

## The Carving and Whittling Began Early for Milam County

During the early years of Texas statehood, the geography of Milam County changed dramatically. In fact, the once huge land mass that had been labeled Milam Municipality was literally “carved” and “whittled down” to its present size of around 1,022 square miles! Milam, the one time second largest county in Texas, can claim parenthood to several other present-day counties in our massive state. That is, thirty-four counties to be exact! All or part of thirty-three other counties, plus our own county, were created from the original lands of Milam County, Texas. But, how did this happen?

To fully understand the “carving out” of the jurisdictions from this area, one must look back to the days when Texas belonged to Spain and Mexico. Tennesseans like Robert Leftwich and Sterling Robertson petitioned the Spanish and Mexican governments for land grants. Like Moses and Stephen F. Austin, these men were empresarios wanting to bring settlers to the province of Texas. Mexico had named the area we call Milam County the Municipality of Viesca, and these empresarios obtained a colonization grant for this area in 1825. It was a huge piece of land! The Municipality of Viesca stretched for thousands of square miles and encompassed one-sixth of the land in Texas. This massive colony covered lands on both sides of the Brazos River from Yegua Creek in the southeast to the upper northwest boundary above the Cross Timbers region.

By 1835, the newly formed Congress of the Republic of Texas renamed Viesca, calling it Milam Municipality. During the Consultation at San Felipe on December 26, 1835 to be exact, Representative Alexander Thomson introduced an ordinance to change the name to honor Benjamin Rush Milam, who had been killed only nineteen days before at the Siege of Bexar in San Antonio. Thus, one of the initial actions of the first provisional legislative government in Texas was to honor Ben Milam for his heroic sacrifice in the Texas Revolution. So then, Milam County had secured its name but not its present size. That would become a reality two years later.

Texas Republic President Sam Houston approved a joint resolution by which Milam County's land east of the Brazos River would become Robertson County. On December 14, 1837, this act reduced Milam County by about one-third of its original area and named the new county after Sterling Clack Robertson. He was credited with bringing the first American colonists from Tennessee to Milam County and for founding Nashville on the Brazos, our first county seat. But, with the creation of Robertson County, the "carving up" of the still larger Milam County had begun in earnest.

Milam County had existed under earlier names such as the Leftwich Grant, Robertson's Colony, Nashville Colony, and the Austin and William's Second or Upper Colony. However, now it was to be divided up and named for various heroes, pioneers, and landmarks of Texas. Beginning on December 20, 1836, Milam County was becoming more organized, gaining both nominated and elected officials. But such a large area was hard to govern. Milam County was one of the original twenty-three counties created by the Republic of Texas. Its county seat was located temporarily at Nashville, which is today considered to be a ghost town just north of Gause. Later the county seat was moved to Caldwell. With the creation of Burleson County, the county seat moved back to Nashville for a short time and then permanently to Cameron In April, 1846.

When Texas joined the United States in December of 1845, Milam County began to shrink by losing its territories one by one. The state of Texas was only a few years old in 1848 when Williamson County was created from Milam. By 1850, Bell, McLennan and Falls were also carved from Milam's borders and reduced it to today's dimensions.

The list of the thirty-four counties that can claim Milam County lineage is a long one. Now... here they are listed alphabetically: Bell, Bosque, Brazos, Brown, Burleson, Burnet, Callahan, Comanche, Coryell, Eastland, Erath, Falls, Hamilton, Haskell, Hill, Hood, Johnson, Jones, Lampasas, Lee, Limestone, McLennan, Mills, Palo Pinto, Parker, Robertson, Shackelford, Somervell, Stephens, Stonewall, Throckmorton, Williamson, Young, and of course Milam County itself. So the next time you travel to the metro areas of Georgetown, Round Rock, Waco, Temple, Belton, Killeen, and points beyond, just remember you never really left the original

boundaries of Milam County. Or perhaps very politely, remind any friends or relatives who live in one of those thirty-three previously listed counties, that surely they owe some allegiance to Cameron, Rockdale, Thorndale, and all of the communities of “Mother Milam.” Although this began 187 years ago, we can carefully remind our fellow Texans that some of their cities and counties were once “carved” or “whittled out” of our beloved Milam County. Theoretically, this could be an interesting conversation starter.

These facts and many more about our ultra-historic county can be found in many places. In books, online, and in stories told at the Milam County Historical Museum. In fact, the museum sells two remarkable publications used to research this article. They are Milam County: Birthplace of a Region, by author Marion Brewer Travis, and History of Milam County, Texas, by author Lelia M. Batte. These are excellent sources of information about the history of our county and are available for purchase at the Milam County Historical Museum gift shop. Everyone is welcome to visit the museum for book shopping or for gathering historical information. To find out more about our amazing history visit the MCHM in downtown Cameron, Thursday - Saturday, 10AM-3PM.