Marker research guide for historic EVENTS

The Texas Historical Commission (THC) created this guide to help county historical commissions and marker sponsors develop a strong application for an event as a topic for a historical marker. It is a guide in researching and preparing the narrative history.

Narrative history: This is the key element to any marker application and the vehicle through which historical context and significance are demonstrated and proven. The narrative history is essentially a research paper that includes four key components — **context, overview, significance and documentation**. A sample is included.

- **CONTEXT:** The historical context represents a broader set of facts or circumstances that explains why the event should be considered historic. What circumstances in the area helped lead to the event? How does the event relate to the history of its community, county or region? What is its relevance to the broader history? What other events took place (locally, regionally or nationally) that may have had a bearing on how or why the event was important? History does not take place in a vacuum; it is dynamic and interconnected, and the context explores these elements.

- **OVERVIEW:** This is the main body of the narrative history, and it represents the key facts in the story. The overview should be told, as closely as possible, in chronological order, with clearly documented connections between earlier and more recent aspects of the context story. While a complete overview is required, the central focus should be on the *historical period of significance* (see *Significance* section).

- **Historical/Cultural Significance**: A topic is considered to have historical significance if it had influence, effect or impact on the course of history or cultural development; age alone does not determine significance. Topics do not necessarily have to be of statewide or national significance; many historical markers deal with local history and a local level of significance. They may also have cultural significance. To determine significance, ask such questions as: How did the event play a role in history? How has it made a difference in the context of local or state history? Who were the individuals involved in the event?

- **DOCUMENTATION:** This is, in effect, the evidence necessary to develop the history or significance of a topic. It is the foundation of historical interpretation and accurate research. For the purposes of the Official Texas Historical Marker Program, documentation associated with applications should be broad-based and demonstrate a survey of all available resources, both primary and secondary (see *Types of Sources* section below). Documentation serves as a detailed guide so future researchers can follow the research trail for their own purposes. As used in marker applications, it is most commonly manifested through endnotes, photographs or maps (see *Preparing the Reference Notes* section below).

TYPES OF SOURCES FOR EVENT RESEARCH

The THC will consider the objectivity and reliability of information sources used in compiling a narrative history. Whenever possible, consult **primary source** material. Primary sources —

those that are contemporary with the topic — include newspaper accounts, diaries, meeting minutes, deed records, census records and legal documents. Such sources, as well as the recollections of disinterested, unbiased and authoritative persons, are preferred over secondary sources.

When using **secondary sources**, check them thoroughly since they are often not as reliable as primary sources. Secondary sources, such as history books, are not contemporary with the topic's history. Oral histories collected from authoritative sources are valuable research tools if properly documented (see example at the end of this document). Any claims of uniqueness (earliest, oldest, first, largest, etc.) must be accompanied by factual documentation from an authoritative, unbiased source.

SUGGESTED SOURCES FOR COMPILING EVENT HISTORIES
Government Records
- Municipal (building permits, minutes of official meetings, ordinances, tax records)

Institutional Records
- Cemetery (family relationships, birth and death dates)

Family Papers
- Letters and diaries (biographical information, building information, social and economic history)
- Photographs (biographical information, building information)

Newspapers and Journals
- Articles (significant local events, economic history, social history, building information)

Oral Histories
- Minority history, social history, business history, building evolution and uses

Published Histories
- County (information on buildings, people, institutions, events)
- Community (information on buildings, people, institutions, events)
- *Handbook of Texas*, Texas State Historical Association, online or in print

Online Sources
- Texas Reference Sources (http://www.txla.org/trsonline.html)
- Portal to Texas History (http://texashistory.unt.edu/)
- The Handbook of Texas Online (http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/)
- Baylor Institute for Oral History (http://www.baylor.edu/Oral_History/)
- Texas State Library and Archives Commission (https://www.tsl.texas.gov/)

PREPARING THE REFERENCE NOTES
For the specific purposes of the Official Texas Historical Marker Program, the **required** means of resource documentation to be used in preparing the historical narrative are reference notes. Generally speaking, facts that cannot be assumed to be common knowledge should be documented with a reference note. They can be either footnotes (placed at the foot of the page on which the fact is mentioned), endnotes (listed sequentially at the end of the history) or parenthetical notes (placed in parentheses immediately following the fact within the narrative history). The notes must be complete so the reader finds the referenced source easily.

Regardless of which type of reference note is used, the first use of a source should include a full first citation (all relevant resource details) with abbreviated information thereafter in subsequent citations

(see examples below). **Note**: With the use of full citation footnotes, a bibliography is no longer a required element of marker applications.

Examples of First Full Citations (Footnotes or Endnotes):

1 Terry G. Jordan, *Texas Graveyards: A Cultural Legacy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), p. 79.

2 Orange County Deed Records, Book 4, p. 139.

3 1900 United States Census, Fort Bend County, Texas (Roll 1553) Enumeration District 16, p. 16.

4 Bessie Jones. Interview with Scotty Jergenson, June 21, 1991. Tape recording and transcript available at the Darrouzett Public Library.

5 Letter from Maria Gutierrez to Henry Guerra, May 23, 1922. Private collection of Henry Guerra, Dallas.

6 "San Jacinto Monument Reconditioned." *Temple Daily Telegram*, Vol. 76, No. 256; July 31, 1983, p. 5-C.

Examples of Subsequent Citations:

9 Jordan, p. 83.

10 Orange County Deed Records, p. 140.

11 1900 United States Census, p. 23.

12 Jones, 1991.

13 Gutierrez letter.

14 *Temple Daily Telegram*, 1972, p. 5-C.

Note: For sources used in preparing the text but not specifically cited, list them separately under the heading ADDITIONAL SOURCES. For further assistance on reference note styles, see the following guides, or contact your local library.

Chicago Manual of Style, 14th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations. 5th ed. New York: Modern Language Association, 1999.

Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*. Revised by John Grossman and Alice Bennett. 6th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

EVENTS RESEARCH CHECKLIST

Narrative histories submitted to the THC in support of marker applications for **historic events** should include, but not necessarily be limited to, the following information. **Note:** Historic events may be considered eligible for listing if they took place more than 30 years ago, if they are historically significant and if they have definite beginning and ending dates.

- Background information on the causes of the event

- Beginning and ending dates

- Location of the event, with current site information

- Major participants, with relevant background information and vital dates (birth and death)

- Discussion of the immediate impact and the long-term effects of the event (local/state/national)

- Associations with organizations or institutions

- Remaining physical reminders (structures, inventions, memorials, etc.)

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SAMPLE HISTORY: Events

NOTE: This sample history, comprised of fictional information, represents in format, scope of content, documentation and length the type of narrative history required for a historical marker application. It is presented as a general guide for developing a narrative of a historic event.

THE POST OAK COUNTY SEAT ELECTION OF 1876

I. CONTEXT

Prior to the 1840s, nomadic Indian tribes, including Kiowas and Mescalero Apaches, lived in what is now Post Oak County. Early Anglo homesteaders included buffalo hunter Archibald Kyle and goat rancher Nelson Pope, with both arriving by 1849 in what was then part of Milam County. Permanent settlement began in the 1850s with the establishment of Fort Gompers, a small stockade to protect settlers against Native American raids, and later by the establishment of the village of Youngstown. The area was attached to Simpson County for judicial purposes in 1858. [1]

The Texas and Northern Railroad built across the future Post Oak County in the fall of 1875, and the New York and Texas Land Company established the towns of Jergenson and Whitley. At about the same time, land speculator John E. Brinkley bought several thousand acres south of Jergenson, in the center of what would become Post Oak County, and there he platted the town of Smackdab. The stage was therefore set for a fierce competition to secure the county seat, and by the end of 1876 the Texas Rangers, the governor and the legislature would all be involved in the determination of the seat of Post Oak County.

II. OVERVIEW

The arrival of the Texas and Northern Railroad to what would become Post Oak County in late 1875 brought an influx of new arrivals, including settlers, businessmen, land speculators and many others. Tom Huxtable (June 11, 1843-June 11, 1876), noted buffalo hunter, moved from his settlement at Buffalo Gap to near the new townsite of Jergenson in January 1876.[2] Huxtable's settlement included a small dugout dwelling and a postal stop on the Butterfield Overland Stage route from Fort Worth to El Paso, as well as a large general

store that supplied area settlers. By April, Henderson moved his store to the growing town of Jergenson. [3]

Meanwhile, John E. Brinkley (May 3, 1847-December 30, 1906), who had previously established the towns of Indianola, Belle Plaine, and Rayner, purchased 5,283 acres from rancher Stanley J. Hollingsworth on November 23, 1875. Two weeks later, Brinkley recorded a plat for the proposed town of Smackdab, complete with four city parks – one in each quadrant – and four major boulevards, with Broadway and Grand running north-south and Main and Pecan running east-west, all intersecting at the center of town at a large central square. [4]

By March 1876, a number of new settlers moved beyond the rim in extreme western Milam County. They petitioned the Texas Legislature for the creation of a new county, rather than having to return more than sixty miles east to conduct their business in the town of Flanders. Chester J. Hornswaggle, Timothy Eanes Wilson, Matthew R. Timpson, and Alexander Kleb were the four men who canvassed the area for signatures for the proposed new county. Three of the petitions had the proposed name of Post Oak County on the top, but the fourth one was to be named for early settler Tom Huxtable. Legend has it that some of the signature lists, in order to reach the required number of 150, included the names of horses and itinerant cowboys. Subsequent research confirms that at least ten of the names cannot be verified through other documentation, including the names Pokey McDougal, Lefty Leinart, and Stubborn Leak. [5]

On March 30, 1876, the Texas Legislature approved the creation of the new county, naming it Post Oak and ordering Hornswaggle, Wilson, Timpson and Kleb to hold an election of all eligible voters before the end of April to establish the first commissioners, county judge, county clerk, county treasurer, sheriff, and most importantly, the site of the county seat. The election of April 18, 1876, started a firestorm of controversy that culminated in the death of nine pioneer citizens and the legislature imposing martial law in Post Oak County. [6]

The problems began when the committee canvassed the votes. Even though 152 signatures were collected for the county's creation in March, more than 1,100 votes were counted for the organization election in April. Judge Thomas C. Beaufort of neighboring Smedley County threw out the first election results, which had Jergenson winning the county seat, and ordered a new election to be held on May 2, 1876. Early that morning, a fire destroyed the bridge across Wilson Creek, keeping a sizeable number of Gable's Gap voters from reaching the Jergenson townsite to vote. As a result, Smackdab took the second election for county seat, 83 to 80. [7]

Brinkley partnered with Belmont Lumber Company to provide the first fifty residences in Smackdab, and he scheduled May 30, 1876, as the day to draw lots for commercial buildings and residence sites in his newly platted town. All seemed to go without a hitch, but over five nights in the following week, each new property owner in Smackdab was systematically terrorized and harassed, often in the middle of the night in their new homes. Many had their newly built wooden business houses burned to the ground by unknown assailants. [8]

Retribution came to Jergenson with tragic results on an unseasonably hot day. On the afternoon of June 6, 1876, James T. Honeycutt, a business associate of Brinkley and a major investor in Smackdab property, rode his horse into Jergenson, intending to confront Wesley

Adamson, the manager of Huxtable's 5H Ranch and the man Honeycutt suspected of arranging the recent violence in Smackdab in an attempt to wrest the county seat back to Jergenson. At precisely 1:15 p.m., Honeycutt emerged from the alley next to the Black Cat Saloon, having spotted Adamson leaving that establishment. The two men quarreled loudly for several minutes before Adamson turned his back and unhitched his horse, intending to leave before the fight escalated. But Honeycutt grabbed Adamson by the shoulder and threw him against the porch post, and then Honeycutt unsnapped his gun holster. Honeycutt shot Adamson first in the shoulder, and Adamson was able to draw his pistol and shoot Honeycutt three times before Honeycutt hit Adamson again, leaving both men mortally wounded. One of the stray bullets also hit the clock in front of J. Peterson's jewelry store, memorializing the exact moment of the affray for all time. Most tragically, another bullet ricocheted and struck Mrs. Elizabeth Tisdale, the wife of the Presbyterian minister, the Rev. John Tisdale. Mrs. Tisdale died almost instantly, and her death sparked a violent outpouring between the Huxtable and Brinkley camps. [9]

For the next two weeks, violent ambushes occurred with frightening regularity, and nearly every business house in both towns was destroyed by fire. Six more people were killed during that time, three from each side of the Huxtable and Brinkley quarrel. Gregory Williams, Joseph G. Helms, Warren H. Toliver, Samuel G. Mickelson and R.Y. Mason were among those killed during the two weeks. Huxtable himself was killed on his 33rd birthday when he was ambushed riding home alone late on the night of June 11th. When word of the civil strife reached the state legislature, Governor Richard Coker instructed the Texas Rangers to dispatch their forces at once under the command of Captain Jack Thompson. At the same time, the Texas Legislature, meeting in an emergency session, declared Post Oak County to be under martial law, and declared all prior elections, filing of deeds, and other legal proceedings since its inception to be null and void. After the Texas Rangers quelled the violence, the Texas Legislature voted unanimously to award the county seat to Jergenson, while Smackdab retained the county jail and other minor county offices. [10]

Jergenson thrived as county seat in the decades that followed. The Texas and Northern Railroad connection made Jergenson a viable commercial center even in the hardest of economic downturns. Construction of U.S. Highway 1190 in the late 1920s connected Jergenson with neighboring county seats and offered a fast road to Fort Worth and Abilene. The establishment of Languid Army Air Field during World War II solidified Jergenson's position as the largest city in the county. As the seat of county government, Jergenson currently has eleven banks, while Smackdab has only two.

Meanwhile, Smackdab has consistently come in second in many competitions with Jergenson. Smackdab came in second in the voting for the establishment of Middle Texas College in the 1890s and remained outside the surveyed route of U.S. 1190. The city of Smackdab retains the layout of its original grand design, including the major boulevards, parks and other public spaces, but the central square that was intended to house the county seat remains vacant to this day, a constant reminder of the events of 1876. The rivalry between Smackdab and Jergenson is still heated and is perhaps most visible in the annual high school football game, with the all-time standings since 1891 currently at 54 wins each and 8 ties.

III. SIGNIFICANCE

The controversial events associated with the Post Oak County seat election of 1876 are indicative of other similar developments in Texas counties in the late 19th century. Selection as

a county seat proved crucial in the viability of many early settlements, and in several counties the county seat was moved many times as flooding, poor agricultural land, new rail and road connections, population shifts and other factors made new parcels of land more attractive to county government. Although the Post Oak County example is perhaps the most celebrated and bloody, several other counties experienced similar periods of controversy and violence in their developing years. The final choice for county seat, imposed by the state legislature, set Jergenson on a course for greater economic success than its rival city, and to this day, the fateful decisions of 1876 continue to play a part in the development of the county.

VI. DOCUMENTATION

[1] Prater, Elihu. *Beyond the Rim: A History of Early Post Oak County* (Jergenson: Post Oak County Historical Commission, 1978), p. 13.

[2] Prater, p. 77.

[3] Prater, p. 78.

[4] Deed records: V. 61, p. 15, Office of the Post Oak County Clerk, Post Oak County Courthouse, Jergenson.

[5] Texas Registry of Legislative Actions, March 30, 1876; Prater, pp. 111-115.

[6] Texas Registry of Legislative Actions, March 30, 1876.

[7] Prater, pp. 111-112.

[8] *Smackdab Sunlight*, June 9, 1876, p. 1.

[9] *Dallas Morning News*, June 8, 1876, p. 14, col. 3.

[10] Texas Registry of Legislative Actions, June 30, 1876.