

## Upton County

What is today Upton County was originally the homelands of the Jumano Indians. The Jumanos were a friendly tribe of hunters, gatherers, and traders with routes that are said to have reached from the Rio Grande to the Sabine River in eastern Texas. Members of the tribe were the first Texas Indians to contact the Spanish in present day New Mexico and often they served as guides to the Spanish explorers. Between 1582 and 1684, several Spanish expeditions ventured through the West Texas region and some may have likely crossed through the area.

In 1839 Dr. Henry Connelly, who was an American merchant residing in northern Mexico, desired to see a trade route established between the two young nations that would avoid the taxes of the infant Texas Republic. That year, he and several companions blazed a trail from Chihuahua, Mexico to Independence, Missouri and established what became known as the Chihuahua Trail, a portion of which went through the present Upton County. For nearly a year, the trail was the main trade route between the United States and Mexico. However another trade route, which did not venture through hostile Comanche and Apache lands, was created and the Chihuahua Trail soon became an imprint on the maps of Texas.

During the late 1840s and '50s, the arid landscape of the future Upton County was frequented by settlers, emigrants, and soldiers as they made their way from the Middle Concho to the Pecos River. Centralia Draw and Wild China Pond were known landmarks for travelers. Wild China Pond was often marked on maps as being one of the few sources of water for anyone going through the dry West Texas region. In the October of 1853, an army officer named John Bartlett made it known that the maps were often at times misleading and could be a fatal mistake for travelers. After venturing to the water hole with a company of troops, Bartlett discovered that the pond was completely dry. The troops, after making the discovery, quickly rushed to the Pecos River where they made camp and watered their horses. Bartlett wrote to government officials that Wild China Pond should be removed from the maps as being a reliable watering hole. He wrote that travelers without a proper supply of water could find themselves, and their livestock, in life threatening situations if they chose to trust that the pond would have sufficient water for their usage.

After Bartlett's discovery was made public, the Upton area became devoid of travelers. In 1858 though, John Butterfield decided to have a portion of his famous overland mail route through the Upton area. In what would become the community of Upland, a station was constructed by the mail company, and even as late as the early 1900s the old stone structure was a favorite picnic and gathering spot for the locals of the county. The success of the Butterfield Overland Mail Route was cut short by the Civil War, but the route became a main thoroughfare after the war had ceased.

In 1866, a portion of the Goodnight-Loving Trail went through the present Upton County region. By the 1870s, settlers again started to move through the region. It is said that in 1872, a wagon train of Mississippians heading west was ambushed by a Comanche war party as they made their way through the Upton area. Quickly moving to the only geographic location of the desert area which could offer protection, Castle Gap, the settlers decided to make a stand against

their pursuers. Quickly being surrounded by the tribe, the gap suddenly became a death trap due to the lack of water. It is claimed that several of the settlers died of dehydration and were buried in unmarked but noticeable graves with-in the gap. After several days of fending off sporadic attacks, the settlers were finally able to break through the Comanche lines and proceeded to the Pecos River where they crossed unopposed. After crossing the river, the wagon train proceeded west, but it is said that some of the settlers returned later to settle in the infant county.

After the Texas Indian Wars had ended, the Upton area was swiftly populated by farmers and ranchers. When the county was created in 1887, the seat of government was located in Upland which was near the center of the county. Word was recieved in Upton County in 1910 that a branch of the K.C.M.O Rail Road was going to be entering the area with-in a few months. For a time, the residents of Upland rejoiced in knowing that the railroad was going to bring a boom to their county and to make a city out of Upland. However, it was soon learned that the railroad was not going to be going through Upland, rather it was going to be going through Rankin. After the rumor was found to be true, Upland was quickly abandoned and Rankin became the county seat in 1914.

Shortly after the Second World War, Upton County experienced a major oil boom. During the 1950's and up to present day, the county became the home of many farmers, ranchers, and oilmen. Today, the region is still as arid as it has always been and the residents are humble oil workers and well standing cattle and sheep men.