

Lampasas Dispatch Record

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Service to county extends through Cox family lineage

Commissioner's great-great grandfather an early-day settler

By JANE McMILLAN

Observing the 150th anniversary of Lampasas County's founding is more than a ceremonial duty of office to Precinct 4 Commissioner Jack B. Cox. It also means celebrating a family tradition that goes back to the county's earliest days when Cox's great-great grandfather, Nimrod Hughes was elected to the first Commissioners Court in 1856.

Hughes moved to the area with his brother, Moses Hughes in 1853. Within about two years, both brothers were among the 135 men who signed a petition for a new county. In response to the petition, the Sixth Texas Legislature enacted the law that Created Lampasas County on Feb. 1, 1856.

With the election of its first slate of Officers, the new county was organized on March 10, 1856. Nimrod Hughes was sworn in as one of the first commissioners, and his cousin, H. B. Dobbins, was named Lampasas County's first sheriff.

Cox traces his Hughes ancestry through his mother's family to the 1881 marriage of his great grandfather, George Washington, "Wash" Mitchell and Nimrod Hugh's daughter, Martha A Hughes. One of their sons, Clarence Nimrod Mitchell was the father of Cox's mother, the late Bethel Mitchell Cox.

The Mitchells came to Texas by wagon train from Carroll County, Tenn., according to "Lampasas County: Its History and Its People." Around 1869, they settled on the Lampasas River in the Townsen Mill area, which later became Adamsville.

Service to Lampasas County Government also comes from the paternal side of Cox's family. His father, the late Herman J. Cox was first elected Precinct 4 commissioner in 1948 and he held the office for almost 24 years. A great grandfather brought the Cox family from Bell County to the Adamsville area in the 1880s. Apparently they were a musical lot. Although he could not read a note, his grandfather Junius Baker "June" Cox became a Lampasas County legend on the fiddle.

Young Herman Cox and his other siblings also were accomplished musicians and often accompanied their father's fiddling at weddings, dances and funerals. "Mr. Cox affected a sweeping mustache and a big hat, and he was full of stories: moreover, he was one of the best country fiddlers," Stanley Walker wrote of June Cox in his book "Home to



PHOTOS BY JANE McMILLAN
Lampasas County Commissioner Jack Cox pays homage to his great-great-grandfather, Nimrod Hughes, who was elected to the county's first commissioner's court in 1856. Hughes came to the Lampasas area in 1853 with his brother, Moses. Nimrod died in 1862 and is buried in what is left of Cook Cemetery, adjacent to the Santa Fe Square Shopping Center.

Texas.” The description could also be applied to his grandson – with the possible exception, perhaps of the musical talent.

“When people ask me how long I’ve been in Lampasas County, I just tell them a mighty long time,” Jack Cox said.

Today’s Lampasas County residents likely are more familiar with the story of Moses Hughes than that of his brother Nimrod, possibly because Moses lived longer, had a multitude of descendants and left a written record. In at least one published letter, he recounted his early days in Texas and described the family’s experiences in the “Runaway Scrape” to flee Santa Anna’s advancing army during the Texas war for independence.

Moses Hughes letter also told about his days as a pioneer in the territory that would become Lampasas County.

“... In November 1853, I moved to Lampasas Springs for the benefit of my wife’s health. ... Myself and my brother, Nimrod Hughes were the first families that settled outside the jurisdiction of Coryell County.”

When Nimrod Hughes died in 1862 at the age of 32, he left behind a widow and seven children, including two sets of twins. The children’s ages ranged from about 10 down to three – probably too young to have many memories of their father.

As time increasingly overshadowed those remembrances, so the old Pioneer, or Cook Cemetery where he was buried also became neglected. It became virtually forgotten until the development of the Santa Fe Shopping Center and the widening of Highway 190 in the 1970s when the late Joe Faught, chairman of the Lampasas Historical Commission was able to save some of the old graves and markers.

Ironically, Cox worked for the state Highway department at the time. “This (Santa Fe Shopping Center) was all just pasture,” the county commissioner explained. He recalled that while on a break, he began to explore the area just out of curiosity.

“And there, in the tall grass, I started seeing these tombstones. At that time, I had no idea any of my kin were buried there. It wasn’t until 10 or 15 years later that I discovered that I was a descendant of Nimrod Hughes,” Cox said.

Much of the information about Hughes is sketchy, which left genealogists and historians to piece together bits and pieces of data from a myriad of sources.

Details are incomplete as to when Hughes married his first wife, Mary Francis, and even the bride’s maiden name is not known. The marriage likely took place after the 1850 Census and before the birth of their twins Rachel and Martha on Oct 27, 1851.

“No marriage record for this couple has been found in Williamson or surrounding counties; perhaps a license was issued in Milam County where records were destroyed in the 1874 fire.” Nancy Dillard Franklin wrote in her book, “Moses Hughes and His Family.”

A third child, Rhoda, was born in 1853, nine months before the Hughes families arrived at Lampasas Springs. The move from Williamson County included Moses, his wife, Hannah, and their seven children, Nimrod Hughes, his wife plus their three children. Some sources say the Hughes clan heard about Lampasas Springs from a group of Native Americans who frequently camped along a creek that flowed across land owned by John Berry, Hannah Hughes father.

The Berry family was told about large mineral springs that possessed medicinal properties.

“The springs were located 50 miles to the west in an area still unsettled by the white man. With Hanna’s life threatened by her ailment, the Moses Hughes family decided to gamble against the elements and Comanche Indians and seek the healing waters that might preserve her life,” according to “John Berry and His Children, Jack Pope, editor. Mary Frances and Nimrod Hughes fourth child, likely was born in Lampasas County during the early part of 1854.

Although Hannah Hughes reportedly got better, tragedy struck when Moses and Nimrod’s mother, Rebecca Dobbins Hughes, died on March 10, 1854 in Belton. She was buried in Cook Cemetery, where the earliest known graves in Lampasas County are located.

Nine months later, Nimrod’s wife died on December 14, 1854. She was about 20 years of age and left four daughters, ages three and under. Some family sources believe there may have been a fifth child, one who is buried beside her in the Cook Cemetery.

“Nimrod wasted little time finding a new wife, Margaret Ann Strong, whom he married in Burnet County on March 14, 1855,” Ms. Franklin wrote.

The petition to establish Lampasas County was signed that same year, presumably before the Sixth Texas Legislature convened on Nov. 5, 1855.

In 1857, the year after Nimrod Hughes was elected Commissioner, he became the father of a second set of twins, Mary H. and William B. Hughes, his only son.

Sometime between the birth of Margaret H. in 1859, and the next federal census, The Hughes family and their seven children moved to Williamson County, where their names appear in the census of 1860.

The following year, Hughes was listed on a company roster under the Command of R. Y. Cross, in the 27th Brigade of the Texas Militia. Since the company was enrolled from Lampasas County in September 1861, he apparently had moved back by then.

Hughes died the next year on October 9. He was buried beside his first wife, Mary Frances, and his mother in the Cook Cemetery.

“Margaret Hughes later applied to the State of Texas for a preemption tract of land in Lampasas County, which was surveyed for her on Sept. 27, 1871. Nimrod’s cousin, H. B. Dobbins was one of the chain bearers for the survey.” wrote Ms. Franklin in her family history account.

“On March 13, 1875, title to the 160 acres on the north prong of Lucy’s Creek about 6 miles north of Lampasas was granted Margaret after (the required) three consecutive years of residence on the land,” she continued. “She eventually sold the entire parcel to Dobbins.”

Although Hughes’ widow later moved away from Lampasas County, two daughters remained here. Mary H. married J. N. Ervin on Jan. 31, 1877 and Margaret H. married George Washington Mitchell on March 27, 1881.

Their descendants are encouraged to join their Cox kinsmen this year in honoring Nimrod Hughes, one of the heretofore unsung pioneers of Lampasas County.