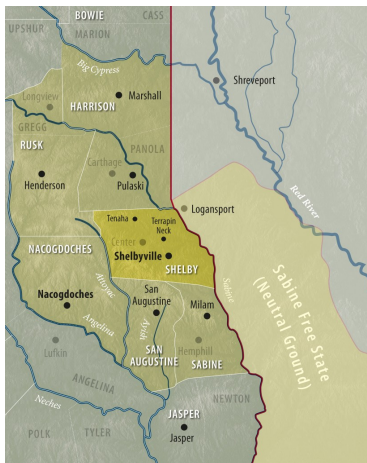


Freebooting



The Shelby County “war”, which took place in Texas during the mid 1800s, was more like a feud than a traditional war. A main factor in creating the problem that led to the conflict was that the United States and Spain, not able to agree on the boundary lines separating Spanish East Texas and the Louisiana Territory and yet unwilling to go to war over it, simply ignored a large strip of land which came to be known as the Sabine Free State or Neutral Ground. Having no national ownership, the area became a lawless expanse – a haven for criminals, fugitives from justice, and other nefarious souls.

That lawlessness soon spilled over into East Texas where raids, livestock theft, land frauds, and murders became a common occurrence. A militia was formed that was allegedly intended to prevent cattle rustling by ne-er-do-wells. They called themselves Regulators but the brand of “justice” they administered was anything but fair and even-handed. Their vigilantism and intimidation against even law-abiding folks led to another group being formed. They named themselves the Moderators as they were designed to moderate the Regulators. Their actions proved to be just as lawless and violent as the group they opposed.

Open hostilities broke out resulting in killings and house burnings on both sides. For five years, from 1839 to 1844, there was little that was done to get the situation under some

semblance of control. Sam Houston reportedly once said, "I think it advisable to declare Shelby County, Tenaha, and Terrapin Neck free and independent governments, and let them fight it out." And so they did.

James (Tiger Jim) Strickland, my daughter-in-law's 3rd great granduncle, was a primary figure in the Moderator camp during this time. History describes him as a "freebooter," which is a person who goes about in search of plunder; a pirate. A known thief, who was particularly adept at escaping capture, he once had his home burned to the ground by Regulators looking to execute him.

The conflict between the two factions finally came to an end when members of both groups ceased their hostilities towards each other to instead join Capt. L.H. Mabbitt's company to serve in the Mexican War.

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