituted the original

fire department. Public cisterns were built on the square to conserve the water supply for use during fires. On March 9, 1868, the members of the Brenham Fire Protection failed in their organization, and the city took charge of their fire engine.

For almost half a century the Fire Department has been one of Brenham's most valuable assets. The department has not only discharged every duty faithfully and well, but it has provided more pleasure for a greater number of people than any other organization in the city. The annual Maifests are spring festivals and had their commencement in 1874, and they have been held each year except during and immediately after the World War—1918, 1919 and 1920. Firemen's Park was purchased by the department in 1884, it was sold to the city March 14, 1917, and improvements of the grounds have been made each year. A new grand stand was built, the base ball diamond laid out, a playground for children, hobby horses, rodeo, a pavilion which is 48 years old, repaired and painted. A beautiful new band stand was recently built and dedicated July 14, 1933. In 1923 when friction, owing to the Ku Klux Klan existed in Washington County, a big "get together" was held at the park in the form of a free barbecue. About 12,000 people attended. The cost of the barbecue was \$6,000.00.

Lusk Park, adjacent to the City Hall, was laid out December 11, 1916, and was officially named at a Council meeting Feb. 5, 1917.

William H. Ewing owned, edited and published the first Brenham newspaper. It appeared in 1845 and was called the "Lone Star." The Texas Christian Advocate was the first published in this city in 1846. Jno. G. Rankin founded the Southern Watch Tower, which was soon afterward named the Brenham Banner. A Daily Brenham Banner was established January 1, 1875, and discontinued January 1, 1904. In 1912, J. G. Rankin sold the weekly paper to the Banner Publishing Company. On October 1, 1913, the company acquired the Brenham Daily Press, and the two papers were

consolidated. The publication is now named the Brenham Banner-Press.

The Public Library was established in ¹⁸⁹⁵1895 by the Fortnightly Club, with about 100 books, given by the members and citizens. At present there are over 3500 volumes on the shelves in the library rooms at the City Hall.

The first school was "Hickory Grove School" built in 1840. It was situated in a hickory grove from which it derived its name—and was known far and wide as an excellent school for girls and boys. The Masons later took charge of the school and named it the "Masonic Academy." In 1848 they built a new and larger school house of cedar. Hickory Grove School was also used as a church and ministers of every denomination preached there. When free schools were opened in Brenham the attendance at the Masonic Academy declined, and it was closed in 1875, whereupon Graham Lodge No. 20 presented the property to the city. In 1875, the Legislature passed a law that Washington County should be Independent School District No. 1, of Texas, the first charter was granted and Brenham had the first free school in Texas. The free school for negroes opened on the same date. School was conducted in the old Key home, on the site of the old Sacred Heart Convent. Central School was built in 1907, at a cost of \$50,000.00. Alamo School was built in 1912 at an expenditure of \$11,000.00. The present High School was completed in 1928 at a cost of \$180,000.00. There were 987 pupils enrolled in the public schools during the school year 1932-1933. Brenham also has good schools for the colored consisting of grade and high schools, the enrollment being 494 for the school year 1932-1933.

Other early schools were conducted by: J. R. Hollmeyer, Mary Rial High School, The German-American Institute, The Lutheran College and the Dominican Sisters operated the Sacred Heart Convent for many years.

Blinn Memorial College had its beginning December 4, 1882, when the school was established in the city. The school

soon offered instruction in all branches and in September 1927, the status was advanced to that of a Junior College.

The churches in Brenham are as follows:

Giddings Memorial Methodist Church—erected 1879, named in memory of J. D. Giddings.
Episcopal Church—erected Nov. 1, 1848, rebuilt in 1919.
Baptist Church—erected 1852, rebuilt in 1884.
Lutheran Church—erected in 1891, rebuilt in 1925.
German Methodist Church—erected in 1873, rebuilt in 1913.
Christian Church—erected during the '80s.
St. Mary's Catholic Church—erected in 1868, rebuilt in 1898.
Presbyterian Church—erected in 1877, rededicated in 1919.
Seventh Day Adventist Church—erected in 1902.
Hebrew Synagogue—erected in 1892, rebuilt in 1893.
German Baptist Church—erected in 1884.

In 1884, a private corporation organized and built a water works for the town at a cost of \$80,000.00. In 1894 the corporation sold the plant to the city for \$40,000.00. In 1924 a purification plant and reservoir was built costing the city \$40,000.00. On June 8, 1933, a contract for drilling a 2000 foot well was let by the city commissioners.

On August 10, 1921, plans for Highway No. 20 were laid out; the highway to run from Fayette County line to the Brazos river. Work started on the highway and on Feb. 1, 1921, a Bond issue of \$40,000.00. was passed for city paving, the contract dated January 14, 1922. Other highways were built soon after as follows: the north and south highway, and the highway to Old Washington. Washington County can be proud of her splendid roads and highways. In September 1929, a great bridge was completed over the Brazos river below Chapel Hill and the old time ferry boat was abandoned to the joy of all motorists.

Brenham has two beautiful clubs located about three miles from town, the oldest being the Gun and Rod Club organized December 31, 1902 with 28 members. There are four charter

members living: Bolling Eldridge, Fred Amsler, E. W. Reichardt and W. W. Searcy. There is a beautiful lodge set among shady trees, a concrete swimming pool, a large lake and good fishing. The other club is the Brenham Country Club, located on a high hill three and one half miles from Brenham. The charter for the club was signed August 1, 1922, the site for the club was purchased consisting of 116 acres of land. The club house was erected in 1924. Facilities of the club consist of a swimming pool, tennis court and a nine hole golf course. The club house has a large ball room and many other attractive features.

In 1912, Dr. T. J. Pier and Dr. Breckmeyer remodeled the ward school on Academy and Cottonwood Streets and organized the Brenham Hospital. In 1920 control of the hospital was assumed by Dr. W. F. Hasskarl. In 1930 the hospital was rebuilt and in April 1931, the opening was held. The Sisters of St. Francis took charge at that time.

In 1930 a group of doctors organized and built the Sarah B. Milroy Memorial Hospital located on West Main Street. The opening was held in April 1931.

At the present time there are practicing in the city: 8 white doctors, 4 specialists and 8 dentists, 2 colored doctors and 2 colored dentists.

The legal profession is represented by: 8 attorneys:

On March 2, 1914, Brenham's first health officer, Dr. J. W. Tottenham, was elected. In 1923 the present health department was organized and has carried on activities similar to those in larger cities. Brenham is supplied with pure, wholesome milk by several modern dairies operating under a standard milk ordinance. The city has a splendid water supply and a modern water works plant.

Each year, beginning in September 1929, a county fair has been held at Fireman's Park. It is chiefly an agricultural fair and is built around community and individual farm exhibits. An exposition hall was built in 1929.

Brenham Elementary School Library,
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The Simon Theatre opened for its first show in November 1925.

The present post office was erected in 1916.

The first gas company was organized in 1912, using artificial gas. The company changed hands several times until in 1919 it was sold to the Brenham Compress, Oil & Manufacturing Company. In 1924 the Texas Power & Light Company bought it and in 1928, sold it to the present owners, the Texas Cities Gas Company. In 1929 natural gas was piped into the city.

The first electrical lights were installed in Brenham before 1891. On December 1, 1924, the Company sold out to the Texas Power & Light Company and is being operated by that company at present.

The local chicken hatchery was established in Brenham December 1923, and is the largest in the South.

The clubs and fraternal organizations of Brenham are as follows:

Fll's Club

Brenham Chamber of Commerce

Woodmen of the World

Rotary Club

Buddy Wright Post No. 48 American Legion.

American Legion Auxiliary

Sons of Hermann

Washington County Medical Society

Woman's Auxiliary to the Washington County Medical Society

Macabees

Parent-Teachers Association

Fortnightly Club

Masonic Lodge

Business and Professional Woman's Club

St. Joseph's Society (Polish)

Some of the chief manufacturing establishments are as follows:

Brenham Compress Company
Brenham Oil & Manufacturing Company
South Texas Cotton Mills
Blue Bell Creameries
H. C. Miller & Sons, Cotton Gin Machinery
Brenham Mattress Factory
Brenham Broom & Mop Works
Adolph Seelhorst, plumbing & tin establishment.
Beaumier Iron Works

A number of wholesale houses have been in business for many years. For the past 10 years Brenham has served as center of the oil industry operations carried on in Washington and surrounding counties. Brenham is the largest city in Washington County and its commercial activities supply practically all needs of approximately 27,500 people residing in the trade territory.

This brings the history of Brenham up to date from 1844 to 1933. In almost a century Brenham has become one of the larger towns in this vicinity of the State and possesses a colorful history.

Great changes and improvements in Brenham have been brought about in the city since it was founded. May we hope that the future will bring expanding wealth, growing population, prosperity, progress and happiness for our beloved little city of Brenham.