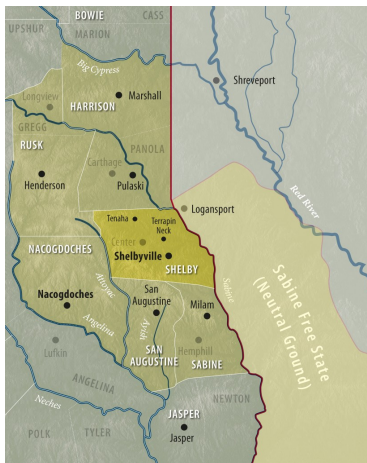


Freebooting



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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The Regulators



After the Civil War, life in many of the southern states was anything but civil. Kentucky in the late 1800s was particularly hard hit with lawlessness and violence that local authorities could not control. It was so bad that the citizenry banded together to take matters into their own hands. Calling themselves "Regulators," they made it clear that lawlessness would not be tolerated... even if they had to break the law themselves in order to enforce it.

This form of vigilantism began in 1879 in Elliott County when two hundred regulators stormed the local jail, dragged two alleged outlaws outside and hung them in front of the courthouse. The movement then quickly spread to adjoining counties, spawning an outbreak of terror against suspected wrong-doers and undesirables, including those operating outside of the moral standards of the community.

In March of 1880, about a hundred regulators rode up to the house of James Binion, my daughter-in-law's 5th great-grandfather, where they demanded to see John Boggs, a supposed nefarious character who was sheltered inside. Binion refused them access, instead opening fire upon them and allegedly killing one of the regulators. Although they had only come to notify Boggs to leave the county, once shots were fired, they broke down the door, fired a volley which instantly killed Binion, then took Boggs and lynched him. Binion's wife suffered a broken leg in the melee and his son was whipped for participating in the exchange of gunfire.

The regulators' reign of terror only lasted a few years. The

movement was squashed when district Judge James Stewart called on Gov. Luke Blackburn to send state troops to restore order. That threat, along with the promise to pardon any regulator who voluntarily surrendered, effectively put an end to the organized vigilantism movement although isolated acts would occasionally occur until the twentieth century.

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